

One's proximity to the border can have a profound effect on cultural practices, including one's relation to food being neither fully Mexican nor fully American but a particular type of hybrid.

## Materialized Practices of Food as Borderlands Performing as Pedagogy

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In this paper, I examine the interrelationship between borderlands, food, and ways in which they perform as pedagogy. First, I define borderlands in relation to art. Second, I discuss food and borderlands as authenticity, hybridity, and race/body. Lastly, I examine various fields of pedagogy including public, border, and food pedagogy and consider how they relate to food. I suggest that the interrelationship between borderlands and food can be used as a pedagogical tool to teach and learn about liminality, tension, contradiction, and hybridity. The hybrid spaces of consumable borderlands challenge food purity and yield unexpected foods such as carne asada fries and hotdog tamales. An important concept of border pedagogy, borderlands can be employed to decenter, reterritorialize, remap and create new knowledge through food materials and processes. The entanglement of public, border, food pedagogy, and tamales is a complicated and dense process wherein knowledge collides with the in-between. Further, the knowledge connected to the experience of dialogue, making and eating food as borderlands enters a liminal space between knowing and not knowing and varies with each encounter.

*Keywords: food, borderlands, pedagogy, hybridity, in-between, tamales*

## Materialized Practices of the Borderlands and Food/Body Performing as Pedagogy

"I have many friends who refuse to live south of I-8," a friend once told me in response to hearing where I lived in San Diego, which was south of I-8 within miles of the U.S.-Mexico border. I interpreted this statement as a strategy for them to ignore both the border and the bodies that inhabit it. They wanted to make it invisible. As someone from and of the border, I do not have the luxury of doing this, nor can I ignore the border, as to deny it would be to deny myself. For *frontizeros* (native inhabitants of the border), the border is both a geographical marker and an identity; it is a "highly diverse, volatile, and ever in constant flux, making it impossible for frontizeros to ignore the issues embedded in their situated space" (Reyes & Garza, 2015, p. 155). As a *frontizera*, even after leaving the border, it is impossible for me to overlook the border as an identity, or even as a social, cultural, and political site.

Now living in central Pennsylvania, I miss the food of the border. One's proximity to the border can have a profound effect on cultural practices, including food practices that exist in-between Mexico and the United States. Upon leaving the border, many attempt to re-create a border diet to offset the process of displacement, but are then forced to adapt it when the same foods are not available or easily accessible. For example, because I cannot find fresh corn tortillas, I make them from dry packaged corn *masa* or dough. Instead of adding queso fresco to green chile tamales, one might add oyster mushrooms from Kennett Square, PA, the mushroom capital of the world. In a small town in Wisconsin, where queso fresco is not available, someone might add cheese curds to tamales. In a neighborhood south of Chicago, Havarti cheese is cheaper than queso fresco, and is available in bulk at Sam's Club. While these adapted foods are not considered to be authentic or prepared traditionally as they are in Mexico, they are authentic (real, genuine) to the site where they are being served. In the process of these emergent food happenings and alterations,

I ask, what does the materiality of food teach us and what can we learn from its intersection with borders? Adapting food practices is a response to living conditions and availability (or lack) of ingredients (Heldke, 2007, p. 390).

In this paper, I examine the interrelationship between borderlands, food, and ways in which they perform as pedagogy. First, I define borderlands in relation to art. Second, I discuss food and borderlands as authenticity, hybridity, and race/body. Lastly, I examine various fields of pedagogy including public, border, and food pedagogy and consider how they relate to food.

### Borderlands as Site for Art

Neither fully the United States nor fully Mexico, the borderlands are "a vague and undetermined place created by an emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" or "two worlds merging to form a third..." (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 25). A space of ambiguity, the bodies of the border are called *los atravesados*- "the queer...the mongrel, the *mulato*, the half-breed, the half-dead" where the "prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" both documented and undocumented (p. 25). This synthetic, politically nation-state imposed, and inflexible line meets the Pacific Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico and divides Mexico from the United States. At this site, waters mix and circulate through the fence as "boundaries that don't hold; times, places, beings bleed through one another" (Barad, 2014, p. 179). More than a geographical space, borderlands are an identity of living in-between multiple worlds.

