

14 Recipes for Immigrant Lives: Crossing, Cooking, Cultivating, and Culture at a Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen

Situational Strangers

Ingredientes: Introduction

Empanadillas de Angeles Reescrito Auténtico

4 lb carne molida de res...

This is the story of recipes loosely belonging—in that recipes are sociocultural narratives—to an immigrant from Guanajuato, Mexico. This is the story of the ways in which these recipes have evolved and taken on new cooks, ingredients, and customers as they have traveled through kitchens and meals over time and space, affirming that food “defies unitary categorization” (Deb 2014). This is therefore also a single “foodways” thread woven within the collective human story that speaks of recipes from all cultures carried in memories, on folded and stained pieces of paper, in pockets and bags like identity papers only meaningful to the beholders, only fully *real* once cooked and eaten. This is a true story of recipes loosely belonging to an immigrant from Mexico, while also being an archetypical story, a thread of a much larger cable-laid story, given that truth is relational and that those who are not socially connected, whose experiences and recipes are not documented, cannot access the solidity of such a claim.

This is the hybrid story of our attempts to tease out some of these “entangled” (Barad 2007) threads, many of which have resulted from intimate “*charlas culinarias* (culinary chats)” (Abarca 2004) with immigrant friends, family members, colleagues, and eaters, who like ingredients are combined to make a single dish. Some of these immigrants cook these recipes directly from their thoughts, while others work from given instructions or from written words, others revise methods and ingredients into new forms and tastes, while still others are its eaters. Some tell their stories in Spanish, which we have translated, others in the adopted language of these lands,

English, so there are nuanced layers of meaning being lost and constructed. Our *charlas culinarias* have taken place at CLiCK, Inc. (Commercially Licensed Co-operative Kitchen), a shared-use kitchen in eastern Connecticut, and in the surrounding community over the past few months and the past few years, creating an overlapping and layered sense of time, just as recipes themselves can be recent but are never really new, given that their roots are always in the past.

Reescrito continua ... 1 taza de sofrito casero

30 tortillas de harina blanca

Recipes may be from unsullied memories or written down, giving the impression of being fixed. Nevertheless, ingredients must change with the moment, with the geography of their production site, just as the people who cook them and eat them must be and are also changed. In this manner, recipes once familiar become new and strange even to their owners, just as the people, who in their homelands were once known, through the act of immigration become part of a vague group type identity making them strangers to others and even to themselves. As Simmel states, though, immigrants are not strangers in “the usual sense of the term, as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the man [or woman] who comes today and stays tomorrow—the potential wanderer, so to speak, who, although he has gone no further, has not quite got over the freedom of coming and going” (Simmel 2004, 139). For Simmel, the epitome of such a stranger is the trader, the ones who are “near and far at the same time” and who are “not really perceived as individuals but as strangers of a certain type” (Simmel 2004, 141). Such “strangers of a certain type” are also the ones whose food is strange “of a certain type.” In fact, all new immigrants are strangers, and if you, “as one who belongs to a given place,” do not recognize their strangeness by their language, clothing, or rituals, then you may well identify them by their strange food. Our shared-use kitchen is such a place, where sights and smells, recipes and products, are created by immigrants and nonimmigrants alike, blending the strange with the familiar, challenging the binary concepts of local and global food.

Reescrito continua ...

Comenzar sofriendo el sofrito ... una vez mezclas todos los ingredientes comienza a formar las empanadillas.

In not being perceived as “known,” strangers are not privileged names in the same manner as those who belong to a given place. In being nameless or renamed in the language of the ones who belong, their strangeness is continually reinforced, even potentially to themselves. When asked the everyday questions, “Who are you?,” “Where are you from?,” “Where do you live?,” and “Where do you work?,” they may not be able or willing to give “truthful” answers. For the stranger, these answers are *political*; how to answer them and to whom can mean the difference between security and threat, anonymous residency and possible exposed deportation. Those immigrants in our story are known to us and have their “real” names used, some do not, and some we don’t know except in passing. But, like all of us, if we become strangers we may still be able—if we can eat the food and savor the tastes from the places whence we once belonged—to sigh and utter to ourselves, “Well, at least our food *knows* our names” (Klindienst 2006).

