

# Walking (in) the Ethnic Aisle:

## *Latinidad/es Stocked in the Market*

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In this essay, I examine ethnic grocery store aisles to demonstrate how the spatial rhetorics communicated in these aisles mirror discriminatory discourses in other public spheres. Combining testimonio, spatial rhetorical analysis, and a holistic culinary approach (Abarca, 2014; Abarca and Salas, 2016) to pose food, culinary practices, and market shelves as sites of transborder connections, I show how the placing of “non-American products” in these “ethnic” aisles emphasizes the Othered status attributed to cultural practices resulting from purchasing these products. Instead of being inclusive or celebrating diversity, these spaces and products compose a space of cultural imperialism where products targeting a Anglo-American clientele are stocked to satisfy their appetite for cultural consumption. In so doing, these spaces reinforce a sense of U.S. nationality built through the imposition of linguistic, sociocultural, and geopolitical borders, and reinforce the homogenization these labels exert upon the Other. Nevertheless, I also assert that these spaces mark “a presence instead of an absence,” turning the ethnic aisle into a space of survivance (survival and resistance) (Powell, 2002, p.

400) and of transborder connections between the many Latinx communities.

To better understand the ways in which ethnic food aisles become sites of transborder connection and negotiation of *Latinidad/es*, we need to view Latinxs as translocal subjects, since “with the intensification of transmigration, growing numbers of Latin@s and Latin Americans today embody similarly shifting registers, positionalities, and epistemes” (Alvarez et al., 2014, p. 4). Hence, *Latinidad/es* “is[/are] always already constituted out of the intersections of the intensified cross-border, transcultural, and translocal flows that characterize contemporary transmigration throughout the hemisphere” (p.2). These transnational and translocal subjectivities blend within one’s “geographies of selves,” or the ways in which our knowledges are inscribed in and on our bodies (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 68-71).

The translocality of *Latinidad/es* and its impact on one’s geographies of selves also explain my personal urgency to study these aisles. My study emerged from my struggle to understand where I fit within hegemonic U.S. racial and ethnic labeling discourses; this situation becomes even

more pressing within the space of the market where the labels *Hispanic*, *Latino* and *Tex/Mex* are commonly used. Because of some of my experiences in the U.S., I have come to feel as if the terms *Hispanic/Latina* are reflective of certain aspects of my identity—even if I may phenotypically seem part of the whitestream, my use of Spanish in public and/or my Spanish-accented English marks me as Other because in Anglo-American society, the Spanish language and an accent have become major ethnic markers that work to homogenize Hispanic and Latinx communities despite the sociopolitical and cultural differences that exist among them.

Yet, in a society where the meanings embedded in the Latinx/Hispanic categories are synonymous with race, I am confronted with the legacy of a colonial history that governs the historiography and politics behind these labels. As a Spanish woman living in the U.S., I find myself experiencing the imposed need for others to identify what I am along a spectrum of labels that are radically problematic and unstable. And so, in an attempt to find an answer to the question, “What am I and where do I belong?”, my

study demonstrates the ways in which my relationship to the Hispanic/Latina labels shifts depending on the geo-socio-political contexts where I am located, while the sense of community I have developed with other Latinx communities travels with me across these borders.<sup>1</sup> My own entering into these spaces has made me become more aware of my intersecting identities as a Spanish woman in the U.S., and encouraged me to develop transborder relations with other members of the Latinx communities based on the relationships I establish with some of the products located in these aisles. At the same time, however, my study of these spaces underlines how ethnic aisles bear witness to the complicated colonial history of labeling discourses, the homogenization and racialization of *Latinidad/es*, and consumption of the ethnic Other.

## Understanding the Multimodality of the Grocery

In studying the rhetorics of the ethnic aisle, I view space as rhetorical, for space, place, and their organization are socially produced embodied texts, which, within the space of the market, reproduce

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 1990 U.S. Census of Population definition, I am definitely Hispanic. Nonetheless, through her study of the Hispanic/Latino controversy, Suzanne Oboler points out that, even though the U.S. Census of Population from 1990 includes Spaniards, “most scholars limit their policy-related research on Latinos to populations with ties to Latin America” (2). Spaniards’ exclusion from the umbrella covered by these pan-ethnic labels is not only exerted within academic circles. As Maria DeGuzmán (2005) and Debra Castillo (2005)

explain, even though U.S. definitions of the Latino/Hispanic labels incorporate Spaniards, many U.S. Latinos usually do not. The inclusion/exclusion of Spaniards within the pan-ethnic Hispanic/Latina labels illustrate the ways in which place and the individual/collective subjectivities shaped in these spaces intersect with the social formation of these labels and the intersectionality and positionality of identity. Depending on where I am located, and given the social and colonial construction of these labels, I can be considered Hispanic, Latina, both, or none.

hegemonic discourses that Other Latinxs. Thus, I am not only concerned with studying the space of the market, but also how this multimodal text affects (my) embodied experiences, (my) understanding of my identities, and individual/collective compositions of this space. Even though mapping has historically been posited as an objective and scientific practice, mapping indeed reflects sociocultural, historical, and political ideologies shaping the rhetor's subjectivities. As a process of multimodal composition, cartographical practices affect how space is conceived and perceived, and, in turn, how individuals act in said space and what knowledges they create (McDowell and Sharp, 1997; Mignolo, 1995; Proppen, 2012). Likewise, the organizational principles shaping a particular grocery store are never arbitrary, but are rather illustrative of the sociocultural and political ideologies of a particular society, thus further shaping an individual's subjectivities and how they conceive their relationship to other members of the communities around them (Dale and Burrell, 2008).

