

Struggling for an Identity Other Than Refugee

How do contemporary poets, Rodolfo Gonzales, Warsan Shire and Jennifer Toksvig depict the personal struggle for survival and creation of a new identity of refugees?

Language and Literature A Higher Level – Category 1

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Contemporary poets Rodolfo Gonzales, Warsan Shire and Jenifer Toksvig manage to depict the struggle for survival shared between immigrants from different cultures as well as emotions such as that of desperation that are felt throughout the immigration experience, in their work. In the poem “I am Joaquín” (published in 1967) Rodolfo Gonzales touches upon the struggles that Mexican immigrants to the United States have dealt with for decades due to the poor economic and political situation in Mexico. In “What They Took with Them” (published in 2016) Danish poet, Jenifer Toksvig, felt the necessity to accurately portray the struggles that she felt many refugees were going through on their long journey to Europe. “Home”, written by Warsan Shire (published in 2009), a British woman with Somali parents, who witnessed the struggles to integrate that her parents went through after making it to the United Kingdom, as well as the struggle to fit in as a woman of color in a very strongly nationalistic society, aims to point out that leaving home is not a choice but a necessary course of action in order to stay alive.

People can struggle in various ways. There is emotional struggle, that can be influenced by religion or culture, and there is physical struggle, that can be perpetuated by external factors. “To struggle is to make forceful efforts to get free of restraint or constriction both physically and emotionally” (oxford dictionaries). For many immigrants arriving to the destination is a struggle in itself, let alone the emotional struggle to leave the past behind once they’ve made it to their so-called safe-haven. Gonzales, Toksvig and Shire convey the struggle of immigrants through various literary devices such as imagery, figurative language, graphic depictions of violence, descriptions of loss and change of

cultural identity, use of narrative voice and most importantly by humanizing the people described in their poems.

I am Joaquín, a poem written by a first generation Mexican immigrant to the United States, Rodolfo Gonzales, describes the frustrations underwent by many Chicanos attempting to integrate into an American society while keeping their Mexican heritage. Gonzales is a first generation migrant and therefore uses his poem to convey a message of frustration, pride and pain that he feels many Chicanos will share with him. His poem “speaks of the struggles that the Chicano people have faced in trying to achieve economic justice and equal rights in the U.S, as well as to find an identity of being part of a hybrid mestizo society” (epc.buffalo.edu) Gonzales says. The poem begins in Spanish stating, “Yo soy Joaquín, perdido en un mundo de confusion” (line 1), or I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion. This sets the mood of the poem, by starting in a different language, Spanish, and then proceeding in English, it makes a statement about Joaquín’s attachment to Mexican language and culture. The immediate use of the word confusion also helps set a clear view of the identity struggle that he, as the protagonist, faces. A look into who Joaquín is throughout the poem is also crucial to understanding the author’s aim when writing the poem. Joaquín does not just represent an immigrant of Mexican heritage but rather represents much of Mexico’s history as well as Mestizos, Mexican Indigenous people, and the Spaniards who conquered Mexico. The variety of people and history that he represents adds to the confusion that make up pieces of his Chicano identity. Gonzales’, Toksvig’s and Shire’s choice of narrative voices throughout their poems is deliberate and personal. Gonzales begins his poem in first person with the use of “I” which makes the reader relate the struggles that are depicted to himself. Halfway through

the poem his use of “I” lessens and he begins to relate directly to the other immigrant Mexicans that suffered with him, and thus relates to his audience directly, who most likely are Mexican immigrants, doing so through the use of “our”. “Our art, our literature, our music, they ignored” (line 250) he is making direct reference to the audience, and the cultural struggle that the Mexican people have faced for centuries.

Shire’s poem manages to be extremely effective and personal because of her choice to address the audience directly. When depicting horrific images such as that of rape, “fourteen men between your legs” (line 65), she forces the reader to imagine the pain and humiliation that many immigrants went through in their journey to the West. The message of her poem is clear, that refugees do not choose to leave home, they are chased away from everything that they love by violence and the need to survive. She makes the reader imagine this by stating, “your survival is more important” (line 86), more important than pride.

