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Publisher: Routledge

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Food and Foodways: Explorations in the History and Culture of

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gfof20>

AUTHENTIC OR NOT, IT'S ORIGINAL

Meredith E. Abarca^a

^a University of Texas, El Paso, Texas, USA

Available online: 16 Aug 2010

To cite this article: Meredith E. Abarca (2004): AUTHENTIC OR NOT, IT'S ORIGINAL, Food and Foodways: Explorations in the History and Culture of, 12:1, 1-25

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07409710490467589>

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AUTHENTIC OR NOT, IT'S ORIGINAL

Meredith E. Abarca

University of Texas, El Paso, Texas, USA

I am a literary critic who grew up in a household almost empty of books but often filled with food. The formative years of my life were spent cooking with my mother in the kitchens of restaurants where she worked. The bond created between us then, in the kitchen, planted the seeds that now give the fruits of my food studies scholarship. *Charlas culinarias* (culinary chats) provide the foundation to my culinary inquiries. The *charlas* are methods of conducting field research that center on the life experiences of working-class Mexican women, some with as little as two years of formal schooling. Conversations on food offer a space to hear the voices of grassroots theorists who ground their social awareness on the epistemology of their cooking practices. The first of such food talks took place in 1996 with my mother, Liduvina Vélez.¹ In this paper the theoretical investigation suggested by the *charlas* is the phrase “authentic Mexican food.”

While this paper will not focus on the *charlas*, it is important to begin with them since the analysis that follows is a product of my initial observation that women from the *charlas* speak rarely, if ever, about the authenticity of their Mexican food.² Yet, in other aspects of my ongoing research about foodways, the word authentic often emerges. The concept of authenticity marks its presence in multiple settings: media, cookbooks, literature, classroom discussion, and casual conversations with friends and colleagues. Thus, the data I am using comes not only from theoretical and literary sources, but also from observations based on media as well as situations where I have noticed how and in what context authenticity enters in everyday exchanges. This article provides a space where such observations are the basic ingredients that flavor the investigation into the politics of claiming authenticity in food production.

Address correspondence to Meredith E. Abarca, University of Texas, El Paso, Department of English, 500 W. University Ave., El Paso, TX 79968-0526 USA. E-mail: mabarca@utep.edu

SCENARIO

While in graduate school, in order to supplement my income, I worked cleaning houses. Once, while working during Christmas break, the lady of the house invited me to sit with her to watch Martha Stewart's cooking lesson on how to make authentic Mexican tamales. The tone of authority in Stewart's voice was unmistakable. I sat quietly, seemingly taking lessons from an expert. A running commentary made by the lady of the house was how much Stewart knew about cooking and how we could learn from her; she also said that I could probably use Stewart's knowledge for my academic research. She knew I was working on theorizing literary culinary metaphors in the works of Chicana writers as well as working-class Mexican women's culinary discourses and practices.

Reflections on the above scenario lead me to ask: what does it mean to "take lessons" in how to make "authentic Mexican food" from someone who is an outsider to this national or cultural community? Can I, as a member of Mexico's national culture by birth, as well as a member of Mexico's cultural diasporic community by place of residence and lifestyle, speak of authenticity in my own methods of cooking Mexican food (Pérez, 1999)? What are the politics of claiming authenticity, of speaking from a position of knowledge and of authority, to define the legitimacy of a particular cultural production? How does this legitimacy affect the politics of inclusion and exclusion in terms of "membership" in a national, cultural, or even familial group? Finally, what does it mean to speak of the authenticity of culinary practices when traditions within all cultures are constantly changing?

Confronted with all these complex questions, I will examine how the everyday non-critical use of the phrase "authentic Mexican food" can manifest itself as a double-edged sword, by illustrating the danger of its ideological implications. My concern echoes Mary Douglas's suggestion that food can be a "blinding fetish in our culture . . ." of which 'our ignorance is explosively dangerous'" (quoted in Kane, 2002: 315). Since language, like food, expresses much about who we are, lack of critical judgment on the usage of language is also "explosively dangerous." Those who award themselves the privilege to define authenticity in any ethnic food, whether they are cultural outsiders or insiders, can inflict wounds that either appropriate cultural and personal knowledge or essentialize it causing a stifling of creative growth.

The discussion following is divided into three parts. In order to demonstrate how claims of authenticity inflict these wounds, in the first section I engage in a theoretical discussion with other academics who have explored the politics of authenticity in ethnic food. Here, the focus is primarily how

mainstream society has viewed the significance of claims of authenticity regarding ethnic food. The second part is a brief culinary analysis of two literary works: Bárbara Brinson Curriel's poem "Recipe: Chorizo con Huevo in the Microwave" and Elaine Romero's play *The Fat-Free Chicana and the Snow Cap Queen*.³ While the word authentic does not appear in these literary productions, its ideological effects carry the action in the works. Here, I bring the gastropolitics of section one and focus them within the dynamics of a single Mexican (Mexican-American) family. In the last section, I suggest how the substitution of "original" for "authentic" might minimize the risk of labeling a recipe unauthentic and by extension planting a seed of suspicion on the cultural identity of the cook.⁴ Debra Castillo's description of a recipe as a "theory of possibilities" offers a paradigm where the changes of a single recipe reflect the "possibility" of multiple voices within any given ethnic community (1992: xiii). Such changes speak to a person's creative growth, to an "original" moment in the life story of the person who is preparing a recipe.

CLAIMING AUTHENTICITY WITHIN THE CULTURE OF ETHNIC FOODS

I am interested in two definitions of authentic or authenticity as they apply to food culture. One definition suggests "possessing inherent authority,"⁵ which in this case refers to the cook. The other applies to a cooking method that is "real, actual, genuine as opposed to imagined,"⁶ which in this case suggests that deviations from a previously set cultural pattern cause suspicion. Having authority and claiming knowledge when referring to a particular culinary method for a specific ethnic food, in and of itself, is not the problem. The problem arises when we consider what social settings exist to claim such authority.

