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Author

Ahumada, Maria Paula

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Loose Accents:
Expressing Latinx Identity through Conversation

By

MARIA PAULA AHUMADA
THESIS

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Approved:

Desiree Martin, Chair

Marissa López

Susy J. Zepeda

Committee in Charge

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In a time where there is a large debate on what Latino/a/@/x's should call ourselves, we also question the need to define who we are in this country. Along with Latinx¹ being a term which many use to identify themselves, it has also become a buzz word across the work and conversations of Latinx scholars. While some choose to identify as Latinx others do not, as it is often deemed as problematic for being a homogenous term. As Latinxs we are the fastest growing group in the U.S., one that continues to struggle in our search for identity. Latinidad is constantly being questioned, therefore this paper is not concerned with discussions of naming or whether we should keep the term Latinx or move on from it as other scholars have discussed. Under our current administration and during these times of crisis, this paper attempts to center the spaces in which Latinidad is expressed. By focusing on moments in conversation that draw attention to inequalities, difference, spirituality, healing, joy, and romance I add to the scholarship about Latinidad that Frances R. Aparicio describes as shifting “from noun to action – that is, from a descriptive meaning to a political activist one” (Aparicio 34). Additionally, it is necessary to identify who this political activism is for and its impacts, as Cristina Beltran has pointed out that Latino political activity under the homogenizing tendencies of Latinidad is what makes it “so susceptible to fragmentation and dissolution” (Beltran 6). Therefore, this paper centers the activism of young Latinx creators (YLC) who use social media to share the work they do in the community as they navigate these political times. An analysis of Danyeli Rodriguez del Orbe and Ernesto Rocha’s podcast, *Loose Accents*² shows how the hosts create spaces of Latinidad which serve to participate in and incite political activism.

¹ I use this term throughout my paper as it is the most recent one available which includes nonbinary and Indigenous people, and it is inclusive in terms of nation of origin. However similar to many, I too remain apprehensive of the ways this term lumps identity but continue to use it to situate myself in the field of Latinx scholarship while centering the various experiences of Latinx identity.

² The first episode of *Loose Accents* was released on April 1st, 2019.

Through a discussion of unbelonging and representation within the Latinx community this thesis seeks to understand how the form of the podcast serves as a tool to create and center spaces of care that transition Latinx identity from noun to action. Their work highlights the narratives of Afro-Latinx and queer undocumented Latinx whose stories are not often told in this country. In doing so they challenge narratives about Latinxs in the U.S. and narratives within Latinidad by using their platform to share knowledge about current political issues such as immigration, racism, sexism, white privilege. By centering the ways in which it affects their individual experiences as they navigate this country, they validate their own lived experience and create knowledge production which exists outside of the academy. Additionally, the two engage in moments that allow for accountability and decolonial ways of thinking. The efforts from Del Orbe and Rocha to create this platform stem from internalized feelings of unbelonging that they have individually faced due to their own journeys. The shared feeling of unbelonging³ as minorities in this country, and Latinxs whose stories are not considered in the broader scope of Latinidad is what has brought them together and has influenced the formation of *Loose Accents*. As the hosts have described it, *Loose Accents* is “an immigrant podcast for the pressed and unbothered” (Loose Accents) it is hosted by Danyeli Rodriguez Del Orbe and Ernesto Rocha who advocate for the importance of centering the individual experience in a non-hierarchical manner. As Jose Esteban Muñoz puts it, “Rather than mapping belonging through exhausted narratives of identity, there may be considerable value in thinking about the problem of feeling like a problem as not simply an impasse, but, instead, an opening” (Muñoz 72). Therefore, I argue the podcast provides an opening, a refusal of systemic harm takes form through discussions of unbelonging that open up the contested and complex Latinx identity.

³ I would like to note here that although this shared feeling of unbelonging is what has brought these two podcasts hosts together, I am in no way asserting that they have experienced unbelonging in the same ways.

However, only focusing on refusal is exhausting and would be a minimal analysis of this podcast. *Loose Accents* exemplifies a way of being in the world, one that similar to Muñoz's analysis of Ricardo Bracho's work, "never let[s] the affective hum of white normativity overwhelm" the conversation. As a student of English literature, it would seem appropriate to focus on a piece of literature rather than a podcast for a Master's Thesis. However, to take on the discourse of Latinx identity as shifting from noun to action, the form of a podcast is central to this movement. In fact, The Santa Cruz Feminist Collective of Color make the argument that "understanding the relationship among difference, colonialism, and oppression provides a basis for creative coalition" (30). As a prime example of creative coalition by two young Latinx creators, *Loose Accents* provides a place of being and more importantly a way of learning and expressing Latinidad. This creative space is rooted in understanding and celebrating difference and interconnectedness. They make room for themselves and their guests to acknowledge their strategies of resistance against a fixed and imposed identity. Additionally, the Santa Cruz Feminist Collective of Color discuss WoC feminisms and state that the "the knowledge produced at these borders forges connections across struggles, lending the perspectives and tools necessary for expansive projects not limited to the university" (33). As we transition Latinx from noun to action a podcast provides more freedom to the knowledge and experiences that are being presented. The spoken word form propels towards action as a result of the form of dialogue between the hosts. They generate a space for questioning their experiences, which are not always answered but provides new perspectives to addressing systems of oppression. A multitude of experiences are shared which allows for a critical dialogue as a way to produce knowledge outside of the academia. The podcast provides real life examples of everyday resistance and shares how to deal with many of the shared injustices that Latinx's face, rather than imposing an

identity and focusing on how we are all the same. The Santa Cruz Feminist Collective of Color remind us that “other spaces of cultural representation that, like conferences or anthologies, construct decolonized communal spaces that can hold the productive tensions and possibility of engaging difference” (28). Through the form of a podcast *Loose Accents* establishes a decolonized communal space that provides us the tools to handle tensions and contradictions under an identity that is always shifting.

