

REPAST: A COLLECTIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC PROCESS OF MEANING MAKING

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ABSTRACT

For over six years, our writing collective has drawn upon our multivarious experiences and existence to examine and question our presence, purpose, motivation, and place at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) at the USA Mexico border. We thrive in our plurality and our disparate discourses have created an enduring sense and space of safety and belonging.

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losing ourselves into a newness
that is foggy and uncertain
crossing has become a border
between known and unknown

for we are mighty,
we are powerful,
we acknowledge
we build our stage
and share it with ourselves

an open forum in a closed room
curtains drawn to protect us from the glare of an angry sun
as it shines down upon our gathering of self-appointed experts.

I is a part of the WE
I is a member of the guilty party

I-came, I-took what was there, and I-left
I-saved no one. I-didn't even try
I-save no one.
(Espinosa-Dulanto, ms. 2024)

For over six years, our writing collective has drawn upon our multivarious experiences and existence to examine and question our presence, purpose, motivation, and place at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) at the USA Mexico border. We thrive in our plurality and our disparate discourses have created an enduring sense and space of safety and belonging. However, this sense/space is not impervious and events as monumental as the global pandemic, as horrific as the images of wars, as devastating as the ravages of climate change, as destabilizing as divisive politics, as personal as new professional expectations, all have become intrinsic part of our bearings and may strain as our commitment to continue dialoging is challenged.

listen my friend
for we have a thousand-thousand stories to tell
stories to amaze,
stories to horrify.
stories that explain what true community is
and how it is built
and how it is destroyed
stories about place
and home
and devastation
and rebuilding
and characters
and hatred
and kindness
and food
and hunger,
of drink and addiction
of riches and desolation
come sit and listen
to our triumphs
and fears
and share your fears too
for it is through this that we can become friends
and let you leave a shadow of you here with us
and send you home with the phantoms of our collective memory. (Espinosa-Dulanto, Ms. 2024)



Through it all, our collective ... four faculty members, four women, four mothers, four professionals ... with no premeditation found ourselves at the table (at each other's offices or homes) introducing ourselves through food, literally and figuratively inviting each other to traverse cultural and gastronomical histories, expanding our palate while learning to tolerate, accept and respect, perhaps to yearn and weaving personal and professional experiences memories through the all-encompassing metaphor of ... FOOD.



HAUNTING MEMORIES

*el sabor de amá,
pozole, enchiladas, chiles rellenos...
yummy memories.
puro amor en cada platillo
love was served in each meal
amor que se traga, que se siente en cada
bocado
learned that love could be swallowed, relished,
savored
amor compartido en la mesa, con la familia
shared love at the family table
that was *el sabor de amá,*
mucho pozole, enchiladas, chiles rellenos...
*hoy sólo me queda el recuerdo
el recuerdo del amor
el recuerdo de esa familia
no more pozole, enchiladas, chiles rellenos
amá,* today I have only your memories
the emptiness in the kitchen
hoy sólo queda el dolor
to remind me that you are gone*

Specifically, through this creative piece we strive to share the organic process of our collective exchange during the Covid-19 pandemic. The piece captures the plurality of our voices, the tangential nature of our thoughts, the interwoven memories, the excruciating yet mundane nature of personal loss in the face of global pandemonium. It captures a single extended period of shared strife during the COVID-19 pandemic under the nurturing umbrella of FOOD, something that to a point, we were able to control. In this piece, the global pandemic is the background and food is the metaphor that helped us to bear witness to each other's struggles, suffering, survival, memories, and dreams.

Too much on too little
too much work/too little time
too much demand/too little resources
too much food/too few ingredients
too much pressure/too little support

Covid-19 and the ensuing urgent need for isolation created a crisis that went beyond the global fear of disease and death. Isolated in our homes, we missed the intellectual sustenance of gathering around food. Our meetings continued and we often raised a glass or a fork to each other on computer screens. The urgency to adapt our meals to the scarcity of food, the muffled guilt of privileged access was reflected in the urgency with which we adapted to the professional demands of work from home and virtual offices.