Like street labels in the city, the labels heading each aisle at the grocery market—with its names and its numbers, usually on both ends of the aisle—act on clients' bodies by directing how they ought to move across and around these spaces. As “spatial signifiers” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 98), the aisle markers and directories are meant to help clients choose whether they want to enter into the space contained within the aisle and, therefore, whether the individual wants to establish a

relationship with the produce stocked in this space and with the other clients navigating this space. Here, I follow Michel de Certeau's view of walking as a rhetorical practice, as the way we choose to walk through the spaces of the market creates an “urban text” of the store's planned spaces (p. 93). Each aisle creates a linear path that obliges individuals to either walk the entire aisle, or to walk back and forth to exit; there's no communication between the aisles—no shortcuts. The linearity of the aisles and their labels (aisle markers and other price and special offer labels) impact consumers' ways of operating (in) these spaces, while also allowing them to transform the space as they act on them (Sen and Silverman, 2014)—a process of multimodal embodied composition where consumers' bodies engage with and act upon the space of the market.

De Certeau (1984) distinguishes two forms of experiencing place and space, thus two forms of “language of space”: the act of seeing, that is, the act of knowing the order of places, and the actual moving within them, that is, “spatializing actions” (p. 119). Along this path, I posit that a rhetor's conceptualization of time-place-space through the use of a set of prepositions affects how certain places, or the objects emplaced there, are described, and, therefore, one's own understanding of the movements that can possibly be performed within said space. Indeed, my contemplation of the spaces of the market is a moment where my bilingualism becomes more transparent, as I always struggle with the correct standard use of

prepositions in English. The influence of my Spanish on my understanding of space permeates my use of English, thus giving voice to a constant communication, negotiation, but also confrontation, between two different systems of thoughts, each of which conceptualizes prepositions in different ways. These differences reveal divergent understandings of space, place, and embodied space, as well as how individuals are located in said space, place, and time. For example, I usually see myself sitting *en el porche*, which I would translate as *in the porch*, while I am told that the standard English translation means I am *on the porch*.

And yet, while this explanation may be far off from the actual meaning of these prepositions, to me, the contrast between locating myself *in* or *on* the porch shapes a different relationship between my body and this space, hence to a different construction of this porch and the objects it holds. Thus, I posit that a rhetor's conceptualization of time-place-space through the use of a set of prepositions affects how certain places, or the objects emplaced there, are described, and, therefore, one's own understanding of the movements that can possibly be performed within said space. Likewise, my movement through the market aisles and labels influence how I conceive my position within these spaces, and how I relate to the produce and individuals who are also acting upon these spaces.

Along these lines, my study of the rhetorical spaces of the market considers the ways in which the landscaping and

labeling of these rhetorical spaces—by means of aisles, shelves, aisle markers, and labels—foreground specific rhetorical categories (Royster and Kirsch, 2012) which engage bodies in different ways. It is essential to acknowledge the ways in which my able-bodied privilege empowers me to engage in this specific rhetorical study of the spaces of the market, because I am able to move through these narrow spaces and reach the products they stock regardless of how high or low they are located on the shelves. This strongly influences the ways in which I interact with the spatial signifiers shaping this multimodal urban text; my ability to easily walk through the market impacts my rhetorical operation, transformation, and theorization of the spaces of the market, and therefore, my understanding of this text as a process of multimodal embodied composition.

Ultimately, my conflict with English-Spanish prepositions shows spatial relations that do not transfer from one language to the other, thereby further illustrating the ways in which space reflects a particular sociocultural and political viewpoint. Further, if space in English is conceived differently in Spanish, then my difficulty with the bilingual use of prepositions may hint towards the untranslatability of space. This untranslatability of space further complicates the ways in which space and place can be conceived, narrated, and theorized, and emphasizes the ways in which the very writing of this essay becomes an embodied multimodal practice where I deconstruct and reconstruct the urban text of the

market and my Self. In other words, my embodied, bilingual interactions with the multimodality of the market leads to a continuous shifting of my subjectivities and positionalities: a reciprocal relationship as the space and its organization affect my understanding of my intersectional self, my positionality within the construction of this space, and my connections to other bodies who may or may not occupy these spaces.

