

*Barriga Llena, Corazón Contento: Puerto Rican Women's Perspectives on
Food, Identity, and US Influence on the Island*

By

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All photographs taken by the author.

Abstract

In the island of Puerto Rico, indigenous Taíno, colonial Spanish, and African slave influences have produced a complex food culture that is currently being re-shaped by numerous global forces. This thesis is the product of research conducted in 2012 in and around Fajardo, Puerto Rico, surrounding issues of food, culture, and identity among Puerto Rican women. Oral histories showcase the ways in which Puerto Rican women negotiate their identities within an ever-shifting food system. I contextualize this study within a legacy of colonialism, the impact of corporate-driven globalization on the island's food system, and the ever-ambiguous political relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico.

This research was guided by a number of questions including: (1) What role do Puerto Rican cultural foodways play in the development of personal, cultural, and community identity for Puerto Rican women living on the island? (2) What impacts have colonialism and globalization had on the significance of cultural Puerto Rican foods and eating practices? (3) How do women negotiate processes of identity formation within the context of an increasingly Americanized and globalized food system? (4) What efforts, if any, are currently underway in Puerto Rico to counteract these influences and to preserve cultural heritage through food and eating practices?

In analyzing the oral histories of research participants, four main themes emerge when considering how US influence on the Puerto Rican food system impacts women's identities in Puerto Rico. First, I demonstrate how discourses of US domination and Puerto Rican dependence are both reflected in women's food narratives. Second, I look at how rapid expansion of primarily US-owned fast food establishments in Puerto Rico impacts local food culture and identity. Next, I examine the shifting definitions of "healthy food" in Puerto Rico, and how this articulates with traditional foods. Finally, I show how food is also being used as a tool for resistance. I argue that while globalization of the Puerto Rican food system cannot (and possibly should not) be reversed, space must be maintained for the preservation of cultural food practices. Most critically, Puerto Ricans themselves must determine the future of the food system, rather than corporations. This study examines in-depth the complexity of the contemporary Puerto Rican food system, and initiates a discussion on where it may be headed.

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Introduction

It's the dance of the cocinera¹: to step outside
fetch the bucket of water, turn,
all muscular grace and striving,
pour the water, light dancing in the pot,
and set the pail down on the blackened wood.
The blue flame glitters in its dark corner,
and coffee steams in the small white pan.
Gnarled fingers, mondando ajo²
picando cebolla³, cortando pan⁴,
colando café⁵,
stirring the rice with a big long spoon
filling ten bellies
out of one soot-black pot.

-Aurora Levins Morales
Excerpt from "Kitchens"
(Levins Morales 1997)

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In the island of Puerto Rico, indigenous Taíno, colonial Spanish, and African slave influences have produced a complex food culture that is currently being re-shaped by numerous global forces. This thesis is the product of research conducted in 2012 in and around Fajardo, Puerto Rico, surrounding issues of food, culture, and identity among Puerto Rican women. Using these personal narratives, I examine the ways in which Puerto Rican women negotiate their identities within an ever-shifting food system. I contextualize this study within a legacy of colonialism and explore its historical and contemporary influence on the Puerto Rican food system. Furthermore, I look specifically at the impact of corporate-driven globalization on the island's food system, and how this articulates with Puerto Rico's political relationship with the United States. In examining this topic I seek to open a dialogue on the status of Puerto Rico's food system, grounded in the lived experiences of Puerto Rican women.

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: "female cook"

<sup>2</sup> Translation: "peeling garlic"

<sup>3</sup> Translation: "cutting onion"

<sup>4</sup> Translation: "slicing bread"

<sup>5</sup> Translation: "straining coffee"

This study was guided by four main research questions: (1) What role do Puerto Rican cultural foodways play in the development of personal, cultural, and community identity for Puerto Rican women living on the island? (2) What impacts have colonialism and globalization had on the significance of cultural Puerto Rican foods and eating practices? (3) How do women negotiate processes of identity formation within the context of an increasingly Americanized and globalized food system? (4) What efforts, if any, are currently underway in Puerto Rico to counteract these influences and to preserve cultural heritage through food and eating practices?

In conducting this research study I bring Puerto Rican women's stories to the center of this discussion in considering how these historical and contemporary influences have created repercussions for Puerto Rican women today. I center this inquiry on women in Puerto Rico because I believe they play a crucial and complex role in community building and in the transfer of cultural knowledge and values within Puerto Rican families and communities. By examining women's food narratives, I use cultural foodways as a focal point to explore these broader topics and to view how they articulate with women's lives and identities.

### **Rationale: Why Study Food in Puerto Rico?**

Food has long been understood as more than a simple tool to provide sustenance to the body. Foodways and food systems in many cultures across the world have historically been a site of personal, political, and community negotiations, as well as a source of identity formation and contestation. Sidney Mintz discusses how food and horticultural practices became woven into local diets to produce various cultural cuisines throughout the world. Over time, the ritual of food consumption becomes transcribed into social meaning and transforms into a marker of cultural significance and identity (Mintz 2003). Others have described food choices as a "personal and public presentation of self" (Rappoport 2003) and a "marvelously plastic kind of collective representation" (Appadurai 1981). A closer examination of the role food plays in people's lives can be a powerful tool for bringing to light deeper experiences, struggles, and dynamics.



This thesis research specifically considers the intersections of foodways, identity, culture, colonialism, and globalization, within the context of contemporary Puerto Rican women's lives. To my knowledge, there has been very little scholarly research that touches on all of these aspects, and none that I am aware of that takes a feminist perspective and centers the discussion on the experiences of women in Puerto Rico. However, previous scholarship has focused on some of these issues and provided a foundation to base this specific research study on. For example, numerous scholars have explored the intricate connections between food and cultural identity (Abarca 2001, 2006; Beoku-Betts 2002; Blend 2001; Counihan and Van Esterik 1997, 2008; Counihan 2005, 2009; Gabaccia 1998). The intersections of food, gender, and family dynamics have been well documented through extensive ethnographic research and literary inquiry (Counihan 1999, 2004; Inness 2001; Voski Avakian and Haber 2005b; Voski Avakian 1997). In addition, the connections between food and colonialism have been well-studied, with Narayan's discussion on British colonialism and Indian foodways (Narayan 1997), and Rich's examination of the impact of French colonial rule on food culture in the African nation of Gabon (Rich 2007), among others (Dietler 2007; Gupta 2012).

Puerto Rican studies scholars have produced a wealth of thought on the negotiations of Puerto Rican identity and culture, the island's political situation, and the impact of globalization and colonialism on Puerto Rican people (Davila 1997; Duany 2002, 2011; Grosfoguel 2003; Morris 1995). However, a focus on changes within the food system, and how those changes impact life and culture in Puerto Rico, has thus far been mostly ignored in Puerto Rican scholarship. Often issues within the food system or cultural connections to food and eating are mentioned briefly within larger works focused more specifically on Puerto Rican identity or economic history. Jorge Duany uses food as an example to show how transnational linkages are maintained between Puerto Ricans living on the island and those in the states (Duany 2002). In their book chapter, Carro-Figueroa and Guptill explore the changing retail food sector and the growth of farmers' markets in the island (Carro-Figueroa and Guptill 2007). Nancy Morris uses food as one of many aspects within which to examine the cultural identity of Puerto Ricans (Morris

1995). However, the food system in Puerto Rico as a whole, and the deeper connections between food traditions and identity, have yet to be closely studied.

While there exists an abundance of literature on the intersections of food, culture, gender, and identity, there still remains a clear disconnect where these bodies of knowledge are not in conversation with each other. My work makes a critical effort to begin to address this void and to expand foodways scholarship to include Puerto Rican voices. This study can also potentially inform future research on related topics and offers vital perspectives on what themes may warrant further analysis. In recent years a growing number of feminist scholars have advocated for the development of a “feminist food studies” that produces foodways scholarship grounded in feminist theory and a critical gender analysis (Allen and Sachs 2007; Voski Avakian and Haber 2005a). While some feminist food studies work has been based in the experiences of women of color, there exists a great opportunity to continue to challenge the erasure of communities of color in food systems work. This thesis research contributes to the development of a more diverse and inclusive field of feminist food studies.

The lack of previous inquiry on this subject combined with a complex historical and political history in Puerto Rico makes this topic an incredibly rich area of study. Through my research, a wide array of important issues related to Puerto Rican women’s experiences with cultural foods have emerged. In order to bound my analysis, I have chosen specifically to focus on the ways in which changes in the food system have impacted Puerto Rican women’s relationships to cultural foods and their personal and community identities. I do not provide an in-depth discussion on the ways that gender dynamics have historically been constructed through foodways and food work. Instead, I acknowledge that this is an area of study that deserves consideration beyond what I am able to provide here. In my Conclusion, I examine very briefly some of my lingering questions regarding gendered issues in the food system in Puerto Rico, and name them as areas for further research. However, I recognize the intersectionality of identities and the ways in which these women’s experiences are intertwined with all aspects of their identities.

## Defining Key Concepts

For the purposes of this study, I use Carole M. Counihan's description of foodways as encompassing "beliefs and behaviors surrounding food production, distribution, preparation, and consumption" (Counihan 2009). I find this description to be particularly useful as it draws in nearly every way that people interact with food, beyond simply the preparation and consumption of food. For the purposes of this study, a general knowledge of some of the recent shifts in Puerto Rican foodways will be critical in considering these women's experiences holistically.

Throughout this thesis I make mention to either "traditional" or "cultural" foods. I find both of these terms to be quite tricky to utilize. The notion of "tradition" itself often conjures up oversimplified and sanitized images of the past, that can be extraordinarily misleading, particularly in the case of this study. Especially given the complex history of Puerto Rico, its repeated colonization and the merging of cultures that form the backbone of today's society, using the word "traditional" seems incorrect. The term "cultural" is also often used to denote foods or dishes that are associated with a specific culture. Contemporary Puerto Rican food is an amalgamation of indigenous Taíno foods, colonial Spanish ingredients and seasonings, as well as food traditions from Africa brought over with African slaves. Many of Puerto Rico's staple dishes use rice, which was brought to the island by the Spanish, and coconuts, which came from Africa. It is very difficult to pinpoint what exactly is meant by "traditional" or "cultural" in an island that has experienced Spanish colonization, importation of African slaves, immigration from many European and South American countries, as well as the current relationship with the United States. All of these forces have impacted the island in innumerable ways, and so the notion of what is deemed "traditional" food or "cultural" food becomes quite complex.

Signifying this cultural complexity, Puerto Ricans themselves often refer to their cultural cuisine as *comida criolla*. In English, this translates literally as "creole food," however there exist various understandings of the different connotations of this term. In Latin America, creole has historically been a term that denoted people born in the Spanish colonies of full Spanish descent (Scarano 1996). The *criollos* were a social class that became established as local elites, who held much power and control

over both land and people – African slaves, indigenous peoples, and people of mixed descent. It can be argued that using the term “creole” to describe one’s food may reveal a desire to more closely associate with an elite social class, and a distancing from indigenous roots. Another complicating factor is that while in Puerto Rico *comida criolla* generally signifies Puerto Rican food, other Latin American cultures also have used this term to describe their own cultural cuisine. This could reflect the wide-reaching effects of Spanish colonialism in Latin America and its impact on food cultures. These particularities were not discussed in interviews I conducted, however they may be areas in need of further research.

I use these terms knowing that they are deeply flawed and insufficient, acknowledging that I know of no unproblematic way to describe the feeling or emotion connected to foods and customs that are culturally significant. I find myself at a loss of words in explaining the emotions I attach to a simple plate of *arroz con habichuelas*<sup>6</sup>, knowing that eating these foods nourishes something inside me beyond simple caloric content. It is a connection I feel both in my gut and my heart. While I acknowledge the problems with such terms as “traditional” or “cultural,” I use them here in order to talk about culturally significant foods in a broad sense.

### **The Research Site: Fajardo, Puerto Rico... *Ciudad de los Cariduros***

At the entrance to many towns and cities in Puerto Rico, there is a sign or small monument declaring the city’s nickname. As you enter Fajardo, the sign reads “*Fajardo: Ciudad de los Cariduros*” which roughly translates as “Fajardo: City of the Hardheads.” These signs serve to provide some information as to the culture of the town, and the identity of its residents. Many Fajardeños<sup>7</sup> rally around this nickname and proudly assert their stubborn characters. Fajardo is a medium-sized Puerto Rican city with a large working class population, located on the eastern coast of the island. Historically, the economy of Fajardo was driven by agriculture, fishing, and small-scale manufacturing, though it has shifted in recent years to include more tourism-based economic activities. Fajardo has also been the site of an increasing influx of American-owned grocery stores and fast-food chains, including being the site

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<sup>6</sup> Puerto Rican-style rice and beans, generally prepared with white rice and red or pink beans.

<sup>7</sup> People from Fajardo.

of the opening of the island's very first Wal-Mart twenty years ago. These recent changes have drastically altered the landscape and consumption patterns of local residents and forms the backdrop to the interviews that I collected. As I explain more in the Methodology section, though my research was focused in Fajardo, I also conducted some interviews in the nearby cities of Luquillo, Ceiba, and Loíza. The below map shows the location of Fajardo in relation to the rest of the island, and two additional cities where I conducted interviews, which are circled in red.



**Figure 1: Map of Puerto Rico showing research locations.**

### **Meet the Interview Participants**

During my time in Puerto Rico I conducted a total of sixteen interviews with twenty-one total interview participants. Twenty of these interviewees were women, as one woman I interviewed was joined by her husband. Many of the interviews were individual, while some were small group interviews ranging from two to five participants. The Methodology section further details how these interviews were conducted, however, I would like to provide some introductory information to the people whose experiences form the foundation of this work. The women I spoke with during my time in Puerto Rico, in

order of interview date, are María Esther García Figueroa, Ada L. Díaz López, Wanda Yvette Méndez, Marivel L. Cano, Amparo Pérez, Myrta Pérez Toledo, Norma Guadalupe Jiménez, Jean Echevarría, Erica Díaz, Anna González, Lucy Sanjurjo, Noemí Avilés, Carmen Garrone, Sandy Ayad, Gabi Ayad, Glenda Félix Ayala, Jessica Díaz, Zuleyka Ponce, María Dolores “Lula” de Jesús, and Suzette Hernández.

While every woman (and man) I spoke with during these interviews has in some way shaped my understanding and analysis, space limitations force me to hone in on certain themes and certain voices. Below I provide short background information for these twelve women whose experiences and perspectives I discuss more in depth throughout the thesis<sup>8</sup>. This information was collected both formally through interview questions and informally through conversations and interactions outside of the interview. All cities and towns mentioned below are in Puerto Rico, unless otherwise noted.

- **Wanda Yvette Méndez** is a fifty-four year old Puerto Rican woman who was born and raised in Las Croabas, the nearby beachside part of Fajardo, on a medium-sized family farm. I met Wanda when one day walking through the center of Fajardo I decided to stop in the health food store that she owned, called “Eden.” Wanda and I completed two interviews together.
- **Suzette Hernández** is Wanda Yvette Méndez’s twenty-seven year old daughter. Suzette joined in the second interview that I conducted with Wanda. She also owned a health food store in a neighboring town, and lived nearby with her husband and two young boys.
- **Marivel L. Cano** is a forty-two year old Puerto Rican woman born in Mayagüez and raised in Río Grande. I met Marivel unexpectedly in a yoga class in Fajardo when we struck up a conversation about my research. Marivel had recently retired from her career as an engineer in order to grow her baking business, Messy Kitchen Goodies. She lives in Fajardo with her husband and son and was very well connected to the community through her business and other activities. We completed a total of two interviews together, both of which were rich with detail about her connection to food, her love of baking, and her experience turning her passion into a successful, thriving home business.

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<sup>8</sup> In accordance with interview participant preferences, no pseudonyms have been used and all names and identifying information are real. See Methodology section for an in-depth discussion on my process of obtaining consent.

- **Glenda Félix Ayala** is a thirty-six year old Puerto Rican woman I met through a family contact. Originally born and raised in Vieques, at the time of the interview she was living in Naguabo. She works as a Dock Master for a private marina located in Fajardo, where she has been employed for the last seventeen years. At the time of the interview she was also a part-time student at the University of Puerto Rico in Fajardo.
- **Ada L. Díaz López** is a seventy year old Puerto Rican woman born in Vieques and raised in Fajardo. A neighbor of one of my family members, Ada currently works as a Home Economics teacher. Ada has never lived outside of Puerto Rico, and at one time owned a popular seafood restaurant in Vieques.
- **Erica Díaz** is a twenty-eight year old Puerto Rican woman who was born and raised in Fajardo. She currently is a student at the University of Puerto Rico in Business Development and Management and works at a pharmaceutical company. Erica and I completed one individual interview together, however also engaged in many informal conversations on the research topic.
- **Jessica Díaz** is a twenty-six year old Puerto Rican woman who was born and raised in Fajardo. She has worked as an Accountant for the last eight years and currently lives in Ceiba with her four year old daughter. Both Jessica Diaz and Erica Diaz are related to me, as first cousins.
- **Zuleyka Ponce** is a Puerto Rican woman in her mid to late twenties, and a close friend of Jessica Diaz. She is originally from Fajardo, and graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a degree in Accounting. She currently works independently as an Accountant and at the time of our interview was about to begin a Master's program in Finance.
- **Amparo Pérez** is a seventy-five year old Puerto Rican woman originally from Cidra. Amparo operates a small road-side food stand, *El Rincón de Abuela*<sup>9</sup>, that I would pass by everyday as I walked from my grandparent's house to the main part of town. I was able to interview her one

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<sup>9</sup> Translation: "The Grandmother's Corner"

morning in her shop, as she served clients (and myself) Puerto Rican dishes such as *arroz con habichuelas*, *empanadillas*<sup>10</sup>, stewed chicken or pork, and *canoas*<sup>11</sup>.

- **Noemí Avilés** is a Puerto Rican woman in her forties or fifties who lives in Fajardo. After living in New York for many years, she decided to move back to Puerto Rico and open a small business. She and her husband run Sueños del Mar, apartment vacation rentals near Las Croabas in Fajardo. I had set out to individually interview Noemí one afternoon, when spontaneously a close friend of hers and some guests staying at the vacation rental joined into our conversation. This interview lasted over two and a half hours, and proved to be one of the richest of the whole summer.
- **Carmen Garrone** is a Cuban-American woman in her forties or fifties who informally joined the interview I was conducting with Noemí Avilés. She currently lives in upstate New York, though she has visited Puerto Rico many times. I have included her perspective in this work because, although not Puerto Rican, Carmen spoke about her experiences being someone from the Caribbean, and drew connections between her cultural identity and Puerto Rican culture.
- **Sandy Ayad** is a Puerto Rican-American woman in her forties or fifties who also joined the group interview with Noemí and Carmen. Though she was born and partly raised in the island, Sandy had not visited in fourteen years and was at that time on vacation with her family. She lives with her family in Southern California and works as a Spanish Medical Interpreter at a hospital. Although she had not lived in Puerto Rico for many years, I found that Sandy's perspectives closely echoed other interview participants.

### Personal Background and Relevance

I can't quite put my finger on the exact moment when I decided to travel to Puerto Rico to interview women about food. I was initially drawn to the field of Community Development by a desire to re-center the experiences and struggles of communities of color within the food system, and specifically

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<sup>10</sup> Fried turnovers filled with seasoned meat or cheese.

<sup>11</sup> Fried ripe plantains stuffed with seasoned ground beef, sometimes topped with melted cheese.



“alternative” food systems work. My trajectory before graduate school included a lifelong commitment to social justice and community-based work. Most recently this had led me to become involved in the food justice and local foods activism happening in Seattle, Washington. It was here that my love for food and my passion for social justice melded and set me on a course towards this work.

Food has always held a deeply important place in my life. Though my family hovered the line between working class and middle class during my childhood, we always were fortunate enough to have the food and sustenance we needed. Beyond the mere sustenance, however, I developed a meaningful relationship with the foods of my childhood, and the foods of my mother’s Puerto Rican culture. I remember inviting friends over for dinner and begging my mom to cook Puerto Rican dishes for them, watching curiously as she turned piles of onion, garlic, green peppers and cilantro into the most amazing tasting dishes. I also remember travelling to Puerto Rico to visit my family and excitedly eating up the coconut ice cream and *frituras*<sup>12</sup>. These experiences left an indelible mark on me, and played a role in my choice to delve into issues surrounding the Puerto Rican food system and cultural identity.

### **Roadmap: An Explanation of the Following Sections**

In the section that follows, I offer an introduction to the historical background and contemporary context of Puerto Rico. By considering some of the most important social and political events in Puerto Rico’s history, I give a more detailed look at some of the factors that have shaped contemporary culture within the island. Additionally, I provide some context to the prevailing academic debates surrounding the political status of Puerto Ricans and how this articulates with the negotiation of identity. Having this historical and political context is crucial to understanding the complexity of the issues I will consider in more depth during my analysis of the research data.

The following section of this thesis details my methodological commitments and the approaches I utilized in this research study. I begin with a review of the key methodological concepts that shaped my particular approach, including grounded theory, grassroots theory, applied research, feminist

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<sup>12</sup> Various fried foods, often sold at the beach or road side stands.

methodology, Latina *testimonios*, and the work of scholars such as Carole Counihan and Meredith Abarca. Next, I take a reflexive position in tackling some issues such as my own positionality as a researcher and the limitations I encountered while in the field. I also outline the specific methods I employed in Puerto Rico, and explain how I found interview participants, established informed consent, and conducted the interviews. Beyond interviewing, I discuss the additional research I did while in Puerto Rico, specifically site visits and participant observation.

Next, I provide an in-depth analysis and discussion of collected research data. I consider specifically how US influence on the Puerto Rican food system has impacted Puerto Rican identities, through four main themes that emerged from the interviews. In examining these issues I seek to start a dialogue on the lived experiences illuminated in this study, and show how they articulate with broader theoretical arguments. Rather than provide a separate review of pertinent literature, I have sought to integrate the relevant academic literature not only in this section, but throughout the rest of the thesis as well. I follow this discussion with a concluding section that lays out my lingering questions and potential areas for future research. In this section I also look at some contemporary trends to consider where the food system in Puerto Rico may be headed, and what community efforts are currently underway to build capacity and strengthen personal and community resilience through food.