INTRO TO COVID

it took a plane ride
crossing the Atlantic overnight...
arriving into a different world
new words to rapidly learn
corona-virus, COVID-19, quarantine...
where did spring go?
Texas—my not home, home
shelter in place, work displaced
no longer **we**, just an isolated **me**
learning what to do next...

borracha de pasión

spring in London
touristing, all senses alive
warm weather allows leisurely

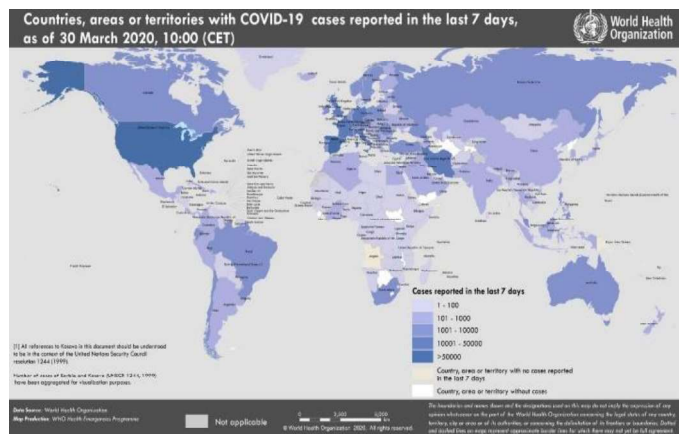
stroll

Borough Market

farmers open air stalls
savory selections
paella pans
little paper boxes
steaming deliciousness

chose a bougie bistro in Portobello Road

we felt free, dressed in fancy clothes
intoxicated with smells, sounds, colors, feelings



giggling, cuddling, touching, sharing
unbelievably ignorant of the impending upheaval
we didn't know that was our last time eating out

The creative piece reflects in its formatting the stream-of-consciousness flow of conversations and writings as each one processed the momentous blink in our collective lived history. *"The poetic text is both a meal unveiled and proffered forth to the reader as well as a form of sustenance for historical survival."* (Abarca & Soler, 2013). Each individual expressing collective concern in distinct voices. The virtual tools allowing us to piece together that which is ours (the written word and art) and that which we collected (illustrations) in our meaning making process. We did not gather to talk about food but yet it found its way into our conversations, keeping us grounded and reminding us that, *"Food ... is not about nutrients and calories. It's about sharing, It's about honesty. It's about Identity."* (Louise Fresco, 2009). Talk about food invariably underscored the complicated nature of our coping with adversity.

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without a schedule, a work agenda, a timecard
hours 've become even funnier
breakfast when getting up
permits a margarita on the rocks, top shelf
or a banana-split for the sugar deprived
while watches are just perfect decorations
no need for alarms
multiple functions counting steps and calories
for our sitting butts...

No longer ate on a schedule
no longer ate 'cause hungry
ate 'cause could,
ate 'cause couldn't
ate 'cause worried
ate 'cause helpless

