

Monsserat Herrera-Vasquez interviewed by Kate Cuapio
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Queens, New York

Kate Cuapio: My name is Kate Cuapio, and I am interviewing Monse Herrera. Monse, do you give me permission to record this oral history?

Monsserat Herrera: Yes, you have my permission.

KC: So Monse tells me a little bit about yourself.

MH: So just like you, we the same major also a freshman and after Guttman, I want to transfer to John Jay's major in criminal justice. After that hopefully go to graduate school for my PhD. and work at a hospital psychiatric hospital or prison as a criminal psychologist.

KC: What is your racial identity?

MH: Latina, Mexican-American.

KC: Sexual orientation?

MH: I am a proud bisexual.

KC: Okay, tell me a little bit about how you and your family ended up here in New York?

MH: I was born here in New York in Manhattan specifically. So was my mom but, my father was born in Mexico in the city and he crossed the border with a bunch of other immigrants as well. He was really young he was in his teenage years and he came to New York. Eventually met my mom and they were very young when they lived together. However, we lived in Manhattan for a short amount of time for about 2 years I would say and then we moved to Queens. I would say I was mostly raised in Queen's because the majority of my life I've lived in Queens.

KC: So just like me, Queens.

MH: Yeah.

KC: What is your opinion on police before the protest against police brutality began in May?

MH: I always was aware of the police brutality and being someone that was on the inside being someone who isn't white. I've heard a lot of racist comments coming from cops and not to me personally but on social media. So, I was very much aware of it. I always felt intimidated by cops every time I pass by them I mean you and I both live near a prescient and for me personally I always feel like intimate like if I make a sudden

movement I don't want them to perceive it as I am dangerous or someone who is going to cause harm just because I am Latina, Mexican-American. Also, based on growing up, based on the personal encounters with the police I've always felt intimidated sort of scared. I always have to watch what I said or how I say it.

KC: Yeah.

MH: I guess my physical behaviors because sometimes I just have to watch myself even though I didn't need to.

KC: Do you have any stories you would want to share with us?

MH: Yes, I am comfortable with that. I would say there were a lot of family issues and it was sort of routine for police to always show up to our house. Ever since I was born it's always been the case. This was a situation where officers have to come to my house to take a family member out of the premises out of my house it was scary growing up seeing police taking your family member away. Then, it was sort of like a pattern and it just keeps repeating over and over again. I can understand for me growing up where that intimidation comes from. Feeling that way for cops it's nothing new to me. Now I really hate to say that I am used to it. But there's always a part of me that's scared. And that something bad is going to happen I don't always want to assume that because they take this family member away and take him to the hospital that's always going to be the case because nowadays with police brutality, I feel like I have the right to be scared.

KC: How about now after the protest that is happening do you feel different about it or do you still feel the same?

MH: There are definitely some differences compared to prior all of this. I feel like now that it's all happening seeing so much on the media and the news and I feel like I have been more emotionally connected with them. Not the police with the protesters and Black Lives Matter because of all these awful videos appearing on social media. I am not going out as much therefore, I am always on social media, seeing video after video which is like heartbreaking to see. It's a mixture of anger and sadness. Sort of feeling that you need to help but you don't know what to do. However, you can just sign a petition and donate money and spread awareness. I have this feeling that I want to do more than just protest because I think things need to be done. We've had conversations before, and you were also made. I've had conversations with my parents and with other friends, we're all angry about this because it's so gut-wrenching to see these things happening in this generation. You would think that after all these changes will occur, but no people are being oppressed just because of their skin color. That's just ridiculous. This has to change so, I'm obviously very much empowered to do something about it because I am just very angry when I think about it or talk about it.

KC: You feel a type of way and I feel you know because we also even though we are not black we still part of that because we are people of color and were also being

affected by it. Obviously, we're all going to be pissed about it and try and make a change about it because it's been years of the same thing.

MH: Yeah, with our president it's really no help and it sorts of up to the people who actually care to try and do something about it. That's why everyone is saying spread awareness sign petition and donate money because the president is not doing anything no one is really doing much. The government not doing much so it's up to us to deal with it and we're doing so much, and I feel like now protesters are putting themselves through hell to fix these issues that should have been fixed years ago it shouldn't even be a problem. This should have never been a problem, but you know this is reality and it sucks.

KC: What is your opinion of protest movements before May 2020?

MH: I love protest movements I've always wanted to attend one. I always wanted to attend women's rights protests, the environment, and about climate change I never went to it, unfortunately, but I always thought there was an empowerment feeling over it. I've always wanted to go to one.

KC: Until now, do you think that's ever changed or it's still the same since the moment you knew about protest until now if that makes sense?

MH: Yes, that makes sense it's still the same actually well my love for protest and how inspired I am by protesting and having a voice I feel like right now everyone wants a voice, especially for Black Lives Matter. So, I feel more empowered by it if that makes sense.

KC: I want your opinion about this. Why do you think these protesters erupted?

MH: What do you mean erupted?

KC: Why is it starting now?