In the Stewart scenario presented above, the TV show represents one type of social setting. Stewart took the position of the expert on a culinary methodology with which I have years of experience. To use the words of cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, Stewart became pseudo-expert through an act of "hijacking" an other's cultural production, while I became the silent, passive observer (1991: 195). Cooking, argue food scholars, involves intellectual knowledge, skillful manual process, and personal as well as collective historical, political, and social stories, all which the act of "hijacking" takes away.⁷

I make the argument that when people add their own *chiste* (twist) to the preparation of a recipe, they add their knowledge and creative expression to it.⁸ *Chistes* within the *charlas culinarias* represent moments of asserting acts of agency. For example, in a *charla* with Alma Contreras in 1996, a mother of four who cleans houses for a living, after sharing the process of how she developed her style of making *enchiladas*, she says that now when she tells other women about how she makes them they respond: “Ay, esas no son *enchiladas*” (those are not *enchiladas*). To such a response, Contreras replies, “yo se como a mi me gustan y como yo las hago” (I know how I like them and how to make them). Contreras neither claims her *enchiladas* as authentic nor someone else’s as inauthentic; she simply stresses the right to her creative energy. I read Contreras’s style as an original culinary moment where her knowledge and creativity take center stage.⁹ Acts of cultural hijacking, therefore, do not occur when someone else’s productions get modified, but when the new versions acquire a claim of authenticity undermining the intellectual knowledge and creative expression of an earlier source. The emphasis on authenticity within the new renditions produces a tendency of erasing the “*chiste*” of other versions of the same dish, thus erasing part of a person’s story and knowledge.

The polemics of authenticity also thrive in the production and advertisement of cookbooks and ethnic restaurants. How are ethnic people constructed by advertisements, particularly when media represents a romanticized image of traditional practices?¹⁰ I recognize that for some people this concern might seem ungrounded. After all, advertisements deploy the notion of authenticity to sell a product; they have nothing to do with actual ethnic people. Yet, I believe, as do other foodways scholars, that what we eat, how we eat, and where we eat create political, social, and symbolic messages regarding attitudes toward ourselves and toward the ethnic other.¹¹

For instance, philosopher Lisa M. Heldke in “Let’s Cook Thai: Recipes for Colonialism” argues that the search for authenticity is tinted with colonialist attitudes, manifesting themselves by the appropriation of ethnic other’s cultural and personal knowledge (2001). Heldke focuses on the production of ethnic cookbooks written by cultural outsiders, who take the task of making the “exotic familiar,” and cultural insiders, who position themselves as the spokespersons of their culinary traditions. Due to copyright laws, recipes become items of ownership only when they are recognized as “printed” words. Within Heldke’s analysis, this represents a colonialist attitude that recognizes the value of ownership in public settings. This recognition tends to undervalue the importance of a free communal exchange of sharing recipes that takes place in private settings.¹² Furthermore, cookbook authors often gather

recipes from firsthand sources whose identities and contributions get literally, symbolically, and legally erased in the process of a book's publication. Cookbooks privilege written knowledge over oral narratives,¹³ and they also privilege "people on the basis of class . . . as well as race and often sex" (185). Since a recipe represents an integral part of a person's life story and history, the colonialist attitudes inherent in copyright laws silence the voice of ethnic minorities who contributed their knowledge.

In "'I Yam What I Yam': Cooking, Culture, and Colonialism," literary critic Anne Goldman also explores the politics of ethnic cookbooks (1992). For Goldman, just as for Heldke, when cultural outsiders engage in the production of writing cookbooks, colonialist attitudes enter their projects. While Diana Kennedy (1972) is recognized as the "ultimate authority, the high priestess of Mexican cooking in America," Goldman points out that many of Kennedy's recipes in *The Cuisine of Mexico* "are based on the meals the . . . maids cooked for her during her various séjours to Mexico" (171 and 192). When we read Kennedy's cookbooks, we know little, if anything, about the lives of these women. Goldman goes on to point out that in her *Mexican Cookbook* Erna Fergusson (1945) writes, "the only way to be sure . . . [of] making tortillas correctly is to have a line of Indian ancestry running back about 500 years" (181–182). Based on these two examples, Goldman suggests two complications with the concept of authenticity, taking over another's knowledge or essentializing such knowledge. I am not sure which of these two carries a lesser implication of colonialist attitudes. Recipes for Goldman represent acts of "autobiographical assertion" (172). Therefore, in endeavors such as Kennedy's and Fergusson's, the "autobiographical assertions" of the original sources of ethnic recipes get marginalized (172).

Authenticity in the hands of a cultural insider, however, for Goldman represents an act of cultural resistance against mainstream hegemonization. As an example, Goldman analyzes the works of Fabiola Cabeza de Baca and Cleofas Jaramillo who wrote and published in an effort to counterbalance either the appropriation of their cultural heritage by Anglo society, which dates back to the 1842 Treaty of Guadalupe, or the dismissal of such culinary practices by the federal funding programs of the 1930s and 1940s, which promoted assimilation of Mexican-American (or Hispanos) into mainstream culture. For example, after reading an article in *Holland* by Mrs. Elizabeth Willis De Huff, Jaramillo says, "In giving the recipe for making tortillas, it read, 'Mix bread flour with water, add salt.' How nice and light these must be without yeast or shortening! And still these smart Americans make money with their writing, and we who know the correct way sit back and listen" (*Romance*, 1955: 173). Similarly, Cabeza de Baca (1982) worked to maintain women's

knowledge and oral traditions alive. In *The Good Life*, the *curandera*, the medicine woman, says to a younger woman, “Why don’t you [write]... down all the prescriptions that I give you each year? . . . I cannot live forever and when I am gone you will have no one to ask” (1982: 14). Cabeza de Baca and Jaramillo, in Goldman’s analysis, represent the voices of Mexican (Hispano) community insiders. A cultural insider’s privilege to define an authentic culinary production, however, remains problematic. While people like Cabeza de Baca and Jaramillo make efforts to protect Mexican culture from erasure, we must be careful that an insider’s privilege to protect culture does not silence the desire for adding culinary *chistes* felt by younger generations. This is precisely the point I will explore with the literary analysis in the second section.

The desire to eat ethnic foods is not always tinted with colonialist attitudes.¹⁴ Some scholars focus on the positive consequences of our global multi-ethnic palate. These include the acceptance of ethnic minorities into mainstream society, the creation of economic enclaves for immigrants who establish and work in ethnic restaurants, and the function of ethnic restaurants as social sites for cultural solidarity. For example, Amy Bentley examines how Mexican food in the Southwest helps transform the “exotic” to “familiar” and the “inedible to edible,” an important transformation “given that not too long ago Texas Anglos considered Mexican food unfit for human consumption” (1998: 239). Lucy Long explores how culinary tourism “offers a deeper, more integrated level of experiencing an Other” because it brings two cultures together by use of “the senses of taste, smell, touch and vision” (1998: 182). Uma Narayan shares Long’s belief. “Gustatory relish for the food of ‘Others,’” says Narayan, “may help contribute to an appreciation of their presence in [a] national community” outside their native country (1997: 184). Ethnic restaurants for Sylvia Ferrero have a “dual-life,” as sites that transcend ethnic differences and as areas for ethnic cultural resistance (2002). For Donna Gabaccia, “What makes the U.S. multicultural is not so much its many separate culinary traditions as it is Americans’ desire to eat a multi-ethnic mix of foods, and to make this mix part of themselves” (1998: 222).