These divergent understandings of an individual's relationship to space, place, and their organization also lead to different conceptualizations of the type of relationships that can exist between an individual and their communities. A sense of community can be developed regardless of the place in which individuals are located, and even if a seemingly monolithic community is located in a specific place, this situation "in no way implies a single sense of space" or a single sense of community (Massey, 1994, p. 153). These different modes of conceiving embodied space, individual/collective relationships, and one's subjectivities, emphasize the need to contemplate the grocery market as a space where negotiations take place by means of aisles, labels, and produce while encouraging the forging of transborder individual/collective relationships.

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<sup>2</sup> This is a general definition of the difference between "saber" and "conocer," especially because the verb saber also includes the "training" of the body to perform certain activities, such as reading, writing, speaking a foreign language, swimming or cooking, where the body memorizes how to do certain things. In contrast, the verb conocer mostly refers to the knowledge that

## **Testimoniando (in) the Market and "A Holistic Culinary Approach"**

My use of testimonio is informed by Latina feminists' reclaiming of the genre of testimonio for the development of Latina feminist epistemologies and coalitions across borders by foregrounding commonalities without erasing difference. Turning personal experience into a source of knowledge, testimonio breaks the constraining object/subject, theory/experience, mind/body binary systems that govern academia, and it exposes and censures the close relationship between the shaping of hegemonic knowledges, power, and colonialism (Córdova, 1998; Cruz, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 1998). As I have explained elsewhere (Roncero-Bellido, 2017), these Cartesian binaries are embedded in the English verb "to know," which in Spanish translates as "saber" or "conocer," depending on whether the act of knowing has taken place through memorization or through experience, respectively.<sup>2</sup> This distinction is blurred in the English language, where the verb "to know" implies both an act of possessing information (saber) and an act of perception (conocer). The blurring of the ways in which the act of knowing can take

emerges through the act of experiencing places, people, or objects. Given the complexity of the meanings of these verbs, it is not my purpose to offer a linguistic study of these verbs, but rather to highlight that the Spanish language acknowledges different ways of making knowledge: memorization and experiencing.

place reinforces the hegemonic binaries established between the mind and the body, theory and experience, and objectivity and subjectivity ruling academia, thus the possibility of multiple forms of truths and knowledge, as well as the role of embodied experience in the shaping of these.

Testimonio facilitates the theorization of embodied experience, as I engage in a process of raising awareness, thinking about the ways in which my positionality and my intersectional identity affect my growing subjectivities. In other words, theorizing through testimonio allows a process of de/constructing the body—a deconstruction of the “geographies of selves” and the identity categories inscribed on the body, but a construction through the theorization of the knowledge emerging from it. My study of space through testimonio, then, fosters the disruption between the mind/body, theory/experience, saber/conocer dichotomies, as [my] testimonio foregrounds the *sabiduría* and *conocimiento* emerging from my/the body. Specifically, my use of testimonio for my study of the ethnic aisle allows me to disrupt the hegemonic binary established between the two languages informing my rhetorical practices: *inglés y español*. My *sabiduría y conocimiento* of these languages provides me with the opportunity to draw connections between the knowledge I have developed through my experiences as a speaker of both languages in different settings, and the knowledges I have acquired through my academic learning.

Weaving testimonio and spatial rhetorical analysis with a “holistic culinary approach” enables me to view food, culinary practices, and food related discourses as sites of historical transatlantic, transnational and translocal connections (Abarca, 2013; Abarca and Salas, 2016). A holistic culinary approach posits culinary encounters as the “connections that food and cooking practices have had and have with a global community” (Abarca and Salas, 2016, p. 252). This approach allows me to foreground the translocality of *Latinidad/es*, emphasizing the similarities that exist between cross-cultural culinary encounters without erasing difference. Within the space of the market, this holistic framework reveals the colonial history of culinary traditions across the Americas as a whole, and of the U.S. food industry specifically. This colonial history is often narrated in the visual texts used to market these produce (Ibid).

A holistic culinary approach, for example, reveals the ways in which the complexity of *Latinidad/es* is embedded in a plate of *fideos*, described by Chicano John Philip Santos as “a ‘quintessential’ dish of *mestizaje*” (qtd. in Abarca, 2013, p. 253). Originally, *fideos* were popular among the wealthy Spaniards from Andalusia prior to the conquest, a delicacy that could only be enjoyed after Marco Polo brought wheat pasta to Europe during the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This example demonstrates the significance of applying a holistic culinary approach to my personal study of labeling discourses in the spaces of the grocery market. Specifically, this

method allows me to contemplate my personal dis/connection to fideos which are, still today, an important part of the Spanish Mediterranean diet; even though I do not personally connect to the Latin American *mestizaje* of the fideos given my Spanish heritage, its colonial history is part of my national history. Engaging with a holistic culinary approach thus allows me to contemplate complex ways in which this meal can make me feel at home in the U.S. while acknowledging the long history of Spanish and U.S. colonialism leading to the view of fideos as the exemplary representation of *mestizaje*.