These tools and new creative coalitions are necessary as knowledge-producing spaces outside of the academy as we shift Latinx identity from noun to action. Additionally, considering that U.S. Latinx literature, specifically texts that have been accepted into the canon are descriptive of the Latinx experience and for the most part take the form of engaging with Latinidad as a noun. Writers have often taken on the tasks of telling the stories of those whose voices are not heard, and I myself have been guilty of analyzing these texts through representational reading. Additionally, *Loose Accents* is central in this discussion because it provides stories that are grounded in the experiences and knowledges of Black people and people of color. While canonized U.S. Latinx literature provides us different stories from the perspective of one writer, the form of the podcast allows multiple voices to be heard. *Loose Accents* is a podcast where the hosts often center episodes hosting other community activists to come on and share their stories. More importantly, what it is doing is empowering and creates spaces for voices that are not often given the opportunity to express and recognize their experiences as sources of strength. *Loose Accents* serves as an analytical form of knowledge production that challenges Latinidad and homogenous notions of identity while validating the lived experience of individuals who are categorized under this term, or at times excluded from it. This strategy, is one that has been named by José Muñoz as disidentification:

“disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counter identification, utopianism) this "working on and against" is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of everyday struggles of resistance” (Muñoz 12).

It is the tradition of Black and Chicana feminist to validate the quotidian experiences of their communities in order to disrupt power structures by reinterpreting knowledge and generating resistant community. *Loose Accents* takes on this approach which allows them to challenge the often-normalized effects of colonization in the larger scope of Latinidad. The hosts recognize Latinidad as something that needs to be explored and is understood through conversations with one another and our experiences, which allows them to exert agency over the public definition of Latinx through their podcast. This is achieved in a way that acknowledges the need for an alternative way of navigating the world. This power comes from the form of storytelling that takes place in the podcast which Solórzano and Yosso have described as counter-story:

“a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society) ... Storytelling and counter-storytelling these experiences can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance” (Solórzano and Yosso 7).

Del Orbe and Rocha use storytelling as an essential tool of their podcasts, which allows them to share, question, understand, and rewrite their Latinx identity. What is important about this podcast is that they don't do it alone, they embrace the opportunity of being-in-common with one another and their community through counter-storytelling.

However, it is important to point out that:

“Counter-storytelling is different from fictional storytelling. We are not developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios. Instead, the “composite” characters we develop are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life, not fiction (Solorzano and Yosso 7).

As a digital counter-story telling space that is not contained, under the canonization of Latinx identity through representation, the podcast welcomes unique analytical insight into a Latinidad that transitions from descriptive to action by using stories grounded in real life.

Rodriguez Del Orbe shares her experience as an Afro-Dominicana raised in Bronx, NY and living in South Central LA, while Rocha speaks from his experience as a queer undocumented Mexican man from LA. They share their lived experiences on how they have and continue to express their individual identity and culture, even under the homogenizing umbrella of Latinx identity. Furthermore, Aparicio’s framework on Horizontal Hierarchies is one that allows this analysis to look further than power differentials between Latinx people, rather it also acknowledges sameness and difference and the internal conflicts they cause in terms of these power differentials. This analysis allows me to argue that Rodriguez del Orbe and Rocha’s work is representative of an alternative Latinx identity, one that is presented through conversation and friendship and allows counter-narratives to frame the discussion. Similarly Muñoz describes his term the brown commons and says it “is not about the production of the individual but instead about a movement, a flow, and an impulse to move beyond the singular subjectivity and the individualized subjectivities...a being with, being alongside...a being-in-common” (Muñoz 37).

Therefore, the podcast's celebration of friendship is a being-in-common, however one that transcends the parameters of a single Latinx identity.

