

Pandemidarios Project 2023

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## PREFACE

I first came to Arivaca, Arizona in the summer of 2012 as a student of Anthropology enrolled in the Undocumented Migration Project Ethnographic Archaeology Summer Field School. Ever since then, I've visited spontaneously as a friend, flaneur, resident, and ethnographer.

Arivaca is a teacher that has taught me about being in the world, of inhabiting a nation torn by the politics of belonging, of finding acceptance and strength in self, and of being in community with people who demonstrate care and compassion to all who need a respite. This work stems from the deep love and gratitude I have for this place and the people I've met and befriended along the way.

I returned to live in Arivaca and its neighboring ghost town, Ruby, for the summer of 2021 as a field instructor for the Undocumented Migration Project's Ruby Archaeological Project. At this point, the COVID 19 Pandemic had taken its toll on my mental and physical health. However, I jumped at the opportunity to spend an entire summer outdoors with colleagues and friends wishing to teach students the fundamentals of archaeology. This summer marked the beginning of a long and ongoing healing process and recovery from burnout. A journey traveled with friends and an emerging sense of place rooted in the spaces between life and death; joy and grief; achievement and loss; community and individuality.

### *Liminal Ethnographic Atmospheres & Kairos*

For this collection of ethnographic stories, reflections, poetics, and meditations of time spent in Arivaca, I position the town as a wellspring where relationships between flora, fauna, material objects, people, state policies, and places merge to create unique and ordinary encounters/*encuentros*. Such encounters/*encuentros* may be understood as affect driven movements, pedagogical windows, palpable scenes, spaces one may inhabit as things come together in context. In this way, these stories are suspended in an atmosphere of becoming. In this liminal space, we create a window of freedom- a dream space- that transforms the self and the landscape we simultaneously produce and dwell in. Dwelling in such atmospheres, one may begin to transform one's sense of self and what we know to be true along *La Frontera*.

These moments also play with time and describe the qualitative nature of kairos; of life passing and setting the pace towards a future; of time moving with experience rather than the hands on a clock; of circulations and relationships that drift to memory yet continue to challenge and solidify the boundaries that produce our sense of past-present-future-space-self-solidarity. Using a conversational, autoethnographic

style, I capture those moments of everyday life that felt both in and out of time; moments of surrender; moments of pause after a long journey.

Together these stories form a patchwork of encounters that linger in thought and memory. There is no intention other than to share and document moments of healing stability during the COVID 19 pandemic. My hope is that these stories find and encourage readers to engage in the slow and gentle work that is place-based healing and to search for those moments that fuel imaginations capable of dreaming new potentialities for our present and future selves.

## A DIARY IN-BETWEEN

### *Arivaca Road*

Arivaca Road is a hypnotic journey that begins when you leave Interstate 19.

It's not lost on me that more petrol seems to run down I-19 than water runs down the Santa Cruz River.

I take exit 48, enter Amado, say hello to the Longhorn, and head down Arivaca Road.

Between Amado and Arivaca sits the Border Patrol Checkpoint. Coming in, the agents don't check my vehicle. They're more concerned with those driving east as they exit the militarized zone.

The hills roll up-down and turn left-right.

The road dips as it traverses silty arroyos.

The windshield becomes a full panorama.

Somewhere in the distance, Baboquivari stares from its home on lands that still belong to the O'odham. What's Babo doing? He sends a greeting. Babo sits in peace. They'll outlive us.

Today I exist, and I drive. The drive feels long. At one point I zoom through a dense tree canopy as if in an arboretum. Sometimes, drivers gesture from the steering wheel. A rural hello.

Loneliness stays away with the radio on.

Who's in town?



## *La Gitana Buzzes*

Someone's buying a round for everyone at the bar.

The bartender rings the triangular dinner bell that hangs above the bar.

I accept the free drink.

Everyone is sugared-up and friendly.

The barkeep and I are close. She's like a sister. And I can say the same thing about her sister. I can say that about several women I've met here.

I wait and order the usual; a bacon cheese burger, a side of potato salad, and a Bud Light.

The pool table sits unused in the center of the room.

Next to it is the touch tunes jukebox.

Someone might start strumming the guitar hanging on the west wall.

I'm told there's a pool tournament on Wednesdays. If you're in the top three you win cash.

Money makers. Joy purveyors. Cheap thrills.

During the summer, the Cantina offers a shady, air conditioned interlude.

Dim and musty, it seems to attract folks like a muddy oasis.