Reescrito continua...

Recuerda incluir un pisca de tu propia cultura.

To recognize this loss of names, we, too, have given up our “real” names—becoming situational strangers, as opposed to being reified ones. As researchers, we can choose to be in the normal role of the stranger as “the potential wanderer”; however, once our subjects of investigation have been interviewed and our observations made, we can return to where we belong, along with our data and our reclaimed names, while those whose stories we seek to illuminate often remain obscured and unnamed. In our case as authors, although we do not share the same race or ethnicity—one of us is a recent immigrant from Puerto Rico and the other is a first-generation American whose parents came from England—in our roles as researchers, we are not strangers; rather, we are the entrusted storytellers, the documenters of truth. In contrast, those who are strangers are not trusted by those who belong, even if and when they do speak their truths. For this reason, we also seek to play with concepts of what is fully true and false, what is real or imaginary. Rather than flashing our social science cards with claims to be documenting “empirical truths,” as only those who are privileged can claim, we are intentionally engaging in “critical ethnographic” (Madison 2012) methods, evoking a “methodology of the oppressed” that seeks to thwart systems of power based on constructions of hierarchy and separation (Sandoval 2000). Those who are methodologically fastidious

may see such methods as suspect, but they are nonetheless, as Sandoval asserts, grounded in “‘love’, understood as a technology for social transformation” (Sandoval, 2000, 2). In this manner, we, too, are moving into the borderlands (*la frontera*), as conceptualized by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), calling on her complexity of identity as *la mestiza*. Developing “a tolerance for ambiguity...characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective” (Anzaldúa 1987, 101), Anzaldúa conceptualized, “the work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality” so that “duality is transcended” (102). Likewise, we are inspired to transcend the imagined duality between truth and falsehood within our social science research and between us as the named ones and those who are the strangers.

Thereby, in the spirit of “inclusion,” included here are pieces of stories from immigrants we have not met but who have spoken of their stories and had them documented by others, as well as pieces of stories that have been said to us by some stranger, somewhere, at some time, in some manner, and therefore the words we share are “original,” but not all are necessarily “authentic” (Abarca 2004). We take this distinction from Abarca’s work, where she identifies the problematic politics of attempting to claim a recipe (or anything else) as being “authentic,” having cultural legitimacy, as opposed to being “original,” as in “the production belonging to that person” (Abarca, 2004, 19). Likewise, we seek to focus on our stories not as being “authentic” but rather as being “original,” in that we seek to recognize that “culture is always changing, [and] ... as active agents we are always defining new cultural practices” (20). In short, we are weaving together stories from our “*charlas culinarias*” as well as from secondary sources and immigration archives, thereby creating “a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others” (Madison 2012, 10). By blurring the artificial borders between ourselves, those immigrants who are part of these stories, and imaginary others, we are evoking the alchemy of cooking. As Hauck-Lawson identifies, “food is a potent mode of communication,” a mode that she termed a “food voice” (Hauck-Lawson 1992, 6). In this spirit, we seek to create a “food chorus,” playing the role more of cooks than of researchers, for not only are we changing “the recipes,” making them “original” (hence subjective) as opposed to being “authentic” (hence objective), but we are asking readers to trust that our methods will enhance the emergent taste of our results, even as we keep some ingredients secret.

