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Many Chefs in the National Kitchen: Cookbooks and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Mexico

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What a propitious subject to discover—household expressions of national culture! Festive meals celebrate family occasions, holy days, and civic holidays. Special dishes represent these celebrations, family identity, and the occupational and ethnic groups in society. Meals serve as ephemeral art expressions of popular history and powerful social symbols. Examples abound. The pit cooking of traditional meats and vegetables in the Peruvian highlands, called Pachamanca, *was a ceremony honoring the earth goddess Pachamama.*[1] *Patricia Quintana wrote a cookbook that followed Mexico's civic and religious calendar and offered the family's recipes for each holiday.*[2] Chiles en nogada *became the special food for Mexican Independence Day because the dish contains the three colors of the national flag. Popular history recounts that cooks in Puebla, Mexico, created it to honor a visit by one of the first presidents on Independence Day.*[3] *Other Mexican regions and families have their own Independence Day speciality, such as* tamales de espiga *(corn pollen) in San Pancho, Morelia.*[4] *In Peru, bread represented independence and also, when the loaf combined a variety of flours from corn, sweet potato, and other potato tubers, the unity of its different peoples.*[5] *Many foods, especially sweets, have religious associations, such as the rich Peruvian colonial soup called* sopa teóloga, *the Mexican Lenten tamales known as* tamales de vigilia, *and* turrón de Doña Pepa*—almond sweets associated with the image of Christ of the Miracles, in Lima.*[6] *As Jeffery Pilcher shows, food expresses the popular culture and history of the nation.*

Laura Esquivel's best-selling novel, *Like Water for Chocolate,* uncovered an affinity between two usually distinct genres, the romance and the cookbook. The story relates the forbidden love between Tita, who is bound by custom to remain single and care for her widowed mother, and Pedro, who

marries Tita's older sister to be near his beloved. Their passion is expressed—through the magical realism of Latin American literature—in the dishes she feeds him, the *mole poblano* (turkey with chile sauce) she sensuously grinds on the *metate* (grinding stone), and the quail in rose petal sauce that literally burns down the house. The manuscript cookbook in which Tita records these culinary secrets thus becomes part of the novel, inspiring the historian to ask, if a modern author can write recipes into a narrative, what narratives did women of the past write into their recipes?[7] The kitchen tales of nineteenth-century Mexico went far beyond the domestic world of food and love to imagine national communities, although the communities imagined in the published works of male professional chefs differed sharply from those imagined in the manuscript collections of female household cooks.

Attempts by Mexican patriots to forge a national cuisine reflected the deep historical connections between food and identity. Native Americans considered themselves to be "the people of corn" and even placed themselves in a cosmological food chain by offering human sacrifices to maize gods. Europeans, meanwhile, took communion through the medium of wheat—according to Catholic doctrine, the only grain acceptable for the Holy Eucharist. After the conquest, Spanish priests attempted to teach Native Americans to eat wheat as part of their evangelical message. They succeeded on ceremonial occasions—witness the elaborate breads prepared for the Day of the Dead—but maize remained the everyday staple. Over time, corn tortillas became associated with poor Indians and mestizos, while wheat bread was reserved for elite Spaniards and *criollos*.

Following independence, liberal governments sought to abolish the distinctions between Europeans and Native Americans in order to forge a common Mexican nation. Nevertheless, while *criollos* invoked the ancient splendor of the Aztec empire to justify separation from the Spanish empire, they rejected living Indians as culturally backward and unfit for participation in civic life. Native Americans could gain citizenship in the new nation only by sacrificing their traditional lifestyles and adopting the trappings of European culture. Intellectuals sought to inculcate liberal values in the masses through broadly conceived educational campaigns. With varying degrees of success, they used secular education, religious icons, and patriotic festivals to instill a feeling of common purpose. They invented a national cuisine as well, but divisions of race, class, region, and gender frustrated nineteenth-century attempts to serve *la patria* (the fatherland) at the dinner table.

Many Mexicos, Many Cuisines

Deciding what constituted the authentic national cuisine was of ongoing concern during the nineteenth century. *El cocinero mexicano* (The Mexican Chef), published in 1831, a decade after independence, set the tone for the national

cuisine. The anonymous author adopted a sharply patriotic tone, praising "truly national" spicy dishes and denouncing the delicate European palates unaccustomed to chile peppers.[8] A later edition of the work admitted that foreign dishes appeared in the text, but only after they had been "Mexicanized"—adapted to Mexican tastes.[9] A few years after *The Mexican Chef* appeared, the *Nuevo y sencillo arte de cocina* (New and Simple Art of Cooking) advertised recipes specifically "accommodated to the Mexican palate," which supposedly had no use for "European stimulants."[10] Nevertheless, Narciso Bassols began his two-volume *La cocinera poblana* (The Puebla Cook) with the pessimistic claim that cookbooks contained an abundance of useless foreign recipes.[11] Vicenta Torres de Rubio reiterated this attack on irrelevant cookbooks, observing that Mexicans neither seasoned nor condimented their food according to European practices.[12] A group of women from Guadalajara declared that most cookbook authors copied recipes without concern either for quality or utility.[13]