Without undermining the positive consequences of ethnic food consumption, an *overly* enthusiastic focus on these social effects can result in creating a deceiving notion of accepting ethnic minorities into mainstream culture. Both Narayan and Bentley acknowledge this by illustrating how the proliferation of ethnic foods represents a false notion that countries are free from the grip of xenophobia. They underscore this concern by juxtaposing specific historical moments of gastronomical acceptance of certain ethnic foods while

treating ethnic minorities as second-class citizens, and preventing them from obtaining equal access to social, educational, or political life.

For example, according to Narayan, Indian curry carries a colonialist legacy since the British invented curry as an Indian commodity for their cuisine. Narayan explains that with the incorporation of curry in England, British people “were incorporating the Other into the self, but on the Self’s terms” (1997: 165). The curry, however, needed authentication in order to sell. Advertisement companies used Indian natives to authenticate a new invention as part of an old established Indian tradition. Narayan goes on to say, “Seemingly simple acts of eating are flavored with complicated, and sometimes contradictory, cultural meanings” (162). A complication in the savoring of curry is that “while curry may have been incorporated with ease into British cuisine, ‘the desire to assimilate and process what is external to the self’ did not extend to actual people of Indian origin” (173). The irony Narayan sees is that a dish called curry does not exist in India.

Bentley brings a similar issue in the context of the Southwest appetite for Mexican cooking. Bentley says:

The popularity of Southwest cuisine, in light of the current negative political climate regarding Mexico and hostility toward Mexican-American citizens, indicates a cultural and political blindness. One needs to think of the overwhelming negative constructions of Mexico in the U.S. media and thus in the minds of many if not most Americans: the 1990s NAFTA debates and passage, complete with such memorable slogans as H. Ross Perot’s “giant sucking sound”; the “us against them” rhetoric contained in nearly all debates over immigration; California’s passage of Prop. 187, English-only measures on state ballots; and 1996 Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan’s defiant and unapologetic use of “Jose” to refer to all Mexican immigrants, not to mention his pledge to build a “Berlin Wall” on the border; all indicate a national anxiety and prejudice. (1998: 244)

To say that such political rhetoric and social attitudes no longer prevail would be a naïve statement on my part. Yes, our appetite for multi-ethnic eating is one step forward to accepting and understanding the meaning of diversity. For the time being, however, I think Leslie Brenner says it succinctly, “When it comes to *food*, anyway, we’re xenophobes no more” ([emphasis added] 1999: 119).

When the acceptance of ethnic foods comes with claims of authenticity of its place of origin, it limits the paths for new culinary *chistes* to develop. Insistence on authenticity makes people act as representatives of foreign,

exotic cultures somewhere else. Trinh T. Minh-ha speaks of the problem of *asking* people to be representatives of their foreign cultures, to remain as “Other.” She writes,

Today, planned authenticity is rife; as a product of hegemony and a remarkable counterpart of universal standardization, it constitutes an efficacious means of silencing the cry of racial oppression. [It says] We no longer wish to erase your differences[:]; we demand, on the contrary, that you remember and assert [them]. (1989: 89)

“Planned authenticity” runs the risk of boxing ethnic people in within well-defined sets of cultural and economic boundaries but expects them to keep to their “way of life and . . . values” by not leaving “the borders of [their] homeland” (Minh-ha, 1989: 80).

In terms of ethnic restaurants in the United States, I read “borders of . . . homeland” as symbolic boundaries. Such boundaries carry the danger of acting as gatekeepers to protect and keep ethnic people’s culture by locking them into a place often defined by social-economic status. While ethnic restaurants might be a bridge that brings people of different cultural and social economic backgrounds to be physically situated in the same location, planned authenticity prevents such meeting to ever take place on equal social and economic footing. Ethnic restaurants, with or without the claim of authenticity, for the most part are assumed to be inexpensive. While having lunch with two colleagues, one said that when guests come to El Paso, Texas, she takes them to Carnitas Querétaro: Authentic Mexican Food. She went on to say that the food there was authentic, the place clean, unpretentious, simple, and inexpensive.

The assumption that certain ethnic restaurants are inexpensive creates “a devaluing” of such food considering the “high prices and tips consumers pay for ‘culturally elevated’ food such as French cuisine” (Narayan, 1997: 180). Narayan elaborates on this concern:

Western eaters of ethnic foods need to cultivate more reflective attention to complexities involved in the production and consumption of the “ethnic foods” they eat. They might, for instance, reflect on the race and class structures that affect the lives of workers who prepare and serve that food, and the implication of class differences between immigrants who own these restaurants and the immigrants who work for them. . . [A]ttention to and reflectiveness about the material and political realities of food production and consumption would help counter the passive and unthinking eating of “ethnic foods” that partially constitute “food colonialism.” (1997: 182)

Lack of critical attention to such complex reality leads to boxing people in within well-defined socio-economic boundaries.

Sylvia Ferrero offers a different way of looking at planned authenticity in her discussion of Mexican restaurants' "dual-life" in the Los Angeles area (2002: 199). For Ferrero, Mexican immigrants who own restaurants define how the concept of authenticity functions. In order to meet the expectations (or the demands) of cultural outsiders, says Ferrero, claims to authenticity help in the creation of an "imagined pseudoethnicity," which keeps cultural outsiders at a distance, unable to *know* or even *taste* the flavors of their ethnic encounter. Since such restaurants cater mostly to the tourist diner who "lacks the knowledge to demand authenticity of Mexican food," the food served becomes standardized in its offerings and methods of preparation (2002). Ferrero argues that in this face of Mexican restaurants' "dual life," an inversion of social ethnic roles takes place. Historically those with economic and political power have ruled the lives of ethnic minorities, but in the restaurant domain those in power become the purveyors of traditional Mexican foods. Tourists give up their authority and must follow the advice of those who own the knowledge of such cuisine (203).

When Mexican restaurant owners deliberately provide a pseudo-ethnicity by creating standardized foods, the gesture reads as a subversive act to prevent cultural appropriation. The cultural insider is fully cognizant that the self-image he/she presents does not reflect the complexity of an ethnic identity. In the inversion of roles, however, what exactly is inverted? Yes, the Mexican immigrant owns the knowledge of her/his cultural cuisine, but in the context of tourism it is the tourist who owns the financial privilege to travel even when lacking in the cultural knowledge of others.

