

Mujeres del Recetario Nacional  
Stories of Women's Cultural Stewardship in the Puerto Rican Kitchen

by

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## ABSTRACT

The formation of a national cuisine and cookbook is a major symbol of national identity and is a representation of a people who have established shared foodways and developed a particular culinary palate and vocabulary. But these recipes are not just dishes, they are a way of living. These recipes are not just nourishment for the body, but for the soul. Recipes can call forth an entire history of a people if one is willing to savor the stories hidden in a mouthful of plátano maduro. Food can also serve to understand the impacts of colonization, globalization, and the ebbs and flows of culture. But preparing and consuming culturally significant foods has the potential to either illuminate or obscure that history.

In this study I examine culinary social practices of puertorriqueñas in relation to cultural identities, histories, and colonization. I use settler and neo-colonial theory and qualitative research methods to unearth and attend to cultural history and colonial trauma. Central to this inquiry lie the questions 1) What stories do Puerto Rican culinary traditions hold? 2) How are these culinary traditions a reflection of ethnic mestizaje and forgotten colonial wounds? 3) And what would a decolonial recetario look like? To understand these aspects of Puerto Rico's national cuisine I turn to cookbooks, recipe videos, and Puerto Rican women. Although they are vital to the continuity of these cultural practices there is a scarcity of literature exploring how women perform cultural stewardship through food.

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## Bienvenidos a la Cocina Puertorriqueña<sup>1</sup>

The formation of a national cuisine and cookbook is a major symbol of national identity (Appadurai, 1988; Wilk, 1999; Barradas, 2010). It represents a people who have established shared foodways and developed a particular culinary palate and vocabulary. But these recipes are not just dishes, they are a way of living. These recipes are not just nourishment for our bodies, but our souls. Recipes can call forth an entire history of a people if we are willing to savor the stories hidden in a mouthful of plátano maduro<sup>2</sup>. In addition to history and identity, Wilk tells us food can also serve as a way to understand the impacts of colonization, globalization, and the ebbs and flows of culture. But preparing and consuming culturally significant foods has the potential to either illuminate or obscure that history.

In this study I am interested in examining food practices of puertorriqueñas in relation to cultural identities, histories, and colonization. The following chapter describes my entry into this line of inquiry by offering some background on Puerto Rican cuisine in relation to identity along with research questions I am eager to address in this project. In this examination of Puerto Rico's national cuisine, I use settler and neo-colonial theory and qualitative research methods to unearth and attend to cultural history and colonial trauma. Central to this inquiry lie the questions 1) What stories do our culinary traditions hold? 2) How are our culinary traditions a reflection of ethnic mestizaje and forgotten colonial wounds? 3) And what would a decolonial recetario look like?

### **Un Recetario Nacional**

First, it may be helpful to describe what I mean by el recetario nacional or a Puerto Rican national cuisine. In the case of latine caribeños<sup>3</sup> broadly, developing a national cuisine served as a form of resistance, a way to distinguish themselves from Spain with each colony developing its own palate, staples, spices, and techniques as informed by the Indigenous peoples and enslaved

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<sup>1</sup> Welcome to the Puerto Rican Kitchen

<sup>2</sup> Ripe plantain

<sup>3</sup> Latines from the Caribbean

African populations in each territory (Barradas, 2010). However, the cuisine and its history should not be taken for granted. Rather, claiming a national cuisine is a process of identification with and privileging of certain histories and identities while dismissing and silencing others. The interpretation of that history and cuisine is never value free. As Barradas shows us, the first national cookbook of Puerto Rico, first published in 1859, was not written by a Puerto Rican at all. Rather, *El Cocinero Puerto-Riqueño ó Formulario* (shortened to *El Cocinero Puerto-Riqueño*) was written by Don Eugenio Coloma y Garcés, a Spaniard and staunch supporter of Spanish colonial rule in the Caribbean who lived in Cuba most of his life and published multiple handbooks still referred to today.

The most concerning feature of this publication is that Coloma y Garcés had previously published *El Manual del Cocinero Cubano* (1856), merely changed the language to match Puerto Rican dialect markers, and republished the same set of recipes under *El Cocinero Puerto-Riqueño*. The underlying assumption here contradicts the essence of a national cuisine, with each region developing distinct gastronomic features. Coloma y Garcés' loyalty to the Spanish crown and ethnocentric perspective is further revealed by his homogenization of the cuisine *even* as he labels each book after the corresponding territories. Despite this bias, the book continues to be published and sold, its most recent edition released in 2004. Importantly, Barradas (2010) concludes that the recipes compiled by Coloma y Garcés were written from the romanticized exoticized perspective of the criollo elite<sup>4</sup> and excludes the culinary influences of rural jíbaros<sup>5</sup>. After seeing the book myself, I would argue African influences are also untethered and divorced from their origins as well and food staples are decontextualized, dehistoricized, and taken-for-granted. That Barradas makes no mention of this important African influence in the culture and cuisine of Puerto Rico should not be overlooked as it is representative of commonplace erasure and anti-Blackness in Puerto Rican scholarship.

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<sup>4</sup> Criollo is a reference to lighter skinned or more racially ambiguous Puerto Ricans with closer or more recent ties to Spain and the Spanish aristocracy

<sup>5</sup> A reference to often poorer and darker skinned rural populations.

The truth is that while Boricuas<sup>6</sup> quite uniformly express that we are a mixture of africanos, españoles, and Arawak/Taíno the Puerto Rican national identity becomes privileged over the ethnic and racial identities/histories. By erasing histories of food, we produce an artificially homogenized notion of mestizaje when in reality our national recetario is the direct product of colonization, slavery, and genocide. Amy Bentley (2001) notes, food disturbances, riots, and protests occur when the population is not in full control over the production of a particular food item. Particularly, important staples. We must consider how colonial practices frequently involve the control of the production and distribution of food. For example, the introduction of bacalao in Puerto Rico began as a reliable supplemental protein that could be rations for the enslaved but evolved to be a culturally significant staple (Ortíz Cuadra, 2006). Part of our colonial trauma is a distancing from our complex and violent histories (Laenui, 2000; Yellowbird, 1998). It follows that this wound has also led to forgetting the histories which produced our cuisine. This is a kind of amnesia that we enact even as we heat up the oil to fry our papas rellenas. By interrogating our recetario and the stories embedded in our dishes we may unearth the complexity of our mestizaje.

Using settler and neo-colonial theory and qualitative analysis, I envision this study as a space where puertorriqueñas can share their stories revolving around food practices and where we can reclaim our cultural knowledges and histories which have been silenced within social and institutional discourses. From a decolonial perspective this reclamation is part of the healing process (Kovach 2009; Laenui, 2000). However, this healing process is not one that can happen by reinforcing the barriers between academy-community. Rather than privilege epistemologies and institutional impulses driven by status hierarchies, it is my hope that my work as a scholar can build the potential for self-reflexivity, historical/colonial trauma healing, and resilience within marginalized communities such as the Puerto Rican diaspora. Therefore, part of my work

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<sup>6</sup> Another term referring to Puerto Ricans that is derived from the Indigenous name of the island, Borikén.

requires me to recognize and address my *own* colonial wounds as a Latina whose temporal/spatial distance from Puerto Rican communities has caused a fragmented and incomplete understanding of my own cultural heritage. This means that I must constantly watch the pot, allow myself to marinate as needed, and be quick to adjust el fogón<sup>7</sup> as necessary. As de la Garza (published as María Christina González, 1998; 2000) writes I must be adaptable and willing to shift focus based on what I learn as I go; my process must be both tentative and dynamic. I consider self-reflexivity, not as a garnish used as a means of meeting the expectations of political correctness in the academy, but as an imperative for this project.

### **A Note on Vocabulary, Language, and Grammar**

Throughout the following chapters you may note the use of Spanish terms and what appear to be grammatical anomalies. I often switch to Spanish because there is not an appropriate English translation for a phrase or because an English translation would offer an incomplete or fractured interpretation of my intended meaning. For instance, the names of countries or ethnicities are not capitalized in Spanish and these only appear capitalized when they are written/read in English. While the Spanish language was imposed on the island through colonial forces it has left indelible marks on Puerto Rican identity and ways of knowing. My use of Spanish is intended to reflect this world view. Especially in the case of direct quotes, I have tried to offer as much of a verbatim representation of accents as possible. Accents in Puerto Rico vary widely from the metropolitan areas up to rural mountain sides. The sample sizes of interviews and social media content creators limit my ability to make any substantive claims in respect to these regional differences, but I find these regional accents irresistibly appetizing and an important reflection of variegations in Puerto Rican identity.

You will find translations in the footnotes and a glossary in the appendix. Most of these terms are related to food, however some have more nuanced meanings that merit more in-depth explanation. However, as is the case with most language, there is no consensus on the meaning

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<sup>7</sup> This is an outdoor charcoal or wood fired stove traditional in Puerto Rico

of these terms and meanings have evolved over time and space. This essay is not an analysis of the similarities and differences of these terms, and therefore I may not do them full justice here, but I would like to explain how I have understood these terms and identification in my life as part of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

There are two terms I use in reference to the island where I was born. Puerto Rico is the label for a colonized nation-state under U.S. colonization and refers to the political body of the island. However, it is often referred to by locals as Borinquen or Borikén. Borinquen is the Spanish corruption of the original name of the island Borikén. Those who use this term may or may not do so with the intent of making a political statement, but this term is often used as a form of resistance against U.S. and/or Spanish colonization as it is derived from the original Taíno name. I use it with the explicit intent of drawing attention to the ethnological aspects of the island.

I also use several terms to describe the people of Borikén including Puerto Ricans, puertorriqueñas/os/es, portorros/as/es, and Boricuas. Since I did not find scholarship delineating the distinctions in these terms, I will offer my own lived interpretation of how these identifiers have been used in my experience. Like the island's name, I understand Puerto Rican and puertorriqueña/o/e to demark the political status of someone born on this colonized island while Boricua more closely relates to an ethnic and cultural background. To add even further nuance, the term portorros/ra/re is more colloquial and often used by the Puerto Rican diaspora and lower socioeconomic classes. Often these words are used interchangeably and at times there is significant overlap.

In addition to these more general identifications, I would also like to discuss the terms criollo and jíbaro. While all the terms in this section can evolve and be used in political ways, the use of the terms criollo and jíbaro identity have been used quite deliberately in political and nation-building projects in Puerto Rico. The word criollo might be translated to creole. However, in the context of Puerto Rico this word was initially used to refer to ethnically Spanish people who lived on the island and their pure Spanish descendants (Scarano, 1996). Eventually, this definition was expanded to include lighter skinned mestizos. We might argue this was done in

similar ways to the expanding conceptualization of whiteness in the United States. Ocasio Vega (2022) argues that despite the definition of “criollo” implying mestizaje, the use of the term often erases Afro-diasporic and Indigenous ethnic elements from Puerto Rican identity. In the context of this project, I am especially interested in the criollo elite, who would also have higher social and economic status, and often have more direct Spanish aristocratic lineage as was the case for two of the cookbook authors.

In contrast to the identity of Spanish aristocracy which the word criollo often invokes, el jíbaro originally referred to more humble origins. Castanha (2010) uses this term to describe the descendants of Taínos who escaped to the jungles and mountains of Borikén in response to the abuse, genocide, forced labor, and malnutrition they faced at the hands of conquistadores. While the narrative of Indigenous extinction is rampant in Puerto Rico, this alternative history is commonly accepted as Puerto Rican mythology is that the Taínos attempted to escape the brutality of the Spaniards by running deeper into the mysterious jungled mountainsides of the island. Guitar (2000) explains that Indigenous flight to more remote areas, farther from the direct influence of the Spanish, became common practice as *kasikes*<sup>8</sup> throughout the Caribbean realized the Spaniards had no interest in equal trade or political relations. Part of what feeds into the narrative of extinction lies in the census recordings. After 1799 the Spanish invaders completely removed any category for Indigenous people (Castanha, 2011). Trujillo-Pagan (2013) explains that after the U.S. invasion, this mountain environment continued to serve as a protective factor which made it difficult for the U.S. invaders to culturally impact the jíbaro population. Instead, these jíbaros would vandalize and destroy government property before returning to the hidden mountain homes.

In contemporary times this term is more commonly used to identify rural peasant populations regardless of ethnic lineage. According to Scarano (1996), the racially white

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<sup>8</sup> Often written as “caciques” or “kacike”. This term refers to political heads of Taíno and Arawak tribal groups throughout the Caribbean and the Americas.

dimension of this term actually emerged from criollo elites who took on the jíbaro label as a way to dissent from popular Spanish policies while protecting their status. In other words, the criollo elite who wanted independence from Spain could not voice this desire without negatively impacting their status. Where once this label was used to denigrate rural, impoverished, potentially Indigenous populations, now it was deployed by criollo elites to enact resistance to Spain. However, as Scarano explains, these criollos did not necessarily distance themselves from the Eurocentric colonial views of Spain even as they took on this label to disguise their intentions. One of these political writers was Manuel Alonso, who authored the book *El Gíbaro*, though he was not one. His Spanish colonial ideals are manifested within this volume as highlighted by Reyes-Santos (2015).

When Salvador Brau (1986: xi) introduced the book *El Gíbaro* by Manuel Alonso in 1884, he wrote that Puerto Rico is the “legitimate child of Spain who discovered, populated and educated him. His literature cannot be any other than the Spanish.” Spain appears as a generous matriarch that has shared its Hispanic civilization with America. (pg.37)

This framing of the relationship between the criollo elite and Spain contrasts sharply with earlier conceptualization of el jíbaro as Indigenous resistance and class revolt against settler colonialism. Therefore, while the term jíbaro often denotes resistance to colonial Spain it can also be used to disguise the intentions of the criollo elite which continue to support Spain as progenitor of Puerto Rican culture, identity, and politics. This erases the Afro-diaspora and Indigenous people of the island and their contributions in the same way the term criollo does while simultaneously distancing themselves from that term. For this project, unless otherwise indicated by an author, content creator, or participant, I understand this term in relation to the lower-socioeconomic class of rural people.

None of these terms have fixed or immutable meanings and other Puerto Ricans are likely to have different understandings for these words. Sometimes the meanings between terms overlap. However, this section is meant to be clear and transparent about how I will be using these terms.

## **Ubicándome en la Mapa y Trauma Colonial**

Addressing the trauma of colonization as a person who carries that trauma can be confusing and risky. I struggled to identify a way to come to this project that would allow me to develop Puerto Rican communication scholarship and decolonial praxis without falling prey to the colonial bias inherent in my own historical and personal traumas. My entry into this work cannot be easily disentangled from a review of Historical Trauma (HT) scholarship and Puerto Rico's history. In this section I attempt to map my entry into this work in relation to HT research. Central to this is my positioning as a puertorriqueña<sup>9</sup> raised in the U.S. and how this motivates and limits my ability to complete this project while continuing to align myself with a decolonial ethic. As Karma Chávez (2009) and Bernadette Calafell (2010) discuss, our cultural amnesia leads to gaps in knowledge which both drive us forward searching for home and hold us back through our own ignorance and inability to fully understand that home. The elements of my experience which have led to this cultural amnesia are largely (dis)informed by the diasporic identity ruptures, religion, and colonial traumas I describe in this section. What follows are tentative reflections based on my journey so far, but with the knowledge that I am sure to encounter more wounds and sources of amnesia as my scholarship progresses.

Central to this problem is my own physical and social distancing from the Puerto Rican diaspora in my late adolescence, particularly in connection to religion. Like other latine cultures, puertorriqueñas have been influenced strongly by Catholicism. It was not until 1868 that Spain decriminalized Protestantism (Marqués, 2005). However, the separation of church and state progressed begrudgingly, and it took much longer for Protestantism to take hold on the island. According to Cook (1965), hundreds of sects came out of the woodwork after the U.S conquest. He argues this is due to much more open acceptance of various protestant traditions under U.S.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that in Spanish that nationality is not capitalized

rule as well as aggressive proselytizing efforts. Cook explains that alternative forms of Christianity became increasingly popular for “landless wage workers.” But Marqués’ examination of letters from United States officials indicates that the push for Protestantism was very much a colonial effort meant to divorce puertorriqueñas from Spain, culturally, linguistically, and religiously.

Unlike most Boricuas I was raised Seventh Day Adventist (SDA), not Catholic, and was discouraged from interacting with anyone outside of the church. As a result, my family’s religion precluded our participation in many cultural practices, such as dancing, and kept me from eating foods, such as pernil<sup>10</sup> or camarones<sup>11</sup>. These are cultural elements that I have reclaimed in my adulthood but was not socialized to in my childhood. Parties and festivities that may be considered essential to performing Puerto Rican identity were largely absent from my experience unless they were sponsored through the church. The SDA church is extremely conservative, banning the alcohol, smoking, dancing, lively music, and sex/sexual innuendo that would typically characterize many Puerto Rican celebrations. As a result, fiestas de Navidad, Año Nuevo, quinceañeras<sup>12</sup> and other celebrations looked vastly different for our family.

One example of this difference in performance and practice of celebration are las parrandas Navideña en Puerto Rico. La parranda Navideña is a lively affair, where neighbors all gather their instruments and go from house to house singing a repertoire of seis, aguinaldos, plena, and bomba. These are highly social musical traditions that encourage a certain degree of improvisation. There’s dancing in the streets, food, and alcohol as the entire barrio gathers. But this merriment could not be further from the modest celebrations of a Seventh Day Adventist. In general, most of our celebrations were small humble affairs at home with only immediate family present rather than communal social events. Somber gratitude was central to celebration rather than jubilation. As a result, if a holiday were considered too pagan, secular, or frivolous, they were completely removed from the calendar.

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<sup>10</sup> Roasted pork shoulder

<sup>11</sup> Shrimp

<sup>12</sup> Christmas parties, New Years parties, and sweet fifteens

This protestant ethic grates against the social norms of Puerto Rican celebrations in a way that distances us from our culture in a move toward U.S. American values. The rise of orthodox and fundamentalist protestant sects in Puerto Rico can be traced to the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico at the end of the 17th century (Martínez-Ramírez, 2005). Catholicism was linked deeply with Spanish culture. Martínez-Ramírez explains that by offering alternative faiths, which promoted individualism and suggested the faithful would somehow be granted financial prosperity, the U.S. was able to establish an ideological and cultural hold in Puerto Rico. This became particularly true for rural areas of the island where Catholicism's reach and influence had been neglected. All of this historical context has influenced my own upbringing.

My family are from Utuado, the district located at the core center of the island. Especially in Mameyes Abajo, in the rural mountains where my mother was raised, I have observed that old Catholic churches and missions are less grand, less common. But in their place are many smaller protestant churches and the influence of the protestant proselytizing mission is still felt today. I can recall my mother sharing many fond memories and stories about *Campamento*<sup>13</sup> *Elias Burgos*, near her hometown in Mameyes. It was established by the Seventh Day Adventist church, and they held classes for the kids in the summer and offered them food and sometimes clothing. It served not only as a place of worship and social connection but also as a site for the distribution of community resources. Decades later, we would receive a small box of food from a Camden food bank which contained powdered eggs. My mom was excited to prepare them since it reminded her of summers at el campamento. Spooning the wet and bland mush into my mouth, which I insisted did *not* taste like eggs, I did not understand how she could hold nostalgia for *huevos en polvo*<sup>14</sup>. I did not understand the profound impact this place had for my mother, only that she connected her memories of this place to foods I did not consider very Boricua. Now I understand that this was part of the complex colonial history in Puerto Rico which had left

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<sup>13</sup> A camp

<sup>14</sup> Powdered eggs

indelible marks within her palate memory, paradoxically nostalgic even as it was representative of how U.S. dominance had disrupted a more traditional foodway. The pull away from the diasporic community came slowly specifically because my parents remained attached to *La Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día Español de Camden*<sup>15</sup> even as my father worked overtime for years to get us out of the “slums” and into the peaceful suburbs. They may never have considered the trade-off of leaving. For my parents, the desire to access education for their children and secure a safer place to live outweighed the importance of this cultural connection. This is how the marginalized seek to climb the social ladder through internalization of assimilationist discourses which dictate that the only way to move up is to move out; a process known as spatial assimilation (South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005). These motivations were similarly driven by the liberal individualist promises of the SDA church whose values and community they continued to hold on to.

We left Camden, but we came back for church every week and made a regular trek into the city for groceries as the markets near our new home did not carry the Puerto Rican staples we needed and were more expensive. Nevertheless, when I eventually left the church after high school it was one less reason to go to Camden. One less reason to engage the diaspora. Without religion tethering me to this communal and cultural space a last point of connection was lost. I had no other relationships within the diaspora that were not linked to the church. It is vital then, to be aware of how these disconnections have formed gaps in relationships, knowledge, and experience as they become liabilities when we aim to undertake emic research. Regardless of how many articles or books I might read on Boricua diaspora or Puerto Rican identity, there is no way to completely overcome paradoxical outsider positioning that was unknowingly cultivated after leaving Camden *allá fuera*<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The Spanish Seventh Day Adventist Church of Camden (NJ)

<sup>16</sup> “Out there” a phrase often used in reference to the diaspora. Here I use it to emphasize the disconnect from the diaspora

*Nunca llegué a probar la' papa' rellenas de mi abuelita Lidia. When I was young, I was a picky eater. I didn't want mami's arroz blanco y habichuelas guisadas to touch. I ate more slowly than anyone I've ever seen, often sitting at the table for 2 hours with a cold plate of food, downing each bite con un buche de leche until I grew full and my parents got fed up with me. So, I never really got to eat abuelita's papa rellenas because I never liked them. Papi has often mentioned they were the best. One of our first stops whenever we went to Puerto Rico was a little shack where they sold papas rellenas. I remember stowing it away in a little pouch so I wouldn't have to eat it, secreting it into a trashcan when no one was watching. By the time my palate developed enough to appreciate our food it was too late to try them. Not only had family vacations stopped once we were all adults and working but then abuelita Lidia had died. It may seem impersonal to reduce her death with never being able to try her food again, but I feel this is a reflection of the familial and cultural disconnect I have experienced as a Boricua raised in the United States since infancy. (September 1, 2019, Personal journal)*

The trauma of cultural loss and separation is but one aspect of colonial violence which is crucial to positioning myself in this work. Domestic violence, alcohol and drug addiction, sexual abuse, and gambling have also become a normalized expectation in Puerto Rican communities and part of my own family's story, each traumatic event exacerbating the next. Conventional models of social determinants of health have tried to account for these kinds of violences by examining access to financial and community resources, education, nutritious food, and infrastructure (Marmot, 2005). However, historical trauma research traces these social conditions to historical legacies of colonial violence in ways that a socioecological model does not account for.

The trauma inflicted through colonial violence leads to social pathologies which get paid forward from one generation to the next. Duran (2006) notes that this unprocessed trauma accumulates and compounds itself as it leads to dysfunctions enacted from parent to child. Historical trauma does not mean that colonial trauma remains in the past or that the trauma has

ended. Rather, Indigenous scholars use this term to represent how the technologies of colonization have inflicted violence that outlive the “event”. The trauma leads to community wide health disparities/abuse (Sotero, 2006; Walters et al., 2011), alcoholism (Estrada, 2009; Poupart, 2003), domestic abuse (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998), self-hatred and internalized oppression (Cook-Lynn, 2007; Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008), and of course cultural, spiritual, and physical genocide (Carpio, 2004; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Grinde jr., 2004; Talbot, 2006; Tohe, 2007).

The accumulation and compounding of all these symbolic and material violences and abuse over time form what Duran (2006) calls the soul wound. Referencing the etymology of the word psychology, Duran brings the soul and spirituality back into conversations about mental health. He notes that the word psychology means study of the soul and explains that the soul wound is a sickness of the soul, an ancestral hurt, an injury which was first inflicted many generations ago through the terrors of colonization. As each generation experiences a temporal distancing from the initial colonial “event”, it becomes harder to address the root causes of the trauma. Thus, the injury becomes increasingly severe and results in coping strategies mentioned above, which harm the self and others. This is particularly true in communities where it is not possible to talk about the trauma event (Tohe, 2007). As de la Garza (2005) notes, these dysfunctions may become normalized as part of the culture when in fact they are colonial residues. Anzaldúa also refers to these tensions within cultural production as “las culturas que traicionan” (2012, p. 37). This signifies a kind of cultural betrayal that is felt when cultural minorities internalize the oppression that has been imposed on them by the dominant society. It also represents a paradox within the identities of Black, Indigenous, and people of color where the mechanisms creating hurt are also those holding us together. Therefore, I consider the soul wound, cultural betrayals and dysfunctions, and the paradoxes that come with them as essential for understanding the relationship between Puerto Rican identity and food.

For puertorriqueñas, these social pathologies have become normalized in such a way that both insiders and outsiders see us as suffering from cultural poverty (Briggs, 2002). These

traumas, dysfunctions, and cultural disconnections have been a central influence on my experiences as a Boricua. I disclose these experiences as a way of grounding my identity within the trauma literature but also to explain the driving force behind this project. Furthermore, understanding the soul wound is essential to healing as the wounds we have sustained can become a liability in the research process. As de la Garza (published as María Christina González, 2000) argues in her *four seasons*, being aware of these liabilities as we enter the work is essential to a decolonial research ethic. Otherwise, our own unacknowledged colonial residues will limit our ability to be receptive to the cultural knowledge we are trying to bear witness to and understand and our observations and interpretations will be colored by our colonial mindset.

### **Four Seasons**

The rationale for undertaking this specific project has been informed in part by Sarah Amira de la Garza's *four seasons* (published as María Christina González; 2000). Primarily, this has been a tool for ensuring that I avoid the assumptions that qualitative research should be opportunistic, should separate the researcher from the work, should privilege the researcher's quest for knowledge extraction, and should center western logics of rationality which further reinforce the mind-body split. Instead, a research approach in line with creation-centered ontologies is tentative and dynamic. The researcher must question their motivations, timing, and methods for ethical soundness and appropriateness as well as whether they are prepared to enter the site they wish to investigate. Preparation may mean priming oneself with literature reviews and exposure prior to entering the primary observation stages. It might mean confronting one's traumas and biases. A four seasons research approach requires the researcher to question their motivations, ethics, preparedness, and assumptions in order to produce *tentative certainty* regarding cultural realities (pg. 628).

Undertaking this approach is a process that requires conscious integration of awareness, as a matter of trial and error and trying again. When it was time to start thinking about dissertation

topics, I was initially very interested in huracán<sup>17</sup> María. It appeared to me to be a *timely* event from which to understand the colonization of Borikén<sup>18</sup>. As I went to conduct a pilot study 9 months after the storm, my outsider status became evident in how I framed my questions in culturally inappropriate ways. I assumed that the importance of the questions I sought to answer would be beneficial to them and conducted my interviews in ways that failed to allow storytelling. Overall, I was underprepared to conduct the research I wanted to do, even as a pilot study. My own colonial wounds became increasingly obvious as I was faced with the difficult question, “Why do I want to conduct this study?” and more importantly “Am I connected enough to this community to receive the stories I am seeking from them?” These questions aligned with those de la Garza (1998) asked in her use of Four Seasons to study Native American traditions and ceremony. In response to these questions, she chose to use poetry and to focus on how non-Native people attempted to “become Indian”. This pivot allowed her to honor what she had witnessed without exploiting it. In my case, the pilot study ended with a complex confrontation of my own biases and traumas. I was not in a place in my experience as a puertorriqueña or scholar to do the study, no matter how large an impact huracán María has had.

Instead, this project (and perhaps all attempts at decolonial cultural study) is an attempt at colonial repair and spring renewal which will bring me closer to readiness by allowing me to reconnect with my Puerto Rican heritage. A four seasons approach emphasizes appropriateness, timing based on appropriateness rather than opportunistic logics, preparedness, an awareness of interconnectedness, and nuanced insight. De la Garza (2000) conceptualizes spring as a time of preparation and self-reflection which allows us to ready ourselves for the work yet to come. It cannot be rushed. Spring is a time of preparation for ethnographic work, a time for reflecting on your presumptions and contemplating the possibilities for the ethnography to come. It is also the time to ask permission for conducting your observations. Summer is characterized by the doing of

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<sup>17</sup> hurricane

<sup>18</sup> The Indigenous name of the island

fieldwork and immersion into the culture one is observing and participating in. For fall, the researcher continues to process, conceptualize, and theorize about what they have experienced in order to do their writing work come winter. Therefore, conducting a full four seasons ethnography is incommensurable with the timelines imposed by university institutions. Rather than exceed my own limitations and capacity and hurt or offend those I claim to be in service to, my preliminary research demonstrated that more time should be spent in springtime. Thus I use my engagement with el recetario and puertorriqueñas to determine what I do and do not know about my own heritage and expose myself to relevant cultural practices.

## Review of Literature

In addition to the historical trauma research cited above, this project is largely undergirded by food studies and Puerto Rican studies scholarship with some generous overlap. As this review unfolds, I return to my guiding questions for this study: 1) What stories do our culinary traditions hold? 2) How are our culinary traditions a reflection of ethnic mestizaje and forgotten colonial wounds? 3) And what would a decolonial recetario look like? With this in mind I examined literature that explores this link between food, culture, and history.

### **La Cocina Puertorriqueña**

To find the stories embedded in Puerto Rican culinary traditions I turned to Puerto Rican gastronomic literature. This scholarship quickly led to reflections on my own experiences purchasing, preparing, and eating comida<sup>19</sup> puertorriqueña growing up. Food has always been a way to connect with my sense of Puerto Rican identity. This section illustrates the ways in which my experiences lattice against this literature.

*Mami was not the best cook. Until I was around 14, we ate some combination of rice and beans everyday so perhaps unsurprisingly I became a picky eater. It wasn't until I was much older and had developed a taste for the kitchen that I began to have an appreciation for preparing and eating Puerto Rican food. Mofongo. Pernil. Arroz con gandules. Tembleque. Guineos en escabeche. Gazpacho. Sorullitos. Carne guisada. Quesito. A list of dishes I've learned to prepare that trigger nostalgia and homesickness for an island I left in my infancy. Recipes that make me feel like a good proper Boricua. I google "recetas" instead of "recipes" to ensure authenticity. I find comfort going to the Latino grocery, interacting with other Spanish speakers even as I stumble over words rusty with disuse. Can I take pride in a receta I got from the internet? Mami was never a very good cook, yet I have many memories of standing in our kitchen, lapping up dollops of salsa tomate and fishing manzanilla olives out of a cold jar to snack on as we waited*

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<sup>19</sup> food

*for potatoes to cook through for habichuelas guisadas. I remember the first time I ate ñame del país and how struck I was by the difference in texture and flavor compared to the ones I ate in the states. I recall the pride that bubbled up the first time I served pernil my first Christmas away from home. (June 19, 2019, personal journal).*

In the end the cultural production of food is more than about the extraction of nutrients. It involves a set of practices, knowledge, and interactions that allow us to articulate and perform cultural, class, and gender identities (Abarca, 2006). Food is a touchstone which carries cultural meaning through embodied sensory information (Marte, 2008). As Leed Hurwitz (1993) tells us, food is one of the most lasting traditions that migrants hold onto when they leave their ancestral homes and are pressured to assimilate to a new culture. This makes it a fitting site for decolonial repair as the daughter of *jíbaros* raised eating and cooking Puerto Rican food in the United States in my struggle to grasp onto my identity. It is not merely a means of nourishment but the foods that have become staples have stories to tell. Stories that are a way to understand, (re)produce, and (re)negotiate cultural identity. Lidia Marte (2008) offers a brilliant description of how crucial the examination of food and food practices are to understanding culture.

La cartografía esencial que llevamos dentro y fuera son versiones de identidades, de mitos, de imágenes, que forman un atlas de nuestra reacciones y percepciones existenciales. La comida y lo doméstico son asuntos centrales de todo esto, por la forma precisa en que sitúan nuestros cuerpos en el presente y la forma en que sabores y olores anclan nuestra memoria del pasado. El comer deviene con ello una transformación esencial, un acto simbólico de toda suerte; un fluido intercambio entre afuera-adentro, sujeto-ambiente, sujeto-sujeto, sujeto-objeto, aquí-allá, ahora-entonces. [The essential cartography which we carry within and without are versions of identities, of myths, of images, that form an atlas of our existential reactions and perceptions. Food and domesticity are central points of all this precisely because of how they situate our bodies in the present and the way in which flavors and smells anchor our memories of the past. Eating becomes an essential transformation, a symbolic act of pure luck; a fluid

interplay between inside-outside, subject-context, subject-subject, subject-object, here-there, now-then. (p. 75).

Thus, our experiences around food become a way to connect to the present and the past, to being an insider and outsider. I would argue this is particularly true within diasporic communities that may go through extraordinary lengths to procure the ingredients and prepare dishes which call forth home.

*As I grabbed the bunch of bananas I hesitated. Despite the care I had taken to select them at Lee Lee's International Market, they had inexplicably yellowed the following day. I sliced off the stemmed end of the bunch and held it up to my nose inhaling deeply. Likely too sweet. My knife ran down the spine of the banana and the skin easily peeled off. It would be too ripe I realized as I pinched off a piece and placed it on my tongue. It tasted like a banana. (September 4, 2019 field journal.)*

The sensory knowledge which informed how to purchase and prepare bananas is culturally situated and part of a practice that makes me feel closer to Puerto Rico even years and thousands of miles away. I think to myself, if I can create this dish properly it proves I am Puerto Rican enough. Part of this impulse can be understood by considering how cultural amnesia can be experienced specifically through food. Abarca (2017) explains how she grew up eating camotes and wondering where this tradition had come from. For her, it was necessary to dig to trace it taxonomically and historically to rediscover and acknowledge the African influence in her Chicana cuisine. Food became the artifact through which she could understand her cultural heritage and history. In Puerto Rico we can see similar erasures of culinary cultural histories reflected in linguistic shifts. For example, the West African word “nyami” became ñame<sup>20</sup>, its African *roots* separated from origin through rearticulation (Goucher, 2013). Nevertheless, Abarca demonstrates that the continued preparation of culturally bound foods may survive even when we

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<sup>20</sup> A tuber commonly eaten in Puerto Rico

have forgotten the stories and origins. A close examination of forgetfulness in our cuisine then is essential for understanding who we are and how we became so.

Lidia Marte (2008) and Meredith Abarca's (2006; 2017) scholarship offer rare insights into the embodied experiences of creating and consuming latine foods for dominicanas y chicancas, respectively. However, these are rare exemplars of this kind of work and are not specifically related to Puerto Rico. Most food studies literature related to Puerto Rico has been much more concerned with constructing a more masculinist historical archive, which has nonetheless been helpful for understanding how colonization has become an enormous force in our diets.

Ortíz Cuadra's (2006) thorough historical survey of Puerto Rican food staples demonstrates that our attachment to food to perform identity is common even in pop culture. But as he explains, most of our staples are not Indigenous to Borikén. Plátanos<sup>21</sup>, many viandas<sup>22</sup>, and even rice came from Africa. While rice was commonly eaten in Spain, the ship manifests of the time indicate that the Spanish did not bring any significant amount of rice with them. Rather, rice was primarily cultivated by enslaved Africans as a cheap and quick food stock for the captive population. Similarly, the bacalao<sup>23</sup> which has made its way into so many recipes was brought from the North Atlantic because it was easily preserved and a way to supplement the meals of a population with imposed rations. That is, it would be too costly and grant too much freedom to allow them to fish. Regardless of how the staples were introduced, no Boricua would deny that these foods are cornerstones of our cuisine. At the same time, we must consider the larger implications of this control over food staples. This connection between food, culture, and history is further explored by food historian Candice Goucher, who notes "Because the shifts in the structuring of discrete culinary components were determined by control over cognitive realms, it follows that the domains of food knowledge would reflect similar historical processes of interaction." (2013, p. xvi). That is, control over a national cuisine begins with control of

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<sup>21</sup> Plantains

<sup>22</sup> A general term for tubers

<sup>23</sup> A white fleshed fish preserved in salt

knowledge and by tracing the history of foods which have become central to our *recetario nacional* we may also better understand dynamics between power and resistance within our African, European, and Indigenous ancestors which produced our *mess-tizaje*.

Our culinary history and the dishes that have defined our *recetario* have undoubtedly changed through the years. Coloma y Garcés' *El Cocinero Puerto-Riqueño* shows a collection of largely meat-based recipes with little attention paid to the staples introduced to sustain the enslaved population (1859). The editor of the latest volume, José Carvajal, notes that the *recetario* was published prior to the abolition of slavery and he suggests that cooking was a task largely left to *africanos* (2004). But were these dishes what the African cooks served themselves or the *criollo* elite? The emphasis on meats and indulgent foods may indicate Barradas (2010) was correct in his critique of the book as a bourgeois imagining of Caribbean food. The *jíbaro* and enslaved populations likely ate more *bacalao*, as Ortíz Cuadra (2006) notes, as well as a high dependence on foods that were easily cultivated in the region, such as *viandas*. What have remained common dishes and cooking practices differ greatly from what Coloma y Garcés presented in his volume, though how this shift occurred despite continued releases of this book remains unclear.

Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra is ostensibly the foremost Boricua food scholar we have. He presents crucial histories of where our food staples come from and how our food has changed. But what becomes evident in his extensive dig through our food history is that there is little engagement with how Boricuas *experience* the connection between food and culture. Both Abarca and Marte make important contributions towards this sensory, relational, and experiential connection. In Abarca's case, she looks to her *chicana* participants as culinary artists who have found ways to make the kitchen a space of empowerment and autonomy. She argues white feminism has conceptualized activism and oppression in ways that exclude how working-class women of color challenge patriarchal norms even as they engage in quotidian domestic tasks. Because white feminism has deemed the domestic realm as always oppressive, it fails to account for the experiences of women who are able to claim space and autonomy through their domestic

labor. This intersection of identity demonstrates the importance of challenging white feminism's assumption that sexual divisions of labor are inherently oppressive (Mohanty, 1998). Her approach relies on *charlas culinarias* as a culturally appropriate/relevant way to engage in conversations with women about Chicana identity, food, and culture. Contrary to a conventional qualitative interview, Abarca indicates that talking from the kitchen as women prepared and ate food together allowed her participants to express their stories on their terms rather than through extraction. Perhaps parallel to my own decolonial endeavors, Marte (2008) takes her own experience of foods, images, and stories to reconnect with republica dominicana as an emigrant to Puerto Rico. What she offers is a way of examining food as a crucial gesture for recuperating cultural knowledge.

Other contributions to Puerto Rican food studies are newly emerging, however. Monica Ocasio Vega's (2022) recent study examines two recipes from *Cocina Criolla* (Valdejuli, 1954). The author argues that Valdejuli's recipes for white rice and pink beans omit crucial details and relies on implied cultural meanings to push readers to remember their own sensory experiences of the dishes. She contends these silences also serve to erase the African and Indigenous origins of the dishes while activating an imaginary of criollo nostalgia.

Recent studies are also considering more contemporary trends within the Puerto Rican culinary experience in the context of globalization and gentrification. María Elena Rodríguez (2021) demonstrates how the introduction of U.S. chain restaurants and fast-food franchises have caused a palate shift in younger generations. Additionally, she notes that due to economic stressors many mothers have begun to rely on these sources of food when time is too limited to cook at home. Because the task of family nutrition and meal planning is often women's responsibility, they also bear the brunt of the blame when younger generations begin to drift away from traditional Puerto Rican foods in favor of U.S. food choices. Globalization and gentrification are also having enormous impacts on the Puerto Rican diaspora in the U.S. As Emilio Araujo (2020) notes, many areas in Chicago which were heavily populated by Puerto Rican residents and restaurants are continually being pushed out in lieu of more up-and-coming populations. He

argues that the development of the famous jíbaro sandwich has allowed Puerto Rican restaurants to gain more attention. The jíbaro sandwich comes in many varieties however the essential characteristic is replacing bread with fried green plantains and topping with lettuce, tomatoes, onions, mayo-ketchup, and usually slow cooked pork or steak. The popularity of the sandwich has spread to other parts of the U.S. but some have taken so much artistic license with the dish that Araujo contends it often loses some of its cultural grounding. He further observed that Puerto Rican restaurants had different philosophies about food and to what extent contemporary fusion might be embraced. Some restaurateurs preferred to stay as traditional as possible while others incorporated U.S. and Mexican elements that were often requested. A third group developed an entirely unique diasporic cuisine emerging from Chicagoan culture.

Despite these few exceptions, what is evident is a lack of research which delves into the sensory experiences and stories about the foods we eat. While the connection between culture, identity, and food may appear obvious, the research on latine populations and food are largely disinterested in culture and much more concerned with influencing our shopping and eating practices. When considering what non-latine scholars have been interested in examining regarding our food practice, two major areas of research reveal primary interests in marketing research attempting to harness “Hispanic” buying power and health interventions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these studies have a tendency to homogenize latine populations without distinction.

Marketing research on latine and food began to gather momentum in the 80s. As latine populations increased commercial entities realized they were losing out on potential shoppers if they continued to exclude Hispanics. Stanton points out that corporations were missing out on a “China sized market” (2005). In Perkin’s book, *Beyond Bodegas: Developing a Retail Relationship with Hispanic Customers* he outlines specific strategies to create cultural relevance to latines for many of the same products other demographics would buy (2004). Marketing firms, like *The Hartman Group*, are also doing research and seem to be grasping the need to “inject emotion” into latine advertising strategies (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Primarily, these are U.S.

corporations developing strategies to attract customers they have historically excluded because it will turn a profit.

Health intervention research also relies on marketing to investigate health concerns. However, they rarely consider culture as relevant to food practices. Adeigbe et. al's meta-analysis on marketing to latines never even mentions culture as a factor in their review of 14 studies (2015). Kunkel et. al's research also explored what kinds of foods were being advertised to latine adolescents without addressing culture (2013). Alternatively, researchers have focused on the inventory of stores where latine people do groceries (Emond, Madanat, & Ayala, 2012). Freeman's study suggests that locations where latine and Black populations are prevalent become hotspots for fast food (2007). She argues "many traditional, healthy eating practices have given way to less nutritious habits as a result of migration, immigration, changes in social status, and the availability and convenience of more harmful foods." (2007, p. 2232). Although she at least mentions that food has strong cultural connections, it is in passing and taken for granted. Other studies actively aim to create culturally sensitive curriculums around healthy behaviors, but never mention the role of traditional foods (Araiza, Valenzuela, & Gance-Cleveland, 2012). Still others examine what foods latines are buying and eating without cultural grounding (Ayala et al., 2016; Gerchow et al., 2014; Grigsby-Toussaint, Zenk, Odoms-Young, Ruggiero, & Moise, 2010; Sugerman et al., 2011). These studies are mostly interested in obesity risks exacerbated by fast-food. However, they do not talk about the significance of cultural relevance to latine gastronomy.

Despite the dearth of cultural context in these studies Coe et. al (2008) and Evan's et. al (2011) offer more culturally sensitive observations. Evan's et. al conclude that "future obesity prevention interventions should reinforce and encourage good practices parents bring from their native countries while also introducing new strategies to navigate a less- familiar food culture and promote healthy eating among children." (p. 1037). While they acknowledge cultural factors, they are not concerned with the cultural significance of those foods. Conversely, Coe et. al argue that preparing and eating traditional foods together becomes a ritual which strengthens family bonds.

Their questions revolve around the procurement, preparation, and presentation of food in a different approach. Rather than taking the cultural significance of food for granted, this study actually asked participants for those experiences in collaboration with the health intervention.

At this juncture it is important to acknowledge that while food studies scholars have consistently argued for the importance of examining consumption practices, there is little research specifically on Puerto Rican food. Egerton (1993) argues, “To learn what has gone on in the kitchen and the dining room—and what still goes on there—is to discover much about a society’s physical health, its economic condition, its race relations, its class structure, and the status of its women.” (p. 3). Therefore, it is important to consider food beyond the implications of health and marketing to better understand the social realities and epistemologies of puerторriqueñas. As Abarca (2006) contends, working-class women of color are “grass roots theorists and their charlas reflect social and philosophical theories from the ground up.” (p. 9). What this means in the Puerto Rican context has yet to be explored. Thus, a focus on women’s experiences with el recetario nacional must be considered. In this project I emphasize the sensory and storied nature of Puerto Rican women’s culinary knowledge to address this onto-epistemological gap because women are central to our foodways. The lack of research coming from this perspective demonstrates how the gendered divisions of labor dismiss women’s work having less substantive value and impact despite food often being central to understanding culture.

### **Of Ivory Towers, Morros, and Identity**

Taking a broader perspective, a review of Puerto Rican studies reveals a strong emphasis on identity and colonization. When it comes to discussion of *identidad*<sup>24</sup> puerторriqueño, consensus is especially impossible. Are we colonial or postcolonial subjects? To what extent does *mestizaje* influence our identity and cultural performance of it? The overarching discourse does reflect one consistent message. We are the product of three distinct ethnic heritages:

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<sup>24</sup> identity

africano, español, y indígena<sup>25</sup>. I would note here that in other Latin-American contexts this mixture is frequently labeled as mestizo. However, I have not found this usage common in Puerto Rican studies literature. This might be due to a dominant nationalist discourse which homogenizes and labels us “simply” as puertorriqueñas (Castanha, 2010). Or this might be because of the African root of our heritage which is potentially obscured by using the term. However, africanismo is for the most part erased, dismissed, and denied within the cultural discourse (Castanha, 2010; Haslip-Viera, 2001; Reyes-Santos, 2015; Rivero, 2005). Rather than fall trap to these discourses of erasure I offer the term *mess-tizaje* to highlight the contested nature of how we understand our identity as the product of colonial sexual violence and slavery; as the descendants of a *settler-Indigenous-chattel slave triad*<sup>26</sup> (Carillo-Rowe & Tuck, 2017).

Notably, identity research in Puerto Rican studies is heavily skewed towards criticism of the U.S. colonial regime while little attention is given to the impact of Spanish colonization. In this section I review some of the Puerto Rican studies literature which informs this study and produces a line of inquiry that attempts to address dual colonial legacies and the wounds they have each inflicted. However, decolonial and neo/post-colonial scholarship produce competing conceptualizations of colonial power in Puerto Rico. Therefore, it is essential to interrogate how institutional structures and epistemologies may inadvertently recreate oppressions even if their stated intention is decolonization.

Generally speaking, scholars who align themselves with Indigeneity and Indigenous survivance have a tendency to more closely interrogate Spanish colonization and the genocide and erasure of the Arawak and Taínos (Guitar, 2000; Castanha, 2011; Forte, 2006). Settler colonialism is primarily concerned with the restoration of Indigenous sovereignty and land and is therefore invested in the material as well as the symbolic forms of colonization (Carillo-Rowe &

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<sup>25</sup> African, Spanish, and Indigenous respectively

<sup>26</sup> Note: Carillo-Rowe & Tuck’s phrasing here frames slavery as a de facto status. More recently many scholars, including myself, I have taken up the phrasing of “enslaved Africans” in my writing to highlight that enslavement was an action and a status imposed on African people by settlers.

Tuck, 2017). As Aimee Carillo-Rowe & Eve Tuck (2017) argue, settler colonial practices rely on genocide and symbolic erasure which turns natives into ghosts. This gives settler unrestricted access and rights to land (Cook-Lynn, 2007). However, in the case of Borikén each of us embody the settler-Indigenous-chattel slave dynamic which Carillo-Rowe and Tuck conceptualize as a triad of separate subjectivities and antagonistic relations. Puerto Rican Indigenous scholars have approached this by grounding their critiques in the histories of colonial practices. For example, how census making deliberately erases Indigenous populations. Guitar explains that the census had little interest in ethnicity:

A clear example of status-based demographic counts is Governor Francisco Manuel de Lando's 1530 census of Puerto Rico. He did not list a category for counting any mixed-blood peoples, but neither did he count any Spaniards who only owned a single slave woman (of any ethnic background), nor did he count the single slave women, free Africans, minor children, nor any of the slaves owned by poor whites or transients. (2000, p. 4).

Although race was not accurately recorded in these censuses the Spanish developed a complex nomenclature for describing percentages of Spanish, Taíno, and African blood, known as *las castas*<sup>27</sup>. The last Spanish census to include the category Taíno was conducted in 1799, showing 2300 Indigenous people remaining (Castanha, 2011). Between not acknowledging mixed-races and then removing Indigeneity completely the census *deliberately and discursively* erased Indigenous existence from the formal record. Yet to present day there are communities across the Caribbean who are clamoring to be acknowledged as Taínos (Estevez, 2008; Forte, 2006; Haslip-Viera et al., 2001). Estevez points out that in Puerto Rico it is accepted to claim Spanish or even African ancestry, but those who claim to be Taíno are ridiculed. The utter disbelief that they could survive a half a century of spiritual, physical, and cultural genocide prevails whatever oral history might be attained. There are very few publications that even

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<sup>27</sup> The castes

attempt to collect these voices at all, Forte being a primary example, but they are often disparaged by the Puerto Rican studies community in ways that make it impossible to acknowledge Indigenous presence (See for example Dávila, 1997; Duany, 2002; Haslip-Viera et al., 2001)

In the context of Borikén, the *Taíno Revival Movement* has been striving to engage in different strategies of decolonization since at least the 1960s (Dávila, 1997; Duany, 2002; Haslip-Viera et al., 2001). However, as Laenui (2000) explains, combing out consensus on what liberation means and how to go about getting it is fraught with contention. If no one will accept oral history as evidence of Taíno survival and survivance by what means can Indigeneity be proven to a colonized and colonial people? Cook-Lynn is right to be weary of using Western epistemologies and methodologies for the Indigenous cause (2007). The colonized/colonizer can always find ways to discount evidence. In the last few decades some have attempted to give definitive proof of Taíno lineage through a series of mitochondrial DNA projects. One of the first that received major attention was conducted by Martínez-Cruzado et al. in 2001, suggesting that over 60% of Puerto Ricans had Indigenous ancestry. This study incited a series of academic debate in Puerto Rican studies. Haslip-Viera denounced the study, claiming that the report did not provide enough evidence to support an Indigenous survival narrative (Haslip-Viera, 2006). However, he refers mostly to official colonial documents, such as the census, to dispute the claim; evidence which could be deemed is completely inadequate as several scholars have pointed out the deliberate erasure of Taínos in such documents (Castanha, 2011; Forte, 2006; Guitar, 2000). The most recent discovery in Taíno DNA analysis revealed that despite African and Spanish influence and intermingling, modern-day puertorriqueñas have significant genetic ties to Lucayan Taíno DNA from 1,000 years ago (Schroeder et al., 2018). It is likely that this newest study will reinvigorate discussion regarding mestizaje in Borikén once again.

While Haslip-Viera situates himself within critical Puerto Rican studies, much of his research is set on denying Indigenous survivance (Castanha, 2013). He also criticized other works that attempted to recuperate oral histories from those claiming to be Taíno such

*Indigenous Resurgence* as well as *The Myth of Indigenous Caribbean Extinction* (Castanha, 2011; Forte, 2006; Haslip-Viera, 2012; Haslip-Viera, 2009). Haslip-Viera goes on to claim that the impacts of any Indigenous revival movement have been minimal, ineffective, and fruitless. Among his own publications he edited a book titled *Taino Revivalism: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Identity and Cultural Politics* (Haslip-Viera, 2001). Haslip-Viera opens by critiquing Indigenous, African, Islamic, and Jewish movements on the island. While the cultural politics of each movement may not be perfect, he seemingly dismisses any claims to an identity other than Puerto Rican. Other authors featured in the book do articulate some valid concerns regarding revivalism. For example, Duany's chapter in the book focuses on some aspects of the movement which appear to deny many cultural influences from the African root, such as food and certain music.

While a dismissal of African influence is certainly problematic, denying Indigenous survivance is not a solution. Poka Laenui cautions those undertaking decolonial projects to be patient in envisioning and dreaming of Indigenous futurity, lest we recreate the same forms of oppression with a Native face (2000). Rushing through the dreaming phase of decolonization without carefully acknowledging internalized racism could lead to the dismissal of African influence even among those who have intentions to decolonize by reclaiming Indigenous identity. There is indeed a strong anti-African sentiment in Borikén, self-hatred borne out of the need to adhere to a racial hierarchy created by the colonizer, and a privileging of the Spanish root.

However, perhaps the most confounding argument against Indigenous survival is not the census itself, despite Haslip-Viera's claims, though it is closely related. Castanha points out that shortly after the Spanish stopped counting Tainos in the census the island experienced a surge of nationalism (2011). He explains:

Those who set the political boundaries of the national consciousness were the colonial Spanish and Puerto Rican criollo elite (or "locally born whites," according to Adalberto López), who were socially and politically conservative and displayed a "fear of and contempt for the masses." The "masses" here were primarily the tens of thousands of

jíbaro who remained a free people at this time, and the increasing number of African slaves being brought to the island. Not surprisingly, the push for national integration based on a capitalist-driven market economy often came at the expense of the economic, social, cultural, and spiritual values of Indigenous societies worldwide. The Puerto Rican elite then came to expropriate the Indian as a national symbol and assertion against the Spanish authorities. (p. 199).

It is clear the criollo elite, the descendants of Spanish settlers who were considered white enough, were successful in tokenizing and exploiting the Indigenous people of Borikén. This having occurred at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to what extent were Indigenous symbols misused and appropriated? To what extent was Indigeneity and resistance to Spain equivocated? Is this nationalist movement what has led to revivalism in Puerto Rico? These are uncertainties to consider within the dually colonial context of Puerto Rico.

Far more common in Puerto Rican studies is to conceptualize our identity through a neo or post-colonial framework which emphasizes violences produced from the exploitation of labor, the push-pull dynamic from Borikén to the mainland, and a lack of full autonomy in the paternalistic colonial relationship we have with the United States (Grosfoguel, 2003; Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2007). Puerto Rican studies scholars note that the people were for the most part very resistant towards U.S. rule even forming a *el Ejército Libertador de Puerto Rico*<sup>28</sup> and *las Hijas de la Libertad*<sup>29</sup> in the 1920s (Denis, 2015). After the United States seized power, nationalist sentiments grew. A nationalism built on a homogenized understanding of identity politics in Puerto Rico (Dávila, 1997). At the same time the U.S. neglected to understand that the Puerto Rican people were a composite of African diaspora, Taíno, and Spanish settlers, a combination often referred to as the *three roots* (Haslip-Viera, 2001). As a result of Puerto Rican efforts to unify against a common enemy, Indigeneity and africanismo was further erased. This framing

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<sup>28</sup> Liberation Army of Puerto Rico

<sup>29</sup> Daughters of Liberation

results in a homogenized nationalistic discourse where the category of “Puerto Rican” is assumed to be coherent and stable within a global system of power that seeks to exploit. While theorizing in this way illuminates U.S.-P.R. colonial dynamics, it simultaneously obscures and erases the impacts of 380 years of Spanish colonial history.

This has greatly impacted how Puerto Rican scholars describe identity and oppression. For example, Grosfoguel explicitly argues that Puerto Rico is a post-colonial territory, where the administrative power of settler colonialism is unnecessary for asserting dominance but he makes no move to address Spanish settler colonialism. It is simply taken for granted. Similarly, Quijano’s (2007) groundbreaking theorization of coloniality of power emphasizes how race was used to legitimize domination. Race became a naturalized set of colonial relations where africanos became free laborers, and Amerindians disposable, with white Europeans at the top of the hierarchy, controlling and profiting from the exploited labor force. However, although this illustrates global racial relations in the context of labor, he does not use this to examine *mestizaje*. Rather his matrix of power is solely used to explain neo/post-colonial labor relations. In the same vein, Mignolo’s (2007) important call to push back against Eurocentric epistemologies which promise happiness in the form of neoliberal democracy does not make room to address how *mestizaje* produces internalized oppressions. We *are* part European. These are not merely ideologies that were born in faraway lands and then imposed on us. In other words, how can we attend to the ways that our *mestizo* identities produce *incomodidades*, tensions, and antagonisms?

This scholarship reveals that the nationalist discourse of *latine*/Puerto Rican identity has effectively overwritten histories of settler colonial violence. Because Boricuas are (sexually re)produced through *mestizaje*, the colonizer can become naturalized and Indigenous (Maybury-Lewis, 1997). As Veracini notes, settler colonialism is most successful, most difficult to detect when it ends (2011). In a case like Puerto Rico, where there is intense *mestizaje* and a second colonial power is imposed, how much more would this be true? Indiscriminately, the

residents of the island both settler and Indigenous became victims of the U.S. and these complexities have had an enormous influence on the landscape of Puerto Rican studies.

A primary guiding question in my development as a scholar has been how do we engage decolonial strategies when colonization and historical trauma is compounded? *We cannot hope to heal from historical trauma caused by U.S. colonialism by embracing Spanish colonialism.* However, key literature in Puerto Rican studies has positioned Spanish colonialism as a given, falling prey to the same nationalist discourse even as they seek to critique it (see for examples Cabán, 1999; Dávila, 1997; Duany, 2002). Even in Dietz's (1986) very thorough *Economic History of Puerto Rico* the Spanish are made all but irrelevant by page 12, subtitled "The Decline of the Spanish Empire". Although these scholars and many others are conducting work vital to understanding the strained relationship between Borikén and the United States, I feel they are missing pieces that are crucial to decolonization.

The question of Puerto Rican identity becomes closely tied to how we conceptualize the colonial subject. If we focus solely on a post-colonial approach, we risk unproblematically assumed identity based on labels of the nation-state. However, Mendoza, Halualani, and Drzwiecka (2002) conceptualize identity "less as a fixed, and reified phenomenon and more as a contested terrain of competing interests" enacted within "macro social, historical, political contexts." (pg. 313). For instance, the meanings of the terms criollo and jíbaro have shifted over time to create varying parameters and criteria to be part of these identities, creating tensions between Indigeneity and whiteness. Importantly, these contexts themselves must also be considered as contested and difficult to apprehend, define, and compartmentalize; The desire to do so is similarly a colonial impulse of modernity. What gets reproduced in many Puerto Rican neo/postcolonial criticisms is a composite essentialized puertorriqueño subject and a homogenous essentialized colon even as scholars attempt to make moves towards liberation (Mohanty, 1988). To assume a stable and fixed identity that can easily be expressed through nationalist discourse is to erase the antagonisms inherent in mess-tizaje and deny the impacts of settler colonialism.

While essentializing erases much of our identity and history, claiming Indigeneity is not synonymous with decoloniality. Castanha (2011) notes that Indigeneity has been strategically deployed in the past to serve colonial interests in Puerto Rico. He explains that the discourse of mestizaje was used by the criollo elite to distinguish themselves from the colonial administration. Identity claims are always political. To better understand Puerto Rican identity Juan Flores (1993) examines some of Puerto Rico's earliest pieces of political literature. He surmises that most of the literature largely dismisses the notion of Indigenous influence on national identity or at least the success of the nation. At the same time, it appears that most identity literature attributes the "weaknesses" of the Puerto Rican people to la raza indígena. In essays such as Antonio S. Pedriera's infamous *Insularismo* (1937) he describes el puertorriqueño as weak, complacent, ignorant, melancholy, cowardly, and passive. Conversely, Flores demonstrates how the poetry of José Martí, Luis Pales Matos, Juan Antonio Corretjer, and others address mestizaje with nuance, complexity, and attention to the contradictory nature of being part of the settler-Indigenous-chattel slave dynamic. However, Flores notes that the impact and influence of oral history, poetry, and folklore decreased in the 1800s as the printing press took off, producing an increasing division between criollo elites and rural jíbaros. Today, *Insularismo* "has marked the standard and prevalent philosophical tone for Puerto Rican cultural interpretation..." (p.17). It follows that the hispanophile, anti-Africano, anti-Indigenous portrayals of Puerto Rican identity which pervaded after the U.S. conquest have continued to shape Puerto Rican studies as well as the national discourse on identity. Mestizaje cannot be conceived of as a stable identity, nor an even distribution of 3 ethnic traits. Rather, we embody a racial hierarchy in each of us which has been subject to the internalized oppression of the soul wound which has caused us to despise certain parts of ourselves and privilege others.

Understanding the soul wound or colonial trauma of puertorriqueñas requires us to attend to violences inflicted through settler colonialism, mestizaje, and neo/post-colonialism. The imperative for acknowledging and recognizing each of these ruptures and traumas is that they demonstrate the complex colonial nature of Puerto Rican identity. That is, both Spanish and U.S.

colonization have left indelible wounds that can be seen if we have the appropriate frameworks to view them. The reflection of colonial and historical trauma. In the case of Puerto Rico, the colonial legacies are layered between the Spanish colonization and the U.S. colonization of the present. This produces an extremely complex dynamic where colonial healing requires us to disinter traumas *beyond* the present conditions to fully understand the injuries we continue to sustain. Part of the impact of nationalist discourses is that it obscures the violence of Spanish colonization. These violences and erasures have become reproduced in Puerto Rican scholarship even as we attempt to liberate ourselves from the oppressor. If we only work towards challenging U.S. colonial violence, we will not be able to address the soul wound that already existed before the U.S. invasion and continues to shape our identity and culture. Therefore, *mess-tizaje* should not be taken for granted. Puerto Rican identity should not be taken for granted. These mixtures occurred through violences that have not yet been confronted and healed. Rather, we have developed a nationalist discourse which allows us to turn away from examining ourselves.

I should note at this juncture, that this fierce sense of nationalism also bucks up against a broader sense of Caribbean or Antillean identity. This is not typically addressed in Puerto Rican studies, potentially another kind of colonial residue. To see how Puerto Rican identity and history intersects with other nation-states and colonized ethnic groups in the Caribbean we would need to pivot to the field of Caribbean studies. The Caribbean is one of the most ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse regions in the world, making the apprehension of a coherent Caribbean identity impossible (Pemdás, 1996). However, activists and scholars have been fighting towards a unification of non-European Caribbean people since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Alai Reyes-Santos (2015) the *antillanismo movement* fought for the abolition of slavery, racial equality, Afro-descendant enfranchisement, and the end of colonialism with the end goal of forming a political and economic integration across the Caribbean, Central, and South America. Afro-descendant movement leaders like Ramón Betances and Gregorio Luperón looked to the recently liberated Haiti as a guide and aimed to create transcolonial social networks. They also

organized *El Grito de Lares* in Puerto Rico and *El Grito de Yara* in Cuba, two well-known insurrections against colonial Spain. But despite the alliances that formed during this period, nationalist movements which emerged in response to U.S. colonialism in the Caribbean disrupted these unification projects. As a result, what we see today between these groups is far more antagonistic. Jorge Duany (2006) discusses that racialization processes ingrained in these nation building projects in the Caribbean further entrenched anti-Blackness. This has led to a variety of racist sentiments such as anti-Haitianism in Dominican Republic and anti-Dominicanism in Puerto Rico which are salient today.

This review of literature demonstrates that we know very little about the stories embedded in Puerto Rican cuisine and food practices. For the most part, food ethnography is an emergent area of study and one that has not yet been explored in the Puerto Rican context. The work of Barradas (2010) and Ortíz Cuadra (2006) does allow us to make historically informed connections to la cocina puertorriqueña<sup>30</sup>, although it lacks an exploration of how the food is experienced by those who eat it and what meanings are layered onto those food practices. Constructing un recetario decolonial then may be a matter of filling this gap, acknowledging the experiences and stories of comida puertorriqueña<sup>31</sup>.

Marte argues to focus on these archival gaps to address the paradox of mestizaje. Further, she sees this (re)engagement with her Dominican roots not as a nationalistic commitment but as a means to converse with the emergent communities in constant flux which have been central to her survival.

Esta urgencia sincrética y contradictoria es también una necesidad que nace de ser un producto del proceso histórico afro-caribeño, de los sazones y situaciones que moldean ciertas formas de enfrentar la paradoja de haber nacido de tal violencia y variedad. [This syncretic and contradictory urgency is also a necessity which is born from being the

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<sup>30</sup> The Puerto Rican kitchen

<sup>31</sup> Puerto Rican Food

product of the historic Afro-Caribbean process, of the seasoning and situations that mold certain forms of confronting the paradox of being born from such violence and variety.]” (Marte, 2006, p.11).

While the work of scholars like Ortíz Cuadra and Barradas has been lauded as that of leaders in Puerto Rican studies, what remains to be discussed is how these cuisines are lived and practiced. It is this archival gap which defines the scope of this study. The nature of this investigation is an attempt to recognize and reclaim the knowledge Puerto Rican women produce alongside their dishes *en la cocina*<sup>32</sup> (Abarca, 2006).

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<sup>32</sup> In the kitchen

## Approaches to (De)Colonial Studies

Considering the importance of colonization in relation to Borikén and Puerto Rican foodways within this project it is crucial to differentiate the different approaches to understanding colonization in its various iterations and the resultant approaches to decolonization. In this section I provide a brief overview of settler colonization, postcolonial theory, and neo-colonial criticism. Because Borikén has been under colonial rule since the Spanish arrived, the island and its people have been subjected to each of these forms of colonization. As mentioned in the previous section the primary critique within contemporary scholarship in Puerto Rico has been against U.S. imperialism which currently takes the form of neo-colonialism. However, each form of colonization has impacts on food and the foodways of the Indigenous, enslaved, and colonizers of Borikén and this work identifies what that looks like. Settler colonials drove bison to extinction with the explicit purpose of creating food scarcity for Indigenous groups of Turtle Island, creating a dependency on rations (Dunbar-Ortíz, 2014). In the Caribbean, Spaniards exploited the labor of the Taínos to the point that they could not sustain their *conucos* and many died of malnutrition as a result (Rouse, 1992). However, settler invaders also could not grow many of the European crops in this tropical environment and had little choice but to incorporate new food stuffs into their diets (Ortíz Cuadra, 2006). Enslaved Africans throughout the Americas were faced with drastically different food offerings than they were used to, though some of their own staples were eventually introduced to the Caribbean (Janer, 2007). Janer notes how these African ancestors had an enormous influence on the cuisine of Borikén as they used new ingredients and attempted to recreate dishes from their ancestral homes.

The colonial project has a long history, manifesting in multiple ways and using various strategies over the last 500 years. Nation states can be both victims and perpetrators of colonial violence. Settler colonial studies addresses the earliest forms of colonization, where European

nations sought to create colonies in Turtle Island, Cemanahuac, Abya Yala, and the Americas<sup>33</sup> with the express goal of claiming Indigenous land for themselves. As part of this process colonizers use many strategies to eliminate the Indigenous people including physical, cultural, and spiritual genocide (Veracini, 2011). For Indigenous people around the globe, the destruction of ancestral foodways is one strategy colonizers use to achieve this. In addition to the exploitation of land and natural resources, the goal within settler-colonialism is to replace the Native population. Veracini contends that the most successful settler-colonial projects are those that come to an end by effectively eliminating the threat of Indigenous people. This makes these colonial projects particularly difficult to recognize for non-Indigenous people. Over time, colonials in these projects begin to see themselves as Native, as is the case in colonial nation-states like the U.S. and Australia. We may even see people misuse the term “Native” to refer to themselves and their city or state of birth despite having no Indigenous lineage to that area.

Another characteristic of settler colonialism is the creation of chattel slavery as the main structure of economy (Carillo-Rowe & Tuck, 2017). This new form of slavery was introduced by colonial powers throughout the Caribbean and American mainland. Unlike previous forms of slavery, chattel slavery was developed to be integral to racial relations, denying the humanity of African people and stripping them of any rights even beyond their own generation.

Decoloniality which emerges from this understanding of colonization is very much material in nature. It seeks to restore Indigenous sovereignty and repatriate land to Indigenous people. In this sense, this form of decolonization calls for the destruction and removal of colonial political structures. Importantly, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) explain that decolonization is not merely a metaphor to tag onto a variety of other social justice projects and doing so may be *settler moves to innocence*. These are a variety of rhetorical strategies that colonial descendants use to position themselves as “good colonials” without needing to address the continued harm

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<sup>33</sup> While Indigenous, First Nations, and Aboriginal peoples of what is now called North America refer to this region as Turtle Island I have not found comparable Indigenous names for Central or South America or the Caribbean.

they cause and are complicit with. Native Hawai'ian scholar Poka Laenui (2000) offers 5 stages towards decolonization beginning with reclaiming Indigenous knowledge, grieving the loss of culture and kin, dreaming of what Indigenous futures look like, discussing and planning within Indigenous communities, and ending with action towards that end.

Since the goal of settler colonial studies is the repatriation of land and the restoration of sovereignty to Indigenous people, it is often clumsy at addressing the African diaspora. Scholarship which simultaneously addresses the colonial wounds, displacement, and dispossession of both Indigenous and Black people is rare. Often scholars tend towards the liberation of one group while the issues of the other are carefully skirted. Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith (2020) note that Black and Indigenous people are often positioned antagonistically against each other through strategies of settler colonization such that the goals of the two groups become incommensurable. For example:

Black movements for reparations for slavery continue to elide the fact that reparations, particularly when compensation is configured as land, requires the further consolidation of the US settler nation and affirms its authority to redistribute wealth and "Native land" as it sees fit. (pg. 7).

King, Navarro, and Smith observe that Indigenous and Black activists inadvertently betray one another through their negotiations with the violent colonial state. By centering colonial power, we cause an increasing rift between oppressed people who would benefit most through coalition. The authors call for more deliberate forms of relating between Indigenous, Black, and other people of color as a means of disrupting this betrayal.

Departing from the myth of discovery, the colonial period which occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is challenged by postcolonial theory which examines the aftermath that follows the creation of independent nation states post World War II (Césaire, 2001; Mbembe, 2001). As a result, this literature often addresses issues in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. This form of colonization differs from settler colonialism in that the goal is not to replace the Indigenous population but rather to extract resources for industrial revolution and create foreign markets for

colonial goods (Sartre, 2005). The agricultural and economic systems are twisted into benefitting only the colons and the metropole, often neglecting the material needs of the Indigenous population. Rather than eliminating Native populations, they are subordinated and exploited within this colonial system (Veracini, 2011). As a result of this form of colonization migration patterns emerge between the formerly colonized and the colonial metropole (Fanon, 2008). Because former colonies are often left in a state of disrepair after extracting all of its natural resources, migrants are motivated by a variety of real/perceived opportunities including economic, labor, education, and safety. Fanon famously noted that this migration dynamic has severe consequences on the psyche of the colonized, creating a deep sense inferiority and affecting gender relations such that it was preferred to pursue European partners to increase one's social capital.

This sense of inferiority can be partly attributed to the othering discourses produced by the colonial metropole. Edward Said's (1978) conceptualization of *orientalism* describes how European art and literature during this colonial period painted Middle Eastern cultures and people as exotic, anachronistic, mysterious, feminized, childlike, and primitive. This discourse was used in turn to justify colonial policies throughout the region as the people were not considered capable of understanding the complexities of the modern world. Chandra Mohanty (1984) explains that this othering discourse continues to manifest in politics, scholarship, and activism today by positioning the White middle-class as the point of reference for what is normal. Like Said, Mohanty notes that this othering discourse also flattens Western perceptions of the global majority. In the case of white feminisms, this means a composite essentialized image of *the third world woman* who must surely be oppressed to a greater extent than women in the West and must be taught (white) feminism to ensure their liberation. Decolonization from the postcolonial perspective is often focused on pushing against these othering discourses by centering the voices of the global majority as well as embracing the hybridity which emerges from these migrant flows.

Despite the removal of colonial administrations from many colonies there are many ways in which colonial power persists through neo-imperialism. Here, the dynamic between former colony and former colonizer remains largely undisrupted through the use of global level administration. On the surface it may appear that former colonies have technically won independence. However, the creation of global scale organizations formed after World War II such as the *International Monetary Fund*, *The World Bank*, and *The United Nations* along with global aid programs ensures that economic exploitation and subjugation of former colonies remains largely undisturbed (Nkrumah, 1965; Rao, 2000; Uzoigwe 2019). Through neo-imperialism Western countries continue to create policies which exploit land, resources, and labor. Combined with capitalism this also means that increasingly, these policies are influenced by large corporations.

The work of Anibal Quijano (2007) and Walter Mignolo (2007) fall under this form of colonial critique. Quijano's posits that modernity cannot be separated from coloniality of power and therefore even knowledge is colonial/colonized. Even conceptualizations of liberation and freedom that emerged through modernity follow colonial onto-epistemologies. Within this *colonial matrix of power*, gender relations, family roles, economic systems, control of land and natural resources, authority, and subjectivity have all been constructed from an inherently racist and sexist colonial structure. Furthermore, this structure is not contained within national or geographical borders. Rather, colonial domination becomes globalized and ways of knowing with it. While decolonial scholarship and movements that emerge from this approach may seek political parity the primary objective is often more epistemological in nature, identifying and disrupting colonial values that have been internalized by the Indigenous people.

Mignolo's *epistemic delinking* is a way of considering these knowledges and how we may inadvertently reproduce coloniality in our knowledge production. He suggests focusing on pluriversality rather than the totality often pushed by colonial modernity. However, many have taken this conceptualization of colonization and reduced it to metaphor. From this approach we

begin hearing some of the buzzwords within the academy that Tuck and Yang (2012) argue against, such as “decolonize your syllabus”.

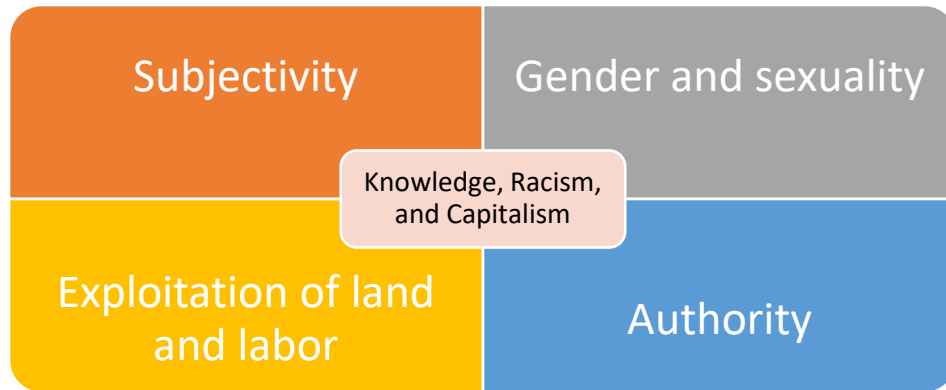


Figure 1: The colonial matrix of power (Quijano 2000) as described by Mignolo (2007)

It is easy to see why tensions between different understandings of colonization and the recommended decolonial repair emerge. Each form of colonization covered in this brief overview is important and continues to have symbolic and material impacts on the global majority and each form of colonization cannot necessarily be addressed in the same way. King, Navarro, and Smith’s (2020) call for Indigenous, Black, and other ethnic studies groups to listen to each other is vital for any form of decolonization to succeed and to avoid the betrayal between oppressed groups in our efforts toward liberation. I see this project as trying to address the multiple forms of colonization Boricuas have experienced from multiple colonial legacies. However, at this stage, the form of decolonization I have potentially contributed to is largely part of an epistemological shift and reclamation of African and Indigenous foodways and the social processes which make them possible. As discussed in the previous section, Indigenous survivance in Borikén is largely dismissed (Guitar, 2000; Castanha, 2011; Forte, 2006). Similar to other Latin American nation-states, *mess-tizaje* makes it difficult to clearly delineate Indigenous from non-Indigenous. Understanding what repatriation of land and restoration of Indigenous sovereignty looks like in the Borikén context has not been sufficiently explored for me to make contributions to that form of

decolonial project. But I look forward to seeing how revivalist movements in the Caribbean dream of their liberation and how I might contribute to that work in the future (Laenui, 2000).