Authors employed a number of devices to define the national cuisine. Chefs cooked everything from stuffed onions to barbecued meat *a la mexicana,* dedicated dishes to national heroes (Moctezuma's dessert, Donato Guerra's cod), and even decorated "monstrous pastries, like those of the middle ages" with portraits of prominent public figures.[14] They explored the national taste for foods such as "patriotic" frijoles, and an 1886 banquet attended by the minister of government and foreign dignitaries featured *mole poblano,* identified as the "national dish." Writers also celebrated the recognition of their food in foreign countries. In 1898 a newspaper proudly announced that New York's finest restaurants served *mole* and other Mexican dishes.[15]

The audience for this national cuisine was largely confined to the literate middle and upper classes. Over the course of the nineteenth century, about fifteen separate cookbooks were published in Mexico. Multiple editions of these works brought the total number up to nearly forty, with perhaps a few thousand copies printed of each edition, for a total of as many as a hundred thousand cookbooks. Several of these works listed dual publication in Mexico City and abroad, principally Paris, which must have delighted Mexican patriots desiring foreign approval of their national cuisine. About four or five volumes, both new works and reprints of old ones, appeared each decade from 1831 until 1890, and at least eight cookbooks were published in the final decade of the century. Additional recipes printed in domestic manuals, calendars, and newspapers ensured that cooking instructors reached a broad audience, at least among the privileged classes.[16]

The authors of this national cuisine came primarily from the liberal intelligentsia. The anonymous author of *The Mexican Chef* employed many themes of the Enlightenment and denounced Spanish conservatism. His publisher, Mariano Galván Rivera, was a political moderate who produced a series of

famous almanacs as well as women's calendars, travel guides, and textbooks. Although later jailed for supporting the French intervention, Galván had employed liberal ideologue José María Luis Mora in the 1830s to manage his journals. Leading liberal newspaper editors, including Vicente García Torres and Ireneo Paz, also entered the cookbook trade. Vicenta Torres de Rubio, the first woman to publish a cookbook, moved in liberal circles and even included menus from political banquets in her work. Manuel Murguía dedicated a cooking manual to Mexican señoritas in 1856, two years after he printed the first edition of the Mexican national anthem. One of the goals of these writers was to create a sense of national identity through shared cultural values. They observed that Mexicans not only spoke the same language and shared the same history, they also ate the same chiles and frijoles.[17]

While emphasizing national unity, cookbook authors also recognized regional diversity. Common references appeared to the *moles* of Puebla and Oaxaca, the black beans and seafoods of Veracruz, and the grilled meats of Guadalajara and Monterrey. Yet, compared with modern works, nineteenth-century cookbooks included within the national cuisine only a handful of regional traditions, essentially those from areas with heavy Hispanic settlements. The virtual monopoly of *criollo* kitchens becomes apparent in the comparative treatment of *mole*. Puebla's chief rival in producing this dish, the southern state of Oaxaca, is known today as "the land of seven *moles*." But nineteenth-century cookbooks ignored the more indigenous versions of Oaxacan *mole* such as *verde*, a green stew perfumed with the incomparable anise-like fragrance of *hoja santa*. They focused instead on *negro*, a spicy black sauce similar to Puebla's fabled dish. An 1834 volume explained that the *moles* of Puebla and Oaxaca "owe their particular good taste to the types of chiles employed; the first making use of a sweet chile called the *mulato*, and the second from a Oaxacan chile called the *chilohatle*."[18]

By defining even chile peppers in *criollo* terms, the nineteenth-century national cuisine ignored a gastronomic geography dating back to pre-Columbian times. Native culinary traditions centered on civilizations such as the Nahua, Maya, Zapotecs, Mixtecs, and Totonacs—ethnic groups that rarely corresponded to Mexican political boundaries. The Huasteca, for example, split between the states of San Luís Potosí and northern Veracruz, seldom appeared on national maps. This heavily forested region contained only a small Hispanic population of rancheros with little political prominence. Nevertheless, large numbers of native communities thrived in the area and developed an enormously sophisticated cuisine. Modern ethnographers have counted forty-two distinct varieties of tamales, including the fabled meterlong *zacahuil*. Other regional dishes, such as the Pacific Coast hominy stew *pozole*, likewise received little notice because of their indigenous associations.[19]