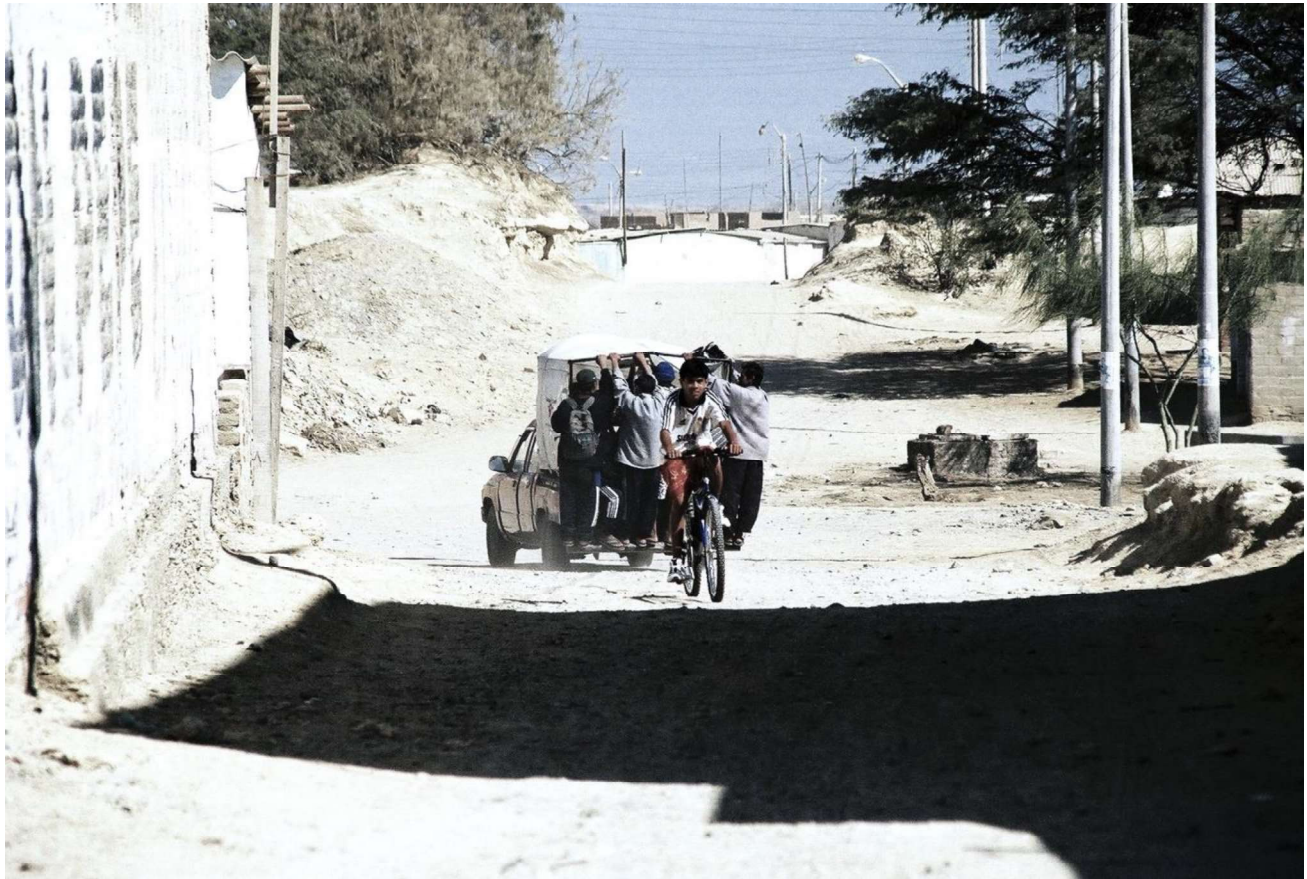
stuck at home, churning out exotic meals
privileged access to bizarre ingredients

outside, COVID continued feasting
on the sick, the dying, the dead
migrant workers around the world
the jobless, homeless, devastated
hallucinating of rotting crops on fertile soils
grieving at the failed harvest
starving

The memories of Covid-19, even for the grieving, are fading. The world continues its trajectory toward environmental, political, and humanitarian crisis. The incredible resourcefulness that the world showed in meeting the needs created then is not perceived as a singular draining moment of resilience but has become established as a pre-requisite for all future success. We adapt, change, and chase a continuously moving goal post because we have shown we are capable of it and we will not be allowed to forget it.

This piece celebrates the inherently timeless and simple act of cooking and eating. The understanding that “Food is our common ground, a universal experience” (James Beard, p. xi) was never more true as during the pandemic. We rediscovered the remarkable ability of food to heal, to mend, to bring succor, and a sense of connectedness in a time of isolation.

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Vejoya Viren celebrates her plural existence as a transnational *Indian Texican* living at the USA-Mexico border. She relies on compassion and empathy in navigating both personal and vicarious experiences.

Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto's teaching, research, and writing draw on decolonial indigenous feminist research methodologies. Peruana, inmigrante desplazada, con pasaporte azul, con raíces nómades y amores arrinconados, caminando al ocaso, con pasos de nostalgia, refugiada en la frontera mexicana, donde está aprendiendo, descubriendo, en español, inglés, tejano, peruano, y en valle-chingón. Miryam's work has appeared both in leading journals, handbooks, peer reviewed books, and regional/local publications that evidence the broad interdisciplinary, community based, and intellectual curiosity of her engagement.

Karin Lewis A native of Massachusetts, Karin Lewis cultivates her transplanted roots in the USA-Mexico borderlands with keen appreciation for transcultural understanding. In all her endeavors, she is grounded by gratitude and an ethic of care.

Eunice Lerma is an Associate Professor for the UTRGV Counseling Department. Dr. Lerma has been an educator for 20 years. In her research, she focuses on investigating the factors and practices that impact the mental health, career development, and academic success of Latina/o individuals. Additionally, she studies the dynamic of teaching and learning in post-secondary and its impact on Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI)

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