

THREE

Many Chefs in the National Kitchen

The Nineteenth Century



El cocinero mexicano (The Mexican Chef), published in 1831, a decade after independence, set the tone for Mexico's national cuisine. Possibly the country's first printed cookbook and certainly the most influential, it passed through a dozen editions and served as a model for cooking manuals throughout the nineteenth century. The anonymous author adopted a sharp nationalist voice in both linguistic and culinary matters. He denounced the Spanish Academy of the Language and insisted on using words of Mexican origins, even as he praised "truly national" spicy dishes and derided the delicate European palates unaccustomed to chile peppers.¹ The publisher, Mariano Galván Rivera, edited out the most chauvinistic phrases from future editions; nevertheless, the insistence on a distinctive national taste continued to flavor the work. The 1868 edition, for example, stated that foreign dishes appeared in the text, but only after they had been "Mexicanized," in other words adapted to Mexican tastes.²

Deciding what constituted the authentic national cuisine remained a source of ongoing concern. 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."³ 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.⁴ Vicenta Torres de Rubio reiterated this attack on irrelevant cookbooks, observing that Mexicans neither season nor condiment their food according to European practices.⁵ A group of women from Gua-

dalajara declared that most cookbook authors copied recipes without concern for either quality or utility.⁶

These assertions revealed more than just the state of Mexican culinary arts. Certainly, they contained an element of self-promotion from publishers trying to increase sales at the expense of competitors. Yet they also reflected deep social divisions that persisted long after independence leaders abolished the colonial system of castes. Native American culture remained a marker of lower-class status, rendering many national dishes inappropriate for cookbooks of the *gente decente* (polite society). The volume claiming to be “accommodated to the Mexican palate,” for instance, contained not a single recipe for tamales, enchiladas, or *quesadillas*.⁷ Moreover, the term *tortilla* adopted its Spanish meaning of omelette unless specifically designated as corn tortillas. One manual even 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.⁸ And 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.”⁹

The striking biases of nineteenth-century culinary literature demonstrated the ambivalent attitude of Mexican elites toward the national culture. Liberal intellectuals sought to forge a sense of nationalism, but they conceived of the nation in European terms. Native Americans could gain citizenship only by sacrificing their traditional lifestyles and adopting the trappings of European civilization. Yet these same elites betrayed a sense of nostalgic yearning for many elements of the popular culture, particularly the foods. After all, the lack of corn-based recipes in cookbooks did not prove that elites never ate these dishes. The Indian servants who did the cooking hardly needed instructions for making enchiladas, and most were illiterate anyway. One must therefore read between the lines of this culinary literature and examine the contexts in which foods were eaten to discern the hesitant development of a national cuisine.

Domestic Culture and Nation Building

Mexican nationalism, like an Aztec god, wore many masks. Creole patriots justified independence from Spain by wrapping themselves in pre-Columbian mantles, invoking the splendors of ancient civilizations and the valor of long-dead warriors. But confrontations with still-living Indians

required a different mask, that of European civilization, which was the foundation on which nineteenth-century leaders hoped to build the Mexican nation. One of the great dilemmas facing these politicians was to gain the allegiance of mestizos and Indians who had been shunned by colonial elites. Intellectuals tried to overcome the divisions of the caste system and forge a common national identity through broadly conceived educational campaigns. Just as colonial missionaries had used religious festivals and icons to indoctrinate Native Americans into the Catholic faith, secular leaders fashioned patriotic celebrations and monuments to incorporate the lower classes into the Mexican nation.¹⁰

Political struggles between liberals, moderates, and conservatives compounded the difficulties facing the newly independent Mexico. Army revolts toppled governments with terrible regularity, as generals such as the flamboyant Antonio López de Santa Anna played out personal ambition at the expense of both tranquillity and the treasury. Internal strife also encouraged foreign invasions, in 1846 by the United States, which cost the country half its territory, and in 1862 by the French, who established a short-lived empire under the Austrian Archduke Maximilian. Mexico finally gained a measure of peace under the strong presidency and later dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911), but the resulting transformation of traditional agriculture and rise of urban industry brought new social upheavals.