## Emergent Critical Qualitative Research Methodology

As the literature shows, while we have significant studies on the history of food in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, there is a dearth of research examining the lived experiences and stories of the puertorriqueñas who prepare, cook, eat, and feed these foods to their families, friends, and customers. In this project I investigate the experiences and stories of women who have passed down these culinary traditions, transformed them, and made them their own. Their experiences and stories are central to the survival of this cuisine and central to this project.

Centering the ways in which puertorriqueñas prepare and consume culturally valued dishes is a way to address a scarcity of intersectional qualitative research within Puerto Rican (food) studies. While the majority of Puerto Rican studies literature focuses on race, class, and the colonial relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico, we are failing to critically interrogate the formation of Boricua identity from a settler colonial perspective. Boricua, portorro, puertorriqueño become hanging signifiers, labels which assume a fixed and knowable identity that needs no further unpacking or explanation. It obscures the internalized racist ideologies which guide our understanding of what it means to be Puerto Rican. But as Anzaldúa (1981), citing Cherríe Moraga, writes, “‘To assess the damage is a dangerous act’... To stop there is even more dangerous.” (p. 171). We must go beyond acknowledgement and recognition. I look to la cocina puertorriqueña as a space where culture is practiced, histories are passed down, and colonial residues become material.

Grounding this study in social processes allows for a closer examination of food as cultural codes (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993). A pivot towards the kitchen offers a departure from the high theory which so rapidly distances scholarship from the lived experiences of those we claim to be experts on (Abarca, 2006). But by examining how we *consume* culture by procuring, preparing, and eating comida portorra we can grapple with the complexities of colonial histories, racial and ethnic identities, class, and gender. Furthermore, the focus on this domestic space/place allows us to emphasize the experience of women. Consuelo López Springfield (1997) notes that the material, relational, and social realities of women have largely been dismissed in Caribbean

literature, art, and scholarship. While her edited volume is over 20 years old, an absence of qualitative research that attends to puertorriqueñas' everyday experiences and how they might reflect larger cultural realities remains. In this investigation I explore the tangibly lived realities of puertorriqueñas through food.

I perceive this epistemological departure as a decolonial move in Puerto Rican studies which satisfies a gap in literature as a vast majority of research at the intersection of latines and food has sought to change or *correct* Latino food practices. The assumption is of course that our diets are unbalanced or inadequate according to a U.S. nutrition paradigm. Other studies stem from a marketing emphasis, desperate to tap into a population long neglected by corporations, leaving millions of dollars out of their pockets. As a result, a lot of studies on the relationship between latine and food have viewed us as exploitable or infantile since the 1980's. In this project I depart from the emphasis on Eurocentric nutrition/health to better describe the lived experiences of the el recetario, focusing on the central cultural stewards of the cuisine, women.

To describe these everyday social and cultural processes I turn to qualitative methods. Qualitative research approaches are largely concerned with generating thick rich descriptions of the subjective realities, perspectives, and meanings within a particular context. The subjective nature of this onto-epistemology allows for multiple, even conflicting, versions of reality rather than assuming there is a singular apprehendable truth that can be captured through the rigors of an objectivist social scientific method (Denzin, 2010). However, a critical approach to qualitative research further acknowledges that these subjective realities are impacted by and reflective of oppressive power structures. It is necessary, then, to be deliberate in research design to address how our collection and analysis of data might contribute to illuminating these dynamics. As Denzin argues, "all inquiry is moral and political." (2010, p. 10). Therefore, we must be aware of what moral judgements and political commitments we reflect within our research practice.

In the case of this study, I align myself with a moral and political impulse guided by a decolonial ethic and a desire to illuminate the latent colonial structures which continue to impact puertorriqueñas. Combining qualitative data collection and analytic methods with settler and

neocolonial theory allows us to closely examine the relationship between these socially constructed realities which are subjectively experienced and the power that produces them. As I demonstrate in this chapter, I have drawn from constructivist grounded theory methods and critical thematic analysis to create an emergent critical qualitative research design.

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory Methods**

To begin, grounded theory as an analytic method was devised by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 in their volume *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. At the time, the two were collaborating on work exploring death and dying in medical settings. It is widely used to this day as a means of systematically analyzing data to generate theory with multiple varieties and approaches emerging. I approach grounded theory methods from a constructivist perspective which aligns with the notion that “all inquiry is moral and political.” (Denzin, 2010, p. 10). Denzin’s dictum echoes Lincoln & Guba’s earlier axiom which states no inquiry is value free, therefore no data collection can be complete or all-encompassing (1985). Their book often cites Glaser and Strauss (1967) insofar as the analytic process is iterative, flexible, uses theoretical sampling, relies on the human-as-instrument, and generates theory. Lincoln and Guba diverge from objectivist and behaviorist approaches to grounded theory by conceptualizing reality as subjective, constructivist, and contextually bound; A reality which cannot be examined in a value-free manner. It is this constructivist turn in grounded theory that allows me to incorporate more critical perspectives into the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a rich and detailed explanation of the human-as-instrument and how this allows for an emergent research design. They posit that to encounter this reality as researchers, to create theory of such a subjective reality, the human instrument is the best tool we can use. Lincoln and Guba offer the following characteristics in their argument for the use and honing of the human instrument. The human instrument 1) is responsive to environmental and social cues 2) is able to adapt to the pivots in inquiry as needed 3) is able to perceive this subjective reality holistically 4) is capable of knowledge base expansion or synthesizing complex new information with existing tacit knowledge 5) is able to process data

immediately 6) is able to react to the environment and request clarification and summarization 7) is able to recognize the validity of atypical or idiosyncratic responses. In contrast to using established survey measures frequently used in the postpositivist paradigm, which cannot account for what is not yet known, using the human instrument allows for a flexible and emergent research design which pivots as needed based on ongoing data collection and analysis.

In addition to an emergent design, a constructivist grounded theory approach attempts to capture “slices of social life” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 270). In this case, those slices are the experiences of puertorriqueñas in the kitchen, the recipes they live by, and the meanings co-created within those spaces. By taking a constructivist approach to grounded theory, the researcher “Constructs a picture that draws from, reassembles, and renders subjects' lives. The product is more a painting than a photograph” (p.270). Charmaz’s constructivist approach to grounded theory resists objectivist and postpositivist tendencies of grounded theory by situating the data collected and analyzed as representations of a multifaceted reality a “world made real by the minds and through the words and actions of its members.” (p. 272). Whereas an objectivist approach to grounded theory assumes a more uniform interpretation of reality and data which exists separately from the observer. However, reality and the meanings layered onto that reality emerge through the interaction between researcher and participant. It would not emerge without that interaction, so accounting for it is essential. Keeping good records and reflective notes as I have described in the section on accountability below is an important part of being transparent about one’s analytical process.

Charmaz (2003; 2006) places emphasis on the co-construction of meaning created even in, perhaps especially in, the research setting:

Constructivist grounded theory celebrates firsthand knowledge of empirical worlds, takes a middle ground between postmodernism and positivism, and offers accessible methods for taking qualitative research into the 21st century. Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities. Recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the

viewer and viewed and aims toward an interpretive understanding of subjects' meaning.”  
(Charmaz, 2003, p. 250).

As we see here, Charmaz posits that even data is co-constructed. Not only does this account for the researchers' role in the process but as Charmaz notes, this framing of grounded theory allows for greater integration with feminist and decolonial approaches to research which have been crucial for this study. De Eguia Huerta (2020) makes a compelling argument for the use of Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory in projects with a decolonial ethic because a constructivist approach necessitates the recognition of the researcher co-constructing realities with their participants rather than an objectivist outsider position. This means acknowledging our participants as cultural experts in the research setting. Further, the open-endedness and pluralistic nature Charmaz (2003; 2006) describes, resists the colonial totality so necessary for delinking from Western epistemologies (Quijano, 2007; Mignolo, 2007).

In the end, while grounded theory methods push for theory to emerge from empirical data, we do not need to dismiss the critical impulses which illuminate symbolic, material, and structural power dynamics. In fact, it is our duty to make these latent structures known through our work.

### **Critical Thematic Analysis and Colonization**

Many indigenous scholars have challenged extractive research approaches which are often used to further colonial ideologies and dominance (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Many of these scholarly endeavors were used to further developmental projects which perpetuate U.S. imperialism (Foley, 2002; Steinmetz, 2017). Specifically in the case of Puerto Rico, we must be wary of how the island was historically treated as an academic playground to train novice anthropologists and sociologists in the ways of using the human-as-instrument since the 1960s (Duany 2010). Puerto Rico was conveniently accessible without a passport and our people sufficiently exotic to tempt intellectual endeavors.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes “The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remain a powerfully remembered history for many of the world's

colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity.” (p. 1). Tuck and Yang (2014) further push for settler decolonial scholars to take up an ethic of refusal in research to “take up a stance of objection, one that will interrogate power and privilege, and trace the legacies and enactments of settler colonialism in everyday life.” (p. 814). They urge researchers to be wary of which stories we seek from Indigenous and vulnerable communities and to think of the ways in which IRB fail to account for harm done to communities rather than individuals.

In their call for decolonial approaches to intercultural technical communication research Agboka (2014) describes decolonial scholarship as research processes which “seek to produce new knowledge about how colonialism has worked and continues to work to subjugate, commoditize, and otherwise exploit culture, knowledge, and other resources of unenfranchised people, groups, and nations.” (p. 6). It is crucial then to recognize the harms committed in the name of knowledge production and how scholarship has often been used to further colonial dominance and white supremacy when it is focused on vulnerable communities. Thus, I cannot be a *tabula rasa* and also decolonial in my research.

As Tuck & Yang (2014) point out there is a “code beneath the code”, the colonial driving force beneath Western empiricism. Entering research while thinking we are not influenced by these structures will perpetuate colonial ideologies in our work. Especially with populations who have been exploited in Western research we must be observant and flexible, adjusting our methods to fit the circumstances and ethically observe and account for stories centered around women’s lived experience in relation to the domestic culinary realm. Charmaz’s (2003; 2006) constructivist grounded theory allows me to incorporate these crucial underpinnings into this empirically driven project. However, she does not explain a systematic way of connecting the data to structures.

To ensure that these structures of power are consistently considered throughout this analysis, I have taken up Critical Thematic Analysis (CTA) as a tool for connecting my sensitizing concepts, data, codes, and categories directly to critical theory. Although many scholars claim to

use CTA there has not been much development of this method with the exception of using open coding to identify recurrence, repetition, and force within qualitative data- with recurrence representing the repetition of meaning rather than specific words (Lawless & Chen, 2019). These indicators were originally conceptualized by Owen (1984) as a way to identify salient themes within an interview text and this framework has remained a cornerstone of thematic analysis. Braun & Clarke (2008) further formalized this method by describing a series of steps within the analytic procedure. This includes: 1) familiarizing oneself with the data 2) generating initial codes 3) searching for themes 4) reviewing themes 5) defining and naming themes 6) and writing the report.

This process has been helpful in providing structure for how to conduct a thematic analysis; however, Lawless and Chen argue that while this process has been used in studies claiming a critical orientation, a lack of procedural specificity has reserved the majority of critical application to the discussion section of these works. To address this, they suggest a second layer of analysis, specifically devised for critical analysis of qualitative data. In addition to open coding for recurrence, repetition, and force in initial phases of analysis, Lawless and Chen also describe a method for closed coding, whereby the codes generated from open coding are linked back to systemic oppressive structures. During this coding phase the researcher asks, "What ideologies, positions of power, or status hierarchies are recurring, repeated, and forceful?" (pg. 103). This ensures that critical theory is incorporated into the analysis itself rather than separating it from the data and falling prey to one of the many criticisms of qualitative research. In this study, my first round of coding followed Spradley's (1980) grand tour. As a result, my coding structure developed 3 main tiers including the grand tour observations which were much more material, to the conceptual interpretation, and finally my critical interpretation (see Figure 2 below).

As expressed in the previous literature review, this study is grounded in settler and neocolonial studies. Therefore, the oppressive structures of interest in this project are those of colonization, racism, sexism, and patriarchy which become salient throughout the corpus of data.

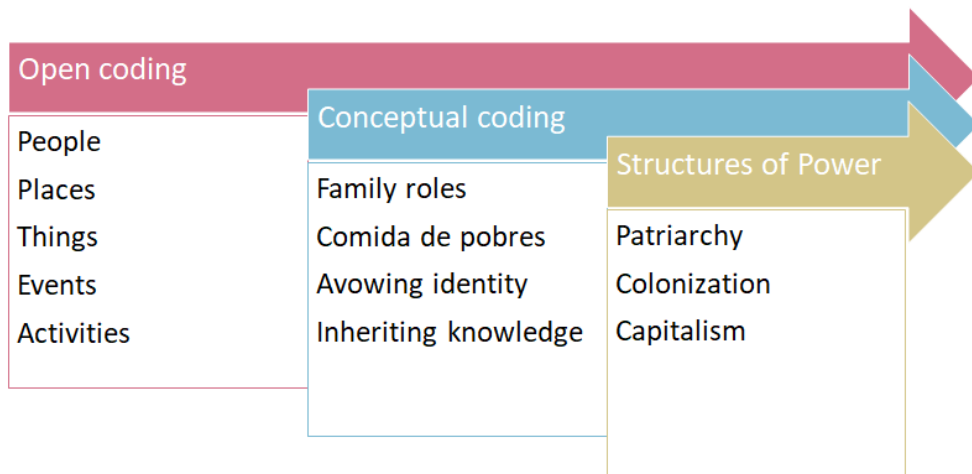


Figure 2: Coding Process

### Grand Tour Coding

To facilitate the coding and analysis process, all fieldnotes, memos, cookbook pages, transcripts, and videos were uploaded to MAXQDA, which is a software designed for coding and analyzing qualitative and mixed methods data. Using this tool allowed for extensive inventorying of people, places, things, events, etc. It also assisted in comparing how different themes emerged from the different sources.

Open coding, also called initial coding, is often used as a first cycle coding strategy for qualitative research (Saldaña, 2016). It is a highly flexible coding strategy that allows the researcher to be completely open to emergent themes and aim to create categories for what is happening within the context (Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, it is an important stage within CTA, as noted above. While remaining open to various themes I also took inspiration from Spradley's *grand tour observations* (1980). Although his strategy is meant for use in ethnographic settings or ethnographic interviews, I found that the dimensions he noted would allow me to give a very holistic initial account of what I was finding in the cookbooks and the recipe videos. Grand tour observation involves cataloging spaces/places, actors, objects, activities, acts, events, time, goals, and feelings. As the name suggests, this strategy is fitting for constructing a big picture of the cultural scene being observed. This became especially helpful as I began to compare these

dimensions between my different data sources since it highlighted the reality being constructed by the creators of the texts.

Particularly as I began my analysis of the recipe videos it became especially important to further separate the acts and activities into two subcategories of social processes and culinary processes. This became an important feature of the recipe videos and interviews which was not prevalent in the recipe books. As these categories became more numerous and abstract, I also began using MAXQDA's code cloud function to help me visually assess how prevalent these social processes were (See Figure 3 below).



Figure 3: Interview code cloud

### Sensitizing Concepts

One of the central tenets of grounded theory is to avoid a priori assumptions as we analyze data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Rather than entering the project with a specific theory in mind or analytic structure, we should rely on theoretical sensitivity. By this Glaser & Strauss are referring to the manner in which we engage with multiple bodies of literature, constantly contributing to our conceptual toolbox so that once we begin analyzing we can select the tools

that align best with our observations (de la Garza, 2018). Giles, King, and de Lacy (2013) point out that seasoned researchers have a less formal, more nebulous literature review “on tap”. However, because it is difficult to enter into a study without any particular framework, it is often useful to select sensitizing concepts which guide the line of inquiry (Blumer, 1954; Bowen, 2006; Charmaz, 2003; Glaser, 1978). Charmaz (2003) contends that

[S]ensitizing concepts offer ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience; they are embedded in our disciplinary emphases and perspectival proclivities. Although sensitizing concepts may deepen perception, they provide starting points for building analysis, not ending points for evading it. We may use sensitizing concepts only as points of departure from which to study the data. (p. 259).

Bowen (2008) further explains sensitizing concepts provide a foundation for analyzing data but should not become a priori assumptions which constrain the emergence of categories. Although there is debate regarding when to conduct a literature review for a grounded theory approach this study has been based on Puerto Rican studies and food studies literature with a heavy emphasis on colonization.

I selected the sensitizing concepts of *palate memory* and *cultural/historical amnesia* as a means of aligning my project with this decolonial ethic and the lived experiences of puertorriqueñas, el recetario, and how it is communicated, to guide my entry into this project. The literature in Puerto Rican and food studies emphasized palate memory and cultural/historical amnesia as prevalent paradoxical themes. El recetario nacional is an artifact that represents both remembering and forgetting. We look to these foods to remember and establish who we are (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993; Barradas, 2010; Wilk, 1999).

Yet, as Ortíz Cuadra (2006) and Barradas (2010) demonstrate, much of the history of the food has been forgotten, distancing us from a violent colonial past. Palate memory ties together the sensory and emotional experience of food to cultural identity. For Abarca (2017), identifying which foods become culturally significant means focusing largely on “the embodied performance, sensory articulation, and collective palate memories shared within groups whose histories have

intertwined their lives.” (p. 25). She uses Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra’s palate memory to articulate how food becomes “vessels that archive people’s cultural knowledge(s).” (p. 26). While I am certain she was referring to a container I also wonder how we might understand food as that which directs our life blood and sustains us. Marte (2008) similarly uses her work as a cultural archive where recipes are inseparable from memories, stories, and photographs of her family and cultural identity in her attempt to reconnect to her Dominican roots as an immigrant in Puerto Rico. The theme of cultural/historical amnesia also emerged as important to understanding the significance of this *recetario nacional*. The work of Marte (2008), Barradas (2010), and Ortíz Cuadra (2006) all point to forgotten colonial and cultural histories which they attempt to recuperate either by retelling personal stories or by digging up archives which might illuminate origins of foods and recipes.

These sensitizing concepts were an important part of making sense of the initial open codes which generated hundreds of items, people, places, and processes. As I transitioned from initial coding to more conceptual codes, it was important to consider how these dimensions of *el recetario nacional* might help explain the experiences of palate memory and historical/cultural memory and amnesia and eventually to connect these concepts back to the oppressive colonial structures.

### **Theoretical Sampling**

As part of an emergent design, Glaser & Strauss (1967) use theoretical sampling as a means of systematically focusing the scope of the study. These are the changes and pivots that occur in method, population, sources, and types of questions being asked as the data collection and analysis begin to draw out prevalent themes. This is part of the adaptability, responsiveness, holistic emphasis, and process immediacy noted by Lincoln & Guba (1985) which characterize naturalistic inquiry. As a result of using the human instrument and following where the data leads, choices need to be made about how to proceed, what data needs to be collected next, and where to get it. Not only are data collected and analyzed iteratively, but constant comparison means that within Glaser’s “all is data” dictum, all pieces of data, categories, participants, sources, codes,

and so on are compared to highlight similarities, differences, and potential relationships for “theoretical relevance for further development of emerging categories.” (Glaser & Strauss, 1985, p. 49).

Researchers working within the qualitative paradigm may turn to a variety of data collection methods including interviewing, ethnographic observation, and curating primary sources such as autobiographies, archival photographs, or news clippings (Corbin & Strauss 2015). In this study I have analyzed a combination of cookbooks, online recipe videos, and interviews in order to paint a full picture of the experiences of Puerto Rican women and food. Since the discovery of the strange history behind *El Cocinero Puertorriqueño* was a large inspiration for this project, I thought analyzing this and other cookbooks as sources would be appropriate starting point to establish some of the traditions and practices within *el recetario nacional* and provide a basis for sampling other sources in subsequent stages of the study.

I focused on popular recipe books meant for everyday use in the Puerto Rican kitchen. Additionally, since the intention for this project was to re-center the voices of women which has been much neglected within the academic literature on Puerto Rican gastronomy, books such as chef Wilo Benet’s *Puerto Rican True Flavors* (2010) were excluded from the sample. Other volumes which focused on the diasporic creativity that transforms dishes, such as *Coconuts and Collards* (Diaz, 2018) or Illyanna Maisonet’s much anticipated *Diasporica*, (set for release in October of 2022) were also not included in the analysis. I began with 5 cookbooks, often cited on blogs or cooking videos as essentials for the Puerto Rican kitchen. Since the themes which emerged from the 5 books overlapped significantly, I did not sample further books. These books included:

- *El Cocinero Puerto-Riqueño ó Formulario* by Don Eugenio Coloma y Garcés, first published in 1859
- *Cocina Criolla* by Carmen Aboy Valdejuli, first published in 1954
- *Puerto Rican Cookery* by Carmen Aboy Valdejuli, 1977 (The English edition of *Cocina Criolla*)

- Recipes from la Isla by Robert Rosado and Judith Healy Rosado, 1995
- A Taste of Puerto Rico by Yvonne Ortiz, 1997

While I coded a random selection of recipes from each book, my main focus was on the front matter which often had introductions, a glossary, or some history of the cuisine. In total, 244 pages of recipe book data was coded and analyzed. This first round of coding for the study was helpful for inventorying what were considered essential ingredients or tools for Puerto Rican cooking and how the cuisine was being described.

What became quickly apparent in the cookbooks was the decontextualization of the food, so it was important that the subsequent data sampled would reflect food within the social and cultural context. In other words, *how* did we cook outside of the list of ingredients which could be alchemized into a final food product? To address this, I turned my attention to other formats where I could observe women cooking. Social media channels dedicated to cooking became an important source in the age of the COVID pandemic to get a glimpse into the more complex processes of creating Puerto Rican food. I followed hashtags on Instagram such as #recetasBoricuas #recetaspuertorriqueñas #comidaBoricua #comidaspuertorriqueñas #puertoricanfoods for several months and began following any page that focused on Puerto Rican food. I had been following various pages since late 2019 and over the course of the pandemic some of these channels exploded in popularity.

I eventually focused my attention on creators who were women and also not professional or gourmet chefs. As Abarca (2006) notes, many of these working-class women do manage to use their domestic skills to make some money and establish some financial independence. However, my focus is on *amas de casa* rather than commercial chefs, so I only focused on women with non-professional cooking backgrounds. I also selected the channels based on whether they were active posters, therefore channels that had not posted any videos in the last 3 months or that had fewer than 10 videos total were not considered. Cooking Con Omi became a frequent poster on my Instagram feed, offering recipes almost daily. She rapidly established a reputation on social media as a cultural steward of the *recetario nacional* over the course of the

pandemic (Rivera Cedeño, 2020). I also found channels on YouTube which focused on everyday women's cooking including *Judy's Rincon Boricua* (Colón, n.d.) and *Evelyn Dominguez* (n.d.). On Facebook, I also found the popular page of *Viña La Gran Pastelera* (Hernández, n.d.). Each of these social media creators have garnered a reputation as las cocineras<sup>34</sup> of the internet, have posted dozens of recipe videos and have thousands of followers which made them strong choices following the analysis of the cookbooks.

My selection of videos narrowed further as my data pointed me increasingly in the direction of *social* processes. To see these social processes in action I needed to select videos with multiple actors instead of just one. This required me to screen hundreds of videos from my selection of creators to determine the extent to which they might perform these complex social processes rather than strictly culinary processes, which were often the focal point of the videos. *Viña la Gran Pastelera*<sup>35</sup>, *Judy's Rincon Boricua*, and *Evelyn Dominguez's* videos were primarily solo acts with the exception of the occasional child speaking, laughing, or crying in the background. While these were important experiences of the Puerto Rican kitchen, they provided limited information. As a result, 22 of the 32 videos I sampled were from by Omallys Hopper (better known as @cooking\_con\_omi on Instagram) (Hopper, n.d.), who often posted videos cooking with her mother. Each video was transcribed and both visual and textual data were coded using a *Grand Tour* approach which I describe further on. Additionally, I also coded the comment sections of 3 YouTube videos to get a sense of viewer's connection to the recipe and processes as I prepared to transition to my final data set.

The videos I analyzed provided a rich understanding of the social processes of the kitchen which allowed me to develop an interview guide to clarify and verify processes and also fill in gaps that remained. Interview participants were recruited through Facebook and Instagram

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<sup>34</sup> The cooks

<sup>35</sup> A pastelera is a woman who makes and sells pasteles. An ancient dish made with a masa (dough) of tubers, stuffed with a seasoned meat filling, and wrapped in a banana or plantain leaf. The bundle is then boiled. This is a very popular dish around Christmas time.

posts and the interviews were conducted over Zoom. Each interview lasted between 50-75 minutes. It is important to note that out of the 8 participants only two did not work within the university setting. This was unintentional, as I had not put any exclusion criteria related to occupation but resulted in very overlapping diasporic experiences being shared. Through theoretical sampling, the study became increasingly specific in its scope.

### **Semi-Structured Interview procedure**

My interview guide (see appendix) was created to verify findings from other data sets and flesh out themes which had not yet been adequately addressed but were essential for understanding social processes of the Puerto Rican kitchen. The 8 participants were recruited via Facebook posts which were circulated in relevant groups and shared by colleagues, friends, and family members. After contacting me via email, participants were sent study details and a consent form via *DocuSign*. Those who completed this process were then able to schedule sessions with me via *Calendly*. This website allowed me to make my availability transparent for participants, facilitated scheduling, and automatically generated Zoom links for each interview meeting.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom, which allowed me to recruit participants from Los Angeles to New York, from Utah to Georgia. Part of this range can be attributed to academic life. That is, typically if a wave of migration is due to employment the diaspora becomes concentrated in an area, like Chicago (Estrella), Vineland, NJ (Kristina), or New York (Carla). However, academics generally do not have a lot of choice in where they are hired, and this means that my academic participants often lived in areas with far fewer Puerto Rican people and resources. Despite this range in locations, they still described very overlapping experiences of the diaspora.

Zoom allowed me to easily record the interviews and generate a rough transcript of the interviews. The videos and transcripts were downloaded from the Zoom cloud and uploaded to MAXQDA (a qualitative data analysis software) for coding. The auto-generated transcripts were often very rough because of different accents and switching between English and Spanish so these were thoroughly reviewed and corrected as needed. I also added nonverbal audible cues to the transcript, such as laughing, sighing, or other sound effects.

The interviews lasted between 50-75 minutes and were conducted in a conversational semi-structured format. This open-ended format follows the co-creative process of meaning making described by Charmaz (2014). Though I had a selection of specific questions I was happy to modify the direction of our conversation to better incorporate themes or stories which I had not considered while writing the interview guide. This sometimes meant that not all questions were addressed during the interview session but nevertheless the women had amazing stories to share of childhood on the island or in various diasporic settings.

As I mentioned earlier, 6 of my 8 participants worked in academic settings, likely an artifact of my social networks and those who shared the invitation. Of the 8 participants, 6 were born in Puerto Rico. The majority of them moved to the U.S. as adults but 1 was raised in Panama and 1 moved to back and forth between Puerto Rico and New York throughout their childhood. The remaining 2 participants were born and raised in the U.S. As you might expect, this group of women had many overlaps and divergences within their diasporic experiences which became core to the emergent themes of the interviews.

Confidentiality of participants was assured with pseudonyms. However, each participant declined the use of pseudonyms during the consenting process. I offered this option to honor the stories or recipes that they might share with me as cultural stewards of Puerto Rican cuisine and culture. This is particularly important in the case of family recipes which are often not written down but must be inherited and passed down through oral traditions. As Abarca (2007) notes, these cultural stewards are experts and theorists in their own right. In line with this ethic, I present a brief biography of my 8 participants here:

- Carla Pérez (29)- Born and raised in Hatillo, P.R., Carla moved to the U.S. to pursue her education and work in the film industry and now lives in New York.
- María del mar Aponte (35)- Her mother was raised in Villalba, P.R. and her father grew up in Caguas, but they eventually moved to San Juan when María was young. She came to the U.S. for college and has lived here since she was 17

and is now based in San Antonio as she finishes her PhD in International Education.

- Estrella Colón (38)- Estrella's parents moved to the U.S. before she was born. Her father's side of the family is from Caguas. She runs a Puerto Rican catering business in Chicago and is hoping to open her own restaurant.
- Kristina Ruiz-Mesa (40)- Her grandparents came to the U.S. after the Progreso soup factory began recruiting Puerto Ricans to their branch in Vineland, NJ where she and her many cousins and siblings were raised. Kristina teaches Communication Studies at California State University, LA.
- Yarma Velásquez Vargas (43)- Yarma was born and raised in San Juan, but her father is from Ponce and her mother is from Moca. She moved to the mainland for her graduate education in Communication and now teaches in the Department of Chicano and Chicana Studies at California State University in Northridge.
- Melisa Valentin (44)- Melisa was raised in her mother's hometown of Guayanillas and her father was from Adjuntas but they moved back and forth between P.R. and New York city after she turned 7. She eventually stayed in the U.S. to pursue her education in education and continues to do research and consulting from her home in Salt Lake City.
- Ana Marrero Lopez (47)- Ana's father was in the U.S. military so most of her childhood she lived in Panama with summers often spent with her grandmother in Puerto Rico. She came to the U.S to pursue her education and is now assistant director at The Academic Multicultural Center at University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
- Yolanda Machado-Escudero (50)- Yolanda was born and raised in Ponce. Her mother was from Barceloneta and her father is from Santa Isabel. After getting

her master's in social work from University of Puerto Rico she moved to the U.S. to continue her education at University of Georgia. She now teaches in the department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work at University of North Florida.

### **Accountability**

Accountability, credibility, and transparency are also important factors in grounded theory studies. This leads to a variety of documenting practices and reflexive exercises through the course of any grounded theory or naturalistic inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bowen, 2008). For documenting practices researchers typically write jottings in the field, expand them with details after the fact for a full descriptive field notes record, record any thoughts or reflections of the event, also known as analytic memos (Charmaz, 2003; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Memo writing is especially useful for “linking analytic interpretation to empirical reality” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 261). Taken together it is a systematic, thorough cataloging of small details, both symbolic and material, which make up the lives of our participants and our co-constructed realities insofar as we can perceive them. For this project I journaled extensively using both a notebook and the logbook and memos feature on MAXQDA to record specific pivots in the studies, describe patterns I was seeing within the analysis, ask questions, and provide rationale for my theoretical sampling. MAXQDA is a software that facilitates the management, coding, and analysis of qualitative data. I also often reflected on my own cooking practice, informal conversations with other Puerto Ricans about food and culture, and my memories of growing up around Puerto Rican food.

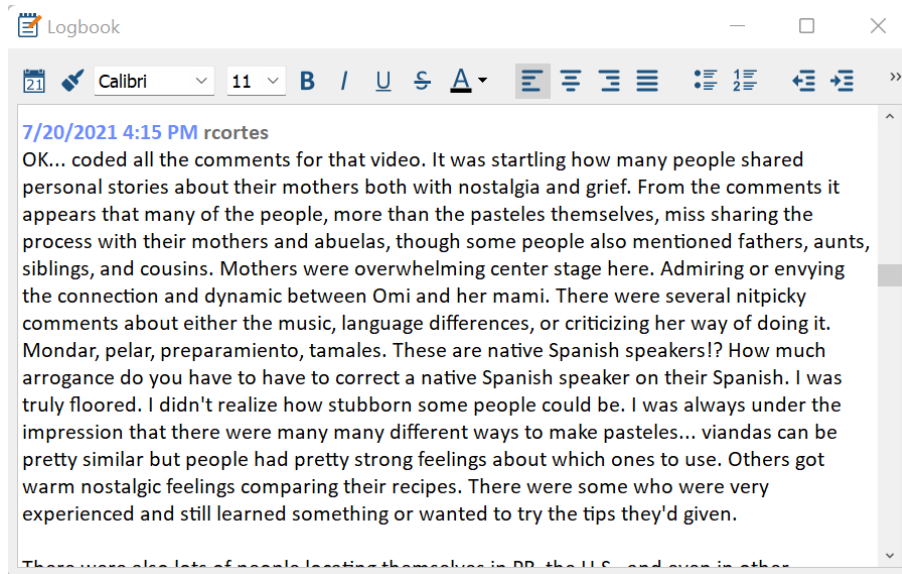


Figure 4: Screenshot of MAXQDA logbook entry

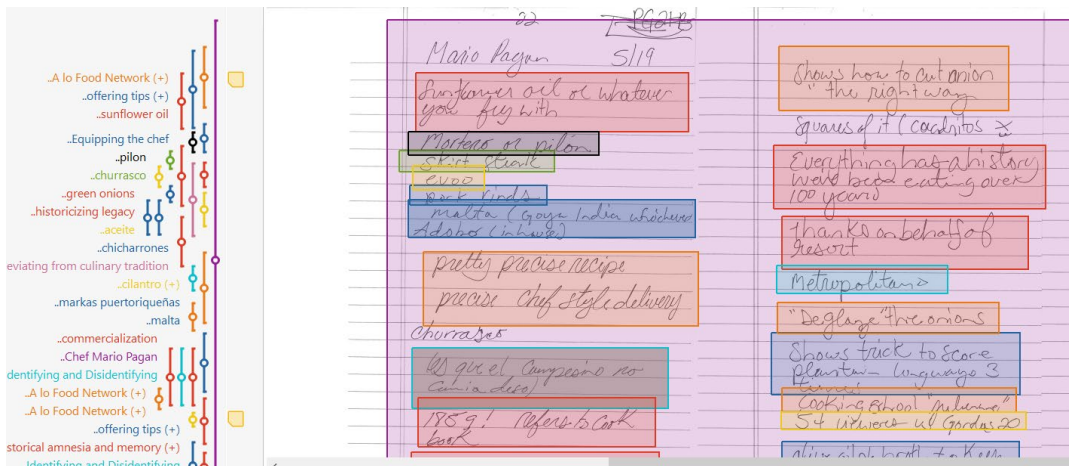


Figure 5: Coded observation notes from watching Mario Pagán's livestream

Triangulation of sources and member checks are also recommended for verifying and clarifying codes, categories, concepts, and theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As I will explain further in the following section, I began with cookbooks and then turned to social media cooking videos and interviews with women to develop this project. This triangulation of sources allowed me to engage in constant comparison between sources and to ask the participants questions related to the emerging themes I had identified in the cookbooks and recipe videos.

## Summary

For this study I relied on an emergent critical qualitative research design. The combination of a constructivist grounded theory and critical thematic analysis results in a rich analysis of qualitative data viewed through the lens of the research activist. Key considerations for the development of this methodology were a constructivist approach to grounded theory which rejects many of the objectivist and behavioral assumptions of its inception. This especially meant responding to data as it emerged through documenting pivots in my process and theoretical sampling. The openness and pluralistic nature of constructivist grounded theory also assisted in avoiding a priori assumptions, while using sensitizing concepts to guide my line of inquiry. Crucially, the use of CTA has ensured systematic application of critical theory throughout the analytic process, resulting in rich connections between raw data and the unveiling of how oppressive structures manifest within the mundane.

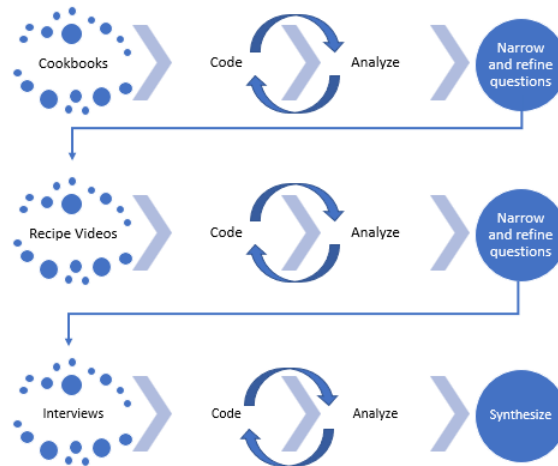


Figure 6: Model of research design

## El Cocinero Puerto Riqueño y Los Recetarios of Colonial Modernity

In the following chapters, I examine the prevalent themes of el recetario puertorriqueño. The cookbooks, recipe videos, and women I interviewed are all major actors in how information about the recetario is communicated and each book, content creator, and woman have their own understanding of the significance of these recipes. Inadvertently, many envision el recetario through a colonial lens even while celebrating this cuisine. Others, sometimes subconsciously, work toward defying and subverting the colonial residues of el recetario. Using Lawless & Chen's (2019) conceptualization of Critical Thematic Analysis, I link the open codes of everyday people, places, things, activities, experiences, and utterances into increasingly complex and processual codes and eventually into codes that represent structures of/resistance to power throughout the following chapters.