This being-in-common creates communities of care that allow for story telling through the hosts real life experiences as well as the multitude of guests that they have on the show. As we see, in Season 1 Episode 3 titled "soy yo," the two introduce each other to their audience by answering questions that they have written up for one another. At the beginning of the episode Rocha asks Rodriguez Del Orbe, "What's in your heart today?" (Loose Accents) this question sets the tone for the episode, as it speaks to the compassion, care, and deep interest that portrays their friendship. Aparicio points out that "For colonized communities, one of the strategies of resistance has been precisely performing nationalism in the public space. Thus, there is a need to examine further the slippages between justified cultural specificity and exceptionalism" (Aparicio 115). However, for this community things are different which is why it is important to pay attention to the care that is present in this podcast, as a form of resistance which is connected to an alternative Latinx identity. The public space of the podcast is not used to center nationalism, and it is also more than a discussion that represents the hosts as a collective body with common interest under the umbrella term Latinx. In place of nationalism, care is prioritized as a way of holding one another's stories and being-in-common, while recognizing that we often continue to experience the feelings of unbelonging while living in this country. Additionally, the form of the podcasts allows them to document these experiences as Ines Casillas reminds us that "the voice, either lyrically or narratively, stands in as "flesh" for Latina/o bodies and as sound evidence of past and continued injustices" (Casillas 181). The podcast allows them to not only discuss issues affecting them now and, in the future, they also bring up childhood memories and moments in which they did not know where certain ideologies were coming from. However,

Loose Accents is also challenging traditional modes of research that have previously been used to theorize Latinx identity. In this case an alternative Latinx identity within this podcast rejects the idea of a collective consciousness, as it is a coalition that welcomes difference while being purposefully anti-hierarchical and anti-exceptionalism. By documenting their experiences and others as well they partake in and invite others in the community to exercise their right to political activism.

Latinidad as a noun is one that is used in America to identify people of Latin American descent. Cristina Beltran writes that “understood as a political category, Latinidad presumes that Latinos as a group share a common collective consciousness” (Beltran 5). However, the term as one which presumes a collective consciousness takes up a lot as it is responsible for identifying people with different nationality, race, gender, sexuality, immigration status, class, religion, etc. In fact, Beltran writes that as a term for identification, ““Hispanic” and “Latino” are terms whose descriptive legitimacy is premised on a startling lack of specificity” (Beltran 6). These differences are crucial when we refer to Latinxs, therefore it is vital to challenge the idea of unity from a label that has homogenizing effects. Additionally, the tension with such terms is present considering that the language to identify Latinx people is in process, which allows there to be rewritings of it. The Santa Cruz Feminist of Color Collective’s discussion of identity suggest that “the formation of “women of color” enables a way of seeing the world through a lens that refracts light in many ways to reveal a world full of possibilities, a world that is constantly shifting and in motion” (24). This way of discussing identity formation is central to an understanding that identity and in this case the transformation of a term reminds us that language is not fixed and that people’s experiences to historical, political contexts, and positionality in this country play a role in how they identify. However, Aparicio points out that “the more we use the

descriptor, the more we construct spaces of Latinidad. The equation of Latinidad with solidarity reflects the activist, oppositional, and politicized deployments of this term.” (Aparicio 34).

Aparicio’s discussion of Latinidad speaks to the term’s transformation from noun to action. This label is redefined as a verb and through our engagement with it, we are able to create necessary conversations about our positioning that include one another.

The title, *Loose Accents* does not signify Latinx, however what makes the podcast unique to Latinidades is that the hosts speak to conflicts and tensions that are specific to the Latinx community. Aparicio’s framework guides my analysis in order to understand the podcast as one that goes beyond discussing vertical power differences in the U.S. as racial and historical minorities. The host take into consideration the horizontal hierarchies that affect our realities and discuss topics from language and hair to naming which produce conversations that lead to discussions of unbelonging. Additionally, Aparicio writes that “As a critical concept, horizontal hierarchies acknowledge the potential for solidarity, alliances, and community while also recognizing the fissure from within” (Aparicio 42). The form of the podcast establishes itself through storytelling and counter-story telling which allows it to challenge the everyday experiences that are often overlooked within the Latinx community by mainstream modes of representation. Additionally, the podcast offers a model of Latinx coalition considering that as Ines Casillas points out on her discussion of Spanish-speaking radio, “immigrants and communities of color are excluded from the larger American body politic, media and popular culture offer feelings of belonging or inclusion” (Ines Casillas 3). However, through the relationship that the two hosts have they render its listeners with ways to care for one another while continuing to water and nourish these bonds in order to navigate conflict and tension.

Furthermore, the podcasts constructs spaces of Latinidad in which the hosts serve as political agents for the community in which we see Latinidad transform from noun to action.

Additionally, Beltran's discussion on the metaphor of the "sleeping giant"⁴ she points out that "Among Latinos themselves the giant represents the long-standing desire to be seen as a vital and inescapable part of the national political landscape, a demographic powerhouse that has earned its right to both representation and recognition" (Beltran 5). However, these metaphors neither fit nor are accurate when we take a close look at the way the work of young Latinx creators is shaping the community. In fact, I am arguing that the creation of a podcast by two Latinx creators reveals that the fight is no longer about representation nor recognition. Through the podcast there is a strong sense of exerting agency over identity and a shift in which Latinidad is expressed through allowing for moments of healing, learning, relearning, unlearning, teaching, sharing knowledge, and resources. Not only do they create their own work for the benefit of their communities to grow and have access to resources, but they are also creating an alternative way to understand Latinx identity in America. This allows them to empower the community by emphasizing the knowledges that are abundant in their everyday realities.