In following the threads of recipes from Mexico, we honor their literary tradition of magical realism that teases reality and invites (im)possibility. Borges gave the definition of magical realism when he said, “I imagine a labyrinth of labyrinths, one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars” (Martin 1989, 3). In our case, such a labyrinth has been spun from food, much as it is in Esquivel’s 1989 novel *Like Water for Chocolate*. In taking our cue from that novel, we must utter that not only is food *magical* but so is everything else in the universe, if magic is taken to mean a “reality” other than the fractured one we perceive. As feminist physicist Barad recognizes, echoing the sentiments of Anzaldúa, it is “impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future” (Barad 2007, ix). The same can be said about the recipes for immigrant lives and how we have chosen to weave their stories and enhance them with our own flavoring, thereby connecting strangers collectively known and unknown.

Reescrito continua ...

Para empanadillas saludables hornea las empanadillas en vez de freírlas.

¡Buen provecho!

Otros Ingredientes: The Authenticity of Place

In our small deindustrialized town in Connecticut, ask anyone in the Mexican community who makes “authentic” Mexican food, and they will tell you: Maria! “Maria... she makes the real thing. When I eat her food I feel like I am back in my home,” says Jose, a local Mexican stranger who happens to be one of our neighbors. Shown here, authenticity in food is not only political in terms of who gets to claim it, how it is claimed, and under what conditions (Abarca 2004); it also requires that the eater possess the cultural and even regional palate to recognize and affirm that authenticity. For the rest of us who claim to like Mexican food, the taste remains merely delicious, as opposed to being “the real thing.” For Maria, a 44-year-old who is short and plump, authenticity means “made by hand” (*tortillas de maiz* becoming *flautas de pollo* or *quesadilla*) and the fact that “all my ingredients come from Mexico.” To verify this, she goes off to get a large bag of white onions and some containers of spices, all of which have been

imported. Speaking in Spanish, she continues, “Sometimes I change the ingredients depending on what I have but I try to use only things that come from Mexico ... like the maize.” The connection between corn and Mexican food goes back to 3500 BC, with the “holy trinity” being maize, beans, and squash, intricately linked with Mexican national identity (Pilcher 2005). To get her imported ingredients, Maria orders them directly from food distributors. “You know there are food smugglers,” she says, raising her eyebrow to indicate that she has shared something secretive. “They cross the border and bring back items that we can’t get here,” she says, producing a large piece of cactus from a bag on the floor. “It’s ingredients like these that are from Mexico that make my food authentic. My recipes connect back to my country,” she adds, evoking in our minds an image of intricate food webs that run across physical spaces and back through time.

Martin, who opened a Mexican restaurant, shares another example of a stranger’s linkage between national identity and the authenticity of his food. When asked by researcher DePue to whom his restaurant catered, he replied, “The restaurant is for pretty much American people. It’s Mexican food, but it’s like—” (DePue 2008, 15), and then his sentence ended there. When asked if the food is “Americanized Mexican food, or ... the authentic stuff,” he affirmed, “No, I think it’s the real Mexican. It’s stuff we make” (15). In this manner, we see that what is made, how it is made, who it is made for, and who ultimately eats it is highly complex in terms of how national and cultural labels are used in the face of claims to authenticity. Obviously, for cooks, as well as writers of cookbooks, claims to authenticity can augment their status, especially if they themselves are not “originally” from the culture. Such claims, however, can also be expressions of colonialism and cultural appropriation, as literary critic Goldman (1992) explores. While we do not dismiss the inequalities embedded within “cultural appropriation,” we also seek to celebrate cultural *entanglements* and the ways in which claims to “authenticity” often require individualized cultural identities that “strangers” are not always privileged to have. As with Maria, her food, and those connected to her, we seek to recognize them all as separate and “original” individuals while also seeing them all as cultural abstractions, as “authentic” archetypes that, like food itself, defy singular categorization.

What is not abstract, though, is the place on which we now focus our attention: the physical shared-use commercial kitchen where the recipe

and the individuals we are discussing intersect, as well as the other kitchen users, many of whom are also immigrants coming from other countries and cultures and as a result have also become abstracted, entangled, and yet enhanced. Serving over 20 different small food businesses, our shared-use kitchen acts as the incubator wherein our small local food entrepreneurs can benefit from the cross-pollination of ideas, knowledge, and social networks.