For decades, the border has been a site of art, activism, and performance addressing political and social issues pertaining to the border. Performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña and literary scholar Claire Fox (1994) expand the notion of border as a geographical line to metaphorical or "portable borders" (p. 61). Fox (1994) posits the site-specific art association of the U.S.-Mexico border is universal:

[I]t is invoked as a marker of liminal subjectivities, such as those which would be experienced by persons who negotiate among multiple cultural, linguistic, or sexual systems throughout their lives. When border is spatialized in these theories, that space is almost always universal. (p. 61)

Fox proposes that the space of the border is universal when marginalized people collide with hegemonic forces. She contends that the border can be found in any metropolitan area—the dislocated, poor, immigrants, and the oppressed collide with hegemonic forces—the white, heterosexual, and middle to upper class. Over 20 years later, art historian Ila Nicole Sheren (2015) applies Fox’s conversation about portable borders to all marginalized groups not necessarily tied to any geographical border or urban area. Sheren connects the notion of portable borders to site-specific borders to “re-inscribe” the border (p. 9). In this case, the art/performance applies to specific borders, but also to larger social issues that make the border portable, or metaphorical as noted by both Fox (1994) and Sheren (2015). Sheren (2015) also refers to borders that are not separated by a land border, but rather an ocean, such as the natural border between Puerto Rico and the United States, as *post-border*. A post-border “subvert[s] a border region where none exists physically” and expands the border to one of multiplicity: “intercultural contact, migration, and ‘transnation’” (Sheren, 2015, p. 134). Sheren uses the work of Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla as an example. *Under Discussion* (2005) examines the space of the Atlantic Ocean that serves as a cultural border between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico and the island territory of Vieques, and the military and civilians. Fox and Sheren focus on ways in which the border can be addressed as a geographical site to a portable one, the merging of both, as well as a border without a defined land border as post-border in art.

## Food, Authenticity, and Body as Borderlands

Food can be used to talk about identity, race, authenticity, and hybridity through borderlands. For example, the union of the *carne asada* (or grilled beef) burrito and the french fry occurred in the Southwest, arguably in San Diego. In this process its makers took the tortilla out of the equation and poured smaller pieces of carne asada meat, salsa, and *queso cotija* among other toppings, on a heap of warm french fries. Considering the conflicting origin of the french fry as French or Belgian, neither fully French, Belgian, Mexican, or U.S. American, carne asada fries is a food of the complicated and multiplicitous borderlands (see Figure 1).

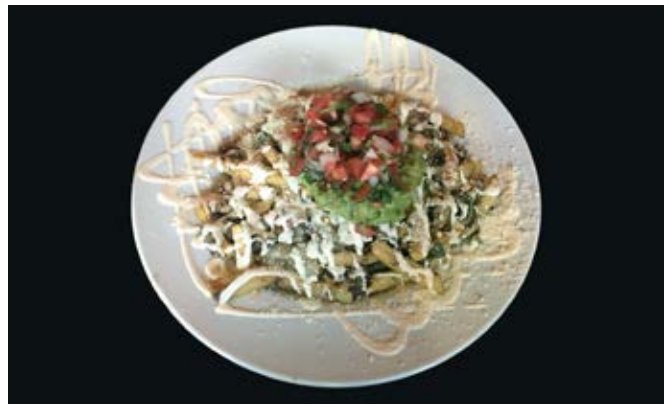


Figure 1. Carne asada fries.

If carne asada fries is neither authentically a Mexican nor an American food, is it authentic to the border? What does authenticity in relation to border food really mean? Does it matter?