While food may appear to be an innocuous necessity it is deeply impacted by structures of power. That is, the foods we consume, how we acquire supplies, how we prepare and store it, are processes entangled in politics, ideologies, and hierarchies. As Quijano (2007) and Mignolo (2007) argue, the colonial matrix of power creates an epistemological hierarchy which privileges modernist colonial thinking in the interrelated realms of agriculture, distribution of land, gender roles, family structure, and subjectivity. The knowledges produced within this matrix are based on racism and capitalism. And each of these interconnected domains have direct implications for Puerto Rican food ways. As I will show in this chapter, el recetario nacional is a complex and paradoxical emblem of these colonial epistemologies.

For many wishing to connect with their culinary heritage, cookbooks appear a good starting point. They are often financially accessible, easy to reference, and can introduce you to new dishes you have not heard of. In fact, several women in this study referenced cookbooks they had inherited or relied on in their learning process; *Cocina Criolla* was an oft cited favorite. One participant, Ana, even described it as “The Bible” of Puerto Rican cooking (Ana Interview, Pos. 227). Since cookbooks are also one of the inspirations for this project it is only fitting that I begin here, with this preliminary analysis of 5 different cookbooks. These included:

- *El Cocinero Puerto-Riqueño ó Formulario* by Don Eugenio Coloma y Garcés, first published in 1859
- *Cocina Criolla* by Carmen Aboy Valdejuli, first published in 1954
- *Puerto Rican Cookery* by Carmen Aboy Valdejuli, 1977 (The English edition of *Cocina Criolla*)
- *Recipes from la Isla!* By Robert Rosado and Judith Healy Rosado, 1995
- *A Taste of Puerto Rico* by Yvonne Ortíz, 1997

You may note that only two of these titles are in Spanish, one is a translation of an originally Spanish-language cookbook, and the remaining two are in English. This indicates a lot about the intended audience for the books. As I discussed in the introduction, *El Cocinero* (Coloma y Garcés, 1859) was published during the Spanish colonial era. It is also important to note that in 1859, slavery had not yet been abolished. It is mostly likely this book was intended for Spanish colonials in the Caribbean and mainland, since the cooks who invented the recipes had no need for such a book. Valdejuli's (1977) *Puerto Rican Cookery* appears intended for U.S. American audiences who are not Puerto Rican or Latine. We see this in some of the promotional interviews she did as well as the front matter of the book inviting outsiders to explore Puerto Rico through our island's cuisine. Tourism began replacing manufacturing as a major export beginning in the late 1960s (Ruíz, 1985). Thus, the publication of an English language cookbook not directed to the diaspora fits this timeline. However, this English version is often vital to the diaspora as a resource when Spanish has faded from their linguistic memory between generations as one of my participants, Yarma, noted (Yarma Interview, Pos. 247). These first three books are also some of the most famous, with *El Cocinero* considered Puerto Rico's first cookbook and *Cocina Criolla* a household staple. The later two have not enjoyed the same levels of fame. None of my participants or the sampled content creators mentioned these books. However, they are also intended for different audiences. Ortiz writes in her dedication that *A Taste of Puerto Rico* is for "All the Puerto Ricans on the U.S.A. mainland who need to learn about our culinary traditions

from a distance". So, her motivation for producing this book was as a service to the diaspora, likely second and third generation migrants. Only two of my interview participants fit this category, however they also made no mention of this book, having learned our culinary traditions directly from their family. On the other hand, Rosado and Rosado indicate that they were seeking to preserve Robert's family's recipes as well as represent the culture to non-Puerto Ricans.

Though each book had slightly different approaches to describing the history of Puerto Rican cuisine and cooking processes they each exemplified values of colonial modernity. This is despite many attempts at genuine cultural exchange, producing a paradoxical tension. While colonial modernity often makes its way into knowledge production in subtle and taken for granted ways, the following themes were recurrent, repetitive, and forceful throughout my analysis of the five cookbooks. There was an overarching belief that 1) anyone can *and* may cook Puerto Rican cuisine so long as they follow the recipe. As is common in most cookbooks this also means that 2) cooking is described as a precise and linear process. And although many of the books offered some cultural and historical account of the dishes 3) an accurate understanding of culture and history is not necessary for cooking Puerto Rican food. In other words, el recetario was reduced to a dehistoricized and individualist commodity which could be created by anyone.

These themes which emerged through the open and conceptual coding of the cookbooks directly relate to onto-epistemologies of colonial modernity. Colonial modernity can be understood as the linkage between Western intellectual enterprise and colonial power. As Quijano (2007) and Mignolo (2007) note, these two enterprises are inextricable from one another as the creation of so many disciplines are directly implicated in the subjugation, domination, enslavement, and genocide of Indigenous people across the globe since 1492. While the "age of reason" is often credited with the scientific method it was within this same production of knowledge that Europeans justified their colonial exploits (Quijano, 2007). As I open coded these recipe books, these modern epistemologies emerged as salient forms of communicating about our food. In the case of these recipe books, we can see that modernity manifests in a particular epistemology of scriptocentric elitism, Cartesian dualism and rationality, and compartmental linearity. While

coloniality manifests through the erasure/romanticization of colonial history and cultural homogenization. In the following section I explain how each of these characteristics inform the epistemology of recipe books.

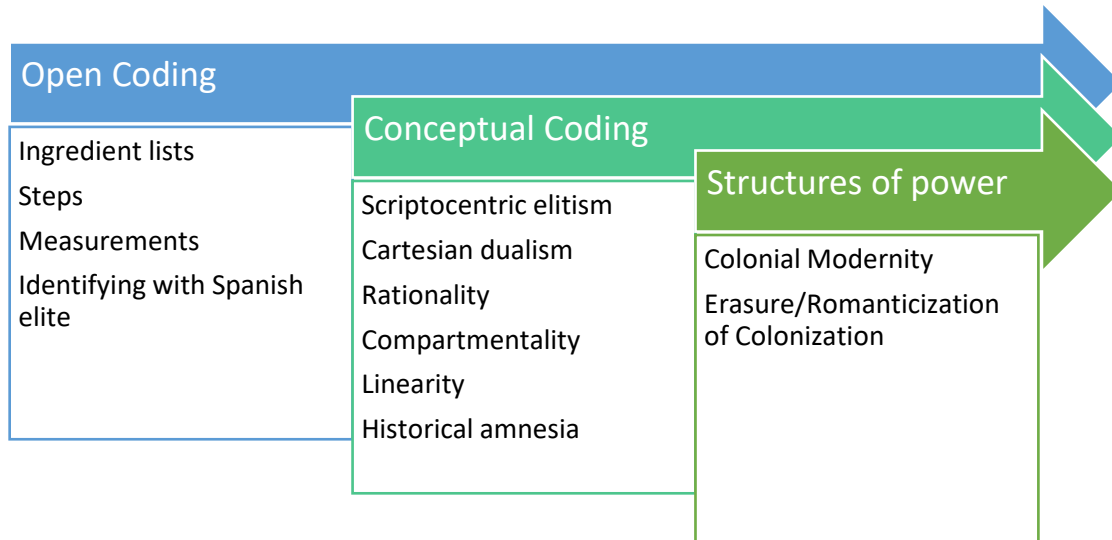


Figure 7: Coding taxonomy for cookbooks

### Scriptocentric Elitism

I use scriptocentric elitism<sup>36</sup> to describe how colonial modernity privileges textual knowledge over oral tradition while emphasizing that publishing is a format reserved for the elite. This category reflects the manner in which textual knowledge of cookbooks is privileged over other forms of knowledge and how the publishing of textual knowledge cannot be separated from discussions of access afforded through social or financial capital. Thus, this category represents how social hierarchies are perpetuated and reinforced through the privileging of textual knowledge.

One may assume that recipes must be linear and precise to be useful in reproducing a dish's flavor, texture, appearance, and other features. However, this in and of itself positions the written word as a superior form of knowledge to oral traditions of learning. As we will see in later

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<sup>36</sup> Codebook entry for Scriptocentric Elitism found in Appendix C 181

chapters, oral tradition has been a corner stone to the preservation and passing down of culinary knowledge for many puertorriqueñas, while written record of recipes is often fiercely resisted. My interview participants María, Kristina, and Melisa each noted their family's refusal to transmit this knowledge textually. The dismissal of oral tradition as knowledge is a long-practiced strategy of colonization. The lack of written record, in a language that European invaders could identify, was held as a justification for the dehumanization and enslavement of Indigenous and Black people since the outset of colonization. To invaders, written language was the ultimate proof of civilization and reason. While Indigenous people around the globe relied on cultural practices of oral tradition which were not merely about passing down knowledge, but also about connection between generations and within the community (Kovach, 2009). A heavy reliance on scriptocentricity can convert the sociocultural practice of handing down recipes into a disconnected solo endeavor.

Furthermore, we must consider how literacy is not necessarily afforded to all and this has been deliberately used as a means of further exacerbating the social hierarchy. Dwight Conquergood notes in his critique of scriptocentricity that "Slaves [sic] were forbidden by law to acquire literacy, a historical fact that underscores the exclusionary politics of textuality where even today in many parts of the world a writing elite is separated from peasants and proletarians who have restricted access to literacy." (pg. 27). Although Appadurai (1988) states that a national cookbook indicates a high level of literacy, the privileging of textual knowledge is also used to keep knowledge from some and denigrate the knowledge of others.

In today's context we must also consider how this scriptocentricity separates those with access from those without. The publication of a cookbook for public audiences requires the author to have particular resources. If they are famous, their name alone may be credibility enough to secure a book deal. Alternatively, if they have the financial means they could publish it privately. But the only other way to publish would be to understand the publishing business and put together a compelling book proposal. This is not a skill or knowledge most home cooks have. So, it follows that a vast majority of cookbooks are published by people with money, fame, or

relevant education. Books may be accessible on the consumer end but getting a book published requires social and financial capital that working class amas de casa likely do not have.

It is no surprise then, that because publishing has long been a luxury of the elite, each book offers glimpses into el recetario from some elitist perspective which culminated in the creation of the category scriptocentric elitism. Barradas (2010) notes that the very first Puerto Rican cookbook, *Cocina Criolla*, was written by the Spaniard Eugenio Coloma y Garcés, who supported the Spanish crown and lived in Cuba most of his life. He authored several manuscripts on food, home economics, and agriculture. Valdejuli, is also part of the criollo elite; Her interview with *New York Times* paints a picture of old money and fame. "She is a daughter of one of the island's most distinguished families, a niece of Monsita Ferrer, the pianist, and cousin of the actor José Ferrer." (Claiborne, 1968). They describe her husband as a mechanical engineer who graduated from Yale She is portrayed as the quintessential criollo elite in every sense in ways that potentially distance her from the imagery of Puerto Rico as a poor and dirty country. However, her success and fame in the culinary world was only possible through the uncredited mentorship of her servant Francisca Falu. Falu is never mentioned in either book but is referred to in passing as a long-time servant for the Valdejuli's in a New York Times interview (Claiborne, 1968). However, in a 1997 interview with Solís Escudero of *El Vocero*, she revealed that Francisca Falu had taught her to cook and the basics of the kitchen in her twenties (2021).

Robert Rosado also identifies with the criollo elite, describing his grandmother as a Spanish aristocrat, their parties fit for royalty. For Ortiz, elitism is not about some aristocratic bloodline but is engendered through haute cuisine, her advanced training as a French chef. The influence of this elite training shines through in her description of our evolving cuisine.

Typical desserts such as flan (egg custard), tembleque (coconut custard), and guava with white cheese have been replaced by lighter and more sophisticated preparations. Mango jelly roll, passion fruit cheesecake, and fresh fruit salad with kiwi are part of the present repertoire. (Ortiz, 1995, pg. 4).

She does not discuss whose repertoire was expanded with these *more sophisticated* dishes, but this does reveal that she feels excited and welcoming about these new techniques and ingredients which are clear improvements to the cuisine. While mindful and careful fusion creations have the potential to create exciting new dishes, Janer (2007) warns that what often occurs in restaurant fusion is the positioning of European techniques, especially French, as superior to endemic culinary practices. The perceived onto-epistemological contributions of Caribbean vs. European are often inequitable. Within *culinary colonialism* and *gastronomic multiculturalism*, the Global South is often viewed only as a source for exotic ingredients (Grey & Newman, 2018). The search for exotic ingredients and spices has been a primary driving force of colonization for hundreds of years but under the discourse of fusion in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is rarely contested as the exploitive practice that it truly is. Instead, this is seen as inevitable within the context of globalization. Although Ortíz is Puerto Rican, most culinary training rooted in the European tradition will reproduce this same ideology (Janer, 2007). As a result, Ortíz's effort elevate Puerto Rican cuisine within this tradition privileges European culinary practices and sanctions the appropriation of ingredients without serious consideration of relevant culinary knowledge of the culture of origin.

### **Cartesian Dualism and Rationality**

The manner in which recipes are presented in these books are also emblematic of Cartesian dualism and rationality<sup>37</sup>, two characteristics of colonial modernity. Within these 5 cookbooks each recipe had a standard format of precise measurements, lists, and processes which are often taken for granted in this genre. However, I argue that this accepted format reflects how we have been separated from the sensory and are pushed to reproduce dishes based on rigid standards.

This division between the mind and body is central to the modernist epistemologies that follow in this section. René Descartes' search for objectivity to develop the scientific method

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<sup>37</sup> Codebook entry for Cartesian Dualism and Rationality found in Appendix C page 182

resulted in a fierce denial of any knowledge the body might offer. He felt the body was riddled with emotions and desires and could not be trusted. Rational thought needed to be solely the domain of the mind. “Indeed, the body and the flesh are linked with the irrational, unruly, and dangerous—certainly an inferior realm of experience to be controlled by the higher powers of reason and logic.” (Conquergood, 2006, pg. 355). I contend that the way in which recipes are described in these 5 cookbooks, and likely many others, deny the value of experience and intuition, instead relying consistently on replicable units of measurement for the production of food. Time and volume are made into simple units of measurement which can be used for cooking and in the context of recipe books you simply cannot get away from the lists of precisely measured ingredients you are likely already familiar with. For example, look at this recipe from Yvonne Ortíz (1997):

*Escabeche Sauce*

1 cup olive oil

3 medium yellow onions, sliced

½ cup white vinegar

½ tablespoon salt

1 tablespoon black peppercorns

4 bay leaves

5 garlic cloves, peeled and chopped

1 cup alcaparrado, drained and rinsed

(pg.17)

Here, exact measurements are presented as a simple, precise, and necessary part of cooking. However, the insistence that using these measurements will produce the desired flavor or even a consistent one neglects to acknowledge that not all garlic cloves are the same size or as potent. Bay leaves can have varying levels of quality, moisture, aroma, and flavor. Sometimes an onion may be more mellow or have more bite. As a seasoned home cook, I can tell you these variances can have an enormous impact on the final dish, require the cook to constantly taste the

dish and adjust. However, colonial modernity enforces rationality and tells us to separate ourselves from our sensory and embodied knowledge. Do not trust your senses. Measure and follow the recipe<sup>38</sup>. Abarca (2007) noted that many of the women she spoke with, if they learned a recipe through a book, through rigid measurements, they would never remember it. In other words, cooking becomes a disembodied practice where only that which can be seen and measured is valid. This is a standard practice in any recipe book so it is not usually questioned but we should consider how this impacts how people engage with cooking.

Ironically, the only book that did *not* use precise measurements was *El Cocinero Puerto Riqueño* (Coloma y Garcés, 1859). But rather than an indication of a more intuitive style of cooking, we have little evidence that Coloma y Garcés, a wealthy Spaniard visiting the colonies of the Caribbean, ever cooked any of these dishes. José Carvajal (2004) writes in his editor's note "Es importante destacar la marcada influencia del elemento africano que se observa en el libro. Hay que recordar que, en 1859, cuando se publicó éste, todavía estaba vigente la esclavitud en nuestra sociedad y los esclavos tenían en gran medida a su cargo el trabajo en la cocina. [It's important to emphasize the marked influence of the African element that is observed in this book. We must remember that in 1859, when this book was published, slavery was still in force in our society and the enslaved had in large portion as their duty the work in the kitchen.]" In addition to acknowledging the African influence of the cuisine recorded in this book, Carvajal also notes here that at the time of its first publication Africans were still enslaved under descendants of Spanish invaders. It was these enslaved African who did much of the cooking. So, if Coloma y Garcés neglected to include precise measurements it is likely he truly had no idea how the enslaved African cooks were doing it and quite possibly his limited understanding led to a very simplistic description of the cooking process.

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<sup>38</sup> I am comically reminded of a scene from the children's film *Ratatouille* (Bird, 2007). Where Colette takes Linguini under her wing and insists that it was the Master Chef's job to be creative and their job to "follow the recipe".

Janer (2007) contends that these enslaved peoples would have been attempting to recreate dishes from their respective homelands with new and unfamiliar ingredients. Thus, we often see similar techniques such as the use of sofrito common throughout the Latin Caribbean which is in turn used to create a variety of rice dishes very similar to the jollof rice dishes of West Africa. However, this history and lineage of cooking techniques is left undiscussed in these five books and I have rarely heard this culinary connection discussed. Instead, Africa is reduced to a source of ingredients. This strategically erases the importance of African and Indigenous culinary knowledge in a move that centers European cooking techniques. Rationality manifests as precise measurements of European culinary approaches which are then easily converted into text. However, this also means that more intuitive, impromptu, resourceful African and Indigenous approaches to food are not acknowledged or recorded in these texts. The criteria for scriptocentricity rejects these traditions which are not rational by standards of modernity.

The prescriptive nature of recorded recipes also enforces rationality by emphasizing a consistent production of food through dampening creative expression. This form is the correct, most accurate, and best version of this dish. Emotions or intuition are irrelevant from food production. Feeling has no place in the kitchen. Only logic. To rely on rationality in recipe making, means to clone a dish whose production must follow the letter exactly each time. For this reason, Valldejuli (1954) writes in her introduction to *Cocina Criolla*, “Lo inspira la certeza de que el arte culinario puede adquirirse fácilmente, si se ajusta a recetas redactadas con amplios detalles y exactitud, que darán el conocimiento equivalente a largos años de experiencia. [It is inspired by the certainty that the culinary art can be acquired easily if one adjusts to written recipes with ample detail and exactness, which will give the understanding equivalent to long years of experience]” In other words, her book was specifically written in the hopes that offering sufficient *written* (back to that scriptocentricity) detailed precision for her readers to follow can replace years of experience. Within this framing, “arte culinario” is a misnomer, because without experience, while reducing the production of food to precision we are creating more science than art. This communicates the production of food as a formulaic process. Nowhere does Valldejuli

discuss the role of creativity, intuition, or sensory knowledge. Rather, this emphasis on measurements and rigid procedures reveals a desire to replicate a dish exactly, repeatedly. This value is more in line with science, not art. I interpret this as a dismissal of the sensory and embodied knowledge built over decades of cooking which one would usually develop by learning from one's elders. Social media content creators like Omi Hopper and Viña Hernandez rarely used measurements. One of Omi's catch phrases is "La cantidad que te diga tu corazón!" (Hopper, 2020g), indicating the importance of intuition and personal preferences. In this video and many other we see her mother often guiding the honing of this sensory knowledge (Hopper, 2020). Similarly, my interview participants often noted that you should season using your senses rather than measurements. Kristina described how her aunt taught her to rely on her senses instead of stringent measurements and textual prescriptions:

I've asked her to write down recipes and she's like, "No girl." And she just won't do it here we're going to do it like by ... seeing and by doing... like "can you tell me if it's a tablespoon or a teaspoon?" She's like, "Girl stop." And so...she very much challenges me to like not be as kind of rigid as I am... I find that this, it comes really organically for her.

(Kristina Interview, Pos. 202-206)

But Valldejuli rejects this freeform and sensory way of cooking. Who needs elders when you have a book with precise measurements and exact instructions?

In the case of Valldejuli, this approach possibly aligns with her motivations for cooking. Because although Carmen Aboy de Valldejuli was *ama de casa*<sup>39</sup> she was not a home cook in the sense of being the main person to prepare everyday meals. Although her Spanish cookbook does not offer much biographical information this pivots drastically in the English counterpart to *Cocina Criolla*. In *Puerto Rican Cookery*, cooking is a means of securing social status. She writes in her introduction:

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<sup>39</sup> Lady of the house

When I was a girl in Puerto Rico, most of the young women I knew were taught in the Spanish tradition that proper young ladies never performed menial household chores. Cooking was one of those chores. Servants were plentiful in those days and my father, who loved fine food, made certain that his kitchen was staffed with the finest cooks in the island. It was lovely food, always, a rare combination of European and domestic cuisine. But only rarely was I permitted to enter the vast room where those *comidas* were actually prepared, and how I regretted that! (Valdejuli, 1977, Introduction).

She further explains how she learned to cook later in life when she married her engineer husband from Yale. The back cover illustrates her family pedigree, and a New York Times interview goes on to describe her lovely mansion and luxurious life, "There is a large kitchen, too, where the family cooking is done by Francisca Falu, who has been with the Valdejuli's for 30 years. Another kitchen is being built to accommodate Mrs. Valdejuli's weekly cooking classes." (Claiborne, 1968). It is clear the editors who wrote the promotional material for Valdejuli wanted to frame her quite explicitly as part of the criollo elite of Puerto Rico and to describe this form of cooking as a luxurious hobby, rather than a menial chore. Furthermore, Falu is described in ways that focus on her servant status, diminishing the cooking expertise which allowed Valdejuli into the limelight. For Valdejuli, cooking is not about homemaking but about entertainment and communicating her social class. This comes through quite clearly in *Cocina Criolla* where she spends 12 pages explaining in detail the rules of etiquette. This section describes in detail all the requirements for a formal meal including table settings, appropriate tablecloth material, wine and food pairings, and general behavior to adhere to for a proper formal dinner.

IX—DIAGRAMA DEL MAXIMUM DE UTENSILIOS QUE DEBEN APARECER COLOCADOS EN LA MESA AL PRINCIPIO DE UNA COMIDA FORMAL

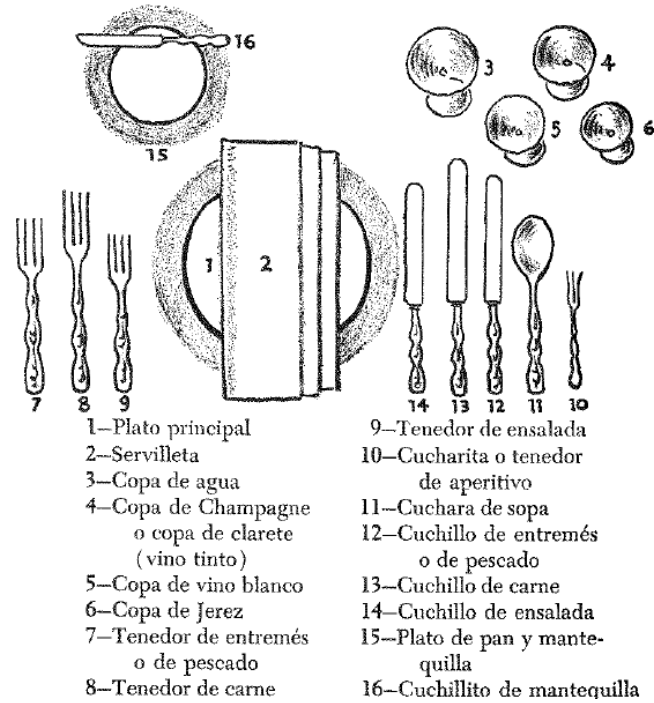


Figure 8: Table setting diagram from *Cocina Criolla* (pg. 30)

I see the rigidity and preciseness of her cooking, then, as directly related to the reason she cooks. This is the perceived rationality required of the criollo elite for whom cooking was a luxurious hobby rather than a “menial chore” borne out of necessity. A perfectionism afforded by having the time, money, and resources to supply all these things which the non-wealthy did not have or necessarily need to cook for their families. Rationality in cooking is also a form of elitism.

### Compartmental Linearity

Necessary for this static reproduction of dishes without intuition is the compartmentalized linearity of process. Within the structure of the recipe books, I consistently found lists of ingredients and seamless, systematic, step by step processes through which a dish could be reproduced repeatedly. Compartmental linearity represents the illusion of uninterrupted singular processes presented in the cookbooks<sup>40</sup>. While this linearity facilitates the ability to write down

<sup>40</sup> Codebook entry for Compartmental Linearity is found in Appendix C page 182

recipes it also compartmentalizes the process of cooking from other social processes. It assumes that cooking is a solitary process. It assumes that the kitchen is a cooking lab separated from other parts of social and domestic life instead of an environment where children cry and play, where neighbors come in for the weekly bochinche<sup>41</sup>, and where mothers offer advice as was shown in the recipe videos I analyzed and described by my participants. If you are cooking as a necessary care taking task, the other tasks (such as cleaning, childcare, making grocery lists, etc.) often creep into the cooking process. But the format of recipe books does not reflect the messiness of reality or the multiple roles that home cooks often have. Instead, cooking is presented as an isolated task.

Not only do the authors create an illusion of what the kitchen is really like in everyday life but this also forecloses on understanding why these other social and domestic processes *are* essential to cooking Puerto Rican food. They are an integral part of what creates the *sabor*<sup>42</sup> of our dishes and how our foods transcend from a purely material and functional realm to a social and cultural one. One of my participants Carla described the environment of the kitchen:

It's like a lot of talking. very loud. There's music playing. My uncle loves his bomba and plena so there's usually that playing in the background. It's like it's just very, I feel like it's good chaotic, because it can be quite chaotic in this. There's little kids...one of my cousin's about to have a baby, so there'll be little children running around. But the last time I went there one of the kids locked himself in the basement...We're like cooking and then the basement doors by the kitchen. So, it was like cooking here, cooking here, and then the guys are like drinking, and then unscrewing the whole door to get the kid out so there's just like a lot of stuff going on. (Carla Interview, Pos. 478-488).

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<sup>41</sup> Gossip

<sup>42</sup> Flavor

While she offers one of the most dramatic examples of what kinds of social processes might disrupt the possibility of a linear and compartmentalized cooking process, these interruptions are common rather than exceptional. They color our understanding of our food with memories.

### **Erasure/Romanticization of Colonial History and Cultural Commodification**

In addition to cooking instruction most cookbooks offer some element of historical account or cultural description. However, I noted that these historical accounts often distanced themselves from colonial violence in order to present a much more idealized version of our history, engendering the category *erasure/romanticization of colonial history*<sup>43</sup>. In true Puerto Rican fashion colonization is not erased outright but oftentimes it is framed in terms of a peaceful mixture of ethnic cultures rather than the violent process of genocide and enslavement that it was. Apart from *Cocina Criolla*, each of these books have some recognition of colonization. This includes Valdejuli's English edition which reads:

It is safe to say that our cocina criolla was initiated by the first human inhabitants of the islands, the native Indians. Not the cruel, marauding Caribs, who in their sail-rigged war canoes invaded island after island, plundering or carrying off such gentler peoples as the Arawaks or the Tainos of our own Puerto Rico...For almost five hundred years the basic ingredients the native Indians used have been enriched by the culinary skills of newcomers who have chosen these blue-green islands as their homes-descendants of the original Spanish, British, French, Danish, and Dutch settlers, or of Negro slaves brought from Africa to toil in the sugar fields. (Introduction).

There is a stark difference between how she describes the Caribs and the colonial invaders of Puerto Rico, completely ignoring how the Europeans *also* "invaded island after island, plundering or carrying off such gentler peoples". Here the violence of Indigenous people is seen as unjust savagery while invaders are described in terms of "newcomers". While slavery is cursorily acknowledged, it comes without a hint of criticism which was bestowed on the Caribs

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<sup>43</sup> Codebook entry for Erasure/Romanticization is found in Appendix C page 183

nor does it implicate these so-called “newcomers” in colonial violence. Without a doubt, this is reflective of the narrative style of the criollo elite who benefit from the tokenization of Indigeneity without coming to account for hundreds of years of violence. She reproduces the same discourses Christopher Columbus used to justify the colonization of the Caribbean.

We see ample evidence of this tokenization throughout *Puerto Rican Cookery* in the use of imagery. The cover itself depicts a Taíno petroglyph of Atabey, a supreme deity who ruled over human fertility and fresh water (Rouse, 1992). According to Rouse, she was also the mother of Yúcahu, God of cassava. Her image can be seen all over the island, sometimes produced by Taínos hundreds of years ago, but often depicted by modern day Puerto Ricans who may or may not understand the significance of Atabey. In the book she remains unnamed. The only explanation is given by the founder of the *Puerto Rican Institute of Culture* himself, Dr. Ricardo E. Alegría. One might expect some in-depth insight into who this figure represents and why she was selected to grace the cover of this cookbook. Instead, we get a very generic explanation of petroglyphs as decorations or markers of ceremonial grounds and that “The Indians attached great magical value to these symbols.” (Front matter). Each section of the book is demarcated with another petroglyph. Never explained, never given importance, merely a decorative and quirky image.

The other image which one will immediately notice in the front matter is a painting by Puerto Rican painter, Miguel Pou. It depicts two jíbaros in traditional straw hats, roasting a pig over glowing coals. As I explained in the introduction at greater length, the Puerto Rican jíbaro is representative of poor rural farmers, the common man. It is an image that is used in a lot of Puerto Rican art to romanticize “simpler times”. But el jíbaro also represents resistance to the criollo elite *and* U.S. imperialism (Trujillo-Pagan, 2013; Castanha, 2011).

Valldejuli’s use of jíbaro and Indigenous imagery in her book is undeniably incongruous to her social status and her approach to cuisine. In this sense, she mimics many of the criollo elite that Scarano (1996) describes, who masquerade as jíbaros to disguise the ways in which they reproduce colonial ideals, to appear as commoners. Here, this imagery is used to exotify the

cuisine and culture, rather than offering cultural depth or richness. This exotification is fairly explicit in the book jacket excerpts “As bewitching as an off-shore breeze, the recipes in this book plumb the mysteries of native dishes in accurate and easy-to-follow details that assures the success of every recipe.” And further on, Valldejuli herself invites people to come Puerto Rico to try the recipes in their natural setting. The language of exotification in this context also lines up with the explosion of the tourism industry around this time. Between 1970 and 1980, the tourism industry tripled in revenue in Puerto Rico (Ruíz, 1985). Prior to this, tourism was largely motivated by Western intellectual enterprise and its relationship to establishing U.S. power (Trujillo-Pagan, 2013; Steinmetz, 2017). In the 50s and 60s students of anthropology and sociology training in their fields flooded to Puerto Rico due to this same perceived exoticness paired with the ease of access granted by U.S. colonization (Duany, 2010).

However, Valldejuli is not the only author who erases/romanticizes histories of colonial violence. Yvonne Ortíz (1997) does acknowledge colonization and slavery, but in some ways her descriptions make these events feel almost inevitable. While talking about Indigenous foodways she notes “Yuca was a staple food of the Taínos. The main food prepared with yuca was casabe, a flat bread that was eaten daily. Yuca was an important staple because wheat did not grow well in the soil of the island and had to be imported from Spain. There were periods as long as eight years when a supply ship would not come!” (pg. 2). Here we clearly see whose perspective she is aligned with and sympathetic to. Yuca was an Indigenous staple and the Taínos had no need for wheat, so why would they care if there was no shipment? Why was this shipment so essential to survival? It is only through the perspective of the colonial invader that such a shipment would be so anxiously anticipated. But for the Taíno, it was this colonial interference in Indigenous foodways that led to disruptions in the food supply. She goes on to explain “The African slave trade brought important foods and techniques to the island's cuisine. The most significant of the former were green pigeon peas, plantain, yams, and okra. The African population also developed many coconut dishes, which are still quite popular.” (pg. 3). Without giving much consideration to the system of slavery she focuses only on the culinary benefit that was engendered through this

horrific system. In the same manner she explains how breadfruit was introduced from Tahiti to serve as slave rations. Again, this is done without any further discussion.

While Ortiz does not *erase* the legacy of slavery and invasion, her descriptions of these processes leave the impression that this was all an inevitable and logical unfolding that was necessary for the development of this cuisine. While this is a different context than the colonization of Turtle Island, this narrative frames the creation of Puerto Rican cuisine in similar terms to manifest destiny where the expansion of the (North) American frontier is justified, necessary, and inevitable (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). Within this framework of manifest destiny, the ends justify the means regardless of the severity or impact of the violence undertaken. This can be seen in the impassive way she describes the strategic violence of colonization.

Of the five cookbooks, Rosado & Rosado's (1995) *Recipes from la Isla!* offers, perhaps, the most extensive and unflinching historical account of the intimate relationship between Puerto Rican food and colonization. They note that it was directly because of the colonial invasion and forced labor that the Taíno's subsistence agricultural system, called *conucos*, was disrupted, leaving many Indigenous people dying of malnutrition. They explain, "Ponce de León employed Indian labor in the search for gold, but the Indigenous population continued to die out from murder, suicide, overwork, disease, and assimilation... within a hundred years the Taínos were almost extinct." (pg. 5). While they tell a more forthcoming historical account of this colonial context, we see at the end that there is still a narrative of Indigenous (near) extinction. Rosado and Rosado offer no hope for Taíno survivance and privilege colonial Spanish influence in other ways.

As I mentioned in my introduction, the survivance of Taínos in Puerto Rico is hotly debated within academic and non-academic circles. Cook-Lynn (2007) explains that regardless of what methodology or science is used to prove Indigenous creation or origin stories a colonizer mentality will continue to find ways to discount it. The same can be said of Indigenous survivance. The work of Haslip-Viera (2001; 2006; 2009; 2012) is a direct representation of this. Whether it is through oral histories (Castanha, 2010; Forte 2005) or mDNA testing (Martínez-Cruzado et al.,

2001; Estevez, 2008), he continually denies any possibility that Taínos survived past the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, there are those who will claim Indigeneity as a form of social currency. Tuck & Yang's (2012) note that the co-opting of Indigenous identity is a strategy settlers use in their race to settler innocence. They posit one way which settlers and their descendants elide accountability for colonial violence is through claiming Indigenous heritage. In the case of Puerto Rico, claiming some distant Indigenous heritage became a mainstream part of a nationalist discourse (Castanha, 2010). It was a way for the criollo elite to rebelliously distinguish themselves from a Spain which had, in some ways, abandoned them. However, these dubious claims of Indigeneity do not necessarily indicate that there are no Taínos left. It also does not mean we should dismiss the impact of the Taíno revivalist movement, mDNA testing, and the oral histories of Indigenous people. For far too long, the people of Puerto Rico have believed stories of Taíno extinction from the mouths of colonial invaders who have had every reason to erase them from existence. By silencing a narrative of survival, settler's claims to Indigenous land and resources go further uncontested (Dunbar-Ortíz, 2015).

To better understand how and why Rosado & Rosado (1997) describe Indigenous extinction in Puerto Rico it helps to read further into some of the biographical narrative. Robert Rosado describes his upbringing and lineage in detail:

My love for cooking and appreciation for great food was influenced greatly by my paternal grandmother, whose own grandfather migrated from northern Spain and settled in San Germán, Puerto Rico, during the middle of the eighteenth century... The Spanish colonists, especially the Catalonians, were for the most part ethnocentric. The pride of who they were, where they come from, and their mission in the new colony firmly established the foundation for most of our institutions. Their legacy is present in every aspect of the Puerto Rican way of life-politics, art, architecture, literature, technology, agriculture, commerce and gastronomy. To be invited to my grandmother's house for dinner was equivalent to being invited to a royal extravaganza whose preparation would sometimes start four days earlier. Everyone invited participated in the preparation. It was

during these times that my grandma's Spanish aristocratic make-up would shine through. Masterfully issuing orders and delegating the tasting and inspecting, she did so with so much grace and elegance that everyone would intuitively address her as Doña Fela, *doña* being a term of respect. (Rosado & Rosado, 1995, pg. 12).

After such a forthcoming description of Indigenous genocide, this reticent acceptance of Eurocentricity is startling indeed. Again, we see a strong affinity with the criollo elite and an exaltation of upper-class lifestyles. Further, he is not distancing himself or disidentifying from the legacy but fully claiming it and indulging in nostalgia as he describes it.

Here, Rosado and Rosado perpetuate the notion which Flores (1993) observes within canonical Puerto Rican literature, that all *legitimate* forms of knowledge are derived from Spain. This relegates African and Indigenous people to passive contributors to our culture and cuisine is another form of colonial erasure. Laenui (2000) reminds us that one of the first psychological factors of colonization is denial of humanity, governance, sovereignty, knowledge, and culture of Indigenous people. Here, hundreds of years later we see a continued lack of recognition of how Africans and Tainos contributed to Puerto Rican culture, mere pages after we are given a glimpse into the violence of the colonizer. What is illuminated from this apparent discrepancy is that acknowledgement of colonial violence does not necessarily mean a deep understanding of one's complicity with it. And in the context of Puerto Rico this tension between the settler-Native-chattel slave triad is one that emerges frequently (Carillo Rowe & Tuck, 2017).