It took seven years of working on the idea of a shared-use commercial kitchen to actually make it a reality (Godfrey and Freake 2016; Godfrey 2017), and during that whole time, Maria would often appear at board meetings and say, “*¿Cuándo viene la cocina?*” (When is the kitchen coming?). The answer would always be “*Pronto, pronto*” (soon, soon), even though the answer did not become true for seven years. Maria’s interest in CLiCK was because for 15 years she cooked food in her house to feed over 100 Mexican wholesale nursery workers. As a result, her living room had vats of rice, beans, and *tortillas* in places where most people have furniture. The walls of her apartment were covered in steam and grease, and her children were teased at school because they “always smelled like food.” People would stop in all the time to buy food at her house, and she could never relax. Fast-forwarding to her relocation in the shared-use kitchen, what took her 10 hours to cook in her house now takes only 5 hours at CLiCK because, she says, “It’s a real business kitchen ... and I have more employees and support.” The shared-use kitchen for her meant not only that she could reclaim her house and furniture, and that her children would no longer “smell,” but that her food business could become legal and therefore expand its markets.

And so it has.

Otros Ingredientes: Crossing, Cooking, and Starting a Food Business

“Many people here in the US think that all of us [Mexicans] come to this country looking for money, but it is not always the case,” says Maria, dropping her *empanadillas* into the hot bubbling commercial fryer at CLiCK’s shared-use kitchen. The kitchen is full of steam, food smells, and ingredients, as well as the two other women who work for her to get the *empanadillas* ready for lunchtime delivery at the wholesale nursery where about 500 mostly Mexican immigrants work, including Jose.

“I was born and raised in Guanajuato, Mexico,” Maria continues in Spanish, “I had a normal and happy life as a child and adolescent. As a young

woman, I had a small but successful flower shop in my community ... money was not a problem." As she says this, she emphasizes her point by taking up the fryer basket and placing it on the counter. "One day I received a phone call from a Mexican friend in the US to let me know my father was very sick. So I decided to take a few weeks off from my business and 'cruzar como mojada' [cross the border] to the US to get my dad and bring him back home, Mexico. That was the moment when my journey began."

Of Mexican immigrants currently in the United States, half of them are here illegally (Gonzales-Barrera and Krogstad 2017). Maria first came here illegally, but, as she says, she came not for money but for family reasons. This is also the case for many Mexican immigrants (and others around the world) in that their journeys over the border, into the borderlands/*la frontera*, are not "choices" in the full sense of the word but rather are the result of family crises or the devaluation of farm products within their own countries, resulting most specifically from the North American Free Trade Agreement (National Farm Workers Ministry 2017). Maria did not intend to stay in the United States, but, she continued,

I had my business back in Mexico but then I broke my leg and then I met my husband here. ... I ended up living in a house with 14 other immigrants in a three bedroom apartment here in CT. I was not working so I cooked, making lunches [*comida Mexicana*] for everyone. I would do it for free but then when they got paid they each started to pay me \$20 a week. I never decided to make a business ... it just happened. I never really learned to cook. ... I just somehow knew how to do it. I'd look at different Mexican foods, I'd taste them and then I'd make them myself. My recipes come from me, from my memory ... you could say the ingredients speak to me ... my recipes come from ... *mi cultura* [my culture].

In starting an underground food business in 2000, Maria joined what in the United States amounts to a \$2 trillion economy (Godfrey 2017). This underground food economy is of course illegal in the United States, but in the developing world, it is standard fare and plays a significant role in creating income for women (Chen 2000). As for how Maria knew how to cook and her notion that the ingredients "speak to her," we are reminded of the description of Nacha, the cook in *Like Water for Chocolate*, who "didn't know how to read or write, [but] when it came to cooking she knew everything there was to know" (Esquivel 1989, 6). Maria does know how to read and write in Spanish, but she does not cook from written recipes and rather looks to her ingredients to tell her what they want to be in that moment.

