

# Language, food, and identity in the borderlands of El Paso

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The border is a contested space. It is a site where physical and discursive violence act to enforce hegemonic understandings of nation, citizenship and belonging. However, the spaces at the border also create sites where resistance to border discourses is possible. Using interviews conducted by the El Paso Food Voices project in 2018 and 2019, I examine the construction of identity through foodways in the US border town of El Paso, Texas. I view these interviews, called “food stories,” as entextualizations of the semiotic food system. Through critical discourse analysis of these food stories, I identify discourse strategies that construct identity in opposition to border discourses. In the borderlands, people have multiplex identities. Through foodways, residents of El Paso construct identities that do not conform to the dichotomizing and hierarchizing discourses of the border and create counter discourses that build possibility outside of border discourses.

*Keywords: US-Mexico border; critical discourse analysis; ideology; resistance; foodways*

## 1 Introduction

The border is a contested space. It is a site where physical and discursive violence act to enforce hegemonic understandings of nation, citizenship and belonging (Walia, 2013). However, the spaces at the border also create sites where resistance to border discourses is possible (Télléz, 2008). The border instantiates the discourses of the nation-state, creating a “border consciousness” among people living at these sites (Abarca, 2007, p. 187). In this paper, I examine how individuals living in the US border town of El Paso, Texas construct and convey their identities in resistance to border discourses. Identity is relationally constructed through the use of semiotic resources. This produces and reproduces social and power relations (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). At the US-Mexico border, processes of identification are situated within a context of stark social stratification and a high degree of cross-cultural contact. The transnational mixing of cultural practices at the border results in the production of multifaceted and hybrid identities that continually fragment existing social categorizations, thereby challenging power structures (Bottero, 2005). I use interviews conducted by the El Paso Food Voices project in 2018 and 2019 in order to understand the construction of identity through foodways in El Paso (El Paso Food Voices, 2019). I view these interviews, called “food stories,” as entextualizations of the semiotic food system. Through critical discourse analysis of these food stories, I identify discourse strategies that construct identity in opposition to border discourses.

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I begin by providing a theoretical background. I outline the theoretical framework through which I conceptualize the social semiotics of food, the border, and the borderlands, as well as the nation-state and the construction of identity. Following this, I describe the context of the borderlands of El Paso. Next, I provide further detail about my methodology and corpus. My analysis is in three parts. First, I analyze the production of meaning through foodways using Cid Jurado's (2016) framework of the "components of the food semiosphere" (p. 251). Second, I use Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) tactics of intersubjectivity in order to identify discourse strategies that construct identity in opposition to border discourses. Finally, I identify themes across the corpus in order to further examine how the discourse strategies identified serve to resist border discourses.

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 The social semiotics of food

Across cultures, food and food practices play important social and cultural roles in meaning-making processes. Food produces, reproduces, and transmits social information, such as cultural beliefs, value systems, social roles, and group norms (Douglas, 1997). Individuals draw on their semiotic resources to construct and convey their identities (Halliday, 1978). Food, like language, is one such mode in which individuals draw on the communicative resources available to them in order to contextually convey social meaning (Van Leeuwen, 2005). As a social semiotic system, food practices are embedded in power relations and regulated by normative discourse (Parasecoli, 2011).

Following Cid Jurado (2011), I understand this system as a process which can be divided into four segments in which signification occurs: a) collection, b) preparation, c) serving, and d) intake. Table 1 provides examples of ways in which signification can occur at each stage of the food system. I return to this process in more detail in my analysis in Section 5.

Table 1. Stages of the semiotic food system.

Stage	Examples
Collection	The specific ingredients collected The ritual purpose of the particular ingredients Where and how the ingredients are bought or produced
Preparation	Organization of the kitchen or other space where preparation occurs Methods of preparation and tools used Who participates and who does not participate in preparation Social interactions or rituals during preparation
Serving	Who serves the food How the food is displayed Practices of sharing food The order the food is served and the order people are served
Intake	Utensils used Meal times and structures Rules of politeness while eating Rituals before eating

Food processes are often highly ritualized and can be rendered invisible as a result of their common practice, especially within highly homogenous communities. However, certain

foods can undergo iconization processes (Parasecoli, 2011). Parasecoli examines food in intercultural communication (Parasecoli, 2011). All individuals have communicative competence and a set of communicative resources through which food is experienced and given meaning. Through movement, people come into contact with unfamiliar food systems, outside of their competence, and must negotiate this form of intercultural communication. According to Abarca (2007), “border consciousness” at the US-Mexico border “flavors the study of food with the complexity of cultural hybridity” (p. 188). As a result of this border consciousness, semiotic systems are made visible, as are the large asymmetries in which they are embedded. At the same time, the border presents a context where unique social and culture interactions result in the creation of new localized food systems (Stano, 2016).