Toksvig’s poem differs from both Shire’s and Gonzales’ in that it gives voice to many refugees. This is made clear by the different items that the refugees decide to take with them such as a rosary, hijab, turban, and a virgin Mary necklace. Toksvig chooses to use a synonymous “we” when describing the struggles of the journey as well as choices made beforehand of the different refugees. Toksvig tries to give voice to several different people from a range of different cultures which can be identified by the different objects they choose to take with them. She chooses multiple voices to portray one shared experience, the struggle of an immigrant’s journey, no matter what religion or culture they are from. Often the voices in the text are internal, reminders to not forget “house keys, house keys, house keys” (line 21), which adds a slight ironic and sad touch because

the audience knows that most likely the subjects will never return to their destroyed homes. The poet repeats house keys three times to enforce the feeling of attachment to home, and the feeling of loss that the immigrants face when they realize that they will never need their house keys again. The use of internal voices gives a very personal feel to the poem, the audience is given an insight into the vulnerable thoughts of several refugees throughout their journeys. Nearing the end the voices begin to address the audience directly “I have nothing from my home. Everything was broken in the struggle. We were out in just ten minutes.” (line 130). This change from internal to external voice demonstrates the intentions of the immigrant, to finally protest against the unfair treatment and suffering that so many have experienced, a protest for a better life, one where not everything must be lost, where identity and freedom does not rely on a beggar’s cup “I have my own cup, it gives me independence” (line 97). Toksvig’s use of different objects to illustrate the diversity of immigrants, as well as seemingly trivial objects such as toilet paper and a flashlight effectively illustrates the desperation and rush that the subjects faced when leaving home. The repetition of different objects is effective because it makes the reader reflect and ask himself what he would take if he had to leave everything he knew in a matter of minutes. It makes the situation more personal and realistic in the mind of the reader.

Toksvig makes an allusion to “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” by Coleridge when the subjects say, “Water, water everywhere” (line 80). The readers most likely will be western due to the reference to Coleridge’s poem well known in the west, but not globally, and thus will know that the poem talks about a ship that is lost at sea and is cursed, where at one point there is ‘water water everywhere but not a drop to drink’,

which is incredibly ironic because they are dying of thirst yet they are surrounded by water. This allusion adds an underlying ironic and yet desperate tone to the poem which is very effective in making the audience understand the emotional desperation that the immigrants go through.

The depiction of cultural struggle, and the loss that immigrants inevitably face is very evident in Gonzales' poem. Joaquín fears for his Mexican heritage, fears that it will be destroyed by modern society and therefore realizes that he “must choose between victory of the spirit or to exist in the grasp of American Social neurosis, sterilization of the soul and a full stomach”(line 15). Rodolfo's choice of words here make it obvious that he hates American culture, and empathizes with Joaquín and many other immigrants for having to choose between integrating fully into society and hopefully prospering or holding on to bits and pieces of their Mexican identity which will mark them as outsiders. Gonzales' portrays Joaquín's emotions when he describes the difficulties, and his “tears of sorrow” and “seeds of hate”(line 18). Throughout the poem Gonzales' tone is angry, at the Spanish conquistadors who forced the indigenous people out of their land, angry at Americans that will not fully accept immigrants and angry at himself for not being able to integrate fully into society.

An immigrant's past and history can be extremely difficult to keep and not reject in the search to integrate into society. Immigrants risk not being fully accepted by citizens when they choose to hold onto their traditions and language. As a result many immigrants end up like Joaquín, “I look at myself, and reject my father and my mother” (line 165) “I sometimes sell my brother out”(line 171), in order to integrate fully into

society. This choice does not come easily, and therefore many immigrants end up feeling ashamed and humiliated as their struggle to fit in continues.

Graphic depictions of violence are used effectively in all three poems to strengthen the portrayal of struggle. Rodolfo’s use of the metaphor for hunger, “I bleed as the vicious gloves of hunger cut my face and eyes, as I fight my way from stinking barrios” (line 200) emphasizes the poverty in which most Mexican immigrants live prior to leaving for the United States to strive for a better future. Joaquín’s identity is composed of “mutilated sorrow” (line 205) for all the experiences he has lived and gone through. The choice to use mutilated here allows the reader to imagine a bloody face, clearly injured, and the deep sadness that the subject is feeling. Toksvig mentions the fear of rape, “We rubbed ourselves in vomit, /So the pirates wouldn’t touch us.” (line 140-1) that many immigrants face. It is her use of imagery such as vomit, and pirates that put people in danger that allows the poem to instill fear in the audience and make non-immigrants understand the struggle and fear that it takes to cross borders and seas. The pirates are extorting money from people who often have none, while they are fleeing for their lives therefore they end up having no choice but to pay huge amounts of money, often to face abuse and die at sea. These pirates are not helping them to safety, they are making money from their fear and desperation. Shire uses imagery of violence throughout the poem. Rape is present, “fourteen men between your legs”(line 65), abuse “the blow is stronger than a limb torn off” (line 61), “strip searches where your body is left aching” (line 35) to continuously focus on the physical struggle that refugees endure and consequentially mental struggle. While reading the poem Shire has the intention of making the reader feel the need to turn away, because the images are too real, too graphic. It

is because of this that the poem is extremely effective, because it's descriptions are so powerful that the poem becomes hard to read and therefore makes it clear to the audience that the experiences are extremely intense.