Published cookbooks had little room for the corn cuisine of the streets. One book, supposedly "accommodated to the Mexican palate," contained not a single recipe for tamales, enchiladas, or quesadillas.[20] Another manual defined tortillas for the benefit of foreign readers, explaining that they appeared on even the most affluent tables in remote provincial cities. The recipes assured Europeans that sophisticated continental cuisine prevailed, at least in Mexico City.[21] And when corn confections did appear, their marginal status was emphasized by their placement in sections designated *almuerzos ligeros* (light brunches).[22] Of course, a lack of written recipes does not prove that elites never ate popular foods. The Indian servants who did the cooking hardly needed instructions for making enchiladas, and virtually all were illiterate anyway. Nevertheless, cookbooks often contained positive censures against the derogation of serving Indian foods. One volume explained that the wealthy had virtually no use for the popular corn drink *atole*.[23] The *Diccionario de cocina* (Dictionary of Cooking), published in 1845, pointedly questioned the morals of any family that ate tamales, the food of the "lower orders."[24]

Even as cooking manuals concentrated on European traditions, clashes between elite and popular conceptions of the national cuisine became obvious, particularly in the streets of Mexico City. Late-eighteenth-century economic growth attracted thousands of rural immigrants, which the city strained to accommodate in hastily built tenement houses. These newcomers brought with them the traditional maize cuisine of the countryside, setting up braziers on any convenient street corner. Curbside *enchiladeras* became ubiquitous, causing officials to complain that virtually every street and plaza in Mexico City had its own resident cook.[25]

Foreign travelers remarked on the enormous variety of foods available from vendors in the capital. Women wandered the streets with baskets of corn confections such as tamales and quesadillas, while men carried improvised ovens with pastries and *barbacoa*. Fiestas provided the primary focus for popular cuisine, as they had since the days of Moctezuma. In the week before Christmas, people exchanged food and drinks in *posadas*, festive reenactments of the holy family's search for shelter in Bethlehem. All Souls' Day or the Day of the Dead was another popular holiday during which adults offered ritual foods to departed relatives while children devoured candy skeletons. The most spectacular celebration of the year came during Holy Week, when great crowds converged on the capital from distant villages and ranches. Throngs of people danced through the streets, guzzling fruit drinks and devouring ice cream, in a movable feast of popular cuisine.[26]

In the early years of the Republic, Mexicans of all classes participated in these festivals, but the process of modernization brought increasing attempts to restrict lower-class foods. Authorities launched ongoing campaigns against the traffic hazard of street vendors. Sanitary regulations also restricted the sale of vegetables and mushrooms by small-time merchants, at times going to the extreme of banning *chiles rellenos* (stuffed chiles), but these proclamations were invariably repealed because of popular outcry.[27] By 1900 Mexican elites

had come to view popular cuisine not only as unfashionable, but also as a positive menace to society. Using language from the newly developed science of nutrition, Francisco Bulnes attributed Indian backwardness to the supposed inadequacy of maize-based diets. Julio Guerrero went further, stating that criminal behavior resulted from the "abominable" foods eaten by the lower classes.[28]

Even sympathetic authors expressed a marked ambivalence about the acceptability of the national cuisine. An 1897 editorial in *El Imparcial* entitled "The influence of *mole*" and signed pseudonymously by Guajolote (Turkey) wavered between nostalgic love and bourgeois scorn. "Baptisms, confirmations, birthdays, weddings, even last rites and funerals, to merit the name, have to be accompanied by the national dish, be it green like hope, yellow like rancor, black like jealousy, or red like homicide, but in abundance, in a broad *cazuela,* thick, pungent, with metallic reflections, speckled with sesame seeds, a magical surface." Guajolote attributed both the genius and the defects of the national character to the influence of chile peppers, then concluded with a warning. "Doctors counsel parsimonious use, even if it be *en nogada,* of this other enemy of the heart, that combined with *pulque* and tortillas, serves as fuel for the untiring machine of the proletarians and even of some who are not."[29]

Reform efforts therefore emphasized public cooking classes as a means of weaning the lower classes from corn and chile peppers. Not coincidentally, police inspectors led the recruiting campaign, an indication of the perceived importance of diet in maintaining social order. The classes, used to attract students to vocational schools, emphasized European models, such as modest French family cooking. Teachers inveighed against the "disgraceful habit" of eating spicy foods and advised their students to give up popular Mexican dishes in favor of English cooking—a drastic measure indeed.[30] Cookbook author Jacinto Anduiza summed up the belief that culinary techniques would contribute to the process of education that would level society, in other words, eradicate popular practices seen as immoral by Europhile elites.[31]

European Fashions, *Criollo* Tastes

Fanny Calderón de la Barca, the Scottish wife of Spain's first minister to independent Mexico, wrote scornfully of the elite's clumsy attempts to imitate European cuisine. She described one of her first meals after arriving in port as "the worst of Spanish, Vera-Cruzified." Parisian chefs employed in the capital's wealthiest homes produced no better results; she thought one dish resembled mining slag. Mexican culinary skills, whether in carving meat, seasoning stews, or dressing tables, invariably fell short of her exacting standards. Yet eventually she stopped drawing comparisons with Europe, accepted Mexican cooking on its own merits, and, on her departure in 1842, wrote that "Veracruz cookery, which two years ago I thought detestable, now appears to

me delicious."[32] Fanny's experience revealed that even the most dedicated followers of European fashion imparted a uniquely Mexican flavor to their cooking. The elite's deep aversion to the lower classes nevertheless kept them from accepting native foods as part of the national cuisine.

