

Honorable Mentions

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In the Chaco

In the Chaco
people send out messages
for the dead
on radio waves;
do they get *radio pa'i puku*
in heaven?

In the Chaco
owl throat calls
full yellow moon month night,
white shroud chrysalis
and soft candle light.

In the Chaco
spring is yellow
acacia sweet
buzzing day and new life waiting
for *asôjñá*.

In the Chaco
your floor is never dirty
it is just dirt,
and when it rains
you make clay people and laugh.

In the Chaco
chickens chase dogs,
hoping for a peck
at the shiny blood-filled ticks
around their necks.

In the Chaco
green glint of parrots
on the wing;
world washed clean
after the *noche tormentosa*.

In the Chaco
dry bread

and hot sugar water
taste great.

In the Chaco
smooth skin bathed in
moonlight, curves
through fire-warm water
and the trees called
tujñie and *aj'ac*.

In the Chaco
rattlesnakes walk at night,
when the north wind blows.

Leaving the Chaco
on a bus,
ghost palms in the headlights
wearing leaf skirts.
I lost track of time
or time lost track of me
and what was left of her was mostly
cheekbone, elbow,
knee.

In the Chaco
the world moved beneath
my pen,
describing itself
to me.

Reflections

"In the Chaco" was written in 1998 during my first field experience as an anthropologist in the small Ayoreo community of Jesudi in the Paraguayan Chaco. I was turned inside out by the intense sociality and environmental sensuality of the place. As I worked hard to write down everything my hosts (and adoptive clan relations) instructed me about their language, their stories and their landscapes, poems also arose for me and made their way to paper. After many years I remain profoundly grateful to my Ayoreo teachers who invited me into their lifeworlds, where everything relates: story, song, bird, tree, dream, thoughts, theory.