As well as listening to her ingredients, Maria cooks with her heart. She stated, “I put a lot of passion and emotion into my cooking. I also still make flower arrangements like in my first business in Mexico. ... I do what I do with love.” Hearing Maria describe her feelings in relation to her recipes reminded us of Lorde’s work on the uses of the erotic and her desire to reclaim it as “the sensual—those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared: the passions of love, in its deepest meanings” (Lorde 1984, 56). Linking Lorde’s definition of the erotic with food and with Maria’s statement that she cooks and arranges flowers with love gave us insight into her secret ingredients. Maria notes how even though she can tell you a recipe for all the foods she cooks, nevertheless, she says, “Every time I cook I change things just a little.” In other words, the food is always “original” (Abarca 2004). Through the alchemy of cooking, which brings disparate ingredients together, there are always the unknown factors such as “energy.” The cook’s energy, the “energy” (freshness) of the ingredients, the “energy” of the heat source, and the “energy” of the kitchen all combine to make each cooking experience unique. Then of course there is the eating, and the recognition that once we begin the act of eating, the separation (which Barad would argue is an illusion anyway) between ourselves as the eaters and that which we eat dissolves.

“Do you want food?” Maria asks only one of us in English, knowing that the one who speaks Spanish is vegan. “Si, gracias, siempre” (yes, thanks, always) is the attempted Spanish reply, and she rushes off to the walk-in cooler, only to return with large white Styrofoam boxes filled with food. “You want the red or green salsa?” she asks, holding up the little plastic containers. “*Ambos*, both, of course,” is the reply.

Otros Ingredientes: Cooks, Gardening, and Community

“Due to my mental conditions I had not worked for over 13 years. I suffer from depression, social phobia and extreme anxiety. I do not like leaving my apartment. It is the only place I feel comfortable,” Lula shares in Spanish. Lula is a slight 50-year-old woman from Puerto Rico who, like Maria, moved to the mainland because of family matters. Puerto Ricans coming to the mainland is *not* illegal, but it does dramatically change their surroundings (especially if they come north to a temperate climate like Connecticut) while challenging their identities. Lula came to escape problems with her

husband, a story she shares while doing dishes at CLiCK. She explains, “He cheated on me with another woman. ... *No me molesta decirlo* (it doesn’t bother me saying it anymore). But back then in my mind was sadness and in my heart was pain. I was leaving a whole life behind. ... I was depressed and suffering a crisis of anxiety all the time. It was a bad time.” Later, during a conversation at her home, Lula continued to share her story: “My mental condition created problems and arguments among my family as they help me with everything. ... Then last summer my daughter invited me to help her in a community garden at CLiCK. I started to work at the community garden as a volunteer at CLiCK.”

As she shared about CLiCK, Lula became much more animated: “Working as a volunteer at the CLiCK community garden changed my life. Volunteering at the community garden became an everyday activity I started to add to my routine. Working with the plants is so relaxing for me. My mind is occupied with positive thoughts about the plants, weeding, watering, and harvesting. I feel in peace mentally and active physically. I just wanted to be alone at the garden taking care of the plants. I was always outside in the garden, until one day my daughter asked me to help in the kitchen at CLiCK.”

Lula’s experience is again not unusual; gardens and gardening have been shown to be healing, if one is *choosing* to garden and has some autonomy over what is done and how it is done as opposed to being a “farmworker.” Klindienst, in her 2006 book *The Earth Knows My Name: Food Culture and Sustainability in the Gardens of Ethnic Americans*, spoke to immigrants around the country about their chosen gardens and the power of gardening. She states, “Many of the gardeners spoke to me about the spiritual power of the act of gardening. The land is said to ‘speak,’ and the gardener learns” (Klindienst 2006, xxiii), much as the ingredients speak to Maria, in terms of her knowing what to make. Additionally, Klindienst shares examples of other Puerto Ricans, who like Lula have found solace in gardening. In one such example, Hilda, who works for Nuestras Raíces (Our Roots), a grass-roots urban agriculture organization in Holyoke, Massachusetts, observed that, “Community gardening is powerful. ... It preserves the earth, it preserves good health nutrition, it preserves so many things—friends, families, cultures, values, traditions” (Klindienst 2006, 201). Then, in comparing gardening in Puerto Rico to that in the United States, Hilda made the astute statement that, “In Puerto Rico having a garden is about growing your own