Like the upper crust from New York to St. Petersburg, wealthy Mexicans cultivated a taste for French haute cuisine prepared by male chefs. France had begun to assert a culinary hegemony over Europe at the dawn of the eighteenth century, when the Sun King Louis XIV's absolutist policies had shorn nobles of their political power. With few social functions beyond dueling and the salons, bored aristocrats turned for diversion to such pastimes as music, painting, and cooking. This aristocracy of the spoon, which actually included many members of the middle classes, rejected the heavily spiced foods of the Middle Ages and adopted the Enlightenment ideal that cooks should reveal rather than distort the true nature of foods. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, chef Antonin Carême perfected the laborious and expensive techniques of classical French cuisine. Beginning with *fonds,* deeply flavored broths, he performed a complex alchemy by concentrating and reducing, adding and extracting, garnishing and gilding, to return in the end to a simple and unified whole. Although Carême worked for only the wealthiest of aristocrats, other chefs such as Jules Gouffé extended *la grande cuisine* to a bourgeois audience, a process that culminated under Auguste Escoffier in the *fin de siècle* Age of Great Hotels.[33]

French culinary influence in Mexico cannot be dated with precision. Many writers date the arrival of continental cuisine to the French intervention, 1862–1867, but this is too late by at least a decade. Even a century earlier, manuscript cookbooks displayed an affinity for French names but not for the new techniques.[34] The first published works of the early republic demonstrated greater command of this exacting art. Gallic styles seem to have gradually displaced colonial dishes of Iberian descent over the course of the nineteenth century, even as Spain itself declined in political and cultural influence. Indeed, the disastrous war with the United States that terminated Spain's empire in America coincided with the 1898 opening by Escoffier and César Ritz of the Carlton, Europe's most fashionable hotel.[35]

Continental influences came to permeate nineteenth-century Mexican cooking literature. Kitchen manuals and the women's pages of newspapers contained recipes for Parisian soup, hollandaise sauce, eggs in aspic, truffled pheasant, chicken cardinal, *vol-au-vent à la financiere,* and *bifstec à la Chateaubriand.*[36] For women unwilling to spend hours preparing such dishes and unable to employ a chef to do it for them, specialty shops sold gourmet pâté and pastry. Wine merchants imported hams, cheese, olive oil, and salted fish, in addition to barrels of Bordeaux wine and Jerez sherry.[37] Mexicans could also enjoy the pleasures of Parisian dining vicariously through translations of French writings. Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's *Physiology of Taste,*

one of the masterpieces of culinary literature, appeared in its first Mexican edition in 1852, a few decades after its publication in French. In 1893 a Mexican press issued a special edition of the celebrated cookbook by Jules Gouffé, former chef of the Paris Jockey Club.[38]

Aspiring gourmets indulged their appetites for continental cuisine in Mexico City restaurants and social clubs. In the 1850s, the Tívoli of San Cosme began offering fine dining in an idyllic setting. Tuxedo-clad waiters moved smoothly through the tree-lined courtyard with platters of *noix de veau diplomate* and *becassines à la cavaliere.* The magnificent Chapultepec Castle, illuminated in the distance by moonlight, lent a romantic air unsurpassed even by the view of the Notre Dame Cathedral from La Tour d'Argent. In 1870 another Tívoli opened in Tlalpan, catering to Mexico City's wealthy people who fled the urban hustle, particularly during the riotous celebrations of Holy Week.[39] By the end of the century, talented chefs such as Paul Laville and V. Barattes could sell their talents to the highest bidders from a number of exclusive restaurants and social clubs. Mexico's greatest coup in international dining came in 1891, when Don Ignacio de la Torre y Mier persuaded the celebrated Parisian chef Sylvain Daumont to come to Mexico City. The Frenchman caused such a sensation that within a year he left the Mexican millionaire to open his own restaurant.[40]

Banquet menus testify to the cosmopolitan tastes of the country's leaders. An anonymous mid-nineteenth-century painting hanging in the National Museum of History at Chapultepec Castle and portraying a feast for a General León of Oaxaca shows the symmetrical place settings, the multiple dishes, and the innumerable wine bottles of classical continental cuisine. A dinner for five hundred held in the National Theater to celebrate President Porfirio Díaz's birthday in 1891 featured French food, wines, and cognac. Only men were seated for this banquet; their wives had to view the proceedings from the theater's box seats, an indication of their exclusion from full citizenship in this patriarchal nation. Meanwhile, provincial elites paid lavish sums to rent French chefs for important events such as a 1903 Monterrey banquet for Governor Bernardo Reyes. The quest for imported civility reached its pinnacle in 1910 during the centennial celebration of independence in a series of banquets honoring President Díaz, cabinet members, and foreign dignitaries. Not a single Mexican dish appeared at any of the score of dinners dedicated to this patriotic occasion. Sylvain Daumont served most of the food, and G. H. Mumm provided all of the champagne. Even the Mexican colony in New York commemorated the centennial with French food.[41]