Claims and demands for real authentic Mexican food by Mexican immigrants frame the other side of restaurants' "dual-life." Immigrants' needs transform some Mexican restaurants into social devices for ethnic community building to "reconstitute" cultural "identity" by serving specialized foods that represent the "practice of 'home cooking' where food . . . [becomes] a symbolic and cultural connection with the homeland" (Ferrero, 2002: 194). Mexican restaurants "allow the social and cultural empowerment of new immigrants, Mexicans, and first and second generation Mexican-Americans" (209).

If my interpretations of Ferrero's arguments are correct, then some (or many) Mexican restaurants are not sites that truly bridge the gap of ethnic, class, and social differences. Instead they are sites that work to maintain distance by creating an "imagined pseudo ethnicity of the Other" (200). While I do not want to downplay the importance of cultural assertion and solidarity

within ethnic groups, one must be careful how the perimeters of such efforts are defined. First of all “real” is a relative term. Gastronomically speaking, encounters of “mainstream and ethnic cuisines” incorporate and borrow “from each other, even as they maintain their distinctiveness” (Narayan, 1997: 186). Gastronomical desire for planned or actual authenticity might prevent the recognition of this mutual exchange of cultural and social influence. We must remember that food is “multivocal and polysemic, and its placement within these realms can fluctuate within individuals and over time” (Long, 1998: 188). Through the process of incorporating differences, people create their own gastronomical *chistes*, making their distinctive meals original to them at the time of their invention.

Claims of authenticity in ethnic cookbooks and restaurants demonstrate the ideological complexities embedded within the phrase “authentic ethnic food.” Whether demanding or delivering authenticity regardless of its consequences as cultural appropriation, the essentialization of other’s food practices, or acts of cultural resistance from within, the ultimate effect is the same. Insistence on authenticity stifles culinary *chistes* from taking place.

POLITICS OF CULINARY AUTHENTICITY IN LITERATURE

The global, social, and political issues raised above in regard to the tinted colonialist attitudes embedded within the ideologies of claiming authenticity are felt and must be negotiated within individual families. Bárbara Brinson Curiel’s “Recipe: Chorizo con Huevo Made in the Microwave” explores gastropolitics and the double-edged sword of claiming authenticity in Mexican food within a single family (1989). While the word authentic does not literally appear in the poem, the notion of a traditional way of cooking carries the same implication as the claim of authenticity. The poem deals with two distinct cooking methods among members of a family who share a common culture but no longer a common tradition. The grandmother’s *traditional*, therefore authentic, *method* of preparing “chorizo con huevo” on an outdoor wood burning stove is altered by a grandchild’s incorporation of modern technology, the microwave. This example shows how in a family the notion of a traditional culinary method acts as a way of preventing new creations if the insistence in keeping tradition is taken too rigidly. Such insistence silences the voices of younger generations by preventing them from developing *chistes* as interpretations of their own lives.

“Recipe: Chorizo con Huevo Made in the Microwave” represents the life story of a generation that does not “feel the pangs of nostalgia for tradition” (Rebolledo, 1995: 137). The entire poem describes the efficiency of cooking and eating *chorizo con huevo* made in the microwave.

Get out a plastic dish.
 Cook the chorizo on high for 4 minutes.
 Crack the eggs.
 Fold them in.
 Microwave 2 minutes
 Stir.
 Microwave 2 minutes
 Serve.

Yet the consequence of modern technology dims “memories of abuelita/feeding wood into the stove” (Brinson Curiel, 1989: 273). The narrator admits, “You won’t smell the black crisp/of tortillas/bubbling on cast iron./Microwaved,/they are pale and limp as avena—/haven’t a shadow of smoke” as when grandmother used to make it “over an outdoor stove” (273–274).

The gastronomic changes for the grandchild began at eight with the desire for “peanut butter and jelly” rather than “sopa de fideo” and later with the introduction of the microwave (273). The reception of these two changes encountered a mother’s raised eyebrow and a grandmother’s “hard stare” (274). The accusatory implication of these two gestures from a mother and grandmother who, generally speaking, represent the voice of tradition, runs the risk of silencing the voice of someone who has a “sense of contemporary, time-saving living” (Rebolledo, 1995: 137). The voice of the younger generation is obviously not mute since we see the grandchild eating “chorizo con huevo made in microwave.” Because of the grandchild’s *chiste*, cooking with modern technology, the poem’s persona seems to insist in placing an internalized guilt on the grandchild for altering tradition. “While your mouth is full,/recall that [grandmother’s] appetite/ached/for a seasonless sky” (Brinson Curiel, 1989: 274).

When I teach this poem, my students always seem divided in their reactions. For some “chorizo con huevo made in the microwave” represents a loss of cultural identity. Some have even referred to this aspect of modernization as a blasphemy. Others defend the right to accommodate life in a fast moving society.¹⁵ I often ask my students to consider to what degree cooking in an outdoor burning stove expresses a conscious desire to maintain cultural

traditions or a reflection of the only option at hand. Blaming those who do change traditional patterns, I argue is a misplaced blame because alterations to cultural practices are unavoidable, and as the poems says, “Ni modo, pues” (273). While not clearly stated in the poem if the grandchild is a woman or man, generally speaking women are the keepers and teachers of traditions. How do women negotiate adding their own *chistes* to traditional dishes, like chorizo con huevos made in the microwave, so that their cooking speaks to an original moment in their particular life circumstance?

Regardless of the “major modifications of traditional foods” caused by globalization, Belasco and Scranton say, “Romance of ethnicity can coexist with globalization” (2002: 2, 16). But what is the cost and who pays the price for holding on to the “romance of ethnicity”? In Brinson Curiel’s poem, cooking on an “outdoor wood burning stove” expresses the idea of “romance.” The “romance” troubles me, for I see it closely connected with the ideological implications found within the claims of authenticity in ethnic food. In the “romance” for “ethnicity,” authenticity becomes a charming double-edged sword. This “romance” raises the thorny issue of who has the right (the power) to speak as the true voice of cultural representation. Which recipe for *chorizo con huevo* is the most culturally authentic: the grandmother’s or the grandchild’s? If we do assert one recipe as more authentic over the other, while we might not necessarily engage in an act of appropriation, we do run the risk of rendering someone’s life experiences less relevant, less valid.

Gastropolitics in Elaine Romero’s play *The Fat Free Chicana and the Snow Cap Queen* (2000) also focus on a single family, but it centers within the family’s restaurant. Romero’s play shows how culinary *chistes* are inevitable, and how they are a product of geographical, social, and generational changes.¹⁶ The play fortifies the argument that to speak of making Mexican food the same way in which it has always been done—the authentic way—denies spaces for new creations.