food.... Here it's not only about food... it's a way of screaming out, 'I want to keep my culture. I want to give this tradition to my children and leave them with this gift, this pride'" (Klindienst 2006, 205). Hilda's expression of pride in sharing her culture with her children is one that Maria shares in relation to her food. Maria's pride extends not just to sharing her food with her family or other Mexicans but also with North Americans. Maria explains, "I feel pride because there are many *gringos* who have learned about traditional, authentic Mexican food from my cooking.... They get trained by my food to identify traditional authentic Mexican food as opposed to fake Mexican." This theme of authentic versus "fake" is very important for Maria and Martin and for many other immigrants who, like Hilda, want to scream "I want to keep my culture."

The issue then becomes how to preserve the balance between "keeping one's culture," avoiding being culturally appropriated, while at the same time benefiting from the richness of cultural diversity, in particular when it comes to food. For example, when Lula met Maria, a cross-cultural bond was created both through a shared common language (Spanish) and the language of food. Lula explains how she went from the CLiCK garden to the kitchen: "I was afraid to go in the kitchen because I knew there are more people working and they seem to be English speaking only. I was as I thought that only white people worked at CLiCK. I always feel uncomfortable around white people because I cannot understand them. I do not want them to think that I am rude, but I cannot communicate so I just look away."

Lula's fear of "white people" because she cannot speak English is again not uncommon, given that only about 38% of foreign-born or first-generation Latinos speak English (Taylor et al. 2012). However, what she found once she did go into the CLiCK kitchen were other Spanish speakers. She explains, "I was wrong. In CLiCK I met Maria, who is the owner of a Mexican catering business. I also met three other Mexican ladies and one Guatemalan lady, all who work at CLiCK and like me don't speak English. I was amazed!" Therefore, slowly Lula began working—something she had not done since coming to the United States. She continued,

At the CLiCK kitchen the more I learn, the more I want to help. I have even learned how to make Mexican food. It's different but similar to our food... they eat more *maize* and *chilies* than we do... but I am getting used to it. I have even shared with Maria something about our food. Every weekday I wake up early to go

to CLiCK to work with Maria. I am not afraid to leave my house and I have made many friends. I am not looking away when people talk English to me. Everybody at CLiCK is also trying to learn Spanish words in order to communicate with me. Working at CLiCK has changed my life. I feel part of the community.

Just as Lula has learned from working with Maria, Maria in turn has learned from working with her. Lula has taught her to challenge stereotypes of Puerto Ricans and how to make her Mexican food just a little bit Puerto Rican. As she explains in another conversation at her house, sitting on her sofa, where once there would have been large vats of food, “Many of us Mexicans... we think Puerto Rican women are lazy but Lula breaks this for me. ... She is such a hard worker. And you too,” she says laughing, as she puts her hand out to the one among us who is Puerto Rican. In our Connecticut town and in many other places around the country, conflicts and tensions between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans are not uncommon, as they compete for jobs, housing, and open spaces while also interfacing very differently with issues of legality, taxes, and public assistance (Feuer 2003). But happily at CLiCK, cooking together has created new “original” cross-cultural communities that are like the “borderlands/*la frontera*” (Anzaldúa 1987) in their intersections, even as national identities are proudly expressed through “authentic” recipes (as claimed) and their manifested food items.