In one of the episodes introductions Rocha says "we are here to celebrate the looseness of our tongues and all of our identity" (Loose Accents). In this celebration, Latinx identity is disconnected from the influence of mainstream American definitions which cause us to internalize such imposed characteristics and therefore resort to previous strategies of resistance through performing nationalism. On the other hand, it is about celebrating and making space for the ways we have decided to engage with our culture, upbringings, experiences, and taking

⁴ The "sleeping giant awakened" is a metaphor which has been used to describe the emergence of the Latinx communities' political power and influence in the U.S., one that is believed to be strongest through unity and a political common agenda.

agency over Latinx identity. There is a clear emphasis and need for discussing the “looseness” of Latinx identity, not just the parts of their identities that categorize them as Latinx under mainstream American definition. The use of the word “celebrate” can be understood as a kind of storytelling method that recreates how we understand the resistance of our marginalized experiences as moments in which the community is not only surviving, but also thriving. The power lies within using a digital platform to record and share these methods.

Furthermore, one of the many discussions around Latinx identity coincides with speaking Spanish, and more importantly speaking it “correctly”. This is an internal conflict within Latinidad that serves to isolate those who come from Latinx communities where Spanish is spoken with a different accent, often from countries in the Caribbean that have large populations of Black people. The discourse of language in relation to the Latinx identity is a contested topic as it also isolates individuals whose language has been denied from them either as a form of assimilating to American life by previous generations, or regions in which Spanish is stigmatized as a result of anti-blackness or anti-indigenouness. However, it is impossible to discuss unbelonging in the Latinx identity without talking about race as this discussion of speaking proper Spanish is tied to performing whiteness. Muñoz points out “whiteness is a cultural logic that can be understood as an affective code that positions itself as the law” (Muñoz 45). *Loose Accents* goes against the hegemony of podcasts, which are traditionally white-dominated spaces. In these spaces the people present are mainly white, however even in an NPR podcasts hosted by Latinxs, the voices that we hear through our headphones are usually what is considered “proper”, “professional” voices. On the other hand, *Loose Accents* makes Latinx voices heard, the voices that you hear in the communities, and in doing so it disrupts the traditional space of podcasts by bringing you these voices directly to the ears of many listeners. Throughout the podcast you will

hear code-switching being used, slang, academic language, different accents and they are all used to theorize individual experiences. In this way they challenge the narratives about Latinx's, however the following discussion shows how they also address the narratives around language within Latinidad.

The discussion of language in approximation to whiteness situates itself as a determining factor for belonging within the Latinx community. One of the guests on the podcasts, Lorraine Avila shares her experience when she had to translate in Spanish for parents at a school she was working at in the west coast. She says:

“parents were looking at me like I was fucking nuts... like they couldn't understand nothing I was saying... but you listen to all this fucking trap Latino that's by white traperos who should be trapeando... but you understand them in their accents but you can't understand me in real life” (Loose Accents).

Here Avila refers not only to the harsh feeling of unbelonging within the Latinx community based off of language, but also the same way that language is glorified when used by white Latinx and white Americans.⁵ However, the podcast provides a space for challenging this issue and also healing in conversation as Avila also shares that she “felt othered by Latinos in the west coast...[and that she] would never forget [this moment]” (Loose Accents). While creating a space for being-in-common as the host allow Avila to share the harm that was caused, the podcast also celebrates an alternative Latinx identity. One where Avila's Spanish, which is a significant agent of difference under a homogenizing Latinx identity is not questioned but welcomed. Muñoz writes that:

⁵ Avila also shares that there were several white educators who would speak in Spanish and the parents did not have an issue understanding them. To this Danyeli realizes that when White Americans speak Spanish it's cute, yet when Dominicans or Caribbean's, Avila adds speak Spanish they are considered uneducated.

Identity is indeed a problematic term when applied to Latinas/os — groups who do not cohere along the lines of race, nation, language, or any other conventional demarcation of difference. Latina/o identity itself is thus a problem. It is perhaps within this very status as problem that we can begin to understand the particularities of the system of belonging and recognition that I am pointing to as *Latinidad*. (Muñoz 73).

The hosts and the guests that they invite are well aware that Latinx identity is problematic and that their podcast serves as the platform which allows them to question that identity. It is through unbelonging or as Muñoz points out, “feeling together in difference” (74) within the Latinx identity label that we can make space for an alternative Latinx identity. An identity where healing from individual experiences and healing in community by understanding how we can also be a part of the problem is fundamental. For this reason, the podcast is also a public space for learning, as Del Orbe and Rocha’s reactions to Avila’s experiences are both shocked yet expected, since feeling like a problem under the scope of *Latinidad* is a prevalent issue for those that don’t fit the identity label.