Romero’s *The Fat Free Chicana and the Snow Cap Queen* is about a Mexican family who owns a restaurant, Café Lindo, in the Southwest. Their lives center on Café Lindo, both culturally and economically. With the exception of the opening scene that takes place at the University in Idaho, the play is set in the restaurant. The story is about a single mother, Gloria Martinez, and her two daughters, Amy Durán, who comes home from college during summer, and Silvia Durán, who stays home helping her mother run Café Lindo. The two other family members are Gloria’s father and her nephew, Rumaldo, a prideful Chicano. In the opening scene, we are introduced to Amy, “a warm-blooded person in a cold-blooded place” (90). Standing on the snow-covered Idaho University campus, Amy struggles between her desire to return to her family

in the Southwest and staying at school to complete her studies. As the “first grandchild to go to college in [her] family,” she feels that to “return home” without the degree would be “a failure” (91). Amy does return home for the summer, and through the *charlas culinarias* between mother and daughter and siblings, the process of negotiating traditional and new culinary *chistes* provide the tension and conflict, and resolution of the play.

Another key character whose roles are both symbolic and realistic is Snow Cap Queen, the icon model of Morrell Snow Cap Lard. Within this role, she speaks as the voice of long-standing traditions. Yet the play provides enough for us to question her motives for keeping tradition. Does Snow Cap Queen speak on behalf of cultural traditions, or is she advocating for the profit of multinational corporations? Her nemesis is the Good Witch of the North who “wears a white lace dress, carries a magic wand, [and] . . . looks like La Conquistadora, the Virgin of Santa Fe, New Mexico” (90). She represents Amy’s subconscious desire for culinary changes, which involve healthier cooking without consuming lard. The two realistic renditions of this character are La Crítica, a food critic who brings into the restaurant her presupposed notions of what is “real” Mexican food, and the Health Officer, who keeps tradition by enforcing the law (114). The four roles played by this one character are quintessential to my exploration of the ideological implications embedded in the concept of “authentic Mexican food.” They highlight the concern raised by the implications in claiming authenticity: silencing the voice of change or preventing new *chistes* from taking place in the name of tradition (i.e., in the name of authenticity).

In the opening scene in Idaho, we are introduced to Amy struggling with her decision to return home. The Good Witch of the North enters the play to help Amy sort out her feelings and needs. The Good Witch symbolizes Amy Durán’s desire to incorporate the different cultural encounters she has experienced into the life she knows in the Southwest. Amy left the Southwest to attend the University of Idaho, where significant changes take place in her life. Before going to Idaho, Amy intended to study Chicano history, but to her surprise, she finds out that in Idaho people were not aware that California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado were part of Mexico, much less have a Chicana/o Studies program. By accident or choice, Amy decides to major in dietetics. This unexpected academic major becomes the catalyst for change in the culinary patterns in the Durán’s family restaurant.

The Good Witch of the North, who is the voice of Amy’s subconscious, encourages Amy to return home.¹⁷ According to North, Amy’s family and the community need her because her mother’s way of cooking with lard is like the “smell of death” (91). With excessive lard consumption, says

North, “Cholesterol levels can shoot so high they’ll lift tin roofs off adobe buildings” (91). Initially, Amy resists North’s arguments. But when North says, “Go home and make your fat-free dreams come true . . . Change your mami’s restaurant. Create a new healthier menu . . .,” it is as though North has spoken Amy’s secret desire (92). Once Amy admits her own desires, she goes home to make her dream come true.

Amy’s initial return home is afflicted with what I call the first-generation college syndrome. She returns armed with her college education and scientific knowledge to carry out her “desires” of changing her mother’s restaurant into a Fat-Free Mexican Café. Amy’s arrival at Café Lindo is unexpected since Amy had announced that she would not be coming home. Once Amy’s mother sees her, she immediately notices that Amy has lost weight and worries that Amy has gotten sick:

Amy : . . . I wasn’t sick. I just changed my diet.

Mami: You’re too young for that.

Amy : According to my height/weight chart, I was twenty pounds overweight.

Mami: Who makes that stuff up anyways?

Amy : [Sarcastically] The AMA, the American Medical Association (94).

Amy embraces the scientific knowledge offered by the AMA as the voice of authority. She is determined to change her mother’s cooking habits since “the Mexican diet is one of the highest-fat diets in the world” (94).¹⁸ Due to such a diet, says Amy, all Mexicans are “diabetics and die of heart attacks while . . . still young” (94). If Mexican food remains unchanged, Amy feels that her mother’s restaurant “Café Lindo” ought to be “The Heart Attack Café” (100).

Amy’s desires for change are significantly drastic and bold. Such boldness, however, encounters a strong obstacle: the expectations and demands imposed by the habits of tradition. Here is where Snow Cap Queen comes in. Snow embodies the ideologies of authenticity by speaking from a position of authority grounded in long-standing traditions. As she says, “I have been eating this food since I was a little girl” (142). In her efforts to maintain authority in culinary matters, she warns Amy that tinkering with her mother’s recipes would ruin business. “Everybody who eats here will know you’re not giving them the *real* Martinez” [emphasis added] (104). Furthermore, Snow tells Amy that she has no “right” to change her mother’s recipes (111). Going back to my argument that “*chistes*” in recipes are literal and social symbolic representations of each person’s life story and knowledge, I agree with Snow that Amy has no “right” to change her mother’s recipes, thus her mother’s

story. But when this argument is carried out to the point of “putting a curse” on Amy in order to prevent change, a curse that supposedly is “in defense of *la cultura, la raza*,” where does this leave Amy? (104) Where does Amy stand in relation to “*la raza*”? To her own family? Does Snow, as the voice of tradition, have the *right* to limit Amy’s culinary dreams of a “fat-free” Mexican diet?

Perhaps the main challenge to Amy’s desire for culinary change is her mother, Gloria. Gloria, throughout most of the play, holds to her ways of cooking to maintain her own traditions and to protect her business. After Amy’s first attempt to change the restaurant’s recipes by using “fat-free cheese,” Gloria declares that her daughter is “a terrorista—that’s what we’ve got in on our hands. A little girl who thinks she can do what she pleases. In my restaurant” (110). Gloria goes on to say, “I will not feed this health food to my customers. They come here to get *real* Mexican food like their abuelas used to make” [emphasis added] (110). In Gloria’s estimation, “It’s dangerous to change . . . [my] recipes” (114).