**Figure 2: Sign advertising local bakery in Fajardo, Puerto Rico.**

## **Historical Background and Contemporary Context**

This section first provides a short historical background to the island of Puerto Rico focusing on the legacy left on the island from Spanish colonialism and the transfer of Puerto Rican governance to the United States. Next, I discuss the current political landscape and some of the prevailing thoughts on Puerto Rico's ambiguous status as a nation. And lastly, I offer some thoughts on the current economic and societal circumstances in Puerto Rico, with a focus on how the island's food system has been impacted by continued U.S. control. Having at least a basic understanding of these issues is crucial to examining the experiences of Puerto Rican women and the context within which they negotiate their identities and lives.

### **Historical Background**

The cultural roots of people who call Puerto Rico home are the product of the merging of many different peoples, most predominantly indigenous Taíno, African slaves, and Spanish colonists. These three groups converged on the island over five hundred years ago when Spanish colonizers arrived at the island they named Puerto Rico<sup>13</sup>, and embarked on a mission to gain control over the island. In the process, the indigenous Taíno population was decimated and Africans were uprooted from their homelands, enslaved, and brought to work the tobacco, sugar, and coffee fields the Spanish established in their new colony. In addition to the convergence of Spanish, African, and indigenous people, many immigrants made their way to Puerto Rico throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, hailing from countries such as Germany, Italy, French Corsica, England, the United States, Venezuela, the Netherlands, and Haiti (Acosta-Belen et al. 2000).

During the approximately four hundred years that Spain controlled the island<sup>14</sup>, very little economic development occurred. Puerto Rico was a geographically convenient point from which the Spanish could rule its Caribbean possessions, but the relatively low amount of gold and resources

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<sup>13</sup> "Puerto Rico" translates in English as "rich port."

<sup>14</sup> Puerto Rico was held under Spanish colonial rule longer than any of the other Spanish colonies.

considered valuable by the Spanish meant that in many ways the island was ignored. The Spanish colonizers, and later the new creole elites, established agricultural and animal production systems to benefit their trade with Europe and their needs for horses and supplies for the conquest of subsequent Caribbean and South American territories (Pico 2006). Education and social services on the island were mostly neglected, which resulted in an illiteracy rate of 83.2 percent towards the end of Spanish rule in Puerto Rico. Despite this illiteracy rate, however, Puerto Ricans under Spanish colonization were highly politically aware and engaged. Although voting in Puerto Rico at this time was limited to men, the island boasted voter turnout rates around 80-90 percent, which have continued to this day (Monge 1997).

As a result of the Spanish-Cuban-American War, the United States gained control over Puerto Rico in 1898, and has retained ownership of the island ever since. This takeover of Puerto Rico by the U.S. was in part motivated by the desire to obtain a strategically placed naval base that would provide for the protection of crucial maritime trade posts, and specifically allow for access to the then-proposed Panama Canal (Whalen and Vazquez-Hernandez 2005). This transference of Puerto Rican governance from Spain to the United States has had numerous far-reaching implications for Puerto Rican people and the relationship between Puerto Rico and the US.

Since acquiring the island from the Spanish in 1898, the United States has employed numerous strategies in an attempt to “Americanize” the island and its people. These policies have been utilized at various times throughout early U.S. occupation of the island, and continue into today, however in a more discreet and subtle fashion. In initial Americanization programs, English was temporarily declared as the official language, particularly in the school system. Protestant missionaries were sent to the island, in an effort to de-Catholicize Puerto Ricans (Acosta-Belen et al. 2000). Food assistance and distribution programs targeted the poor populations of Puerto Rico’s rural countryside and growing cities. These programs distributed processed American food staples such as canned vegetables, white bread, milk, and peanut butter. In the school system, breakfast and lunch programs were institutionalized with the goal of teaching poor Puerto Ricans “proper nutrition” that was based solely on American dietary trends,

trends which did not incorporate, or even acknowledge, local food traditions and eating practices (E. Santiago 1993).

Puerto Ricans both living in the states and on the island were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917 through the Jones-Shafroth Act. This coincided with the entrance of the United States into World War I and conveniently provided a new pool of young men to be eligible for the military draft (Acosta-Belen et al. 2000). World War I was in fact a great pressure to expedite the passage of the Jones-Shafroth Act, in order to suppress any pro-independence movements on the island, to permanently link the two countries, and to lower dissatisfaction on the island due to colonial rule. While the political status of the island remained largely unchanged, this shift in citizenship of island nationals marked the end of any meaningful Puerto Rican citizenship in a legal sense. Puerto Rico was defined as an unincorporated territory and would remain so for the next thirty years (Whalen and Vazquez-Hernandez 2005).

In 1947 the United States passed legislation to modify the political status of the island for the first time since the Jones-Shafroth Act. At this point Puerto Ricans were allowed to elect their first governor and to adopt a constitution, one that would need to be approved by the United States Congress, however (Whalen and Vazquez-Hernandez 2005). The 1948 election of Puerto Rico's first local governor Luis Muñoz Marín ended fifty years of island governance by outside federally-appointed officials (Acosta-Belen et al. 2000). In 1952, Puerto Rico was subsequently established as an *Estado Libre Asociado*<sup>15</sup>, or commonwealth, of the United States. This political designation allowed the United States to determine which aspects of governance would be legislated federally, and which aspects would be self-governed on the island.

Moving forward, the U.S. federal government retained control in Puerto Rico over the military, citizenship and immigration, currency, foreign affairs and trade, transportation, communication, and the judicial system (Duany 2002; Whalen and Vazquez-Hernandez 2005). Puerto Ricans maintained their U.S. citizenship, although to this day they cannot vote for President of the United States and also lack voting representation in Congress. Puerto Ricans instead have an elected non-voting resident

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<sup>15</sup> Literal translation: "Free Associated State." There has been considerable debate over the potentially misleading use of the word "free" in this political designation.

commissioner to the United States Congress. These complex and contradictory circumstances have led to much discussion on the current political status of Puerto Ricans, as I will now explore in more depth.

### **Questions of Status: Puerto Rico's Contemporary Political Landscape**

*Realmente no somos un estado, somos una colonia.*

In reality we are not a state, we are a colony.

-Wanda Yvette Méndez

Puerto Rico's current ambiguous political position has been described in countless ways, and from a variety of viewpoints. In this section I consider these various viewpoints, in order to shed light onto the current political positionality of the island, and to provide further context to my exploration of the negotiation of identity through cultural food and eating practices.

In addition to the changes in political ownership and citizenship detailed above, the United States has continued its domination on the island, however in more subtle ways than the early Americanization and assimilation programs of the 1930s and 1940s. With the establishment of the island as a U.S. commonwealth, the new tactics for gaining Puerto Rican trust, and subsequently control, have been based on a tenuous sense of Puerto Rican nationalism and the promotion of island identity. This has constituted a new form of "*puertorriqueñista* colonialism", through the public promotion and celebration of such nationalist symbols as the Puerto Rican flag, the Spanish language, and other Puerto Rican cultural identifiers. This promotion of Puerto Rican culture and national identity by the U.S. "created a false illusion of autonomy, as if Puerto Ricans have control over their own political destiny, when in fact it is U.S. Congress that dictates policy and wields power over the local administration" (Grosfoguel 2003). This form of colonial control is very much apparent today, with the United States using the affirmation and celebration of a distinct Puerto Rican culture and national identity to thereby continue the exploitation of the island and its people.

Puerto Rico's current status as a commonwealth has been paradoxically described as an entity that "belongs to but is not a part of the United States" (Duany 2002). This is not only a sentiment felt by many Puerto Ricans, but a position defined by the United States Congress and Supreme Court in their proceedings to establish the situation of Puerto Rico with more legal clarity. Beyond how Puerto Rico is defined in a legal sense, this positionality has implications for the negotiation of identity amongst Puerto Ricans. This sense of being "owned" by an outside force but not entirely belonging within that force becomes easily internalized in the identities of Puerto Ricans. This then serves to further exacerbate the divide between Puerto Rico and the U.S. as well as the process of "othering" Puerto Ricans within a U.S. context (Aranda 2007). Consequently, Puerto Ricans in the United States often remark on the general ignorance of U.S. Americans on the history of Puerto Rico and specifically the role the U.S. has played in the domination and control of the island. This need to provide "history lessons" to Americans on U.S. imperialism reifies the ethnocentric attitudes of classical colonizing countries (Aranda 2007).

In addition, complex and unequal hierarchies of power are created by positioning Puerto Rico as an entity belonging to a more industrialized, and therefore "civilized," nation-state. These hierarchies are reminiscent of traditional colonial projects in the sense that Puerto Ricans are characterized as being colonized, conquered, and subsequently owned by the United States. The role of gender in this characterization cannot be overlooked. The positioning of Puerto Ricans as "colonial subjects" of the United States evokes historical colonial notions and the role of colonized women as objects, property, or sites of sexual exploitation. Gendered racism has been highly documented between Anglo-American men and Puerto Rican women, both contemporarily as well as historically (Aranda 2007). This is also connected to the continual U.S. militarization of the island, which has resulted in an increased presence of U.S. military service men on the island, and subsequent abuses of power.

Puerto Rican scholar Ramón Grosfoguel describes the status of contemporary Puerto Rico as a modern colony, given the control exerted on the island by the United States combined with the island's access to such benefits as welfare, extensive civil rights, sponsored migration, shared citizenship and higher wages than other postcolonial Caribbean nations (Grosfoguel 2003). This distinction has been

made since Puerto Rico lacks political sovereignty, and although there is some amount of local control, Puerto Ricans are still subject to all federal laws of the United States. It is important however to note that Grosfoguel argues that these benefits and economic reforms were granted to modern colonies after World War II to prevent “the success of any potential anticolonial struggle” and to “offset the inequalities produced by core-periphery exploitation” (Duany 2005; Grosfoguel 2003).

Some scholars believe that the colonial/postcolonial debate is no longer in question, and accept the status of Puerto Rico as purely colonial (Duany 2005). Among these scholars there is, however, much discussion on how this colonial relationship plays out in the lives of Puerto Ricans, and the ways in which the relationship exhibits certain postcolonial characteristics, particularly in the use of the Spanish language on the island and some cultural autonomy. In some cases Puerto Rico has been described also as “a colony in a postcolonial world” (Davila 1997). For some this means that Puerto Rico is a “postcolonial colony” in that it combines aspects of limited political autonomy with traditional colonial control, in addition to a distinct local culture and a generally good standard of living (Duany 2002, 2010). Puerto Rico has also been defined as a nation, but not in the traditional sense. Duany defines nation in the case of Puerto Rico “not as a well-bounded sovereign state but as a translocal community based on a collective consciousness of shared history, language, and culture” (Duany 2002). Furthermore, there is much discussion, and much disagreement, on the topic of decolonization of the island and movements for independence and sovereignty (Duany 2005).

More recently, there is increasing discussion on the shift from historical colonial control to a “neocolonial recolonization,” promoted by the neoliberal capitalist globalizing agenda of the United States (Grosfoguel 2003). This shift is designed to lower wages, reverse environmental protections, and diminish important gains in social and civil rights on the island. Grosfoguel argues that the United States is keen on benefitting from these reduced protections, as they currently represent limitations to economic gain and military use of the island, specifically in the case of the American military base in Vieques (Grosfoguel 2003). Economic development on the island is purported to eventually lead to a more sovereign existence for Puerto Ricans, however there is much critique as far as who would actually



benefit from these changes. This seemingly neocolonial pseudo-sovereignty may actually represent the most colonial option in the end, as the ones who benefit may mostly be transnational corporations and the local elites, rather than working class and poor Puerto Ricans.

There is still much debate over the political status of Puerto Rico and the nature of its relationship with the United States. As I will explain further, this uncertainty has real ramifications for the lives of Puerto Ricans, and particularly Puerto Rican women. Beyond the economic and political sphere, Puerto Ricans also experience a complex process of identity-formation, given the unresolved status of the island. It has even been argued that this contested political status has played an important part in creating Puerto Rican identity and has paradoxically reinforced the strong cultural ties felt among Puerto Ricans (Duany 2002).

Within the context of this increasingly ambiguous state of being, Puerto Ricans navigate the creation of their identities in a multitude of ways. These narratives are tightly bound to the island's history, the legacy of colonialism, and the contemporary policies put in place in the island by U.S. governance. Additionally, this process of identity formation is inextricably connected to processes of nationalism within the island as well as in the lives of Puerto Ricans living outside of the island. As opposed to the construction of nationalism based primarily on the classical views of the nation-state, Puerto Rican nationalism is instead often characterized by cultural expressions and identities. According to this view, Puerto Rican people often find identity and cultural belonging through "identification with a culturally distinct community" (Davila 1997). Among Puerto Ricans, this can translate into a sense of belonging based on *puertorriqueñidad*, or "Puerto Rican-ness," rather than a strict association with a distinct nation-state. Also important to acknowledge is that the terms "nation" and "nationhood" can be highly contested on the island, given the three-way split of Puerto Ricans and their disparate desires for the political status of the island. While some Puerto Ricans do prefer independence and political sovereignty, even more are split between Puerto Rico becoming the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the United States, and for Puerto Rico to remain as a commonwealth. Subsequently, the use of these terms and their meanings is often subject to the political leanings and agendas promoted by those who use them (Davila 1997).

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Puerto Ricans voted on a non-binding referendum to determine if the population desired a change to the current political status of the island and its relationship to the United States. Similar votes had taken place in 1967, 1993, and 1998, with only 5% or less of Puerto Ricans choosing independence and the majority choosing to keep the relationship as it is (Coto 2012). In this last plebiscite, Puerto Ricans voted on two separate questions addressing the island's status. The first question asked voters if they were satisfied with the current status as a U.S. territory, and the second asked voters to choose their preference between three different options, statehood, independence, and "sovereign free association" which would resemble the current status while granting additional autonomy to Puerto Rico. 54 percent of voters responded "no" to the first ballot question, indicating that they were unsatisfied with the island's current status as a territory of the U.S. In regards to the second question, 61 percent chose statehood, which for many people signaled a clear majority in favor of changing the island's status from a territory to the 51<sup>st</sup> state of the United States (Fox and Coto 2012).

However, some Puerto Rican scholars are cautioning people from accepting these results at face value and concluding that they signify a desire for this potential change. Puerto Rican filmmaker, writer, and scholar Frances Negrón-Muntaner points out that more than 400,000 voters left the second question blank. This may have been due to confusion over the wording of the question, or to some voters being undecided on the matter. When taking this number into consideration, the clear majority for statehood becomes less clear. In addition to the vote, Puerto Ricans also ousted the pro-statehood governor Luis Fortuño, replacing him with pro-commonwealth Alejandro García Padilla. Regardless of whether the contested results were pro-statehood or not, Negrón-Muntaner argues that the starkest result of this election was that Puerto Ricans made it clear that the current political status is no longer acceptable or desired. She questions what impact this vote will have on thus far unenthusiastic and disengaged U.S. policy-makers, as well as the new pro-status quo governor. Regardless, the 2012 plebiscite remains a crucial turning point in Puerto Rican history, one in which Puerto Ricans are no longer afraid to speak out against the status quo and reject an "outdated and undemocratic policy" (Negrón-Muntaner 2012).

## **Changing Aspects of the Puerto Rican Food System**

This next section will provide a short overview of some of the recent changes that have taken place in Puerto Rico regarding the island's agricultural sector, food importation, fast food industry, and retail grocery sector, and most specifically the retail giant Wal-Mart. Space does not allow for a full historical and contemporary account of these sectors, however it is my hope to provide a brief look into some of the biggest players and events within the quickly-changing Puerto Rican food system. Having some understanding of these issues is crucial in providing context to the experiences shared with me by the interview participants.

### ***Agricultural Sector and Food Imports***

For decades the local food and agricultural sectors in Puerto Rico have been on the decline, and many believe that agriculture on the island is a dying industry. This decline has been coupled with an increase in food importation as the island has become less able to produce a significant portion of its own food through local agricultural development. Time Magazine reported in 2011 that Puerto Rico imports over 80% of the food it consumes, though some place this figure closer to 85 or 90% (Kaufman 2011). This high rate of food importation leaves Puerto Rico dependant on other countries, and most notably the United States, for such basic necessities as food and agricultural products.

When Puerto Rico became a part of the United States in 1898, the island already relied on outside food imports, however local agriculture also produced a significant portion of basic food needs. Throughout the next fifty years land held in agricultural use slowly declined, however this decline picked up speed in the 1950s. New policies put in place in order to industrialize the island left the agricultural sector mostly ignored, and increased food importation from the United States meant that local products couldn't compete with cheaper imports. A number of export-focused agricultural schemes developed in the 1970s failed at bringing Puerto Rican agriculture up to speed, while in the 1990s neoliberal economic models abandoned what little focus had previously been placed on agricultural development (Carro-Figueroa 2002).

The agricultural and food sectors have more recently been described as possible ways to push the island forward economically and to “lead Puerto Rico out of its economic crisis and into a new age of prosperity” (Ryan 2011a). The issue has now become how to attract new farmers and to promote the image of farming as an economically-feasible career path. However, the majority of those in Puerto Rico who discuss the potential for economic growth through agriculture talk about the need for increased technology and innovation, which generally means industrial and agrochemically-based forms of agriculture, with little room for organic or sustainable methods. A 2011 Caribbean Business Journal piece talked at length about these suggested agricultural innovations. In this article, Edwin Aquino, commercial director of the market research firm SymphonyIRI Group, was quoted as saying that “companies such as Monsanto are investing in developing new types of crops using the island’s fertile soil as a great laboratory” (Ryan 2011a). The article continued by saying that the necessary changes would require Puerto Rico to diversify beyond the current crops the island grows, and “develop into a cutting-edge agro-industry based on technology” in order to be successful. This is reinforced when another contributor to the article urges Puerto Ricans to abandon their outdated perceptions of agriculture as the small-scale “artisanal sector we remember from our grandparents’ time” (Ryan 2011a). There is, however, a small minority who are interested in developing the agricultural sector through organic farming and sustainable agriculture, a topic I consider again in the Conclusion of this thesis.

### ***Growth of the Fast Food Sector***

Fast food is not food for you, it's food for the money and somebody else's pocket.

-Marivel L. Cano

While the agricultural sector of the island has decreased dramatically over recent years, the fast food industry has experienced an explosion in terms of numbers of restaurants and franchises, as well as in popularity among Puerto Ricans. Fast food companies have been portrayed as a provider of jobs, a solution to Puerto Rico’s high level of unemployment. In December 2012, Puerto Rico’s unemployment

rate was a staggering 14%, which was much higher than the US national average of 7.8%, and higher than all fifty states (USBLS 2012). However, not much mention is made to the fact that the majority of these jobs are part-time positions that lack benefits and a livable, steady income. According to the United States Department of Labor, the minimum wage in Puerto Rico as of January 1, 2013 is only \$4.10 an hour, which is far below the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 (USDOL 2013). These issues frame the discussion that follows on recent changes and trends within the fast food industry in Puerto Rico.

Burger King is undoubtedly “king” amongst fast food establishments in Puerto Rico. The first Burger King location opened in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1963 and since then has grown to become the most successful international Burger King franchise operation (PR Newswire 2001). The number of Burger King restaurants in Puerto Rico has continued to rise in recent years. In 2001 there were 158 locations, that number grew to 168 in 2005 (Rosa 2005). A recent count of Puerto Rican Burger King locations from the company’s website comes to a total of 188, twenty more restaurants than existed just twelve years ago (Burger King 2013). This specific example shows how the island’s most successful fast food chain has grown over past years and saturated the market with its products. The pace of expansion for fast-food restaurants in general does not appear to be slowing, despite concerns over a scarcity of desirable locations and market saturation (Rosa 2005).

In considering the expansion of fast food in Puerto Rico, it is necessary to examine the assumptions that are made about the local culture in relation to fast food. A 2005 Caribbean Business article on the fast food industry in Puerto Rico states that with “sales reaching over \$1 billion, the island’s fast-food industry is satisfying the local market’s changing lifestyles.” This same article also offers a gendered explanation for why fast food establishments have been so successful in the island. Quoting a representative of McDonald’s, the article states: “The family structure is different from what it used to be 30 years ago. Mom has become the gatekeeper of the family, and there is less time to eat at home every single day” (Rosa 2005). This discussion begins to point at some crucial issues of changes within the food system, which will be further discussed in the analysis of this thesis.

### ***Food Retailing in Puerto Rico: Historical Restructuring and Contemporary Growth***

During the time of Spanish colonial rule, most Puerto Rican cities and towns used a combination of imported food products and locally produced foods to address local food needs. Around this time many towns established local produce markets, called *Plazas del Mercado*, where vegetables were sold, though not always directly from the farmer who grew them. Up until the 1950s, most Puerto Ricans purchased their food from these *Plazas del Mercado*, local specialty stores such as bakeries or butcher's shops for perishable items, as well as *colmados*. *Colmados* are generally small, locally-owned neighborhood stores selling dry goods and some fresh produce. Food prices tended to be quite high due to the high costs of food importation and the concentration of the market (Carro-Figueroa and Guptill 2007).

Modern, industrialized grocery store chains emerged on the Puerto Rican market beginning in the 1950s as a result of various benefits and incentives given by the Puerto Rican government to retailers. The hope, during this time of economic stagnation, was that "efficient, modern food retailing" would not only encourage business investment in Puerto Rico and support economic growth, but also that food prices would decline with outside competition. Rising household incomes, population growth, and increased urbanization also fueled the entrance and expansion of US-owned grocery chains throughout the island. In the late 1950s, the first two grocery chains to open in Puerto Rico were Grand Union and Pueblo, both owned by North American corporations (Carro-Figueroa and Guptill 2007).

The entrance of US-owned grocery chains to the island had numerous effects. Food prices did go down, since retailers were able to circumvent Puerto Rico's wholesale sector and import food products directly from the United States at cheaper prices. However, local Puerto Rican producers experienced mixed effects. Some producers, specifically in the egg, chicken, and dairy industries, were able to grab a hold of this new market for their products and to this day continue to sell the majority of their products through grocery stores within Puerto Rico. Other producers, however, were forced out of the market when they couldn't compete with products imported at a lower cost. This has impacted most directly Puerto Rican farmers producing staple foods of the Puerto Rican diet, including rice, beans, tubers, root

vegetables, and plantains. These five products have some of the lowest world prices and supermarkets can easily obtain them elsewhere in the Caribbean or North America at cheaper prices than those produced in Puerto Rico. Local producers of these foods, that feature so prominently in Puerto Rican cooking, are usually left with selling their produce to truckers who sell it from roadside stands, or to local *colmados*. However, as larger grocery chains continue to expand throughout the island, locally owned *colmados* are quickly being pushed out of the retail food sector (Carro-Figueroa and Guptill 2007).