Repetition is also a common theme throughout the poems. Rodolfo chooses to write "I am Joaquín" seven different times throughout the poem. This repetition creates a sense of reassurance for Joaquín, who clings to his identity, while illustrating to the reader that Joaquín changes every time he repeats these three words. This serves to emphasize the struggle for identity that immigrants go through, their struggle to become something other than refugee and unwanted immigrant. He realizes that full integration into American culture must equal loss of Mexican identity. However, the poem ends with a strong message, to endure, and to "refuse to be absorbed" and continue to honor Mexican heritage even after a new identity has been formed.

The first verse of, "What They Took With Them", sets the tone for the rest of the poem, one that translates the character's desperation and vulnerability towards society. The poem starts out simply stating, "Wallet; empty," and then proceeding to make reference to the sea and guards possibly at a border who hold a "torch, whistle, laser point". The use of such trivial words such as torch, escalating to a more threatening and specific word such as laser point allows the audience to sympathize with the characters and understand the underlying anxiety that accompanies them throughout the turbulent voyage.

It is a stereotype that refugees either do not work, spend their time begging, or steal the jobs of citizens and are therefore useless to the economy. Due to this mentality,

many asylum seekers are treated badly, even treated as less than human sometimes. This first person perspective of a refugee wanting to work so that “I can become someone again” (Toksvig, line 25) demonstrates the desire of many refugees to earn respect when arriving, with almost nothing, in a new country. This verse allows the audience, both potentially refugees, or well-off citizens of a country that is experiencing an influx of refugees, to sympathize with the main character, and understand where many people are coming from in today’s world.

The repetition of “painkillers, painkillers” followed by the use of “Sea sickness tablets. Walking stick, walking stick, white cane, crutches. Wheelchair.” allows the reader to understand that the subject is in a grave state and needs medical help, but for some reason is unable to receive it. The repetition of certain words is effectively used by the poet to point out certain aspects of the refugees physical or mental state that she would like us to notice and therefore sympathize with. When the poem begins the more trivial objects are mentioned such as toilet paper and house keys, but as it continues it is clear that the subjects are in danger as they need pain killers, and bandages. The entire poem is a contrast between trivial and necessary items, and the struggle for life, identity and comfort. By the end the objects are almost forgotten, because the subjects escape with barely anything but “my life” (line 144). There is a movement from trivial to desperate necessity throughout the poem, that of carrying only the necessities which are no longer objects but rather, “my children” (line 136) and “my virginity” (line 138). It allows the reader to reflect on the loss and horror that most immigrants face, as well as a focus on what is important, not the objects mentioned throughout the poem, which are

effective in portraying the desperation of the subjects but rather the people that they care most about.

Racism, unfortunately, is a common aspect of the migration experience that many, if not most, immigrants end up facing. Racism often leads to an identity struggle because, most of the time the last thing an immigrant wants to do is stand out in the new, alienating society. This struggle is pointed out when the girl states, “I want my skin to be white, and my hair to be spiked. I don’t want them to know I’m a refugee” (Toksvig, line 39). There are many prejudices that are tied to skin color and physical features. The poet underlines the racism held even by cops, people who are supposed to be part of the system for justice, “What if somebody spots me and calls the police because I’m illegal? But not if I’m white, that’s right isn’t it?” (line 44) and the unfair treatment of non-whites in many western countries.

The lack of freedom, opportunities, and therefore choices that an immigrant has is highlighted in the eighth stanza, “The most painful thing about being a refugee, Is that you wake up one day to find you’ve lost, All of your liberty...It’s like everything is closed in your face, So there’s nothing else but the sea.”(line 73) The strong imagery used throughout the poem allows the audience to put themselves in the shoes of the speaker describing her story first hand. The sense of loss and sadness is strong, the author aims to humanize refugees, and make their situation as relatable as possible so that people begin to realize that their situation could happen to anyone born into a country raging with conflict. The eighth stanza serves to emphasize the vulnerability of many immigrant’s identity and their desire for freedom, for themselves and their families.

Many immigrants don't have much to hold on to, and because they are extremely vulnerable many hold on to faith. The woman in the "What They Took with Them" prays, a lot, as "Virgin Mary necklace" (line 118) and "Rosary and prayer beads, Rosary, prayer beads, Rosary" (line 105) is repeated several times. The author is effective both in demonstrating the importance of religion in an immigrant's identity as well as the desperation and anxiety that they feel every day that drives them to pray continuously for a hopeful future. The situation is out of their control, and therefore they look to a higher power to sooth their hardships and instill their souls with hope.