### **Summary**

The overarching story crafted in mainstream cookbooks is that despite Puerto Rican culture and cuisine emerging from Indigenous, African, and Spanish culture, it is the Spanish and criollo elite who are deserving of recognition for the development of our cuisine. Whether the authors are conscious of it or not, their accounts of our culinary history romanticize and erase the devastating consequences of colonial violence through framings of manifest destiny. Indigenous and African culture is reduced to ingredients transformed and elevated through Spanish ingenuity

while those who have created these dishes are largely forgotten. This may be due to the limited population which has access to disseminating knowledge in this form.

The residues of colonial ideologies are felt strongly within this genre. Not only does scriptocentricity privilege the elite but the knowledge produced within these books articulate culinary practices as rational and reproduceable. In doing so, African and Indigenous culinary practices based in sensory knowledge, and which allow a more flexible approach that is responsive to available ingredients and needs, are dismissed or denigrated. Scriptocentricity also fragments social and cultural life, compartmentalizing the task of cooking from other domestic labor in unrealistic ways. It also fragments the relationships necessary to learn these skills within an oral tradition.

If these characteristics are colonial in nature, then an epistemic delinking from coloniality would require us to suture the mind body split and these relational ruptures. Indigenous relationality places emphasis on intergenerational and communal connections not just for human relationships but with all beings in our ecological worlds (Nickel & Fehr, 2020). While not fully understanding or honoring its value, colonizers on the mainland saw how crucial the oral traditions were to pass down intergenerational knowledge, so in addition to banning many Indigenous practices they eventually created the Indian Boarding School system to disrupt these communal and familial connections (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Grinde jr., 2004). A decolonized food practice would need to address this rupture in our family relationships and in the rupture between mind and body.

While these cookbooks can be an important tool for novice cooks (re)connecting with Puerto Rican culture through cuisine, they are not a value-free collection of recipes. The manner in which our history is presented is often through a romanticized version of colonization. The philosophy behind cooking can similarly empty *el recetario* of the sociocultural significance by enforcing a split between the mind and body. I am not claiming that cookbooks should stop offering measurements and specific steps for cooking. What I do argue here is that a person who seeks to understand the essence of Puerto Rican cooking is only getting a small sliver of the

experience through cookbooks, one that is highly by colonial modernity. I contend that following these recipes without any further understanding of the sociocultural and historical context reproduces a colonial narrative of our food and identity and means producing a dish *sin sazón*.

## El Recetario Goes Digital

Puerto Rican cookbooks can certainly offer a wealth of knowledge on how to prepare a dish. However, this knowledge is also constrained by the limitations of scriptocentricity. Recipes in cookbooks are diminished to a disembodied, individualistic, and linear experience of converting ingredients into food. As Greco (2006) contends, “Written recipes crystallize [sociocultural] grammars and their promise is that, if you follow instructions, you will get to an authentic experience of a certain culinary tradition.” (pg. 69). However, this promise is often left unfulfilled by the isolating and decontextualized way that recipes are written. The reason I wanted to look at el recetario nacional was to find the stories in our dishes. Because the cookbooks lacked narratives that might emerge through social context, I sought out sources that would present opportunities for seeing the cooking process in a way that more accurately depicted the sociocultural and communicative experiences of the kitchen.

To explore the social ingredients of el recetario I turned to social media. Women have often used social media to post their recipes, and this rose significantly as the COVID-19 pandemic hit in spring of 2020 and families began to quarantine when many began pursuing hobbies in earnest. I followed several hashtags ((#Boricuafood #puertoricanfood #comidapuertorriquena #chinchorro #recetasBoricuas #recetaspuertorriqueñas) and accounts (Jeff+Jo’s Puerto Rican Kitchen, n.d.; Sofritatapas, n.d.; Limon y Cilantro, n.d.; Café el Coquí Bar & Grill, n.d.; Bodega Boricua Distributors, n.d.; Chef Mario Pagán, n.d.; Papito Moe’s, n.d.; Boriqua Kitchen, n.d; MofongosLA, n.d.; Gascón-López, n.d.; Mofongos Restaurant, n.d.; Rios, n.d.; Hopper, n.d.) dedicated to Puerto Rican food. Some were famous resort chefs like Mario Pagán and others were stay at home moms like Omi Hopper.

The creators I sampled from for this study include Omi Hopper (Hopper, n.d), Evelyn Dominguez (n.d), Judy Colón (n.d), and Viña Hernández (n.d). I should note that Viña Hernández was the only creator based in Puerto Rico, living in mountainous rural region of Yauco. In addition

to selling her famous pasteles<sup>44</sup>, she has been using Facebook to share her recipes and as a point of contact for her cuchifritos<sup>45</sup> stand since 2020. The other creators are all part of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States. Omi Hopper is based in Rhode Island while Judy Colón and Evelyn Dominguez are located in the state of Florida<sup>46</sup>. For the most part they do not disclose a lot of personal information, even in their social media bios. While they do not specify in their videos how long they've been in the U.S. or their reasons for leaving the island, their fluency in Puerto Rican Spanish gives the impression that they lived in Puerto Rico into adulthood. Omi, appears to be the youngest of the 4 creators, with two sons still in k-12. Like Viña, she began posting her recipes in March of 2020. She is followed by Evelyn who appears to be around my mother's age, in her late 40s or early fifties and began her YouTube channel the earliest of the 4 content creators, in 2012. Judy and Viña appear to be in their late fifties or early sixties. At the very least, they look significantly younger than my abuela and around the age of some of my older aunts. Judy posted her first recipe in 2016.

Over the two years I was following and carefully observing this social media content, it became immediately apparent that there were formats formally trained professional chefs would utilize in their videos that were distinct from the non-professional content creators. This style of presentation closely mirrors the colonial/modernist format of cookbooks. They typically begin with a list of ingredients, a step-by-step process, and studio magic which gives chefs the ability to compartmentalize the cooking process from other aspects of "home" life. In my analysis of cookbooks, I noted that the recetario was conveyed in ways that were often scriptocentric, disembodied, rational, compartmentalized, linear, elitist, colonialist, and individualist. These values are often reflected in food television and by professional chefs who post on social media.

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<sup>44</sup> Pasteles are a very old Caribbean and Latin American dish. A dough is made from root vegetables, stuffed with tender simmered meats, and then wrapped in a plantain leaf. The parcels are then boiled. Pasteleras will be discussed at length in the following chapter, but what you should know for now is that many barrios and even U.S. cities with a Puerto Rican population will have a woman who sells pasteles by the dozen out of her home.

<sup>45</sup> Cuchifritos refers to a variety of common fried dishes.

<sup>46</sup> I clarify this because there is also a town in Puerto Rico called Florida

Non-professional women content creators often tried to emulate this “professionalism” and the *mise-en-scène* produced in television programming through the use of branding, clothing, and presentation. I began calling these attempts to reproduce this style of presentation *a lo Food Network*<sup>47</sup>. However, it is when they “fail” *beautifully*<sup>48</sup> at this attempt that we begin to see the real sociocultural complexity of *el recetario*. “Failing” beautifully denotes how women content creators depart from the accepted professional standards of television programming by *emotionally engaging* with the audience and *highlighting cultural elements* that other Puerto Ricans relate to. When the women who produced recipe videos on social media did *not* adhere to the presentation styles of television chefs it opened opportunities to engage more deeply with the sociocultural, emotional, and narrative dimensions of *el recetario*. In this chapter I discuss how puertorriqueñas’ attempt to emulate the culinary elite, inadvertently reproducing colonial modernity in their desire to look more professional and the many ways in which these standards are rejected through their cultural performance.

#### **A lo Food Network: The Mise-en-Scène of the Kitchen**

Before I delve into my analysis of women food content creators, I would like to briefly describe some dimensions of conventional food television. Any film-based medium has several components that contribute to the reality projected on screen. We have make-up, costumes, lighting, multiple cameras, a mic boom, and a set design which all contribute to the final *mise-en-scène*, the frames that the viewers eventually see (Baron, 2006).

Designed sets are realised cinematically only in conjunction with the work of the cinematographer, who through framing and lighting devices animates the fragmentary construction and imbues it with an imaginary wholeness, and the editor, who during post-production adds a temporal dimension to spatial relationships, and thereby anchors them in a constructed reality. (Bergfelder, Harris, & Street, 2007, pg. 15)

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<sup>47</sup> Codebook entry for *a lo Food Network* found in Appendix B page 179

<sup>48</sup> Codebook entry for “failing” beautifully found in Appendix B page 180

Thus, when considering the kitchen space as a site for filming, several considerations are in order. The construction of the set must offer ample food preparation space that simultaneously allows cameras to have full view of the cooking process and of the chef. A kitchen island or a low counter facing an open area is ideal, while counters facing a wall make finding an optimal angle for recording the cooking process with the chef's face in view difficult.

To demonstrate this, I will describe how one professional chef sets up his camera-ready kitchen and engages with el recetario online. Chef Mario Pagán owns three fine dining restaurants in San Juan and is executive chef of *MELAO* at Dorado Beach and Gold Resort (Mario Pagán Restaurant Group, n.d.). On May 19, 2020, I joined one of his Instagram live streams where he was preparing mofongo (M. Pagán, personal communication, May 19, 2020). During this time, travel and tourism in Puerto Rico were negatively affected by COVID and Pagán invested into making his kitchen more camera accessible so that he could do live streams on Instagram (Pagán, 2020). Mofongos are classic Puerto Rican fare featuring fried green plantains molded using a bowl or pilón. Most often, I have seen restaurants and home cooks serve it alongside chicharrones de pollo<sup>49</sup>, carne frita<sup>50</sup>, shrimp, or chuletas<sup>51</sup>. This was not a dish my mother had ever prepared in my memory, so when I first began preparing this dish over ten years ago as a novice cook, I relied on online recipes. Most recipes indicated that the fried plantains are traditionally processed in a large wooden pilón<sup>52</sup> which has been seasoned with garlic, salt, olive oil, and other herbs or spices if desired. Then the “cake” is topped with a savory meaty broth.

Chef Pagán's kitchen is open and spacious (Pagán, personal communication, May 19, 2020). In the back corner we see a colorful abstract painting, a stainless-steel industrial refrigerator, and a wall lined with luxurious wooden cabinets. A marble-like counter with professional equipment wraps around to the front of the kitchen where we see a sleek glass-top

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<sup>49</sup> Chicharrones roughly translates to cracklin' or pork rinds. In this case I refer to a kind of crispy fried chicken that is twice fried

<sup>50</sup> A kind of fried pork dish

<sup>51</sup> Porkchops

<sup>52</sup> Mortar and pestle

stove. This is the perfect set up if you are cooking for an audience because it allows the viewer full view of the process.

There is silence on the set as Pagán begins greeting 54 viewers joining the live stream from behind the shiny counter and he begins his preparations (Pagán, personal communication, May 19, 2020). He reviews some history of the dish, referring to Valdejuli's *Cocina Criolla*. He has decided to pair the mofongo with churrasco, which is a Brazilian style skirt steak served with chimichurri sauce which he notes has become popular in Puerto Rico in the last couple decades saying "Es que el campesino no comía de eso! [It's just that the rural people didn't eat any of that." Lining up his ingredients, Pagán begins to list them to the viewers: sunflower oil for frying, green plantains, onions, skirt steak, pork rinds, malta<sup>53</sup>, and his in-house adobo<sup>54</sup>. He refers to his notes for exact measurements then proceeds to show us "the right way" to cut an onion, get the perfect sear, deglaze a pan using the malta, julienne, and the trick to peeling a plantain, a series of techniques he has perfected through years of training and working as a professional chef. He tops his mofongo with green onion threads. Closing by thanking his audience on behalf of the resort.

This sign-off represents a kind of professionalization and commercialization. He is sharing this recipe with his chef peers and tourists as a culinary professional rather than a cultural steward. It is not a personal affair. Furthermore, Pagán's version of this traditional dish incorporates European vocabulary and techniques to create an elevated and sophisticated twist to a traditional mofongo, similar to the perspective of Yvonne Ortiz. Many professional chefs, like Pagán and Ortiz, bring together ingredients that may deviate from a classic recipe or use techniques not traditionally used. Using malta to deglaze a cooking pan is a culinary innovation and might result in a flavorful sauce but certainly not traditional. Topping a mofongo with green

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<sup>53</sup> This is non-alcoholic, slightly carbonated, sweet malt beverage popular in Puerto Rico.

<sup>54</sup> a salty seasoning mix which comes in many varieties but may have some combination of onion powder, garlic powder, turmeric, cumin, and oregano

onion threads might make for an elegant presentation but it is not a traditional ingredient in Puerto Rican cuisine.

Pagán's menu reflects a European culinary instinct (Mario Pagán Restaurant, n.d.). The menu is filled with French and European cooking terms: confit, velouté, aioli, a port foie gras reduction. He uses fusion as a means of "elevating" Puerto Rican ingredients and tropicalizing European ones: tartare with plantain chips, escargot with mofonguitos<sup>55</sup>, and croquetas<sup>56</sup> with papaya and gouda. All at prices that would attract the desired clientele. A far cry from cultural stewardship, this kind of culinary fusion is a form of Western imperialism. Janer (2007) explains that this kind of fusion reflects a racial hierarchy that positions European cuisine, especially French, as sophisticated while Indigenous cuisines are seen as primitive and inferior. She writes "the enduring hegemony of French cuisine as the highest standard of European culinary modernity-rationality against which all other cuisines are measured." (pg. 385).

The manner in which fusion is constructed in this context privileges the values and motivations of French haute cuisine. In Pagán's restaurant we can see how French techniques dominate the menu while Afro-Indigenous ingredients and dishes are used to add a splash of the exoticized local culture. Not to celebrate it. Grey and Newman (2018) introduce the terms *gastronomic multiculturalism* and *culinary colonialism* to describe how neo-liberal processes of commodifying Indigenous foods leads to exploitation of Indigenous people, land, and resources. Simultaneously, gastronomic multiculturalism dilutes the cultural significance of Indigenous foodways and heritage while necessitating the commercial production of Afro-Indigenous ingredients. So rather than being a form of equitable cultural exchange, it is cultural exploitation which reproduces colonial hierarchies, benefiting wealthy tourists desire for the exotic, and the criollo elite who commodify culture. Despite being Puerto Rican, Pagán uses his own culture for individual benefit. This self-enriching motivation is part and parcel of the neo-liberal capitalism

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<sup>55</sup> Miniature mofongos

<sup>56</sup> Croquettes

which Quijano (2007) and Mignolo (2007) also critique, the transformation of culture to commodity which benefits U.S. imperialists. Therefore, the culinary tourism promoted by Pagán and other haute cuisine chefs is not a cultural exchange but a form of colonization.

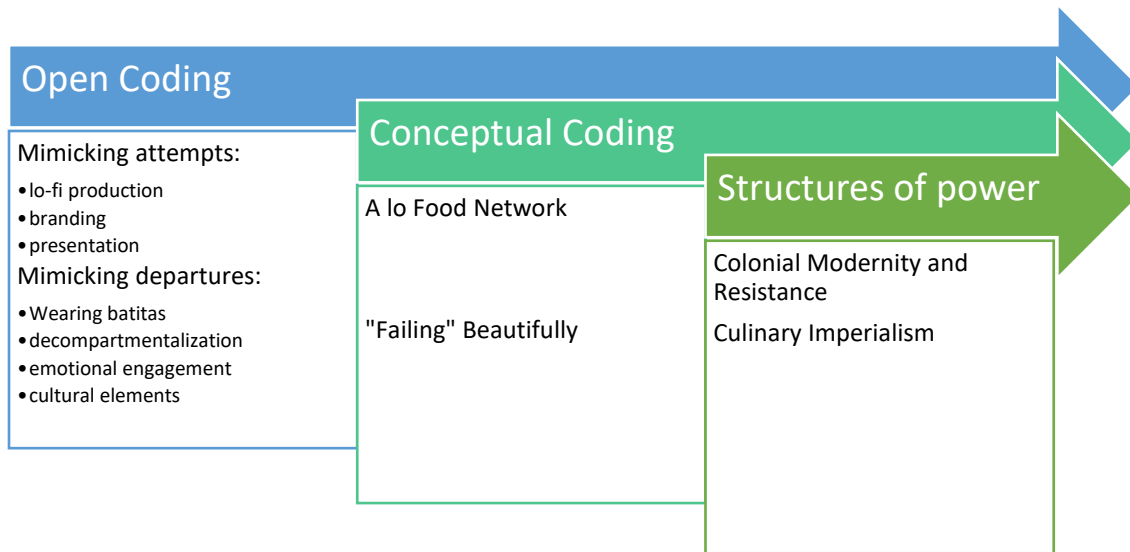


Figure 9: Coding taxonomy for recipe videos

Las amas de casa who post recipes on social media have a very different approach to Puerto Rican cuisine, motivations for sharing their recipes, and fewer resources than Pagán. We can see within their videos attempts to mimic a network cooking show by controlling the environment, offering a linear compartmentalized process, using impractical presentation strategies, and creating branding.

Creating a studio-like environment to mimic the *presentation* of television chefs requires significant resources. By presentation, I am referring to how content creators attempt to mimic the *mise-en-scène* of the professional chefs. They must consider acoustics of the room, lighting, and audiovisual technology. They are less likely to have a kitchen designed for recording and fewer resources for modifying it. In the case of the four content creators, I analyzed for the study, most of their kitchens did not easily accommodate a camera at the right angles because their kitchens were much smaller. Omi Hopper was the only one who had any preparation space facing away from a wall as she had an island in her kitchen. They also appear to be recording using very basic

equipment, most likely their phones. Ambient sound fills background and the only lighting available from windows and home fixtures. The only microphone on their smart phone. Oftentimes we see them adjusting the camera themselves because their videos are largely solo endeavors (Colón, 2022).

They are writer, director, producer, costume designer, cinematographer, boom operator, and editor. And because they are also *amas de casa* we become immediately aware that they are indeed *not* alone when the world outside of their kitchen begins to bleed into the studio. *Childcare* becomes a constant interruption in the kitchen even as these women attempt to record their recipes. As Evelyn Dominguez demonstrates how to *adobar*<sup>57</sup> the perfect *pernil*<sup>58</sup> or cook a tender steak we hear children constantly in the background, playing, screaming, laughing, and watching television (2019; 2018). As Judy prepares a nostalgic *sopa de leche*<sup>59</sup>, we hear a child's toy singing in the background (Colón, 2021). In one of her earliest recipe videos, Omi's youngest son curiously interrupts. "Whatcha making ma!? Whatcha making?" She responds "Arroz con dulce papi." (Hopper, 2020a). He later "ruins" one of her videos by popping on screen in green sunglasses, making funny faces, and dancing, "Muchacho! Este huele ej'taca!" she chastises jokingly (Hopper, 2020h). These women are mothers and grandmothers who do not have the luxury of enforcing "quiet on the set". While the perfect presentation and *mise-en-scène* requires compartmentalizing the task of cooking from other domestic demands, it is not realistic or possible within a context where they have other responsibilities.

Nevertheless, some creators embrace this *decompartmentalized portrayal* of *la cocina*. That is, in real life it is difficult to separate the task of cooking from other aspects of social and domestic life. *Decompartmentalized* portrayals represent a resistance to creating the illusion of *linear compartmentality* which I saw was prevalent within the cookbooks. Rather than attempt to create an illusion of compartmentalization, *Viña la Gran Pastelera* demonstrates the overlapping

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<sup>57</sup> Seasoned

<sup>58</sup> Roasted pork usually using the shoulder

<sup>59</sup> A soup of white rice and milk

dimensions of her life. Filming from her small home “Desde la zona montañosa de Yauco [From the mountainous zone of Yauco]”, Viña Hernandez takes viewers on tours of her small patio full of chickens, ducks, plants, and grandchildren (2021a). Her Facebook feed is littered with photos of them posted almost daily. Sometimes she livestreams or records her videos while washing dishes or peeling vegetables in a sink that sits outside her kitchen window (2021b). She edits nothing out. As she prepares to sauté onions for guineos en escabeche<sup>60</sup>, her young granddaughter comes in to ask for cookies. “Dir mi amor”, Viña responds. Rather than turning her away she tells the grandchild that she will have their mother grab them off an upper shelf (2020). Later the child returns to talk to abuela. Viña tells viewers to wait as she patiently listens to her granddaughter’s fragmented sentences. We learn her granddaughter dislikes onions. Viña switches between roles of grandmother and content creator seamlessly. For her, cooking and caretaking are inseparable responsibilities. Whether she is deliberately keeping these moments in her videos or simply does not prioritize editing, we catch a glimpse of what she faces regularly as she cooks.

Overall, Viña’s videos present the least amount of pretense. She wears a blue hair net, t-shirts, and comfortable cotton shorts in nearly every cooking video (Hernandez, 2021a; 2020). I refer to this prioritizing of the practical over the aesthetic as *wearing batitas*<sup>61</sup>, practical clothing for cooking and getting messy while doing your chores. She lacks the professional smile of a television host and does little to modify this. Her home is small with old plumbing fixtures, old appliances, and a tin roof. This is a common sight in Puerto Rico once you distance yourself from tourist destinations. She shares videos of her backyard, plants everywhere, chickens and ducks running around as she coos, “Ave María que cosa linda. ¿Que fue, ah? [Oh my goodness what a pretty thing. What is it huh?]”. (Hernández, 2021b). I am immediately reminded of spending time

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<sup>60</sup> A dish of green bananas which are boiled and then marinated in an oil and vinegar dressing which is heated and infused with garlic, onions, and spices.

<sup>61</sup> Partly this is because how Viña, Omi, and Consuelo (Omi’s mother) dress to cook reminded me of how my mother would dress for cooking and cleaning in her worn-out gown.

at my own grandmother's house with chickens clucking around. Viña's videos feel like an invitation to sharing time with her in her everyday life, uncensored.

Meanwhile, Omi often dresses up completely for the occasion. Large dangle earrings, fresh curls, bright lipstick, head wraps, and flowy dresses have all become part of her iconic look (Hopper, 2020a). Not necessarily practical wear for cooking. On other occasions she records her videos plain faced, with a ponytail, and sweats or even a bata. Judy and Evelyn typically wear slightly more fitted or embellished t-shirts and jeans. Other impracticalities of adhering to the presentation standards of the professional shows include the manner of demonstrating ingredients. We see some creators placing their ingredients into small bowls to showcase them linearly at the beginning like the professional chef shows. However, this likely creates unnecessary dishes that they would otherwise avoid if they were not recording. Despite this effort at mimicking network television, the bowls are often mismatched which creates a rupture in the presentation (Colón, 2019).

One way content creators try to make content a la Food Network is by establishing their *brand*. Branding includes creating marketing imagery and product, establishing a fixed presentation format, and coining catch phrases. They create logos and have them printed on shirts, mugs, aprons, pilones, and tostoneras in online stores (see for example <https://cookingconomi.com/> or <https://judysrinconb.square.site/>). Omi even began selling her sofrito, naming it after her sing-song catch phrase "Mi sofrito fresquecito" (Hopper, 2021c). On the more video production side, Judy also has an opening reel with clips of her previous recipes. In the background we hear *Mi Borinquen* by Doug Maxwell and Jimmy Fontañez playing, an open-source plena tune (Music of the World, 2021). The transitions between scenes reminiscent of a film from the 90s. But because the clips are off time and are in her dimly lit kitchen it does not add the desired level of polish she might have hoped. Being a one person show with limited resources results in a lo-fi production.

While these "missteps" may break the pretense that network food television attempts paint, these cracks in presentation offer us valuable glimpses into the actual lives of the women

who have inherited these recipes, made them their own, and will hopefully pass down to future generations. This is why I refer to these various missteps as *“failing” beautifully*. What they lack in “professional” presentation they make up for with culturally relevant and relatable content that resists the illusions that professional chefs create around food with their studio magic. Instead, we see what it looks like when they are cooking off camera for themselves, friends, and family rather than cooking for the camera.

### **Emotional Engagement**

While some of the missteps in recreating the *mis-en-scène* of food television are accidental, puertorriqueña food content creators also depart from the standards of this genre in deliberate ways. *Emotional engagement* became a recurring theme demonstrated by these creators. In other words, they demonstrate aspects of *el recetario* directly related to feelings and emotions that would typically be seen as unprofessional within food television programming. A *Food Network* style of presentation would mean leaving feelings off camera and enforcing emotional distance. However, these creators express a full range of emotions from affection for viewers to grief of a loved one. They share these moments of “unprofessionalism” with their followers. I contend these moments of emotional engagement humanizes the content creator and leads to building more relationships with the viewer.

Emotional engagement can be achieved simply enough through the use of terms of endearment for their viewers. *Viña* uses “*mis amigos [my friends]*”. But *Judy* uses the term of affection “*mis amores [my loves]*” (Colón 2019; 2021; 2022) and while *Evelyn* does not use an affectionate term for her viewers, she does offer her blessing to them “*Que dios me las bendiga. Hoy, mañana y para siempre [May god bless you on my behalf. Today, tomorrow, and always]*” (Dominguez, 2018). Using terms of affections and offering blessings encourages forms of intimacy not typically seen in television food shows. But they are a culturally relevant way of engaging in *el recetario*, one that builds relationships between people.

In response to this emotional engagement with their audience, many viewers reciprocate in the comments section through the offering of blessings. The offering of blessings is a common

social exchange for many puertorriqueñas, even used as a greeting between family members. For example, if I were to greet an aunt I might say “Hola títi. ¿Bendicion? [Hi auntie, a blessing?]” and she would respond “Que Dios me la bendiga [May God bless you on my behalf].” But this exchange is usually reserved for close friends, family, or other emotionally invested relationships. For Omi, Judy, and Evelyn’s viewers to initiate this exchange represents the parasocial relationship that they have built, the closeness they feel, with these content creators.

Judy Colón also makes a deliberate departure from contemporary television food shows by taking time in every video for a *saludos* segment where she greets fans who have left comments on videos (Colón, 2019; 2021; 2022). She calls on them by name, comments on where they are viewing from, thanks them for watching, and even offers birthday wishes. In a sing song voice, she announces a special birthday to her fans, “Hay un cumpleaños hay un cumpleaños hoo hoo! ¡De parte de Elsa a su mama que cumple 87 años de Brooklyn! Felicidades, mi amor en esta fecha tan especial a Milagro Colón. Es de Isabela, Puerto Rico ¿Lo dije bien? Siii 87 años mi amor. ¡Un beso!” (Colón, 2022). She puts both hands up to her lips, making kissing sounds as she extends them outward. Not only does Judy’s *saludos* make her YouTube videos more interactive but it is also an opportunity for her to express care and affection towards her viewers. She positions herself, not as a television food show star, but as a neighbor, auntie, and friend. Someone who would be teaching their recipes out of love.

Emotional engagement can also mean expressing thoughts or feelings that might appear “unprofessional” in a food show. In one video Omi shares her grandfather’s favorite dish. As she blows on her *funche de bacalao*<sup>62</sup> to cool it down she recounts “Yo me acuerdo que yo me sentaba al la’ito de el cuándo el se sentaba en la silla mecedora y yo ej’perando a que el me ofreciera el ultimo boca’ito... que siempre lo hacía. [I remember that I used to sit at his side while he was in the rocking ch’ir, waiting for him to offer me the last bite... which he always did.]”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> A kind of corn meal porridge made with salted pollock or cod

<sup>63</sup> Note: Compared to the other content creators Omi had a very rural accent and informal way of speaking.

(Hopper, 2020d). She signs off very quietly while holding back tears “me cagowena.” In this video she is both nostalgic and grieving and sharing that grief with us in an uncharacteristic show of vulnerability compared to her usual cheerful self. Her confliction over sharing the video is conveyed in the caption “Por poco no pongo esta receta, porque me emocioné mucho y me dio sentimiento al final. [I nearly didn’t post this recipe because I got very emotional, and I had feelings at the end.]”

This emotional engagement in the form of grief is often shared by her viewers who comment similar stories of losing loved ones and how much cooking and eating these recipes reminds them of loved ones who have passed. Angelita Bonilla commented “Muy Lindas Las Dos Gracias Por Su Pasó a Paso De Hacer Pasteles Yo lo aprendí de mi mamá también que descanse en paz Dios los Bendiga a las Dos. [Very pretty both of you. Thank you for the step by step for how to make pasteles. I learned from my mom too. May she rest in peace. God bless you both.]” (Hopper, 2020d). As a result, her recipe videos become a place for social exchange of stories and experiences, not just the functional aspects of the cooking process.

### **Cultural Elements of the Recetario Digital**

Another strategy that allows content creators to challenge the standards of television food programming is by *highlighting cultural elements* of the recetario. Essentially, this means offering cultural grounding and context for the recipes by incorporating other aspects of Puerto Rican culture that might otherwise be suppressed by attempts to remain professional and through the elitism of the food programming genre. These cultural elements come in different forms that are most prevalent within Omi’s videos and include using cultural references such as music, dancing, sayings, jokes, and slang that many Puerto Ricans recognize and relate to. It is content for and by Puerto Ricans or latines.

Omi’s videos begin with an enthusiastic “Hola mi gente! [Hello my people]” as she sings and dances to bachata, merengue, and salsa classics. The phrasing of “mi gente” is one that most Puerto Ricans and other latines are very familiar with and represents cultural affinity. While Omi’s videos are the most edited of all the creators I included in this analysis, her preparation of

Puerto Rican food includes cultural elements Evelyn Dominguez and Judy's Rincon leave out, potentially in their effort to mimic professional chef shows.

Her musical selection changes depending on the recipe and her mood ranging from plena of the 1940s to today's reggaeton. In one video her and her best friend prepare a special Dominican dish for semana santa<sup>64</sup>, habichuelas con dulce<sup>65</sup> (Hopper, 2021b). She opens with "Vamos hacer habichuelas con dulce. ¡Eso no es habichuelas con dulce eso es Gloria Estefan! [We're making habichuelas con dulce. That's not habichuelas con dulce that's Gloria Estefan!]" Indicating that the music did not fit the context. Her friend changes the music looking for the right genre. They remain unsatisfied until they find a track by Dominican artist Juan Luis Guerra. In another video she makes her abuelo's favorite dish, un funche de bacalao, as a somber rendition of *El Lamento del Jibaro* plays in the background (Hopper, 2020d). Other times she sings and dances along to classics like Andy Montañez's *Quien no se Siente Patriota* (Hopper, 2020a). The music she plays on her videos represent a continued connection to the culture even when she is thousands of miles away in Rhode Island. It also represents a cultural ambiance that accompanies the cooking process for many Puertorriqueñas.

In addition to singing and dancing, Omi also engages in a Puerto Rican style of humor that uses slapstick, rhymes, and puns. "Pa'lla no mire. Que eso no'ej pa ti. [Don't look over there. That's not for you.]" and "Con que se come ej'to? Con la boca! Mira ej'toooo. [What do you eat this with? Your mouth! Look at thissss] Me cagowena!" (Hopper, 2020b). This kind of humor tones down the formality of her presentation compared to the other creators. Furthermore, her rural accent and the use of common phrases like "me cagowena" (truly not translatable but in English it might be interchangeable with "goddamn") increase the connection to a less metropolitan viewership in comparison to the professional chefs like Mario Pagán.

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<sup>64</sup> Holy week

<sup>65</sup> A Dominican dish prepared for Holy Week which consists of red beans and sweet potato cooked with sweetened condensed milk and coconut milk. Some people also add raisins. It is infused with anise, cloves, and cinnamon and often served with a kind of cookie on top.

Omi's catch phrases also represent a very embodied and personalized style of cooking that reflects the need for developing sensory knowledge. "La cantidad que te diga tu corazón [the amount your heart tells you.]" "Bien independiente hoy [real independent today]" "En tu cocina tu manda, pero en la mía mando yo. [You're in charge in your kitchen, but I'm in charge in mine.]" Each saying reflects a sense of ownership over one's recipes, empowering the viewer to trust their instincts and modify at will instead of relying excessively on rigid measurements. Instead, she uses sight, touch, and taste to know when something is good and encourages viewers to do the same rejecting rationality of food programming and the cookbook genre and embracing an embodied cooking practice.

Perhaps more than the other content creators, part of what makes Omi's channel so compelling is her distinct connection between dishes, stories, and nostalgia. When she creates a dish the smells and flavors transport her to specific memories which many other Puerto Ricans relate to. In other words, she demonstrates how palate memory functions. As she stirs a nearly finished pot of gandinga she exclaims with feeling "Ay dios miiiiio. En ej'ta casa ahora mij'mo huele a campo, huele a la casa de mi abuela... Me transporte! Me transporte! [Oh my God. In this house right now it smells like the countryside, it smells like my grandmother's house. I transported myself! I transported myself]" (Hopper, 2020e).

Omi covers all the classic recipes most Puerto Ricans are familiar with: sofrito, mojo, sancocho, bacalaitos, alcapurrias, mofongo. The works. But she also offers a wide range of lesser-known and more regional recipes: arroz apastelado, empanadas de yuca, majado de vianda, and domplines. These were dishes that even my parents were unfamiliar with. In addition to regional dishes, she also reveals the economics of her upbringing. The dishes she cooked which remind her of her grandparents could be considered *comida de pobres* or poor people food. It is not a repertoire that the other creators include in their recipe video collections. Comida de pobres is affordable and accessible. The funche de bacalao is mostly cornmeal and preserved fish. Though bacalao has become much more expensive today, it was an affordable source of protein from the Spanish colonial period until the 20-30 years ago. My local supermarket now

carries it at nearly 10 USD per pound however, so I do not think this could still be considered poor people food. Omi hopper also prepares a variety of traditional Puerto Rican recipes which utilize offal, including hearts, liver, and pig stomach, foods often associated with poorer classes.

In this case, Omi cooks a more contemporary kind of comida pobre. “Mira si tu ere’ bien culsi y tu no naci’te pobre siguelo siguelo [If you’re real prissy and you didn’t grow up poor keep going, keep going, keep going].” (Hopper, 2020b). She waves her hands upward as if scrolling, “Siguelo no te preocupe’ no me va ofendel, dale dale dale. Ok pa loj’ que nacieron pobre como yo vamo hacel una conbif hoy, dale!!!. [Keep going don’t worry I won’t be offended, go go go. Ok for those who grew up poor like me we’re going to make a corned beef. Let’s go!]”

While she speaks of this dish fondly and with nostalgia, this reference to corned beef as poor people food is based on part of Puerto Rico’s colonial history. Canned meats became popular in Puerto Rico due to the decline in local food production post WWII, which increased a dependency on imports (Carro-Figueroa, 2002). Prior to the implementation of food stamps on the island in the 1970s, the government distributed food stuffs to poorer families in similar fashion to rations. Historically, rations have been used to create paternalism and dependency between colonizer and colonized (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Additionally, many rations provided through colonial governments lead to health complications long term. My mother described some common offerings of el mantengo<sup>66</sup> her family received growing up in Mameyes: fruit cocktail, powdered milk and eggs, raisins, corn meal, flour, dried potato flakes, pancake mix, and syrup (personal communication, 2020). All very shelf stable goods though not necessarily healthy options and often ones that were not culturally relevant. Nevertheless, ingredients like corned beef and spam were eventually incorporated into some of our traditional dishes where fresh meat might be substituted, particularly for financially disadvantaged families.

These cultural elements which link Omi to lower socioeconomic status and more rural regions of the island sometimes lead to many contestations regarding identity and authenticity.

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<sup>66</sup> Rations

People can use a dish and the presentation of the recipe to either validate or deny Puerto Rican-ness. A recurring theme in the comment sections of many recipe videos. This is often done through linguistic corrections of more rural Puerto Rican slang. (Hopper, 2020d). Beatriz Hernández commented “Móndal nunca en mi vida he oído esa palabra que se dice pelar!!! [Mondal. Never in my life have I heard that word. It is said pelar]... I was so curious and search it up it’s not even a word lol.” The linguistic distinction this commenter is making is related to mondar and pelar. Two words meaning to peel. It is not clear whether Hernández was familiar with the more rural accent which would change “mondar” to “mondal” but what is clear is a sense of dismissiveness and superiority. There were several other comments arguing over which word was the proper one to use. Mariela Ortiz comes to Omi’s defense “Así hablamos los Boricuas PRPRPRPRPR.” Angie Santana also took many of these linguistic differences as a sign of authenticity, particularly for jíbaro identity. She says,

Una vez me encontré con uno de tus vídeos hace como un mes atrás y desde ahí soy adicta a ellos porque me encanta tu forma de ser eres así tan tan jíbara como somos aquí en Puerto Rico tan bella tan tan humilde tan dulce de verdad que tu mamá y tú son dos bellas mujeres puertorriqueñas admirables Dios me las bendiga siempre. [One time, I found one of your videos a month ago and since then I’m addicted to them because I love your way of being. You’re like that. So so jíbara like how we are here in Puerto Rico. So beautiful. So so humble. So sweet, truly. You and you mother are two beautiful admirable Puerto Rican women. God bless you forever.]