Notwithstanding this desire to appear cosmopolitan, Mexicans demanded a uniquely national flavor in their haute cuisine. Foreigners such as Fanny Calderón de la Barca often made scathing comments about their inability to execute properly European culinary techniques. Critical Mexicans likewise recognized that continental dishes underwent a process of creolization. Antonio García Cubas lampooned the pretentious Tívoli restaurant, wondering who had granted diplomatic credentials to a piece of veal and predicting that anyone who ate the horseman's snipe would receive spurs to the stomach. He noted that many dishes parading as French bore little resemblance to Parisian preparations.[42] These differences, while appearing outlandish to contemporaries, provide modern readers with valuable clues to the nature of Mexico's national cuisine.

Chile peppers constituted the greatest shock to foreign palates. Mexican *adobos,* for example, differed from the marinades used to preserve meat in Europe principally because they included chiles. The eighteenth-century French culinary revolution had banished such sharply spiced foods common to medieval and early modern Europe. The Enlightenment ideal of flavors—"exquisite but not strong"—left Mexican cuisine as a self-conscious anachronism.[43] Some obsequious cooking experts conceded this point and joined Europeans in denouncing spicy foods. More nationalistic authors bitterly refuted the European opinion of peppers as poisonous and condemned the continental "war against stimulants, principally chiles."[44]

Another characteristic of Mexican elite cuisine was the profusion of meat. A quick glance at any nineteenth-century cookbook reveals an enormous variety of seasonings and dressings for meat.[45] Nor was this creativity limited to cookbooks; women prepared these diverse recipes on a daily basis. One foreign traveler observed that wealthy families ate the same meats prepared in different styles several times a week.[46] Fanny Calderón de la Barca described plates filled with meat, fish, and fowl served indiscriminately at every meal. She recorded that the wealthy ate meat for virtually every meal and in astonishing quantities, more than in any other country in the world.[47] Visitors from Europe and the United States almost invariably criticized Mexican meat dishes as overcooked. An Englishman, lamenting the lack of juicy roast beef, blamed local butchers for cutting meat in a "slovenly and injudicious manner."[48] In fact, tradesmen carved beef to suit their customers' preference for well-done steaks. Mexicans abhorred the dripping, rare fillets served in Europe and cut their meat into thin strips, pounding and marinating to tenderize them. Such techniques often constituted the "Mexicanization" of European dishes: a recipe for *bifstec à la Chateaubriand* appears to foreigners like fajitas with French fries.[49]

Mexican elite men used cuisine as a symbol of the progressive Western society they hoped to create. But one must beware their public representations of national character made in cooking manuals and stylish restaurants because they may have had little relevance for the majority of the people, particularly for women within the domestic sphere. To understand actual culinary practices, it is necessary to peer into the smoke-filled confines of nineteenth-century kitchens where women were preparing the future of Mexico's national cuisine.

Cookbooks and National Identity

Benedict Anderson has persuasively argued that modern nations were forged not through the development of tribal customs in the distant past, but rather in the eighteenth century as a product of the Enlightenment. The standardization of vernacular languages through the spread of print and literature allowed people from different ethnic groups to imagine "national" communities that had not previously existed. Nineteenth-century Mexican elites certainly used instructional literature to attempt to mold a patriarchal nation based on Western European models. Cooking manuals contributed to this identity by assigning women to a domestic role within the nation and spelling out acceptable cultural (eating) practices. But standards of domestic morality and national identity created by male authors did not necessarily reach a complaisant female audience. Indeed, community cookbooks produced in turn-of-the-century Mexico imagined an alternative vision of the nation and of the female place within it.[50]

Nineteenth-century Mexican standards of domesticity established an inherently unequal relationship, placing a woman under the authority of her husband. She could legitimately leave him only if he beat her *excessively,* and the law defined adultery as a crime for females but not for males. The culinary arts provided a natural medium for inculcating these gender roles because the kitchen was a primary focus of domesticity. Even women with servants spent a large part of each day making sure their family was well fed.[51] Professional cookbook authors explicitly supported the subservient role of women in the domestic world. In the introduction to one family manual, María Antonia Gutiérrez cautioned that a woman must "maintain a pleasant and agreeable home so that her husband would not abandon her."[52] Jacinto Anduiza elaborated this theme in an 1893 cookbook that attributed many of the worst domestic calamities to failures in the kitchen. He warned that men dissatisfied with their wives' cooking would seek their pleasures in taverns and bordellos.[53] Many upper- and middle-class women accepted—at least in public forums such as newspaper letter columns—the image of matrimony as a burden requiring constant work and self-abnegation on their part to ensure their family's happiness and honor. Nevertheless, manuscript works and community cookbooks contained other possible constructions of the domestic sphere.