## **2.2 The border and the borderlands**

The notion of “the borderlands” was first introduced in 1987 by Chicana scholar, Gloria Anzaldúa. Based primarily in critical theory, queer theory and feminist theory, Anzaldúa’s work conceptualizes the geographical spaces along the US-Mexico border as a hybridity of both cultures and thus not fully either (Anzaldúa, 1987). This contests the colonial construction and enforcement of the border. Anzaldúa (1987) also understands “borders” as the division between social groups, created by the same discourse as national borders. I use this idea to understand the space at the border in El Paso and the cross-cultural interaction of food systems.

In addition, Harsha Walia’s (2013) theory of “border imperialism” explains how borders are operationalized by Western nations through a process that deliberately maintains global structures of inequality in order to expand neoliberal empire. Border imperialism connects practices of imperialism abroad with settler-colonial ideology and the exploitation of migrants domestically (Walia, 2013). By creating displacement and simultaneously securitizing borders, Western nations create a precarious labour force while maintaining their global position of power. At the same time, discourses that “other” and vilify migrants are advanced. This allows migrant labour to be exploited. Border imperialism naturalizes and renders invisible the logic of the border and the nation-state and asserts biopolitical control, particularly over Indigenous and other racialized people (Walia, 2013). Following Walia, I understand border discourses as American settler-colonial ideologies as they manifest in the borderlands. This includes the imposition of discourses such as those of heteropatriarchal family and social structures, White Christian hegemony, a neoliberal individualist and profit-driven orientation, manifest destiny, and the logic of borders (Holguin Mendoza, 2011). However, I also understand the borderlands as a contested space where these discourses are both reproduced and resisted (Télez, 2008).

The nation-state operates by constructing what it means to ‘belong’ to a particular nation (Anderson, 1983). Anderson argues that the nation creates an “imaged political community,” where members view themselves having a shared history, value system and identity. This creates a sense of belonging and comradeship between members, without the need for personal social interactions (Anderson, 1983). The American “imagined community” inscribes border discourses and draws social divisions between those who “count” as American and those who are viewed as “other” (Garcia, 2019).

## **2.3 Constructing identity in the borderlands**

Existing work in sociolinguistics examines language in the context of the borderlands, including the border of El Paso-Juárez. I draw on this literature in order to understand the operational discourses of language and the spatial construction of identity. It is in relation to these discourses that the participants in my corpus construct their own identities. Much of the literature

focuses on the reproduction of social division and power relations at the border (Blackledge, 2006; De Cillia et al., 1999; Garcia, 2019; Meadows, 2014) or attitudes toward Spanish and Spanish-speakers (Hidalgo, 2008; Mena & Garcia, 2020). For this reason, I choose to focus on the production of counter-narratives in the construction of identity in the borderlands of El Paso. In the literature, for example, Americans in border communities frame their identities relationally with the border, where the social construction of the border positions those living in the US as “us” and those living in Mexico as “them” (Garcia, 2019; Mason Carris, 2011; Schwartz, 2014). Similarly, Mena and Garcia (2020) describe a process of converse racialization that reifies racial hierarchy in the US. While the markedness of Spanish continues to racialize Latinx-Americans, Spanish is commodified and becomes unmarked in the context of its saleability.

Other work contends with how individuals navigate the spatial construction of identity at the border and challenge social hierarchy. For example, Mick (2011) examines how the discourse strategies of migrant workers in Peru can serve to resist social hierarchy and the “discursive borderline” by contesting, distancing from, or choosing to identify with, how their identities are constructed by dominant discourses (p. 203). In addition, Johnson (1994) analyzes how a speaker builds solidarity and cooperation at a binational business conference at the US-Mexico border.

In my analysis, I draw on Bucholtz and Hall’s (2005) framework for the production of identity through social interaction. I understand identity as relationally constructed and negotiated through semiotic practices (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). It encompasses macro-social categories, as well as local and cultural positions and temporary interactional participant roles (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Identity is indexed through the use of a variety of semiotic resources (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In particular, I use Bucholtz and Hall’s (2004) idea of the tactics of intersubjectivity, which describes the social relations created by semiotic processes in everyday interactions. This framework is comprised of three pairs of tactics which serve different purposes in the production of identity: a) “adequation and distinction,” b) “authentication and denaturalization” and c) “authorization and illegitimation” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 382). I provide an overview of this framework below and return to these tactics of intersubjectivity in my analysis in section 6.