MH: Like why it hasn't been done before?

KC: Yeah why are they so mad not so mad, but you know what I am trying to say?

MH: I feel like there's a deeper meaning to it to protesting sort of when your protesting you have this feeling that I am strong, I am doing something by screaming holding up a sign and giving a speech and that's the psychology behind it. When you are in a protest you at the moment but, ever since George Floyd I feel like that was the last straw. Apart from me feels like George Floyd should have not been the last straw if that makes sense this is something that should have been trying to fix from the beginning from years ago. Way before we were born because this is something that has been happening, but everyone is turning away and shutting it. There are still people that believe that we shouldn't have the same freedom, equal rights. But it's so hard to fight

for those things that right now especially with this generation which includes us. This is so empowering because they know what they want, and they are going to fight for it. There are so many memes online on how people in the community would be so shy to make an order in McDonalds but would punch a cop at a protest. Enough is enough already and it's ridiculous.

KC: So going with Coronavirus do you think that coronavirus changed like I know it changed our lives in many ways, but do you think it changed the way we thought or think about society, the world everything that's going on?

MH: Yes for sure. Is this a personal question or you asking me in general have seen any changes with people?

KC: Both personal and in general.

MH: Okay well I mean in general obviously I have seen a lot of people change and its affected people. Being a college student and obviously having friends who are college students it's stressful. So, virtual learning I mean even people who are not from Guttman still have to wake up on a schedule where they have to still long on and go to class and I am not saying that's super stressful they still have to be at home with our families and have to find time and space where we can prioritize our education. Not just the students but imagine our parents and adults that still have to leave the house during this pandemic and work it's not because we're just in the pandemic is not real, I am still going to work. The pandemic is real, coronavirus is here and it's happening, but we still need money to pay rent and pay off you know mortgages or to feed your kids to keep a roof over your head and it's not easy we've seen that first hand. Being in families that are in the working class, it's affected in the general population it's affecting me personally and my mental health. But it's something that I feel like I've been working on a lot, so it's affected everyone, not just me every single person has been affected by it.

KC: I also think that I don't know if you can agree with me or not but quarantine gave us that time to catch up with everything that's happening cause sometimes we forget about watching the news or knowing what's happening in our world right now and right now it was like a reflection for us?

MH: Yes, definitely but you also brought up a good point watching the news you realize how back then before this whole pandemic before the protests thing before any of this 2020 stuff happened no one was really watching the news but now that we're kind of stuck at home and always stuck on the media. You realize all of the information's out there misleading they not reporting correctly on tv. I just want to point that out the news like ridiculous especially the news that tries to point out protesters as bad people cause that's so dumb.

KC: Yes, I think we see that a lot with our household and other news.

MH: Yes.

KC: Do you think COVID impacted protesters or protests?

MH: I'm pretty sure there have been protesters that have caught COVID out of the bunch. The protest has been going on not just in New York but all over the country. I am not sure if you're aware of or if you even know there's protest happening also internationally for Black Lives Matter because if there was then I'm pretty sure that could have affected them as well. But, definitely here in the United States and in New York I'm pretty sure there are people who caught COVID during a protest. They have to wear their mask or have gloves on. Therefore, it affected protests and protesters.

KC: Going back to the question you asked me about protests in other countries I think there was a protest in Hong Kong China about Black Lives Matter.

MH: Oh okay.

KC: If I am not mistaken.

MH: Okay yeah, I am not aware either.

MH: If there was then, it probably could have affected them as well.

KC: Also going back to another thing you talked about earlier was you never been part of a protest and even though you're not part of a protest what do you do to make your voice be heard?

MH: Just the fact that I'm not able to go out I think social media is the prime of everything right now that the source of everything and reposting stuff and sharing stories and make sure that your voice is including other voices as well. If you don't have a story than sharing someone else story who needs it to be heard. I signed a lot of petitions. I don't have much money I'm just a student and college needs to be paid for. So, I try to donate as much money I could when this actually started I tried donating to a few like the go fund me page and etc.

KC: Yeah.

MH: People really needed help during this pandemic and during all these protests.

KC: Since your always-on social media what do you think about the cops respond from the protests or respond to the protest that began in May?

MH: OH GEZZ! I've talked about this a few times with a couple of my friends because if we talk about the bad cops then it's obvious their response would be to protest. They hate them. There's been audio reporting were leaked actually from our NYPD here in New York our police department that they said they were gonna shoot the protesters. I believe I don't want to quote that I'm pretty sure they were going to harm protesters.