Having both mother and daughter interacting on camera further highlights cultural elements and demonstrates an emotional engagement between the actors and audience. Coni’s presence alongside Omi represents a dynamic between mother and daughter in the Puerto Rican kitchen. A dynamic that does not go unnoticed by her hundreds of followers who often express a kind of approval, admiration, or nostalgia. Take for instance, the following comments left on a YouTube video of the dynamic duo making pasteles (Hopper, 2020d).

María Muñoz: “Que hermoso es ver esto. Mamá e hija, [How beautiful to see this. Mother and daughter.]”

Elizabeth Rivera: “Que lindo es trabajar en equipo...aprendiendo de tu mamá. [How beautiful it is to work together...learning from your mother.]”

Edwin Heredia: “ [L]o más que me rompió el corazón es el amor qué tiene esta santa Hija por su mamá yo nunca dudaría casarme con una dama así que dios me la bendiga a las dos. [What breaks my heart the most is the love this holy daughter has for her mother. I would never doubt marrying a lady like that. May God bless you both.]”

These and dozens of other comments remarked on the emotional connection between mother and daughter.

Their interactions also bring Puerto Rican humor to the forefront. “Y aquí la master le va echar el achiote! [And here the master is going to add achiote!]” (Hopper, 2020d). “Te va enseñar *ella*, la madre que me pario! Dale, dale, dale! [*She's* going to show you, the mother who gave birth to me! Go, go, go!]” (Hopper, 2020f). As I write this, I realize this is a humor that cannot be easily translated or perhaps is only understood by other Puerto Ricans or latine Caribeños. She is invoking common Puerto Rican phrases and jokes that may not be known or significant to outsiders. Later we hear Coni tapping along to music in the background as Omi tries to demonstrate a step in her recipe. “Mami, tu puede dejal de tocal conga allá ‘tra’ pol favol. [Mami, can you stop playing congos back there please.]” (Hopper, 2020g). They both erupt with laughter. No matter the recipe, their videos together are always filled with mirth even if chastising each other.

However, this does not mean that other emotions do not also enter the kitchen. Since Omi edits many scenes out there are obviously things left unseen. Nevertheless, we sometimes catch a glimpse at more serious conversations that might be occurring during these mundane exchanges. While preparing pasteles together, a task that would likely take the entire day since they were making many dozens to sell, a moment of mothering occurs (Hopper, 2020d). As one of Omi's sons announces his departure, Coni remarks, “No me guj'taria que el se fuera y lo' otro

se quedan aqui. [I wouldn't like that he went out and the others stayed here.]" While this moment is brief, it represents a sliver of what conversations they were having in that kitchen while preparing food together. She expresses concerns for how Omi was raising her children or what rules were in place for the children. Whether or not Coni's unprompted advice is appropriate or welcomed, this moment is a negotiation of meaning between mother and daughter that was likely not meant for wider audiences and the illusion of a perfect romanticized relationship between mother and daughter is disrupted. While this moment was singular in my analysis, it stood out as a representation of what might typically occur off camera.

### **Summary**

As we see in these examples, the assumption that network food television offers the penultimate form to present recipes is strongly disproven. These women incorporate vital cultural elements into their cooking that reflect the real lived experiences of puertorriqueñas. There are sociocultural and emotional elements of el recetario that go beyond the ingredients. Within the rigid format of a conventional food show there is not much room for this kind of cultural performance. Kelly (2017) sheds some light on why this might be the case, arguing that food programming's interest in non-White foodways is limited to exotification and food tourism conducted by white connoisseurs with very few representations of the actual cultural stewards of the cuisine. What we see in these examples is that even when we have cultural stewards presenting the cooking process, because of the epistemological hierarchy of colonial modernity, they may still take up a culturally anemic presentation of the cuisine. But social media provides a platform for Puertorriqueñas to share their cultural knowledge. The only constraints are those content creators have been socialized to accept as the most professional or profitable.

The themes which emerged in these recipe videos demonstrate moments of aspiring to mimic network food programming as well as significant departures from the genre. When creators mimic professional chefs and adhere to the stylistic requirements of television food programming, they unwittingly reproduce the idea that our food is best understood and presented through scriptocentric elitism, compartmental linearity, rationality, and the erasure of not only our

history but of essential cultural performances. Perhaps one of the most important themes to emerge from the recipe videos is that of emotional and relational connection as a way of engaging with el recetario. Whether that means Judy's saludos segment or Omi's moments of vulnerability, this characteristic is completely absent from the cookbooks. These emotions challenge the rationality and isolation of the culinary canon.

Interestingly, though they sometimes engender these colonial and modern characteristics in their videos I did not see any of these women mention the canonical texts, like *Cocina Criolla* (Valdejuli, 1954). In the videos we see Omi learning recipes or practicing them with her mother. It is likely that this was the way in which she learned how to cook, instead of through a book. Though it is not clear from the videos how they learned to cook, Viña, Judy, and Evelyn are also seasoned veterans who no longer need to refer to a book for cooking instructions. Would such a book have been seen as useful for women in the 1950s and 1960s who were not part of the criollo elite? Unless they shared Valdejuli's experience of being kept away from menial chores it is far more likely they grew up helping their families with these domestic tasks. Perhaps they would notice, as I did, that Valdejuli's elitist, rational, linear, and compartmentalized culinary guidance would not be realistic or would be too rigid. Still, women like Ana, Yolanda, Estrella, and Yarma from my interviews do keep books like these in their collections without necessarily following the rigidity of the recipes.

Many colonial residues remain in the production choices in these videos. It is important to note that Omi was the only creator to cook along with someone else in her videos when I was screening content for this study. This indicates a normalization of cooking as a solitary process which is an illusion perpetuated by cookbooks and television food programming. This is also part of an individualist orientation to the world created not only by colonial modernity but neo-liberal capitalism. However, it is difficult if not completely impossible to engage in culture alone. An essential part of cultural performance is community. The real experience of cooking our cultural dishes cannot be separated from being in relation with others. In this respect the recipe videos on social media still perpetuate colonialism even when the women have good intentions in their

sharing of recipes. It is mostly in accidental ways that we catch moments of relationships as children laugh, play, or cry in the background.

The compartmental linearity and rationality of colonial modernity in cooking videos also means removing stories from the cooking process. Judy Colón and Evelyn Dominguez rarely leave room for reflection in their videos. They follow an a la Food Network format of list of ingredients, step by step process, and perhaps a sampling of the food at the end. Viña Hernández invites us into the home space, and we see the everyday environment whether it is feeding the chickens or caring for her grandchildren. It is very much in the present rather than stories of the past. Although Omi Hopper is the youngest of the 4, she offers the biggest strongest connection between stories, memories, and food. Her stories are of eating these foods in Puerto Rico as a child with her family. Recreating these dishes allows her to “transport” herself back to those memories through the sensory experience of eating. As a result, she invokes what Ortíz Cuadra (2006) calls palate memory, a way in which the sensory experience of food allows us to remember a shared collective and culturally bound past. So, as she recalls her grandmother’s house in the countryside and sitting by her grandfather, she invites viewers to also think of these places and their own memories of eating these foods in a shared imaginary of Borikén. Interestingly, the other 3 creators do not engage in this kind of storytelling even though they are older. Because Viña has never left Puerto Rico, she does not have a longing to return. However, there is still a potential for nostalgia of the past which she does not exhibit. Judy and Evelyn’s omission of storytelling appears to stem mostly from the mimicking of the food network format which depersonalizes the recipes.

What this section of my analysis demonstrates is that anyone can reproduce the values, beliefs, and ontoepistemologies of colonial modernity as they share our cultural cuisine. Not all stories are necessarily decolonial. Afterall, Rosado and Rosado (1995) and Valldejuli’s (1954) storytelling and nostalgia is very much rooted in criollo elitism and social hierarchies which romanticize colonization. But nostalgic storytelling that does not obscure colonial violence but draws attention to inequality may have decolonial potential. Omi’s introduction to conbif as poor

people food directly relates to systemic poverty as well as U.S. colonization which introduced canned meats into the Puerto Rican culinary repertoire. The brief snippets of stories of her grandparents give us a picture away from the wealthy metropolitan area and towards the often-forgotten rural population. Her positionality contrasts starkly against the culinary and criollo elite. This also means that her motivations for cooking and her reasons for sharing her culinary knowledge are also different. Valldejuli cooks to entertain and meet the perfectionistic expectations of elite hosting. Ortíz cooks to elevate Puerto Rican dishes with Eurocentric fusion. But the women in these recipe videos are cooking to feed their families and keep their cultural traditions alive. Yolando, one of my interview participants echoed this very sentiment, saying “We don’t want these traditions to die!” (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 969)

Indigenous scholars such as Margaret Kovach (2009), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (2001), and Jo-ann Archibald (2008), write about the importance of storytelling as a communal and cultural practice. Archibald especially emphasizes the pedagogical value of these stories through 7 principles of storywork including respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (pg. 3). These characteristics are incommensurable with the colonialist stories told in the cookbooks by Valldejuli (1954), Rosado and Rosado (1995), Ortíz (1997). In the list of storywork principles you will notice an emphasis on ethics and relationships. It is not a solitary or self-serving process. It is not about reinforcing a social hierarchy. Rather, Indigenous relationality tells us to honor and learn from all our relations (Nickel & Fehr, 2020). This includes non-human relations, as was so beautifully demonstrated in Robin Kimmerer’s (2013) *Braiding Sweetgrass*. In turn, I would propose that if stories can serve as a decolonization of our recetario, they should also adhere to these principles of ethical relationality or they risk perpetuating colonial modernity instead of liberating us from it. This means turning towards our relations. Not only intergenerationally but relationship with land and food sources as well.

## Ocho Mujeres del Recetario Nacional<sup>67</sup>

Social media offered a glimpse into the more emotional and cultural aspects of el recetario. However, most videos are planned and edited for conciseness and presentation which limits an understanding of how puertorriqueñas experience the cuisine. The stories told within these videos were limited by expectations of the genre and platform. Therefore, it was crucial to speak directly with the cultural stewards of this cuisine, who have learned the sensory knowledge from their mothers and abuelas and are passing it to the next generation. I devised an interview guide based on the previous analyses of the cookbooks and recipe videos to expand on more social aspects of the recetario. What became recurrent within Ana, Estrella, María, Yarma, Yolanda, Carla, Melisa, and Kristina's stories and experiences is that cooking Puerto Rican food was inextricably linked to politics, cultural identity, and relationships. Politically, access to land and food has been greatly impacted by colonial capitalism and pressure to migrate to the U.S. As a result of this migration each of them uses Puerto Rican food as a way to connect to our culture. However, the relational aspects of el recetario, the memories, are what made the food culturally significant.

While it had not been my initial intention to focus on the diaspora, the eight women I interviewed had all moved to the United States for various reasons. The majority had moved to the U.S. for the sake of furthering their education while leaving their families back on the island. But for the second-generation participants, their parents and grandparents had moved to the United States desperate for employment opportunities. I called these various trajectories and motivation for immigration *diasporic journeys*<sup>68</sup>.

Kristina explains that her family came to New Jersey after the Progreso food factory in Vineland, New Jersey began recruiting Puerto Ricans in the 60s. This migration pattern is, of course, no coincidence. Without a critical and post-colonial lens, these migrations are often

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<sup>67</sup> Eight women of the national cuisine

<sup>68</sup> Codebook Entry for Diasporic Journeys is found in Appendix C on page 178

attributed to push factors such as poverty, fear, disasters, and unemployment. However, these circumstances are very much linked to the colonial metropole and have significant impacts on el recetario. Thus, I begin this section with a historical examination of how immigration to the mainland resulted from colonial processes.

### De Monoculturas y Huertos Caseros<sup>69</sup>

Food production and access is a deeply political issue as the control of land and agriculture are sectors of dominance within the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2007). What became a recurring theme in my conversations with women was that the colonial political structure had directly influenced what kind of food staples these women and their families could access. Yarma, Yolanda, Melisa, and Ana each mentioned the value of growing up with *huertos caseros*<sup>70 71</sup> and how important they are to our traditional foodways. Huertos caseros provide access to essential staples and this in turn shaped how these participants understood our cuisine. However, access to these staples shifted drastically when moving from Puerto Rico to the U.S. mainland. To understand how these eight women ended up leaving la isla<sup>72</sup> we must recognize how the United States has contributed to political and economic instability in Puerto Rico.

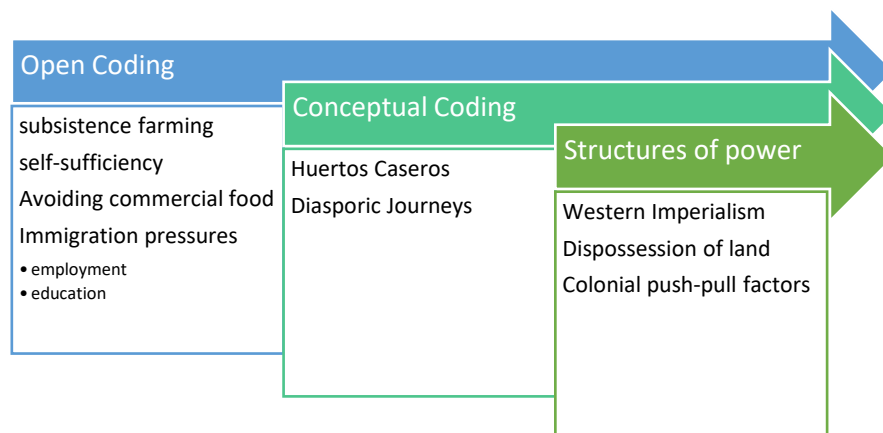


Figure 10 Coding Taxonomy for Huertos Caseros and Diasporic Journeys

<sup>69</sup> Of monocultures and home gardens

<sup>70</sup> Codebook entry for Huertos Caseros found in Appendix C page 179

<sup>71</sup> Home garden for subsistence farming

<sup>72</sup> The island

While all forms of colonization are violent processes, there is a marked difference between the settler colonialism of the Spanish and the modern colonialism of the U.S. With settler colonialism, there is a desire to replace the native population by invading and settling on their lands, undertaking all forms of genocide (Veracini, 2011). Veracini explains that modern “colonialism reinforces the distinction between colony and metropole.” (pg. 3). In other words, the colony is not meant to be a new home. Rather, it exists to provide land, labor, and resources while the metropole is the sole beneficiary of this extraction. In the case of Puerto Rico, the Treaty of Paris granted the U.S. complete control of the civil and political rights of citizens (Cabán, 1999). The well-being of the people, economic stability, or political integrity was of little importance as there was no delusion of permanence. Unlike the Spanish, who sent their own citizens to establish colonies, the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico did not result in waves of migration from the mainland U.S. Instead, the primary concern is what can be extracted and exploited at any given time and because resources are often finite, colonialism continually pivots to exploit different resources dependent on the needs and desires of the metropole. Never that of Puerto Ricans.

Cabán (2005) makes note of these different waves of exploitation since the U.S. invasion. It began as a sugar cane republic, much like the banana republics established in Central America. American firms took over much of the existing tobacco industry as well. The first 2 years after the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico, President McKinley had appointed military governors but in 1900 Charles Herbert Allen was appointed the first civilian governor. By 1901, Allen had established the American Sugar Refining Company by buying up land in prices afforded by the U.S. takeover and the devaluation of the local currency (Denis, 2015). A company now known as Domino Sugar. According to Cabán, U.S. investors quickly began accumulating land and taking over agriculture and by 1920 half of the sugar cane industry was owned by 4 U.S. firms. This change in land ownership was facilitated by the *Hollander Bill* passed in 1901, which taxed middle- and high-income landowners (Ayala, 1996). As a result, most of the larger Puerto Rican owned plantations were sold or broken up into smaller and smaller plots of land.

But after WWII, the U.S. initiated *Operation Bootstrap* which moved Puerto Rico away from monocultural plantations and placed increasing emphasis on export manufacturing (Ayala, 1996). In 1976 the U.S. also created Section 936 of U.S. Tax Code, a means of offering enormous tax breaks for U.S. companies to manufacture in Puerto Rico (Toledo, 2017). Pharmaceutical and chemical industries took advantage of these incentives (Chertow, Ashton, & Espinoza, 2008). However, after 1996 new companies could no longer claim this tax break and the benefits ended completely in 2006 at which point many of these factories simply shut down and took their business elsewhere (Ayala, 1996). Currently, Puerto Rico is prized by the ultra-wealthy who are incentivized to relocate through tax haven policies not afforded to local residents (Atilés, 2022).

Since the beginning, the U.S. intended to make Puertorriqueñas an exploitable workforce who remained unprotected by policies in the mainland. The relationship with the U.S. gave Puerto Rico no political or commercial leverage. All production, commerce, and economic policies were designed to benefit U.S. companies at the cost of economic security for puertorriqueñas who were not part the criollo elite. After the U.S. invasion, Puerto Rico's exports to Europe and the rest of the Caribbean declined harshly as all products were now prioritized to the mainland (Cabán, 2005). Furthermore, Puerto Ricans faced heavy taxes on their end while Americans enjoyed enormous discounts due to U.S. policies. For example, *The Jones Act* enacted in 1929 required all "domestic water transports to be performed, by vessels that are U.S.-made, crewed, owned, and flagged." (Grabow, 2019). Grabow reports that because of this policy, imports to Puerto Rico must transfer to U.S. vessels, 88% of them in Jacksonville, Florida. This additional step increases the cost of shipping by over \$500 million and this cost trickles down to consumers.

As a result of so many policies and structures taking advantage of puertorriqueñas there is high rate of unemployment and poverty. According to the United States Census Bureau, currently 43% of the population lives below the poverty line (n.d.). The high level of U.S. control over agricultural and manufacturing production has neglected the needs of puertorriqueñas for over a century and eventually led to a high dependency on U.S. government assistance (as

demonstrated in the previous chapter in my discussion of el mantengo<sup>73</sup>) and mass migration to the mainland starting in the 1940s (Ayala, 1996). Some migrate for work opportunities while others seek to improve their chances through furthering the education in the U.S.

While my participants never mentioned these historical factors, they have contributed to the reasons my participants migrated from Puerto Rico to *alla fuera*<sup>74</sup>. Despite the deep decline in subsistence farming in Puerto Rico four of the women I spoke to recalled growing up with huertos caseros<sup>75</sup>. While it did not completely separate them from the commercial food industry, it afforded their families some independence and self-sufficiency and had enormous impacts on the kind of Puerto Rican cuisine which they prepared. As Melisa noted “One thing that I do love about the process in Puerto Rico is, locally, there is just so much you can do with, you know, at home. If you have... even if it's just a little bit, a small piece of land. Just, you know, your garden. There is so much that you can do to have really good quality products and ingredients for your food.” (Melisa Interview, Pos. 322-324). Melisa, Yolanda, and Yarma each told me how their connection to huertos caseros impacted their approach to food.

Yolanda explained that her mother worked for *La Sección Agrícola*, teaching economically disadvantaged families in the community how to create huertos caseros<sup>76</sup>, “ella siempre tuvo un apego a la tierra y a preparar comida. [She always had a draw to the earth and to preparing food.” (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 6). Cultivating rosemary, oregano, aloe, gandules, mangos, guanabana, guayabas, lemons, corazón, papaya, and every kind of tree they could fit in

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<sup>73</sup> Rations

<sup>74</sup> This translates to “out there” and is a common phrase in Puerto Rico to refer to people who migrate to the U.S.

<sup>75</sup> Home gardens for subsistence farming

<sup>76</sup> It is unclear why this government intervention was necessary in a context where subsistence farming had been an essential food source, but it is possible that this links to the dispossession of land that had occurred decades earlier. Alternatively, this could be a similar tactic to U.S. health programs in Puerto Rico discussed by Trujillo Pagán (2013) which would have been used as a strategy to instill U.S. American values and gain greater control of resistant rural jíbaros through disingenuous charity.

the small yard of their apartment complex. Melisa's father had grown up a farmer and later in life also maintained a garden with as many basic staples as possible.

He was a farmer until he was 17 when their farm was sold because my grandfather died. It was too hard for him to work the farm alone. He later went to school and became a nurse with a nephrology specialty. But I think it is safe to say that he was and will always be our jibarito. (Melisa Interview, Pos. 855)

Plátanos, guineos, malanga, yuca, and ñame were some of the essential starches they cultivated while gandules and habichuelas provided rich protein. Acerolas, cerezas, jobo, anones, parcha and other fruit trees. The family also raised rabbits, chickens, and ducks. So overall they were extremely independent when it came to food stuffs. Melisa noted they only needed to rely on the store for more processed products like flour and spices or for other meats to round out the meal.

As you might imagine, easy access to fresh agricultural products leads to a completely different process in food preparation. Yarma described how easy it was to prepare pasteles with such ready access to guineos verdes. This foodway is resourceful and frugal. Making use of whatever is available.

For my mom to make pasteles, she goes out, cuts a racimo de guineos [bunch of bananas], and makes them. And then my father cuts the meat. And right? So, making pasteles is like an hour and a half in my house. You know? Like she just makes them like, like nothing! She just sits there and does the masa [dough] and like by hand, el guallo [the grater], and then the chicken and the thing and then done. Yeah, ella hacía una docena de paj'tele como como nada. Como si fuera nada, [she made a dozen pasteles like it was nothing. Like it was nothing] right? And mostly because we had access to guineos. When the guineos are ready, they're ready. They don't wait. (Yarma Interview, Pos. 111-119).

Yarma herself still seems amazed at her mother's culinary efficiency. And for good reason! Pasteles are perhaps one of the most labor-intensive dishes within Puerto Rican cuisine.

In one of Omi Hoppers videos, she and her mother spend the entire day to make several dozen pasteles to sell (2020). Without a modern food processor, the guineos would need to be grated by hand as Yarma's mother did. The meat or filing need to be seasoned and stewed. The banana leaves need to be charred over the stove to soften them. And then it would be time to spread the masa on banana leaves, stuff them with whatever fillings was being used, mold the masa, and wrap it in the banana leaf before putting it in a pot to boil. A tedious and time-consuming process that Yarma's mother completed with ease.

For the women who grew up with huertos caseros, food was easier and cheaper to access. Although it requires physical labor, many of these plants are perennials and once established would bear fruit for years to come making it a worthwhile investment. Harvesting your own food in Puerto Rico meant a greater sense of independence from commercial products and government rations. However, there has been a steady decline in subsistence farming as a common cultural practice. I asked Yolanda why the shift toward more commercial food sources and she suggested "Yeah, I think we were brainwashed. [joint laughter] To say... that food from the outside was more nutritious, or better, or easier, probably more the fact of convenience. Made us to kind of lose track on the things that we know." (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 600-602). But since her mother's job was also involved in teaching people these agricultural skills, we can see that this is perhaps a trend that ebbs and flows over time. Declining with dispossession of land and mass migrations and reemerging when people desire self-sufficiency.

One of the contributing factors to this decline is mass migration away from the countryside and to Puerto Rican urban centers or the U.S. Yarma and Melisa each lived in more rural areas of Puerto Rico before their families eventually moved to San Juan. Both noting how this move decreased the amount of land available for subsistence farming, decreasing their families' crops. Ayala (1996) argues that U.S. driven capitalist agriculture dispossessed many rural farmers, turning them into low-wage workers. Without the development of local industry, they were left with few alternative working opportunities, leading to mass migration to the United States which was desperate for cheap labor. As I mentioned earlier, Kristina's grandmother

moved to New Jersey after the Progreso soup company began recruiting Puerto Ricans to work in their factories.

Once in the U.S., many families no longer had the same opportunities for huertos caseros. For example, Melisa's family lived in an apartment in NYC and those who moved to the U.S. for educational purposes lived in dormitories. Furthermore, attempts to plant Puerto Rican staples in a different environment has had disappointing results. Yolanda and Yarma explained that the soil and climate was much different (in L.A. and Georgia respectively), leading to failed crops. As a result, these migrant families shift from a high level of self-sufficiency to high dependence on commercial goods. So, although they were granted more work opportunities in the U.S. the cost of food increased drastically while the quality declined.

At the political level, land distribution and dispossession along with control over economic policies and investments means control over food. This grants authority over all available resources and determines the movement of people. So, while the staples of Puerto Rican cuisine were created from Spanish colonization and the slave trade, U.S. colonization has greatly impacted this foodway through a control of economic, land, and labor resources. Meaning the waves of migration from Puerto Rico to the U.S. has enormous implications for el recetario.

### **A Taste of Home**

Migration to the U.S. means that members of the diaspora will experience various challenges in connecting to Puerto Rican food and culture but a desire to connect to Puerto Rican identity is one of the central motivations for participating in el recetario. Resisting assimilation requires a deep avowal of Puerto Rican identity and food can be one way to demonstrate this claim. María, Ana, Carla, and Yarma indicated they only took an interest in cooking once they moved to the United States and found Puerto Rican food difficult or impossible to find, never having learned from their families prior to relocating. So, it was migration to the U.S that made them their Puerto Rican identity salient and pushed them to value el recetario. The theme of A

*taste of home*<sup>77</sup> represents a how participants used food as a means of avowing their Puerto Rican identities.

Though Yarma is now an accomplished cook, she knew only the most basic dishes when she first moved to the U.S. for school. The food served at the cafeteria felt foreign to her.

So, then I started going once a week to the supermarket and bought pans and pots and started cooking myself rice and beans every week ... but when I started cooking it was horrible cooking right? It was like I just went to the Goya aisle and God, a can of Goya beans, a can of adobo, sofrito powder... And I would just throw them in and cook it, which is not at all how my mom's food tastes but that's how I started. (Yarma Interview, Pos. 160-170).

For Yarma, she had only ever known Puerto Rican food. Moving to a place where that was not available and where all the food offerings were new and strange motivated her to begin learning.

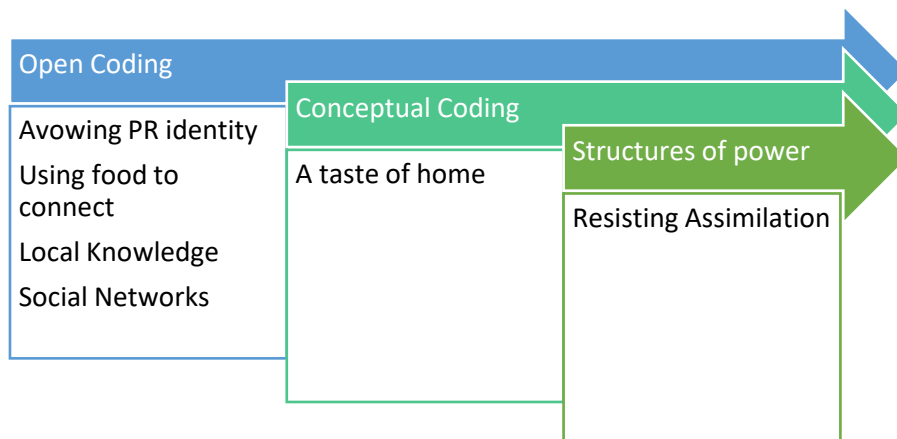


Figure 11: Coding taxonomy of A Taste of Home

Carla also began learning the basics only after moving to the U.S. She was the youngest of the 8 women I interviewed and had come to the U.S. in the last ten years. The first recipe she

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<sup>77</sup> Codebook entry for A Taste of Home found in Appendix C page 177

asked her mother to teach her was her favorite chuletas. But while she has perfected tostones, her repertoire is still limited and she says her rice still needs some work. In contrast Melisa has had a big role in cooking for the family since she was 8 years old. After moving to New York with her family, there was a significant shift in childcare and employment, so they hired a babysitter. But while the new caretakers were Latina, they were not Puerto Rican, and her siblings were unaccustomed to the food, so she began to learn to cook for them to get a sense of home.

In contrast to the exotic flavors often presented by professional chefs, these women who had all been born in Puerto Rico understood our food simply as everyday necessity even when other food was easier to access. Even decades after coming to the U.S., Puerto Rican food still makes up Yarma's main diet and now that palate is passed on to her children.

Food becomes a way of connecting and remembering Puerto Rican identity, but this identity is not homogenous. Several women expressed an interest in the history of our foods and its connections to African or Taíno lineages. This was a notable shift from the homogenizing narratives of the cookbooks which erased ethnic distinctions in favor of melting pot discourses. But especially for the second and third generations of the Puerto Rican diaspora, knowledge of the island's history and politics may suffer. Despite this lack of knowledge, they still maintain pride in their heritage. For Carla, this was baffling to her at first.

When I was growing up in Puerto Rico. I never felt that I wanted to be very Puerto Rican, you know. I wanted to go to the US... and then once I lived here... it's like I finally understood why Nuyoricans are so proud. While I feel like people in the island are like "you guys need to calm down." [laughter] And they're so excited. There's a parade here. They got the flags out. They're like "We have the music!" (Carla Interview, Pos. 27-35)

Due to a lack of immersion and formal education, second and third generation Puerto Ricans must make greater efforts to learn about the multi-ethnic culture and history if they wish to be connected with their identity. One of the resources Estrella uses to learn about el recetario as a second-generation Puerto Rican is chef Roberto Pérez based in her hometown of Chicago. His

educational initiative, *Urban Pilon*, seeks to preserve Afro-Caribbean culinary traditions (Urban Pilon: About).

[Roberto serves not only as chef, but as storyteller, sharing the stories of our ancestors through his cooking, classes, and demonstrations. His popular Caribbean cooking courses showcase these stories by teaching both classic and original recipes along with the history behind them.]

As a friend and mentor, Estrella has really appreciated learning a lot of the historical and cultural histories of Puerto Rican food from Pérez. “He knows all these things because you know he obviously he studies and that's why he went to school for, you know? I learned in my mom's kitchen. In my abuela's kitchen.” (Estrella Interview, Pos. 419-421). She noted that her grandmother had passed before she could learn some of that history directly and added “There's a lot of people out here who...are ‘We're Puerto Rican’, we have our flags hanging on their cars... but if you ask them a question about the history of something from the island, they couldn't tell you anything.” (Estrella Interview, Pos. 438).

Estrella's story demonstrates a disconnect in the passing down of knowledge and also that a knowledge of how to cook does not necessarily come with all of the history of the culture. But those who grew up on the island often have more (latent) intimate knowledge of the cuisine, its connections to particular ethnic heritages, and regional variations. Yarma had been describing domplines, also called arepas, to me. Because I was unfamiliar with it, I asked her if it was a regional dish and she suggested:

I think that the coast, especially in the East and in the South. They make a lot of arepas. Must be an African thing, I guess, because of the demographics that live there. Like my White part of the family does not eat arepas or domplines it's more the Black part of the family that eats it. (Yarma Interview, Pos. 314).

While she seems to not have had many thoughts about the origins of domplines she quickly pieces together the pattern she had noticed over the years in connection to African influence in the cuisine. After hearing about this dish, I revisited the cookbooks to see if the recipe was

included in any of them but it was nowhere in the 5 books. It was an omission I could not have predicted since I was not familiar with the dish. Many of the foods included in the books have African origins or influence, like our arroz mampostado which is similar to West African jollof rice (Janer, 2007). However, this may mean that another colonial residue within these books are the choices for selecting or omitting dishes from the canon based on a racialization of food.

Even though Estrella learned in her mother's kitchen, in her grandmother's kitchen, there might not be enough of a conscious understanding of the cultural knowledge they possess to pass down to the next generation. She seems to hold this academic knowledge in higher regard than the teachings of her mother and grandmother. However, part of the knowledge of el recetario then is latent knowledge. Subconscious. For instance, despite her insistence on cooking primarily Puerto Rican dishes, Yarma expressed she does not feel that Puerto Rican cuisine is special or particular. Possibly because for her it is such a mundane part of everyday life. However, she felt differently when it came to pasteles which she believed were very distinct from other Latin American cuisines.

A person that tastes a pastel for the first time, it's not love at first sight. It's like a love that grows on you. I think that it's the taste of the green banana masa, that is very strong, but different. And then not only the taste, but the texture. That combination of the two, people are not very used to that particular combination. And you know, it's so distinct from Mexican cuisine, because like tamales are hard versus like pasteles can be slippery like in... a gooey kind of way. (Yarma Interview, Pos. 77-87).

This distinct combination of flavors and textures are a key example of the ethnic heritages of Puerto Rican cuisine. Yolanda proposed that pasteles are the *most* iconic Puerto Rican dish due to this mixture of ingredients from each African, Taíno, and European origin.

El pastel tradicional que es de masa de guineo y calabaza y yautía pues es... que tenía como los tres tradiciones [sic] étnica de Puerto Rico. Y además el cerdo porque en puerto rico se come muchísimo cerdo. [The traditional pastel, that is dough from green bananas and pumpkin and yautia, well it just has the three ethnic traditions from Puerto

Rico. And besides that, the pork because in Puerto Rico we eat so much pork.] (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 17).

The yautía and West Indian pumpkin that she is referring to are Native ingredients that were part of the Taíno diet, while all varieties of banana were originally from Asia but had become a common staple in Africa which made convenient rations for enslaved Africans throughout the Caribbean and the pork was introduced from Spain (Ortíz Cuadra, 2006). When asked where you would get them, Melisa responded while fighting a bout of laughter.

¡En una casa! ¡No puedes comprar eso! Hay gente que lo venden y lo venden carísimo. ¿Sabe? Como a treinta dólares a la docena y más. Hay gente que pagan más porque es tan importante. Entonce' pues, es especial en la época navideña. Como el olor de pastel y la hoja de plátano como que nos dice "navidad". Pero yo no los hago. Pero casi siempre hay una tía o una prima. Este, inventamos y hacemos y así es como- hay que ir a una casa... Yo nunca he ido a un restaurante a comer un pastel... ¡Porque no está en el menú! [laughter] No, no, yo creo que ej' muy elaborado. Eso es una comida de amor. [In a house! You can't buy that! There are people who sell it and sell it at a high price. You know? Like \$30 a dozen or more. There are those who will pay even more because it is so important. And well, it's special around Christmas time. Like the smell of the pastel and the plantain leaf announces to us that it's Christmas. I don't make them. But there's almost always an aunt or a cousin. And well, we improvise and make it and that's how it is- you have to go to a house. I've never gone to a restaurant to eat pastel... Because it's not on the menu! No, no, no, I think it's too elaborate. It's a food of love]. (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 19-23).

Because this dish is so elaborate it often takes several people to make. While I was growing up, I had no idea that my mother knew how to make pasteles. We often relied on doña Carmen from our church and would buy some from her. But my mother shared with me that when she was a girl, still unmarried and living at home, her family would form a kind of assembly line. Her abuela María would round up daughters and granddaughters and gave each a task. Peeling,

chopping, stirring, stuffing. All the women in the family were involved and then each would take a batch home with them for their families that demonstrated a kind of interdependence with abuela María at the helm. Whether you make your own pasteles or buy them from the local pastelera, what is clear here is that pasteles are not merely food production but as Finol & Pérez (2016) argue, these culinary rituals that include many members of the family are a way of “teaching, practicing, and reinforcing of family and social values.” (pg. 273).

Having this food at the Christmas table, especially for the diaspora, becomes a way of performing Puerto Rican Identity. However, to access this food one must have the necessary *local knowledge and social networks*<sup>78</sup>. This category represents the importance of relationships with a larger community for acquiring food supplies and engaging with Puerto Rican identity. Despite how important pasteles are for Puerto Ricans, the intense labor required to make them means that they are not typically found in restaurants. The home cooks who sell them from their kitchens can charge high prices for them. Particularly when the smell of pasteles in the banana leaf has become such an important sensory experience for puertorriqueñas around Christmas time. Because these word-of-mouth entrepreneurs are typically serving up pasteles from their kitchens, finding the local pastelera requires you to be plugged in to the local knowledge of the town. Carla’s mother, for example, found her favorite pastelera in her hometown of Hatillo by talking to the women who work at the local bakeries and corner stores. Always a friend, or a friend of a friend. Similarly, María recalled some of the relational and social network differences she experienced between Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, and the U.S.:

In Puerto Rico when you go see my grandma it was different because they still had in their neighborhood, like a guy that would drive by every Saturday "¡Platano! ¡Cuatro por un dolar! ¡Gandul!" And you can run out and you know he would he would make sure to

stop by your house because he knew that you were running low and make sure that you had it. (Ana Interview, Pos. 274-276).

Carla and Ana's examples demonstrate how Puerto Rican identity is not something you can simply avow. Rather it must be performed with relational others in order to invoke those cultural values. This makes performing identity in isolation difficult if not impossible because this aspect of Puerto Rican identity is deeply relational.

The local knowledge which grants access to el recetario shifts drastically in the U.S. context however, where the social dynamics are different. Carla noted that it was far more difficult for her to get access to the local knowledge in NYC.

I had somebody served me proper pan de agua at the restaurant I have nearby, and I was like, where did y'all get the bread? And the waitress didn't know and I was like "Who do I ask? Where did you all get this bread?" ... New York is a little more standoffish. You know, in Puerto Rico we are generally pretty friendly, and they're very happy to welcome you, and you know. Take this, take that you know? They're very happy to like serve you. While here is a little bit more difficult. (Carla Interview, Pos. 659-669).

A difficulty for Puerto Ricans in the diaspora then is that the culture of the host country bucks up against Puerto Rican social norms and networks. Therefore, even practicing or connecting with one's Puerto Rican identity has limitations in this context. One aspect of these norms which relate to Puerto Rican identity are the gender dynamics of la cocina. These norms demarcate who is likely to become a culinary cultural steward and who is likely to use the preparation of food as a part of avowing Puerto Rican identity. Carla finds that when you learn to cook our foods you are taking part in a cultural practice, in a performance of identity, one that the men in the family often do not participate in to the same extent. She recalled a cousin who had distanced himself from the family and culture.