Even to begin expressing themselves, Mexican women had to break a longstanding male monopoly on the cultural capital of literacy. Jean Franco has shown that during the colonial period, clergymen exercised editorial control over female authors such as the poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, and after independence liberal intellectuals took over the task of instructing women in their duties of citizenship.[54] By the end of the nineteenth century, works by female authors had begun to expand through educational campaigns. One measure of this literacy was the growing popularity of manuscript cookbooks,

which had impressed foreign visitors as early as 1880. Fanny Gooch observed that affluent Mexican ladies took great pride in their handwritten volumes, although she noted that a hired cook often followed her own recipes and ignored her mistress's instructions.[55] Simone Beck, the famous French cooking teacher, recalled that her mother had likewise filled notebooks full of recipes even though a hired cook did the actual work.[56] In the 1890s these manuscripts developed into community cookbooks as women came together to publish their recipes. Indeed, cookbooks may actually have helped spread writing skills by providing women with a medium for expressing themselves, a poetry familiar from their hours in the kitchen.

These nonprofessional books testify first to the sociability of Mexican women, for housewives carried on a brisk market in recipes as well as gossip. María Luísa Soto de Cossío, a rancher's wife in Hidalgo, included in her personal cookbook dishes from her grandmother, Aunt Gabriela, and a neighbor Virginia. She also copied out recipes from the published *Recetas prácticas,* a volume she may have borrowed from a friend.[57] Manuscript cookbooks even served as albums for recording family traditions, with dishes handed down from mothers and grandmothers. The fact that the older women were often illiterate added further to the value of their daughters' books. The exchange of cooking tips also reached beyond the extended family to become the focus for Catholic charities, which were one of the few legitimate female activities outside the home. A group of matrons in Guadalajara prepared a recipe manual to support the local orphanage, and several community cookbooks from Mexico City were dedicated to works such as cathedrals for Saint Rafael and Saint Vincent DePaul.[58]

In 1896, Vicenta Torres extended this community of cooks throughout the Republic in her *Cocina michoacana,* a serialized guide to the cuisine of Michoacán. Printed in the provincial town of Zamora and sold by subscription, it began with local recipes submitted by women within the state. Nevertheless, she soon expanded her audience to reach cooks from all over the country. A woman from Celaya sent her recipe for "Heroic Nopales," from Guadalajara came a green chile lamb stew, a Mexico City matron offered her favorite meat glaze, and a reader in the border town of Nuevo Laredo even sent her "Hens from the Gastronomic Frontier." By printing recipes from throughout Mexico, Torres provided the first genuine forum for a national cuisine. Contributors exchanged recipes with middle-class counterparts they had never met and began to experiment with regional dishes, combining them in new ways that transcended local traditions. Thus, women began to imagine their own national community in the familiar terms of the kitchen rather than as an alien political entity formulated by men and served up to women in didactic literature.[59]

Torres and her collaborators conceived of their work as a community cookbook, first for the state of Michoacán and later for the entire nation, in

which they shared in the common oral culture of the kitchen despite the distances separating them. Confident that readers were familiar with the basic techniques of cooking, they provided correspondingly vague instructions. One woman wrote simply to fry pork chops in "sufficient quantities of pork fat" until well done and to serve with "hot sauce to taste." A contributor to another community cookbook listed among the ingredients for *mole poblano:* "of all spices, a little bit." A recipe for stuffed chiles read, "having roasted and cleaned [chiles], fill with cooked zucchini squash, onion, oregano, etc." It went without saying that cooks would adjust their seasonings to taste, for recipes served merely as written keys to a much fuller language of the kitchen.[60]

Certainly cooks adapted the recipes they found in cookbooks to fit their personal tastes. María Luísa did not simply copy verbatim the dishes presented in the *Recetas prácticas*; she simplified procedures, removed extraneous ingredients, and on one occasion found it necessary to change "stirring frequently" to "stirring continuously," a lesson perhaps learned at the expense of a ruined dinner.[61] Moreover, they read selectively, passing over impractical dishes such as Manuel Murguía's absurd recipe for stuffed *frijoles,* which involved cooking beans—"but not too soft"—slicing them in half, inserting a bit of cheese, dipping them in egg batter, and frying them in oil.[62] Male chefs, for whom cooking provided a degree of status, may have delighted in such outlandish preparations, but housewives tended to view cooking as an everyday chore and therefore stressed practicality.