Further, by weaving this holistic approach with *testimonio* and my understanding of space as articulated above, my study emphasizes the embodied knowledges individuals create while interacting with the products stocked within the market space. In other words, I pay attention to the connections individuals create between the placement, categorization, and marketing of products with their knowledge of individual and collective modes of food preparation and space navigation; and, I contemplate the relationships that can emerge between these products and the community members navigating these spaces. Foregrounding these connections, then, my study of these spaces constructs and (re)presents a set of multimodal transcultural encounters within the space of the market, and with the labels and packages of the products it stocks.

## **Walking (in) the Market**

Engaging in an analysis of my own embodied experiences within the spaces of the grocery market proves a difficult task, as I talk about a set of spaces where my Spanish identities are usually misconstrued, if constructed at all, in the same way as are the identities of the many (other) members of the Latinx communities. Each store has a different organization depending on their location—a different understanding of what is ethnic or not—as well as a different set of labels that are used to mark these aisles and produce. And while I am aware that part of this form of labeling and storing products is often related to food safety maintenance, such as the need for refrigeration, my study of these spaces reveals a set of organizational and labeling patterns that continue to negate the complexity of *Latinidad/es*. This essay bears witness to a process of de/construction of my embodied experiences as I observe and fight against the fragmentation of my own identity as it is stocked on these shelves.

Here I study a grocery market where I frequently shopped in South Chicago, an area that was mainly inhabited by immigrants from Germany, Ireland, the Czech Republic, Poland, Italy, and Lithuania around the 1920s and 1930s (Knox, 2004). These demographics began to change in the 1970s as Mexican families began to populate the area. According to Douglas Knox (2004), about 10.8% of the



Figure 1: The two "ethnic" aisles are located next to each other. However, the Latinx aisle is standalone, while the other is designated as a Polish, Kosher, and catch-all "Ethnic" aisle.

population identified as Hispanic in the 1990s, with these numbers rising to 51.9% of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino in the 2000. These changing demographics—both in terms of numbers and ethnic identification, from Hispanic to Latino—are indeed registered in the organization and labeling of products at this particular store, where there are two different ethnic aisles: the “Tex/Mex-Latino,” situated next to the “Polish-Kosher-Ethnic” aisle. It should be noted that there is a full aisle labeled “Tex/Mex-Latino,” while the “Polish-Kosher-Ethnic” aisle turns into the “Pasta-pasta sauce-Italian-soup” aisle halfway through the corridor.

The Polish-Kosher-Ethnic and Tex/Mex Latino aisles extend before me as I stand by the Fish & Butcher Department, and I wonder: which part of me is Ethnic and what part of me is Tex-Mex-Latino? A quick glimpse at the “Polish-

Kosher-Ethnic” aisle lets me know this space is very much like mainstream ethnic aisles I am used to seeing at other grocery stores in Illinois—Simply Asia, Thai Kitchen, and Marion’s Kitchen cooking kits, while this one also stocks Polish salsas, pastas, and other produce in packages I cannot read. Halfway through this aisle I see boxes of pasta sporting different brand names, products that are now considered mainstream. As the label in the market indicates, the Italian section is a different part of the aisle, one that is not considered ethnic anymore, even though prior to 1914 Italian food was seen as antihygienic and detrimental (Levenstein, 2002)—rhetoric that, as I will shortly discuss, was also used to describe Mexican food in the U.S.

I head towards the Tex/Mex-Latino aisle and I see no other modifiers have been chosen to describe the products stocked in this aisle. The contrast between

the Tex/Mex and Latino labels chosen to describe this space shows an effort to unequivocally identify the Mexican-American population, while also making sure to include other Latinxs who may shop at this store. As I enter this aisle, I observe six full shelves filled with religious candles to my right. Blue and white candles on the top shelf with images of Jesucristo Nuestro Señor, la Virgen de San Juan de Los Lagos, La Virgen de Guadalupe, and San Antonio guard the entry to the aisle, reminding one of the role of Catholicism during the Conquest. On the next set of shelves I find many pots and pans, strainers and graters that, as far as I know, are commonly used kitchen utensils. But next to them I see different sized and shaped comales, flat griddles I have recently learned are used to cook and warm up tortillas. Next to these, I see tortilla warmers, molcajetes—the Mexican version of a mortar and pestle to ground and hold freshly made salsas—and hand-held lemon squeezers. These are technologies I now know are common to any traditional Mexican kitchen, tools I had never seen before but are as basic as a paella pan or a ham-holder stand in most Spanish-peninsular homes.

I find products of Mexican-origin to my left, like bottles of Jarritos and Mexican sodas, some of them unfamiliar to me. As I continue walking down the aisle, I find bags of Mexican candy followed by at least five stands filled with spices in bags and plastic jars, tamale

leaves, and lots and lots of chiles. These are facing the corn oils, another product this aisle has marked as ethnic by separating it from the other oils located in a different, mainstream aisle with other baking products. As I keep walking, I can see how the path I am following through this aisle reproduces, and helps me construct, a non-provided recipe, for after heating up an oily pot for the homecooked meal, Maggi bouillon cubes and seasoning kits are in order. So far, this aisle defines Latinidad/es not only in terms of the actual items stocked on the shelves, but also through the cooking rituals these products—most of them labeled as Mexican—help to enact.