Additionally, Lula’s daughter, who is a vegan (and who is also one of us), has been learning Maria’s recipes from her and from her mother to use them in her cooking classes held at CLiCK. Employed by our state university’s agriculture extension program as the nutrition outreach educator to our county, she teaches “healthy eating” to local Latino families, including children. To do this, she changes ingredients to traditional Latino dishes to make them, as she says, “healthy” and even “vegan.” “It’s really hard being a Latina and a vegan,” she tells the other one of us. “When I first came here from Puerto Rico, I ate healthy but I didn’t eat apples or kale—I’d never seen kale before—but I am learning too and then teaching the kids that we can put apple and kale in quesadillas and maybe even some soy cheese...but then they aren’t really Mexican anymore.” She continues, “I think it helps the kids that I too am Latina and that I too am learning. If I were white the kids and their parents might feel like I was judging them and their culture...but we know that in our home countries we eat so much fruits and vegetables but here eating healthy is crazy expensive. It’s not like it’s our culture that’s the problem—I see it as a money problem.”

This last point speaks to a prevailing perception held by many whites within “alternative food institutions,” that people of color don’t value “healthy foods” but would “if only they knew” (Guthman 2008). Such dominant views reinforce racism and classism, as opposed to recognizing the ways in which race and class privileges and oppressions, combined with relationships to physical places and cultural spaces, shape food access, food choices, and food identities. Returning to how she has been changing Maria’s recipes, she adds, “When I use soy cheese with the kids I like to tell them that we are making Mexi-gan quesadillas. Get it?” We do and we laugh, but we are not sure Maria would approve, as they may now be “original” but certainly not “authentic!” “What matters,” she adds, “is that the kids eat them. You know I really want the kids who are born here to get the same healthy food exposure I had in Puerto Rico or that they would have if they had money ... it’s important to me.”

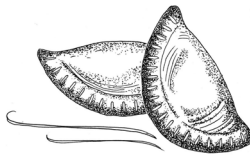
In being a first-generation immigrant, like Maria, Jose, and Lula, Lula’s daughter brings her cultural knowledge of healthy eating, which in her new role as a stranger is often assumed by the nonstrangers—especially within the white “alternative food” community—not to exist. This is why she is passionate about teaching healthy eating. Her focus is not on cultivating the *desire* for better, healthier foods—that already exists. Nor is her inclusion of ingredients like apples and kale about making recipes fit within the white “alternative food” health label. Rather, her focus is on working knowledgeably within the confines of the food region and economy that shape many immigrant lives. In her educator role, she provides other immigrants with knowledge of what to *do* with such food items as kale and even apples while honoring cultural tastes and food expectations as well as valuing a tradition of health. She concluded our *charlas culinarias* by noting, “People try to blame us immigrants for eating bad food as if that is what we like, as if that is our culture. It’s not, it’s yours.” We nod together, affirming our agreement.

Otros Ingredientes: Cultivating, Consuming, and Conclusion

“I hate to look at your asparagus ... it brings back memories,” said Jose, who is in his late fifties and is wearing a Mexican cowboy hat and black work boots. He had wandered over into our garden to borrow our wheelbarrow and saw our emerging spring crop of asparagus. Jose, who speaks near fluent English, can talk endlessly, so he begins to tell us about when he first

came to the United States about 30 years ago. “When I first crossed over from Mexico, ... you know I grew up on a Lemon Farm in Vera Cruz ... I used to work in the asparagus fields out in Eugene, Oregon. You have to water asparagus all the time ... and picking it ... *hay Dios mío* (oh, my God) ... it kills your back.”