During the 1980s, a new restructuring of the retail food sector occurred which caused large grocery store chains to continue their expansion across the island. Consumer spending was already on the rise since the United States expanded its Food Stamp Program to include Puerto Rico in 1975. Local and federation tax regulations were put in place that encouraged US developers to build large shopping centers and to fill them with US-owned grocery and other retail stores. When retail giant Wal-Mart entered the Puerto Rican market in 1992, it opened its first location in Fajardo, where my family lives and where this research was conducted. In the two decades since Wal-Mart established its first store in Puerto Rico it has grown to be the largest retailer on the island (Ryan 2011b).

Wal-Mart's growth throughout Puerto Rico has been termed aggressive, with just under twenty locations opened within the last twenty years (Ryan 2011b). In 2002 concerns about Wal-Mart's expansion were brought forward by an anti-Wal-Mart coalition of local businesses, retailers, wholesalers, and farmers. This coalition was against a deal Wal-Mart was negotiating to purchase the Amigo chain of grocery stores and its thirty-three stores in Puerto Rico, which would give Wal-Mart control of forty percent of island grocery sales (Carro-Figueroa and Guptill 2007; ILSR 2003). After a legal battle over the purchase of these stores, Wal-Mart reached a settlement with the Puerto Rican government and received clearance for the purchase. This decision left many communities dismayed, and some argued "at the mercy of a near monopoly" (ILSR 2003). Wal-Mart's expansion plans in the island are far from over, however. A Wal-Mart executive who led the operation of the chain in Puerto

Rico in 2011 was quoted as stating that “we certainly have more ‘dots’ on our Puerto Rico map where we would like to have a presence or more robust market participation” (Ryan 2011b).

In addition to changing local community dynamics, Wal-Mart’s expansion has also impacted the Puerto Rican job market. Wal-Mart is currently “the largest local private-sector employer” in the island (Ryan 2011b). The addition of new Wal-Mart stores has been promoted as another way to boost the local economy as well as provide more jobs to Puerto Rico’s unemployed. In a 2011 Caribbean Business Journal article detailing a \$200 million dollar Wal-Mart expansion in Puerto Rico, job creation was referenced numerous times. This expansion was described as generating 1,212 new jobs for local Puerto Ricans, and shifting some existing stores to a 24-hour format would assist in creating another 403 jobs. This job-creation rhetoric mirrors Wal-Mart’s stated mission of increasing quality of life by helping people save money on food and household expenses. However, little to no consideration is made for the quality of life of Wal-Mart’s part-time, low-wage workers, or local farmers and businesses uprooted by their dominating presence.

As discussed previously, consolidation of the retail food sector, as examined in the example of Wal-Mart, produces negative consequences not only for consumer choice and self-determination, but also for local farmers and small businesses. Replacing local and regional chains with giant global corporations makes it more difficult to get local products into grocery stores (Carro-Figueroa and Guptill 2007). Local, small-scale producers often cannot compete with the low prices that supermarket corporations are able to demand in the market. Despite Wal-Mart’s claims to support local producers, the amount of locally-sourced products is often minimal in comparison to imported food products. While visiting the Wal-Mart in Fajardo, I noticed the below display of bananas and took this photo. The bin reads “Harvest from here, Puerto Rico. Supporting our farmers.” This was the only such display I found in the store, however it helps further Wal-Mart’s image as a supporter of local communities and people.





**Figure 3: Bin of locally grown bananas at a Wal-Mart in Fajardo, Puerto Rico.**

As Viviana Carro-Figueroa and Amy Guptill state in their book chapter on the Puerto Rican food retail sector, the “globalization of food retailing has enormous consequences for farmers, food processors, regional grocery chains, and other actors in the food system” (2007). Current food retailing trends in Puerto Rico do not look positive for local producers hoping to sell their products and make a living off agricultural work. The prospects for increased self-sufficiency and self-determination in regard to food consumption in Puerto Rico are further damaged by the continued expansion of US corporate control of the food system. All of these changes to the food system may be put further in perspective when considering that Puerto Rico is an island of only 110 miles by 40 miles. Changes such as the expansion of Burger King or Wal-Mart locations heavily impact local culture and lifestyle when so densely packed into a bounded island geography. Regardless, there do exist movements for change within the food system, which will be discussed in more detail in the concluding section of this thesis.

## **Methodology**

The act of sharing our stories is in itself an act of agency.

-Meredith Abarca  
*Voices in the Kitchen*  
(Abarca 2006)

In this section, I lay out my approaches for conducting field work, including the scholars and theories of methodology that my research draws upon. I subsequently discuss how these theories played out on the ground, by providing specifics surrounding how I found interview participants, established informed consent, and conducted interviews. Additionally, I explain how the semi-structured interviews were supplemented with various site visits throughout the island, and a small amount of participant observation. To begin, I turn to the theories and perspectives that have most informed this study.

### **Approaches to Field Work**

#### ***Grounded Theory, Grassroots Theory, and Applied Research***

My approach to field work draws upon grounded theory, as detailed originally by Glaser and Strauss, as well as later iterations. Grounded theory methodology is used in many qualitative research studies, with an aim of producing theory. One of the main concepts of this approach is that theory is derived from qualitative data collected in the form of interviews, participant observation, or study of documents. When initiating a study, researchers are advised to avoid preconceived ideas and instead allow theory or main concepts to be “discovered from data” (Dey 1999). This approach differs vastly from positivist thinking, that one poses a hypothesis and then collects data or conducts experiments in order to prove or disprove that hypothesis. Instead, grounded theory is “grounded” in the data that is collected, and for many is considered to be a much more organic process.

While grounded theory has proved useful in this research study, I have found some limitations in applying it to my work. In conducting this research, I cannot claim to simply be an observer to the

theory-making of other women. My own observations and experiences are intricately intertwined with the research topic, and I am present within it just as much as the interview participants. This negotiation of self also relates to my experience as a hybrid insider/outsider, which I further detail shortly. My own lived experiences and cultural connections to this topic articulate with the experiences shared with me in interviews. Rather than claiming to have come to this research as a blank slate without any preconceived notions, I argue that my use of grounded theory has manifested more in an exchange of ideas between myself as a researcher and the interview participants. Utilizing this framework resulted in my engagement with interviewees in developing theories regarding our diverse experiences as Puerto Rican women. I believe this dialogue and exchange has resulted in a more nuanced and powerful representation of lived experiences than if I had attempted to report on this topic as an outside observer.

The concept of grounded theory melds in a unique way with my aim to elucidate the theory-making that happens in the everyday lives of women. A framework that has been critical for me in this work is the idea of grassroots theory, and specifically women as grassroots theorists. I have drawn on the work of Meredith Abarca to apply this perspective to my own study. For Abarca, this idea contends that in order to ground our work in women's knowledge and make it accessible and relevant, we must "peel off the thick skin that keeps theory-making within the realm of academia so that we can find theories in nontraditional places" (Abarca 2006). In delving into the experiences and perspectives offered by those I interviewed, I have sought to highlight this theory-making that occurs in women's lives. Within the Analysis section of this study, I weave together the theoretical perspectives of the interviewees with my own reflections and analysis. In doing so, I again hope to ground this work in the lived experiences of Puerto Rican women, and produce scholarship that is relevant and meaningful to these communities.

I have also utilized the concept of applied research methodology in conducting this study. This methodology proposes that research must be relevant to real-life contexts, something that I find articulates well with grounded theory. Both positivist and non-positivist research have been harshly

critiqued for occurring in a vacuum and lacking validity and applicability to daily life. However, applied research methodology has allowed me to consider the ways in which this study applies to everyday life, and in some way contributes to finding solutions to issues faced in Puerto Rico. The usage of this approach goes back to my underlying commitment to producing scholarship that is relevant and accessible for those outside of academia, and that contributes positively to the communities I studied.

### ***Grounding Myself in Feminist Methodology***

In my efforts to increase the accessibility and reach of my work, I draw upon bell hooks' discussion of theory as a liberatory practice. hooks rejects the notion that theoretical work, and specifically feminist theory, should be written in a way that furthers the disconnect between lived realities and academic scholarship. Instead, she proposes that theory can be expressed as a "lived experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis" and subsequently draws the connection between theory and practice in the real lives of women both inside and outside of academia (hooks 1994). It is this accessibility and connection to lived experience that I have sought to accomplish in my research of Puerto Rican women and food.

My research framework acknowledges Shulamit Reinharz's take on feminist methodology that recognizes the plurality of women's voices and the multiplicity of women's ways of knowing (Reinharz 1992). My usage of this idea intersects with my previous discussion on grounded theory and creates space for multiple voices, including my own, to contribute to a broader, more inclusive, and more liberatory endeavor. In approaching this work with a feminist lens I have sought to center the experiences of women in order to produce scholarship that challenges gender oppression and the silencing of women's voices, particularly in colonial and post-colonial societies (Roy-Féquièrre 2004). I recognize the unequal power hierarchies inherent in field research, not only in the research design and process but also in the act of writing about other (often 'marginalized') women and seeking to represent their voices and experiences (Wolf 1996). My attempt here has been to write about the experiences of Puerto Rican women, while also reflecting on my own connections to these issues.

In her essay “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?” Judith Stacey writes that power dynamics in ethnography are inherently imbalanced. She goes to say that while ethnography cannot be fully feminist, “there can be (indeed there are) ethnographies that are partially feminist, accounts of culture enhanced by the application of feminist perspectives” (Stacey 1991). In conducting this research I have sought to ground my methodology in feminist principles in order to produce scholarship that centers women’s voices, is relevant to women’s lives, and challenges the erasure of experiences of women of color.

Early on in this project I received an email from a Puerto Rican man living the San Francisco Bay Area who had heard about the research I intended to do. At this point I was considering comparing the lives of Puerto Ricans living in the Bay Area and Puerto Ricans living on the island, and had sent some emails to a number of Puerto Rican cultural organizations in the area, looking for potential interview contacts. This man emailed me and asked, in an abrupt tone, that I call him regarding my proposed project. I did call him, and our conversation helped me pinpoint further my reasons for focusing specifically on the stories of Puerto Rican women, as opposed to both women and men.

As soon as our phone conversation began, the man on the line asked me pointedly why I was planning to interview only women. I began to offer an explanation but before I could tell him very much, he launched into a diatribe. He explained to me that he couldn’t see the importance of interviewing women, because in Puerto Rico most of the highly successful chefs and restaurant owners were, in fact, men. He told me if I really wanted to know about Puerto Rican food, then I should stick to interviewing Puerto Rico’s renowned (male) chefs, and forget about wasting my time interviewing housewives.

I offered him a rebuttal, stating that what he just said was the *very reason* why I felt compelled to travel to Puerto Rico and document women’s stories. The fact that the lived experiences of “everyday” Puerto Rican women were not considered to be noteworthy enough for research, indicated to me what I already felt inside – that what has been traditionally considered “women’s work” in the household was completely devalued by society as “unproductive” work. Additionally, his reasoning echoed the constant silencing of women’s voices as unnecessary and unimportant. I delve more deeply into these issues in

the conclusion of this thesis, however I feel this anecdote helps to explain further why I chose to focus on women's stories in the planning of my methodology. As for the man on the phone, he completely dismissed my argument, I thanked him for his time, and then ended the call.

### ***Finding the "Food Voice" – Counihan, Abarca, and Latina Feminist Testimonios***

In this study, I use food as a vehicle for delving into rich conversations about women's lives and experiences. Other scholars have noted the usefulness of food as a tool to gaining insight on people's thoughts and emotions. Annie Hauck-Lawson has coined the term "food voice" in reference to the way that discussions about food and eating can provide a medium for deeply meaningful conversations about people's lives (Hauck-Lawson 2004). Food can elucidate thoughts on cultural connections, power, family, gender relations, migration, resistance, personal and group identity, among many other topics. In developing my own methodology, I have sought to listen for and find the "food voice," and build upon other scholarly work that also uses food and eating as a tool in this endeavor.

Carole M. Counihan has utilized food-centered life histories in order to explore the relationship between food, place, and people among Italian families in Florence, Italy (Counihan 2004) and Mexican-American women in Antonito, Colorado (Counihan 2009). She describes food-centered life histories as interviews that focus on "experiences and memories about food production, preservation, preparation, consumption, and exchange" (Counihan 2006). Through food-centered conversations with women, Counihan has brought to the forefront discussions on family, gender, identity, community, cultural citizenship, environmentalism, and cultural survival.

These life histories build upon the ethnographic genre of *testimonios*. As described by the Latina Feminist Group, *testimonios* are "a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure" (Acevedo 2001). In this research study I have employed Counihan's method of food-centered life histories to explore topics of food, gender, identity, and community among Puerto Rican women. Additionally, I ground this work in

the tradition of Latina feminist *testimonios* to emphasize the lived experiences of Puerto Rican women within the larger historical and contemporary discourse on Puerto Rican culture and experience.

In addition to Counihan's work, I draw from Meredith Abarca's method of *charlas culinarias*<sup>16</sup> as described in her book *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Working-Class Mexican and Mexican American Women*. Abarca utilized this technique to showcase the voices of Mexican and Mexican-American women in California on topics regarding the intersection of food, culture, identity, agency, and place making. Her research showed how certain women used their positioning within the family and the home as a means for self-empowerment, the assertion of agency, and the re-claiming of previously oppressive places and practices. Abarca states that "kitchen talk, written in cookbooks or memoirs, or spoken as in the case of ethnographic research on food as voice, offer moments of seizing subjectivity and narrative authority, which allows women to embrace the power of their own history – its pain, its suffering, its joy" (Abarca 2006). I have grounded my research methods in Abarca's work in order to explore the potential that exists for food to serve as a tool for resistance and transformation within women's lives, by centering Puerto Rican women's experiences with cultural foodways.

While the above approaches have offered me much insight on the development of my own research study, I have also found certain issues with them. Most specifically, Counihan states throughout much of her work that in doing food-centered life histories she aims to "give voice" to traditionally marginalized and silenced women. I reject this notion of "giving voice" in my own work. To me, "giving voice" implies that these women are voiceless to begin with and it is I who "allow" them to speak. Frankly, I find this position to be extremely problematic, and the inherent power dynamics to be counterproductive to the work I aim to do. A main goal of researching this topic has been to use the privilege I have as a university student to create space, both inside and outside of academia, where the voices of historically silenced women can be heard and celebrated. However, those voices are already present and being expressed in a multitude of ways, regardless of whether others have deemed them important or not.

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<sup>16</sup> Translation: "culinary chats"

### **Positionality and Limitations**

In an effort to acknowledge my positionality in this field research project, I take a self-reflexive approach to consider what aspects of my own identity and politics effected the relationships I created in the field, and subsequently the data I gathered (Chiseri-Strater 1996). In doing this, I find discourse around the insider/outsider dichotomy to be both useful and limiting in considering my own experience doing research in Puerto Rico (Wolf 1996). As the daughter of an Anglo father and a New York Puerto Rican mother, the fact that I am half Puerto Rican may have detracted from others' views of me as someone who identifies with Puerto Rican heritage. Also, I grew up in the states, or the "mainland" as some islanders call it. My family background and upbringing have both made it so that I do not fit easily into the insider/outsider dichotomy. Though I grew up in the states, I have visited my family in Puerto Rico numerous times, and knew the area around Fajardo much more intimately than a complete outsider would. At certain times while in the field I felt very much like an insider, because of my ability to connect with interviewees on cultural foods or experiences, such as the meals we prepare for certain holidays. Simultaneously, I have also felt like an outsider, lacking the nuanced comprehension of Puerto Rican Spanish, and feeling the embarrassment that comes from not understanding a joke or a certain phrase. Additionally, over time I noticed increasingly feeling more like an 'insider' as I gained more familiarity with the area and grew to feel more comfortable expressing myself in Spanish. My experience doing field research in Puerto Rico has been affected by my positionality and the ways in which I navigated between both being an 'insider' and an 'outsider' to those communities, and how that changed over time.

Another critical aspect of my positionality in this research project is my political viewpoint. I hold opinions on the same issues I asked about in the interviews, particularly the contested relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. The time period in which my research took place was also a complicating factor, as the island would be voting on a new governor and a non-binding resolution to the island's status only two months after my departure. The political atmosphere in Puerto Rico was at times tense during my stay, and perhaps this influenced their willingness (or unwillingness) to speak



openly about the more political questions I posed. I attempted to address these issues by asking non-leading questions as much as possible and by limiting the amount of information I shared upfront on my own political beliefs. I did not attempt to appear unbiased, however. This has been a delicate boundary to navigate, but I also feel strongly that reciprocity was crucial in developing meaningful, trusting relationships with the women I interviewed. When asked my own thoughts on a certain topic I shared them, believing that open, honest communication would assist in creating those relationships. In conducting these interviews I made an effort to create an atmosphere where an interviewee would feel comfortable to express her opinions openly and freely, without fear of judgment.

There is no doubt that my level of fluency in Spanish has been a limiting factor in both conducting interviews in the field, as well as analyzing interview content. I grew up in a mixed language household where we spoke mostly English but with much Spanish mixed in. Though I communicated primarily in English, I was constantly surrounded by Spanish music, television shows, and the conversations between my more fluent family members, mostly my mom and her brothers and sisters. I studied Spanish in high school for two years, but in college chose instead to learn Italian. Before traveling to Puerto Rico for this study, I refreshed my Spanish by taking two quarters at the college-level. Currently, I have an intermediate understanding of Spanish in speaking, listening, and writing. I acknowledge that my lack of complete fluency did play a part in my role as a researcher, not only in my ability to converse with interviewees but also in how they perceived me.

One last, and very crucial, limitation, was simply the amount of time I spent in Fajardo and the surrounding area. I spent approximately two and half months in Puerto Rico, between the dates of July 4<sup>th</sup> and September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012. I chose this time frame because it was summer and therefore logistically easier to travel for an extended period, rather than taking a quarter off of classes during the school year. Although I was able to collect a significant amount of interviews during that time, I definitely felt under pressure to complete them and wished I had more time. My original desire for conducting interviews had been to conduct follow up interviews with all of those I interviewed. However, due to timing, logistics and lack of time this was impossible. Rather, I ended up completing a few follow up interviews

with selected women, and coupled that with seeking new interviewees. Below, I speak more directly to how I looked for and found women to interview, however I did feel the lack of time in the field resulted in a more frantic and piecemeal approach to finding interview participants. With a longer time in the field I feel this could have been approached in a more organized fashion. Since I was short on time towards the middle and end of my stay, I chose to focus more on interviews, and therefore conducted fewer site visits and less participant observation than I had hoped, which I also detail in the following section.

## **Research Methods**

### ***Interviews***

To find interview participants, I began by using the contacts I had through my family and friends currently living in Fajardo and the surrounding cities. This included polling my family members about their local connections and identifying people who may be interested in talking with me on this topic. During this process I also identified a number of my own family members to interview, though the majority of women I interviewed were not related to me. Next, I started a process of making my own contacts in Fajardo. To do this I took many walks throughout the core of the city and identified potential people to speak with. For example, I came across a health food store and after coming in a few times to purchase some items and chatting with the owner, Wanda Yvette Méndez, I introduced the project I was doing and asked if she would be interested in talking with me about it. This particular interview proved to be one of the most rich of all I conducted, and also led me to a number of other contacts. Additionally, there was a tiny Puerto Rican eatery on the main road I walked on into town each day, and one morning I stopped in and started getting to know the owner and cook, Amparo Pérez. She also participated in an interview later on. In many instances I found women to interview simply by entering their businesses and starting to form a relationship with them.

To broaden my interview pool, I used the technique of snowball sampling. This consisted of asking each interview participant if they knew of any people who might be interested in also speaking with me on this topic. This tactic proved extremely helpful in identifying additional interviewees, and also provided me with a much broader interview pool in terms of occupation and age. This was also a factor in why a number of my interviews took place in some of the surrounding cities and towns outside of Fajardo. I had originally planned on focusing my interviews only within Fajardo, however the more I delved into the interviews, the more I found how interconnected many of the towns in this region were. Many people had family or friends scattered throughout the region, and it became more useful for me to open my geographical lens to encompass interview participants from the neighboring communities as well.

In finding interview participants, I also strived to include various perspectives among different age groups. As my pool of interviewees grew, I reviewed the composition of the group and sought out additional women from certain age groups that were less represented. I found that it was quite easy to connect with women ranging from 35-50 years of age, and more difficult to find interviewees in my own age group of 18-35. Towards the end of my stay in Puerto Rico it was suggested to me that I connect with the local university in order to better reach this age group, however unfortunately I lacked the time to make that a reality. In addition, while embarking on this research project I sought to interview women of varying ages within the same family, in order to document their intergenerational experiences and viewpoints. However, this also proved more difficult to coordinate than I had anticipated and I was only successful in interviewing a few mother/daughter pairs during my short stay.

While I focused explicitly on obtaining an interview pool that encompassed a range of ages and generations, I had more difficulty establishing the same diversity when it came to class and ethnic backgrounds. A complicating factor was the lack of reliable information I collected regarding how interviewees self-identified in these two categories. While I can make some rough assumptions to socio-economic status of interviewees based on occupations or educational levels, I did not collect this

detailed information from each person I interviewed. This limits my ability to analyze the potential implications of these categories on interviewee's responses and perspectives.

Before each interview I established informed consent in the form of oral consent. I wrote and utilized an oral script approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that explained the research study, any potential risks of participating, and asked the interviewer for explicit permission to audio-record the exchange. I also provided every interview participant with a contact sheet that summarized some main points of the study and included contact information for myself, my advisor, and the IRB. I had IRB-approved copies of the contact sheet in both English and Spanish and provided the interview participant with whichever version they requested. As an appendix at the end of this document I have provided a copy of the contact sheet, in both English and Spanish.

Before beginning the interview, I provided each interview participant with the choice to use their own name and identifying information in this study, or to use a pseudonym. Out of the twenty-one people who participated in an interview, not one person asked for confidentiality. Interestingly, a number of interview participants felt very strongly that they did want their names to be connected with their interviews. Many people expressed excitement in being able to contribute to a university research project on this topic. The opportunity for interview participants to share their stories and be recognized by name seemed to be an important moment of recognition and agency. Therefore, all names and identifying features presented in this thesis are real, in accordance with the interviewee's choices.