Adequation and distinction are tactics which seek socially recognized sameness and difference, respectively. For example, Bailey (2000) describes how Dominican-American teenagers construct their identities outside of a White-Black dichotomy, a process of distinction. However, they also show solidarity with Black teenagers, demonstrating adequation (p. 192, as cited in Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 385).

Authentication and denaturalization encompass discourse practices which are meant to construct how “real” or legitimate an identity is (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). For example, De Cillia et al. (1999) outline linguistic strategies that construct national identity in Austria. This is not only a process of adequation, serving the purpose of producing social sameness, but authenticates an Austrian identity. In contrast, denaturalization often serves to undermine essentialism assigned to identities. This can be seen in the Peruvian migrant workers discussed above, who defy an essentialist discourse that defines their social category memberships by assuming hybrid identities (Mick, 2011).

Authorization and illegitimation concern either instituting or withholding authority and institutional power from a particular identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Mason Carris (2011) describes a process of illegitimation in her analysis of how, through the mocking of a White

woman’s inauthentic pronunciation of Spanish, Latinx individuals in a Mexican restaurant in Southern California disrupt the normative sociolinguistic hierarchy.

**3 The borderlands of El Paso**

El Paso is located in the Southwestern United States in Western Texas. It borders Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. The largest American border town, as of 2019, the city of El Paso had a population of 681,728. This is comprised of 80.9% Latinx people (United States’ Census Bureau, 2019). There is also a large population of migrant workers in El Paso (Bhimji, 2009). The border region as a whole is a major economic centre. Referred to as Paso del Norte, it is comprised of El Paso, Texas, Las Cruces, New Mexico, and Juárez, Chihuahua (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010). At the time El Paso Food Voices conducted the interviews I use in my analysis, the Trump administration’s “Migration Protection Protocols” policy, commonly known as the “Remain in Mexico” policy, was in effect. This forced many asylum seekers back across the border into Juárez (Garrett, 2020).

El Paso is located on the traditional Indigenous territories of the Mano, Suma and Jumano nations, as well as the Apache. As a result of Spanish colonialism, the Mano, Suma and Jumano peoples no longer exist as distinct groups (Torre Curiel & Perez Gonzalez, 2020). The Tigua of Ysleta del Sur Pueblo are now the predominant Indigenous nation in the area. They have lived on the land since they were displaced to the region by the Spanish between 1680 and 1681 (Ysleta del Sur Pueblo, 2020). Present day El Paso and Juárez were a single community until Texas was annexed by the US from Spain in 1850. They are now two distinct cities, located across the Rio Grande from each other and divided by a border wall (Harlow, 1982).

Table 2. El Paso Food Voices participants.

Name	Type	Age	Gender	Birthplace	Background	Occupation
Parul Haribhai	Private Kitchen	-	Cisgender, woman	Rochester, New York (grew up in a village 200 miles from Mumbai, India)	Indian-American	Physical therapist
Jake Jacobs	Private Kitchen	65	Cisgender, man	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	African-American	Truck driver (retired), musician
Yolanda Leyva	Private Kitchen	63	Cisgender, woman	Juárez, Mexico (El Paso since a newborn)	Mexican-American	History professor
Roman Wilcox	Public Kitchen	38	Cisgender, man	El Paso, Texas	Mexican-American and White American	Restaurant owner
Wayne Calk	Public Kitchen	58	Cisgender, man	Del Rio, Texas	White American	Former teacher, Chuckwagon competitor
Antonio Elias Lopez	Public Kitchen	-	Cisgender, man	Dallas, Texas	Mexican-American	Cook at Indigenous women’s org.

#### 4 Methodology

El Paso Food Voices project is comprised of six interviews conducted between 2018 and 2019 (El Paso Food Voices, 2019). It was created by the Institute of Oral History at the University of Texas, El Paso. The interviews, called “food stories,” discuss each participant’s family history and connection to the border through food and food practices. The interviews range from approximately 30 minutes to one and a half hours in length. The corpus includes three public kitchen and three private kitchen interviews. Public kitchen interviews are with those involved in feeding the community, such as at restaurants or community centres (El Paso Food Voices, 2019). Private kitchen interviews discuss food made in the home for friends and family (El Paso Food Voices, 2019). The interviews are all conducted in English with some participants using minimal code-switching into Spanish. In Table 2, I provide a summary of the backgrounds of the participants, all of whom have spent at least 20 years living in El Paso (El Paso Food Voices, 2019). As the data is not my own, some information in Table 2, including the participants’ backgrounds and genders, are assumed from context. It does not necessarily reflect the language each participant would use to describe their identities.