The voice of Snow encourages Gloria not to give in to her daughter’s culinary changes. As Gloria laments on what she has done wrong since both her daughters “only eat air,” Snow appears to her (96). The exchange between Snow and Gloria opens the door to question Snow’s motives for keeping tradition. According to Snow, Gloria is in a crisis due to Amy’s desire to change her cooking, and due to the competition for customers created by a restaurant across the street from Café Lindo. The solution, says Snow, is to “buy more lard” (98). Gloria needs to “put lard in the beans to get them to taste just right. And . . . [her] tortillas would be flaky without a little manteca . . . [Her] Christmas tamales would only be good for Halloween if . . . [she] used vegetable oil” (96). While Gloria might agree with this, she questions Snow’s motives as she asks, “are you sure this isn’t one of your commercials?” (98). Immediately after the question, Gloria begins singing a jingle: “*For you and your family there’s nothing more*” (98). Snow’s response confirms her authority: “It’s me. It’s the truth. Listen to the song or close your doors forever” (98). Snow, as the agent for the Morrell Snow Cap Lard, plays on Gloria’s emotions.

Is Romero’s play an invitation to explore the politics of multinational corporations, which sell their products under the disguise of “tradition”?¹⁹ Is the purpose of Snow to protect tradition or to sell lard? If it is to protect tradition, which tradition is she advocating when she claims to be from “the Andes. South America. The lard capital of the world” (97), and, therefore, Morrell Snow Queen Lard needs to be purchased in the U.S. Southwest in order to cook “real Mexican food.” Considering this transnational

implication, whose tradition is Snow protecting? The play clearly suggests Mexican tradition since lard is needed to cook real Mexican food. Considering that the Spaniards introduced lard to the Americas, and that now lard is closely associated with Mexican food, the “realness” of Mexican food suggests a culinary development of different traditions. Why is it that once some traditions become norms, they are difficult to change? What are the social factors that prevent changes? Within the context of the play, and the frame of my analysis of Snow, the answer is painfully obvious. Economic profit either creates or prevents change. Snow, as the voice of a multinational corporation, within the play has the support of La Crítica and the Health Official.

The role of La Crítica, whose opinions are seemingly informed by objective knowledge, helps us to further question Snow’s motives. Supposedly La Crítica and her lover eat at Café Lindo just because she has never eaten there, and “How bad could it be?” (106). La Crítica, acting as an agent for Snow, eats at Café Lindo with the preconceived agenda to keep Amy from changing the “real Mexican” recipes. La Crítica orders “Enchiladas with rice and beans. And a little chorizo on the side” (107). Amy provides the *enchiladas*, rice, and beans, but not the *chorizo*. La Crítica’s goal is to “protect la cultura, la raza” by keeping Amy from tinkering with her mother’s Mexican recipes. Before taking the first bite, La Crítica’s uses the French phrase “Bon appétit.” In the United States, within the realm of ethnic foods, French food holds the status of “high cuisine.”²⁰ La Crítica’s choice of language not only establishes her sophistication and informed opinions in culinary matters, but could also suggest that knowledge of French cuisine is a prerequisite to judge a Mexican *enchilada*. After taking the first bite of the fat-free cheese *enchiladas*, La Crítica and her lover gag, ask for water, and finally declare the food “disgusting” (107). La Crítica’s visit ends in bad publicity for Café Lindo and the arrest of Gloria for serving poisonous food. The Health Officer, Snow’s second agent, makes the arrest. Therefore, law enforcement also assists Snow in keeping tradition. The measures to “protect la cultura, la raza,” taken by Snow with the assistance of La Crítica and The Health Officer seem more drastic than those motivated by Amy’s own desires for change.

The Martínez/Dúran family pays a high price in order to keep tradition: Amy’s mother suffers a heart attack caused by a cholesterol level of 325. Yet Gloria’s identity revolves around her way of cooking. She asks Amy, “But what am I supposed to do? You want me to quit cooking? You want me to give up the one thing I do good?” (129). Amy is not asking her mother to stop cooking, but simply to cook differently. “No. I just want you to do it a new way. You know, grill the meat instead of frying it. Soften the corn tortillas in the microwave instead of dipping them in lard” (129). Considering Gloria’s

health incident, Amy's suggestions sound sensible. But Gloria feels that lard gives her food the "real" flavor that all her customers like, and it gives her the "reputation for having the best beans in town. The newspaper had voted . . . [Café Lindo] number one for five years in a row" (98). Since Amy began her efforts to change the cooking style of Café Lindo, Gloria laments, "Nobody from the bean committee has been in here to taste our beans" (129). Amy reassures her mother that they will come.

When I teach this play, the actions taken by Amy lead many of my students, many Mexican-Americans or Chicanas/os, to see Amy as a "sell-out," and to accuse her of losing her cultural identity while away in college. Amy's sister, Silvia, encourages my students' interpretations since Silvia indicates that Amy rejects everything that is Mexican (133). Ironically, the criticism Amy receives is because she rejects the consumption of lard, something imposed in Mesoamerica by the colonizers. Teaching this play demonstrates how the phrase "authentic Mexican food" acts in fact as a double-edged sword. I bring this reaction to the play in the context of my class to show that not only those from outside a national or cultural identity stereotype others, but this form of essentializing takes place also from within members of the same cultural group.

What does it mean to lose one's cultural identity? Does this mean that on a given morning we wake up, look in the mirror and we do not recognize our *self*? Furthermore, is there only one *self* to be had? Or as [Curtin and Heldke \(1992\)](#) argue in their study of the "thoughtful process" of cooking, do we have multiple *selves*? Our socially interactive lives will always provide means that will identify us as being members of a specific ethnic group, members of particular political affiliations, members of a particular social economic class, members of specific regional zones. It is naïve to believe that such social affiliations do not have any serious effect on the conceptualization about our cultural make-up, about who are we. We do not lose our cultural identity, instead, it is in a constant process of transformation.

Amy Durán has not lost her cultural identity. She learns, however, to embrace both the joy (the gain) and pain (the loss) that come with the realization that cultural practices are not fixed in time, place, or space; they must involve a collective effort that allows room for compromises, as it happens towards the end of the play:

Mami: C'mon Amy. I've been thinking. About this fat thing.

Amy : You have?

Mami: I think we can come up with an agreement.

Amy : You do?

Mami: There will be no more dying people in my restaurant. . . . No more deep fat frying. From here on out, it's clean living. (149).

At the end, even Snow will change her ways. She will eat a baked rather than the fried “chimichanga,” and Gloria will continue to add just a bit of lard to her famous beans. Gloria and Amy reach an agreement that allows them both to create recipes with *chistes* that reflect original moments in their own life narratives.