Women also used cuisine as a means of defining a uniquely religious version of the national identity. Torres and her correspondents, while not afraid to experiment with the techniques of foreign haute cuisine, emphasized national dishes that often held religious significance. Most prominent were the colonial *moles,* "those essentially American dishes," which they considered indispensable for festivals such as the Day of the Dead. Another culinary tradition with patriotic affiliations developed around the Virgin of Guadalupe. Having first appeared to an Indian in 1531, the saint gained a universal appeal in Mexico that was recognized even by such anticlerical liberals as Ignacio M. Altamirano. In 1895, church officials acknowledged the Virgin's power as a national symbol by formally crowning her the patron saint of Mexico. Vicenta Torres paid homage a year later by inserting in her cookbook a recipe for *gorditas* (small corn griddlecakes) from the Villa de Guadalupe Hidalgo, the location of the Virgin's shrine.[63]

The Virgin's incorporation into the national cuisine illustrated not only the religious character of female patriotism but also the peculiar selection process that transformed local dishes into national symbols. Residents of Guadalupe Hidalgo made a living by selling the plump, sweet, silver-dollar-sized corn griddlecakes to visiting pilgrims. But among their own families they celebrated December 12, the Virgin's day, by eating barbecued goat with *salsa borracha* (drunken sauce). Nevertheless, the plaza *gorditas* ultimately gained

recognition as the food of the Virgin, so that by 1926 a newspaper ran a cartoon showing a man refusing to accompany his plump wife (in Spanish, also a *gordita*) on a trip to the Virgin's shrine with the excuse: "Why take a *gordita* to *la villa*?"[64]

As in the case of *gorditas,* this exchange of recipes even began to cross established class and ethnic lines, perhaps because women worried less than men about the social stigma attached to Indian dishes. Unlike the usual practice of segregating enchiladas into the ghetto of "light brunches," the *Recetas prácticas* integrated these foods among other recipes for meats and vegetables. Another cookbook prepared by a charitable women's organization in Mexico City gave more recipes for enchiladas than for any other type of food.[65] Vicenta Torres made a virtue of including recipes of explicitly Indian origin, assuring readers that these "secrets of the indigenous classes" would be appropriate at any party. Along with tamales, she included *gordita* cordials, *pozole* de Quiroga, and *carnero al pastor* (Shepherd's mutton), but out of deference to her elite audience, she carefully set them apart with the label "*indigenista.*"[66]

But care must be taken in interpreting this acceptance of native food as an indication that ties of gender were breaking down lines of class. Even middle-class women, after all, could generally count on a household servant to do the difficult work of grinding corn and chiles. Moreover, these same women shared with elites an admiration for French haute cuisine. Yet they also embraced a genuinely Mexican national cuisine based on colonial *moles* and even pre-Columbian tamales that were rejected by Eurocentric male elites. Being excluded from power themselves, perhaps women simply had less motivation to maintain the distinctiveness of *criollo* culture. After all, they based their image of the nation on the Virgin of Guadalupe, a symbol shared with the Indian masses, rather than on the trappings of Western industrial society idealized by elite men.

A Mestizo Cuisine

Mexican leaders of the nineteenth century hoped to build a modern, patriarchal nation based on Western European models. Cookbooks offered a valuable means of indoctrinating women into this new order by emphasizing European dishes and disparaging Indian foods. In this way, intellectuals hoped to cleanse Mexico of the vestiges of its pre-Columbian past. Corn became a symbol of the disorderly and unsanitary elements of society, such as street people and backward villagers. Women were considered especially vulnerable to the immoral influences of the streets, hence the need to keep them locked away in the kitchen. Reformers focused particularly on lower-class women in an attempt to improve family diets and morality and thereby transform the proletariat into imitations of the bourgeoisie.

The dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and its ideal of imported progress collapsed with the Revolution of 1910. From this social upheaval emerged a new group of leaders who sought to reformulate the sense of national identity and create an ideology with broad appeal to the Indian and mestizo masses. The revolutionaries launched a cultural campaign to legitimize themselves as representatives of the mestizo "cosmic race." They glorified the pre-Columbian past in murals, museums, and movies and decried the deposed dictator as a toady to foreigners. The culinary expression of this new ideology was stated succinctly by a leading nutritionist, Rafael Ramos Espinosa. He formulated the simple equation that people who ate only corn were Indians, those who ate only wheat were Spaniards, while Mexicans were those people fortunate enough to eat both grains.[67]

Mestizo cuisine was not identified as a national standard until the 1940s, but the roots of its recognition lay in the late nineteenth century. Cookbooks written after World War II, which offered Indian foods as a symbol of the Mexican nation, grew out of the community works produced at the turn of the century. The social gatherings of women sharing family recipes developed into organized cooking classes, and successful teachers in turn provided recipes to women's magazines and published cookbooks of their own. Their ties to oral culture nevertheless remained close, as can be seen from the hospitable author who invited readers to her Mexico City home for further instructions.[68] The most prominent teacher, Josefina Velázquez de León, traveled throughout the Republic, holding cooking classes and collecting regional recipes. She published more than 150 cookbooks exalting tamales and enchiladas as culinary manifestations of Mexican nationalism. Her audience came from the rapidly growing middle class, the wives of businessmen and professionals who shared a vision of the mestizo nation. Although stark inequalities remained between rural and urban diets, maize had finally regained its place at the Mexican banquet table.[69]