The interviews I conducted in Puerto Rico primarily took the form of semi-structured interviews. As detailed previously, I drew heavily from Meredith Abarca's work with *charlas culinarias* and Carole Counihan's food-centered life histories in constructing the interview design. To do this, I combined aspects of these different techniques in order to have a conversation with interview participants on certain aspects of their lives, through the lens of food. The interviews lasted anywhere from forty minutes to two and a half hours. I utilized a set of predetermined interview questions, however I also left flexibility in the structure of the interview, to attempt to create a more comfortable, conversational tone. By engaging in an open dialogue with the women I spoke with, the analysis that

resulted was developed through our shared discussions. The interview questions I prepared are included as an appendix at the end of this document. To best accommodate the women I interviewed, I conducted the interviews in whichever language the interviewees were most comfortable speaking, either Spanish or English.

### ***Site Visits and Participant Observation***

Although the majority of my time in Puerto Rico was spent conducting interviews, I also visited certain local cultural events and sites of interest. Among those were an artisan festival in Old San Juan, the local *Plaza de Mercado* in Fajardo, a gastronomic festival in Aguada on the western side of the island, food kiosks in Luquillo, and Guavate – a small mountain town near Cayey known for its *lechonerías*<sup>17</sup>. In collecting both interview data as well as historical and contemporary contextual information, I have sought to connect the stories and experiences of women in Fajardo to the larger political and cultural landscape of the island.



**Figure 4: Typical Puerto Rican sweets at an artisan fair in Old San Juan.**

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<sup>17</sup> Small stands or restaurants selling roasted pork on a spit.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

When asked questions about their lives or the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, many women I spoke with offered nuanced and complex perspectives. In this way, they challenged the pervasive notion that “everyday” women have nothing to offer academic scholarship. While analyzing interviews for this thesis, numerous themes and topics of interest arose. In order to more cohesively discuss my analysis, I have chosen one overarching theme to focus on here, with four interrelated sub-themes. This was a difficult task, as these issues of food, culture, and identity in Puerto Rico are quite complex and interconnected. To use a food metaphor, with each interview I conducted during the summer of 2012 I felt as though I was peeling back one more layer of an increasingly complex onion. Insights from one interview would articulate with comments mentioned in another, either in corresponding or contradictory ways, adding to this nuanced comprehension of the food system in Puerto Rico. Additionally, as mentioned previously, the situation in Puerto Rico is quickly changing, some would argue for the better, while others would argue for the worse. My analysis here seeks to open up a dialogue on these issues, by considering a current snapshot of lived experiences in and around Fajardo, Puerto Rico.

As discussed in the Methodology section, I have utilized a grounded theory approach in conducting this research, as well as in analyzing it. Throughout the research process I was able to constantly analyze the interview data, picking up on emerging themes and adjusting my interview questions to more directly address those themes. I have sought to base this discussion in topics that were relevant to those I interviewed, as mentioned previously. Rather than applying theory in a top-down approach to the analysis of these interviews, I view the interview participants as grassroots theorists, who are constantly developing their own theories that are both based in their lived experiences and relevant to their own lives and communities. My own experiences as a Puerto Rican woman and my analysis of these topics intertwine with the information I gathered in interviews, and what follows is a dialogue between the theorizing of both myself and the women who spoke with me.

## **US Influence on the Puerto Rican Food System: Repercussions for Puerto Rican Identities**

In order to delve more deeply into the following topics, I have organized this discussion within one primary overarching theme, that being how US influence on the Puerto Rican food system impacts the identities of Puerto Rican women. Within this theme I focus on four main sub-topics, those being how discourses of US dominance and Puerto Rican dependence are reflected in women's food narratives, the ways in which the expansion of the fast food industry has affected the food system and cultural identity, the changing definition of "healthy foods" particularly regarding traditional Puerto Rican foods, and lastly the ways in which food serves as a tool for resistance. For all interview excerpts, those provided only in English were from interviews conducted in English. For interviews conducted in Spanish I have first provided the excerpt in Spanish, and then provided an English translation<sup>18</sup>. In the discussion that follows, I have sought to draw connections between various interview participant's stories and to present a rich and complex understanding of women's experiences within the contemporary Puerto Rican food system.

### **Discourses of US Dominance and Puerto Rican Dependence**

My first argument is concerning the ways in which a dual discourse of dominance and dependence has been created in the food narratives of women I spoke with as a part of this research. First, I show how US control of the Puerto Rican food system creates and reinforces an overall discourse of US dominance in Puerto Rico. Additionally, I add to this a discourse that is created concerning the dependence of the Puerto Rican people on aid given from the United States, most specifically in the form of food stamps. I aim to show how these two discourses are reflected in these women's narratives, and how they articulate with each other. I believe that these discourses are a reflection of the colonialist relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. The impact of colonialism on foodways has been previously examined within numerous other contexts (Dietler 2007; Narayan 1997; Rich 2007). Uma Narayan takes a feminist analysis in considering the impact of food colonialism and cultural

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<sup>18</sup> All Spanish to English translations in this thesis, including any potential errors, are my own.

commodification within Indian immigrant communities in England (Narayan 1997). She, as well as other scholars, has established the close linkages between food culture and exertions of dominance by colonizing countries. As echoed in interviews, I argue that the creation and maintenance of this dominance negatively impacts Puerto Rican cultural identity.

To open this discussion, I turn to an interview I conducted with Marivel L. Cano. Throughout the two interviews we conducted together, Marivel was eager to share details about her baked goods business, Messy Kitchen Goodies, and about her thoughts on the importance of food within the family and community. However, when I tried to engage with Marivel on questions of a more political nature, the tone of the interview quickly changed. This was not odd, as the tense political climate in Puerto Rico at that time often caused people to either open up passionately about their thoughts, or to not want to discuss the topic at all. But I found the following excerpt of our interview to be quite telling.

Maria Elena: Ok, so what do you think about the, I guess, the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States? Politically.

Marivel: (Long pause. Smiles, then looks at recorder) Can I stop?

Maria Elena: Pause? Yeah. (Pauses recorder, then recording begins again)

Marivel: It's a relationship that, it's good in many ways, brings advantages and disadvantages, but I am not somebody that knows about it too much, to be really a person of a good input. (Pauses) That's it.

This short section of the interview speaks volumes. First, her reluctance to speak on the topic is very salient. Perhaps the question I posed caught her off guard, as she asked me to turn off the audio recorder for a few moments, so she could ponder what it was she wanted to say. When she was ready to start the recording again, her response seemed to brush off any potential contributions she could have, by saying that "I am not somebody that knows about it too much, to be really a person of a good input." And then, it seems as though she tried to end the conversation there when after another pause she stated "That's it". This reluctance to discuss political issues, and the devaluation of her potential input, was noted in other interviews as well, though not all. In the quote that follows, however, Marivel did open up a little and allowed me a brief look at some of her thoughts on this topic.



Maria Elena: Um, (pauses) do you want to comment on what you think some of the advantages or disadvantages are?

Marivel: I can mention, mention a few, like for example Puerto Rico when um, when the United States took over Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico was a very undeveloped place, um, very little education, things like that, you know, people starving or going hungry, a lot of abuse in terms of you know who was the owner of what and who was working for whom and then when, when the United States took over, they started to create an environment where little by little people would be able to be educated, more opportunities for people to, um, not have to be slaves basically, and um programs that were beneficial to help us kick start, so that I would say is the biggest advantage of our relationship with the United States.

When prompted by me, asking if she wanted to comment on any of the advantages or disadvantages she sees to this political relationship, she began to unfold her story, slowly and hesitatingly. What I find fascinating about this section of our interview, is the language she uses in order to describe the transference of Puerto Rico to the United States. Twice in this section Marivel states “when the United States took over” Puerto Rico. This came as a surprise to me, since even though she was hesitant to discuss this topic, and would not be someone who I would describe as pro-independence or anti-US, the very language she used to describe how the island became an entity of the United States potentially reflects a discourse of US dominance. By saying that the United States “took over” Puerto Rico, one can argue that this transference of ownership could be described as the United States enacting imperialist domination to claim lands for the purpose of furthering American goals and strategies. This wording does not seem to indicate a peaceful union between two cooperative nations. Instead, it reinforces this discourse surrounding US presence and domination on the island.

Wanda Yvette Méndez, on the other hand, utilizes the metaphor of a whore to describe Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States.

Wanda: *Pero yo comparo eso, como las prostitutas. Las prostitutas estaban al cambio de alguien y su autoestima, yo entiendo de que no es muy buena. Porque tu no necesitas ser prostituta para obtener otras cosas o sea, otros seres humanos, logran, quizás, los mismos objetivos, en otro tipo de cosa. Este, y yo por eso, con algunas personas que me atrevo decirlo, siento a Puerto Rico como la ramera del Caribe. Que necesita, pues, hacer como las prostitutas. Este, trabajar para que te den algo, y no me gusta ese concepto, no me gustaría que mi país siguiera en ese tipo de situación. Yo lo veo así. Yo siempre he dicho: “me siento como si Puerto Rico fuera la ramera del Caribe.” De verdad. [...] Y en un momento lo sentí así. Yo dije: “Wow, nosotros estamos en una posición bien, bien fea.”*

(But I compare this, like prostitutes. Prostitutes were in exchange for something and their self-esteem, I understand, is not very good. Because you don't need to be a prostitute to obtain other things, you know, other human beings, achieve, who knows, the same objectives, in another type of thing. So, and I therefore, with some people I dare to say this, I feel like Puerto Rico is the whore of the Caribbean. That needs to, well, do like the prostitutes. This, working so that they give you something, and I don't like this concept, I would not like for my country to continue in this type of situation. I see it this way. I always have said: "I feel as if Puerto Rico was the whore of the Caribbean." Really. [...] And in one moment I felt like this. I said: "Wow, we are in a very, very ugly position.")

By using this metaphor of a "whore" to describe Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States, Wanda is communicating her strong opinions on the imbalance of power between the US and Puerto Rico. I also believe that the gendered connotation of her speech cannot be ignored. To begin with, the word "*ramera*" is a feminine noun in Spanish. *Ramera* can be translated in English to mean whore, prostitute, hooker, or street walker, all words that have very gendered connotations in English as well. The image that can be conjured up in one's head when considering Wanda's word choice, is that of a helpless woman at the mercy of her more powerful, and undoubtedly male, pimp or owner. This is strongly reminiscent of a colonial construction of gender dynamics, where woman's bodies were exploitable and stood as symbols of a land that could be conquered. By comparing the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico to a pimp and his whore, Wanda draws a connection to Puerto Rico's colonial past. Additionally, she indicates her feelings as to where this political relationship currently stands and furthers the construction of a discourse of US dominance in Puerto Rico.

Many interview participants discussed specific ways in which the United States limits various aspects of life in Puerto Rico. Marivel stated that:

Marivel: But then the disadvantage of what can be good then can become not so good. For example, we have um, I don't know much about this and I don't want to comment and look like stupid on this, and this is for real, but there is a law or an agreement between the United States and Puerto Rico, in Spanish it's called uh, la ley de, caa-, it's not coming, uh, I forgot the name now but it's, it's a law that doesn't allow us to do free commercial, commercial trading with other countries, so it caps us, in the globalization that is a very disadvantageous point, or place to be.

Wanda had a similar thought regarding commercial trading limits imposed by the United States:

Wanda: *Yo entiendo que ahora Puerto Rico está limitado, porque unas leyes de comercio, de acuerdos que se hicieron en los años 60 con la nación americana y no es que yo esté en desacuerdo con ellos, pues porque yo entiendo que ha sido de gran ayuda en ciertas cosas pero en otras partes, nos ha limitado, este... la mente, a pensar de que dependemos de eso solamente. Eso es lo que yo pienso.*

(I understand that right now Puerto Rico is limited because of some commercial laws, of some agreements that they made in the 60's with the American nation and it's not that I am in disagreement with them, well because I understand that it has been a great help in some things, but in other parts, it has limited us, this... the mind, to think that we depend solely on this. That is what I think.)

Wanda also described the ways she felt that these limitations impacted the very ways in which consciousness is created in the island. When I asked her specifically what she thought of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, Wanda's immediate response was:

Wanda: *Pues, ha tenido sus beneficios, pero yo, en mi opinión, yo entiendo de que...cuando se les crea a las personas una consciencia de que "me den todo," eso afecta porque las personas crean una co-dependencia, piensan que dentro de ellos no hay un talento para poder crear, y para poder buscar la manera de sobrevivir. Yo no estoy de acuerdo con que a Puerto Rico le hayan dado tantos fondos. Pues porque le ha creado una vagancia a la población, una mentalidad de no hacer nada porque me lo dan.*

(Well, it has had its benefits, but I, in my opinion, I understand that...when you create in people a consciousness that "they will give me everything," this has an effect because people create a co-dependency, they think that within themselves there is no talent to be able to create, and to be able to find a way to survive. I am not in agreement that they have given so many funds to Puerto Rico. Because it has created a laziness in the population, a mentality of doing nothing because they will give it to me.)

Wanda, and many other interview participants, discussed the high amount of food stamp use on the island, as a result of intervention on the part of the United States. This is a highly contested issue that some argue has brought great benefit to Puerto Rico in decreasing hunger and poverty, while others argue that it has instead impacted Puerto Rican society negatively in creating a dependence on the US. This is especially true as the US solution to fight poverty in the island has historically been primarily the issuance of food stamp benefits to island residents, while mostly ignoring other potential solutions such as supporting job creation or investing in agricultural or economic development. Specifically in regards to governmental food stamp benefits, Wanda said that:

Wanda: *Le ha creado una conciencia de que “yo no tengo que trabajar porque comoquiera voy a recibir para mis alimentos.”*

(It has created a consciousness that “I don’t have to work because either way I will receive for my food.”)

Wanda describes further her perspective on how a dependency on the United States has been created in Puerto Rico:

Wanda: *La relación de Puerto Rico con los Estados Unidos, pues yo creo que todos los países pueden tener relaciones con otros países, pero no de crear este... una conciencia de que ese otro país me tiene que dar ayudas a mí, a cambio de esto otro. Yo no creo que los seres humanos deben trabajar a cambio de nada, si no a cambio de sus propias satisfacciones, este...debemos de tener otro tipo de mentalidad. Yo creo que sí esa mentalidad cambia, podemos intercambiar con los Estados Unidos, o con cualquier país, alimentos, como hace España, como hace China, como hace...pero tener la libertad para poder ser creativo y nosotros no tener unas leyes de otro país que (inaudible) a nosotros y nos limite.*

(The relationship of Puerto Rico with the United States, well I think that all countries can have relationships with other countries, but not to create this... a consciousness that this other country has to give help to me, in exchange for this other. I don’t believe that human beings should have to work in exchange of anything, if not in exchange for their own satisfactions, so...we have to have another type of mentality. I believe that if this mentality changes, we can exchange with the United States, or with any country, food, like Spain does, like China does, like... but have the freedom to be able to be creative and for us to not have laws that another country (inaudible) us and limits us.)

In stating that countries should be able to have relationships with other countries she acknowledges the potential benefit these relationships can have. However, she then says that those relationships are fine as long as they do not lead to the creation of dependency, or “*una conciencia de que ese otro país me tiene que dar ayudas a mí a cambio de este otro*” (“a consciousness that this other country has to give help to me in exchange for this other”). In this quote, Wanda rejects the notion that because the United States supports Puerto Rico in a number of ways, that Puerto Ricans must feel indebted to the United States.

Secondly, in this section Wanda quickly introduces the idea of freedom and contrasts it with limitations. In discussing the limitations that have been placed on Puerto Rico through its agreements with the United States, Wanda discusses how these limitations have molded the minds of Puerto Rican people. She stresses strongly the word *mente* (mind), emphasizing the extent to which these limitations

have affected people on the island, down to their very minds and the ways in which they think. She cites these limitations as having such a drastic effect on people that they cause them to think that there is no other option. Wanda argues that the limitations Puerto Ricans have felt at the hands of the United States have resulted in people believing that there is no way out of this dependence, which serves to perpetuate this dependent relationship even further.

Returning to the topic of freedom that Wanda introduces in her interview, this is a critical juncture in her interview and in the discourse that is reflected in her speech. This line is particularly telling in regards to her potential feelings surrounding this topic. In the preceding lines, Wanda discusses how she is in agreement that countries can have relationships with other countries in the specific case of food trade, and cites Spain and China as examples of countries that trade with other countries. However, she states very forcefully that this should only be the case when those countries still maintain the freedom to their own expression. She says specifically that countries should have the freedom (*pero tener la libertad*) to be able to be creative and to not be limited by other countries and laws originating from outside entities.

Wanda expanded on this discussion in our second interview together:

*Wanda: Yo entendía que esa relación de Estados Unidos y Puerto Rico, ha tenido unos beneficios buenos, pero, otros no tan buenos. Ejemplo, que Puerto Rico esté ciertas leyes federales, nos limita para que nosotros podemos comercializar con otros países, como Suramérica, Europa [...] Todas esas cosas las tenemos que hacer con el permiso de los Estados Unidos. No como otras naciones [...] que no tienen la influencia de los Estados Unidos, y pueden comerciar libremente [...] quizás conseguir muchos alimentos saludables de Sudamérica, de Santo Domingo, de Europa. Pero, nosotros lo que recibimos, siempre nos limitamos a que tiene que ser a través de los Estados Unidos, por, por las leyes que hay de comercialización. Y, eso nos limita un poco, pero [...] el beneficio de que por ser casi un estado, realmente no somos un estado, somos una colonia, este, pues, recibimos esos beneficios a cambio de otras cosas.*

(I understood it that this relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, has had some good benefits, but, others not so good. For example, that Puerto Rico has certain federal laws, it limits us from being able to market with other countries, like South America, Europe [...] All of these things we have to do with permission from the United States. Not like other nations [...] that don't have the influence of the United States, and can trade freely, maybe obtain a lot of healthy foods from South America, from Santo Domingo, from Europe. But, us, what we receive, we always are limited to have to go through the United States, because, because the merchandizing laws that exist. And, this limits us a little, but [...] the benefit of being almost a

state, in reality we are not a state, we are a colony, this, well, we receive those benefits in exchange for other things.)

In this quote, Wanda explains that when it comes to trade, and food trade specifically for her as the owner of a health food store, Puerto Rico can obtain what it needs only with the permission of the United States. She points out that other countries that don't have this relationship with and influence from the United States can *freely* trade. This relates back to her previous discussion regarding freedom and the lack of Puerto Rican freedom to function without obtaining permission – a relationship that could be described as that between a parent and a child. Later on she asserts that although Puerto Rico seems almost like a state, it is in fact a colony of the United States. Her description of this political relationship leads me to believe that her experience of it reflects this duality of both dominance and dependence.

Marivel also discussed some of the impacts of the benefits given to Puerto Rico by the United States government:

Marivel: In the way that the United States seems to compensate us not being able to actually develop on a different scale our economics, they bring a lot of funds to Puerto Rico. But the thing is that when you get a lot of a good thing, you might harvest people that then only know how to live with those things that you give them. And in that sense, that can become a disadvantage. I guess that is for me, the biggest disadvantage.

Here, she echoes the idea that the ways in which the United States has sought to compensate Puerto Ricans (in the form of funds) has actually resulted in what she considers to be the biggest disadvantage of this political relationship. She says that by bringing in these funds, the United States may actually be creating a situation where people “only know how to live with those things that you give them.” She doesn't go into more detail on this topic, however her words do contribute to this broader discussion on domination and dependence.

In my second interview with Wanda Yvette Méndez, we were joined by her daughter, Suzette Hernández. Suzette offered these thoughts regarding the high amount of food stamp use in Puerto Rico.

Suzette: *Yo, yo siento que, que hay personas aquí en Puerto Rico, que de no ser por las ayudas que brinda Estados Unidos hacia este país, pues, quizá pasaría hambre, porque no tuvieran qué comer. O, quizás me equivoco y al no tener estas ayudas de Estados Unidos, esas personas se verían en la obligación de buscar un trabajo, o de ellos mismos crear un trabajo por su propia cuenta.*

(I, I feel that, that there are people here in Puerto Rico, that if it wasn't for the help that the United States brings to this country, well, maybe they would be hungry, because they wouldn't have food to eat. Or, perhaps I'm wrong and not having this help from the United States, these people would be forced to find a job, or they themselves create a job on their own.)

In addition to Wanda's perspective detailed previously, many interview participants discussed how the mentality of some people in Puerto Rico has changed as a result of financial support from the United States government. Both Suzette Hernández and Anna González provided their insights on this.

Suzette: *Lo que pasa es que la, la mentalidad de ciertas personas aquí en Puerto Rico, es que mientras haya unas ayudas que brinda el gobierno de Estados Unidos, no tienen la necesidad de trabajar, porque si trabajan el gobierno de Puerto Rico, le quita las ayudas que son de Estados Unidos.*

(What happens is that the, the mentality of certain people here in Puerto Rico, is that while there is support provided by the United States government, they don't have to work, because if they work the Puerto Rican government will remove the support that comes from the United States.)

Anna: *¿Tu quieres que te diga la verdad? ¿Por qué son vagos? Por que el gobierno le da cupones a todo el mundo. Tú has hecho una pregunta que maybe que no te guste la respuesta, pero es una respuesta muy sincera y yo estoy diciendo lo que yo siento. Ni pues que le den cupones a personas que realmente las necesiten, pues bien, que para eso es la ayuda que da el gobierno. Pero aquí le dan cupones a todo el mundo y todo el mundo [...] Por eso es que no quieren trabajar. Que dile a una persona, "Mira, vete y siémbreme esa matita de guineo." "Are you kidding me? Yo ensuciarme las manos, yo mejor la compro." Y antes no era así, antes eso era la forma de tu mantener a tu familia. Tú tenías que sembrar para mantener a tu familia porque tu no tenías dinero para ir a comprarlo. Ahora, pues el dinero aparece y mejor se compran las cosas, es mejor.*

(You want me to tell you the truth? Why are they lazy? Because the government gives food stamps to everybody. You have asked a question that maybe you won't like the answer, but this is a very honest answer and I am saying what I feel. Well, if they give food stamps to people who really need them, well fine, because that is the purpose of the help that the government provides. But here they give food stamps to everybody, everybody [...] This is why they don't want to work. You say to someone, "Hey, go and plant this banana tree." "Are you kidding me? Me, dirty my hands, I'd rather buy it." And before it wasn't like this, before this was the way that you provided for your family. You had to plant to provide for your family because you didn't have money to go and buy it. Now, well, the money appears and they'd rather buy these things, it's better.)