As I continue to navigate through the store's commercial construction of Tex/Mex-Latinidad/es, I see shelves filled with packets of rice and legumes, and I finally see something that does target home: a package with a starting kit to make paella valenciana from a brand still new to me, Vigo. Except for the Spanish name, "Paella Valenciana," everything else on this package is written in English, including the capitalized word "Authentic"<sup>3</sup> preceding the Spanish "Paella Valenciana," and followed by a mistranslation of the traditional Valencian rice dish into the explanatory "completely seasoned yellow rice and seafood dinner." Underneath these words there is an image of a paella or paellera filled with (yellow) rice, shrimp and mussels, an image that aims to ensure consumers that Vigo's paella kit

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the problematic politics of claims of authenticity, read Abarca, M. E. (2004), "Authentic or Not, It's original."

provides an “authentic Spanish recipe.”<sup>4</sup> In doing so, Vigo contributes to an essentialist understanding of Spanish foodways, a monolithic view of the Spanish traditional dish that is nonetheless conflated with the very name of the product: paella valenciana, that is, from the region of Valencia. With this I want to point out the ways in which a space like the ethnic aisle not only homogenizes Latinidad/es in national terms, but also the regional differences that exist across nations.

Vigo’s construction of “authentic” Spanishness is further complicated as Vigo’s Paella Valenciana is located next to other rice boxes from two brands commonly known for targeting the Latinx clientele: La Preferida, a local company that takes pride in producing “authentic Mexican food,” and Goya Foods, Inc., which presents itself as “a Hispanic-owned food company” (Basque, by way of Puerto Rico) and “the premier source for authentic Latino cuisine” (About Goya).<sup>5</sup> Each of these brands has a fascinating history that, observed from a holistic culinary approach, further complicates the ways in which a Spaniard like myself can relate to the food narratives contained within this space, as the amalgam of the Basque, Spanish, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Latino, and Hispanic labels emphasize the transborder complexity of Latinidad/es.

Thus, before continuing to analyze the rice boxes stocked next to Vigo’s paella valenciana, it is important to observe the history and commercialization of each brand, especially given their role in the homogenization of Latinidad/es but also the forging of a pan-ethnic Hispanic-Latinx solidarity through identity.

Specifically, La Preferida illustrates the impact of the Mexican and Puerto Rican populations in the introduction of the so-called Latino products into mainstream supermarkets such as this store. The founder of La Preferida was Henry Steinbarth, who opened a butcher shop in the European ethnic neighborhood of the Southside of Chicago. As this neighborhood became Puerto Rican and Mexican, Steinbarth began producing and packaging chorizo to meet the demands of the Mexican community (Arellano, 2012, p. 194). Since then, La Preferida has expanded its production “into a complete line of Mexican specialties that covers more than 250 products” in order to “accommodate both Latino and non-Latino consumers” both with its produce and its bilingual packaging (La Preferida). While trying to meet, as the company states, the needs of “Latinos and non-Latinos,” La Preferida insists that their products are Mexican, even if the original butcher shop Steinbarth opened in South Chicago sought first to meet the needs of

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<sup>4</sup> There are many versions of this traditional dish made with rice; thus, the name changes depending on the descriptive words given to the word “paella.” Paella refers both to the pan where this rice is cooked and to the bomba-rice dish seasoned with Spanish saffron and Spanish sweet paprika.

<sup>5</sup> Given the purposes and scope of my analysis, I will not discuss the politics of Basque nationalist identification and the Spain-Basque Country conflict.

European immigrants, and then Mexicans and Puerto Ricans.

In contrast, Goya presents itself as “a Hispanic-owned food company” and “the premier source for authentic Latino cuisine,” offering products specifically designed to meet the needs of Caribbean, Mexican, Spanish, Central and South American cuisines. Indeed, Goya was founded in 1936 by Prudencio Unanue, a Basque who left Spain and settled first in Puerto Rico and then in New York. It was in New York that he first started to import Spanish products such as olives, olive oil, and sardines (“About Goya”). Yet, the Unanue family worked to cater to the specific needs of the newly arrived communities: Puerto Ricans after World War II, Cubans in the 1950s, and Dominicans in the 1960s (Carlyle, 2013). Goya thus exemplifies a company that has grown along with Latinx populations in the U.S.

