

Our Voice

Food nourishes bodies, but it also carries histories, expresses values, and connects people to entire ecosystems and social structures. As a result of decades of research and dialogue across the humanities, social sciences, and the arts, we now have a remarkably vast body of knowledge demonstrating that food's significance extends far beyond its nutritional value. While access to sufficient, nutritious food remains a pressing issue for many communities due to inequality, war, displacement, and climate change, questions of identity often take center stage when considering what we choose—or refuse—to put on our plates. In planning this issue, we sought to emphasize the symbolic, narrative, and affective dimensions of food. By centering the concept of "voice," we bring attention to how food production, culinary practices, appetites, and consumption habits serve as eloquent expressions, conveying meanings that might otherwise be difficult to articulate in a more straightforward manner. Food speaks of origins, aspirations, delight, and conviviality—but also of loss, erasure, and exclusion.

The twenty-two pieces in this issue offer a wide range of perspectives on what growing, cooking, and eating food reveal about the worlds we navigate: from personal memories of recipes and feasts to the intersections of visual representations and biodiversity, as well as the impact of globalization on food systems and the movement of people who carry their culinary expertise with them. A sight as common as an esquite cart in Mexico City evidences the profound impact of neoliberal policies on a crop that has nourished the continent for thousands of years. The economic and geopolitical events of the last few decades provide the backdrop for several articles in this issue that explore how gustative memories and nostalgia for certain ingredients frequently shape narratives of migration. These stories center the possibilities of reimagining regional and national cuisines abroad, sometimes as the foundation of Mexican-owned restaurants and food businesses in the U.S. and Canada, and consider the wider cultural impact and political implications of these enterprises. Another way to acknowledge the value of this culinary knowledge is through the recovery of endangered species such as chiles, herbs and edible flowers, encouraging intergenerational exchanges of sensory and creative practices.

The contributions also position food and drink as central to the analysis of class and gender divisions. Drinking cultures are shaped by stratification along the lines of monetary and cultural capital, while cannabis-focused cuisine presents a promising space for challenging stigmas surrounding consumption and alternative health practices. Eating habits are not merely a reflection of gendered norms and expectations; through food, we also reinforce or challenge restrictive assumptions about men's and women's roles and labor. Alcoholic beverages, for example, are often linked to spaces where women are vulnerable to gender-based violence, yet for others, crafting beer and spirits has become a path to economic independence and a means of fundraising for organizations dedicated to advancing women's rights.



Ruy Muñoz y Sol Gutiérrez

Another piece examines the tensions that arise when government-issued nutritional guidelines and public health agendas must be navigated by skillful, but often under-resourced, working-class female cooks, who often staff school canteens in Mexico.

In connection to the subject of food and gender, but focusing on a different kind of kitchen, five years after the crisis food businesses faced due to COVID-19-related closures it is still necessary to discuss how restaurant culture glamorizes macho figures who have harmed, harassed and exploited workers in the name of culinary perfection. At the same time, it is important to center dissident chefs working to repair the abusive structures of professional kitchens. Markets, restaurants, cafés, and food stalls are essential to the social and cultural life of cities. The ephemeral nature of the tasty bites they serve echoes the ever-changing nature of urban life—and even our own transience as living beings, as exemplified by the pictoric genre of still lifes.

In line with the theme of voice and language, we have not forgotten the delightful, witty allusions to food in Mexican folk songs and sayings. We hope this issue will inspire further conversations on how taste moves across borders and how the voices of the past and present converge at kitchen tables and the places where we eat and toast. We are grateful to all our authors and artists who have dedicated their expertise, insightful words, and splendid illustrations to exploring the historical, social and cultural significance of food and drink.

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