Two new signs hang from Café Lindo as *The Fat-Free Chicana and The Snow Cap Queen* comes to the closing scene. “One reads, ‘Order From Our Original-Style or Third-Generation Menu.’ Another reads: ‘Low-Fat Food Available Here’”(142). The new recipes that Gloria and Amy will cook might not be “real” (authentic) Mexican food. The new recipes created in Café Lindo, however, are original to their creators.

FROM AUTHENTIC TO ORIGINAL

Why replace our common use of “authentic” for “original” within food culture? While I see the claim “authentic Mexican food” as a false notion, the phrase carries real colonizing attitudes and implications. Claiming one culinary method as authentic renders other versions as questionable and consequently dismisses them for not providing real ethnic food. Since conceptions of food transfer to attitudes about people, my concern remains that claims of authenticity can essentialize certain ethnic groups by stifling creative growth. Lisa Heldke (2001) sees some of these attitudes as ingrained in deep-seated patterns of colonialism and imperialism. For her such patterns are “a three-step process.” Heldke writes, “that which is novel to me ends up being exotic, and that which is exotic I end up defining as most authentic to a culture”(181). Food’s newness, strangeness, and exoticness from the perspective of a cultural outsider, in this case, define authenticity.²¹

Furthermore, “we need to be wary about ideals of ‘cultural authenticity,’” as Narayan (1997) says, “that portray authenticity as constituted by lack of criticism and lack of change. We need to insist that there are many ways to inhabit nations and cultures critically and creatively” (33). Narayan’s suggestion is to ask people to be critical of the process by which some cultural productions emerge “as ‘exotic’ and ‘ethnic’ while [others] . . . [are] ‘naturalized,’ ‘nationalized,’ and ‘indigenized.’” Thinking about this categorization, “forces us to think about the vocabularies we use and the complexities that confront us as we try to analyze such multi-directional transnational flows

and their ‘cross-cultural effects’” (188). I agree with Narayan. The underlying argument throughout the paper engages in the politics of our lack of critical attention to ideologies embedded within our rather ordinary words and common phrases such as “authentic Mexican food.” For me this expression functions as a double-edged sword: On one side it rips away intellectual cultural knowledge belonging to an *ethnic other*, as indicated above in the case of ethnic cookbooks. On the other side, it boxes in certain *ethnic others* by essentializing them and keeping them within well-defined cultural, social, and economic boundaries. This form of essentialization is imposed not only by cultural outsiders who demand authenticity, but also within the culture by those who claim to deliver it, as the above argument on ethnic restaurants demonstrates. Yet the most pressing complication presents itself when in the name of authenticity the creative expression, the culinary *chiste* of some members of a culture, gets denied. The fight against such denial manifest itself in Bárbara Brinson Curiel’s poem and Elaine Romero’s play as struggles caused by generational differences within a single family.

To avoid issues of essentialization and prevent stifling creative inventions, we would do well to remember, as Debra Castillo (1992) indicates, that a recipe composition “is not a blueprint. It is less a formula than general model; less an axion of unchanging law and more a theory of possibilities” (xiii). In Castillo’s paradigm, a single recipe reflects a diversity of voices within any given ethnic community. Within the frame of this paper, the “possibilities” are the culinary *chistes* each individual adds to composition of a recipe. These *chistes*, because of their potential for constant change, reject the ideologies embedded within the notion of authenticity. The ongoing transformations of a recipe speak to an original moment in the life story of the person preparing a meal.

I strongly feel that the word original diminishes the possibility for encompassing colonizing attitudes, and therefore for operating under stereotypes. A paradigm that addresses originality rather than the authenticity places the focus on newness. A definition of the word original suggest something that is “an adoption to anything in relation to that which is an [earlier] production of it.”²² To speak of original rather than authentic, the production always belongs to the person who creates it. Yes, an earlier source is followed, but room for change exists. Alterations to cultural reproductions and creations of new productions do not render them less meaningful. Deviation to a degree from an earlier source allows room for modifications that expand cultural boundaries. Furthermore, learning to appreciate each other’s original *chistes* opens the door to cross-cultural, cross-generational dialogues.

Narayan (1997) offers a word of caution regarding the critical awareness I am suggesting we need to develop in order to examine the ideologies language conveys. “Concern and reflection alone,” argues Narayan, cannot “completely free [people] . . . from ‘colonialist eating.’” If people believe it can, she continues, “they mistakenly conflate changes in their individual stances and attitudes with concrete changes in social relationships of power” (182). I disagree with such a generalized statement, for change often begins by first planting seeds of concern and reflection. As scholars and teachers, I believe we have the potential for planting seeds of critical observation and critical action in our students’ lives, just as such seeds were planted in my own thinking first as a child cooking with my mother, later by the working-class women of the *charlas culinarias*. Understanding food practices as “original” underwrites the power relations implicit in “authentic” on at least two accounts. First, the power to define belongs in the hands of the person preparing a recipe. When such a person belongs to an ethnic minority, by race, class, and gender, the act to define enacts empowerment. For example in the *charlas culinarias*, Alma Contreras, mentioned above, asserts her creative agency by defining her right to her own cooking style in making *enchiladas*. Secondly, it fosters a dialogue to exchange experiences without placing them in a hierarchy paradigm that measures their value. I am an academic literary critic, the women from the *charlas* are grassroots theorists, and we are constantly learning from each other. Within the perimeters of my own research and teaching, the women from the *charlas*’ omission of the word authentic regarding their cooking influences my theories about food and my pedagogy about teaching literature.

The change from “authentic” to “original” functions as a constant reminder that culture is always changing, because as active agents we are always defining new cultural practices (Hastrup, 1995: 79). Yet if we are truly interested in understanding our original culinary creations we must resist the temptation to essentialize each other and be ready to engage in active *charlas* with one another. Martha Stewart’s *tamales* were original to her at the moment of her invention, my mother’s *tamales* are her own creation every time she makes them, and the *chistes* I develop when I make them will be original to me.

NOTES

1. When the initial *charlas* with my mother took place in 1996, I had over twenty official culinary chats recorded. Since then I have continued to have conversations with women I meet. In order to maintain a general sense of cohesiveness, ninety per cent of these women are Mexican or have Mexican origin and have a working-class background. I have also

introduced the concept of *charlas culinarias* in my literature and folklore classes as a way of exploring history in our own backyards. This particular project with my students has allowed me to read *charlas culinarias* collected by my students.