To provide an anchor against the public turmoils threatening the nation, Mexican leaders perceived a desperate need for domestic middle-class values. Women therefore had an important although limited role to play as mothers of patriotic children and guardians of family morality. Liberal intellectuals embraced the Enlightenment ideal of educating women both to assure that they carried out these duties and to limit the influence of conservative clergy. Authors defined family values in a whole genre of instructional literature, including calendars and journals.¹¹ Cookbooks composed an important segment of the market for domestic guides because of the centrality of cuisine in nurturing a family. First, these books promoted the bourgeois ideal of balancing the household budget by preparing economical meals. They were also useful in guarding family health, with instructions for purchasing sanitary foods, filtering drinking water, and detecting adulterated milk. And if contamination should somehow slip past the household defenses, they taught women how to serve as family nurse, prudently dispensing remedies such as the ubiquitous *manzanilla* tea.¹²

But efficient management was not intended as a challenge to the basic separation between the house and the street. The ideals of domesticity

inherited from Mediterranean culture sought to keep women and children locked safely behind heavy wooden doors and grated iron windows. Men alone supposedly possessed the physical strength necessary to provide the family with sustenance, which entitled the patriarch to unquestioned authority at home.¹³ Nineteenth-century cookbook authors explicitly supported this subservient female role. 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.”¹⁴ Jacinto Anduiza elaborated this theme in a 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.¹⁵

The choice of appropriate foods for family meals not only helped assure a stable domestic environment, it also served to foment patriotism within the home. Cookbook authors often resorted to quite blatant nationalist language, preparing everything from stuffed onions to barbecued meat *a la mexicana*, and dedicating dishes to national heroes, such as Moctezuma’s dessert, insurgents’ soup, and Donato Guerra’s cod.¹⁶ 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.”¹⁷ Writers also celebrated the recognition of their food in foreign countries. Newspapers announced proudly that New York restaurants served *mole* and other Mexican dishes.¹⁸

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, was a political moderate who produced Mexico’s first almanac as well as countless editions of 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.¹⁹

Over the course of the nineteenth century, about fifteen separate cookbooks were published in Mexico. Multiple editions of these works bring the number up to nearly forty, with perhaps a few thousand copies for each run,

for a total of between fifty and 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 each of the last two decades of the Porfiriato. Additional recipes printed in domestic manuals, calendars, and newspapers assured that cooking instructors reached a broad audience, at least among the middle and upper classes.²⁰

Yet published recipes did not exhaust Mexican culinary literature; many women wrote their own manuscript volumes, particularly as educational opportunities increased toward the end of the nineteenth century. Fanny Gooch observed in the 1880s 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.²¹ Women likewise took ideas from published works, transforming them to fit their personal tastes.²² One housewife copied a number of recipes from a published volume into her kitchen notebook. In the process she simplified techniques, 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.²³ Moreover, women passed 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.²⁴ One cannot simply assume women adopted liberal ideals of a national culture, given the creative way they read these books and the diversity of regional cuisines across the republic.

Many Mexicos, Many Cuisines

The liberal poet and politician Guillermo Prieto had few kind things to say about Antonio López de Santa Anna, but he did have to admit that the caudillo was, “like most *veracruzanos*, fond of a fine table.”²⁵ The inhabitants of this Gulf Coast state, renowned for its fresh seafood, spoke endlessly about local delicacies such as fried *robalo* (snook), dogshark turnovers, and octopus stewed in ink. Other regions inherited their own distinctive culinary traditions from the colonial period. Puebla was known for its *mole* with turkey, while Oaxaca possessed its own special black *mole* sauce. Spatial divisions existed even within the boundaries of Mexico City between the

popular cuisine of the streets and the elite foods consumed within private homes and exclusive restaurants. The enormous diversity of local dishes made it difficult to imagine a single national cuisine, just as devotion to *patrias chicas* (little fatherlands) confounded the search for national unity.