As of today, Goya caters to “the taste of the totality of the Hispanic market through the diversification of products” (Dávila, 2001, p. 91). This explains its use of both the Hispanic and Latino labels to define itself, and its location in the Tex/Mex-Latino aisle. Goya, like La Preferida, illustrates how the imposed category of Hispanic/Latino is “subject to constant negotiation with regard to the multiple identifications of Hispanics” while also contributing to the market’s construction of Latinxs as “a nation within a nation” (Dávila, 2001, p. 91). This shows the power of food discourses to convey a sense of U.S. nationalism which is based on “geopolitical nationhood”

(Socolovsky, 2013, p. 3), that is, in terms of spatial and geographical borders. These borders create a cultural divide that marks Latinxs as outsiders regardless of their place of birth, legal status, or colonial heritage. Particularly complicated is the case of Puerto Ricans, whose U.S. citizenship, marked by colonial status, disrupts the many borders this ethnic aisle so strongly seeks to establish.

Importantly, the growth of Goya shows how the foodways of a Spaniard like myself are indeed reflected in the space of this grocery market, by reproducing the history of Spanish colonialism that ties a Spaniard like me to the foods stocked in this space, just like the fideos previously mentioned. Before the 1970s, Arlene Dávila (2001) explains that “Goya’s version of Hispanidad was publicly conveyed by pointing to the Spanishness of its products, such as its olive oils, advertised in the 1970s as ‘coming from Andalucía’ and being ‘pure, virgin, and Spanish,’ or else by alluding to the products’ connections with Puerto Rican culture” (pp. 91-92). Dávila asserts that this encouraged Puerto Ricans to identify with the Hispanic label, which clearly proves 1) the role food discourses play in the construction of a sense of ethnic identity; 2) the privileging of Spanish heritage over other elements of Puerto Rican *mestizaje*, specifically, and Latin America as a whole. Indeed, Vigo’s *paella valenciana* is located next to other rice boxes from La Preferida and Goya, which are being marketed as Spanish rice. While Vigo’s *paella* kit seems to actually offer the possibility of reconstructing a recipe

that is originally from Spain, La Preferida's Spanish rice and Goya's two forms of Spanish rice offer three different products that are not traditionally from Spain. The box of Spanish rice from La Preferida showcases a picture of a yellow rice dish with bell peppers that seems to mainly differ from Vigo's paella in its lack of seafood. La Preferida does not offer a Spanish translation for the Spanish rice meal, while Goya features a bilingual text for its two types of Spanish rice—which is translated as arroz con tomate, or rice with tomato—and its yellow rice-Spanish Style, which is explicitly targeted at non-Latinos (Carlyle, 2013)—simply translated as arroz amarillo.

By reinforcing the use of the term “Spanish” and ensuring the authenticity of these products—the Paella kit, Goya's Spanish rice, Goya's Yellow Rice, and La Preferida's Spanish rice—and in an aisle that has been labeled Tex/Mex-Latino, these boxed rice packages contribute to the commercialization of a homogeneous understanding of Latinidad/es by using a “Spanish fantasy heritage.” To explain, the use of the term “Spanish” to refer to food practices originally from Mexico dates back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Charles Fletcher Lummis and other restaurateurs and cookbook writers added the Spanish label to traditional Mexican dishes in order to make these meals more pleasant for the Anglo-American public (Abarca and Salas, 2016; Arellano, 2012; Valle and Torres, 2000). Yet, Lummis was not the first or only person to use the term Spanish. Californians, Tejanos, and New Mexicans also used this term to

define themselves to emphasize their European heritage. This form of identification allowed them to claim a “pure Spanish heritage” while denying any Indigenous or mestizo ancestry (McWilliams, 1948, p. 21). This fantasy heritage was also reinforced by the Anglo population who used this as “a tool for subordinating Hispanic peoples” (Rosales, 2006, p.163) in the very same way that marketing and labeling practices identify these products as Other.

After the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, travelogues and newspapers would employ a “culinary analogy to illustrate Mexican savagery and depravity to mark a community as racial Others” (Valle and Torres, 2000, p. 74). To fight against such racist culinary rhetoric, cookbook authors such as Lummis or Bertha Haffner-Ginger would engage in the rhetoric of a Spanish fantasy heritage. The work of Haffner-Ginger (1914) helps us to better understand the use of the Spanish label within the space of this aisle. In 1914, Haffner-Ginger published the *California Mexican Spanish Cook Book*, juxtaposing the Californian, Mexican, and Spanish labels to reinforce the Spanish fantasy heritage in a way that very much resembles the labeling discourses enacted in this Tex-Mex/Latino aisle. A quick peek at the table of contents—which she calls “Classification of Recipes”—reveals that the Spanish label has been affixed to most of the recipes, either with the English word “Spanish,” or with the Spanish translation “Espanol” (sic), to insist on the European heritage of these recipes (p.

125). The rice section, which Haffner-Ginger has titled “Arroz a la Espanol” (sic), features four rice recipes, which are “Spanish Rice: Mint Flavor,” “Spanish Rice,” “Spanish Rice au Gratin”, and “Green Peppers with Rice” (p. 99).