### But is it Authentic?

In the following section, I provide some ways that food authenticity has been discussed and consider this discussion in relation to Mexican food served on the border. More than four decades ago, some defined *authentic* as an objective conception of culture and place (Boorstin, 1976). In contrast, others in the 1990s and at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have argued that cultures are constantly changing and there is no such thing as a pure society, which makes the notion of authenticity a social construct (Bell & Valen-

tine, 1997; Jackson, 1999; Meethan, 2001; Molz, 2004; Sims, 2011). Nina Wang (1999) contends that authenticity is about constructing one's own identity in relation to self and the Other, "tourists are not merely searching for authenticity of the Other, they are also searching for authenticity, of and between, themselves" (p. 364). A "traveler can make contact with 'not me,' and can connect with their identity through that contact, either by absorbing the flavors of the Other into their own identity, or by rejecting them as 'what-I-am-not.'" (Heldke, 2007, p. 390). In other words, one can situate their identity in relation to self and the other in the intermediary process of consuming food that is deemed to be authentic. In examining conceptions of authenticity, it is necessary to consider why, for some, authenticity is so important. Taylor (2001) views the quest for authenticity in contrast to a world that is removed from nature where one perceives that life is becoming more and more inauthentic.

I have briefly referenced some scholarly work on food authenticity that considers authenticity as an objective truth, a social construct or myth, or is more about the experience of the consumer than the food as a place or an idea. The question I pose in relation to food made on the border is, can it not be authentic or genuine to those who live in this space? Perhaps the notion of authenticity could apply to one who lives on the border and enjoys carne asada fries in a hybrid space.

### Mestiza Food Consciousness

According to Anzaldúa (as cited in Abarca, 2015), instead of promoting the purity of race, culture, nationality, gender, sexuality, etc., mestiza consciousness embraces the tension, hybridity, ambiguity, contradiction, and multiplicity in the intersections of plural social and uneven power relations. I interpret this consciousness as a *food mestiza consciousness* that does not focus on the purity or *authenticity* of food, but rather on the tensions, contradictions, and problems that arise from liminal food practices. For example, in Central Pennsylvania I have to rely on tamales

that I make instead of buying them down the street or making them with family (see Figure 2). In essence, they are an interpretation of an interpretation, or a *borderland of a borderland*. These tamales are ambiguous and impure and have become tamales of the Pennsylvania/U.S./Mexico borderlands. Thus, my tamales made in central Pennsylvania could be considered to be authentic in that they are genuine and real to the liminal and hybrid site where they are being made.



Figure 2. A Tamal Family: El Gordo, La Flaca, y La Chiquita, digital image, 2017.

### Food/Body as Borderlands

The next section addresses some connections between food and bodies. Sarah Ahmed (2010) remarks, "The object is not reducible to itself, which means it does not 'have' an 'itself' that is apart from contact with others" (p. 243). For example, a *tamal*<sup>1</sup> (tamale) is made from corn and is inseparable from the body. The soft moist dough that encases a tamal is made from corn. Many of the bodies that make and consume tamales are also of the *between-ness* of the border that would not be produced in this border space without the border bodies to make them. Further, Ahmed suggests, "while bodies do things," things might also "do bodies" (p. 245). For example, a body can make a tamal, but a tamal can also make a body as it provides daily calories, nourishment, a sense of home, culture, and more. Slocum (2008) con-

<sup>1</sup>While people of many races, ethnicities, and locations eat tamales, I focus on the tamales made and consumed on the border.

siders the role that food practices play in shaping and forming race through the body:

Race becomes material through the body. Groupings of bodies do things and are 'done to,' becoming racialized in the process (Grosz, 2005). From this perspective, bodies are not only inscribed; they actively participate in the material production of themselves and other bodies. Race takes shape out of the physical gathering of bodies in which phenotype matters in its connections to material objects, practices and processes (Saldanha, 2007). (p. 854)

There is a long colonialist history of equating corn to race and morality. Catholic missionaries sought to eradicate corn, as they associated it with pagan practices, while wheat was associated as a "symbol and sustenance of Christianity" (Pilcher, 2012, p. 22), corn was relegated to the poor indigenous of Mexico, and the urban Hispanic elite consumed wheat. Further, there was an official Spanish political propaganda set in place to rid Mexico of *maíz* (corn) and replace it with wheat flour (Pilcher, 1998). In his 1899 text *El Porvenir de Las Naciones Hispano-Americanas*, Mexican Senator Francisco Bulnes categorized and created a hierarchy of bodies into three races: corn, rice, and wheat. Bulnes wrote that wheat is superior to corn, which he called a peasant food that represented the Indian's inability to become civilized (as cited in Pilcher, 1998). Through this process Bulnes uses matter to categorize the bodies: the Indians, who eat corn, as inferior, and the Spanish, who eat wheat, as superior.