The strong sense of loyalty felt by Mexicans for their place of birth encouraged all sorts of regional rivalries, particularly between provincials and residents of the capital. A cookbook published in Mexico City and Paris asserted that lower-class Indian foods appeared on even the most affluent provincial tables. Vicenta Torres de Rubio refuted this slander in her book of Michoacán cooking by demonstrating the prowess of Morelia women in preparing French delicacies.²⁶ Another example of culinary chauvinism appeared among *jarochos*, who considered the tiny black *frijoles* of Veracruz, with their smooth texture and fragrant oils, to be the finest in the country. When forced to live in the capital, they willingly paid thirty to forty pesos per mule load to import them. *The Mexican Chef*, trying to overcome this regionalism, insisted that the black beans of central Mexico compared favorably to those of Veracruz.²⁷ And as late as 1916, Manuel Gamio asked for an imported beer in Mérida, and received a Dos Equis from Orizaba. When the anthropologist repeated his request, the waiter replied: "That's the only foreign beer we have; if you want a domestic, I'll bring you a Yucatecan brand."²⁸

Nevertheless, many Mexicans also recognized the wealth of the country's diverse regional cooking styles. Nineteenth-century cookbooks included many local specialties, from the seafoods of Veracruz and Campeche, to the *moles* of Puebla and Oaxaca, and the roasted meats of Monterrey and Guadalajara. But by comparison with modern works, these books acknowledged only a handful of regional cuisines, in particular the centers of Spanish settlement. The virtual monopoly of Creole 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*." Yet nineteenth-century cookbooks ignored the more indigenous versions of Oaxacan *mole* such as *verde*, a green stew perfumed with the incomparable aniselike fragrance of *hoja santa*. They focused instead on the black *mole* 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 *chilobatle*".²⁹

By defining even chile peppers in Creole terms, the nineteenth-century national cuisine ignored a gastronomic geography dating back to pre-Columbian times. Native culinary traditions centered around civiliza-

tions such as the Maya, Mexica, Zapotecs, Mixtecs, and Totonacs—ethnic groups that rarely corresponded to Mexican political boundaries. The Huasteca, for example, split between the states of San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, and 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 *zacabuil*, a meter-long monster that required most of a tree of banana leaves for wrapping.³⁰

Other culinary regions received little notice because of their native origins and local character. Culhuacán maintained two distinct gastronomic traditions in an obscure corner of the Valley of Mexico, southeast of the capital. The cuisine of the Chalco lakefront featured vegetables, fish, and ducks, while people living on nearby foothills dined on cactus, pork, and rabbits.³¹ Along the Pacific Coast, the hominy stew *pozole* assumed countless forms among different native ethnic groups. Yet because of its indigenous associations, *pozole* was also ignored by elite cooking manuals.

Spatial divisions based on class and ethnicity existed even within the boundaries of Mexico City. An economic boom of the late eighteenth century attracted large numbers of immigrants from the countryside to the nation's capital. With housing deplorable or nonexistent, common people took their meals in the streets. The pre-Columbian kitchen of *metate* and *comal*, largely unchanged since the conquest, provided cheap and delicious food to help relieve the burdens of urban existence. A woman could set up a brazier on any street corner, and as soon as the coals began glowing, do a brisk business selling enchiladas to pedestrians. Expanding the operation required no more than a few stones to hold a *cazuela* of beans over the charcoal. These curbside kitchens were so pervasive that a government official complained that virtually every street and plaza in Mexico City had its own resident cook.³² The upper classes objected to the spectacle of dirty, half-naked people crowded around pots of bubbling stews and beans. Nevertheless, in many places such as the Street of San Juan and the Plaza of San Pablo, improvised cafés became known for their superb dishes.³³

Popular sector chefs also set up shop in drinking houses known as *pulquerías*. Decried by moral reformers as a social blight, these shops opened early in the morning and quickly filled to capacity, which might be more than five hundred occupants. Customers drank *pulque* from small clay bowls, then smashed the empties on the floor. They amused themselves by gambling, eating pickled chile appetizers, and dancing with waitresses to

rowdy tunes. More substantial food was available, not from the management, but from women who set up small braziers at the back of the houses, filling the unventilated buildings with smoke. Once they started cooking, other aromas permeated the room, attracting numerous customers for foods such as *carnitas*, tasty bits of fried meat served with hot sauce.³⁴ Many *pulquerías* owed their reputations more to the delicious food than to the quality of their drinks, and despite their lower-class associations they often attracted an affluent clientele. Discriminating diners such as Guillermo Prieto and Mariano Otero favored the enchiladas served at the *pulque* houses of "Uncle Juan Aguirre" and "The Granny."³⁵