If the Latinx identity label excludes individuals who do not fit under the guise of white America’s definition of Latinx, how does it affect the way we are represented when we are included in mainstream American media? Often when representation is attempted it is discussed as not fulfilling the expectations of the entire Latinx community. However, there are Latinx who accept the umbrella term and see such moments as a win for representation. For instance, on the discussion of Latinx representation at JLO and Shakira’s halftime show at the Super Bowl, Stefanie Fernandez mentions that she hesitates in calling this a win for representation and questions “at what cost to the complexity of our full story is this being told?” (NPR). Fernandez’s comment is in response to the hyper-sexualizing backlash of Latinas that this

performance received. Although for many Latinx's this performance was a huge achievement for the community, we see how large-level representation efforts bring forward stereotypical responses from white American viewers. As a response to the topic of vulgarity expressed by many viewers Maria Elena Cepeda says that "the borders of decency get policed in certain ways for Latinos and for Latinas in particular" (NPR). As we have seen in multiple instances mass media's attempts at representation tends to misinterpret the Latinx community. However, YLC through an alternative Latinx identity shift the conversation of representation to one of ownership and agency. For instance, in the podcast Rodriguez Del Orbe urges her listeners to document their stories and says, "it is important for all of you to be the owner of your story" (Loose Accents). This call to action for counter-stories is one that recognizes that the narratives that have been told about Latinxs have served to invalidate and dismiss our experiences. Rodriguez Del Orbe and Rocha, who are both spoken word artists and podcasts hosts embody ownership of their individuals' stories through their art and through the podcast make meaning out of it. A refusal of representation through mainstream media provides more authority of our stories and how they are shared, and it also allows individuals to make sense of their diverse experiences. It allows us as a community to address the internal tensions that we constantly face while living in the U.S. and being labeled as Latinx. Although these large performances attempt to represent Latinx's, they only slightly bring forth the issues centered around race, sexuality, gender, etc. However, the dialogue cannot be taken further as the intention is to entertain and cater to a white audience. For instance, Cepeda refers to JLO's "let's get loud Latinos" at the end of her performance as a moment of possibility, she says "it's a song reference but also a simultaneous call for Latinx political action" (NPR). We could say that JLO's closing is one of attempting to awaken the giant, considering that the Superbowl is a mainstream American event.

However, this call is filled with tension, as JLO and Shakira have capitalized from Latinx representation which privileges whiteness. Many critiques have been made about the performance and the artists choice to partake in this event. However, even in an NPR podcast, the conversations that are happening and the work that is being done is different from a podcast like *Loose Accents*. The host provide a space that is primarily for themselves and the community, in order address the everyday realities that our communities are facing. In “The New Mestiza Nation”, Anzaldúa reminds us that “We need to create poetry, art, research, and books that cannot be assimilated, but is accessible” (Anzaldúa 210). Incorporating the lived experience of marginalized groups as individuals, is at the forefront of breaking this pattern of being “tokenized or assimilated to death” (211). The hosts have a vital task of deciding whose voices to welcome on to the show however the form of the podcast allows the guests voices to be heard in a way where they are in control of how their story is told. As activist who engage with the communities that they come from the responsibility to have a multitude of voices and stories told becomes a central task. The host recognize that if they wait, someone outside of our communities will attempt to represent us without the tools necessary to do so, monetize off of our stories, and repeat oppressive cycles of silencing and dismissing Latinx voices.

When representation is regulated by the Anglo-dominant majority the full story is never told, because it is presented through a white gaze which is associated with stereotypical perspectives of Latinx identity. On this note, Marissa Lopez has pointed out that “Latinidad rests on a set of social expectations that must be upended if *Latinidad* is to be anything other than an ethnic performance dictated by an Anglo-dominant majority” (Lopez 11). However, YLC express Latinidad through their work as the podcast serves as a prime example of a space in which full stories are represented through the individual experience. Beltran refers to the “giant”

as the desire of Latinx's wanting to be seen, however this desire is no longer vital as YLC are conscious of the power that their stories hold. Apart from mass media's efforts towards Latinx representation misinterpreting the community, it doesn't lessen the struggles that it takes for representation to happen in the first place. Additionally, YLC are not trying to fit any societal expectations or standards imposed by the Anglo-dominant majority. This is what makes Loose Accents so significant, as a platform which expresses the power of Latinx experiences and documents an alternative Latinx identity. An identity that does not submit to a given label and in doing so they create new ways of understanding and theorizing the Latinx experience through agency over our stories.

Additionally, constructing spaces of Latinidad allow for moments of tension, confusion, and exploration in ways that do not enforce unity or a collective consciousness. Beltran also writes that ““Latino politics” is best understood as a form of enactment, a democratic moment in which subjects create new patterns of commonality and contest unequal forms of power” (Beltran 157). The reinterpretation of patterns of commonality is present when we understand the ways in which we are colonized and being aware of how colonization affects us differently. Suzanne Bost and Aparicio remind us that the term is an inevitably politicized one since ““Latino/a ” identity is a product of layers of conquest, colonialism, and cultural mixture” (Bost and Aparicio 2). Therefore, conversations of commonality must go beyond sharing similar cultural traits and differences and diverge into taking into consideration how our diverse experiences allow us to create spaces of Latinidad. Additionally, how do we challenge traditional notions of colonization in our communities? Beltran asks, “How does one “awaken” a political figure whose very political existence is so uncertain?” (Beltran 8). To this I bring to the forefront Suzanne Oboler's research on Latinx identities in which she claims that “in constructing the

Latino self and a Latino social movement in the struggle for social justice in the United States, it is important to acknowledge the many "others" within - and against- which Latinos' identities and sense of self are being forgotten" (Oboler 15). As Oboler points out, recognizing the uncertainties of our identities are central in a Latinx social movement, one that allows us to challenge the homogenization of our community and includes those selves that are being neglected in a search for unity. Juan Flores and George Yudice have written that "Latino aesthetics do not pretend to be separate from everyday practices but rather an integral part of an ethos which seeks to be politicized as a means to validation and self-determination" (Flores and Yudice 61). Therefore, Latinx as a politicized term centers the quotidian experiences as we see in *Loose Accents*, in which the hosts' upbringings and experiences are central to their understanding of identity. Additionally, Oboler reminds us that the "richness of the Latino ethos lies precisely in incorporating the individual life histories and experiences as processes of being and becoming- in recognizing and acknowledging the internalized others in the process of defining the self" (Oboler 15).