2. Lisa Heldke (2001) offers a reason why the women from the *charlas culinarias* do not speak of their food in terms of “authenticity.” As Heldke discusses how the recipes in ethnic (exotic) cookbooks are gathered from women who fix such meals in an every day basis, these foods for them are rather ubiquitous; these women are just doing the ordinary, the mundane.
3. I must be up front and admit that my particular selection of these two literary works is a result of having taught them a number of times. My students’ reactions to them led me to begin questioning how the ubiquitous claims of “authenticity” in Mexican food enters into classroom discussions cutting as a double-edge sword, not only in terms of the character’s lives but my students’ own lives.
4. Many scholars have made the connection between recipes and people’s life narratives. See Janet Theophano’s *Eat My Words* (2002), Annie Hauck-Lawson’s “Hearing the Food Voice,” Cecilia Lawless’s “Experimental Cooking in *Como agua para chocolate*,” Victor and Mary Valle’s *Recipes of Memory*, Anne Goldman’s *Take My Word*, Tey Diana Rebolledo’s *Women Singing in the Snow*, Traci Marie Kelly’s “‘If I Were a Voodoo Priestess’: Women’s Culinary Autobiographies,” Susan J. Leonardi’s “Recipes for Reading: Summer Pasta, Lobster à La Riseholme, and Key Lime Pie.” Film directors and producers share the belief that recipes convey life narratives. Here I am thinking of films like *Eat, Drink, Man, Woman*; *Mostly Martha*; *Babbette Feast’s*; and *Soul Food*, just to mention a few.
5. As defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.
6. As defined in the *Webster Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*.
7. Some scholars who have made these arguments are Luce Giard’s “Doing Cooking,” Deane W. Curtin and Lisa M. Heldke’s *Cooking, Eating, Thinking*, Anne Goldman’s “‘I Yam What I Yam’: Cooking, Culture, and Colonialism,” and Carole M. Counihan in “Food as Women’s Voice in the San Luis Valley of Colorado.”
8. In *Voices in the Kitchen: Latinas Culinary Chats* (book manuscript), my theoretical construction of *chiste* is not always just an act of resistance. The *chiste* in the *charlas culinarias* resonates theoretically with Gloria Anzaldúa’s argument that we need to stop “reacting” and begin to “act.” Women in the *charlas* see, think and express their *chistes* as their moments of asserting their knowledge via their creative agency, which they do not always conceptualize as a reaction to social demands and/or patriarchal oppression. José E. Limón in “Carne, Carnales, and Carnavalesque” raises some similar issues as mine in his discussion of working-class men’s way of preparing and eating “carne asada” in South Texas.
9. See Abarca’s “Los chilaquiles de mi ‘amá: The Language of Everyday Cooking” in *Pilaf, Pozole, and Pad Thai: American Women and Ethnic Food*. Ed. by Sherrie A. Inness. (2001).
10. See *Kitchen Culture in America* edited by Sherrie A. Inness for collections of essays on how advertisements have promoted women’s place in the kitchens of America.
11. See the works of Mary Douglass (1982 and 1979), Sherri Inness (2001), Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (1997), David Bell and Gill Valentine (1997), Peter Farb and George Armelagos (1980), Donna Gabaccia (1998), Gary Nabhan (2002), Uma Narayan (1997).
12. The contributors to the collection of essays in *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore* (1993) offer compelling arguments on how we have failed to recognize women’s spaces of production as “different” but equally valuable as those that are generally recognized in public arenas.

13. Kathy McCloskey, while working within the context of Navajo women's weaving, suggests that women's work gets appropriated and is underpaid because of the Western division of arts and crafts. Crafts, such as weaving and in my case food, have been privatized and domesticated as labor produced by women, thus making them less valuable. They become more valuable once they are in the trading system (stores or museum) or restaurants or cookbooks.
14. The desire for ethnic food is evidenced throughout the States; ethnic restaurants are in abundance, and the academic interest in ethnic eating is not lacking. Books like *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the U.S.: The Performance of Group Identity* edited by Linda Keller Brown and Kay Mussell (1984), *The Taste of America Place: A Reader on Regional and Ethnic Food* edited by Barbara G. Shortridge and James R. Shortridge (1998); *Pilaf, Pozole, and Pad Thai: American Women and Ethnic Food* edited by Sherrie A. Inness (2001) suggest an interest in ethnic foods.
15. I have taught this particular poem, and the play analyzed within this paper, for the last three years in my Chicana/o Literature course (undergraduate and graduate level), in Mexican-American folklore and recently in a course on "women philosophers in the kitchen." The divisions and tensions among the students never fail to arise.
16. The feminist theoretical discourse of "situated knowledge" resonates with the conceptualization of the "chiste" found in recipes. The "chiste" reflects the changes in a recipe, which in turn represents the cook's "situated knowledge" which privileges the history and "social location" of such person, "where knowledge is always partial but also embedded in the differing visions of active subjects" (*Situated Live*, edited by Louise Lamphere, Helena Rogoné, and Patricia Zavella. 1997: 5)
17. The literary function of North captures Narayan's social and political argument that "members of ethnic immigrant communities, though they may wish to retain some aspects of their 'ethnic roots' also often wish to be seen as legitimate members of the cultural context they inhabit in the West, and not as a mere 'representative of a foreign culture somewhere else'" (183).
18. Lard, it must be noted, is itself a product of colonialism. Some of the most unhealthy and fatty aspects of Mexican food, such as lard, beef, cheese, and wheat were all introduced by the conquest.
19. Jeffrey Pilcher's "Industrial *Tortillas* and Folkloric Pepsi: The Nutritional Consequence of Hybrid Cuisines in Mexico" brings up two issues that I am suggesting Romero's play invites us to question (2002). Pilcher illustrates how industrialization and modernization replaced vegetable proteins with "expensive animal proteins" and how imported products, such as Pepsi, in some communities are sold as needed for the performance of traditional rituals.
20. See Leslie Brenner's *American Appetite: The Coming of Age of a Cuisine*. (1999).
21. Doris Friedensohn in "Chapulines, Mole, and Pozole: Mexican Cuisines and the Gringa Imagination" describes this appeal to romance and adventure that Mexicans use to cater to the "gringa imagination." In Oaxaca, she eats in Tlamanalli, "the place for 'authentic,' expertly prepared, and beautifully served Oaxacan cuisine." She goes on with a rather ironic tone because she realizes how the setting of the restaurant is meant to appeal to a "gringa imagination." "We observe Marcelina, on her knees, bending over a molcajete, a black basalt mortar, making guacamole. With a pestle in hand, she mixes the avocado, bits of chopped onion, tomatoes, chiles, and other seasonings. A few feet away, María Luisa, also on her knees, grinds corn for masa (to thicken the soup) on a grinding stone, also made of black basalt . . . Our waitress, Rosaria, demure yet dignified . . ." (169–170).
22. *Oxford English Dictionary*.

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