Fiestas provided another focus for Mexico's 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 in which adults offered ritual foods to departed relatives while children devoured candy skeletons.³⁶ The most spectacular celebration of the year came during Holy Week, when great crowds converged on the capital from distant villages and ranches. From Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday throngs of people danced through the streets, in a movable feast of popular cuisine. Thirsty revelers guzzled *aguas frescas*, refreshing waters flavored with pineapple, melon, tamarindo, and *chia* seeds, dispensed by women from palm-frond and flower-decorated stands. Holy Week also marked the traditional start of Mexico City's ice-cream season, these frozen treats made with ice carried down from the slopes of Popocatépetl.³⁷

In the early years of the republic, Mexicans of all classes participated in these festivals. But the process of modernization brought increasing attempts to remove disorderly people from the streets. By the 1880s, many fashionable residents left the capital to celebrate Holy Week in Tlalpan, where they dined in outlandishly expensive restaurants. Coffee houses also proliferated as an alternative to the undignified *pulquerías*. And street-corner enchilada women lost customers to restaurants such as "The Archbishop," managed by the redoubtable "Don Frijoles" (Mr. Beans). Spatial lines of class therefore became ever more apparent in the nineteenth century.³⁸

Etiquette and Transgression

Mexican cuisine varied not only between regions, but also over time, as different occasions demanded appropriate foods. Rules of etiquette served

as temporal maps guiding interpersonal relations across the often tortuous social terrain of class, gender, and kinship. Appropriate behavior both depended on and determined an individual's status, making it difficult yet essential to situate oneself correctly within any given context. The etiquette of eating also helped to resolve social contradictions by affording members of the *gente decente* spaces in which to consume unfashionable yet desirable popular foods. Nevertheless, transgressing the boundaries between house and street posed grave dangers to polite society.

The memoirs of Guillermo Prieto fondly recalled the meals of his youth, illustrating the rich variety of Mexican meals in the nineteenth century. He had awakened each morning at boarding school anticipating a cup of succulent chocolate in bed. This essential stimulant, made with either milk or water and served with a roll or some candied fruit, composed the *desayuno* (breakfast). Serious eating did not begin until the *almuerzo* (brunch) served about ten in the morning. Still too early for visitors, this family meal proved substantial nevertheless, with grilled meat or chicken, stews, *moles*, or perhaps an omelet. And regardless of the main course, beans served as the regular accompaniment. Wealthy families drank imported red wine and the middle classes consumed native *pulque*.

The principal meal, *comida*, began around one or two in the afternoon, and Mexico City unfailingly observed its ritual. Offices closed early so that men could go home to eat with their families — they might return to work for a few hours after a siesta. The meal followed an invariable format, and each course arrived at the table separately. First came a broth of chicken or beef with limes for squeezing and chiles for garnishing. The next course consisted of a dry soup of pasta or rice, with tomato sauce either tossed over the former or cooked into the latter. Main courses had more variety, a typical choice being *puchero* stew, made with cabbage, turnips, garbanzos, ham, and assorted other ingredients. After *frijoles* and dessert, the family drifted into a siesta that lasted until the late afternoon.

Between four and five, another cup of chocolate stimulated appetites for the *merienda*, a late afternoon snack of rolls and sweets. Often served to visiting members of the extended family and other friends, it would tide them over until the *cena* (supper) was ready about ten at night. This meal, whether taken in the home or at a modest *fonda* (restaurant), might consist of stewed meat with salad or chicken covered in *mole*. Well-to-do Mexicans did not usually retire until quite late, having consumed remarkable quantities of food throughout the day.³⁹

A skeptic might question whether this represented a typical diet, even for the wealthy. Prieto was, after all, a gourmand of unusual dimensions. His

appetite shocked the boarding-school mistress, who exclaimed, "he eats like ten tigers."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, similar meals greeted foreign travelers from the beaches of Veracruz to the deserts of Sonora. Edward Tayloe characterized his first dinner in Mexico as "an incessant volley of dishes." Olive Percival recounted suppers in Mexico City that included twelve meats, eight sweets, and countless wines.⁴¹