Jose continued, “I have been farming for over 30 years and now I finally get my own garden, even though when I get home or on the weekends I am so tired I can’t do as much as I would like to.” Jose drives a truck for the wholesale nursery where Maria sells her food, and during the summer months he works 10–12 hours a day. He says, “Some days I don’t have time to eat but when I do, I always buy Maria’s food ... you know she makes it like real Mexican food.” In fact, Maria hears such compliments all the time. She had one stranger say to her, “Ah, your food reminds me of the *enchiladas* of *mi Madre* (my mother).” She has even had her customers in tears: “I have even seen people crying because they have not eaten our traditional food in years,” she says. Depending on the season, Maria can sell hundreds of meals in a day, and her customers never get bored because, as she likes to say, although she always cooks Mexican, it is “*comida!*” (whatever we got!), and in that way it is both *authentic* and *original*. Jose agrees, saying, “Her food is ... you know ... you never get tired of it. It’s like home.”



How much of our relationships to our recipes, to our lives, are held within the dreams we have as to what we will make or do, could make or could do, if we had the time, money, ingredients, skill, or opportunity? Recipes for immigrant lives are made not just from food items or from actual experiences but also from an intersection of dreams, many of which we create while we are doing those tasks that form the material stability of our everyday existences.

Maria may stand in a hot kitchen six hours a day during the week, but her dream is to “train people to take over her role,” and she would like to have “a buffet style restaurant for Mexican food ... *¿quién sabe?* (Who knows?) ... Maybe it will happen.”

Lula may work with Maria cooking and clearing, but her dream is to continue to feel better and to do more enjoyable things with her family using her money from working for Maria. “I went to Orlando, FL, with my daughters and grandchildren for a vacation. It made me so happy ... my life has really changed,” and with that, she smiled.

Jose may drive a truck up and down the New England highways, but his dream is to return to Vera Cruz in order to run his family farm. “I was born under a lemon tree,” he likes to share, “I hope one day I can die under one as well.”

In our dreams, the threads of our particular parts of the collective human tapestry get woven in the colors and patterns we most desire, regardless of what our actual lives may be like. In our dreams of the lives we wish to live, we are never the strangers, the others; we are always home.

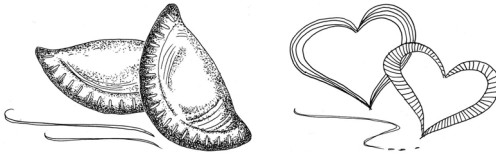


Our strangers who find community together through CLiCK are, as Simmel theorizes, both “near and far,” not only to us but also to each other, and even to themselves. In such a space, the distinctions between the “authenticity” of one culture and the “originality” of its ongoing time- and place-based interpretation through intersections with other cultures and our own “original selves” is both the challenge and the richness of the borderlands. However, the question of how to preserve the balance so that the dominant nonstranger culture does not demean, co-opt, or erase the other(s) is an ongoing struggle in our increasingly hegemonic and globalized world. Yet in CLiCK’s shared-use commercial kitchen, the universal human threads that bind all us strangers and nonstrangers together within these stories are formed not just through the geographies of intimacy in the kitchens, gardens, neighborhoods, and streets where we have had *charlas culinarias* but also through the recipes and the culturally diverse foods whose textures, smells, and tastes we have shared and will continue to.

After all, you the reader will not meet our strangers or even the strangers and nonstrangers who are us. And even though you most likely will not eat Maria’s food, you can nevertheless still find some food somewhere that has

the essence of “authenticity”—Mexican or otherwise—with a pinch of creative “originality” in it. It is hoped that some of its ingredients have been grown by you or by strangers you know in the specific place where you are, or created by the same or other specific strangers in that place in order to now make it new, yet ever linked to all our collective pasts. Thereby, in that intentionally cross-pollinating moment, you, too, can become part of the millions of other disparate threads that nevertheless weave together the global recipes of “*mi cultura*” (my culture), “*tu cultura*” (your culture), and “*nosotros culturas*” (our cultures)—and hence all our foodways.

Empanadillas de Angeles Reescrito Original



Ingredientes:

Reescrito continua ...

Mucho Amor ...

Mas Pasión ...

Tanto Energía ...

Sueños colectivos ...

Suficiente de mi cultura ... y un poco de tu cultura

Mezcla despacio con conciencia ...

¡Buen provecho!

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