There's a cousin in our family ...who is ...half Puerto Rican and he never learned Spanish. Mom never taught him, even though she's Puerto Rican. And so, he would come to these big gatherings and while he maybe understood the cultural thing of us

doing this and the food. He never understood us fully because at some point we're all just speaking Spanish... He moved to a different state and just kind of left... my family was acting like it was a big surprise. I understand, because I feel like he was never involved in the culture. And I feel like food and all of this, it is beautiful to share it ... but to have only the woman...cook all this? I feel like it takes away from sons who can also be very good cooks. (Carla Interview, Pos. 367-383).

Thus, part of identity performance are the social practices which emerge from the culture. While Yarma, Yolanda, and Melisa shared that some of the men in their families were deeply engaged with el recetario, some gender roles keep many men from learning to cook. Yolanda reflected on being sent to her father's house when she was younger.

We were like one day, "Mom don't send us anymore because he doesn't know how to cook. He's horrible!" ... I mean to this day, bless his heart, he just can't. He eats whatever he cooks... he's like, "No, yo cocino allí cualquier cosa." [No I'll cook whatever] But he's never got interest, you know, to learn because he didn't have to... La cocina es de la mujer en [the kitchen belongs to women in] Puerto Rico. (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 616-640).

If the connection between culture and food is as important as the women in this study have described, then not knowing how to create our cultural dishes and pass that knowledge on to the next generation leads to a disengagement in part of our cultural practice. This gendered division of labor stems from the patriarchal standards of the colonial matrix of power. Potentially, this division of labor which earmarks women for the domestic realm of the kitchen is part of why our social and cultural processes involving food have not been studied. Even though they are considered so important to everyday experience, we do not have scholarship which explores why it is important or how this practice is maintained. That is, women's domestic labor is not seen as knowledge or cultural production. In this sense cooking in scholarship has been treated very much as Valldejuli (1954) describes it, a menial chore.

Consuming el recetario alone is not enough to fully engage in the knowledge, culture, and history of Puerto Rico or any other culture. It is not enough to avow Puerto Rican identity. Rather, by treating it as *just* food, it is separated from the oral traditions and ancestral knowledge which created it. Over time, second and third generation migrants from Puerto Rico may lose the sociocultural significance behind those pasteles, that arroz con pollo, the mofongo. Partaking in the embodied practices and storytelling is what produces the palate memory and reconnects us to generations of knowledge. Otherwise, we are merely reducing our culinary heritage to a commodity.

### **Sofrito, Sazón, y Amor in Every Dish**

“If you don't have a good sofrito your food is shit.” (María Interview, Pos. 643)

In the more social and cultural levels of el recetario we find relationships and customs which are difficult to fully separate. Many of the culinary and social practices here relate to palate memory. A combination of sensory information and nostalgia. When asked about the essence of Puerto Rican cuisine some participants responded with material characteristics such as sazón, flavor, or sofrito. Others leaned into the less tangible aspects of cooking which were emotionally driven and centered their relationships with family and friends. For these women, to cook Puerto Rican food well, one must have patience and love for those you plan to feed. A labor of love.

*Sofrito*<sup>79</sup> is the base of most savory dishes in Puerto Rico but here I refer to a broader commitment to the culinary traditions and ingredients of el recetario and how participants define the authentic flavors of our cuisine. It also refers to the great lengths that Puerto Ricans will go to recreate these flavors despite the limitations the diaspora faces in some regions in the U.S. Therefore, the subcategories of this theme include *recreating authentic flavors*, *diasporic limitations*, and *rejecting commercialization*.

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<sup>79</sup> Codebook entry for Sofrito is found in Appendix C page 175

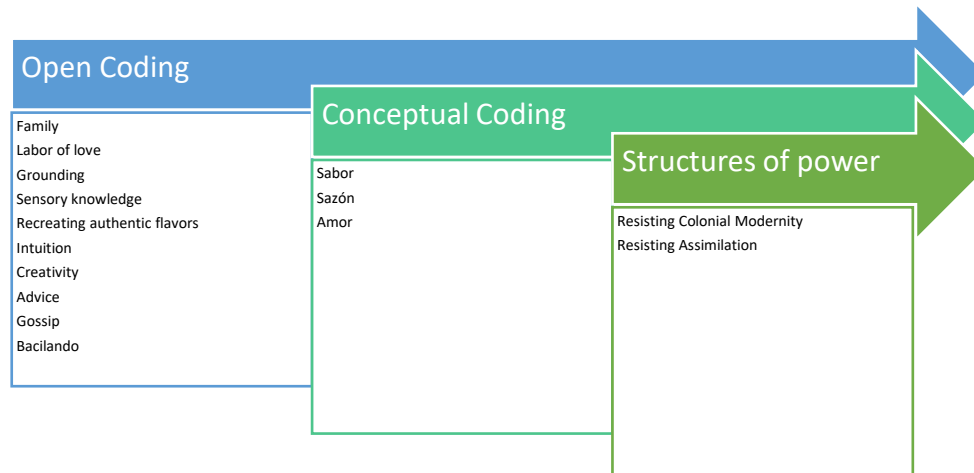


Figure 12: Coding taxonomy of Sabor Sazón and Amor

I begin this section with a discussion of how Puerto Ricans in the diaspora describe and recreate the authentic flavors of our cuisine and the diasporic limitations to doing so. Without sofrito you cannot cook Puerto Rican arroz amarillo, carne guisada, fricase de pollo, habichuelas or any of our most iconic dishes. But make a batch of sofrito and you can make anything! It refers to both an ingredient and the technique of *sofriendo* or sautéing. Though the recipe varies from family to family it typically includes cilantro, culantro, onions, garlic, and aji peppers. Some families also season it with salt and oil or prepare it with ham or tomatoes. When married together in a sizzling pan these simple ingredients impart the signature flavor profile of Puerto Rican cuisine.

This base is so important that most of the women had many stories to tell about trying to find the appropriate ingredients in the United States. While onions, cilantro, and garlic might be widely available in most grocery stores of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, our last two ingredients can be quite elusive and only available in certain regions. Culantro, also called recaó or cilantro de hoja ancha, has a similar flavor to cilantro but much stronger and smokier. Aji are a native Caribbean pepper which are small but very flavorful. These two ingredients may appear easily substituted but the difference in flavor is remarkable. Melisa Valentín notes:

When I go back home, my mom, her oldest sister, ¡Te voy a tener la comida rica, lista con recaol! [I'm going to have tasty food here for you, ready with recaol!] Because that does make a huge difference you know? You don't think it makes like it impacts the recipe or the flavor, but it does. And you can, it's, it's obvious once you haven't had it in a long time. And then you have it it's like I had forgotten what a difference it does make.” (Melisa Interview, Pos. 550-552).

Although these ingredients are essential for a full flavored sofrito, ingredients can be extremely difficult to find depending on the region. When Estrella temporarily moved from Chicago to Atlanta, she recalled how different the availability of ingredients were, “I saw what I thought was aji peppers and it wasn't aji peppers, and I made the sofrito and it came out spicy and I was like, ‘What the heck is going on?!’ And no this is no. I was so mad cause I had to throw it away. Nobody's gonna eat it.” (Estrella Interview, Pos. 548-552). As a result, most of the women substitute the culantro and aji with extra cilantro and bell peppers or Anaheim peppers. But for Yarma, there is simply no substitute, “I cannot make my own sofrito because there's no way I can find recaol in LA, so I have to bring my sofrito from Puerto Rico.” (Yarma Interview, Pos. 335-339). Yarma has even attempted to grow recaol herself, but the lack of humidity resulted in a failed harvest. Melisa's 12-year-old daughter hopes to have an indoor garden in their home in Salt Lake City so that they can plant recaol and ajies. Ana also goes out of her way to get the authentic flavors of sofrito when she can. When she does get the opportunity to visit Puerto Rico, she and her mother make a big batch, freeze it, and pack it in a checked bag so that she can “have those keystones that keep us connected to what it should really taste like and what it should really feel like when you're cooking it.” (Ana Interview, Pos. 725-727).

As you can see, sofrito is such an important ingredient that Puertorriqueñas will go through great lengths to get the required ingredients for an authentic flavor. Each family has their own sofrito recipe, often passed down from abuelas and mothers. The recipe is so special that some even keep it a secret. María explains “I also love to make my own sofrito, and my mom taught me how to make it, so I make hers. And I've shared it with like other friends who are like

'what do you use?' and I'll say, 'I can't tell you my recipe, but I'll make it for you.'" (María Interview, Pos. 171).

When no fresh ingredients or appropriate substitutes can be found some women resort to using commercial offerings, often by the Goya brand which has become widely available. Though there is often a rejection of these commercial products there may not be any other alternative.

Ana explains how different the resulting flavor is:

A homemade, un sofrito casero? There is nothing like it. You can suffer through the frozen versions and the versions that Goya tries to provide if you're in a hard spot, you know? I used them for years when I first moved here to Vegas where they didn't have anything, *anything* Caribbean. It was all Mexican. They did have some basics, like the garlic and onion, but they didn't have the same recazo that we use de hoja larga. With that flavor and smell. They didn't have lo' ajies that we use that are sweet ajies. (Ana Interview, Pos. 416-420).

Because *sofriendo* is a *sautéing* of these fresh ingredients, commercial offerings simply do not have the same impact of flavor. Onions and garlic lose their bite. Cilantro and culantro wither and oxidize. *Ají* mellows. Both freezing and canning the ingredients corrupt the texture, aroma, and flavor. So instead of a fresh vibrant profile, the resulting dish is muddy and dull. Ana, Melisa, Yarma, María, Estrella and Yolanda all expressed vehemently that *sofrito* is not something to buy at the store. It is a base you must make at home for the authentic experience of Puerto Rican food. Having tasted many frozen and jarred commercial offerings over the years which did not contain even a fraction of the flavor, I definitely agree. In fact, I can still smell the garlic on my hands right now from making a batch of *sofrito* yesterday.

While *sofrito* is the base to many Puerto Rican dishes, other ingredients can be equally difficult to find. In addition to tropical fruits that are rarely found in the U.S., Puerto Rican cuisine also includes many root vegetables, green bananas, and plantains. Puerto Rican avocados, for example, are markedly different from the Hass avocado that has become widely available in the U.S. It is larger, firmer in texture, sweeter in flavor, and still green when ripe. Ana has resorted to

getting the small already processed avocado cups since she is unable to tell when a Hass avocado is ripe, lacking the sensory knowledge needed to select the perfect avocado. But for dishes like gazpacho, which needs larger chunks of avocado, this would never work. Though plantains are getting easier to find, they are often too ripe for many of our dishes. Finding green plantains is far more difficult. For a mofongo, you must have very green plantains. For alcapurrias or pasteles you would also need very green cooking bananas. Yarma explains, though she really loves mofongo, she cannot make the dish on a whim:

Well, first of all, I have to go on a huge hunt for green plantains, which is practically impossible here in LA. So, I cannot, even if I love you very much, I cannot commit to mofongo until after. In fact, there is a food truck here that sells mofongo, and sometimes their mofongo tastes sweet because they can't find enough green plantains. (Yarma Interview, Pos. 321).

Melisa noted that in Salt Lake City, as is the case in many areas with smaller Puerto Rican populations, even the most basic commercial Puerto Rican staples were not available ten years ago. But with the brand *Goya Foods* expanding its reach, products like frozen pasteles, passion fruit pulp, malta, adobo, and sazón have become widely available in supermarkets all over the U.S. (Ana interview; Carla Interview; Melisa interview; Yarma interview; Yolanda interview). And while it has granted access to essential Latino staples in smaller diasporic communities it has not been without complications. The commercialization of our staples has clearly been a profitable market for brands like *Goya Foods*.

In July of 2020, Goya CEO, Robert Unanue, faced fierce criticism after praising former U.S. president Donald Trump (Brewster, 2020). Unanue's remarks led to an international boycott of Goya products. Lin-Manuel Miranda, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, and Julián Castro all joined in publicly supporting the boycott. Much of the discontent was due to Donald Trump's racist remarks and policies against Latinos throughout his campaign and presidency. But for some Puerto Rican women, boycotting would mean giving up Puerto Rican cuisine all together since alternative brands are not available in many places. Yarma explains:

There are things that it's very very hard to find here in LA. Even in LA, that you think there's so many people, it's very hard to find some of the ingredients. So that was a huge thing when the whole boycott of Goya thing because I work in an ethnic studies department. There's a lot of pressure to boycott Goya and I'm like I can't do that. That means I can never eat gandules again because there's no other brand that has gandules in this area. Let's say this is an impossible request? (Yarma Interview, Pos. 341-347).

Without alternative brands available, boycotting Goya would mean giving up some of those foods. The brand has also been a household name for generations of Puerto Ricans to the point that each of the 8 women who participated in the interviews brought up Goya unprompted. For many, the taste of Goya products is ingrained in their palate memory, it *is* what our food tastes like. Kristina recounted trying other brands before breaking into laughter over the attempt.

I have tried you know the Rancho Gordo beans is like what everybody's talking about. These like heirloom beans, they're like, "Oh my god!", ... my aunt was making fun of me. She's like "I cannot believe what you spent on beans!", I was like, "I had to know if these are really the best beans." I gotta say, the Goya ones in the can taste just as good to me. (Kristina Interview, Pos. 329-331).

Especially when it comes to sazón and adobo, the spices and seasoning of Puerto Rican food, Goya has been an enormous part of how the diaspora keep their recipes alive. Both Kristina and Melisa shared with me that their parents would send them care packages of adobo and sazón Goya. Although Kristina was born in the Vineland, NJ, it is an area with an enormous Puerto Rican population. Moving to Denver, Colorado for school she found the stores had many Mexican products available but no Caribbean goods. For Melisa, who had moved to Salt Lake City for work after graduate school, the situation was even more dire. Estrella relies heavily on their vegetarian bullion varieties, which add the depth of flavor that tocino<sup>80</sup> usually offers so that she can still serve her catering clients who do not eat pork. But as Goya dominated the markets

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<sup>80</sup> Uncured pork belly

their product selection has expanded to what some think is an absurd amount. Ana remarks that adobo is also a crucial seasoning, however the commercialization of adobo with brands like Goya have meant less control of the flavor:

My grandma's adobo like she would get like el sal de ajo [garlic salt], el polvo de, this and that un poquito and she would make her own. It wasn't like the commercialized adobo by Goya. And that was just like the powdered version of to, you know, for that quick seasoning. Because if she didn't have all those powders, which I'm assuming when she was first starting out that they were in more of their natural state before they became commercialized right. She would want to mix her own so she would know what was in it and be able to control all of the stuff that was in it. (Ana Interview, Pos. 428-432).

Perhaps to make up for this lack of customization, Goya continues offering more and more varieties. Adobo con asafran<sup>81</sup>, con pimiento<sup>82</sup>, con naranja agria<sup>83</sup>, con limon<sup>84</sup>, con achiote<sup>85</sup>, con pique<sup>86</sup>, sin sal<sup>87</sup> (Goya Foods: Adobo, n.d.). And they make a killing with the brand now worth \$3 billion dollars (Atkinson, 2020). Despite reservations some Puertorriqueñas have about using Goya, the combination of the free publicity as a result of the boycott and a pandemic where many were stocking on canned goods led to a rise in sales according to NBC's Atkinson.

While adobo or sazón is important to the flavor of the dish, there is more to it than tangible ingredients. My participants often associated being a good cook with an intuitive sense for flavor rather than the ability to follow strict recipes and measurements. In this sense they depart very deliberately from the cookbooks' rationality. This conceptualization of sazón<sup>88</sup> refers

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<sup>81</sup> Saffron

<sup>82</sup> Black pepper

<sup>83</sup> Bitter Orange

<sup>84</sup> Lime

<sup>85</sup> Annatto seed

<sup>86</sup> Hot pepper

<sup>87</sup> Without salt

<sup>88</sup> Codebook entry for Sazón is found in Appendix C page 176

to *sensory knowledge and creativity* as an essential characteristic of the cultural practice of cooking but also the way this sense is *guided by ancestors*. It is more important to taste the food as you go along and adjust as needed to suit the palates of those they are cooking for. It was when this sensory knowledge had developed that one really became a proper expert. “My sister, Carla, is the best cook... Carla will just put- I mean she's so much like my mom, you know? She doesn't measure anything. She will put everything there and bam a dinner for eight people.” (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 772-777).

Many associated the intuitive sense of *el sazón* with the inherited knowledge of the family, whether or not the knowledge was conscious or subconscious. This is a reclamation of the intergenerational sensory knowledge. “I'm channeling my ancestors!” (María Interview, Pos. 199-203). Or “Here, watch me until the ancestors tell you to stop.” (Estrella Interview, Pos. 474-477). A difficulty sometimes arises however, if they were not taught a specific recipe because in addition to not measuring ingredients many participants noted that their family had not written down their recipes. Recreating these dishes requires the cook to tune in to that sensory knowledge and palate memory. Yolanda described one such instance. Her mother had passed away without recording any of her recipes. But Yolanda desperately wanted to recreate one of her favorite dishes, *arroz con pollo*. Because her love of cooking had developed later in life, she had never prepared it before:

I was so scared and I'm like “okay, I need a recipe”, and [her boyfriend] he's like “No, follow your heart. Follow your mother's spirit.” You know? Something like that. And, and I did, and it- quedo tan bueno! [it turned out so good!] Because, you know, you go back to, back watching your mother doing it. And she was always like “Un poquito de vino. Un poquito de cerveza.” Something there, you know, no measurements *at all*. But it got to the point where I could remember you know the taste and like ‘It's close enough!’

(Yolanda Interview, Pos. 66-74).

Relying on intuition rather than a written recipe does not occur by coincidence but rather is part of a cultural practice that privileges the body and challenges the rationality and

scriptocentricity of the cookbooks. Kristina described the resistance her tía demonstrated to writing down recipes “I’ve asked her to write down recipes and she’s like, ‘No girl’ and she just won’t do it. ‘Here we’re going to do it by ... seeing and by doing.’” (Kristina Interview, Pos. 202). Melisa remarked “I never, it never occurred to me to write anything down is just you kind of memorize what they’re showing. And then you do it so many times, it’s impossible to forget.” (Melisa Interview, Pos. 455). But for Estrella, who is trying to open a restaurant, she has needed to figure out ways to measure ingredients and record recipes so that she can have a consistent product. She explained her comical process, “it’s a weird process for me...Um, I put like a plate. And then I’ll put [adobo] on the plate as if I’m putting it into the pot. And then I’ll take that plate and put it into a measuring cup.” (Estrella Interview, Pos. 483-493).

While these recipes are often left unwritten, many of them *are* taught firsthand how to prepare them from parents and aunties. Both of Melisa’s parents taught her how to cook and María was taught by her mother. But because her mom’s role within the intergenerational family was to be a working professional, Kristina learned how to cook from her aunt. Each learned by watching or by doing. “On Saturdays when my mom was at home or in the evenings, you know she would come ‘Come and watch what I’m doing.’ And, and that was really important for me to watch.” (Melisa Interview, Pos. 72-74).

Learning from family instead of a book adds an essential social component to taking part in el recetario. This is a crucial departure from the individualistic approach of colonial modernity and toward a more Indigenous, intergenerational, and communal orientation to knowledge transmission. As part of this, time in the kitchen as a family is not only about food production but rather it can play an important part in developing relationships. Other social processes of the kitchen included things like playing, collaborating, bochincheando<sup>89</sup>and seeking counsel. Melisa and Yolanda both explained how the gandules harvest was a multiple step process that required all hands on deck. But that does not mean that it was all business. “Sentadas en el balcón,

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<sup>89</sup> Gossiping

bochincheando con las vecinas [laughter] desgranando gandules. [All sitting on the porch, gossiping with the neighbors. Unhulling the gandules.] Throwing the worms away.” (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 417). Melisa also fondly recalls this time with her family:

When it was time to pick the fruit or pick the gandules or the beans and we would all go together and then usually we sat together at the kitchen table and did all the cleaning ...My aunt lived right across the street from us and when she was going to do the same thing we all kind of gathered at her table. And when we needed help, sometimes they came over and they helped us. And so it kind of- we shared the responsibility... I have two older brothers and I don't think they enjoyed the work very much... you're complaining, you're dragging your feet, have a bad attitude, but... 10 minutes into it everybody's laughing... And of course, there was always one of us that was using them... to throw at each other or just to play around. (Melisa Interview, Pos. 397-423).

Melisa's story reflects the deep interconnectedness that the family members had with each other and how that was part of the food process. Would Melisa think of this as a fond memory without the *bacilando*<sup>90</sup> and music playing in the background? Would gandules taste different without a touch of gossip? These aspects of *el recetario* are not directly related to the practical task of food preparation but these relational acts are a crucial part of the cultural and social practice (Finol & Pérez, 2016). Which brings us to the theme of *amor*.

*Amor*<sup>91</sup> represents the relational bonds that are strengthened through the embodied and relational practices of *el recetario* and are the final essential component to Puerto Rican food which I identified through coding these interviews. Relational bonds are strengthened and maintained through a variety of bonding activities like *collaborating* to make a meal together, *bacilando*, and exchanging *gossip* or *advice*. There are also other exchanges, like *inheriting knowledge* and *tools* which become part of the strengthening of these relationships.

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<sup>90</sup> Joking around, playing around, or horsing around

<sup>91</sup> Codebook Entry for *Amor* is found in Appendix C on page 172

Among these relationships is love of the self and of others. Estrella, Melisa, Ana, and María each described the intuitive process of cooking Puerto Rican food as a deep connection to the body or a kind of *grounding*<sup>92</sup> process. María described grounding in terms of it as a spiritual experience, “This is like a religious experience for me. Like whenever I feel like I'm getting stressed, detached, or overwhelmed. I try to go back to my roots and to ground myself.” (María Interview, Pos. 200-202). Similarly, Ana and Estrella described the kitchen as a sacred space. For some women, cooking is time to be alone and work out the stresses of day as a way to come back to themselves. Estrella also explained having a cultural practice that she understood and could control was a way of defusing anxiety. Each woman had her own personal relationship with food and the role cooking had for themselves as individuals.

However, Yolanda contends that it is the act of cooking for people you care about that makes the food taste better. “The people that like to cook Puerto Rican food, they make it with a lot of care. They make it with a lot of sense of responsibility and passion.” (Yolanda Interview, Pos. 49-59). Part of her reasoning was that before she had anyone to cook for, she did not really enjoy cooking, but it was a necessary chore. Now that she is more committed to the process and reviving her mother’s recipes her sense of taste has improved. Carla typically only cooks for herself and occasionally friends, but she suggested that especially because cooking is often a woman’s role that there was an element of caretaking involved which turned the cooking process into something entirely different than cooking for oneself alone. Melisa noted similar sentiments:

Cooking really comes from the heart. Like it really does reflect, something that you do for the people that you love, and it is a very very conscientious process. If you're not connected to what you're doing in the kitchen, you're gonna mess it up. (Melisa Interview, Pos. 86-92).

Yarma observed the differences between her mother and her grandmother’s approach to cooking and how it affected the family’s relationship with food. Although her mother cooked daily

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<sup>92</sup> Codebook Entry for Grounding is found in Appendix C on page 172

and knew the technical aspects of how to create the dishes, she has never enjoyed it. But Yarma's grandmother had a great love of cooking and used it to convey affection to her older siblings. It was something that Yarma herself could not experience because her grandmother passed away before she was born.

You can see in my household, we have very different relationships with food, because my brother and my sister got to meet my grandmother got to be fed by my grandmother, and were taught how to eat with my grandmother right and cook and eat and all of this.

There's like this perception of the children have to be fat... You have to overeat and love is shown through food. Kind of thing with my siblings. But because I am so much younger, I only got my mother's version of food which is "I hate food." "I hate eating." "I hate cooking" "rice and egg and we're done" right? (Yarma Interview, Pos. 192-202).

Perhaps this is why even though Yarma felt her mother's cooking was average, everyone in the family said that she was a bad cook. It was not just the quality of the final product, but the emotional and relational experience of cooking that made other perceive it as "bad". As a result of only experiencing her mother's understanding of food and cooking, Yarma also cooks with an emphasis on efficiency. Cooking alone at her own pace. But her vast collection of handwritten recipes which she has collected since grade school seem to contradict this self-proclaimed apathy towards food. Some had been sent from her aunt when she first moved to the U.S. Others were newspaper clippings. And still others she had asked neighbors and her friend's parents to share with her. And here 20-30 years later she kept them all there in her kitchen within reach.

In addition to showing love and affection, cooking also opens up opportunities to have a variety of conversations that might not be possible in other settings. According to Melisa:

It feels like you drop your guard, in a sense. You're so focused on just the interaction and what you're doing that, it's almost like there's no need to pretend or no need to hold back you just it, there is a comfort level to just talk about whatever is going on that. I mean probably you wouldn't, you wouldn't be doing it if you're watching the news together or something like that... Like sometimes my mom is cooking... and then somebody else is

pulled into the kitchen and just lean on the counter and starts helping but then we're having an important profound conversation. (Melisa Interview, Pos. 671-677).

When I asked Melisa what kinds of conversations might occur in this setting she mentioned talking through problems at work or her daughter figuring out a conflict with a friend. Kristina also believed that the table was for laughter and stories. But when it came to more serious conversations, it happened in the kitchen while family members cooked together. The task at hand simultaneously holding the participants hostage and diffusing the tensions:

Any Puerto Rican table that I've been a part of, there's a lot of laughing... so it's just a very, kind of, most of the time it's very lighthearted... we joke a lot. We tease a lot... If there's conversations that are more serious, they're not happening at the table with everybody. They're happening in the kitchen, in whispers, in the corner with my tía. Or they're happening when everybody else has gone home for the night. (Kristina Interview, Pos. 445-455)

When I asked her about these distinctions in topics of conversation Kristina offered the example of when her tía asked her about future plans and children. She suggested that it was a conversation she might have brushed off over the phone but in the kitchen, she was held captive by the food and tasks they were completing together. And while it may appear an idle pastime, gossip can be an important communication function for the family. Particularly for those who do much of the domestic work in the home. Carla explains:

We love the chisme [gossip] ... my aunt knows everything going on with everyone in the family. Because she'll be calling me on Facetime, and I see her like cleaning. You know? Doing the dishes... but she's talking to me. So, I'm finding out and she's telling me everything that's going on. And I'm like "I wonder whether my uncle knows a lot of this stuff." You know what I mean? (Carla Interview, Pos. 420-424).

The majority of research on the roles of gossip come from a psychology perspective and suggests that chisme and rumors serve as a form of community bonding (Guerin & Miyazaki, 2003). Other scholars contend that this can also be a way to socialize and enforce norms

(Pietrosemoli, 2009). Pietrosemoli further explains that it also serves as an exchange of information and relational maintenance. Gossip often gets a bad reputation as being idle and immoral but in this context those who gossip are in the know about who is sick, who is pregnant, who is getting married, who is moving to the mainland, who is moving back. Crucial information for the family system.

The social connection that occurs during cooking is so important that some of the women try to replicate it from far away. María explained that she will often call her mom for recipes that she already knows, just for the opportunity to talk to her. While her mother sometimes complains about María's forgetfulness, María recognizes that food is one of the main ways in which they connect. Kristina also will call her aunt and cousin while cooking either to ask questions about a recipe or simply to spend time together. She shared that she had recently called up her cousin late at night due to the time zone difference. Despite coming off a long shift, her cousin took the call:

She then spent the next 40 minutes on the phone with me just catching up while I cooked. I had my earbuds in... and so it's almost like she was here with me right because I'm cooking in the kitchen and she's talking to me. And I'll do that a lot with both my tía and my cousin, that while I'm cooking, I'm on the phone with them. So, it's a way of being still connected. (Kristina Interview, Pos. 521-525).

The practice of simulating being together while cooking could also be considered part of palate memory. Bringing to together a sensory awareness of that person's presence and the smells of the kitchen with nostalgia. Bridging the gaps between diasporic community members.

Another part of this social and intergenerational connection comes from the material culture of el recetario. Some of the most important tools of the Puerto Rican kitchen are passed down between generations, especially pilones<sup>93</sup>and calderos<sup>94</sup>. Calderos are so vital to cooking

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<sup>93</sup> A wooden mortar

<sup>94</sup> A shallow cast aluminum or cast iron pot

that Omi even made a song about her own, sung to the tune of Ferlin Husky's *I Love My Baby* (Hopper, 2020h). "I love my caldero, my caldero and me. It was passed down to me through my family tree. People think I'm crazy and that it's not clean. But I love my caldero, my caldero and me!" She jokes often that they are older than she is. María insists "Like, I don't care what people say. These like regular shmegular pots are not it. You need the metal one, like the one that you get from like your grandma." (María Interview, Pos. 696). She pilfered hers from her mother before moving to the U.S. for school and has been dragging it around the country ever since. Estrella inherited a small one from her mother but supplemented her collection with ones she purchased herself so that she could accommodate the enormous meals required in her catering business. Despite having more expensive copper-bottomed pots, Kristina says nothing can replicate the flavors and textures from a traditional hand-me-down caldero. "My aunt has my grandmother's that are probably 50 years old and they're seasoned and they've got like a whole life in them, right?" (Kristina Interview, Pos. 254).

But of all the women I interviewed, Yarma had the most extensive and particular collection of calderos. She refers to her favorite pot as her "precious arocera" and went through a good deal of trouble to find one that met her specifications. She scoured flea markets, estate sales, and garage sales for years to find one just like her mother's until she found one at a second-hand store. She noted that most stores now carry a cast aluminum caldero but that the originals were made of cast iron, so she considers the modern ones cheap imitations:

Very old families will have these [a cast iron caldero] and it's the family treasure. So, I know that my mom has one that belonged to my grandmother in the house where my grandmother lived. And I know that that is going to be a serious fight between my siblings. (Yarma Interview, Pos. 495-499).

Similarly, pilones often get passed down to daughters and granddaughters. Ana's pilon was given to her by her mother along with her grandmothers machaca<sup>95</sup>so it has been used by

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<sup>95</sup> pestle

three generations of her family. “My sister also has a pilon base because my grandmother had them in like five different sizes... When, she passed away we each were able to have one of those. (Ana Interview, Pos. 540-542). She makes sure to wash it right away after using it and never uses soap. Melisa takes special care of her pilon by drying it thoroughly. Even though she now lives in the dry climate of Salt Lake City, she noted that in Puerto Rico’s humid environment they could easily grow mold if not dried properly. Even more difficult to find are the ditas, which are bowls made of the higüera fruit and other island gourds. Ana was fortunate enough to inherit a large one from her abuela, though to preserve it she does not use it to serve food as she said they can be difficult to find in large sizes anymore.

To inherit these precious culinary tools, typically someone has passed away. Estrella and Yolanda lost their mothers and grandmothers who taught them so much about the recipes they hold dear. Yarma mentioned never having tried her grandmother’s cooking. While el recetario is often a source of laughter and happiness it can also be a source of grieving. There may be desperate attempts at recreating dishes to match how loved ones prepared it. Once that flavor is achieved, they can be transported to memories of that person in much the same way Omi demonstrates in some of her recipe videos (Hopper, 2020d; 2020e). It follows that a disconnection in the passing down of culinary knowledge may make it more difficult to remember. A rupture in palate memory. Without recreating the sensory experience of the food, the memory of those loved may be less sharp. Relying on cognitive memory instead of embodied memory.

While not made of gold and pearls, these precious items are critical for the continuation of palate memory, the interaction between sensory information and nostalgia. A brand new caldero will take dozens of uses before it will be properly seasoned but when you have inherited one from a parent or grandparent, one that has fed your family hundreds of times, it imparts a completely different flavor. This palate memory is rooted in the ancestral connection with family, the embodied experiences of preparing and eating our food, and the oral traditions that accompany them. The women who go to such lengths to cook Puerto Rican food, despite the barriers presented through migration, not only keep our culinary traditions alive but resist a

colonial pressure to assimilate. The hierarchy of colonial modernity privileges the nuclear family over intergenerational connections, mind over body, individualism over collectivism, rationality over ancestral knowledge. However, engaging in el recetario in these ways resists this epistemological hierarchy.

### **Summary**

I was reminded of so many of my own memories as I spoke to these 8 women and they shared their experiences of food and cooking with me. While our interview times were singular and fairly short, there were so many stories. There were stories of struggling to recreate fondly remembered dishes; stories of immigration and using home to reconnect to those memories; stories of childhood mirth; stories of grief and remembrance too. At the very least I can say that talking to puertorriqueñas about our food practices will always engender stories. Unlike the compartmentalized understanding of food in the cookbooks which creates the illusion of isolation or the often functionally driven presentations of recipe videos, these women could not help but connect the food to those memories. It is those stories that make food important, yet these stories are not shared in cookbooks and are shared by very few food content creators. If this work demonstrates anything, it is that we are only barely scratching the surface on the relational and cultural processes that are part of this cuisine. Indigenous scholars teach us, these processes, this knowledge is handed down through storytelling (Kovach, 2009; Archibald, 2007). To really understand our cuisine, we need to center these stories. While I do not think any of these women see themselves as storytellers, what they shared with me bore some of the principles of storywork which Archibald describes. Most notably I sensed themes of interconnectedness, reciprocity, responsibility, and reverence for our foods. Each story was about relationships, building them, maintaining them, nurturing them through the processes of the kitchen. There was also an overall understanding that this is not simply a functional process but an emotional and even a spiritual one. To dismiss these stories is to flatten, reduce, and empty our recipes to some kind of material and practical existence as has been done in so many presentations of our food in

this study. Thus to decolonize our recetario, we must reacquaint ourselves with its metaphysical existence.

I am certain that colonial residues exist within these experiences as well, though after seeing how deeply colonial modernity is ingrained in the teaching of our recipes I was only too happy to focus on the potential resistance to this. Primarily, the colonial residues that became most prevalent in our discussion related to an epistemological hierarchy based on patriarchy and academic knowledge. Estrella held Roberto Pérez and his expertise in higher esteem than the knowledge she received from her mother and grandmother. Most of the participants learned from their families, so it is not clear if this might be a pattern. At the same time we see Yolanda and Carla make note of the often sexist division of labor that has become part of our culture. Yolanda seems to be accepting of it while Carla rejects the notion fiercely. Participants like Yolanda and Carla, are only just beginning to open themselves up to our cultural cooking. Yolanda simply did not see the value and significance of cooking until it was time to cook for her own family. Carla, being the youngest of the women and the one most recently come to the U.S., appeared not to really value our cultural tradition and instead elevated and aspired to U.S. culture until the pangs of homesickness made her interested in recreating her mother's chuletas. On the other hand Yarma has been cooking our dishes for decades now. Her stories indicate a tension between wanting to be practical and efficient and what I saw as a deep love, appreciation, and commitment to preserving these cultural traditions. Continually cooking Puerto Rican dishes as a way to resist assimilation.

Whether the women moved to access education, become academics, or because their parents sought working opportunities, colonization creates this dynamic of push and pull. This migration meant relying increasingly on U.S. commercial and capitalist foodways. This may have led to many other forms of assimilation which I did not explore in these interviews. Even prior to emigrating from Puerto Rico, many U.S. food staples had already been introduced to our culinary

repertoire including canned goods like conbif and other the supplies from el mantengo<sup>96</sup> like pancake mix, dehydrated milk and eggs, and potato flakes. As Rodriguez (2021) discusses, many U.S. restaurant chains have changed the culinary landscape of the island. Through cultural imperialism, the palate of Puerto Ricans on the island are becoming increasingly Americanized. Perhaps as Carla noted, there is not as great a pressure to avow Puerto Rican identity until one leaves. The nostalgia and longing for home bring us back to those traditions.

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<sup>96</sup> Government rations

## Discussion and Conclusion

The relationship between food and culture is often taken for granted but there is a dearth of research truly exploring the nature of this relationship, particularly in the Puerto Rican context. I used an emergent critical qualitative research methodology based on Critical Thematic Analysis and drawing on Grounded Theory methods. Through the exploration of Puerto Rican cookbooks, recipe videos, and speaking with cultural stewards of this cuisine I have only begun scratching the surface on why food is such an important part of our cultural identity and the stories our cuisine holds. A complex series of political, cultural, social, and individual processes are what create our cuisine and keep it alive and there are equally complex layers of oppression and resistance in each of these. Within the limited scope of this study, it is not possible to generate new theory but here I offer connections between this food system, the stories which emerged throughout the analysis, and colonization. I go on to discuss the challenges and limitations of the study and how I might expand on the project in the future.