These abundant meals not only sustained life, they also helped structure it. Keeping the family well fed occupied a great deal of a woman's time, regardless of whether servants did the actual work. Conscientious housewives went through a daily cycle of budgeting the groceries, planning the meals, overseeing the cooking, gathering the children, controlling the children, and organizing the leftovers.⁴² Meals also regulated the city's life, closing businesses in the afternoon so that men could return home and share the *comida* with their families. Meanwhile, the *cena*, called the *mesa del amor* (table of love) and often taken in open-air *fondas*, formed part of the evening social life along with promenades through the Zócalo, the central plaza.⁴³

The dinner table served as calendar as well as clock, changing over the year to reflect religious rituals and seasonal produce. Catholic dietary laws restricting the consumption of meat on Fridays and throughout Lent required the greatest adjustment. Guillermo Prieto reminisced that preparations for Good Friday dinners during his youth had called for a "genuine culinary congress" whose deliberations produced a lavish menu with several varieties of fish, lentils with pineapple and bananas, *romeritos* (dried shrimp fritters with greens) and *capirotada* (bread pudding). The feast of San Agustín, on August 28, demanded *chiles en nogada*, and for family celebrations such as baptisms and weddings, *mole* was essential.⁴⁴

Social divisions revealed themselves in the foods chosen for such occasions; for the popular sectors important celebrations meant tamales. The villagers of Tepoztlán, Morelos, consumed these native treats on Christmas Eve after "putting the child to bed," ceremoniously placing a figure of the infant Jesus in a manger of hay. On June 24, the Day of San Juan, residents of Chavinda, Michoacán, ate *tamales tontos* (silly tamales) made of uncooked corn with only a little added pork fat. The people of Huejotzingo, Puebla, offered plain white tamales with *mole* to deceased relatives on All Saints Day. And in Acolmán, México, it was traditional to eat Judas tamales on the Saturday of Holy Week during the festivities in which crowds burned papier-maché effigies of the traitor Iscariot.⁴⁵

For the *gente decente*, Christmas Eve supper, the most formal meal of the year, demonstrated the superior social status of European foods. The menu

followed strict conventions in comfortable homes, with virtually nothing of domestic origin. First came the fabled *ensalada de la noche buena*, "the most pompous and magnificent of all salads," according to *The Mexican Chef*. He called it a miniature Plaza del Volador, and the riotous mixture of lettuce, carrots, beets, potatoes, raisins, almonds, peanuts, bananas, *jícamas*, oranges, limes, and pears did resemble the colorful market formerly adjacent to the Mexico City Zócalo.⁴⁶ Next came dried cod, a tradition dating back at least to 1804, when restaurateur Carlo Monti served this dish to his nonpaying customer Francisco Zapari on Christmas Eve. Cooks selected the whitest and fleshiest cuts, soaked them overnight, then cooked them in olive oil with finely chopped tomatoes, onions, garlic, and red bell peppers, as well as olives, capers, and pickled yellow chiles. The dish was always served with wheat bread rolls and wine. Indeed, much of its attraction lay in the conspicuous indication of wealth, for after spending outrageous amounts on the fish, housewives also had to buy imported wines, oils, and condiments.⁴⁷

European food likewise dominated the most important meal of the day, the afternoon *comida*, pushing national dishes to the periphery. *The Mexican Chef* organized popular-sector dishes such as enchiladas and tamales into a chapter of *almuerzos ligeros* (light brunches), to be eaten privately in the morning.⁴⁸ A later edition of the cookbook explicitly distinguished between the situations for elite and common foods. Among family members and intimate friends, it explained, one could safely eat stuffed chiles, *mole poblano*, or even enchiladas and tamales. But for formal brunches, and always at dinner, one should adhere to European customs.⁴⁹ These rules were not limited to stuffy etiquette manuals. Guillermo Prieto, no stranger to lower-class enchilada makers, described *mole* as excellent for intimate family gatherings, but preferred the Spanish *olla podrida* for banquets.⁵⁰