Over 100 years later, President Donald J. Trump's border wall proposal symbolizes bodies that *matter* and bodies that do not *matter*. In utilizing Sarah Ahmed's (2006) spatial politics, there are spaces within United States that are considered "more or less habitable" (p. 112) to particular bodies. Corn and tamales are an integral part of the border diet and occupy the space of many homes, stores, and bodies. However,

according to Trump's agenda, the United States is considered "less habitable" (p. 112) to many of the bodies that consume corn. Consider one of Trump's (2018) tweets "...Building a great Border Wall, with drugs (poison) and enemy combatants pouring into our Country, is all about National Defense. Build WALL through M!" In referring to those who cross or have crossed the border as "enemy combatants," Trump considers these bodies not only to be less, but inhabitable in the United States.

### The Meta-discipline of Public, Border, and Food Pedagogies

In this last section, I use the process of making and eating a tamal to talk about authenticity, hybridity, and bodies as borderlands. I use the example of a hotdog tamal (see Figure 3), an ambiguous food that resides between the United States and Mexico to consider ways in which tamales perform as public pedagogy, border pedagogy, and food pedagogy.



Figure 3. Fillings for a hotdog tamal and other hybrid tamales.

### Food as Public Pedagogy

Public pedagogy is an area of educational scholarship that consists of five domains: (a) citizenship within and beyond schools, (b) pedagogical theory on popular culture and everyday life, (c) informal institutions and public spaces as educative arenas, (d) dominant cultural discourses, public intellectualism and (e) social activism (Sandlin, O'Malley, & Burdick, 2011). Here, I



consider two forms of public pedagogy: dialogical art and socially engaged art (SEA). These two forms can inhabit varying combinations of the five domains of public pedagogy through considering the materials that make-up a hybrid tamal, the process for making them with others, as well as eating them.

Art historian Grant Kester (2013) notes that dialogical art is based on conversation, exchange, interaction, dialogue, and collaboration. For dialogical art, the value is placed on the qualities of the interaction rather than the formal qualities of an object (p. 10). This type of work supplants the “banking” notion of art—borrowed from educational theorist Paulo Friere (1982)—whereby the artist “deposits” artistic meaning to be “withdrawn” later by the viewer, and replaces it with conversation. In dialogical art, the quality of the art does not reside in the visual, but rather in the aesthetics of a social interaction. Also, it defies the notion of artist as genius and sole authorship. Instead, the emphasis is placed on collaborative authorship in which “to collaborate” means to “work together” (Kester, 2011, pp. 1-2). Dialogical art is a liminal form of contemporary art, art pedagogy, activism, and social interaction.

The process of making and eating tamales is an example of dialogical art. The act of assembling tamales is called a *tamalada*: a gathering wherein friends and family come together to make tamales (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. A *tamalada* with Xalli Zúñiga and friends, State College, PA, 2017