The podcast serves not only as a way for the hosts and their guests to define the self but as Rodriguez Del Orbe says in reference to her writing, it is "is a way of documenting joy" (Loose Accents). I add that the podcast allows them a platform to document their identities as a queer Latinx man and Afro-Latinx woman, which are stories that often fall under methodologies that attempt to silence these experiences. Aparicio writes that:

"The term Latinidades... allows us to document, analyze, and theorize the processes by which diverse Latina/os interact, subordinate, and transculturate each other while reaffirming the plural and heterogeneous sites that constitute Latinidad..." (Aparicio 6).

Through the expression of plural Latinidades, the podcast allows them to record and analyze their experiences in a way that challenges dominant ideological claims of a hegemonic Latinx identity. Simultaneously, the podcast sets an example for its listeners to do the same as a form of resistance. In addition, the relationship between the hosts provides an interactive model for how to create these spaces within our communities. The ways in which they contribute to these expressions are through modes of care, for example let's consider this question that Rocha asks, "What is your favorite word to use, what does that word mean to you?" (Loose Accents) and Rodriguez Del Orbe responds:

"My name, it carries culture because Dominicans are known for having these kinds of names, like combinations of names. So, once I say my name if people are familiar with Dominican culture, they're already like you're Dominican? So, it just carries so much weight" (Loose Accents).

Rodriguez Del Orbe's answer is very specific to her nation of origin, the question allows her to refer to a specific cultural custom of naming children after their parents through a combination that forms their name. Through this question Rocha centers her experiential knowledge as a writer, who is bilingual and writes on issues of immigration for Afro-Latinx's. This dynamic allows Del Orbe to draw on her lived experience and produce a form of knowledge through her answer. Beyond representing this custom and having a space to share something about her culture, Rodriguez Del Orbe also connects what this means to her and how it has shaped her being and understanding of her identity. Her name is a marker of recognition for people from the Dominican Republic⁶, and she says it is also the place where her parents are still together.

⁶ On her Instagram account Rodriguez Del Orbe shares a poem about a taxi driver in Providence pronouncing her name correctly the first time he says it, and she writes "knowing me before I make a sound". <https://www.instagram.com/p/B9cfi3EgJoy/>

Therefore, her name strengthens her knowledge of self in relation to her family and culture. Additionally, the discussion empowers her to theorize her experiences as an immigrant in the U.S. and she shares wanting another name as a child, like “Nicole” and comments "Colonization out here.... But now my name is my brand, my name is who I am” (Loose Accents). This reflection is powerful one as it hints to the ways in which the effects of colonization reach every part of our being, down to disliking our own names. However, her response represents a transition of her name that has allowed her to step into her identity through her work as a spoken word artist and writer. Additionally, Marta Caminero Santangelo writes that:

“Latino” is found in the boundaries between one so-called Latino group and another. It is in the connection we forge with each other—in the “space” between us—that we become something more than Chicano/a, Cuban, American, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan American, and so on. We become Latinos” (Caminero Santangelo 2007).

Therefore, Rodriguez Del Orbe shares a specific experience related to her country of origin, it is in this space of the podcast and in conversation with Rocha that Latinidad is expressed. Through conversation the two are able to offer more than an exchange of experiences and contribute to an in between space that challenges a collective consciousness of Latinxs. More importantly, the space in between is created by the podcast, but the dynamic present in the hosts’ relationship is what shows how tend to and care for these spaces. The environment of care is present not only in their relationship, but through the podcast as well, as it also allows guest speakers to share their stories and make meaning and knowledge through the conversations that are held.

The host are further able to intertwine their individual experiences in their conversations by covering topics which range from immigration, moms, queer love, migration, issue in the black community, as well as anti-blackness in the Latinx community, the trans community, and

more. They invite community activists, writers, play directors, and friends to be in conversation with them about these different topics. Whenever they have a guest on the show, they ask them “Who you be?”, which sets a playful and welcoming tone for the episode and creates a space for the guests to introduce themselves and for their voices to be heard in an authentic way. The question also stands out as a way for the guest to identify themselves, rather than the hosts providing them a label. In Season 2 Episode 2 “undocubae y las malcriadas ft. lorraine avila” they invite author of *Malcriada and Other Stories*, Lorraine Avila, who I introduced earlier. The three engage in discussions about hair, storytelling, anti-blackness with the Latinx community, and more.