Using El Paso Food Voices as my corpus, I use my own transcriptions of audio recordings of the interviews for my analysis and use a critical discourse analysis methodology (Blommaert, 2005; Fairclough, 1995).

#### 5 The food system of El Paso

Across the corpus, the participants engage with processes of signification at different stages of the food system: a) collection, b) preparation, c) serving and d) intake (Cid Jurado, 2016). I analyze how each participant produces meaning at each stage in order to identify how they use their semiotic resources within the food semiosphere to construct their identities (Parasecoli, 2011).

##### 5.1 Collection

At the border, people and goods continually move across the border as part of the economic food system. As such, collection within the semiotic food system of El Paso is situated within the social and power dynamics of the border, as Yolanda demonstrates in excerpt 1 (Parasecoli, 2011).

(1) Yolanda (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

I love cheese. Cheese is one of my favorite things. And I have to tell you the story, one time I was in this little town in Chihuahua. And there's a plant here that that grows that you use to make asadero cheese and you use it to coagulate the milk. So listen, this little *pueblito* Chihuahua they all make us a little cheese. And the lady was super proud showing her cheese. And then she said, “but you can't make it in the United States. You don't have this plant.” And I said, “we have this plant everywhere in El Paso. It is considered a weed,” and she was so shocked that a plant would live in the United States that was Mexican to her.

Travelling across the border to buy particular foods or ingredients itself produces social meaning. In excerpt 1, Yolanda describes a cross-border interaction that demonstrates the hegemonic nature of border discourses. Identity is produced through particular social and cultural understandings of the nation. Following the logic of the border, a plant that is Mexican should stop where Mexico stops. The social divisions created by border discourses also result in the plant holding very different social meaning on each side.

## 5.2 Preparation

In the preparation phase, cultural knowledge and beliefs are shared, not only through recipes and food practices themselves, but through the way in which knowledge is transmitted (Abarca, 2007).

(2) Yolanda (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

So I love cheese, so that I started making cheese. And it's really changed my relationship to cheese to make it. I taught my granddaughter how to make it a few weeks ago and because it's chemistry too.

(3) Wayne (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

She did other things. She did Mexican cornbread, she did chicken fried steak, she did fried chicken, you know, all that sort of stuff. And it was just kind of through osmosis that I picked up from her, those sort of things. And I think I learned fundamentally how to make gravy from her by not just, "mom show me how to make gravy," just watching and seeing that, you know, common sense tells you, you need to add this or don't add too much of that, and then it kind of comes out all right.

In (2) and (3), identity is produced through intergenerational transmission of foodways and epistemological practices. Yolanda expresses a particular epistemological position in (2), where she views the transmission of knowledge about food as teaching her granddaughter scientific practice.

## 5.3 Serving

The way in which food is presented (4), including in menus (5), embeds social meaning (Cid Jurado, 2016).

(4) Antonio (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

And that's how I like to think of how- that's how I like to present our, our ancestral foods to a- in a contemporary way. Because to a lot of people that's a very foofy and contemporary way to serve it. But to us it's an ancestral way of eating.

(5) Roman (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

I don't keep menus. As long as I'm in control of a- of a program[...]And it's, you know, all this stuff is very trendy right now. And it's a lot of fun, and it's good, but it's what's behind it, the experience behind it and the intention that we're putting forward. That has, I'm telling you, it's like becoming less and less about the food and more about the people.

Preparation serves in (4) to construct a particular practice as alignment with tradition and in (5) to position the purpose of the public kitchen as centered around feeding people.

## 5.4 Intake

Intake within the food system serves a role beyond that of necessary intake of nutrients. The particular practices and the value given to them is socially meaningful. At the border, this involves interaction between different food systems (Parasecoli, 2011).

(6) Jake (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

They just made a point of trying to expose us to food from different parts of the world. And some of it I was a little bit hesitant to try, but some of it I tried and you know, it didn't kill me. I actually embraced it.

(7) Parul (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

We do not have the TV on at night when I make dinner. All four of us sit down and we talk and we eat and we enjoy the food I have cooked and those are the memories my children are going to take with them when they're older. They definitely are going to have childhood memories of food.