Both Anna and Suzette, as well as other interviewees, articulated to me that they felt this support from the United States, and often specifically food stamps, created a laziness in the Puerto Rican people. They described how people of all ages, but also particularly young people, did not feel the need to work and provide for themselves due to the support they received and the fact that their food needs were taken care of through food stamps. This discourse reflects a continued dependence of Puerto Rico on the United States. Suzette argued that maybe if people didn't have this help they would be forced to provide for themselves or to create a job in order to support themselves, which she and her mother Wanda viewed as a way that people were held back. These perspectives are increasingly complicated when we consider the detrimental effects of internalizing an oppressive viewpoint that the people of your culture are lazy or cannot provide for themselves without the support of another nation.

In analyzing the discourse created through these women's interviews, I have come to a number of conclusions. First, I have found that not only are there these discourses of US domination and Puerto Rican dependence reflected in these women's narratives, but looking a bit deeper, I am also finding that there are some very nuanced ways in which these are upheld and maintained. Some interviewees explained how Puerto Rico has no other viable option but to continue with its current political status, regardless of any disadvantages it brings. For example, when I asked Marivel where she saw the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico going in the future, her response was:

Marivel: Puerto Rico and the United States? Same thing that it is right now. I don't think the United States wants to deal with what it would be to get Puerto Rico as a state, I don't see the benefit either because with the relationship that we have they get the most of what they can out of us, just because it is... it's just the way it is, you know? We don't have, like, super natural resources, we don't have like this, you know, strategic place. For Europe we did, when you know Spain was conquering all the land down below, Puerto Rico was a great place to stop and then keep on going south, but for the north, we were never you know, a port, a rich port, we were for the Spaniards and the people that were going to South or Central America. So, we don't have a strategic place anymore ... so I don't know. I don't think there is much for the United States in terms of what they get from Puerto Rico, why would they want to have a state and assume all that it would take and the trouble that it will be to change all these people? It's not like Hawaii you know, they were like in the middle of, of you know, Asia, Japan... the war, you know and it was strategic and important to take Hawaii as a territory... but I don't see that being Puerto Rico location and place so for me it's gonna be the same, (pause) for a long time.



In this quote, Marivel reveals a crucial aspect of the relationship between the US and Puerto Rico. Here she says that with the status-quo relationship between the two nations, the United States is able to receive what they want from it, perhaps even while ignoring the needs or desires of the island. By stating that the United States gets “the most of what they can out of us” Marivel establishes this relationship to be very one-sided and perhaps also manipulative. The discussion does not revolve around a balanced, mutually-beneficial relationship, but instead centers around a larger political power that already currently is getting all that they need from their colony. Marivel describes that there is no need for the US to go through any potential hassles or complications that would be brought about by converting Puerto Rico’s status into a state. Instead, it clearly makes more sense for the United States to maintain the relationship the way it is and to continue receiving the benefits that they currently do. Marivel also gives the impression that the current state of affairs is to be unquestioned when she says “it’s just the way it is, you know?” This gives the feeling that the political relationship she previously described is inevitable, and even in making this comment alludes to a sense of powerlessness to address or change the situation, regardless of a person’s opinion on the situation.

While discussing the future of Puerto Rico’s political situation, Wanda repeated numerous times that Puerto Rican people would have to work very, very hard to change the mentality of dependence that she feels has been ingrained into Puerto Rican society.

*Wanda: ¿Qué pienso del futuro? Bueno, yo pienso que hay que trabajar duro para que esa mentalidad cambie y pensemos que dentro de cualquier ser humano hay miles de talentos, que podemos echar hacia adelante, que cada persona tenga una misión en la vida, [...] y que podemos salir hacia adelante. Hay que trabajar duro con, con volver a crear una conciencia diferente.*

(What do I think about the future? Well, I think that we have to work hard for this mentality to change and for us to think that within any human being there are thousands of talents, that we can push forward, that every person would have a mission in life, [...] and that we can move forward. We have to work hard, to re-create a different consciousness.)

Not all interviewees were as hopeful as Wanda. I have found that the very way that some people talk about how the US controls Puerto Rico further perpetuates the power the US holds over the island and the dependence that is created. This is reflected in the way that some interviewees, such as Marivel,

resign themselves to an “inevitable” state of affairs, with no other option but to continue with the current political relationship. So the discourse of dominance itself serves to further reinforce a discourse of dependence. This helps to create a political atmosphere on the island that is not conducive to seeking alternatives to the current status quo.

### **Impact of Fast Food on Local Culture and Identity**

People are in a hurry. I understand that, I just think it’s sad to lose those traditions that were so important to me growing up, and it taught me survival.

-Sandy Ayad

The growth of the fast food industry in Puerto Rico was a topic that came up in almost every interview, sometimes initiated by myself, sometimes brought up by the interview participants before I had the chance to ask them about it. Fast food chains, most of which are American-owned, are ubiquitous in Puerto Rico. As described early on in this thesis, fast food companies have taken advantage of the Puerto Rican market and expanded their chains all throughout the island, impacting the local food system in a multitude of ways. In this section, I use excerpts from a number of interviews to discuss this availability of fast food on the island, the increase in consumerism, and the repercussions these changes have had on Puerto Rican lives and diets.

In her ethnographic work with Mexican-American women in Antonito, Colorado, Carole Counihan argues that the industrialization and globalization of the food system has affected not only how people in Antonito eat, but “also how their changing foodways reflect a challenge to the survival of their culture and economic autonomy” (Counihan 2009). She discusses how industrialized foods have altered not only the way the foods themselves taste, but also the cultural or personal connotations those foods hold for the people consuming them. Counihan’s exploration of food and family dynamics in Florence, Italy, also reflected these shifts, as she documented the impacts to Italian food culture through the introduction of convenience and fast foods (Counihan 2004). This was reflected in my research as I

noted how women described how changes from eating more traditional diets to consuming more fast food manifested in both a loss of local food culture as well as shifts in the very identities of many Puerto Ricans.

Wanda discussed how the increase in consumerism and the availability of new convenience foods, like fast food, was a big reason why there were more illnesses now than in the past:

*Wanda: Y hoy en día que lo tienen todo, que hay mas consumerismo, la gente tiene todo más fácil para consumir, ir al 'fast food,' este pues ahora la alimentación está un poco mas...hay mas enfermedades! Hay mas enfermedades... yo creo que esa abundancia es la que ha hecho que la personas se enfermen mas porque pues, todo lo tienen a la mano, pero lo que tienen a la mano no es necesariamente lo más saludable.*

(And nowadays that they have everything, that there is more consumerism, people have everything easier to consume, to go to fast food, well now the diet is a little more...there are more illnesses! There are more illnesses... I think that this abundance is what has made it so that people get sick more because well, they have everything at their hands, but what they have at their hands is not necessarily the most healthy.)

This connection between the increased availability and accessibility of fast food to negative health effects was echoed throughout other interviews as well. In an interview I conducted between both Jessica Díaz and Zuleyka Ponce, we spent a lot of time discussing the impact of fast food on Puerto Rico. Their discussion revealed impacts both in the sense of how commonplace it had become to find fast food, as well as the lower quality of the food and its toll on people's health. When I asked them both what they thought of the availability of fast food in the island their response was the following:

*Jessica: Está en todas las esquinas.*

*Zuleyka: Exacto. Porque realmente la cultura de fast food viene de los Estados Unidos. Todos los fast food vienen casi siempre de allá. Hamburgers, de esos aquí no era, eso era más de allá que de aquí y ahora está en todos los lados...*

*Jessica: Están en todos los lados. [...] Bueno, es que andar comiendo en restaurantes criollos sale más caro que en los mismos fast food; a veces uno se va para el fast food por eso, por precio.*

*Zuleyka: Exacto. Menos calidad, pero más barato. Y la gente prefiere comer chatarra que gastar más chavos.*

*Jessica: Fast food everywhere, por eso estamos tan gordos.*

(Jessica: It's on every corner.

Zuleyka: Exactly. Because really the culture of fast food comes from the United States. All the fast food almost always comes from there. Hamburgers, those didn't exist, those were more from there than here and now it's on every corner...

Jessica: They are on every corner. [...] Well, it's just that to go eat in Puerto Rican restaurants are more expensive than fast food, sometimes one stops at a fast food for that, for the price.

Zuleyka: Exactly. Less quality, but cheaper. And people prefer to eat junk than to spend more money.

Jessica: Fast food everywhere, that's why we are so fat.)

Here, Zuleyka states that the majority of fast food on the island comes from the United States, and in describing how common it is, both Zuleyka and Jessica state that you can find one "on every corner." One reason they offer for its popularity is that the food is cheaper than eating *comida criolla* and that people are willing to receive less quality food if it means they can stretch their dollar more. At the end of this quote, Jessica makes the connection to the negative health impacts of fast foods, concluding that because there is a fast food restaurant on every corner, and the food there is cheaper, this is why Puerto Ricans "are so fat" in her opinion. She contrasted the healthfulness of fast foods with *comida criolla* in this statement:

Jessica: *Porque se supone, digo yo, que no pienso que si la gente come a diario comida criolla van a estar tan gordos como están los que siempre están comiendo fast food.*

(Because, I suppose, I say, that I don't think that if people ate Puerto Rican food daily they would be as fat as those who are always eating fast food.)

I continue this dialogue in the next section regarding the views of different interview participants on what constitutes "healthy food" and specifically how traditional Puerto Rican cuisine relates to that. However, Jessica's quote clearly pits fast food against more traditional foods in the sense that according to her if more people ate more traditional foods rather than fast food, they wouldn't be as fat, and we can assume she also means they would be healthier. This, of course, is relying on a very specific few of what it means to be healthy (i.e. fat equals less healthy) which can surely be

problematized. However the significance behind Jessica's view on this topic communicates her opinion that fast foods are much less healthy than more traditional fare.

Anna González stated very clearly in her interview that fast food had a negative impact, one reason being for the health impacts. Her response when I asked whether the increased availability of fast foods was positive or negative was:

*Anna: Negativo, que es comida chatarra, es comida que no es saludable, es comida que, es una realidad, mucha grasa, uno no sabe como la cocinan, pero es buena, because te resuelve dondequiera que tú vas tú tienes fast food, dondequiera que tú estás en la calle y comes, no pasas hambre. Después que tengas dinero no pasas hambre, obviamente. Pero esa es la parte positiva, pero la negativa es que no es saludable. Everybody knows that.*

(Negative, it's junk food, it's food that is not healthy, it's food that, it's a reality, a lot of fat, one doesn't know how they cook it, but it's good, because it resolves you, wherever you go you have fast food, wherever you are on the street you eat, you won't be hungry. If you have money, you won't be hungry, obviously. But that is the positive part, but the negative part is that it's not healthy. Everybody knows that.)

Ada Díaz López described the increase in fast food not only as a shift to eating less healthy foods, but also as a reflection of how "Americanized" the island has become.

*Ada: Hemos cambiado mucho. Estamos muy americanizados. Estamos dejando unas comidas nutritivas por hamburger, los hot dogs, que, sí, tienen su lado nutritivo pero no es lo aconsejado. Osea, por las pizzas, los burritos, [...] ha cambiado bastante el menú de los puertorriqueños.*

(We have changed a lot. We are very Americanized. We are leaving behind nutritious foods for hamburgers, hot dogs, that, yes, they have their nutritious side but they are not recommended. Or for pizzas, burritos, [...] the Puerto Rican menu has changed substantially.)

When I asked Ada whether she considered these dietary changes to be positive or negative, she responded:

*Ada: Bueno, los dos. Hay unas partes negativas, pero hay unas partes positivas como te estoy diciendo. Osea mucho fast food, pues, es negativo, pero las ensaladas, comidas nutritivas, pues es positivo. Osea las carnes al horno, pues, americanos usan mucha comida al vapor, lo aprendimos de ellos las comidas al vapor. Comidas asadas, eso es positivo. Ahora, lo otro, los fast foods, pues, no están tan positivo.*

(Well, both. There are some negative parts, but there are some positive parts like I'm telling you. A lot of fast food, well, is negative, but the salads, nutritious foods, well this is positive. Or the baked meats, well, Americans use a lot of steamed foods, we learned from them about steamed foods. Grilled foods, this is positive. Now, the other, the fast foods, well, aren't very positive.)

In this quote, Ada is describing the positive and negative aspects of many of the different effects of becoming more “Americanized” as she puts it. She clearly states that the increase in fast foods is a negative change, while also pointing out some positive changes to the diet as well. Other interviewees such as Glenda Félix Ayala and Wanda also made similar comments. This duality of having both negative changes (fast foods) and positive changes (cooking techniques such as steaming and grilling, as opposed to frying) are reflective of the broader situation in Puerto Rico as well. Given the complex political relationship and the mix of benefits and disadvantages people experience as a result of this relationship, many people describe different aspects of the US influence in the island as both positive and negative.

Beyond specifically changes in the Puerto Rican diet or impacts on health, Glenda talked with me at length about how this outside influence, in the form of changes to the food system, has impacted Puerto Rican identity and mentality as a nation. She spoke specifically about the flow of new technology and information into the island, which has had its benefits, but has had impacts on every aspect of Puerto Rican life, she argued. When I asked her specifically why she thought these changes had occurred, her response was indicative of deeper issues of national and cultural identity:

*Glenda: Aquí en Puerto Rico nosotros tenemos mucha influencia, nosotros como pueblo, es bien pobre nuestra propia identidad. Aquí cualquiera viene e incluye, y planta bandera. Los fast foods especial- [...] ahora tu miras así, a vuelta y redonda está, está osea inundado, invadido de los fast foods. [...] Aquí todo lo que ponen la gente lo apoya y lo aprueba. Siguieron creciendo [...] y la competencia en el mercado hasta que lo que tenemos hoy en día, que estamos saturados de comida chatarra, prácticamente, porque todo tienen preservativos, y comida que se guarda por tanto tiempo a la hora de la verdad no es nada saludable. Y aquí mayormente la cocina que encuentras es de los Estados Unidos. Acá nosotros somos relacionados con los Estados Unidos [...] no es estado pero estamos relacionados. Y allá es donde empiezan a buscar cada cadena a poner su fast food, su línea de restaurantes y entonces se viene la competencia, la competencia de pollo, que si Popeye's, Kentucky, Church's. Y entonces viene el Chili's viene el Longhorn [...] Y aquí todo el puertorriqueño lo patrocinan todo, aunque no lo entienda, aunque no lo usen, lo patrocinan.*

(Here in Puerto Rico we have a lot of influence, us as a people, our own identity is very weak. Here anyone comes and is included, and plants their flag. Fast foods especially- [...] now you look here, turn around and all around it's there, it's inundated, invaded with fast foods. [...] Here everything that they put people support it and try it. And they continue growing [...] and the competition in the market until what we have today, that we are saturated with junk food, practically, because everything has preservatives, and food that keeps for a long time truthfully is nothing healthy. And here for the most part the cooking you see is from the United States. Here, we have a relationship with the United States [...] it is not a state but we have a

relationship. And there is where they begin to look for every chain to put their fast food, their line of restaurants and then comes the competition, the competition of chicken, whether it's Popeye's, Kentucky, Church's. And then comes Chili's and Longhorn [...] and here Puerto Ricans support everything, even if they don't understand it, even if they don't use it, they support it.)

In this quote, Glenda relates the expansion of fast food chains in Puerto Rico to the political relationship between the island and the United States, prior to me asking any questions about this political relationship. To her, the two issues are related in that because the island has this relationship with the US, it makes it much easier for fast food chains to enter the island and set up their restaurants. Her discussion of Puerto Rican identity in relation to fast food is fascinating because she comments that Puerto Rican identity is in fact very weak, which many have argued is a result of so many years of colonization. She also discusses how she believes that Puerto Ricans support these new outside chains, "even if they don't understand it, even if they don't use it." I feel this is related to other discussions I have had that related this high level of consumerism on the island to the desire to be seen as a "modern" people. Some Puerto Ricans have engrained in them this identity that as a people they are "backwards" or "behind the times," potentially as a result of early Americanization programs or more contemporary US-promoted industrialization and modernization efforts. There may be a connection between these US efforts to modernize the island (and its people) and the internalization of this identity. A response to this internalized identity of needing to become more modern could be the high level of conspicuous consumption and the need to try and support new "modern" trends and conveniences, such as fast food.

When I asked Glenda how she personally felt about these changes and the impacts of US influence on the Puerto Rican food system, she responded:

*Glenda: No me gusta que nada ni nadie tenga influencia sobre mí. Pero en cuanto a la influencia que hemos tenido de los Estados Unidos... yo le digo que yo no le hecho la culpa, no veo como que lo estén haciendo mal. [...] Nosotros estamos permitiendo que sigan influyendo cada vez más y más y más en lo que es, costumbres, tradiciones, hasta la nuestra cultura. Porque es como todo, si usted patrocina a algo y dice que esto está bien, pues "vamos a darles otros más." Okay, luego esta línea de cadenas. Fantástico, "vamos a ver cómo va esta," entonces luego esta, ha pasado con IHOP. [...] Ahora viene esta... un Cheesecake Factory, viene un Red Lobster, que jamás pensamos que estas cadenas fueran a llegar aquí. Y van a venir y van a tener estas y se van a expandir. [...] Es como que nosotros mismos nos hacemos daño, nosotros mismos somos los que estamos abriendo esta ventana [...] Yo no me opongo, yo soy de las que, pues sí, estamos en un país que se está desarrollando fantástico, pero el exceso es lo que yo no paso así.*

(I don't like for anything or anyone to have influence over me. But regarding the influence that we have had from the United States... I would say that I don't blame them, I don't see it as they are doing wrong. [...] We are allowing them to continue influencing every time more and more and more in whatever it is, customs, traditions, until our very culture. Because, it's like everything else, if you support something and say that it's good, well "we're going to give them some more." Okay, this line of chains arrived. Fantastic, "we're going to see how this one goes," then there it is, it happened with IHOP [...] And now comes... a Cheesecake Factory, a Red Lobster, we never thought these chains would come here. And they are going to come and they are going to have these and they are going to expand. [...] It's that we do the damage to ourselves, we ourselves are the ones who are opening the window [...] I am not opposed, I am one who, well yes, we are in a country that is developing fantastically, but the excess is what does not do well.)

Here, Glenda places the blame on Puerto Ricans themselves for the expansion of fast food throughout the island. She argues that by supporting each new chain and contributing to their success, that they are allowing them to continue growing and expanding into new chains and brands. Her comment at the end of this quote is also particularly interesting, because it indicates a need for some balance. Glenda comments that Puerto Rico is in a period of development, which seems to allude to the fact that she feels some of these changes naturally go along with development. However she concludes that the excess is the problem. I take this to mean the excess in these fast food companies, that she described earlier as being on every corner, to the extent that Puerto Rico has become "*inundado, invadido de los fast foods*" (inundated, invaded by fast foods). Here what she seems to be saying is that along with development do come some of these changes, that they might be expected. However what she takes issue with is the extent to which fast foods have "invaded" Puerto Rico, and the problem is in the excess. This echoes other interview participants who talked about these changes as potentially inevitable, but maybe had extended beyond what they deemed reasonable.

Anna González discussed the impact of fast food on the food choices of Puerto Rican youth, as well as the pace of life in relation to fast food:

*Anna: Es que la juventud, tú le presentas un plato de arroz y habichuelas y mejor dice, "No, yo quiero nuggets." Y ahí es que están los problemas. Que la influencia es negativa por ese sentido, que los niños se acostumbran a comer mucha comida de fast food, si tú los acostumbras. Y como a veces es más fácil, y el estilo de vida te obliga a ir a un fast food, y comprarle por la ventanilla y sigues caminando y sigues haciendo lo que estás haciendo y sigues trabajando. [...] Pero eso es lo negativo,*



*que les influye. La influencia es en que se acostumbran muy ligero y entonces no les gusta la comida que uno tiene en casa.*

( It's just that the youth, you give them a plate of rice and beans and they say "No, I want nuggets." And there's where the problems are. That the influence is negative in this sense, that children get accustomed to eating a lot of fast food, if you accustom them to that. And how many times it's easier, and the lifestyle obligates you to go to a fast food, and buy it from the drive-through window and continue on and continue what you are doing and continue working. [...] But this is the negative, that it influences. The influence is in that they are very easily accustomed and then they don't like the food that they have at home.)

This excerpt reinforces numerous other perspectives already discussed, and also touches on some key issues that Glenda was discussing in her previous excerpts. First, Anna describes a situation where the negative influence of fast foods in Puerto Rico would cause children to reject their own cultural foods in favor of "nuggets" or other fast food items. She says that this stems from people causing their children to become overly accustomed to eating fast food, to the point where they prefer it over what they would be eating at home. And secondly, Anna comments on how she feels the very lifestyle that many Puerto Ricans lead obligates them to feed their families at fast food restaurants or from the drive-through window. Because of lack of time and the need to quickly eat to move on to other things or to continue working, parents are in a sense being forced by time constraints to opt for the easier and quicker option. This has serious repercussions, she argues, in the ways that children and youth become accustomed to eating this way, and lose the desire to eat more culturally significant foods. Many other women I interviewed made similar comments regarding the fast-paced lifestyles people lead, the decrease in time available for cooking or sharing meals with family at home, and the impacts this has had on diet. Glenda related the pace of life in Puerto Rico to the relationship between the island and the United States:

*Glenda: Los restaurantes [...] de comida rápida así, a mí nos han impactado tanto. Aparte del stress de vida y lo rápido, lo ligero que vivo. Y todo es en cualquier esquina, vas para al trabajo y desayunas, pareces del trabajo, almuerzas en el carro. Y sigues haciendo más cosas y más cosas y mientras más saturada se ve la gente, más obligada se ve en comer afuera, porque no hay tiempo para cocinar. No hay tiempo, imagínate, no hay tiempo para cocinar. No hay tiempo para sembrar. [...] Estamos viviendo al estilo americano aquí, no somos estado pero nos comportamos como tal en muchos aspectos. Nos gustan las cosas fáciles y rápidas.*

(The fast food restaurants, to me they have impacted us a lot. Apart from the stress of life and the fast pace, the quickness that I live. And all of this is on any street corner, you go to work and have breakfast, come out from work and have lunch in your car. And you continue doing more things and more things and meanwhile you see people more swamped, more obligated to eat outside, because there is not time to cook. There is not time, imagine, there is not time to cook. There is not time to grow food. [...] We are living the American style here, we are not a state but we act like it in many ways. We like things easy and fast.)