In this process hands/bodies join the *hoja de maíz* (corn husk), masa, and filling to make the tamal. The process of learning how to make tamales and then eating them creates an opportunity for conversation. I argue that people selling tamales on the street, family and friends at *tamaladas*, restaurant workers and patrons, etc. have the potential to engage in dialogical art when conversations about the tamal lead social, political, and other topics of conversation. Whether the public, friends, or family, we prepare fillings from foods that are locally available. As a group we look at the material components that include corn masa and unexpected ingredients such as hotdogs and ketchup. In the process of making tamales, one can consider material components that include corn masa, hotdogs, and ketchup. These foods embody mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2012) wherein hybridity, tension, ambiguity, fragmentation, contradiction and multiplicity prevails over purity. I mention the concept of mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2012; Anzaldúa & Keating 2015) and explain that it focuses on hybridity, tensions, ambiguity, fragmentation, contradiction and multiplicity of social constructions instead of trying to attain purity (Abarca, 2015). A food mestiza consciousness focuses on the anxiety, contradictions, and between-ness that arise from liminal food practices. Take, for example, when hotdogs, a food often associated with barbecues and sports games in the United States, and corn masa, often associated with border, Mexican, and Indigenous cultures, come together, it results in the hotdog and ketchup tamal. The value of this tamal arises from its in-between and borderlands existence. The outcomes of these *tamaladas* are unpredictable and uncertain. However, conversations related to liminality often emerge when ingredients like hotdogs and ketchup are tossed into the mix.

The partnership of borderlands, food, and bodies falls within what artist/writer/educator Pablo Helguera calls a “generic descriptor” —socially engaged art (SEA) that “functions by attaching itself to subjects and problems that nor-

mally belong in other disciplines, moving them temporarily into a space of ambiguity" (2011, p. 5) or a borderland. In ambiguous spaces, food and border enter not into the in-between, but the "between-ness" of the space (Helfenbein, 2016, p. x). Helguera (2012) refers to the changing landscape of visual art as a "metadiscipline" because

It modifies other disciplines by bringing their activity into a territory of experience, ambiguity, contradiction and criticality. Art making becomes a vehicle of producing knowledge in relation with other disciplines, and while it can continue to be a vehicle in and of itself, it can also function as a vehicle to advance the discourse of other areas of knowledge and human activity. (para. 15)

In the case of making a tamal, ketchup, corn, hotdogs, authenticity, mestiza consciousness, bodies, and race enter into a space of ambiguity. The intersection of critical race theory, performance, food studies, Latina/o and Chicano/a studies creates a meta-discipline wherein new knowledge occurs in the interstices of these disciplines and dialogues.

### **Food as Border Pedagogy**

The leading concept behind border pedagogy (Giroux, 2005) is to create a "democratic public philosophy that respects the notion of difference as part of a common struggle to extend the quality of public life" (p. 20). There are three aspects to border pedagogy. First, border pedagogy is a process used to understand the metaphorical and conceptual borders that bodies, culture, history, and politics define as the borderlands, two worlds merging to form a third (Anzaldúa, 2012; Giroux, 1991; Kazanjian, 2011). For example, this article discussed the history of political propaganda in Mexico that created borders between corn and wheat declaring those who ate corn as inferior to those who ate wheat. The second aspect of border pedagogy is about implementation, where students learn to become perpetual border

crossers and redefine the border in the process of constructing new identities; "students become border crossers in order to understand otherness in its own terms, and to further create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power" (Giroux, 1991, pp. 51-52). Take, for example, a hotdog tamal. Its identity is neither fully American nor Mexican, it does not fit neatly in any cultural, ethnic, etc. category. Hybrid by nature, the tamal is multiplicitous and does not subscribe to the notion of purity. Third, border pedagogy "makes visible the historically and socially constructed strengths and limitations of those places and borders we inherit and that frame our discourses and social relations" (Giroux, 2005, p. 20). For example, the hotdog tamal makes visible the problems of associating the notion of authenticity with one particular culture or place.

Various significant studies of border pedagogy have utilized Anzaldúa's (2012) notion of *Nepantla*, which is a way for marginalized individuals to develop self-knowledge through living in a liminal space of *ni de aquí ni de allá* (neither here nor there) who are in a constant state of displacement in order to undergo a transformation of self (Ramirez, Ross, & Jimenez-Silva, 2016, p. 304).