As time passes immigrants begin a new life, as their identity is shaped to a greater extent and integration into society comes with more ease. The poem ends with the marriage of the immigrant woman who uses her "Mother's wedding ring" because she lost hers "in the bombing so my mother gave me hers." The wedding "symbolizes freedom", freedom to choose "what to wear", and to choose which parts of her old identity she wishes to keep and which parts of the new culture she is faced with she wishes to adopt and make her own. Yet again the woman has to choose which parts of her identity she wishes to keep and which to discard to move on to a new future. Jenifer Toksvig manages to describe the struggles of an immigrant's first hand experience, especially when it comes to the destruction and creation of identity, ending with a positive message of hope and freedom.

A common misconception that people who have never earned the title of asylum seeker have is that refugees have a choice to stay or leave their country. This is much like saying that people have a choice between life and death, which although holds some

truth, is a ridiculous ultimatum to reach. Life is most often seen as the obvious choice, and therefore leaving one's country or facing death becomes not much of a choice.

Warsan Shire's masterpiece, "Home", emphasizes the lack of freedom that refugees are dealt when fleeing the place they called home. Her choice of a lack of punctuation and capital letters makes the reader experience the poem in a hurried manner. It deliberately manages to portray the level of education or lack thereof that many immigrants unfortunately will have. Warsan Shire effectively uses the following metaphor "no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark" (line 1) for home, making it clear that home is no longer a desirable, or safe place to be. The poem is also addressed directly to the reader, shown by the use of "you" several times throughout the poem, "you only leave home when home won't let you stay" (line 10). While, "the boy you went to school with who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory is holding a gun bigger than his body," (line 6) allows the reader not only to empathize more strongly with the main character but rather to imagine what it would be like to be put in such a heart wrenching situation. It also makes the poem sound like a protest or a plea to understand what the protagonist has gone through. The personification at the end of the poem also makes the ending extremely powerful. By making home whisper "i dont know what i've become but i know that anywhere is safer than here" (line 93) it's almost as if the people of their countries are crying out, and the people committing horrible acts are pleading for forgiveness and asking for their people to leave before everything is destroyed. The ending is effective in demonstrating the desperation of the country itself which wants to protect its citizens and so begs them to leave.

The use of imagery throughout the poem such as, “hot blood in your belly” (line 13) allows the author’s message to be more effective as the images portrayed provoke strong feelings of devastation, hopelessness and desperation in the reader. Leaving home was never part of a plan in the refugee’s future, and so their shock in being forced to leave is emphasized by the author’s use of a hyphen to create a dramatic pause in the poem, “it’s not something you ever thought about doing, and so when you did -” (line 14) just before everything, including identity begins to change.

The trip, often illegally, made to a new ‘home’ changes a person significantly. If one makes it alive to the other side, it is very rare to make it unscarred and unchanged. However if they manage to survive, they are identified as, “dirty immigrants, asylum seekers, dark, savage”(line 50). Shire’s use of the rhetorical question, “look what they’ve done to their own countries, what will they do to ours?”(line 56) highlights the mentality of many people against welcoming refugees. This is how she manages to humanize the subject of her poem, by showing the raw emotion that immigrants have to go through. Gonzales manages to do the same by his description of Joaquin’s confusion and pain whereas Toksvig is very effective in her use of various objects that provide comfort and security such as a doll, emphasizing the refugees vulnerable sides.

It is easier to live with the weight of shame, indignity, poverty, and disapproval, and being mistreated constantly than to be raped or bombed in one’s own country. This is not yet a good life, but certainly a better one than back home.

Refugees are stripped of their identities, and often their ‘new life’ begins with devastation and pain, because “home tells you to leave *what you could not behind, even if*

it was human” (line 86). Their future begins with committing the unbearable, the unimaginable, and courageously trying to put together a new identity.