Excerpts (6) and (7) demonstrate intake serving two different functions within the food system. Excerpt (7) shows the social meaning inscribed into community and family practices. Excerpt (6) is an instance of intercultural communication in the food system. Meaning is produced when an individual comes into contact and must contend with food outside of their communicative resources (Parasecoli, 2011).

## 6 Tactics of intersubjectivity and resisting border discourses

I identify four discourse strategies that are used to resist or disrupt border discourses. These discourse strategies serve particular purposes in the construction of identity, which I view as employing tactics of intersubjectivity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). I outline the role of each discourse strategy in Table 3 and further examine their usage in my corpus below.

Table 3. Discourse strategies.

Discourse Strategy	Tactic	Impact on Border Discourses
Recontextualizing border discourses	Illegitimation	Challenges the authority of border discourses to define social meaning.
Here/there	Distinction, Authentication	Refutes social division and places value on cultural practices.
The imagined community	Denaturalization, Adequation	Creates a sameness at the border and defies hegemonic construction of the community.
“Us” and “them”	Adequation, denaturalization	Resisting essentialized categories and social divisions.

### 6.1 Recontextualizing border discourses

The discourse strategy of recontextualizing border discourses involves subverting border discourses by changing their context and the social meaning that they hold, as in excerpt 8.

(8) Roman (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

And as we got older, things change, and that standard American diet of processed food just really took over our family. Yeah, and it's, it kind of makes me want to cry. Because it was so innocent. It was so innocent, and so well intended. And I think our generation of kids of this age experienced that because this convenient food took over. And it was almost like, a good thing to be able to pick up fast food. It was cool and it was acceptable.



In (8), Roman employs this discourse strategy to illegitimate a discourse that associates fast food with American identity, convenience, disposability and freedom (Schwartz, 2014). Roman acknowledges this discourse but denies its authority to dictate the social meaning that it holds for him. This strategy is employed by participants throughout the corpus, particularly in the context of the forces that seek to disconnect them from the production of food and from foodways that hold cultural importance outside of a normative American identity.

## 6.2 Here/there

The *here/there discourse strategy* is used to spatially position people in relation to the border. Existing literature discusses the use of this discourse strategy in reproducing a border discourse where the US is “here”, and Mexico is “there” (Johnson, 1994). However, the use of this strategy differed in my corpus. I found an absence of a spatial positioning of “there”. “Here” is used to refer to El Paso (9), the US, or the borderlands (10), but the participants do not position Mexico as “there”.

(9) Parul (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

When I came **here**, and I started talking to people, they would tell me that they would soak these chilies and then grind them up. And then that was their sauce. And I said what are you talking about? And so the biggest thing I've added to my cuisine is the Mexican red chili sauce, chili sauce for enchiladas. And so I now buy my chilies, soak them, grind them and make it very traditionally the Mexican way.

(10) Wayne (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

I mentioned that *pon de campo* is a- is a bread that's made on the ranches along the border **here** with Texas and, and Mexico and I guess lots of other places but that's where I've known it from and not that I make a lot of *pon de campo* but if you go out on a ranch and you got a bunch of old timers that are that are Hispanic and you know, Mexican Cowboys.

In excerpt (9), Parul positions El Paso as “here”. In doing so, she positions herself as an outsider that moved to El Paso and became part of the community. She maintains a distinction between herself and the Chicana people who teach her about their traditional cooking. However, this does not construct social division. Rather, Parul emphasizes cultural ownership and authenticates both her and Chicana identities and the important place of Mexican food practices in the US borderlands. In (10), Wayne uses a discourse of “here” that demonstrates the permeability of the borderlands and its foodways.

## 6.3 “Us” and “them”

I define the *“us” and “them” discourse strategy* in contrast to the *“us” versus “them” strategy* found in much of the literature (Garcia, 2019). As discussed in reference to (9), the participants maintain distinct cultural identities. This positively constructs “us” as a social category. However, in identifying with particular social groups, the participants do not index the features of “them” negatively.

(11) Antonio (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

And back then, I really didn't know our language that well. I was a Chicano, I still am a Chicano.

Antonio constructs a sameness with other Chicana people at the border, while resisting or denaturalizing the discursive construction of what is required to claim this identity. In this excerpt, Antonio is describing his introduction to the Queer community in El Paso and the connection he felt to the culture and food within this predominantly Chicana space without the presence of an essentialized notion of what it meant to hold both Chicana and Queer identities.