To begin summarizing key findings from this preliminary study, I review the significance of *el recetario* at the political, cultural, social, and individual level. When it comes to the political implications of our cuisine we must look to colonization and the way that colonial power creates hierarchies of knowledge and claims control over land and labor. Not only did Spanish colonization dispossess Indigenous Arawak but the subsequent U.S. invasion dispossessed their *mestizo* descendants. The dispossession of land is a primary strategy of colonization (Veracini, 2011; Laenui, 2000; Quijano, 2007; Cook-Lynn, 2007; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015). This is a strategy that greatly disrupts traditional foodways by controlling who has access to staples and by creating dependency on Spanish and U.S. colonial rations which often lead to health issues (Carro-Figueroa, 2002; Rouse, 1992). But resourceful Taínos, Africanos, and their *mestizo* descendants began making use of these newly introduced foods to create our national cuisine. And hundreds of years later, during U.S. colonization, they would do it again, making dishes with corned beef and Vienna sausages as part of our everyday culinary repertoire. Still, this shift in land ownership continues to impact Puerto Ricans today through a loss of agricultural knowledge,

dependence on commercial goods, and eventually creating demand to migrate to the U.S. (Ayala, 1996). Once in the U.S., the availability of Puerto Rican food staples is largely dependent on whether or not a Puerto Rican diaspora is already well established in the area.

At the cultural level, participating in el recetario is a way to define and perform Puerto Rican identity. This often means emphasizing one aspect of this messy colonial identity and erasing others. For the professional chefs, Puerto Rican identity and culture may appear an uncomplicated mestizaje of African, Indigenous, and European ingredients that merit little critical appraisal. They can exploit the recipes tourists find most appealing and write recipe books with our greatest hits. Within this framing, our food and culture become a commodity which anyone can purchase or participate in. But las mujeres del recetario<sup>97</sup>, las amas de casa<sup>98</sup>, and other committed cultural stewards understand the importance of recognizing the history of our ingredients and how each region has developed dishes based on that. For instance, people eat domplines in Loiza and Ponce, where Afro-Boricuas thrive, or malanga, ñame, and yautia up in the mountains where the jíbaros live.

El recetario is also part of enacting a cultural practice, the enactment of cultural values. An afternoon spent shelling gandules with your family is not simply about food preparation but instilling an understanding of interdependence within the family system. A Saturday spent chinchorreando is not only about eating alcapurrias, but this national past-time is also about the exchanges that occur at each stop along the road. Additionally, cooking our dishes requires a connection to the ingredients and seasonings that are the cornerstones of the cuisine. A lack of measurements and written recipes means relying on sensory information in the cooking process. It means developing an embodied knowledge and intuition to create authentic flavors. But it also means connecting to other aspects of our culture including (oral) histories, music, dancing, and celebrations. I would argue this study contributes to a richer understanding of Ortíz Cuadra's

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<sup>97</sup> The women of our national cuisine

<sup>98</sup> The ladies of the house or homemakers

(2006) concept of palate memory as it describes the many forms sensory knowledge takes in relation to cuisine and collective cultural experiences.

Socially, Puerto Rican food becomes a way of connecting with friends, family, and other social networks. Our *recetario* relies on intergenerational relations. Recipes, *remedios caseros*, cooking sensibilities, and *calderos* are passed down from mother/grandmother/*tía* to child, ensuring the continuation of the cuisine and the development of palate memory. By connecting the sensory knowledge of food with the social interactions that bring that food alive, Puerto Ricans can build a shared sense of knowledge through food. *La cocina* becomes a place of laughter, *chisme*, shared grief, and other joyful or vulnerable social exchanges. Food becomes a vehicle for relationship building. Additionally, one cannot engage with *el recetario* in isolation. Accessing food staples, whether on the island or in the diaspora, means connecting to the social network, plugging in to the local knowledge, and following the word-of-mouth entrepreneurs. However, the domestic labor of cooking can also be a source of unequal gender dynamics. This is not only because it requires labor from women, but because that labor is so severely underestimated, depreciated, and taken for granted (Cairns, Johnston, & Baumann, 2010; DeVault, 1994; Lupton, 1996).

Individually, *el recetario* can be a form of creative and emotional expression. Chefs and home cooks can create new dishes based on old ingredients, though fusion can introduce some problematic Eurocentric values into our approach to cooking (Janer, 2007; Grey & Newman, 2018). It can be used to express love for friends and family or to avow Puerto Rican identity. Cooking can be a sacred way of knowing and grounding yourself. Engaging in this embodied practice can also be a form of remembrance, using food to transport yourself to another time and place.

### **Stories of el Recetario Nacional**

I began this project hoping for stories about our food. I did not expect that I would find so few in the cookbooks and recipe videos which I analyzed. The stories in the cookbooks were often grand, examining our colonial past and the formation of the nation state. History is taken for

granted. Despite consistently discussing colonization, these stories obscure the violence of this process. Genocide and enslavement of our ancestors is mentioned impassively and without remorse while the intellectual and cultural superiority of colonizers is celebrated. The Spanish are so celebrated that some cooks cling desperately to their connection and lineage to them as is the distinct case for Valldejuli (1954) and Rosado & Rosado (1995).

Because the food content creators often mimick the compartmental linearity and rationality of this culinary canon and contemporary food television, stories are often more difficult to identify. With Viña we see moments of everyday life, caretaking tasks, and a variety of less aesthetic domestic labor. While this resists colonial modernity it is not necessarily narrative in nature. Omi Hopper offers bits and pieces of stories however, which connect el recetario to stories of family and of la isla. These stories allow a shared nostalgia to emerge between content creator and audience. *I also ate that with my abuelo. My abuela also used to make this for me en el campo. This dish reminds me of such and such time, place, person.* Although these moments are often limited, they may still act as a catalyst in encouraging viewers to engage in al recetario and in palate memory.

Stories and palate memory were most prevalent in the interviews. Though Carla, Ana, Yarma, Melisa, Estrella, María, Kristiana, and Yolanda all had unique experiences there were frequent overlaps in their stories. Immigration was a salient theme, often motivated by education and work opportunities. This diasporic journey often made important staples less available which set off a series of adaptations and strategies to preserve culinary traditions. Whatever the reason for coming to the U.S., they shared a strong desire to continue as authentic a cooking tradition as possible, leading to substitutions, use of commercial products, arranging for care packages, and traveling long distances for supplies. Each story was situated within familial and relational contexts, such that we could not understand these foodways without an understanding of these intergenerational connections as integral to cultural knowledge transmission. My 8 participants communicated about food in ways that illuminate the metaphysical aspect of cultural cuisine. It is not simply an alchemization of material ingredients. Cooking our foods takes heart, creativity, and

finely honed sensory knowledge. As the majority of the women I interviewed said, it is an act of love.

### **Colonial Residues in el Recetario Nacional**

Overall, this work demonstrates that the relationship between Puerto Rican dishes and colonization runs deep. The distribution of land and control of labor resources are a part of the colonial matrix of power which directly impacts foodways. Both Spain and then the U.S. put policies in place to dispossess those who were not members of the criollo elite. The way in which we communicate and think about that food is impacted through the hierarchies of knowledge which privileges scriptocentricity, rationality, and commodification. Furthermore, the colonial matrix of power also creates gender roles/relations which diminish the value of women's domestic labor. It is this colonial and masculinist hierarchy of knowledge that has likely led to so little research on women's domestic labor in comparison to other modes of cultural production. For instance, Puerto Rican literature and music have enormous bodies of scholarship, but emphasize a masculinist or gender-neutral perspective (Cruz-Malavé, 1996; Springfield, 1997) (see for example Cartagena, 2004; Duany, 1984; Flores, 2000; Flores, 1993). But because cooking is deemed primarily a woman's domain, the functions of the dishes has simply been taken for granted without further exploration to what the nature of this cultural practice is. Feminist food theorists have argued the value of women's domestic and caretaking labor is often dismissed (Devault, 1994). This project has offered some illumination in this regard.

The cookbooks which chefs and home-cooks continue to reference perpetuate the idea that cooking is merely a functional, material, and rational process, simply a combination and processing of ingredients. The format of this genre reduces the importance of social, cultural, and historical processes which give these dishes significance *even* as they claim to do the opposite. They claim that these foods are important parts of social interactions but do not allow that social interaction to bleed into the cooking process they describe. They claim that they are motivated by cultural stewardship but then do not offer explanations for cultural meanings and commodify our culture for personal gain instead. They claim to offer histories of our foods but then erase or

minimize the violence committed against our African and Indigenous ancestors who created this food. For some novice cooks, perhaps these books offer a good starting point. But to *really* understand our foods you will need to go past the text to understand the cultural performances which create our dishes.

The colonial modern manner in which the recetario is communicated in these cookbooks trickles down to people who are not part of the criollo elite and indeed may have much richer narratives to share about our food. Omi Hopper, Viña Hernández, Judy Colón, and Evelyn Dominguez show a deep knowledge and expertise about Puerto Rican cuisine. However, perhaps due to the constraints and affordances of these media channels, they sometimes reproduce colonial modernity. The cookbooks and television food programming which have established themselves as canon influence the way in which these content creators present recipes. They often take up food programming stylizations by dressing up, creating branding for their channels, and describing the cooking processes as linear and rational. Judy and Evelyn cook alone. Though we sometimes hear children in the background we do not see them as if they have been told to keep out of the kitchen. Memories or stories are excluded from their explanation of the recipe in the same way as it was in the cookbooks. While Viña does not have a compartmental or linear presentation style, her videos are very much focused in the present. Omi Hopper, however, is departing from the established format of food television programming by bringing stories, memories, creativity, and... her mother. Cooking alongside her mother in dozens of videos is a form of resistance to the colonial modernity of this genre because it brings culinary knowledge back to intergenerational knowledge transmission. It also demonstrates the importance of relationships as part of the cooking process.

This emphasis on relationships and intergenerational knowledge transmission was also very salient among the interview participants. For the most part, my participants had learned from their mothers and grandmothers. There were only a few instances where racial dynamics within Puerto Rican food culture were mentioned, however. Yarma noted that some foods were more common in the African side of her family. She was the only participant who made a personal

distinction regarding race in her family and how it might impact the culinary repertoire. This is very distinct from cookbooks because they make no such distinctions in how different dishes might be associated to different populations on the island. For these authors all dishes are part of the national cuisine. Domplines and arepas are not mentioned in any of the cookbooks, which might indicate omissions of other more African recipes. Yolanda and Estrella were the only other participants to bring race into our conversation on food. But this does not necessarily mean challenging the melting pot discourse. For example, Yolanda describes pasteles as a food that represents the coming together of our three ancestral lineages. There is no struggle, messiness, or violence in this coming together. While the three ancestral lineages are acknowledged it is also taken for granted. On the other hand, Estrella's demonstrate a desire to look more specifically at the African influence in our cuisine. While she is still only beginning to learn about it, delving into the racial history of our food may allow us to reject a romanticization of colonization which erases the violence of *mestizaje*.

### **Decolonizing el Recetario Nacional**

The cultural stewards of *el recetario* are not just keepers of recipes. They are artists, caretakers, storytellers, historians, and counselors. They have a deep understanding of social networks and the importance of relationships for understanding our foodways. They teach us how to connect with and trust our bodies, our sensory experience. They are cultural theorists in their own right and it is time that we acknowledge that the labor they contribute to our culture is not simply a food product (Abarca, 2007). Reyes Cruz (2008) argues for citing our participants and informants to honor their expertise as a form of decolonial praxis. This is especially important when we see such a gap in the literature as there is here.

What can these cookbooks, recipe videos, and women teach us about decolonizing *el recetario*? *Viña la Gran Pastelera* shows us that we should decompartmentalize cooking from other domestic and caretaking work and that editing those "interruptions" out of our presentation of recipes creates a pale, lean, and anemic representation of our food. Omi Hopper shows us that cultural knowledge is intergenerational, relational, and that food can transport us to those

memories. Ana, Estrella, Kristiana, Yarma, Yolanda, María, Carla, and Melisa showed us that cooking is not merely a practical process for providing the body with nutrients. Rather, it is a spiritual, sensory, and emotional process that connects us to who we are. These elements strongly resist the ideologies of colonial modernity which romanticizes Spanish colonial violence and is elitist, linear, rational, compartmentalized, and isolating. Since these ideals are perpetuated through scriptocentricity, how might we rewrite our recetario in ways that do not reproduce this colonial ideology? Do all texts promote scriptocentric elitism? Can we separate the textual from modernity?

I do not possess the arrogance to submit a firm solution to this tension. However, I see potential in Indigenous storywork and performance to mitigate re-inflicting colonial violence on our cultural knowledge. I wonder how much of that knowledge has already been lost and must be recuperated. Archibald (2007) explains that she learned the principles of Indigenous storywork from her Elders. These 7 principles include: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (pg. 3). At times during this study, I saw moments where these principles shone. A far cry from how cookbooks describe our foodways, the women I spoke with shared stories that often took up these characteristics, bringing cultural knowledge and values that come from our African and Indigenous ancestors to life. But our ancestral stories appear to be largely lost to us. Native people of Turtle Island still tell of Coyote and Skywoman; they have been able to preserve some of their stories. But we do not talk about our African Orishas or Taíno deities or spirits. Most of the Taíno creation stories I have heard have been through anthropology studies conducted by outsiders. There is a lot of knowledge that must be recuperated and there will inevitably be things that cannot be and for that we must grieve (Laenui, 2000).

Despite this knowledge loss I am hopeful that we can create new stories that follow these principles as ways to teach Boricuas about our foods. To resist the trapping of elitism, we should center the voices which are often erased. This includes working-class women and homemakers, the local pastelera, the women who fry giant alcapurrias in their kiosks. To challenge the isolating individualism inherent in compartmental linearity we need to have stories centered on family,

communities, intergenerational learning, and the chaos of everyday life. To combat rationality, it must have heart and body. If it is to be a book at all, these things must be conveyed in a completely different stylistic genre than that of conventional cookbooks. Must a recetario be textual at all? I am inclined to agree with cultural and performance scholar Dwight Conquergood (1995) who contends “The textual paradigm is not a sensitive register for the nonverbal dimensions and embodied dynamics that constitute meaningful human interaction.” (pg. 26). However, performative writing can offer a way to capture the embodied and spiritual experience of cooking in textual forms. Instead of forcing an illusive kind of coherence, Tami Spry (2016) tells us performative writing helps us better see the fragmented sense of self and reality. It is not just mimicking but creation and transformation. Soyini Madison (2006) argues for the dialogic potential of performance and performative writing. She argues that performance should not only be an expression of creativity but should speak to a collective experience. This makes performative writing very compatible with the 7 principles of Indigenous storywork. These two paradigms could help our community rewrite el recetario in ways that align with our African and Indigenous ancestral knowledge.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

I came to this project as a way to immerse myself in Puerto Rican culture and to address a gap in the food studies and Puerto Rican studies literature which had consistently dismissed the role of women. Throughout this process I was challenged by new recipes and cultural practices I had not known, reminding me of how much my diasporic journey has disconnected me from my culture. However, so many of the women’s stories reverberated against my own experiences grieving my abuela’s cooking, making ridiculously long trips to find ingredients, and avowing Puerto Rican identity by frying up tostones. It also gave me hope in the power of food for connecting to history, culture, politics, and identity. More and more Puerto Ricans are becoming interested in reclaiming traditional foodways and we are seeing an increase in research and activism in food sovereignty, particularly after hurricane María (Félix & Holt-Giménez, 2017; Díaz & Hunsberger, 2018; Garriga-López, 2019;).

I faced 4 big challenges while completing this project that may have contributed to a less rich, less critical overall analysis. As I mentioned in my introduction, there is an overall scarcity of literature exploring women of color's experiences with food and their contributions to cultural production. While there have been studies at the intersection of food and gender or at the intersections of food and culture, these three elements rarely connect. Finding literary support for my observations usually meant either choosing a focus on women, food, or culture. Thus, this essay contributes to this archival gap.

While settler colonial and neo-colonial critique were at the heart of this study there were some ways in which I may have reproduced these ideologies. My focus on Puerto Rico and national cuisine discounts the many historical and cultural overlaps throughout the Caribbean. Scholars and activists have argued for a more Antillean identity politic since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Reyes-Santos, 2015). I wonder what kind of decolonial potential a more pan-Caribbean perspective might have in projects about our foods.

I also had difficulty framing the scope of this project in a way that would center women's voices without reinforcing a gender binary. In some ways this is due to the gendered division of labor established through colonial modernity. Similarly, a veneer of cisheterosexuality was also built in to this project. As much as there is a dearth of scholarship on women's perspectives on food, there is even less making connections between women of color, queerness, and food, though I can attest we are very fond of it. It may be true, as Yolanda noted, that cooking is a domestic task generally assigned to women and because domestic labor is often framed as women's work and due to colonial formations of gendered relations, I struggled to incorporate a queer politic into this work. This framing centers cisheteronormativity even as I challenge a patriarchal knowledge hierarchy, an aspect of the cuisine I would love to explore further. My goal was to fill a gap in literature that spoke to the lived experiences of women with el recetario. By naming them the cultural stewards of this cuisine I erased the men and non-binary people who are may also be cultural stewards. Therefore, this was a constraint within the project that

narrowed the scope but also caused harm. Understanding how to address this in future work requires further conversation with queer cultural stewards, study, and exploration.

A major limitation of this study was the length of time and relatively small sample sizes, which diluted the explanatory power of each source of data. Although triangulation is a common practice in grounded theory and these sources had many fruitful overlaps and divergences, they each have potential to be an entire project. Having more work dedicated to cookbooks or recipe videos or women's experiences could illuminate further themes which I could not do justice in this study. Furthermore, limiting my interactions with the cultural stewards of the cuisine to only one interview each drastically reduced the analytic power. Ideally, future projects in this trajectory would incorporate more ethnographic methods to establish longer term relationships with cultural stewards and more hands-on interactions. I believe this would add a much richer layer of embodied understanding to this work. For instance, grocery shopping and cooking alongside the women who know this cuisine would incorporate a greater bodily sense of the cultural functions of the cuisine. This would open up opportunities for richer sharing of experiences of *el recetario* and the women who steward this social and cultural practice. Despite the limitations of this study, I believe this project still contributes new understandings of Puerto Rico's national cuisine and the vital roles of the women who maintain and pass on our culinary traditions. Considering the lack of research in this area, this is an important move towards filling this archival gap which has dismissed the contributions of women to cultural production for so long. This is only a first step in reclaiming women's domestic work and the sociocultural processes of cooking within *el recetario*.

A *recetario* decolonial could not possibly be created alone. To bring such a book to life will require deep reclamation of Indigenous knowledge, grieving over loss, dreaming of possibilities, discussions with cultural stewards, and eventually action (Laenui, 2000). It will also require a new (or is it an old) way of thinking, talking, and writing about our recipes, which may reflect the vivid and complex metaphysical nature of our food. I believe we can do this through performative writing and following principles of Indigenous story work which do not flatten and inflict violence on our cultural knowledge but rather better align ourselves with it.

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APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## Women's Cultural Processes in the Puerto Rican Kitchen

### Interview guide:

1. (Warm up) If I didn't know anything about Puerto Rican food what's the first thing you would want me to try? Where would be the best place to get it?
2. How would you describe the essence of Puerto Rican cooking?
  - a. What is your favorite part of Puerto Rican cuisine?
3. What was a typical Puerto Rican meal with your family like growing up?
  - a. From start to finish what were the steps to preparing the meal?
  - b. How were supplies obtained?
  - c. Who was involved?
  - d. What were their roles in the process?
  - e. Can you tell me about them?
  - f. What would be some differences in the process if you were to cook a similar meal today?
    - i. From start to finish what were the steps to preparing the meal?
    - ii. How were supplies obtained?
    - iii. Who was involved?
    - iv. What were their roles in the process?
    - v. Can you tell me about them?
4. Can you tell me about the last time you cooked a PR dish with someone?
5. What are some of your favorite Puerto Rican dishes
  - a. When might you make a dish like this?
  - b. What makes this dish special?
  - c. What do you know about the history of this dish?
6. How did you start cooking Puerto Rican food?

- a. Did anyone play a part in your learning?
  - b. What was this person like?
- 7. If there was a Puerto Rican dish you didn't know how to make how would you find out about it?
  - a. What do you like about this resource?
- 8. Will you give me a tour of your kitchen?
  - a. What are some absolute essentials for Puerto Rican cooking?
  - b. What are your favorite items?
  - c. Can you show me a tool that you've had for a long time? How did you get it?
- 9. Other than cooking or eating, what are other activities that occur in this kitchen?

APPENDIX B  
IRB APPROVAL

EXEMPTION GRANTED

[Sarah De La Garza](#)

[CLAS-SS: Human Communication, Hugh Downs School of](#) 480/965-3360

[delagarza@asu.edu](mailto:delagarza@asu.edu) Dear [Sarah De La Garza](#):

On 4/1/2022 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title:	Women's Cultural Processes in the Puerto Rican Kitchen
Investigator:	<a href="#">Sarah De La Garza</a>
IRB ID:	STUDY00015218
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form-translation-certificate.pdf, Category: Other;</li> <li>• Interview Guide Spanish.pdf, Category: Translations;</li> <li>• ReslieCortes Consent Form Spanish.pdf, Category: Consent Form;</li> <li>• ReslieCortes Protocols-Version5 (1).docx, Category: IRB Protocol;</li> <li>• Social Media Recruitment Spanish Version.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials;</li> </ul>

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 4/1/2022.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

If any changes are made to the study, the IRB must be notified at [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) to determine if additional reviews/approvals are required. Changes may include but not limited to revisions to data collection, survey and/or interview questions, and vulnerable populations, etc.

REMINDER - - Effective January 12, 2022, in-person interactions with human subjects require adherence to all current policies for ASU faculty, staff, students and visitors. Up-to-date information regarding ASU's COVID-19 Management Strategy can be found [here](#). IRB approval is related to the research activity involving human subjects, all other protocols related to COVID-19 management including face coverings, health checks, facility access, etc. are governed by current ASU policy.

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator cc: Reslie Cortes

APPENDIX C  
CODE BOOK

Codebook			
Subcategory	Subcodes	Examples	Source
<p>Amor: Represents the relation aspects of Puerto Rican cuisine and the role that food plays within the development, maintenance, or resignification of the family dynamic.</p>			
labor of love		Well, first of all, I have to go in a huge hunt for green plantains, which is practically impossible here in LA. So I cannot, Even if I love you very much. I cannot commit to mofongo until after.	Yarma Pos 321
		No no you creo que ej' muy elaborado. Eso es una comida de amor.	Yolanda Pos 23
		And that's something that I realized that was very different in how you know our culture reflects in the kitchen and our food, versus, Following a recipe. And so, that made me feel like cooking really comes from the heart. Like it really does reflect, something that you do for the people that you love. And it is a very very conscientious process. If you're not connected to what you're doing in the kitchen, you're gonna mess it up.	Melisa Pos 84-92
		I think the best way to describe it is is really just love, you know, because people will tell me "You can tell that you made this food with love."	Estrella Pos 106-116

Grounding		This is like a religious experience for me like whenever I feel like I'm getting stressed with detached or overwhelmed. I like try to go back to my roots and to ground myself. (Maria transcript, Pos. 201)	María Pos 201
Activities that bond		I feel like there's modeling there's a teaching of teaching the next generation like for me like being with my aunts, and I and I bond more with my aunt more than with my uncle, and that's for multiple reasons.	Carla Pos 424-426
		but once you get over that initial kind of resistance that, you know, 10 minutes into it everybody's laughing and just, it becomes something fun that everybody, you know, everyone is participating in and, really, those are some of my favorite childhood memories.	Melisa Pos 409-411
→	Collaborative process	But he she would put all of us in in a you know, like a compartmentalized operation. You will cut the potatoes. O mondar las papas. You will cut the zanahorias, vas a mondar las zanahorias.	Yolanda 395-418
		Yes I'm like yes, and they are definitely all part of the business as well. So the day that we have an event, they come and, they um they pack up all the things that we need the pack up the car and making sure that we have everything that's ready	Estrella Pos 278-284
		And so during this process, you've already talked about everyone in the family was involved, either checking the food, storing or peeling there anyone else was involved in like procuring like.	Ana Pos 262

→	Bacilando	Horsing around with gandules	Melisa and Yolanda
→	Gossip	we love the chisme and I feel like it's also like, for example, my aunt knows everything going on with everyone in the family	Carla Pos 420
→	Advice	potentially kind of risky conversations to happen in a space that is safe because you're not going to walk away	Kristina Pos 482
		I was venting about what had happened in the meeting about my feelings I was, you know, they were giving me feedback, and giving me suggestions and, you know, being empathetic.	Melisa Pos 689
inherited tools		And my mom gave me a pilon, the base with my grandma's machaca. So, the machaca is like three generations of women who have had it.	Ana Pos 524
		First of all you need a good caldero like I don't care what people say these like regular shmegular pots are not it, you need the metal one, like the one that you get from like your grandma.	María Pos 696

	So I know that my mom has one that belonged to my grandmother. In the house where my grandmother lived, and I know that that is going to be a serious fight between my siblings.	Yarma 497-499
Inherited knowledge	No, yeah, she she always. and I learned that you know adobar las carnes antes de cocinarlas like for a day. like it makes a difference in the food, sometimes she used lemon. I always keep lemons because I remember her, you know, just squeezing a lemon.	Yolanda 297-300
	I'm like," What are you talking about?" she's like you can't use a lid, you have to use a plate and cover it with foil. And I'm like, son of a gun. I made it with the plate covered and boy it let's adjust enough moisture and just let out just enough that it tasted like hers then.	Kristina Pos 247-249
Sofrito: Represents an adherence to culinary cultural tradition and defines the authentic flavor of the cuisine. For the diaspora this often means going the extra mile to find ingredients because it cannot be substituted. This also includes cultural elements like music and dancing		
Recreating authentic flavors	A homemade, un sofrito casero there is nothing like it. You can suffer through the frozen versions and the versions that Goya tries to provide.	Ana Pos 416
Diasporic limitations	for example, I was in one of the restaurants and I ordered a pastel. And they're like "Ah es un pastel Puertorriqueño." and I was like "De que esta relleno?" so they're like "Es no mas de masa" and I was like (gasssp) "Eso no es un pastel puertorriqueño!"	Ana Pos 131
	And that's what I do! You know when I don't When I don't find the culantro I use cilantro...uhhhh like you know whatever whatever I find to always have some sofrito.	Yolanda Pos 92

	So sweet potato the regular, the regular ones in, when we lived in New York, we used sweet potatoes in Puerto Rico we used batata or even sometime's ñame because that's what was available. But those... yeah.	Melisa Pos 307
	I cannot make my own sofrito because there's no way I can find recaó in LA. So I have to bring my sofrito from Puerto Rico.	Yarma Pos 337
Rejecting Commercialization	There's a lot of pressure to boycott Goya and I'm like I can't do that that. That means I can never eat gandules again. Because, there's no other brand that hasgandules in this area.	Yarma Pos 342
	I gotta say, the Goya ones in the can taste just as good to me.	Kristina Pos 331
	My grandma's adobo like she would get like el sal de ajo, el polvo de this and that un poquito and she would make her own. It wasn't like the commercialized adobo by Goya.	Ana Pos 428
Sazón: This is the embodied sensory knowledge that is so important to the cuisine. It is a sense of intuition that develops with time and experience.		
Guided by ancestors	Your ancestor sending you like messages like you know you need to do this more and feed your child food so he can eat more of our food	Yolanda Pos 129
	Yeah it's kind of one of those here watch me until the ancestors tell you to stop.	Estrella Pos 475

	When you have someone who's cooking it, that has that know has a knowledge and has been cooking it. It's like a flavor. It's like a. There's this this saying because you know your ancestors tell you how much to put in, while you're cooking.	Ana Pos 80
Sensory knowledge & Creativity	My sister, Carla, is the best cook... Carla will just put- I mean she's so much like my mom, you know? She doesn't measure anything. She will put everything there and bam a dinner for 8 people	Yolanda Pos 772-775
	I've asked her to write down recipes and she's like, 'No girl' and she just won't do it. 'Here we're going to do it by ... seeing and by doing	Kristina Pos 202-205
Taste of home: This concept encompasses the avowal of Puerto Rican identity and a longing to connect with Puerto Rican culture. It describes how the women see the connection between food and Puerto Rican identity		
	I think my my enamoramiento de la cocina came late in life.Yeah. And just for for the feeling at home, right?	Yolanda Pos 882-886
	And so when you go to Humboldt Park it's such a different experience it's like you go into a whole different world and it's like taking you to the island without being on the island. And I've always felt that. So, being in the kitchen, and knowing the food, and just putting my heart into it is just like it takes me there.	Estrella 87-89
	Did not feel an affinity to Puerto Rican culture until she moved to the U.S.. At this point she began learning to cook as a way to connect.	Carla

	Feeling the most Puerto Rican when cooking with salsa and reggaeton	María
Local knowledge and networks	Where to find authentic pan de agua and how to find the local pastelera	Carla 659 & 622
	The local vendor making sure you have plantains and beans for the week	Ana Pos 247
Diasporic journeys: This term encompasses the variety of trajectories that led to living in the U.S.		
Education	So I have lived in Salt Lake City, Utah, for 20, a little bit over 21 years now. I moved here to go to school. And then I just I stayed here I found a job and so it's.	Melisa Pos 8- 11
	It was, it was not planned. I was planning to go back to Puerto Rico.	
	My mom and dad are Puerto Rican My dad was from San Juan, my mom is from Caguas. My dad was in the military, so I spent most of my youth in the Republic of Panama.	Ana Pos 13-17

	And so I didn't actually come to the States until I was going to college in 1995.	
Employment	So my grandmother worked for the Progreso soup factory... they sent folks to Puerto Rico to look for people to work at the factory.	Kristina Pos 6
Huertos Caseros: This represents how the women and their families would have home gardens as a means of sourcing food and limiting reliance on commercial products or government rations		
	Our house was in an urbanización, so we didn't have a big yard, but she had every single tree she could plant. We had bananas, we had guayaba, we had um guanabana, we had mango.	Yolanda Pos 420-424
	And we moved to San Juan later on and, and we did not. My parents still had a lot of fruit. And like guineos and platanos in their backyard, but it was not as much as when we were younger.	Melisa Pos 320
	A lot of the viandas and the fruit came from my grandparents' finca and then, my mom, since she grew up in a finca- we lived in San Juan, and our yard is not big. But we had- we still have. We have bananas, right now We still have bananas. but before we used to have and gandules, we always had gandules, so they gandules that we ate.	Yarma Pos 103
A lo Food Network: This is a video stylization where home cooks who post recipe videos attempt to mimic the mis-en-scène television food programming.		

Branding	Creating Logos	Cooking con Omi and Judy's Rincon
	Creating theme songs	Cooking con Omi and Judy's Rincon
	Selling products	Cooking con Omi and Judy's Rincon
	catch phrases	Cooking con Omi
Clothing	Wearing full makeup or clothing that is not practical for cooking	Cooking con Omi , Judy's Rincon, and Evelyn Dominguez
Presentation	Set design elements that mimic professional mise-en-scène.	Judy's Rincon
<p>Failing Beautifully: This represents how women reject the standards of television programming whether it is intentional or unintentional. A counter to "a la Foodnetwork"</p>		

emotional engagement		connecting the activities of el recetario to emotions and sharing those emotions with the viewers.	Cooking con Omi, Viña, Evelyn Dominguez, Judy's Rincon
highlighting cultural elements		Music, dancing, Puerto Rican slang, Puerto Rican humor, palate memory	Cooking con Omi, Evelyn Dominguez, Viña, Judy's Rincon
decompartmentalized portrayal of la cocina		Demonstrating the overlapping social, cultural, and domestic aspects of el recetario	Cooking con Omi and Viña
→	Childcare	Children interrupting or being heard in the background	Cooking con Omi, Viña, Evelyn Dominguez, Judy's Rincon
wearing batitas		Prioritizing comfort and practicality over presentation	Cooking con Omi and Viña
Scriptocentric elitism: This is a privileging of knowledge that is written and whose access is limited to the elite. A privileging of textual knowledge undermines oral traditions of inherited knowledge.			
		She is a daughter of one of the island's most distinguished families, a niece of Monsita Ferrer, the pianist, and cousin of the actor José Ferrer.	NYT Clairborne piece

	It was during these times that my grandma's Spanish aristocratic make-up would shine through. Masterfully issuing orders and delegating the tasting and inspecting	Recipes from La Isla p 12
	Typical desserts such as flan (egg custard), tembleque (coconut custard), and guava with white cheese have been replaced by lighter and more sophisticated preparations.	A Taste of PR p 4
	Formal dinner instructions	Cocina Criolla
<p>Cartesian Dualism and Rationality: This represents a privileging of mind over body in the kitchen. The use of precision is a way to replicate dishes to perfection rather than a sensory, emotional, or creative experience.</p>		
	Measured ingredient lists	All books
	Time specifications	All books
	Lack of sensory information	All books
<p>Compartmental Linearity: This is a way of cooking and talking about food where there are no interruptions to the cooking process from the outside world. The process proceeds step by step without interruptions.</p>		

	Step by step instructions	All books
	Lack of external social or cultural processes	All books
<p>Erasure/Romanticization of Colonial History: This represents how cook books distance Puerto Rico's food from colonial violence and slavery.</p>		
	The ingredients used in traditional Puerto Rican cooking, like the dishes that showcase them, are a result of a wonderfully tangled heritage.	A taste of PR p 7
	For almost five hundred years the basic ingredients the native Indians used have been enriched by the culinary skills of newcomers who have chosen these blue-green islands as their homes-descendants of the original Spanish, British, French, Danish, and Dutch settlers, or of Negro slaves brought from Africa to toil in the sugar fields.	Puerto Rican Cookery Intro
	Use of Indigenous Iconography	Puerto Rican Cookery

APPENDIX D  
GLOSSARY

Adobar- to season

Adobo- a salty seasoning mix which comes in many varieties but may have some combination of onion powder, garlic powder, turmeric, cumin, and oregano.

Africano- African

Allá fuera- "Out there" a phrase often used in reference to the Puerto Rican diaspora

Ama de casa- the lady of the house

Amor- love

Año nuevo- New Years

Bacalao- a type of white fish preserved in salt. Most commonly cod or pollock are used.

Barrio- neighborhood

Bata/Batita- a casual article of clothing usually resembling a large t-shirt which comes down to the knees. Used to lounge, clean, cook, or sleep.

Bochinche- gossip

Boricuas- an ethnic identifier which refers to the Indigenous people.

Borikén- the Indigenous name of the island

Caldero- a shallow pot made of cast aluminum or cast iron

Camarones- Shrimp

Campamento- a camp or camp ground

Caribeños- people of the Caribbean

Carne frita- a fried pork dish

Chicharrones- Chicharrones roughly translates to cracklin' or pork rinds but it can use chicken or pork. It is very crispy and often fried twice to get the desired texture

Chisme- roughly translates to gossip but is not necessarily malicious. Can refer to catching up on talk.

Chuleta- pork chops

Cocina- Kitchen

Cocineras- women cooks

Comida- food

Criollos- lighter skinned or more racially ambiguous Puerto Ricans with closer or more recent ties to Spain and the Spanish aristocracy

Croquetas- croquettes

Dissertation glossary of terms

Ejército Libertador de Puerto Rico- Liberation Army of Puerto Rico

Español- Spanish

Fogón- an outdoor charcoal or wood fired stove traditional in Puerto Rico

Funche- a kind of savory corn meal porridge

Guineos en escabeche- green bananas which are boiled and then marinated in an oil and vinegar dressing which is heated and infused with garlic, onions, and spices.

Guisar/Guisado- a stewing technique

Habichuelas- beans

Habichuelas en dulce- a Dominican dish prepared for Holy Week which consists of red beans and sweet potato cooked with sweetened condensed milk and coconut milk. Some people also add raisins. It is infused with anise, cloves, and cinnamon and often served with a kind of cookie on top.

Hijas de la Libertad- Daughters of Liberation

Huertos caseros- a form of subsistence farming or home garden

Huevos en polvo- dehydrated powdered eggs

Huracán- hurricane

Identidad- identity

Indígena- Indigenous

Jíbaros- poorer working-class people from rural areas in Borikén who are often more melanated

Kacikes- Taíno and Arawak tribal leaders

Las Castas- a caste system created by the Spanish to differentiate different mestize people

Malta- non-alcoholic, slightly carbonated, sweet malt beverage popular in Puerto Rico

Mantengo- government rations.

Mofongo- a dish made by smashing lightly fried plantains into a mold. Often seasoned with garlic and typically served with a flavorful broth which is used to moisten the plantains.

Mujeres- women

Ñame- a type of tuber

Navidad- Christmas

Parrandas- a community wide Boricua celebration common during the Christmas season where you amass people from house to house and form a festive procession. It involves music, food, and dance.

Pernil- roasted pork often a shoulder cut if preparing at home but there are many shops in Puerto Rico that also roast the pig whole

Pilón- a wooden mortar and pestle

Plátano maduro- a ripe plantain

Puertorriqueños- People born in the nation-state of Puerto Rico, usually with an ethnic lineage there.

Quinceañeras- Sweet fifteen

Recetario- refers to both a cook book and to a cuisine

Sabor- literally means flavor or richness

Sazón- a seasoning mix that usually comes in small pre-portioned envelopes. It is used for both flavor and color since it often has annatto seed in it.

Semana Santa- Holy Week

Sofrito- the base of most savory dishes in Puerto Rico. It is a chunky puree of garlic, onions, cilantro, culantro, and aji or bell peppers. Every family has their own recipe, sometimes adding tomatoes, oil, water, or pork fat.

Tocino- uncured pork belly

Viandas- while this can mean vegetables in general more often it is used to refer to a variety of tubers grown and eaten in Borikén and the Caribbean

Yautía- a type of tuber