Whether the media chooses to call them immigrants, asylum seekers or refugees, the decision to migrate to a new country on short notice is usually taken due to need rather than choice. As “I am Joaquín”, “What They Took with Them” and “Home” have tried to convey, the immigrant experience is full of struggle and the often harsh experiences that immigrants have to face become part of their identity. Gonzales, Toksvig and Shire chose to highlight different experiences with subjects from the Middle East Latino and African communities, but they all manage to depict the feelings of anguish, desperation, hope and resilience throughout their poems that provides a common ground for migrants to relate to. Today, more and more immigrants are fleeing to the West. It is likely because of this that these three poets chose to write about either their own personal experiences of immigration, or that of the struggle of others, in order to help promote a more understanding society towards those that are the most vulnerable: refugees.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: ‘What They Took With Them’, Jenifer Toksvig

I transcribed the following poem from the UN official website

- Wallet; empty,
 Wallet, wallet, money, coins, pennies.
 Torch, whistle, laser pointer –
 Seen more clearly out at sea.
 5 Three bags. One bag. Rucksack. Trunk.
 Yellow plastic bag for papers,
 Sellotaped till waterproof
 And yellow cards for refugees
 And national ID.
 10 Army service record,
 And information booklet from the government,
 Diploma: Electronics, Certificate from high school.
 Passport: if you’ve got one you can take.
 Expensive one way ticket: fake.

 15 Flag, flag, national flag.
 Flash drive, laptop, phone, mobile
 Phone number, phone number, phone number
 SIM card, spare one,
 Phone, phone,
 20 Smart phone with Skype and Facetime,
 Headphones, charger, charger, overseas adaptor.

 House keys.
 House keys.
 House keys.

 25 We have suffered so much.
 I want to study so I can become someone again.

 Painkillers. Pain killers
 Sea sickness tablets.
 Walking stick, walking stick, white cane, crutches. Wheelchair.
 30 Syringes to use in an emergency
 Bandages, bandages, toiletries, toothpaste
 Toothbrush and toothpaste, nail clipper, comb, shampoo and hair gel
 Barber equipment and sunscreen and ointment for sunburns
 And tablets for son’s epilepsy:

- 35 one every day.
And all vaccinations recorded to date
For the baby.
- And face whitening cream.
I want my skin to be white
40 And my hair to be spiked.
I don't want them to know I'm a refugee.
What if somebody spots me and calls the police because
I'm illegal?
But not if I'm white, that's right isn't it?
- 45 Traditional clothing. Warm clothing, baby clothing, favourite clothing
Dirty clothing, wet clothing, layered clothing
Pants, pants, pants.
- Sewing machine: it's my life, it's my blood.
Four dresses, and change of clothes.
50 One pair of flowery jeans,
That I wore to a party
And won't wear again
Until I go to another one.
One shirt, one shirt, and one missing sandal
55 A pair of shoes, pair of shoes, new: never worn
A hijab, a gift from a friend.
My favourite scarf, with skulls on: I just love the colour
My turban, my turban's my guardian
Now it protects my identity, and my faith
60 Without it, I'm vulnerable
Head scarf, from someone who died in the conflict.
A hat for the baby, and socks for the baby
One nappy, just one
And sanitary towels.
- 65 Sports jacket for warmth,
And some have a life jacket too
And some don't.
- The most painful thing about being a refugee,
Is that you wake up one day to find you've lost
70 All of your liberty
And can no longer decide on your life.
It's like everything is closed in your face,
So there's nothing else but the sea.

- 75 There's nothing but the sea
 As a way to get out
 And be free.
- 80 Cigarettes: cartons, packets, lighters
 Clay pipe, ginseng, jerry can, milk
 Sterile water, bottled water
 Water, water, everywhere,
 A half a litre bottle for a one week trip.
 Bottled oil, lemons, lemons,
 Dates, dates, dates, dates
 Biscuits, crackers, crackers, crackers, corned beef in a tin.
- 85 Tea set for the others on the boat
 We're thirsty, tired and afraid.
 I'll make some tea.
 That's what we do,
 We make a family.
- 90 Baby food, marshmallows, bread that wasn't fully baked.
 The man who threw us out wouldn't let us finish up.
 Metal cooking pot to make some dinner for the children.
 One man only brought a cup
- 95 I'd have been ashamed to ask everyday for a cup, just to take a drink of water.
 People get tired of being asked for things all the time,
 And eventually they will say no.
 But now I have my own cup.
 It gives me independence,
 No matter where I go.
- 100 Plastic carpets, rug, rug, pillow
 Animal skin tent
 A piece of mortar from the house.
 A piece of soil from the garden, wrapped in fabric.
 Sacred soil, sacred book, sacred text
- 105 Rosary and prayer beads,
 Rosary, prayer beads,
 Rosary
- 110 My headdress hides the key to a small metal chest
 Containing all of the essentials for a wedding
 Ring, ring, charm, ring
 Mother's wedding ring