Avila describes herself as “Dominicana from the Bronx, a *malcriada*⁷, educator, and teacher, and a whole ass author”. In the episode they began to talk about Avila chopping off her hair and they participate in conversation about the power of hair in the Latinx community based off their individual experiences. Avila speaks from the perspective of being an Afro-Latina and having a mother who is a Dominican hairstylist⁸. She says, “It just got to a point where I am not my hair... even with this Afro-Latina movement what makes us black is not our hair” (Loose Accents). Avila discussion represents the multiple layers of oppression within Latinidad based off of hair and having to define her blackness and womanhood through hair. Additionally, Rodriguez Del Orbe adds that she connects with Avila and says:

“For me going natural was very important because I learned how to step into what it meant to be afro descendent through embracing my hair but at some point once I learned

⁷ In English it translates to poorly raised. Avila explains that *malcriadas* is a nickname given to “girls... who speak back, [sit with their legs open], wear whatever they want... girls who are experiencing freedom in a way... that past generations didn’t” (Loose Accents).

⁸ Avilas references Elizabeth Acevedo’s description of “amnesia through the straightening of Dominican hair”, and shares that her mom is the practitioner of that.

what hair meant... it became something I no longer needed to do as a means of resistance..." (Loose Accents).

It is in this space and discussion of hair that *Loose Accents* represents a Latinidad that centers everyday practices. The podcast allows these two Afro-Latinxs to feel empowered in this discussion of how they wear their hair, and use it as a form of resistance, as well as how they are able to shift from that.

They each approach this topic through their own counter-stories of in order to reflect their relationship to it in the broader scope of Latinidad. Avilas and Rodriguez Del Orbe speak from their perspective of being Afro-Latinas from Dominican Republic.⁹ For them at some point hair was associated with empowerment within their identity as Afro-Latinas, it connected them to their blackness, and was a mode of resistance. Yvette Modestin has written about this when she discusses the backlash she received from cutting off her hair and going natural and says, "For me, it represents a sense of freedom and a confidence in one's internal and external beauty that only those who exhibit it with pride can understand. I am at my best when my hair is all out and taking its own form" (Modestin 420). However, both Avilas and Rodriguez Del Orbe discuss transitioning from needing to hold on to their hair to connect to their Blackness. These powerful reflections challenge traditional Latinx ideologies of preserving white standards of beauty through hair, and further attempting to negate blackness from Latinx identity. This is also what makes the podcast represent an alternative Latinx identity because it doesn't just focus on the similarities of their experiences. The stories are similar but if we only focus on this perspective,

⁹ I do not say this to group them together because of their overlapping Identities, here I attempt to the make the point that in regard to the topic of hair they agree that their experiences are similar. Later on, in the episode when discussing migration Avila makes a point of saying that their experiences vary based off their birth differences since Rodriguez Del Orbe was born in Dominican Republic and was formerly undocumented.

we fail to realize that the sharing of the experience challenges anti-Black standards that affect the Afro-Latinx experience.

Mark Sawyer writes that “it is through recognizing the diversity of Latin@s that the possibilities for a truly progressive politics arise. Moreover, it is the unresolved issue and invisibility of Blackness within Latino communities that prevent bridges and encourage antagonism with African Americans” (Sawyer 533). The topics that the podcast covers allows for the presence of Blackness through the centering of Afro-Latinx’s individual experiences. These narratives are often invalidated or centered as a way to avoid the discussions of how race affects the everyday experiences of Latinx’s. However, the podcast, challenges these silenced narratives not only by discussing them but by centering Latinx bodies as sites of knowledge and resistance. Additionally, the podcast also allows for a diversity of Latinidades as we see that Rocha’s experience is also welcomed, Rocha adds that he used to have long curly hair in order to bond with his mom and when he cut it off his mom was upset, “she had grown in to a relationship with me through my hair” (Loose Accents). Although his experience is different considering that he does not have to face the traditional gender roles that woman do of being expected to have long hair or his hair being related to his race. As a man and a non-Black Latinx he does not impose his own experience on to theirs, instead he is able to share his experience in this space without it needing to be the same. They each add to the topic from different positionalities and it is in this space and tone that the episode provides a space for multiple Latinidades. However, most of the conversation is about the relationship of hair and anti-Blackness in the Latinx community, or hair and Afro Latinx identity. Although Rocha adds to the conversation the podcast allows for a space for these very needed conversations that often would not be represented through mass media. Additionally, Sawyer says that “when pan–Latin@ identity accommodates and recognizes the

diversity of the Latin@ experience, it becomes a progressive alternative to identities that emphasize brownness as an alternative to Blackness or country-specific identities” (Sawyer 533). For Rodriguez Del Orbe, Rocha, their guest, and listeners the podcast provides a space where a multiplicity of Latinidades are welcomed and are present, especially the inclusion of Blackness and discussions of race. As Solórzano and Yosso remind us, “Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform” (Solórzano and Yosso 32). *Loose Accents* works to share these counter stories as a form of political activism facilitated by the hosts, which challenges dominant ideology by telling the many unheard narratives of Latinx identity.