While we were discussing why less people cook at home nowadays, Zuleyka offered this explanation, which also touched on the gendered component of this issue:

*Zuleyka: Por el tiempo, yo creo que es más, ahora la vida está más dura que antes. Para mí que antes las mujeres estaban más en la casa y se dedicaban más a la cocina; pero ahora todos salen a trabajar, mujeres y hombres, y la mujer también llega cansada y no se va a poner a trabajar en la cocina después de estar todo el día trabajando; y también eso hace que compren más comida afuera. Yo lo veo así.*

(Because of time, I think it's more, now life is more difficult than before. For me it's that before the women were in the house more and they dedicated themselves more to cooking; but now everyone goes to work, women and men, and the woman also arrives tired and doesn't set herself to work in the kitchen after spending the whole day working; and this also makes it so that they buy more food outside. This is how I see it.)

After considering these interviewee's words, I would like to return for a moment to some of the broader discussions happening in the literature surrounding fast food and globalized diets. We have recently seen an increase in the academic scholarship looking specifically at the relationship between globalization and food cultures, of which the proliferation of fast food restaurants is a part of. Akil Gupta discusses the global movement of cuisines, showing how global production, distribution and consumption of food and spices provides a rich case to examine cultural transaction and exchange. By considering globalization from this point of view, Gupta discusses how the "movement of crops, changing culinary practices, and shifting habits of food consumption" have played a critical, and undervalued, role in shaping local identity and culture (Gupta 2012). In his examination of globalization and food culture in Belize, Richard Wilk provides an additional viewpoint on the effect of the globalized movement of food and people on cultures. He argues that forces such as globalization, tourism, and global capitalism do not automatically result in a "steamrolling" of culture and identity. Instead, he shows how in Belize these forces have interacted with local culture and fueled the emergence of a highly

transnational and creolized identity, as evidenced through culinary culture (Wilk 2006). This concept of a creolized and transnational identity is particularly relevant in the case of Puerto Rico, given its political history.

In this section I have sought to focus upon the issue of fast food in Puerto Rico and to provide some clarity on the wide-reaching effects of these food system changes. As with the other arguments I am making in this section, I argue that these changes affect not only what people put in their bodies, but also the connections they have to their own cultural foods and the identity they feel as Puerto Ricans. In our interview, Jessica Díaz and Zuleyka Ponce described this connection between food and identity in this way:

Jessica: *La comida es muy buena pero tenemos que... Eso es una cosa que nos caracteriza a nosotros, de verdad, la comida; pero si no ponemos de nuestra parte, pues ahí mismo se va.*

Zuleyka: [...] *La comida, la cultura, eso es lo que identifica a las personas de que país son. Y es como la identidad de uno, si eso se pierde, pues entonces ya no va a haber puertorriqueños.*

(Jessica: Food is very good but we have to... This is something that characterizes us, really, food does; but if we don't do our part, well, just like that it will vanish.)

Zuleyka: [...] The food, the culture, this is what identifies people and what country they are from. And it's like the identity of someone, if this is lost, well then there won't be any Puerto Ricans anymore.)

The above excerpt came at the end of our interview together, after I had asked about the increased availability of fast food on the island and the three of us had talked in depth about its impact. Both Jessica and Zuleyka's words are incredibly powerful here, linking the cultural identity of Puerto Ricans to their traditional foods and arguing that if we lose these cultural markers, we lose Puerto Ricans themselves. However I also feel their words offer a bit of hope. Jessica's reference to "doing our part" offers younger generations an opportunity to reclaim aspects of cultural identity that have been negatively impacted by the encroachment of fast food. This is a topic I return to in the conclusion, however next I consider a very closely linked issue to fast food, the changing attitudes in Puerto Rico regarding traditional foods and what is considered "healthy food."

### Shifting Notions of “Healthy Food”

In almost every interview that I conducted we discussed the topic of “healthy food.” I asked interview participants what they considered to be healthy food, whether they considered traditional Puerto Rican food to be healthy or not, and to explain why. There were many different perspectives shared during these discussions, which I explore in this next section. In examining the various opinions given on this topic, I argue that the perceived healthfulness of “traditional” Puerto Rican foods has shifted drastically in recent years, mostly due to the increased use of industrialized and processed ingredients in Puerto Rican cooking. These dietary transformations coincide historically with other significant societal changes, such as the overall industrialization of the island during the 1950’s and 60’s, and the subsequent decrease in support for local Puerto Rican farmers.

A number of interview participants did not describe Puerto Rican food as healthy food. When I asked Erica Díaz whether she thought Puerto Rican food was healthy or not, she replied:

*Erica: No, mucha sal, mucha sazón. Bueno, puede ser saludable en porciones. Si uno lo controla la porción y tu puedes coger arroz, puedes coger pollo, entonces puedes coger más ensalada. Así sí, pero I think que tiene muchas calorías y casi todo es frito también, al menos que sea vianda, que eso también es saludable. Reemplazar el arroz por la vianda, reemplazar la papa por something else. Pero si es mucho fritura, como bacalaíto, too much.*

(No, a lot of salt, a lot of seasoning. Well, it can be healthy, in portions. If one controls their portions and you can take rice, you can take chicken, and then you can take more salad. This way yes, but I think that it has too many calories and almost everything is fried too, at least if it’s *vianda*, that too is healthy. Replace the rice with *la vianda*, replace the potato with something else. But if it is too much fried food, like *bacalaíto*<sup>19</sup>, too much.

An interesting point in this interview quote is the fact that Erica makes reference to *viandas*. This term in Puerto Rico refers to a variety of root vegetables and tubers such as yucca, taro, cassava, potato, and different varieties of sweet potato. *Viandas* are often associated with the more traditional diets of rural or poor Puerto Ricans, especially in previous generations. It is much less common now to see young people in Puerto Rico eating *viandas*, however Erica refers to these foods as something more healthy which could replace rice, that she considers less healthy.

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<sup>19</sup> Fried and salted codfish fritters.

At one point in my interview with Jean Echevarría, she made mention to how she thought diabetics should not eat Puerto Rican food. When I asked her to clarify if this meant she thought Puerto Rican food was unhealthy she explained:

Jean: I believe so, because everything is fried. The best food in the world is fried food. [...] I believe Puerto Rican food is not good for you. No, definitely not. But it's so good. It all tastes so good.

I experienced this perspective first-hand, even in Davis, where the Puerto Rican community is very small. During the spring quarter of 2012, I attended a social gathering organized by the Latino/a Graduate Student Association where we gathered in one member's home for a lesson on Puerto Rican cooking, and a meal together. In this gathering I was excited to meet other Puerto Rican graduate students in the area, one of which was hosting the gathering and leading the cooking lesson. While we were preparing the meal at the host's direction, I noticed some interesting commentary and cooking choices. Among the Puerto Rican-identified students, who I would say ranged in their mid twenties to early thirties, there were many references made to how unhealthy Puerto Rican food is. They joked that the only reason it tasted so good was because it was overloaded with salt, oil, and fat.

We were preparing a rice dish called *arroz con gandules*<sup>20</sup>, and when we drained the beans from their cans, the woman directing the cooking instructed us to retain the liquid the beans were canned in. She explained that we would add this liquid, which is very high in salt, to the rice later on in order to give it more flavor. Additionally, they opted to use multiple packets of Sazón – which is a brand name processed and pre-mixed seasoning blend that many people now use in place of fresh seasonings and ingredients such as onion, peppers, and cilantro. They continued to season the rice with an abundant amount of oil and Adobo – another pre-packaged seasoning mix of mostly salt, pepper, dried garlic, and onion powder. These are the seasonings that many Puerto Ricans under the age of forty or so have been raised on, and one of the main reasons why there was so much talk at this cooking lesson about how bad the food was for you. After the cooking lesson, I took some of this rice home with me and shared it with a

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<sup>20</sup> Rice with pigeon peas.

friend. She commented that she liked my version of the dish better, that was made with fresh ingredients, because it wasn't so oily and salty.

A topic I asked about in many interviews was regarding the seasonings interviewees used, and how they procured them. Puerto Rican cooking is known for the unique and flavorful seasoning of many dishes, either from ingredients like onion, garlic, tomato sauce, and peppers, or from pre-packaged seasoning mixes and sauces like Adobo, *recao*, and *sofrito*. These last three can also be made from scratch, however many Puerto Ricans have shifted to store-bought versions, many of which contain preservatives, artificial colorants, and high levels of MSG. When I asked Zuleyka and Jessica whether they preferred to make sauces and seasonings themselves or to buy them pre-made, they replied:

*Zuleyka: Comprarlas hechas. Mi mamá siempre hacía su sofrito, las salsas no, la salsa en bote; pero el sofrito sí, mi abuela y mi mamá lo hacían ellas, compraban el recao, los ajíes y eso y los molían y hacían el sofrito. Por mí lo compro hecho pero el sabor no es el mismo.*

*Jessica: Exacto. Eso sí, pero yo nunca vi cómo lo hacen, así que, pero sé que es menos trabajo en cuestión de comprar tanta cosa.*

*Zuleyka: No es mucho trabajo, es que es más caro comprar todos los ingredientes que comprarlo ya hecho.*

(Zuleyka: Buy them pre-made. My mom always made her own *sofrito*, the sauces no, the sauce came in a bottle; but the *sofrito*, yes, my grandmother and my mom made their own, they bought the *recao*<sup>21</sup>, the peppers and all and they ground them and they made the *sofrito*. For me, I buy it pre-made but the flavor is not the same.

Jessica: Exactly. Definitely, but I never saw how they made it, so, but I know that it is less work when it comes to buying so many things.

Zuleyka: It's not a lot of work, it's just that it's more expensive to buy all the ingredients than to buy it pre-made.)

In their interviews, many women rejected the notion that Puerto Rican food was unhealthy, at least the way they remembered it being prepared in their childhoods, or throughout their grandparents' lifetimes. There was a lot of discussion on the transition from cooking from scratch and seasoning meals with whole ingredients to this more common process of utilizing premixed and processed seasonings.

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<sup>21</sup> Puerto Rican coriander.

When I first asked Anna González whether she thought Puerto Rican food was healthy or not, she responded by saying:

*Anna: Ahí me hiciste la pregunta muy bien, porque saludable... no es. Yo no creo que sea bien saludable por la grasa. No es que no sea buena, porque es riquísima, pero no es tan, tan saludable [...] el puertorriqueño come el arroz y habichuelas, arroz con esto, arroz con pollo, arroz con gandules, arroz con carne, arroz con todo, y eso se sabe que viene siendo no muy bueno para tu salud porque es alto en colesterol, alto en carbohidratos [...] la comida es riquísima pero como que saludable, tan, tan, no es, por la grasa y por los altos contenidos en carbohidratos y colesterol.*

(Here you've asked me a good question, because healthy ... it is not. I don't believe that it's very healthy because of the fat. It's not that it isn't good, because it's delicious, but it's not very, very healthy [...] a Puerto Rican eats rice with beans, rice with this, rice with chicken, rice with pigeon peas, rice with meat, rice with everything, and that we know becomes not very good for your health because it is high in cholesterol, high in carbohydrates [...] the food is delicious but healthy, not very much, because of the fat and the high amounts of carbohydrates and cholesterol.)

However, when I asked her to distinguish between Puerto Rican food today and in previous generations, her answer quickly changed.

*Anna: La comida era mucho más saludable [...] ¿Por qué? Porque uno en el patio de su casa sembraba yautía, se sembraba la mata de guineo, se sembraba batata, se sembraba de todo y por ende era más saludable porque no tenía ningún ingrediente de estos [...] preservativos, y todo lo que uno compra hoy en el mercado, lamentablemente, tiene preservativo porque viene de todos sitios menos de tu país, lamentablemente. Lamentablemente eso es así. Ahora nadie quiere cultivar, nadie quiere meterse al patio, nadie quiere ensuciarse sus uñas, sus manos, y los viejitos de antes no eran así. [...] Esa es la gran diferencia, y la gente antes duraba más, duraba más porque estaban comiendo todo natural, saludable, mataban los cerdos, comían eso fresquito.*

(The food was much more healthy [...] Why? Because in the patio of their house one would plant *yautía*<sup>22</sup>, they would plant bananas, they would plant sweet potato, they would plant everything therefore it was more healthy because it didn't have any of those [...] preservatives, and everything one buys today in the supermarket, sadly, has preservatives because it comes from every place except your own country, sadly. Sadly, that's how it is. Now nobody wants to cultivate, nobody wants to go on the patio, nobody wants to dirty their nails, their hands, and the older generation from before were not like that [...] This is the big difference, and people lived longer, they lived longer because they were eating everything natural, healthy, they killed their own pigs, they ate it fresh.)

This second response was quite a change from her first perspective on the healthfulness of Puerto Rican food. This shift from the traditional diet of previous generations to that of what people eat

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<sup>22</sup> A root vegetable or *vianda* – sometimes translated as “tanier” in English.

today was a very consistent theme throughout many interviews. Amparo Pérez, owner of the roadside eatery *El Rincón de Abuela*, stated emphatically in her interview that you damage food's taste and nutrition by adding processed, store-bought seasonings to it. She even went so far as to go through her kitchen, pulling out the *sofrito* and *recaito* she used in her cooking, proving to me that she made them from scratch in small batches and froze them so she wouldn't have to rely on processed seasonings that she said contained preservatives and chemicals. Throughout the interview she spoke very passionately about how her food was natural and didn't contain any of those processed seasonings, and that her clientele knew this and that's why her small business was so successful. When I asked her specifically if she thought Puerto Rican food was healthy, she told me that if you did it right, the way food was made in the past, then it was healthy.

This perspective was also shared by Glenda. When I first asked her whether she thought Puerto Rican food was healthy or not, she immediately responded no, and explained that it has too much salt, fat, and unhealthy condiments. However, when I asked about how food was made in the past, Glenda talked at length about how traditional Puerto Rican foods used to be made in what she considered to be a much more healthy way.

*Glenda: Sí, era mucho más sana [...] en los años de antes, las personas duraban ochenta, noventa, cien, ciento-seis años. ¿Por qué? Porque la comida iban de [...] la parte atrás del patio. Se comían sus viandas, sus vegetales, su pollo, todo era cosechado, todo era de la planta o del huerto a la cocina. [...] Todo era condimentado natural con su ajíes, con su pimiento, con su cebolla, con su sofrito... natural. [...] Eso es muy cierto, a como se prepara la comida ahora, se prepara sin ningún respeto real, pero antes sí, antes valía la pena [...] Estamos comiendo lo mismo que comían los viejos de los tiempos de antes pero en una manera muy distinta.*

(Yes, it was much more healthy [...] in the years before, people lasted eighty, ninety, one-hundred, one-hundred and six years. Why? Because the food came from [...] the part behind the patio. They ate their *viandas*, their vegetables, their chicken, everything was harvested, everything was from the plant or the garden to the kitchen [...] Everything was seasoned naturally with their sweet peppers, with their pepper, with their onion, with their *sofrito*...natural. [...] This is very true, regarding how food is prepared now, it is prepared without any real respect, but before yes, before it was worth it [...] We are eating the same that the older generation ate but in a very different way.)

In the interview, Glenda continued to describe some of the specific changes she thought had contributed to this decline in the healthfulness of Puerto Rican food. She said that in the past people ate



food that was more local and fresh, while today people often eat food that has been frozen and has travelled many miles to its final destination. She spoke about how as a child she would go out to the cow to get fresh milk to pour over her cereal, while today milk is overly processed and homogenized, and therefore damaged. She also connected all of these changes to what she considered was an overall decline in health, saying that you didn't see so many diet-related illnesses in those times.

In our second interview together, Marivel also thought that the way Puerto Ricans used to eat was much healthier. Here she describes some of the changes she has noted, specifically with the addition to the diet of more processed foods.

Marivel: I would say yeah, the original, the original was very healthy [...] we had like a lot of fruit, vegetables, and grains, like *gandules*<sup>23</sup> [...] I remember that our treats were like those almonds that grow on the side of the street and the mangoes and we would have whatever was available at the moment and usually was for free, you know, you'd find it on the street and, in general, yes, I would say yes. [...] You know, what would kill people were diseases like, like, for example, tuberculosis and stuff like that before my time, but it was not, it was not the food unless it was wrongly prepared you know and left outside or got some listeria or something would get to it but yeah I think our food is good for, the, the, the, the diet that we used to have, yes. But once you start adding the Twinkie, the soda, the, the little burger from McDonald's [...] then things started getting more complicated.

Wanda's interview builds upon this theme. Barely minutes into our interview, as she was describing the memories she had regarding food from her childhood, Wanda described in detail how she was raised on a small family farm very near to where we conducted our interview. She explained how her family ate what her grandfather grew on their land, as well as the local fish her father caught when he worked as a nearby fisherman. She used her own story growing up on this farm as a contrast to what she described next:

Wanda: *Yo entiendo que para los años 45 o 50 a los 60 la dieta de los puertorriqueños era bien saludable. Lo que sucede es con el paso del tiempo han venido otros modernismos que ha cambiado la dieta del puertorriqueño, se está comiendo comida mas procesada. Ya que no cultiva, ya aquí no hay... antes había caña de azúcar que se hacía aquí en el mismo país. Había unas procesadoras de sal, en Cabo Rojo y en Icacos, y en diferentes lugares. Ya eso no existe.*

(I understand that from the years '45 or '50 to the 60's the Puerto Rican diet was very healthy. What happens is with the passing of time modernizations have come that have changed the Puerto Rican diet, we are eating food that is more processed. Now nobody cultivates, now here

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<sup>23</sup> Pigeon peas.

there isn't... before there was sugar cane that was made here in this very country. There were salt processors in Cabo Rojo and in Icacos, in different places. This doesn't exist anymore.)

Wanda makes an important distinction in this quote regarding the increase in consumption of processed foods on the island. Here she describes the diet of Puerto Ricans in the 1950's and 1960's as being much healthier and locally-based, with salt and sugar processors still located on the island. She says that the shift to eating more processed foods has caused the Puerto Rican diet to change, and that this shift has come as a part of "modernizations" on the island.

Wanda's words reflect a common theme running throughout many of these interviews, specifically regarding some of the dietary shifts occurring in the island around the 1950's and 1960's. These changes reflect broader societal patterns in Puerto Rico at that time such as increased movement of people out of rural areas into cities and the subsequent abandonment of agricultural lands. This movement of people out of rural areas fed into Puerto Rico's Great Migration, a continuation of previous migration waves that accelerated greatly in the post World War II years (Acosta-Belen et al. 2000). During this time period it is estimated that approximately 470,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States, out of a total population of 2.2 million people at the time. This constituted a twenty-one percent emigration rate, which Acosta-Belen and Santiago called "one of the highest in modern times" (Acosta-Belen and C. E. Santiago 2006). This was also a period when much industrialization was promoted on the island, in an attempt to bring its population out of poverty and more up to speed with its "modern" counterpart, the United States.

The dietary shifts described in these interviews, from a fresher and more local diet to one with more processed ingredients sourced from farther away, also reflects dietary changes in many other parts of the world during this time. What seems clear from analyzing these women's words and perspectives is that the supposed benefit gained from these new "modern" conveniences has often impacted the local diet in ways that interviewees did not always describe as positive. I believe that this has critical implications for younger generations of Puerto Ricans, and for their personal connections with Puerto Rican food and identity.

Many Puerto Ricans in their twenties or thirties, either in interviews as a part of this research or through informal conversations, have expressed to me their belief that the foods associated with our cultural heritage are not good for us. However, when we unpack this situation further, it seems as though the very foods that are commonly defined as “traditional” can also be viewed as heavily influenced by “modern” interventions. More recently, the cooking of specific “traditional” dishes has relied heavily on the usage of more “modern, industrialized” ingredients such as canned beans and pre-made sauces and seasonings. These shifts can be seen in many Puerto Rican cookbooks, restaurants, food stands, and even online food blogs. In her cookbook *A Taste of Puerto Rico: Traditional and New Dishes from the Puerto Rican Community*, Yvonne Ortiz provides readers with recipes that she describes as “completely authentic, yet adapted for the modern kitchen” (Ortiz 1997). The adaptation of what is considered “traditional” food to a more “modern” kitchen setting calls into question the validity of using such loaded terms as “authentic” or “original” when describing “traditional” Puerto Rican dishes. But more importantly, I argue that younger generations of Puerto Ricans are basing their belief that Puerto Rican food is unhealthy on this recent adoption of more processed food products into the diet, which is a direct result of the globalization and industrialization of the food system.

This discussion becomes even more complex when we re-consider notions of “traditional” food on an island that has seen the influx of countless food cultures over centuries, and in a culture that often describes its food as *criolla*. Before the introduction of industrialized and processed food products, Puerto Rican cuisine was never a static entity. Positioning the diet of contemporary Puerto Ricans against a more “pure” or “authentic” traditional diet of the past is problematic and overly simplistic, as the diet itself is an amalgamation of many different global cultures. Regardless of the various ways Puerto Ricans define tradition or authenticity, food serves as a critical site of ongoing formation and contestation of personal and community identity for Puerto Ricans. The interviews previously analyzed show some of the ways that women in Puerto Rico describe their shifting relationships with Puerto Rican cultural foodways.

Disdain for processed convenience foods came up in interviews many times, as previously analyzed. One way this discussion can be problematized, however, is when considering that many convenience foods or ingredients such as canned beans or pre-made sauces and seasonings can be seen as a benefit to working class, poor, and single parent families. For people who still may want to cook at home, however don't have the time, money, energy, or desire to make everything from scratch, these items actually save a lot of time and are a benefit. It provides an avenue for resource-limited people to still provide their families with culturally-significant foods at home, if they are seeking to do so without having to rely on fast food. Meals can be prepared at home using these ingredients that still serve to connect younger generations with culturally significant foods, while fitting into busy schedules.

Also, there are many people who have no interest in cooking food from scratch and prefer to use pre-packaged and pre-made sauces and seasonings. I do not wish to subscribe to an elitist standpoint that assumes that even given enough time and resources people should not cook with the convenience of canned beans or store-bought spice mixes. A few of the women I interviewed, although they appreciated traditional Puerto Rican cuisine, disliked cooking in general or had little desire to cook from scratch, and these experiences should not be discounted. While some women I spoke with genuinely enjoyed cooking, there are many others who reject this gendered assumption and prefer to spend as little time in the kitchen as possible. The historically oppressive nature of women's roles in the home and kitchen cannot be ignored here, and these experiences are just as valid.