#### 6.4 The imagined community

The final discourse strategy I discuss is that of *the imagined community*. This strategy contrasts with Anderson's (1983) conception of the "imagined political community". Rather than accepting the US as the imagined community and the social divisions of the border, the participants distance themselves and sometimes challenge this idea of America as a contiguous community. This denaturalizes the authority of the US to define the structure and limits of the community.

(12) Roman (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

I never do any recipes that are not attainable within- that the ingredients are not attainable from within our barrios.

(13) Yolanda (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

So when we eat something that's corn, to me, we're going back to those really ancient memories. Corn is something that we've had a relationship with for 8000 years. And I say a relationship with that plant. Because corn cannot live without us. And for thousands of years, we could not live without corn. We have to plant the corn in order for it to grow. And we eat the corn in turn to honor it.

As in (12), this discourse strategy serves to draw a connection and a sameness between the resident of El Paso, where the people of the borderlands are the community. Excerpt (13) shows a resistance to hegemonic discourses, where Yolanda builds her identity in relationship with non-human life and in connection with ancestral knowledges (Coté, 2016).

## 7 Themes

Each discourse strategy discussed above employs particular tactics of intersubjectivity to construct identity in particular ways (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). However, in doing so, the participants produce or resist discourses that frame the borderlands. I identify four themes found across the corpus that encapsulate the way in which the discourse strategies found work to resist border discourses.

### 7.1 The border as hybridity

The food system of El Paso is complex and involves a great deal of intercultural interaction. The participants construct identities that challenge the dichotomies instituted by the border through the construction of multifaceted identities (Bottero, 2005). This resists a border discourse that cements binaries between people and their identities and makes visible the border as a construct (Mick, 2011).

### 7.2 Agency and practices of community care

By refusing to accept the neoliberalizing of foodways, the participants assert agency over their identities (Freeman, 2007). The participants' food practices are discursively constructed as practices of community care. This refuses both the centering of profit in the public kitchen and hegemonic social structures in the private kitchen (Abarca, 2007). The participants choose how

they engage with a national identity, as well as their specific cultural identities. Further, the participants contest the devaluing of reproductive labour (Abarca, 2007). For example, Parul discursively constructs cooking for her family with agency and value. Antonio constructs cooking for an Indigenous social justice organization as a valuable contribution to their work. Each participant assigns value to practices of community care in opposition to patriarchal, neoliberal and heteronormative discourses (Fischer-West, 2004).

### **7.3 Claiming spirituality, culture, and identity**

Across the corpus, the participants discuss their relationship to food through their cultural and spiritual identities. They claim their multifaceted identities, and in doing so, resist the dominance of a White, Christian, and straight American identity. Instead, the participants construct their identities in opposition to or outside of this discourse. Border discourses assert a hierarchy of identities that the participants do not accept.

### **7.4 Authenticity and “Americanization”**

It is a common theme across the corpus that the participants challenge border discourses that seek to homogenize or essentialize their identities. The participants position themselves in opposition to a process of “Americanization” that seeks to disconnect them with their cultural identities and foodways through the dominance of processed and packaged foods (Freeman, 2007). In addition, the corpus engages with the relationship between health, white supremacy, and access to food. Food and foodways of non-White people are discursively constructed as unhealthy, while racialized and working-class people are denied access to healthy food in their communities (Freeman, 2007). At the same time, their foods are commodified, and “authenticity” is manufactured (Martinez-Cruz, 2019). The participants resist this. They instead claim their foodways outside of a White supremacist frame of food and health. For example, Jake speaks of finding joy in soul foods and Antonio speaks of decolonizing his diet.

## **8 Conclusion**

In the borderlands, people have multiplex identities (Bottero, 2005). Through foodways, residents of El Paso construct identities that do not conform to the dichotomizing and hierarchizing discourses of the border and create counter discourses that build possibility outside of border discourses.

(14) Yolanda (El Paso Food Voices, 2019)

So she says in this video, so every time you eat tacos de carnitas you're supporting the conquest. You're honoring the conquista. And I was I was like, oh, that's true, because I also teach in my classes about the importance of pigs, and how pigs made the military conquest possible. So she's right about that. And then the next Saturday we went to the ranchito and what did we have? Tacos de carnitas. But so I had them.

While people at the border resist hegemonic discourses, their identities are inherently situated within the power relations of settler-colonial and neoliberal empire, as seen in excerpt (14) and Walia (2013). By contending with the complexities and contradictions of their social realities, people in the borderlands contest the hegemony of the border.

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