None of these recipes is familiar to me, and none of them resembles the paella dish featured in Vigo’s paella packaging. Thus, I find Haffner-Ginger’s rationale for her use of labels, as provided in her “Word to the Readers,” rather amusing. Written in 1914, Haffner-Ginger’s fantasy heritage rhetoric voices some of the concerns I have when I see the use of the descriptive adjective Spanish to describe foods I know are not part of the culinary tradition I grew up with. As Haffner-Ginger states:

It is not generally known that Spanish dishes as they are known in California *are really* Mexican Indian dishes. Bread made of corn, sauces of chile peppers, jerked beef, tortillas, enchiladas, etc., are *unknown in Spain as native foods*; though the majority of Spanish people in California are as devoted to peppery dishes as the Mexicans themselves, and *as the Mexicans speak Spanish, the foods are commonly called Spanish dishes.* (p. 14; my emphasis)

With these words, Haffner-Ginger insists on the Spanish heritage of these foods, defining them in terms of language, rather than nationality. This form of identification indeed characterizes the homogenization enacted through the imposition of the Hispanic label, since the term “Hispanic” refers to people who have ancestry from a Spanish speaking country

(Oboler, 1995). In doing so, both the use of the word “Spanish” and the term “Hispanic” engage in a form of identification that reduces the many members of the Latinx communities to their relationship with Spanish colonialism and its colonial language, while ignoring the U.S. imperialism affecting Latinxs within and beyond this Tex/Mex-Latino aisle.

And yet, Haffner-Ginger insists that, despite the origins and ethnic labels attributed to these meals, they are appropriate for the Anglo consumer. They have even been “revised,” which is to say, appropriated, to fit the expectations of the Anglo palate, further colonizing the cultural heritage of the traditional Mexican cuisine and creating a racial hierarchy of taste, and, consequently, of the people. This practice of adaptation continues today, as La Preferida and Goya have produced different items labeled as “Spanish rice,” reproducing the racist rhetoric of the Spanish fantasy heritage while promising the “authenticity” of the “revised” recipes so as to satisfy the Anglo-American clientele even if Haffner-Ginger warns that these recipes are completely unknown in Spain.

Quite shocking are the images Haffner-Ginger includes at the end of her cookbook, where she juxtaposes two Spanish women, one dressed in a more middle-class gown and labeled “a type of Spanish women” (sic) while on the other page we have a picture of a woman wearing a rebozo and holding a guitar with the inscription, “Another type of Spanish women” (sic) (p. 117-18). The need to

mark an ethnic Other and the legacy of the Spanish fantasy heritage are not only present in these boxes of rice or other foodstuffs in this aisle. This helps me to better understand my first experiences as an international exchange student in Arkansas, when I first found myself confronted with the ignorance that pervades the stereotyping of minorities living in the U.S. It is only now that I understand why people were shocked to hear the response to the question always triggered by my Spanish accented English: “Where are you from?” I guess sometimes I would say that I was from Spain, while at others I responded just by saying that I was Spanish. Either way, I often got the same reaction; to them, I was “too white to be from Spain.” This response puzzled me, since the forms I had completed before arrival to the U.S. only described me as an international exchange student; I had not yet been formally assigned a racial/ethnic category.

Now returning to the market, at the end of this aisle I find the label “Tortilla Center”: a movable shelf holding tortillas of different brands. There are both wheat and corn tortillas of different brands, and on the top shelf I see packages of tostadas, the flat deep-fried tortillas that accompany many traditional Mexican meals composed of seafood or hearty stews, or form the base for other toppings (a “tostada”). This “Tortilla Center” also tells a story—a story of how the growth of the Mexican population in Chicago after 1960 led to the opening of many tortilla factories, such as Atotonilco or Sabinas in Pilsen, as well as to the selling of tortillas in many

chain supermarkets such as this grocery store. Many of these tortillas/tostadas have been locally produced by companies such as El Milagro Tortilla Products or Mission Foods, while others come from different Mexican-American companies spread all over the country, such as La Banderita.

These tortilla packages feature what the U.S. food industry would likely describe as traditional symbols to address the Mexican-American community or to further reinforce their promise of authenticity. For example, La Mission products feature an image of a bell that makes one think of the church bells that rang to announce Mexico’s War of Independence against Spain in the town of Dolores Hidalgo in 1810. Faithful to its name, La Banderita products feature a Mexican flag with either cereal grains or an ear of corn in lieu of the Mexican coat of arms. Next to these, the packages of Tortillas El Milagro, produced in Chicago, illustrate how this Tortilla Center aims to cater to Mexican-American and Anglo clientele, as both English and Spanish are written on the front of the package, while the back of the package offers cooking instructions in English.