My argument does not discount the value of these convenience foods to people who either benefit from the time savings or simply do not want, for whatever reason, to cook their meals from scratch. However, it is the creation of this rhetoric around the unhealthiness of Puerto Rican food that is most concerning to me. As Jessica and Zuleyka expressed, culinary traditions can be intimately related to a person's ethnic or national identity. Aspects of food culture that are deemed negative, such as Puerto Rican food being unhealthy, high in fat, high in sodium, and so on, leave their mark on the ways in which people identify with the foods of their own heritage. I think this is particularly important when

considering younger generations growing up in a time period where US influence on the food system in Puerto Rico is ever-increasing as new fast food chains set their sights on the Puerto Rican market.

### **Food as a Tool of Resistance**

Though the women I interviewed did not describe using food as an explicit means of resistance, I heard in their narratives certain ways in which women had historically or currently used food as a force of personal or community agency. This challenges the mainstream discourse that asserts that women's contributions to the home and to cooking do not count as productive work. Many interviewees spoke about women selling food items from their homes or in their communities, such as *helado*<sup>24</sup> or *limbers*<sup>25</sup>. In my own family's *barrio*<sup>26</sup> I noticed hand-made signs outside various homes advertising these types of goods for sale. I heard stories about how in the past when refrigerators and freezers first came to Puerto Rico that women would make *limbers* in ice cube trays and sell them for a penny each, to bring in a little extra money to their household.

Through her ethnographic work with Mexican and Mexican-American women, Meredith Abarca argues that the kitchen space and the act of cooking do not have to be automatically relegated to a space of oppression. She highlights these women's experiences with challenging patriarchy and asserting agency and self-determination, specifically around food. Abarca advocates for a reconsideration of the traditional viewpoint that work related to food preparation is inherently oppressive and proposes that food can instead be used a vehicle for resistance in women's lives (Abarca 2006).

During one of our discussions, Marivel mentioned specifically how the money women make from selling items from their homes usually stays with them, or helps to support their children.

Marivel: I have found that women, around here in Puerto Rico and I'm pretty sure in other places too, are taking a very active role in supporting their families and they do not do it by going out to work because most of the work is not available, to work with companies and stuff like that. They have found out that if they go and do, you know, *limber*, you know what *limbers* are? They buy, they make *limbers* or they make, you know, little cookies and stuff like that,

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<sup>24</sup> Translation: "ice cream"

<sup>25</sup> Frozen flavored ice often sold in small cups.

<sup>26</sup> Translation: "neighborhood"

goodies in general, they have an extra income that can help mostly their children, not their husbands, their children.

This idea of women taking an “active role” in utilizing the skills and resources that they have in order to support themselves and their children, is reflected in Meredith Abarca’s work as well. She argues that women, even while in potentially oppressive situations, often assert agency to re-claim household space as their own. She encapsulates this argument by stating: “Because *place* does carry this patriarchal ideological baggage, when women define the kitchen as their *space* they engage in their own everyday acts of resistance” (original emphasis) (Abarca 2006). Abarca believes that some women’s reclamation of the kitchen space is an act of resistance, regardless of whether those women use that same language to describe it. Jean mentioned in her interview how she claimed the kitchen space as one in which she could express her culinary expertise:

Jean: With my husband, before Thanksgiving, oh we used to make *pasteles*<sup>27</sup>. He used to love to make *pasteles* because he loved *pasteles*, so he would help me. I would tell him, “No, no, no, no, wait, wait, wait, you’re helping and you’re not telling me what to do in the kitchen. You’re so used to telling me what to do, but here you’re not going to tell me because I know how to make *pasteles*.” I learned looking at my mother.

When I asked Noemí to explain how she learned to cook, her response indicated the ownership her own mother established over the kitchen space in their home.

Noemí: Oh the hard way. On my own. Yeah. Because remember, my mother did everything. So when my mother cooked, the kitchen was hers. You didn’t go into the kitchen. That’s why I’m not a very good cook, because I never had anyone to show me, except Carmen who showed me how to do lasagna.

Throughout our conversation, Carmen Garrone articulated a complex relationship with her own desires to cook for herself and her family. At one point she described cooking as an outlet to express her love for her family and her creativity.

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<sup>27</sup> Savory meat stuffed dough wrapped in plantain leaves. Some refer to *pasteles* as a Puerto Rican version of Mexican tamales, although they are made with different ingredients and have quite a different flavor and texture.

Carmen: I think the most delicious meals that I've created were those that were made with love. They were made that my family was going to truly enjoy it. There was a sort of creativity there that wouldn't have been there otherwise.

Meredith Abarca showcases the practice of cooking as a way to create space for alternative forms of self-expression, especially for women who have lacked access to formal or public modes of expression, such as publishing. In this way, Abarca furthers the argument that dominant culture is subverted through the agency women enact and in the spaces they claim as their own. Additionally, she asserts that women often combine theory and practice in transforming ingredients into artistic creations, which she terms *el arte culinario casero*, or homemade culinary art (Abarca 2001). Counihan also explores the potential for cooking to serve not only as a creative outlet, but also a way to challenge patriarchy and oppression in her work with Mexicanas in Colorado (Counihan 2005).

In addition to an outlet for creativity, Carmen also discussed how that relationship with cooking changed over time. She spoke about how after her children left the house, and more recently following her divorce, she gained a new appreciation for cooking only for herself.

Carmen: I found the joy of cooking for one was magnificent. I didn't have to deal with all of the elements of trying to please everyone. That was only to please me. To the extent that when my kids came back from college, I'm like, "When are you going back?" They're like, "Mami, when are you going to cook this, when are you going to cook that?" I'm like, no, I want to cook for me. The joy of cooking for one.

By describing her "joy of cooking for one," Carmen explains how her love of cooking for her family shifted as the dynamics within her home shifted as well. Once she found herself without her family to cook for, as she had become accustomed to doing, she also found that she developed a great interest in cooking exactly what she liked, rather than "trying to please everyone." Though not quoted above, Carmen expanded on this topic, stating that she would buy herself expensive cuts of meat or seafood, that she wouldn't have been able to feed to her whole family. This new way of cooking provided her with the pleasure of satisfying her own culinary desires, and in a different way, reclaiming her ownership over her cooking and her kitchen space.

Beyond solely the gendered dynamics of reclaiming the kitchen as a space of resistance, numerous scholars have shown how cultural foodways can also be a site of resistance in the case of cultural hegemony and the erasure of culturally significant foodways. Aurora Levins Morales, a Jewish Puerto Rican historian, writer, and activist, wrote about this idea in her book *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of Puertorriqueñas*. This book is a re-telling of Puerto Rican history, centering on the experiences of women. In this book she writes about the creation of cultural foodways as a result of the melding of Spanish, African, and indigenous Taíno ingredients. She describes how *plátanos*<sup>28</sup>, originally from West Africa, were introduced in Puerto Rico in 1515, and how slave masters used them a cheap source of starchy food to feed their slaves. She envisions women using whatever ingredients they were able to find, a bit of grease or salt pork, to transform the plain starch into a variety of dishes such as *tostones*<sup>29</sup> and *mofongo*<sup>30</sup>. Levins Morales states that although the newly forming cuisine was not heralded as the most healthy, “making *sabrosura*<sup>31</sup> out of empty calories is an act of resistance” (Levins-Morales 2001).

One scholar in particular discusses the role of women and food traditions in cultural survival and resistance to cultural hegemony. Josephine Beoku-Betts writes about her ethnographic research with Gullah communities of the Sea Islands in South Carolina and Georgia and the role that Gullah women play in preserving cultural identity and community resilience through food and cooking traditions. In this piece, she acknowledges the role that food practices have played in the perpetuation of gender inequalities, however she says that these practices can also “provide a valued identity, a source of empowerment for women, and a means to perpetuate group survival” (Beoku-Betts 2002). She acknowledges that while food practices can be viewed within the dominant culture as a vehicle for women’s subordination, the maintenance of endangered foodways can also act as a form of resistance to cultural hegemony and create a more resilient cultural identity for marginalized groups. Beoku-Betts

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<sup>28</sup> Translation: “plantains”

<sup>29</sup> Plantains cut into small chunks, fried, smashed, and then fried a second time.

<sup>30</sup> A dish made with fried plantains, often prepared in a *pilón* (mortar) and stuffed with meat or seafood and served with a broth or sauce.

<sup>31</sup> Translation: “tastiness”



also delves deeply into how women in these Gullah communities preserve cultural food practices and resist intrusion by the dominant US culture and efforts for outside economic development of their lands.

In her discussion of Chicana identity and food, Benay Blend explains that Chicanas can “affirm and strengthen cultural identity” while also resisting cultural dominance and hegemony through culinary traditions such as tortilla- and tamale-making that provide a space to explore the intersections of race, class, and gender (Blend 2001). These discussions on the way food can serve as a vehicle for resistance to various forms of oppression reflect the potential for also resisting cultural hegemony through reclaiming cultural foodways. While the women I interviewed spoke mostly about ownership of the kitchen space or food as a tool to support their families or engage creatively, there exists a great opportunity to better integrate the gendered and cultural aspects of thinking of food as a tool for resistance. Particularly in the case of Puerto Rico, where the impact to local food culture has been so widespread, cultural foodways can provide people with a vehicle for resistance and cultural preservation.

Before I transition into my concluding thoughts, I wanted to provide the following longer interview excerpt. In many of these interviews our discussions were multi-layered and the previous themes were tightly interconnected. This excerpt from my interview with Noemí, Carmen, and Sandy is a prime example of how although we can talk about main themes that emerge in this kind of research, in people’s lives the experiences are often intricately intertwined. The below dialogue simultaneously touches on issues of US control, Puerto Rican dependence, the impact of fast food in Puerto Rico, ideas around unhealthy food, and a brief nod to resistance, while highlighting the interconnectedness between these different issues.

Carmen: As far as the traditional fast food places like McDonald’s, and Wendy’s, and Sizzler’s, I find it really sad when I come to an island like this and I see ... and it’s not so much that they’re here, but that they’re here in so many different places. That they take over the Puerto Rican tradition. Not only are they bringing in the food that is not good for you...

Sandy: Unhealthy habits.

Noemí: Yeah, that is not good for you.

Sandy: It's just not good in general.

Carmen: Yeah, but yet you're taking away the beauty of the island by Americanizing it in that manner. You're taking something.

Sandy: Taking part of the culture.

Carmen: Yeah, you're taking something away from Puerto Rico when you're that much in peoples' faces.

Sandy: You're that present.

Carmen: In so many places. Yeah. If we had a McDonald's here, and ...

Noemí: Four towns over.

Carmen: Yeah, but you go down to the main plaza, and it doesn't look any different than when you go to Pennsylvania or upstate New York, or in Brooklyn. You know. You look around, you go, what, there's a freaking Wal-Mart, this is Puerto Rico! It's a little in your face, I think a little too much, taking over the island. I think that the more that the Americans get in here, the more that they are going to take precious land to build places like that again. You know what I'm saying? Maybe that was farmland once upon a time and now it's a freaking Wal-Mart, selling American products. Expensive American products, because everything has to be shipped here so everything has been super expensive.

Sandy: Yeah I think it's sad. From an outsider now looking in, I think we're losing our resourcefulness, we're losing our resources.

Carmen: Becoming too dependent.

Sandy: Well, not that we're losing them. They're here, we don't know how to use them. We're losing our ... creativity and our know-how.

Carmen: Then ultimately your culture, because ...

Sandy: It's being diluted.

Carmen: Where you're going to turn around and say, oh my god, is this Brooklyn? I see a bunch of palm trees, so I must be in Puerto Rico. But yeah. That was one of the issues in Cuba before the revolution, where the mafiosos were in there and they were basically taking over the island, Americanizing the island to the extent that there wasn't ...

Sandy: I don't think it's Americanizing, because really, what's American? I think it's capitalizing. It's just capitalism.

Carmen: But you know, that goes hand in hand with Americans.

Noemí: We're allowing it, which is the sad thing. See, because if we ...

Carmen: I don't think that at this point there's much of a choice though. I mean, there's this stronghold that the states have on Puerto Rico.

## Conclusion

*Para mí, la comida, más que simplemente ingerir alimento, es un canal de comunicación. Y de mantener la familia unida, o de reunir amistades y personas que hace tiempo no se ven. [...] Para mí, yo creo que la comida es bien importante, bien importante.*

For me, food, more than simply ingesting nourishment, is a channel for communication. And to maintain the family together, or to reunite with friends or people that you haven't seen in a long time. [...] For me, I believe that food is very important, very important.

-Glenda Félix Ayala

### ***Unas preguntitas más: A few lingering questions...***

Throughout the many informal conversations and the audio-recorded interviews, the women I spoke with in Puerto Rico had much to say. Every interview was incredibly rich in its own way, with an abundance of potential topics to discuss and examine. As discussed in the introduction, I have chosen to focus on the four preceding topics as a way to bound this discussion around one common theme – how U.S. influence on the food system impacts the identities of Puerto Rican women. However, analyzing these interviews has left me with numerous lingering questions and many potential themes to consider in more depth. One very critical area left to discuss is the complex and nuanced way in which gender dynamics are negotiated in Puerto Rico through foodways and food work. The following short discussion summarizes a few of my remaining questions on the topic, which are areas for potential future research.

One common theme that I heard throughout almost every interview and many informal conversations while in Puerto Rico was the impact caused to traditional food culture by many women entering the work force within the last fifty years. Some even described these changes as having caused a “laziness” in mothers who don’t want to cook anymore or a situation in which mothers have entrusted the feeding of their children to other caretakers such as in childcare or schools, places which may not necessarily provide their children with very healthy food. There was discussion on the health impacts to children whose working parents may have opted for fast food due to the pace of their lives and their

need to work long hours. These shifts are reflected in Carole Counihan's exploration of the food system and gender dynamics in Italian homes as more women entered the work force (Counihan 2004). Much of this discourse around the care and feeding of children seems to inadvertently blame working mothers for not cooking at home as much. This combined with discussions around the loss of traditional food culture centering in the home, seems to place an unequal burden upon poor and working class women as the main consumers of fast food and therefore the ones most to blame for a loss of traditional food culture in the home.

Secondly, while considering gender dynamics in the home as well as the professional culinary sector, I have noticed what I would call a devaluation of women's food work in the home combined with a much higher value placed on professional cooking, a field in Puerto Rico that is predominated by men. Interviewees such as Glenda and Wanda noted this dichotomy, and the man I spoke with on the phone that I described in the Methodology section inadvertently played into this discussion as well. Glenda described how women have traditionally, though not in every household, held the power over cooking and feeding the family in the home, while men dominate more in professional culinary venues.

I saw this first hand as I attended a *Feria Gastronómica*<sup>32</sup> on the western coast of the island during my time in Puerto Rico. This fair featured renowned chefs and restaurant owners from the western region of Puerto Rico, the majority of which I saw when I arrived at the fair, were men. Even the post card I received advertising the event reflected this; the card showed pictures of twelve featured chefs, eleven of whom were men. At the fair, I visited many of the booths and collected flyers advertising restaurants and culinary schools. Of the culinary school flyers I collected, all of the images depicting students were of men, accompanied by text urging the viewer to "earn a certificate in culinary arts" or exclaiming "*¡Tú también puedes ser un profesional!*" (You too can be a professional!). This imagery, and the underrepresentation of women at the fair, both serve to further this conceptualization of successful chefs as predominantly male and those cooking in the home (and significantly less compensated for their work) as predominantly female. This becomes further complicated when we consider the previous

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<sup>32</sup> Gastronomic Fair.

point, that women have been blamed for a loss of food culture in the home, while men are celebrated as professional chefs and thereby hold more social power when it comes to cooking.

This topic deserves more examination than space affords me here, however I mention it because I feel it is indicative of larger issues concerning gender and the food system in Puerto Rico. My initial thoughts regarding these dynamics is that they reflect a larger devaluation of women's food work in the home, that is seen as less sophisticated and therefore less appreciated than the culinary work performed by men as professional chefs, which afford them with a higher status than women cooking for their family in the home. In one interview I conducted with two very successful female restaurant owners and chefs, they alluded to their success in the restaurant business as being related to them not having children. As a lesbian couple, the fact that they did not have a "traditional" family make-up with children to care for allowed them to become more successful as culinary professionals. This comment reinforces the idea that women, who often are expected to be the main caretakers of children and the family, are not afforded the same opportunities as men in the culinary field, because of these very roles they are expected to fulfill.

### **Some Caveats**

In conducting this research and delving into the analysis, I have confronted numerous personal and internal struggles as a result of the complexity of the situation in Puerto Rico and the lives of the women I spoke with. These issues I am discussing do not have clear solutions, and they intersect many aspects of people's lives, identities, and experiences. The group of women I interviewed for this study had a multiplicity of viewpoints, and although there were overarching themes, they also often had contradictory opinions. Moving forward, I believe that the most successful approaches will acknowledge multiple ways of knowing, and will encompass divergent beliefs and experiences. In this section, I address some of the most critical struggles I faced in writing about this topic, and to more thoroughly explain my stances on them.

To begin, I want to address the issue of “globalization.” I have made mention to the globalization of the food system many times throughout this thesis, however I want to stress that this does not necessarily make me “anti-globalization.” What I take issue with regarding the situation in Puerto Rico is the way that globalization of the food system in the island has been spearheaded primarily by corporate interests, with little to no regard for the people of Puerto Rico. This corporate-driven globalization has made it extremely difficult for the creation and sustainability of “alternative” non-corporate food practices. For the most part, the interviewees also did not express anti-globalization viewpoints; instead they commented that life was about change and that cultures and societies were always in a state of flux. Marivel specifically spoke to this and related it to her love of fusion cuisine, being able to meld aspects of her culture with others, using the example of making a non-traditional Puerto Rican lechón<sup>33</sup> with a litchi fruit glaze, a fruit that is not typically used in Puerto Rican cooking. She distinguished this kind of exposure to different cultures from corporate globalization that for her manifested most profoundly in the expansion and proliferation of fast food restaurants throughout the island. While globalized changes to the local food system in Puerto Rico may be inevitable, they also need to work for people on a more holistic level, and allow for different forms of connecting to food and culture.

I want to return for a moment to the complexities of describing Puerto Rican food and culture as “traditional.” As I discussed before, and as some women noted in their interviews, in discussing food and culture in Puerto Rico, we cannot take a static view of those terms. While many Puerto Ricans have a distinct idea of what constitutes “traditional” food, the food landscape in the island has been in constant flux for centuries. There has never been a static Puerto Rican cuisine, and one may argue that the changes being seen now are only an extension of already-witnessed historical trends. What concerns me about these more recent changes, however, is the pace at which they are occurring and the way corporate interests are prioritized over local interests. Some women, like Ada, discussed these changes as potentially evident and a circumstance of living in a globalized world. And some other women, such as

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<sup>33</sup> Puerto Rican-style roast pork, traditionally roasted on a spit

Wanda and Glenda, talked very openly about the dominating influence of the United States on the island's cultural food heritage.

Something very important that I learned from the women I interviewed was that no matter our intentions or values, we cannot always live in absolutes. In Puerto Rico, globalized food is everywhere, just like in many countries throughout the world. Regardless of our personal or community values around food, sometimes the busyness of our lives means the decision of where to eat comes down to choosing from a number of undesirable choices. This is especially true for working class families and single parents. I saw a striking example of this, as one of the women I interviewed fed her young children fast food the night I interviewed her, because she didn't have time to do the interview as well as cook, help her children complete their homework, and so on. This same woman owned a health food store and spoke passionately about her desire to cook using whole ingredients, to ensure her children were eating healthy. Even this woman who was so committed to a healthy lifestyle relied on fast food occasionally when her schedule did not allow for cooking at home.

This idea of not living in absolutes is also closely related to the next point I would like to touch on. While I am passionate about preserving cultural foodways in Puerto Rico, and I would argue I am not alone in that desire, it would be problematic for me to assume this was important for all Puerto Ricans. As I attended the Feria Gastronómica food fair, I found myself becoming upset over the lack of what I would consider to be "traditional" Puerto Rican food. Instead I saw stall after stall of "international" or fusion cuisine, drawing heavily from Italian and Spanish foods such as polenta and paella. My initial thought was to consider the damage an event like that was causing to traditional foods, which I think is in part true. However, what I realized next was the hypocrisy of me attempting to impose my own values on others. While these values might be shared by some others as well, I cannot decry the presence of international cuisines in the Puerto Rican market when I myself like to enjoy food from many different countries. It would be problematic for me to insinuate that there is no place in the Puerto Rican food system for events such as the Feria Gastronómica or a wide range of non-Puerto Rican restaurants. For me, this is reminiscent of well-meaning alternative food advocates in the US who inadvertently impose

their own set of (often White and affluent) food-based values onto “low-income” or “marginalized” communities, many of which are communities of color with their own distinct food cultures and values. After considering this point, I now am contemplating what a Puerto Rican food system that caters to everyone’s diverse needs and values would look like, and how we could get there.

Considering the above points, my main concluding argument is two-fold. First, while globalization of the Puerto Rican food system cannot (and possibly should not) be reversed, space must be maintained for the preservation of cultural food practices. Secondly, and perhaps most critically, Puerto Ricans themselves must determine the future of the Puerto Rican food system, rather than corporate business interests or cultural outsiders. There already do exist a number of “alternative” food-based initiatives or projects working towards these goals, which I detail very briefly in the next section. The amount to which these projects work in collaboration at the food system level is not quite known at this point, however it is my hope that Puerto Rican communities themselves will be at the forefront of this work, and the work will be based in the diverse needs and desires of Puerto Ricans.

### **The Future of *Comida Criolla***

*Ada Díaz López: Todo tiene sus cosas buenas y sus cosas malas. Osea porque ningún cambio es excelente, pero no es malo tampoco. Hay que buscarle la parte buena a todo. No todo es malo, hay que buscarle todo lo positivo en los cambios. Que hay que aceptar los cambios. Tenemos que estar receptivos a cambios.*

(Everything has its good things and its bad things. Because no change is excellent, but it’s not bad either. You have to find the good part in everything. Not everything is bad, you have to find the positive in the changes. You have to accept the changes. We have to stay receptive to changes.)