Location as well as time determined the appropriateness of certain foods; Mexico City required more formality than the countryside, where the affluent could relax and enjoy popular cuisine. The *tamalada*, a picnic expressly for eating tamales, was a regular feature of nineteenth-century social life. Families traveled to the suburbs of Tacubaya and San Angel to spend the afternoon in a quiet wood or beautiful garden, dancing, playing ball or croquet, or fighting *guerras de manzanas* (mock apple wars). In addition to tamales, refreshments included *atole de leche*, a sort of milkshake made with ground corn, and *chongos*, French toast with brown-sugar syrup and grated cheese.⁵¹

Travel provided another excuse for wealthy Mexicans to indulge in otherwise forbidden fruits, as it had since the colonial period. In 1695 an

innkeeper, José de Rueda Montezuma, had complained that one María de Alsibar was selling tamales and chocolate from a crude hut on the roadside without a license, thus depriving him of business.⁵² In 1910, an English-woman observed similar foods being sold in train stations on the route from Veracruz to the capital: "To my horror I saw these educated people lapping up dreadful little mixtures offered them on leaves, made with Heaven knows what ingredients."⁵³ The women of Tepoztlán, Morelos, climbed two hours to the nearest railroad station to sell their tamales. Tourists could achieve the ultimate pre-Columbian experience by eating tamales while exploring the newly uncovered pyramids of Teotihuacán.⁵⁴

Thus, at times the elite shared in the culture of the popular classes, but only from a distance, secluded in remote picnic spots or disguised by the anonymity of travel. Another example of this reserve was the *jamaica*, a party in which upper-class girls dressed in peasant costume and went around selling each other candy, fruit, and lemonade. This playful imitation of street life took its name from a popular festival of the colonial period. Nevertheless, the "scandalous, profane" dances that provoked the outrage of eighteenth-century moralists had vanished from these elite affairs. Instead, the festival was trivialized to the level of a child's game, with play money from a "bank" and brightly decorated stands like those in the streets during Holy Week. A few girls dressed as ambulant vendors added further authenticity, and for a special touch, a boy with a burro carrying tropical fruits imitated the *fruteros* from the steamy lowlands.⁵⁵

Mexican elites may have brought these street festivals into their homes to sublimate dangerous elements in society. Rather than allowing them free reign outside, they were kept under careful watch by family authorities. A painting by Agustín Arrieta of one such *jamaica* illustrated the nineteenth-century ideals of domesticity. The scene centered around a pretty young girl selling fruit drinks from a stand decorated with flowers and grasses. While she served a drink to her mother, maids worked at the *metate*, grinding and straining pineapple juice, and mixing it with water carried by another servant. Unlike the rowdy setting of Holy Week, solid walls protected this party from the dangers of the street, and the only scenery lay in a few landscape paintings. Finally, the patriarch stood by in a European top hat as guardian of family morality.

Constant vigilance was necessary because both tamales and the unwashed street people who ate them held a promiscuous allure for Mexico's *gente decente*. Carlos González Peña, in his 1915 novel *La fuga de la quimera* (The Flight of the Chimera), explored the forbidden delights of gastronomic transgressions. The dilemma centered around Sofía, the fashion-

able young wife of Don Miguel Bringas. Her temptation took place in the streets of San Juan del Río, north of Mexico City. The couple's journey by train, the symbol of modern life, sharpened the contrast with the filthy market and the street vendors. Miguel asked his wife if she wanted to taste them, but Sofía declined, fearing that somebody would see her in the undignified act of eating tamales. Miguel then goaded his wife across this line of propriety. She refused to buy the tamales herself, so he plunged into the market and came back with the popular confections wrapped in greasy paper. Sofía continued her protests, but when she finally accepted, her eager manner betrayed the feigned reluctance. A convenient case of dyspepsia prevented Miguel from sharing the forbidden fruit. Instead he watched, a voyeur, as his wife "dispatched, with gluttonous face and lingering bites, the tamales of San Juan del Río. Chewing with satisfaction, her lips glossy with grease, she was filled with secret vanity knowing that her husband had solicited this caprice."⁵⁶

González Peña wrote in the modernist style, which sought to portray the promiscuity of Latin American urban life. His association of the lower classes with dirt and sexuality corresponded to the middle-class morality of his time. Greasy lips, capricious indulgences, the ever-present threat of contamination through gastrointestinal disease, all appeared to the elite as natural elements of the streets. González Peña used Sofía's flirtation with tamales as a prelude to an adulterous affair and a tragic death. Purging Mexican cities of such dangerous forms of corruption, both culinary and sexual, became an important focus of nineteenth-century social reform.