This statement coming from bad cops was not a surprise. I have seen a few videos of cops who are actually for the Black Lives Matter they said, "well you know I want to protect the protesters and what people are doing in my department is wrong". Thank you for acknowledging that but do something within your department but it always goes back to this destructive obedience of police officers only doing these bad things because they are being told. So, there is a sort of fear of losing their job because they might also be providing for their families and themselves. However, that's exactly where destructive obedience comes from because you harming the community you're supposed to be protecting and serving and these are protesters, and these police officers say they are aware that these protesters are peaceful and there trying to fight for rights, for Black lives, trying to make voices be heard. All of these stories and these unfortunate losses that we've had to morns like George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. This is something that shouldn't have happened but of course, these police officers who are making these videos and posting them on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook should be doing something about it. Since you're an actual police officer do something in the department. Make voice be heard. I've actually read an article well and again I don't want to say it, and then for it not to be true a police officer I think actually tried to make changes within the department. I am not sure if it was here in NY or in another state as a consequence, they actually lost their job because of it. So, that again proves the destructive obedience that cops do bad things because they are being told to and if they disobey that means they're done, they lose their jobs.

KC: Yeah.

MH: Yeah.

KC: What do you think about mayor De Blasio's response to protest?

MH: I don't know I am not happy with a lot of the things De Blasio has been saying and doing. He hasn't really done a lot of the things that would be benefiting New York. So, I'm not very happy about it. I don't know it's just ridiculous that someone who is supposed to be hearing the people of New York I don't agree with the things he's been doing actually the things he hasn't been doing for us.

KC: How about with Andrew Cuomo?

MH: Cuomo has been doing a lot more than I feel like De Blasio has been doing. I follow Cuomo more than I do with De Blasio with the protesters. I believe that Cuomo was with the protesters.

KC: yes

MH: He was obviously Black Lives Matter, but he is doing a lot with telling people to wear a mask because there's a protest happening. He is putting up rules and regulations needed such as wearing a mask otherwise when in public places entrance would de deny to you because of everybody health matters.

KC: Do you know anything with congress and there respond to the protest?

MH: I've heard a lot, but I am not really 100% sure I don't want to quote something that's not true

KC: Yeah okay and I think this would be your favorite question

MH: Okay.

KC: So what do you think about President Trump's response to the protest?

MH: I feel like that would also be your favorite question. It's obviously not right we all know this I mean being a New Yorker and being from a more liberal state a majority I don't know the statistics number of population percentage of people here who are against trump. I definitely am anti-trump because you know I am not happy with his responses they are ridiculous for literally. He acts like a grown child that hasn't really grown maturity or he's not very aware of what's going on even though he's probably reading all these articles and seeing what's happening but of course, if we go back to the protest happening, I don't know what state it was...

KC: The one in Washington?

MH: Was it in Washington? The one where these white people we're protesting they are Trump supporters. They wanted to open up states and had signs that say I want to cut my hair open up the shop and it's ridiculous because those people are seen as peaceful even though. They were armed they had guns and he tweeted that their good people and I think that's ridiculous and it's so stupid. Literally every word that comes out his mouth it's a stupidity because they're supporting him, of course, he would say that they're nice people but when he sees protesters and he sees them aside from looting. However, there were peaceful protesters that actually went in front of the White House and he had people shot them.

KC: Yeah.

MH: With Rubber bullets and I think It also had to be the same day that President Trump was doing some photo thing or whatever.

KC: Yeah in front of the church.

MH: With the bible.

KC: Yeah upside down.

MH: Of course, you want to be protected as the president and people have always been very much against him and he's fully aware of that. But, for him to even call out peaceful

protesters and say that they're people who are bad, harming their communities. There's a difference between looting and protesters but that's a whole different subject. I don't think you agree with that he's been saying.

KC: No I don't.

MH: Yeah.

KC: Okay last question how would you like to see this movement resolved?

MH: Resolved. I feel like the way everyone wants it to be resolved Trump out of the office. We want a President whose actually going to take care of these problems. We could also defund the police so the money could go to so many other different things that could be beneficial. If you remember high school mental health services were barley for instance, I remember going to the social worker there because I had a lot of anxiety. She was always a student after student after a student she was always booked. So, I was never really able to get any mental health services that I needed. Then, again the police have all this money for these weapons or for whatever they use that money for when it could go to education. They could provide these services that we need. Defunding the police would be the ending police brutality and charge the police officers that committed police brutality because is a crime. Just because you're a cop and of course as a police officer but speaking to a police officer and just imagining them in that position feeling they're above the law. The police supposed to be here to protect and serve and you're putting the community in fear and that shouldn't be the case.

KC: That sounds pretty good.

MH: Yeah

KC: The last question do you have anything you wanna say out to the public anyone who listens to this what would you like to say?

MH: If you're a person of color, if your Latin X community, if you're black, if you're LGBTQ plus, if you're all of that together it's tough right now and I feel like you can agree to that. I've always been the type to put mental health first and definitely if you feel like just anxious or really sad or down feeling stuck and trapped, there's always alternatives for that. There definitely are people that want to hear what you have to say.

KC: Yeah

MH: You're always heard there's always a voice that needs to be heard. We just need to listen a bit harder it's not just these people who are struggling at this moment. They shouldn't have to scream for help we should also be listing to people who need it because you and I are fully aware we both check up on each other because these times aren't easy, so I feel like we need to be doing that.

KC: Yeah, I agree with you. Okay Monse well that was it thank you very much

MH: You're welcome.