- I lost mine in the bombing so my mother gave me hers.
My earrings.
I make jewellery, all the jewellery of my people.
- 115 It symbolises freedom.
No one tells me what to wear.
Heart necklace, heart necklace,
Virgin Mary necklace
Bracelet, bracelet, bracelet
- 120 No the bracelet's not my favourite thing
That's Nancy, she's my doll.
The night we fled my mother put her on my bed
So we would not forget her,
But in all the rush she did get left behind.
- 125 I don't mind. She'll keep watch.
- Watch, digital and analogue
Family portrait, photos, photos
Photo of my father.
- Memories of my father.
- 130 I have nothing from my home.
Everything was broken in the struggle.
We were out in just ten minutes.
They destroyed the house around my sick bed.
The neighbours heard me shout
- 135 And came and carried me out.
- I carried both my children, in baskets
Swinging from a pole across my shoulders
- And I carried my virginity
Out at sea
- 140 We rubbed ourselves in vomit
So the pirates wouldn't touch us.
- I escaped with my children,
Sister, brother, husband, wife.
- 144 With my soul With my smile With my life

Appendix 2: 'Mouth of a Shark', Warsan Shire

no one leaves home unless
 home is the mouth of a shark
 you only run for the border
 when you see the whole city running as well
 your neighbors running faster than you
 5 breath bloody in their throats
 the boy you went to school with
 who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory
 is holding a gun bigger than his body
 you only leave home
 10 when home won't let you stay.

no one leaves home unless home chases you
 fire under feet
 hot blood in your belly
 it's not something you ever thought of doing
 15 until the blade burnt threats into
 your neck
 and even then you carried the anthem under
 your breath
 only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets
 20 sobbing as each mouthful of paper
 made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.

you have to understand,
 that no one puts their children in a boat
 unless the water is safer than the land
 25 no one burns their palms
 under trains
 beneath carriages
 no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
 feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
 30 means something more than journey.
 no one crawls under fences
 no one wants to be beaten
 pitied

no one chooses refugee camps
 35 or strip searches where your
 body is left aching
 or prison,
 because prison is safer
 than a city of fire
 40 and one prison guard
 in the night

is better than a truckload
 of men who look like your father
 no one could take it
 45 no one could stomach it
 no one skin would be tough enough

the
 go home blacks
 refugees
 50 dirty immigrants
 asylum seekers
 sucking our country dry
 niggers with their hands out
 they smell strange
 55 savage
 look what they've done to their countries
 what will they do to ours?
 how do the words
 the dirty looks
 60 roll off your backs
 maybe because the blow is softer
 than a limb torn off

or the words are more tender
 than fourteen men between
 65 your legs
 or the insults are easier
 to swallow
 than rubble
 than bone
 70 than your child body
 in pieces.
 i want to go home,
 but home is the mouth of a shark
 home is the barrel of the gun
 and no one would leave home
 75 unless home chased you to the shore
 unless home told you
 to quicken your legs
 leave your clothes behind
 crawl through the desert
 80 wade through the oceans
 drown
 save
 be hunger
 beg

- 85 forget pride
 your survival is more important
 home tells you to leave what you could not behind, even if it was human.
 no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear
 saying-
 leave,
- 90 run away from me now
 i dont know what i've become
 but i know that anywhere
 is safer than here

Appendix 3: 'I Am Joaquín', Rodolfo Corky Gonzales

- Yo soy Joaquín,
 perdido en un mundo de confusión:
 I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion,
 caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,
- 5 confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes,
 suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society.
 My fathers have lost the economic battle
 and won the struggle of cultural survival.
 And now! I must choose between the paradox of
- 10 victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger,
 or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis,
 sterilization of the soul and a full stomach.
 Yes, I have come a long way to nowhere,
 unwillingly dragged by that monstrous, technical,
- 15 industrial giant called Progress and Anglo success....
 I look at myself.
 I watch my brothers.
 I shed tears of sorrow. I sow seeds of hate.
 I withdraw to the safety within the circle of life --
- 20 MY OWN PEOPLE
 I am Cuauhtémoc, proud and noble,
 leader of men, king of an empire civilized
 beyond the dreams of the gachupín Cortés,
 who also is the blood, the image of myself.