Cooking Classes as Social Reform

Laura Esquivel's best-selling novel *Like Water for Chocolate* dramatized the connection between cuisine and morality in Mexico. The heroine Tita was forbidden by custom to marry because as the youngest daughter she must care for her widowed mother. Worse still, her beloved Pedro, in order to be near Tita, agreed to marry her older sister. Unwilling to trade romance for respectability, Tita carried on an illicit affair through the medium of her cooking. Her dishes expressed her emotions: her sorrow brought people to tears, and her passion literally burned down the house. One of the most provocative scenes in the sensual screen adaptation depicted Tita grinding *mole* on the *metate*, the rhythmic swaying of her body nearly giving Pedro a heart attack. Such sexual electricity shocked Mexican elites as well, but for entirely different reasons. The lustful excesses they attributed to lower-

class women seemed to threaten the nation's morality. Health authorities, meanwhile, began drawing connections between street foods and disease. Over the course of the nineteenth century, these two discourses of health and morality gradually intermingled, conflating legitimate concerns about public hygiene with a desire to instill middle-class values of domesticity among the urban poor. By the Porfirian period, elite fears of popular cuisine in the streets had escalated to the point that cooking classes became a national priority.

Mexicans have long associated the act of grinding corn on the *metate* with female sexuality. Pre-Columbian artists carved fertility symbols in the shape of lavish earth mothers bent over their grinding stones. Native women of the Huasteca still proposition men with suggestive claims that "my water is fresher, my *metate* tastier, and my sleeping mat hotter" than those of other women, and by urging potential lovers to "come taste my *cazuela*."⁵⁷ The kneeling exertions of tortilla makers certainly caught the eyes of nineteenth-century men, who paid particular attention to the blouses "that failed to cover their breasts." *Costumbrista* painters likewise lingered over this provocative subject of poorly clad yet graceful women.⁵⁸

The popular press further aroused elite anxiety by using culinary metaphors in broadsheets attacking its genteel pretensions. José Guadalupe Posada, the woodcut artist best known for his satiric *calavera* skeletons, illustrated many of these works toward the end of the nineteenth century. In one scene he depicted two men sitting in the rain, protected only by the broad sombreros that marked them as commoners. As they watched, a well-dressed young woman crossed the flooded cobblestone street, her skirt pulled up to her knees. "Who could keep Lent?" asked one of the men, "and not trade the most delicious red snapper for those legs of pure *carne maciza* (chopped loin)."⁵⁹ Another broadside, entitled *El Pinche* (literally the scullery, but also an impolite word in Spanish), explicitly threatened bourgeois society. Posada drew the unshaven *pinche* waving a large knife over a string of *chorizones* (big sausages, with predictably rude connotations): a general, a banker, an industrialist, a foreigner, a priest, and an old woman symbolizing alcoholism. But the people feasting on elites remained largely a dream during the Porfirian period, when the reverse was more common. Posada once caricatured the governor of Puebla in the dress of a street-corner cook, grinding up *masa*, both corn dough and the common people, to make enchiladas for President Díaz, dressed as a peon. The *cocinera* also held a bundle of tamales, representing the municipalities of Puebla, waiting to be gobbled down by the dictator.⁶⁰ Cooking, the very

hallmark of domesticity, therefore posed a menace to society when practiced in streets.