By stocking both wheat and corn tortillas, which are produced both locally and nationally, these shelves create a crossborder U.S.-Mexico connection while targeting the Anglo-American clientele; and, by seemingly adapting to the Anglo ways, they testify to the ways in which the presence of these products entails a tactic of resistance. This situation dates back to the time of Hernán Cortés,

as does the colonial appropriation of Indigenous foods, when the Aztec civilization was forced to feed the Spanish colonizers who thoroughly enjoyed the native food (Arellano, 2012, p. 16-17). While the Spaniards embraced tamales, tortillas, chiles, and cocoa beans among other local offerings, “they introduced bread along with beef, lamb, pork and chickens, and other flora and fauna that profoundly changed the Mexican diet” (p. 17). Nevertheless, the Indigenous community did not fully accept these impositions and refused to eat wheat in favor of their corn tortillas and tamales. The imperial power inscribed within food practices becomes clear at this point, as the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún insisted on the natives’ need to eat wheat, for only then would they become as strong, pure, and wise as the colonizers (p. 18). As can be seen, the conflict between wheat and corn illustrates a discourse more complex than mere different eating habits. The Indigenous Other is defined in opposition to the “strong, pure, and wise” colonist, and only by embracing the colonizers’ ways would the Other achieve a “civilized state.”

Nevertheless, according to Arellano (2012), Indigenous communities resisted and continued making corn tortillas and tamales, in spite of threats of punishment and promises of evolution made by the colonizers. Hence, corn tortillas and tamales illustrate negotiation and resistance against colonizing discourses, for it was not only corn that the natives kept, but also their cooking practices. The making of corn dough was a process that

embedded “the centerpiece of the diet for most of Mexico’s indigenous, one filled with mystery and ceremony” (p. 18-19). And so, even if Indigenous communities incorporated some of the colonial products in their cooking rituals, the act of making corn tortillas becomes an act of “survivance” (Powell 2002) against colonial ways.

These rhetorical acts of survivance continue today, as these shelves become the space of negotiation where discriminatory discourses are projected, but also, the place where the subject Other maintain their cultural food knowledges. As the genealogy of some of the brands and produce analyzed evidence, these acts of negotiation lead to the continuous growth of this complex space. It is because of this continuous morphing that the more and more I contemplate the meanings of the Ethnic, Tex/Mex, Latino aisles and the history of the products they contain, that bringing this study to a close becomes difficult, but also problematic. I believe that the ever-evolving meanings of this space need to be studied further, as new products are stocked on these shelves.

## **Implications**

As one can see, the multimodal spaces of grocery store aisles invite us to ponder how we construct (our) identities and relationships. Company geneologies reveal how Latinidad/es identities are stocked and (mis)represented on market shelves. A market functions as a testament to a complicated colonial history, including the labeling discourses that shape these spaces

and Latinx communities. Landscaping and labeling practices of the public spaces of a market will change depending on location and the communities navigating these spaces. Thus, there is a need to study how public spaces like a market can impact the shaping of Latinidad/es. And yet, the rhetorical practices that can be/are enacted in a market can turn a space such as the Ethnic aisle into a space of survivance against Othering hegemonic discourses and negotiation of transborder Latinx solidarities. Everyday practices in public spaces can shape the development of our complex subjectivities and individual/collective embodied knowledges.

Different modes of conceiving and experiencing space and place affect the construction of the self and individual/collective relationships. My wrestling with the narration and theorization of space in English and Spanish reveals a pressing need to study how multimodal rhetorics may reproduce spatial discourses that force individuals to constantly negotiate and translate their complex subjectivities. The untranslatability of space demands that we contemplate how different communities understand, recount, and experience space because divergent constructions of space will inevitably lead to different forms of *conocimiento* (knowledge from experience) and *sabiduría* (knowledge from memorization). Connections between the narration of space and linguistic practices call for the incorporation of multilingual studies into scholarship on visual, spatial, and multi-

modal rhetorics. Even if I studied the English language more extensively, my *conocimiento* of space influences my *sabiduría* (as academic learning) of the standard uses of prepositions in the English language. My embodied knowledge of space determines my perceptions, conceptualizations, and rhetorical representations of it. A rhetor's linguistic *sabiduría* and *conocimiento* affect the study of space and other multimodal rhetorical acts, problematizing the Cartesian mind/body, theory/experience, and *saber/conocer* binaries and hopefully, promoting a decolonial reconsideration of canonical scholarly practices.

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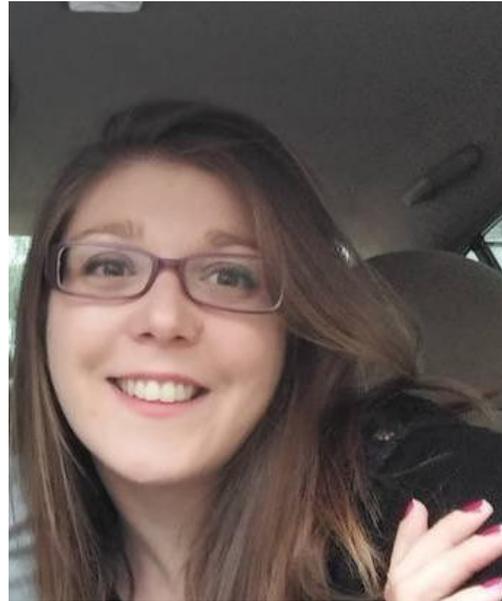
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