Furthermore, the relationship between the hosts also demonstrates a Latinidad that through storytelling, can also address disputes within the community. In Episode 4 “mami & amá lessons” the two discuss their upbringings and bring their moms in to the podcast space through discussion. It is a very beautiful space that continuously, brings to the forefront Latinx voices and stories that would be considered unconventional forms of knowledge. The episode is filled with laughter, lighthearted banter, and lessons learned. However, the conversation and tone of the discussion allows for holding each other accountable. Rodriguez Del Orbe points out that Rocha had recently asked her what she had done for her mom on Latina Mother’s Day and to this she says that “These Mexicans in LA swear, swear, swear that Latinidad is out here under you know, just Mejicano”. Rocha’s comment stemmed from the specific cultural tradition of Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador sharing the same Mother’s Day. She has to remind Rocha that she celebrates Dominican Mother’s Day and American Mother’s Day. The anecdote that she provides displays the homogenous tendencies of Latinidad and the ways they influence our interactions with one another. Even when one attempts to do the work to unlearn these dominant

ideologies, they still play a role as they are layers of colonialism that affect our everyday experiences. Although Rocha's innocent question was directed with care it assumed that one country's celebration was representative of all, which is one of the complications that the Latinx label encompasses. This form of storytelling by Rodriguez Del Orbe is one that centers her marginalization and feelings of unbelonging as an Afro-Latina living in the west coast. Her choice to address this is less about the frustration with her friend, considering that she chooses to share it on the podcast. Later in another episode Rodriguez Del Orbe brings this discussion back up and says "moving to the west coast and us coming with our black ass selves, experiencing what it's like for Afro Latinos to not even be like a thought in academia, in conversation, in workspaces" (Loose Accents). Making this a larger conversation, allows her to begin to address the erasure of Black Latinx's in west coast spaces. Although there are many Latinx's in these spaces, under a homogenizing Latinx identity minority Latinx are subjugated to feeling isolated as a result of anti-blackness and/or anti-indigenesness. For this reason, Loose Accents brings forth these conversations, instead of subverting to the ideologies embedded in these communities it offers a space to challenge and unlearn them.

This moment is an example of Latinidad as one that allows the heterogenous expressions which are made possible through the connection forged between the two. Although Rocha made a mistake Rodriguez Del Orbe holds him accountable in a way that also addresses the larger Mexican community for doing the same. They are both cognizant that this is a greater issue related to the wider concept of Latinx identity in the U.S., one that the space of the podcast allows them to challenge in their friendship and with their audience. Additionally, Lorena García and Mérida Rúa address this topic in their co-authored theorization of Latinidad:

“As it happens, it was by way of these disputes that we embodied *a* latinidad and experienced first hand that claiming latinidad is not just celebratory or about a comfortable space - a middle ground. We were part of very insightful and enlightening exchanges as dear friends and colleagues that oftentimes were intense, heated, very uncomfortable, and at times even painful” (García and Rúa 19) ¹⁰.

Their reflection expresses a Latinidad that goes beyond celebrating similarities and differences, similar to the work that the hosts are doing in their podcasts. At times these discussions can be unpleasant, but they are necessary, and it is these moments where Latinidad is expressed and we can find a middle ground. Their friendship and the space of the podcast goes beyond centering their individual experiences, but it also makes these moments of calling each other out more accessible. Although there was a slight tension, it was necessary in the episode for it to be one of learning and accountability.

Rather than clinging to a Latinidad which claims the same experience of all Latinx people, the hosts discuss their individual experiences and ask each other and their audience if these moments are ones they can relate to. Although the form of a podcast doesn't allow the audience to immediately respond, this presents a way for the community to begin to validate and process their own experiential knowledge. This point is crucial as we can no longer claim Latinidad under the guise that all Latinx people share the same experiences, without considering the role that race, gender, class, sexuality, language, and immigration play in our lives. As Aparicio points out Latinidades “now signals the mutual transculturations and horizontal

¹⁰ This quote is a reflection after a Puerto Rican flag (owned by Rúa) was taken down by Mexican students at the house of Latino students on UIUC's campus at a post-parade celebration of a Mexican independence parade where Latino students also participated in 1992. Rúa questions if the flag made “the house less Mexican” and in response García “argued that the removal of the Puerto Rican flag was done as a sign of respect to Mexican Independence” (García and Rúa 19).

hierarchies that emerge in these spaces” (Aparicio 113). The hosts use storytelling and counter-storytelling to empower and welcome Latinx voices in order to center real life experiences. This podcast manages to challenge dominant ideology by creating an accessible knowledge production space by the community, for the community. Additionally, the experiences they focus on are ones of survival, resistance, refusal, as a form of focusing on being-in-common through unbelonging.

The podcast is not about defining or proving Latinidad, rather it centers how their identities in relation to Latinidad affects their realities. Ultimately, this podcast facilitates a space where Latinidad is documented and theorized by being in conversation with one another. The centering of individual experiences under a politicized identity allows for the expression of a multiplicity of Latinidades, one that transitions Latinx identity from noun to action. The hosts resemble a way of being in community that allows for authenticity as well as displaying how we can hold one another accountable in our ways of interacting. The platform of the podcast allows for presenting a mode of expressing Latinidad outside of the collective consciousness of a homogenizing Latinx identity, by working on against dominant ideology. Additionally, it is important to consider other ways in which Latinx is open to transformations. This is an ongoing conversation which I attempt to contribute to beyond trying to answer how one label can attempt to describe a large diverse group of people, and instead consider the moments where Latinidad is expressed, celebrated, and complicated.

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