According to Giroux (1991):

Border pedagogy shifts the emphasis of the knowledge/power relationship away from the limited emphasis on the mapping of domination to the politically strategic issue of engaging the ways in which knowledge can be remapped, reterritorialized, and decentered in the wider interests of rewriting the borders and coordinates of oppositional cultural politics. (p. 53)

As border pedagogy considers the borderlands as a space and culture of liminality, I propose that food can also be used as a pedagogical tool to remap, reterritorialize, and decenter knowledge. For example, living in-between worlds (*nepantla*), the mestiza conscious tamal

begins to remap traditional or authentic food and replaces purity with ambiguity in relation to food of the borderlands. The hotdog tamal reterritorializes the idea of regional food as it detaches from border and shifts to places far from the border such as Central Pennsylvania. Finally, the hotdog tamal decenters the desire to be genuinely American, Mexican, or border food. It is what it is without the physical or social parameters that tie the hotdog tamal to a single place. It can be replicated in various sites and adapted over and over again steering clear of the question: "But is it authentic?"

### Food as Food Pedagogy

Because food is an integral part of this paper, it is necessary to address specifically *how* food is pedagogy. Food pedagogy is "learning" and "teaching" through food (Swan & Flowers, 2015, p. 1). For this pedagogy, food plays two roles: as an "object of learning" and as a "vehicle for learning" (Flowers & Swan, 2012, p. 423). It is through food that we are "taught about power, culture, bodies, gender, class, race, status, identity, pleasure, pain, labor, health" and "who and what we are" (Flowers & Swan, 2012, p. 423). Tamales, using the concept of borderlands, teach us about the in-between, otherness, ambiguity, hybridity, etc. Food pedagogies refer to a "range of sites, process, curricula, learners and even types of human and non-human teachers and can create knowledge at an individual, family, group, or collective level" (Flowers & Swan, 2012, p. 425). In this case, I position the tamal as a non-human teacher and facilitator.

Using food as pedagogy is a way to utilize untraditional knowledge or "home knowledge" (i.e. food, eating, making, memories) with the unfamiliar in order to engage critically with new knowledge (Abarca, 2015; Durá, Salas, Medina-Jerez, & Hill, 2015). For example, the making of tamales is ultimately home knowledge. Many learn how to make tamales from a mother or grandmother through a *tamalada*. Putting the tamal with what is unfamiliar to many (i.e. corn as

a historically "raced" food in Mexico), the pairing has the potential to enter new territories of knowing.

### Public/Border/Food Pedagogy

When public, border, and food pedagogy enter into a space of ambiguity, they create a meta-discipline. The materials and processes of food influence how we learn and experience the in-between, ambiguity, mestiza consciousness, contradiction, authenticity, and the like, through the processes of public pedagogy, food pedagogy, and border pedagogy. Because this meta-discipline resides in a liminal space, I propose that instead of creating knowledge, the process of food borderlands exists in-between knowing and not knowing. It becomes a space where knowledge making is fragmented, conflicted, hybridized, and unpredictable.

### Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the interrelationship between borderlands, food, and ways in which they perform as pedagogy. First, I defined borderlands in relation to art. Second, I discussed food and borderlands as authenticity, hybridity, and race/body. Ultimately, I investigated various fields of pedagogy including public, border, and food pedagogy and consider how they relate to food. I suggest that the interrelationship between borderlands and food can be used as a pedagogical tool to teach and learn about liminality, tension, contradiction, hybridity, etc. The hybrid spaces of consumable borderlands challenge food purity and yield unexpected foods such as carne asada fries and hotdog tamales. An important concept of border pedagogy, the concept of borderlands can be employed to decenter, reterritorialize, remap and create new knowledge through food materials and processes. The entanglement of public, border, food pedagogy, and tamales is a complicated and dense process wherein knowledge collides with the in-between. In addition, making tamales can be thought of as a "complicated conversation" that William F. Pinar (2005)



describes as a “collaborative investigation and consultation with others as well as that dialogical encounter occasioned by...conferences” (p. 8). The conferences, in this case, are the dialogical tamalada events wherein collaboration can lead to uncertain knowledge. Further, the knowledge connected to the experience of dialogue, making and eating food as borderlands enters a liminal space between knowing and not knowing and varies with each encounter.

### Author note

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