In many interviews, we discussed what the future potentially held for traditional Puerto Rican food and cooking. As mentioned previously, many women discussed a significant decline in cooking at home. Some women concluded that this decline was resulting in a loss of cultural food traditions being passed from older generations to younger generations. Erica Díaz, who is twenty seven years old, talked



a lot in her interview about the changes that might occur in Puerto Rico if our generation does not learn certain cultural traditions such as cooking traditional foods.

Erica: *Si no pasa de generación, pues, lo que vamos a terminar de comer es porquería. Se va a ir la cultura y yo sé que esto está mal, de mí y de mi hermana también que no ha aprendido.*

(If it doesn't pass from generation to generation, well, what we're going to end up eating is junk. The culture will vanish and I know this is bad, for me and my sister who also hasn't learned.)

In offering their thoughts on how this issue could be addressed, a number of women discussed the role that restaurants and tourist venues might play in preserving food traditions. Some argued that although there was a decline in cooking Puerto Rican food in the home, these foods would not vanish completely because of the popularity of Puerto Rican restaurants and roadside or beach stands selling *comida criolla*. Some women argued that the staples would always continue to be present in the home – the *arroz con habichuelas*, *pollo guisado*<sup>34</sup>, and the dishes served at holidays such as *lechón*, *pasteles*, and *arroz con gandules*. However when it came to some of the less common cultural dishes, some pointed to restaurants and hotels to keep these traditions alive.

Both Wanda and Ada talked about the success Puerto Rican cooking has had in international cooking competitions and the work that Puerto Rican chefs have done in introducing our food to a broader audience. While considering this point I am drawn back to the previous discussion on the gendered dynamics of the professional culinary sector in Puerto Rico. As mentioned previously, while attending the Feria Gastronómica I found very little Puerto Rican food present at the event.

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<sup>34</sup> Stewed chicken, generally served with rice.



**Figure 5: Two featured dishes at the *Feria Gastronómica*: meat dumplings and polenta with pesto.**

This experience has made me question how much faith we can put in restaurants and hotels in preserving food traditions, at least those venues that I saw promoted at this particular event. Granted, the event was more geared towards medium and upper scale dining, with local neighborhood and family eateries not well represented. However, these are also on the decline in Puerto Rico. As more and more fast food restaurants open across the island, small, family-run restaurants are pushed out of business. I saw this in my family's hometown of Fajardo, noting at least three closed down restaurants, all of which had previously served *comida criolla*.

While in Puerto Rico I had the opportunity to interview María "Lula" Dolores de Jesús, a seventy-five year old Loíza woman who operated a small eatery serving traditional food from that area, cooked on a *burén*. A *burén* is a type of griddle and a technique of cooking that is descended from indigenous Taíno cooking methods, a method that has almost completely died out of usage. When I asked Doña Lula what her thoughts were on the future of the *burén*, she told me that young people would have to interest themselves in keeping the tradition alive. She mentioned a young nine year old girl and a teenage boy who had been assisting her, both of whom seemed interested in the work she was doing. During my time

in Puerto Rico I never once encountered another person or restaurant utilizing this cooking technique, and those who I asked about it did not know what it was.



**Figure 6: *El Burén de Lula* in Loíza, Puerto Rico**

An additional concern I have regarding restaurants taking the lead in preserving Puerto Rican food culture is the issue of price. As Jessica and Zuleyka mentioned in their interview, fast food is often a more viable option for some families because it is cheaper. However, if the responsibility to maintain the traditional food culture is placed with restaurants and tourist establishments such as hotels, we run the risk of pricing out the very people whose culture is embedded in those food traditions. One interesting development I experienced in Fajardo was a restaurant called Punto Caribe. This establishment served primarily Puerto Rican food, in a style that more mirrored fast food restaurants and was generally affordable, however definitely more than the Church's Chicken fast food restaurant next door. This isn't to say that the solution necessarily lies in expanding fast food even more in the island, however it served as an interesting intersection between the issues I am considering here.

Another potential situation that was mentioned in interviews, and experienced by myself, was this idea that Puerto Rican food would remain in Puerto Rico, however marketed and packaged more as a tourist attraction. This is closely related to my previous points regarding restaurants and hotels,

however warrants more discussion. Wanda talked at length in her interview about how although fewer people are passing down culinary traditions in the home, there still remain locations in Puerto Rico that are known for their traditional Puerto Rican food, such as Piñones and Luquillo. These places feature rows of kiosks with different vendors selling everything from rice and beans to *frituras*. While some locals do visit these locations, they are often full of tourists, and many guidebooks and websites lead tourists to these destinations to try “authentic, local food.” My concern here is the focus on preserving cultural food traditions that are mostly directed toward serving a tourist clientele, rather than local residents. In my experience, many outside tourists come to Puerto Rico seeking an “authentic” food experience, and these venues cater to that desire, with varying outcomes.



**Figure 7: *Frituras* and *piña coladas* at the kiosks in Luquillo**

One unique experience I did have was a trip to Guavate, a small mountain town near Cayey, which was known around the island as having the best, and most traditionally made, *lechón*. Many people who found out I was studying traditional foods urged me to go to Guavate and when I finally arrived there near the end of my trip I saw why. To reach Guavate you follow a road that winds throughout the mountainside, and as you begin to reach the town, roadside *lechonerías* begin to appear. These are small eateries that roast their pigs on a spit, often on display for customers. Alongside *lechón*

they often serve rice, beans, *bacalao*<sup>35</sup>, *viandas*, and other side dishes. There is no fast food in sight, a truly unique experience in an island inundated by them, according to Glenda. I visited Guavate on a weekend and at the top of the mountain I was surrounded all on sides by different *lechoner*as.



**Figure 8: A *lechoner*a in Guavate, Puerto Rico**

This was truly a family affair, with music playing, some folks dancing, and people of all ages enjoying the food and the ambience. There were also fewer tourists than I had noticed in other locations that focused on traditional *comida criolla*. Perhaps this was because it was further away from the main highways, more difficult to get to, or not as publicized in the guidebooks and online tourist guides. However, it did give me hope that there still existed places in the island that serve to bring Puerto Ricans together around food, and to offer these experiences to the younger generations as well.

In Puerto Rico there has been a recent surge in efforts aimed at re-connecting people to the land and their food. Though space limits me from fully considering this work in detail, I would like to highlight a few projects that I have come across in my research on this topic. Eric Holt-Giménez of Food First recently published an article on the Puerto Rican food system and recent shifts in supporting

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<sup>35</sup> Salted cod fish.

efforts for sustainable farming and food sovereignty on the island. He argues that, while the local agricultural system has been devastated through historical farming policies and pesticide use, “scores of young people are returning to the land in Puerto Rico” (Holt-Giménez 2013). He details Boricuá – an ecological farmers’ movement in Puerto Rico that promotes farmer-to-farmer initiatives, knowledge sharing, and seed swapping.

There exist numerous other projects and programs aimed at promoting more sustainable shifts in the food system. Casa Pueblo is an organization located in Adjuntas that promotes community-based ecological and sustainable projects that preserve the environment and culture of Puerto Rico. Some of these projects include an educational sustainable eco-tourism center, a project that supports local artisanal and ecological coffee production, and a store for local artisans to sell their goods (Casa Pueblo 2013). SembrArte is a collective of workers and activists aimed at preserving ethnobotany, sustainable agriculture, and botanical medicine practices in Puerto Rico. Based in principles of social justice, economic viability and ecological wellbeing, members of this organization hold workshops, create educational publications, and conduct research to support these goals. Maria Benedetti is a member of this collective and the author of a number of books aimed at preserving knowledge around Puerto Rican medicinal plants, local botanical healing practices, and agricultural traditions (SembrArte 2013). Numerous similar projects exist, and it seems as though, as Eric Holt-Giménez argues, this “movement in Puerto Rico is on its way to forging food sovereignty on the island” (Holt-Giménez 2013). These projects hold great potential for expanding movements throughout the island that prioritize a healthy, sustainable, and culturally significant food system for people in Puerto Rico.

### ***Barriga Llena, Corazón Contento***

The title of this thesis begins with “*barriga llena, corazón contento*,” a phrase in Spanish that translates into English as “full belly, happy heart.” This phrase was mentioned in two separate interviews that I conducted in Puerto Rico, and in a few short words encapsulates many of the sentiments I heard about food in people’s lives. Food meant many different things for the women I spoke

with, and they talked at length about the importance of food to family, cultural preservation, building connections between people, and generally feeling satisfaction in life. There was also a distinction made between the literal sustenance that food provides for survival, and the deeper significance it holds for people and communities. Similar discussions took place in almost every interview, with too many quotes to include here. For these women, food holds an incredible power to bring people and communities together, regardless of what it looks like or how it has changed with time and outside influences. It has a great potential for forging positive human relationships, and for connecting people across generations to their cultural roots. I would like to conclude by offering some thoughts shared with me in the group interview with Noemí, Sandy, and Carmen. In our conversation, they described the importance of food in this way:

Noemí: I think food brings us together.

Sandy: Beyond survival.

Carmen: It's the survival of the soul. It's the feeding of the soul.

Sandy: It's a survival skill to begin with, it's a basic need. Beyond that, it's a sharing. It's a sharing of culture and sharing of yourself, and love.



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## **Appendix A: Interview Questions in English**

The first question is simple, tell me about yourself.

Where and when were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Have you ever lived outside of Puerto Rico, and for how long?

Do you work (or have you worked) outside the home?

Tell me about your work. What exactly do you do? (Or are you a student?)

How do you feel about doing this work?

How did you get interested in this work?

What did you do before this work?

Do you like your work/studies? Why or why not?

\* \* \*

Talk to me about what you remember from your childhood regarding food or cooking in the home.

What do you remember about food in the community? (Parties, weddings, holidays, etc.)

What did your family eat when you were growing up? Do you believe this has influenced you, and how?

During your childhood and in relation to food, what things did the women do and what things did the men do? (How was the distribution of labor in your house in relation to food? This could include growing, buying, preparing, cooking, sharing, or serving food.)

And how is it now in your house?

Do you know how to cook?

How did you learn to cook?

Who has been the most influential in your cooking?

How often do you cook now?

Who do you usually cook for?

Do you enjoy cooking? Why or why not?

\* \* \*

When you cook, do you use recipes or cook from memory?

If you use recipes, where do you get them from?

Do you use cookbooks? Do you get recipes from friends or family? The Internet?

Are there any recipes that you've created on your own? Tell me about them.

What things influenced your creation of these recipes?

Do you have a favorite dish to make? A favorite dish to eat?

Are there any dishes you are known for making?

What are the foods or dishes that are most important in Puerto Rican cooking?

What do you and your family eat on a daily basis?

Do you ever share or exchange food with other family members, neighbors, or community members? If  
yes, when does this usually happen?

Do you know of people in your community or town who are suffering from hunger, malnutrition, or  
food-related health problems?

What foods are typically eaten at community celebrations, parties, or holidays?

Do you know of any foods that are used in healing or natural remedies? If yes, what foods and what are  
their uses?

\* \* \*

Where do you get your ingredients for cooking Puerto Rican dishes?

Do you prefer to make sauces and seasonings, or buy them from the store? And why?

In Puerto Rican food, what are the most important spices or ingredients? And how do you use them?

Do you grow any of your own foods or spices? Have you in the past? What foods/spices?

Does anyone else in your family grow their own food or spices? Which ones?

Do you preserve any of your own foods? (This could include canning, drying, pickling, freezing, etc). If  
yes, what foods and how?

Do you like to garden? Why or why not?

Do you have space to garden?

\* \* \*

For you, what meaning or significance does food have in family life? What meaning does it have in community gatherings? How has this changed throughout your lifetime?

When you think about Puerto Rican food, what is the first word that comes to your mind (and why?)

How has Puerto Rican food changed in your life time? What do you think about those changes?

What are your thoughts on Puerto Rico's status as a commonwealth of the United States?

What do you think about the future of this relationship? Do you see it changing? How?

How do you feel about the availability of American foods and fast food in Puerto Rico?

Do you think this has had an impact in the way that Puerto Ricans eat? And how?

Do you like American food? Why or why not?

What do you consider to be "healthy" food?

Do you think that Puerto Rican food is healthy food? Why or why not?

What do you think about vitamins and supplements?

What do you think about the future of Puerto Rican food?

\* \* \*

What is the most important thing for me as a researcher to know about Puerto Rican foods?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Do you have any questions for me?

Do you know of anyone else I should speak to for this project?

What is your full name and spelling?

## Appendix B: Interview Questions in Spanish

The below questions were translated by myself, using the original set of interview questions in English. Then, I consulted family members fluent in Spanish to correct mistakes and improve clarity of questions in Spanish. Any mistakes that remain are mine alone. Additionally, the questions below are written in formal Spanish, as the majority of the interviews that I conducted in Spanish were with elders or persons I didn't know. For any interviews I conducted in informal Spanish, the below list of questions were modified.

La primera pregunta es simplemente, hálame de su vida.

¿Dónde y cuándo nació?

¿Dónde se crió?

¿Ha vivido fuera de Puerto Rico, y por cuánto tiempo?

¿Usted trabaja o trabajaba fuera de la casa?

Háblame de su trabajo. ¿Qué hace exactamente?

¿Cómo se siente al hacer este trabajo?

¿Cómo llegó a interesarse en este trabajo?

¿Qué hizo antes de este trabajo?

¿Le gusta su trabajo? Porque si o no?

\* \* \*

Háblame de las memorias de su niñez sobre la comida en su casa.

¿Que recuerde de la comida en su comunidad? (Fiestas, bodas, días festivos, días religiosos, etc.)

Durante su niñez, ¿como comía su familia? ¿Usted cree que esto le ha influido, y cómo?

Durante su niñez y en relación a la comida, que cosas hicieron las mujeres y que cosas hicieron los hombres? (¿Cómo fue la distribución del trabajo en su casa en relación a la comida? Puede ser cultivando, comprando, preparando, cocinando, compartiendo, o sirviendo la comida.)

¿Y cómo es ahora en su casa?

¿Sabe cocinar?

¿Cómo aprendió cocinar?

¿Quién ha sido la más influyente en como Ud. cocina?



¿Ahora, con qué frecuencia cocina, Ud.?

¿Usualmente, para quien cocina?

¿Le gusta cocinar? ¿Por qué si o no?

\* \* \*

¿Cuándo cocina, utiliza recetas o cocina de memoria?

¿Si usa recetas, de donde vienen?

¿Utiliza libros de cocina? ¿Obtiene recetas de amigos o parientes? Usa el Internet?

¿Tiene recetas que ha creado Ud. misma? ¿Cómo son? ¿Qué cosas han tenido una influencia sobre su creación de estas recetas?

¿Tiene un plato favorito de hacer? ¿Un plato favorito de comer?

¿Ud. está conocida para hacer algunos platos?

En su opinión, ¿cuáles son los platos típicos más importantes para la comida puertorriqueña?

¿Qué comen Usted y su familia a diario?

¿Comparte o intercambia comida con otros miembros de su familia, los vecinos, o miembros de la comunidad? ¿Cuándo sucede usualmente?

¿Sabe si hay personas en su comunidad o pueblo que están sufriendo del hambre o malnutrición? ¿Y problemas de la salud que son relacionado con la comida?

¿Cuales comidas se come típicamente en las celebraciones o fiestas comunitarias?

¿Sabe algunos alimentos o ingredientes que son usados para la curación de la salud o remedios naturales? ¿Cuáles son? ¿Y, para que se usan?

\* \* \*

¿Dónde obtiene sus ingredientes para cocinar platos típicos puertorriqueños?

¿Prefiere hacer las salsas o sazones Ud. misma, o comprarlos al supermercado? ¿Y, por qué?

En la comida puertorriqueña, ¿cuáles son las especies e ingredientes más importantes? ¿Y cómo se usan?

¿Cultiva algunas verduras o especias? ¿Lo ha hecho en el pasado? ¿Cuáles verduras o especias?

¿Hay alguien en su familia que cultiva verduras o especias? ¿Qué verduras o especias cultivan?

¿Preserva algunas de sus propias comidas? Puede ser comidas enlatadas, secas, encurtidas, congeladas, y más. ¿Cual comidas y como lo hace?

¿Le gusta trabajar en el jardín? ¿Por qué si o no?

¿Tiene espacio para sembrar semillas o tener un jardín?

\* \* \*

¿Para Usted, qué sentido o significado tiene la comida en la vida familiar? ¿Qué significado tiene en los eventos comunitarios? ¿Cómo ha cambiado esto durante su vida?

¿Cuándo piensa en la comida puertorriqueña, cual es la primera palabra que sale en su mente? ¿Y, porque?

¿Cómo ha cambiado la comida puertorriqueña durante su vida? ¿Y, que piensa de estos cambios?

¿Qué piensa de la posición política de Puerto Rico como un Estado Libre Asociado (o “commonwealth”) de los Estados Unidos?

¿Qué piensa sobre el futuro de esta relación? ¿Piensa que va a cambiar? ¿Y cómo?

¿Qué piensa sobre la disponibilidad de comidas Americanas, o ‘comida rápida’ en Puerto Rico?

¿Piensa que esto ha impactado la forma en que los puertorriqueños comen? Y como?

¿Le gusta la comida Americana? Porque si o no?

¿Para usted, que es comida “saludable?”

¿Piensa que la comida puertorriqueña es saludable? Porque si o no?

¿Qué piensa de la vitaminas y suplementos?

¿Qué piensa del futuro de la comida puertorriqueña?

\* \* \*

¿Cuál es lo más importante que tengo que saber sobre la comida puertorriqueña?

¿Hay algo más que quiere compartir sobre esta tema?

¿Tiene algunas preguntas para mí?

¿Conoce a alguien que sería importante de entrevistar para esto proyecto?

¿Cuál es su nombre completo?

## Appendix C: Research Contact Sheet in English

### Research Contact and Information Sheet

**Research Project Title:** Puerto Rican Women, Food, and Culture

For any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher:

| Researcher:                                                        | UC Davis Faculty Advisor:                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Maria Elena Rodriguez<br>(206) 351-1996<br>merodriguez@ucdavis.edu | Jonathan London<br>(530) 752-2733<br>jklondon@ucdavis.edu |

This is a research project designed and conducted by Maria Elena Rodriguez, graduate student in Community Development at the University of California, Davis.

You have the right to know the details of this research project. Participating in research is your choice. If you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and leave the project at any time. To participate in this project, you will be asked to give oral consent, meaning I will ask you verbally if you would like to participate.

#### **About this research project:**

I hope to learn more about the role that food plays in the lives of Puerto Rican women. I seek to document life stories, memories, thoughts, and opinions on the meaning food has in personal and community life.

To contribute to this project, you will be asked to participate in an audio-recorded interview. I will keep copies of the interviews indefinitely, unless you ask me to destroy them. The interview is expected to last between 45 minutes and 2 hours. You may end the interview at any time and for any reason.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this project. You will not gain any financial benefit or compensation from taking part in this research. There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to participate in the interview described above.

#### **Confidentiality**

In this project, it is your choice whether your identity is kept confidential or not. You have two options from which to choose:

1. **No confidentiality.** Your full name and identifying features may be used in any reports or publications resulting from this project.
2. **Full confidentiality.** The researcher will take all possible steps to keep your identity confidential, including using a pseudonym and changing any identifying features in all reports or publications resulting from this project.

For questions about your rights while taking part in this study call the Institutional Review Board at (916) 703-9167 or write to IRB Administration, CTSC Building, Suite 1400, Room 1429, 2921 Stockton Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95817. Information to help you understand research is on-line at:

[www.research.ucdavis.edu/IRBAdmin](http://www.research.ucdavis.edu/IRBAdmin)

## Appendix D: Research Contact Sheet in Spanish

### Hoja de Información y Contacto (Contact and Information Sheet)

**Título del Proyecto:** Mujeres Puertorriqueñas, la Comida, y la Cultura  
Favor de contactarme con algunas preguntas o preocupaciones:

| Estudiante:                                                        | Supervisor de UC Davis:                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| María Elena Rodríguez<br>(206) 351-1996<br>merodriguez@ucdavis.edu | Jonathan London<br>(530) 752-2733<br>jklondon@ucdavis.edu |

Este proyecto está diseñado y conducido por María Elena Rodríguez, estudiante de posgrado en Desarrollo Comunitario (Community Development) en la Universidad de California en Davis.

Usted tiene derecho conocer los detalles de este proyecto. Participando en este proyecto es su propia opción. Si usted decide participar, puede cambiar la decisión más tarde y dejar el proyecto en cualquier momento. Para participar en este proyecto, se le preguntará que dé su consentimiento oral, significando que le voy a preguntar verbalmente si le gustaría participar.

#### **Sobre el proyecto:**

Espero aprender más sobre el sentido que tiene la comida en las vidas de mujeres puertorriqueñas. Estoy documentando los recuerdos, pensamientos y opiniones sobre el significado que tiene la comida en la vida personal y comunitaria.

Para contribuir a este proyecto, se le preguntará a participar en una entrevista de audio grabado. Voy a guardar las copias de las entrevistas indefinidamente, a menos que usted me pregunte para destruirlos. La entrevista se espera que dure entre 45 minutos y 2 horas. Usted puede terminar la entrevista en cualquier momento y por cualquier motivo.

No hay riesgos previsibles asociados a participar en este proyecto. Usted no va a obtener ningún beneficio financiero o compensación de tomar parte en esta investigación. No hay alguno costo para usted más del tiempo y el esfuerzo requerido para participar en la entrevista que se ha descrito anteriormente.

#### **Confidencialidad**

En este proyecto, es su opción si su identidad se mantiene confidencial o no. Usted tiene dos opciones entre las cuales elegir:

1. **Sin confidencialidad.** Su nombre completo y señas de identidad se puede utilizar en todos los informes o publicaciones resultantes de este proyecto.
2. **Confidencialidad completa.** La estudiante tomará todas las medidas posibles para mantener su identidad confidencial, incluyendo el uso de otro nombre y el cambio de las señas de identidad en todos los informes o publicaciones resultantes de este proyecto.

Para preguntas sobre sus derechos durante su participación en este proyecto, llama a la Junta de Revisión Institucional (Institutional Review Board) a (916) 703-9167 o escriba a IRB Administration, CTSC Building, Suite 1400, Room 1429, 2921 Stockton Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95817. Información para ayudarle a entender más sobre los proyectos de estudio está en línea en:

[www.research.ucdavis.edu/IRBAdmin](http://www.research.ucdavis.edu/IRBAdmin)