- 25 I am the Maya prince.
I am Nezahualcōyotl, great leader of the Chichimecas.
I am the sword and flame of Cortes the despot
And I am the eagle and serpent of the Aztec civilization.
I owned the land as far as the eye
- 30 could see under the Crown of Spain,
and I toiled on my Earth and gave my Indian sweat and blood
for the Spanish master who ruled with tyranny over man and
beast and all that he could trample
But...THE GROUND WAS MINE.
- 35 I was both tyrant and slave.
As the Christian church took its place in God's name,
to take and use my virgin strength and trusting faith,
the priests, both good and bad, took--
but gave a lasting truth that Spaniard Indian Mestizo
- 40 were all God's children.
And from these words grew men who prayed and fought
for their own worth as human beings, for that
GOLDEN MOMENT of FREEDOM.
I was part in blood and spirit of that courageous village priest
- 45 Hidalgo who in the year eighteen hundred and ten
rang the bell of independence and gave out that lasting cry--
El Grito de Dolores
"Que mueran los gachupines y que viva la Virgen de Guadalupe...."
I sentenced him who was me I excommunicated him, my blood.
- 50 I drove him from the pulpit to lead a bloody revolution for him and me....
I killed him.
His head, which is mine and of all those
who have come this way,
I placed on that fortress wall
- 55 to wait for independence. Morelos! Matamoros! Guerrero!
all companeros in the act, STOOD AGAINST THAT WALL OF INFAMY
to feel the hot gouge of lead which my hands made.
I died with them ... I lived with them I lived to see our country free.

Free from Spanish rule in eighteen-hundred-twenty-one.

- 60 Mexico was free??
The crown was gone but all its parasites remained,
and ruled, and taught, with gun and flame and mystic power.
I worked, I sweated, I bled, I prayed,
and waited silently for life to begin again.
- 65 I fought and died for Don Benito Juarez, guardian of the Constitution.
I was he on dusty roads on barren land as he protected his archives
as Moses did his sacraments.
He held his Mexico in his hand on
the most desolate and remote ground which was his country.
- 70 And this giant little Zapotec gave not one palm's breadth
of his country's land to kings or monarchs or presidents of foreign powers.
I am Joaquin.
I rode with Pancho Villa,
crude and warm, a tornado at full strength,
- 75 nourished and inspired by the passion and the fire of all his earthy people.
I am Emiliano Zapata.
"This land, this earth is OURS."
The villages, the mountains, the streams
belong to Zapatistas.
- 80 Our life or yours is the only trade for soft brown earth and maize.
All of which is our reward,
a creed that formed a constitution
for all who dare live free!
"This land is ours . . .
- 85 Father, I give it back to you.
Mexico must be free. . . ."
I ride with revolutionists
against myself.
I am the Rurales,
- 90 coarse and brutal,
I am the mountain Indian,

superior over all.
 The thundering hoof beats are my horses. The chattering machine guns
 are death to all of me:

- 100 Yaquí
 Tarahumara
 Chamala
 Zapotec
 Mestizo
- 105 Español.
 I have been the bloody revolution,
 The victor,
 The vanquished.
 I have killed
- 110 And been killed.
 I am the despots Díaz
 And Huerta
 And the apostle of democracy,
 Francisco Madero.
- 115 I am
 The black-shawled
 Faithfulwomen
 Who die with me
 Or live
- 120 Depending on the time and place.
 I am faithful, humble Juan Diego,
 The Virgin of Guadalupe,
 Tonantzín, Aztec goddess, too.
 I rode the mountains of San Joaquín.
- 125 I rode east and north
 As far as the Rocky Mountains,
 And
 All men feared the guns of
 Joaquín Murrieta.

- 130 I killed those men who dared
To steal my mine,
Who raped and killed my love
My wife.
Then I killed to stay alive.
- 135 I was Elfego Baca,
living my nine lives fully.
I was the Espinoza brothers
of the Valle de San Luis.
All were added to the number of heads that in the name of civilization
- 140 were placed on the wall of independence, heads of brave men
who died for cause or principle, good or bad.
Hidalgo! Zapata!
Murrieta! Espinozas!
Are but a few.
- 145 They dared to face
The force of tyranny
Of men who rule by deception and hypocrisy.
I stand here looking back,
And now I see the present,
- 150 And still I am a campesino,
I am the fat political coyote—
I,
Of the same name,
Joaquín,
- 155 In a country that has wiped out
All my history,
Stifled all my pride,
In a country that has placed a
Different weight of indignity upon my age-old burdened back.
- 160 Inferiority is the new load
The Indian has endured and still
Emerges the winner,
The Mestizo must yet overcome,

And the gachupín will just ignore.