When the alternative is being outside, staying in a trailer or recreational vehicles, or camping in a tent, the Cantina is a pleasant alternative.

Sometimes I follow folks outside for a smoke break.

Some folks carry their own smokes.

Some smokes taste better than others.

In a circle, we pass the smoke.

The conversation billows and conjures the winds of nostalgia.

I listen as folks remember a time bygone, both near and far.

A time when *vaqueros* and outlaws and hippies had children and inhabited this place.

In the years before hyper surveillance, I imagine the taste of freedom was as palpable as the grit of dirt on teeth.

The smoke is gone and the circle disbands.

Back inside, I'm greeted by faces framed and mounted on the east wall.

They're all dead.

The wall is a memorial for the regulars that used to decorate the room with their voices.

Air is capable of leaving and returning to the lungs.

Lungs are capable of breathing air in and out.

These frames are portals.

Each frame is a little different and some are hyper stylized to match the individual it holds.

In this way, the dead converse with the living.

Lit, one can almost see tiny, wispy specters dancing between the glass bottles on the shelf.



## *Monsoon Fed Rattlesnake*

It was the end of summer and we were told there was water running at Rattlesnake; a small, shrubby *tinaja* that seasonally fills and flows after the rains.

We parked the Rav4 off Ruby Road and hiked into the boulders and grasses for a few paces before we heard the water fall into the pool.

It was close, yet private.

Clothing off. Swimsuits on. Yours a bright red. Mine the usual black.

Our skin was made balmy by the humidity of sweat and water.  
The monsoons were generous. The water cascaded down the rocks.

The water audibly rushed and gurgled.

The water hissed!

Monsoon fed snake.

Snake danced with pleasure.

Rattlesnake hissed!

Water greeted us like a whip.

The reptiles found that they were bathing with Rattlesnake's tongue.

The vegetation was vibrant and the air was humid.

The leaves on the agave were oiled to shiny perfection.

The pink fairy dusters lined the trail with whimsy.

Bees hummed in the blooming bushes.

Two reptiles were bathed by Sun.

Two reptiles bathed in Monsoon's rain made pool.

I could not be convinced to jump off the ledge on Rattlesnake's face, but you did it with bold force.

Happiness is two reptiles in a desert pool.

Playing at something that won't last forever.



## *Ruby's Bats*

We came to Ruby to see the Mexican Free Tailed bat colony that lives in an abandoned mine shaft.

Ruby is a ghost town, although I've only ever seen shadows.

Shadows cast by people on the move.

This place is a deadly and violent frontier of extraction and displacement.

We parked near the adobe structures standing in ruin. They reminded us that this used to be a prosperous mining town. The manager class used to live in the nicer adobes located near the mill. The workers lived across the way in tents and semi-permanent housing.

The group forgot to check-in with the groundskeeper, it's okay, she'll find us later.

The bat colony lives here seasonally. In May, they return to Ruby and stay for the hot months. In the fall, around September, they migrate south to Mexico and Central America.

The air smelled slightly metallic as we gradually walked up the sloping hillside leading to the bat cave. Bat guano.

Standing at the edge of the abyss, we went no further than the barbed wire fence allowed.

There was a cold, musty breeze coming from the dark slit in the rock.

From years past, we knew that the breeze would intensify. The winged mammals stirred and caused the smell of bat guano to hit our nostrils. Unable to tolerate the olfactory overload, we found a seat in the viewing area.

The sun began to set and the sky changed into a horizon composed of vivacious pink, hot orange, and dreamy blue.

Off in the distance, Hawk stood on a dying oak tree's dry limb. The nearly leafless oakes, appearing brittle and gnarled, darkened the tree line.

Oak was/is thirsty.

Water was/is scarce.

The insects hummed louder. Did they know what was coming?

Hawke knew it was dinner time.

The smell intensified, the air whooshed, and the bats emerged from the cave. Materializing like a black cloud, the bats flew and created something like a starling's murmuration.

Hawke was bold enough to dive into the cloud and emerge with a prize.

They flew towards the Tumacacori Mountains until they disappeared.

This place is a fertile and healing nesting grounds for those seeking respite from migration journeys, harsh climates, and the unjust forces that extract and displace.



## **AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Magda E. Mankel, PhD comes to this writing from the perspective of an applied Anthropologist with research interests in Sonoran folkways, heritage, im/migration, and social movements. She currently resides in Tucson, AZ where she teaches and holds the role of Director of Education for the Earlham College Border Studies Program.