

ESSAY BY DANIEL JÁQUEZ

Borderfesto

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A *borderfesto*. What is that? Not really sure, but I like the name. I guess I'll clench my right fist and raise it in the air: "Borders not fences! Borders: Yes. Fences: No. Borders link, they don't divide!"

But I will not speak about immigration, migration, the undocumented, deported, abused, murdered. I will not talk about fear, starvation, missing families, or about fathers and brothers gone, mothers and daughters alone. Not the DEA or ICE, not border patrol or customs. Those things stand clearly before us; they're everywhere we look, if we ever care to see. I don't want to look out the window and notice the disparity of wealth, nor the systematic abuse by the powers that be. I don't want to look at dreams shattered and dying hopes; at ditches full of people with no country and no food. Put me in a bubble and just take me to the beach.

I don't want to talk about crossing borders, because that's old news. If you want to be a better human being, you *have* to cross borders. It's the way it's always been. If you want to be smarter, safer, kinder, you'd better cross some borders. Use those borders as points of reference, then jump that fence, swim that ocean, ride that train, cross that door, read that book, kiss that boy. This is the only way we grow, this is the way to expand our universe. Babies cross borders on a daily basis; they explore the unknown, they reach for the unfamiliar—that's what they do. They learn to understand *us*: the strangers in their midst. They take, they learn, they give, and if you play your cards right, one day, they might give up everything for you.

I will, however, talk about living on the border, and about being from the border: that beautiful and difficult place where ordinary people are everyday heroes. The Border. Where people become ambassadors of culture, of politics, of opinions, of languages, of rituals, and always work towards a greater shared understanding. We are used to looking out and looking in. We are used to being as comfortable here as we are there. We are *Fronterizos* (border-dwellers).

I have the blood of Cuauhtémoc and the spunk of Davey Crocket; I have the insolence of Napoleon and the Navajo resistance to Manifest Destiny. That is my heritage, my constitution. Those are some of the peoples that inhabit my blood, my border. *Fronterizos* patiently spend what feels like infinite hours each day, moving from one place to the next, in order to jump through all the hoops to get a little of what we want and experience a little of what we haven't; a complicated game of Twister, always reaching far and pulling back, stepping in and stepping out, and forever leaving our print. We make a life out of navigating both worlds, or should I say, of creating a unique world in which transition is at constant play. We are, as Georgina Escobar calls us, "Border Welders: the linkers of worlds." We can make fire and heat to soften the hard, sharp edges of two pieces of steel so they can come together as one strong piece of humanity.

We are trees that grow through walls, our roots spreading underneath in all directions—north, south, east and west, getting nourishment wherever we find it. Our branches push out on fences, growing through holes and crevices, trying to breathe, but always, always reaching towards the sun; ready to give shade and fruit to whoever allows themselves to come near.

Border-festo... ¿Que es esto? No estoy seguro, pero me gusta el nombre, como manifiesto. Alzaré el puño del brazo derecho: ¡Fronteras, Si! ¡Bardas No! Las fronteras unen, las bardas separan.

Pero no hablaré de inmigración, migración, indocumentados, deportados, abusados, asesinados; no hablaré de temores, hambres, familias perdidas; padres, hermanos lejos; madres e hijas, solas. Ni del D. E. A. ni de la I. C. E. ni del Border Patrol ni de aduanas... Todo está en frente de nuestras narices y claramente lo vemos si lo queremos captar. No quiero mirar por la ventana y observar la desigualdad económica, ni el sistemático abuso de los que están en el poder. No quiero ver sueños destruidos ni esperanzas moribundas. A gente en canales sin país ni alimento. Súbanme en una burbuja y llévenme a la playa.

Tampoco quiero hablar de cruzar fronteras, ya se ha dicho todo. Si quieres ser un mejor ser humano tienes que cruzar fronteras. Así ha sido desde siempre. Si quieres ser mas listo, seguro, amable, tienes que cruzar fronteras, crúzalas todas si tienes oportunidad. Usa la frontera como punto de referencia, luego brinca la barda, nada el océano, móntate a un tren, cruza la puerta, lee el libro, besa al muchacho. Es la única manera de crecer, expandir nuestro universo. Los bebes cruzan fronteras a diario, exploran lo desconocido, se acercan a lo ajeno. Así es como crecen, así es como aprenden a entendernos: los extranjeros en su mundo. Ellos toman, aprenden, dan, y si juegas bien tus cartas, un día, ellos lo darán todo por ti.

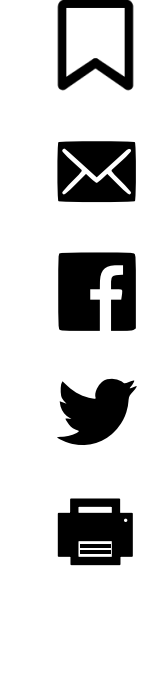
Sí quiero hablar de la vida en la frontera, el ser de la frontera. Ese bello y difícil lugar donde cada persona es un héroe. Cada persona es un embajador de cultura, política, opinión, idiomas, rituales y -- sabiendo o sin saberlo -- continuamente luchan por una convivencia global. Estamos acostumbrados a ver hacia allá y ver hacia acá. Nos sentimos en nuestro ambiente en este lado como en el otro. Somos fronterizos.

Llevo sangre de Cuauhtémoc y el brío de Davey Crocket; tengo la insolencia de Napoleón y, del Návaro, la resistencia a la doctrina del destino manifiesto. Sí, es verdad, esa es mi herencia, mi constitución. Estas son las gentes que habitan mi sangre, mi frontera. Gente que no quiere cruzar ni regresar, gente orgullosa de ser de donde es. Pacientemente esperamos horas en línea para cumplir los requisitos y poder llegar a disfrutar lo que queremos o a tener una experiencia que no hemos tenido. Es un juego complicado de Twister, siempre alcanzando hacia adelante y buscando hacia atrás, pisando aquí, pisando allá y siempre dejando nuestra huella. Vivimos navegando los dos mundos, o mejor dicho, creando un mundo único de transiciones, de paso. Somos, como Georgina Escobar nos llama, Soldadores. Soldadores Fronterizos: unidores de mundos. Creamos fuego y con el calor ablandamos los puntos duros y rasposos de dos pedazos de acero para que juntos, se enlacen en un fuerte pedazo de humanidad.

Somos árboles que crecen entre y a través de muros. Nuestra raíz viaja por debajo en todas direcciones, norte, sur, este y oeste tomando alimento donde lo encuentre, ramas empujando y torciendo contra bardas encontrando hoyos y ranuras por donde respirar. Pero siempre buscando el sol y siempre listos para dar sombra y fruto al que nos lo permita.

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Loved reading this, thank you Daniel. Having grown up on the border and calling myself a "Fronterizo" as well, all of this rings very true. I think it's a fertile place for dramatic endeavors...

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