- 165 I look at myself
And see part of me
Who rejects my father and my mother
And dissolves into the melting pot
To disappear in shame.
- 170 I sometimes
Sell my brother out
And reclaim him
For my own when society gives me
Token leadership
- 175 In society's own name.
I am Joaquín,
Who bleeds in many ways.
The altars of Moctezuma
I stained a bloody red.
- 180 My back of Indian slavery
Was stripped crimson
From the whips of masters
Who would lose their blood so pure
When revolution made them pay,
- 185 Standing against the walls of retribution.
Blood has flowed from me on every battlefield between
campesino, hacendado,
slave and master and revolution.
I jumped from the tower of Chapultepec
- 190 into the sea of fame—
my country's flag
my burial shroud—
with Los Niños,
whose pride and courage

- 195 could not surrender
with indignity
their country's flag
to strangers . . . in their land.
Now I bleed in some smelly cell from club or gun or tyranny.
- 200 I bleed as the vicious gloves of hunger
Cut my face and eyes,
As I fight my way from stinking barrios
To the glamour of the ring
And lights of fame
- 205 Or mutilated sorrow.
My blood runs pure on the ice-caked
Hills of the Alaskan isles,
On the corpse-strewn beach of Normandy,
The foreign land of Korea
- 210 And now Vietnam.
Here I stand
Before the court of justice,
Guilty
For all the glory of my Raza
- 215 To be sentenced to despair.
Here I stand,
Poor in money,
Arrogant with pride,
Bold with machismo,
- 220 Rich in courage
And
Wealthy in spirit and faith.
My knees are caked with mud.
My hands calloused from the hoe. I have made the Anglo rich,
- 225 Yet
Equality is but a word—
The Treaty of Hidalgo has been broken
And is but another threacherous promise.

- My land is lost
- 230 And stolen,
My culture has been raped.
I lengthen the line at the welfare door
And fill the jails with crime.
These then are the rewards
- 235 This society has
For sons of chiefs
And kings
And bloody revolutionists,
Who gave a foreign people
- 240 All their skills and ingenuity
To pave the way with brains and blood
For those hordes of gold-starved strangers,
Who
Changed our language
- 245 And plagiarized our deeds
As feats of valor
Of their own.
They frowned upon our way of life
and took what they could use.
- 250 Our art, our literature, our music, they ignored—
so they left the real things of value
and grabbed at their own destruction
by their greed and avarice.
They overlooked that cleansing fountain of
- 255 nature and brotherhood
which is Joaquín.
The art of our great señores,
Diego Rivera,
Siqueiros,
- 260 Orozco, is but another act of revolution for
the salvation of mankind.

Mariachi music, the heart and soul
of the people of the earth,
the life of the child,

265 and the happiness of love.
The corridos tell the tales
of life and death,
of tradition,
legends old and new, of joy

270 of passion and sorrow
of the people—who I am.
I am in the eyes of woman,
sheltered beneath
her shawl of black,

275 deep and sorrowful eyes
that bear the pain of sons long buried or dying,
dead on the battlefield or on the barbed wire of social strife.
Her rosary she prays and fingers endlessly
like the family working down a row of beets

280 to turn around and work and work.
There is no end.
Her eyes a mirror of all the warmth
and all the love for me,
and I am her

285 and she is me.
We face life together in sorrow,
anger, joy, faith and wishful
thoughts.
I shed the tears of anguish

290 as I see my children disappear
behind the shroud of mediocrity,
never to look back to remember me.
I am Joaquín.
I must fight

- 295 and win this struggle
for my sons, and they
must know from me
who I am.
Part of the blood that runs deep in me
- 300 could not be vanquished by the Moors.
I defeated them after five hundred years,
and I have endured.
Part of the blood that is mine
has labored endlessly four hundred
- 305 years under the heel of lustful
Europeans.
I am still here!
- I have endured in the rugged mountains
Of our country
- 310 I have survived the toils and slavery of the fields.
I have existed
In the barrios of the city
In the suburbs of bigotry
In the mines of social snobbery
- 315 In the prisons of dejection
In the muck of exploitation
And
In the fierce heat of racial hatred.
And now the trumpet sounds,
- 320 The music of the people stirs the
Revolution.
Like a sleeping giant it slowly
Rears its head
To the sound of
- 325 Tramping feet
Clamoring voices
Mariachi strains
Fiery tequila explosions

- The smell of chile verde and
- 330 Soft brown eyes of expectation for a
Better life.
And in all the fertile farmlands,
the barren plains,
the mountain villages,
- 335 smoke-smearred cities,
we start to MOVE.
La raza!
Méjicano!
Español!
- 340 Latino!
Chicano!
Or whatever I call myself,
I look the same
I feel the same
- 345 I cry
And
Sing the same.
I am the masses of my people and
I refuse to be absorbed.
- 350 I am Joaquín.
The odds are great
But my spirit is strong,
My faith unbreakable,
My blood is pure.
- 355 I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ.
I SHALL ENDURE!
I WILL ENDURE!