Laura Esquivel's novel provides an apt metaphor for the transformation of Mexican cuisine and society. Her heroine, Tita, declines a respectable marriage to an American doctor so that she can continue an illicit affair with her Mexican lover. In the same way, Mexicans have begun to give up the slavish imitation of foreign models and show pride in their Indian heritage. Foreign influences certainly persist, with American fast food displacing French haute cuisine as a modern status symbol. Nevertheless, the Indian dishes scorned by nineteenth-century elites have been enshrined as the national cuisine. *Pozole,* formerly a "secret of the indigenous classes," now serves as the symbol of Guadalajara's cooking. And tamales, once the food of the lower orders, have become the heart of the country's haute cuisine. Tita learned "the secrets of love and life as revealed by the kitchen"; modern Mexican women have followed that same path to define their national identity.

Notes

1. Jorge Stanburg Aguirre, *La gran cocina peruana* (Lima: Peru Reporting E.I.R.L., 1995), 225.
2. Patricia Quintana with Carol Haralson, *Mexico's Feasts of Life* (Tulsa: Council Oaks Books, 1989).
3. Guadalupe Rivera and Marie-Pierre Colle, *Frida's Fiestas: Recipes and Reminiscences of Life with Frida Kahlo* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1994), 49.
4. Dianna Kennedy, *My Mexico: A Culinary Odyssey with More Than 300 Recipes* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1998), 10.
5. "Lima Gastronómica," I, in *Lima: Paseos por la ciudad y su historia* (Lima: Banco Sudamericano–Guías Expreso, n.d.), 299.
6. Ibid., 296, 312; Kennedy, *My Mexico,* 254–57.
7. Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate: A Novel in Monthly Installments, with Recipes, Romances, and Home Remedies,* trans. Carol Christensen and Thomas Christensen (New York: Doubleday, 1992).
8. *El cocinero mexicano,* 3 vols. (Mexico City: Imprenta de Galván a cargo de Mariano Arévalo, 1931), preface and 1:77.
9. *Nuevo cocinero mejicano en forma de diccionario* (Paris and Mexico City: Librería de Rosa y Bouret, 1868), x.
10. *Nuevo y sencillo arte de cocina* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Santiago Pérez, 1836), iv. See also *Libro de cocina: Arreglado a los usos y costumbres nacionales* (Mexico City: Imprenta de I. Guerrero, n.d.).
11. Narciso Bassols, *La cocinero poblana y el libro de las familias: Novísimo manual práctico de cocina española, francesa, inglesa, y mexicana,* 2 vols. (Puebla, Mexico: Narciso Bassols, 1877), 1:3.
12. Vicenta Torres de Rubio, *Cocina michoacana* (Zamora, Michoacán, Mexico: Imprenta Moderna, 1896), iii–iv.
13. *Recetas prácticas para la señora de casa sobre cocina, repostería, pasteles, nevería, etc.* (Guadalajara: Imprenta del Orfanatorio del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, 1892), 3.
14. *Nuevo cocinero mejicano,* 62, 158, 264; Bassols, *La cocinera poblana,* 1:37; Torres, *Cocina michoacana,* 28, 36, 224, 409; *El Siglo XIX,* February 2, 1853. Donato Guerra, a hero of the French intervention, may have tasted his namesake cod, but Moctezuma never ate the dessert named in his honor, which was made of candied sugar, ground almonds, and bread rolls.
15. Guillermo Prieto, *Memorias de mis tiempos, 1828 á 1840* (Mexico City: Librería de la Vda. de C. Bouret, 1906), 287; *Nuevo cocinero mejicano,* preface, 940; *Diario del Hogar,* February 9, 1886; *La Patria,* December 2, 1898.
16. For a comprehensive listing of cookbooks published in Mexico since 1821, see the appendix in Jeffrey M. Pilcher, "¡Vivan Tamales! The Creation of a Mexican National Cuisine" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 1993).
17. Miguel Angel Peral, *Diccionario biográfico mexicano* (Mexico City: Editorial PAC, 1944), 292; *Diccionario Porrúa de historia, biografía y geografía de México,* 3d ed., 2 vols. (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1970), 1:833, 2:1434, 2:1593.
18. *El cocinero mejicano refundido y considerable aumentado en esta segunda edición,* 3 vols. (Mexico City: Imprenta de Galván a cargo de Mariano Arevalo, 1834), 1:391.
19. Dolores Avila Hernández, "Región centro norte," in *Atlas cultural de México: Gastronomía,* ed. Dolores Avila Hernández, et al. (Mexico City: Grupo Editorial Planeta, 1988), 67–78. This discussion draws on insights from Claudio Lomnitz-Adler,