Popular cuisine even threatened to subvert the patriarchal order, as women resorted to kitchen secrets to defend themselves against their husbands. This tradition dated back to pre-Columbian and colonial times, when food served as a medium for witchcraft. For instance, José de Ugalde complained to the Mexican Inquisition in 1774 that his wife had bewitched him by putting herbs in his food and drink. She allegedly fed him such concoctions throughout their seventeen-year marriage, but he reported the case only when she used supernatural powers to prevent him from exercising his right to beat her.⁶¹ Another common display of machismo involved the practice of maintaining a mistress, usually in a separate location, but at times actually bringing her into the home. A disgruntled wife could negate her husband's power to define the family in this way by refusing to feed the other woman. And as a last resort, a woman could leave an abusive husband and support herself, however precariously, by cooking on the street.⁶²

Enlightened Mexicans of the nineteenth century may have scoffed at stories of witchcraft or domestic insurrection, but they found other reasons to fear street foods and the women who prepared them. Colonial authorities had long regulated municipal markets, but the first formal institution dedicated to improving public sanitation, the Mexico City Board of Health (Consejo Superior de Salubridad), was founded in 1841. One year later the physicians and chemists of the Board issued their first ruling against unscrupulous vendors who adulterated chocolate with iron filings. When merchants took advantage of a flood of dead trout in June 1856, the scientists called for a ban on the rotting fish as a public health hazard. The Board also lobbied successfully for a regulation requiring poultry vendors to slaughter chickens in the market, to prevent the sale of decaying carcasses.⁶³ Other health hazards lurked in the candies sold to children throughout the country. Mexicans used sugar to crystallize virtually every imaginable fruit, vegetable, nut, and seed, with the ironic exception of chocolate. They particularly delighted in coloring these candies, and therein lay the problem. To obtain brilliant hues of red, blue, and yellow, the vendors added mercury bisulfate, powdered cromoxide, and aniline compounds, all toxic to humans. The Health Board recommended an immediate ban on such substances and provided a list of safe alternative dyes.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, legitimate concerns about sanitation became conflated with a general disdain for the lower classes and their foods. Guillermo Prieto described a short-lived 1833 proclamation by the Federal District's

governor as filled with “tremendous prohibitions against fruits and other foods,” banning even stuffed chile peppers.⁶⁵ In 1854 the Health Board again used the lack of hygienic practices among small-scale vendors as an excuse to outlaw the sale of fruits and vegetables in Mexico City. Public outcry against such outrageous restrictions quickly forced the district governor to reverse the decree.⁶⁶ In 1870 the Board launched a more limited offensive, this time against mushrooms. Allegations of frequent poisonings persuaded the *ayuntamiento* to ban the sale of mushrooms until scientists could prepare a guide identifying toxic species. Calls for such regulations dated back to 1831, when *The Mexican Chef* pointed with approval to Paris, where police vigilance allowed the public to eat mushrooms without fear. The prohibition also received the endorsement of Mexico City newspapers. Yet its implementation revealed the sanitary reformers’ lack of regard for popular custom.⁶⁷

By banning mushrooms completely, the Board provoked widespread opposition from the people of Mexico City. The city council therefore requested a list distinguishing safe and toxic mushrooms, but the scientists could not provide this and asked for a delay on the pretext that mushrooms were out of season. The police commissioner, besieged by disruptions in city markets, demanded immediate action: either list the acceptable spores or repeal the decree. Pressure continued to mount in city markets, and within two weeks the commissioner denounced the ban as completely unworkable, declaring that it was better to run “the remote and improbable risk” of a bad mushroom entering the market than to cut off the trade entirely. But two prominent Board physicians, Gumercindo Mendoza and Manuel Urbina, when called before the city council, scorned the demand for a quick answer. In a lofty discourse citing obscure German experts, they described the complexity of fungi and the difficulty of distinguishing between toxic and safe varieties. They then appealed for a grant to purchase several European monographs and for time to conduct a thorough study of regional specimens.⁶⁸ The scientists, if not so enamored of German texts, had local experts they could have consulted. Mexican folk healers had harvested mushrooms for thousands of years and knew an immense variety of specimens. But the thought of consulting such people, however efficacious, never occurred to the scientists, perhaps because the *curanderos* referred to the plants with Náhuatl rather than Latin names.⁶⁹

Mexican leaders believed the solution to concerns about both public health and popular morality lay in the schooling of women; indeed, some considered a national campaign of domestic education as the only method of civilizing the masses, particularly the Native Americans.⁷⁰ The gov-

ernment of Benito Juárez took a step in this direction in 1871 by founding the Escuela de Artes y Oficios, an industrial school for women. Officials hailed the new school as a “powerful means of moralizing the people, inspiring love of work, and opening wider opportunities to *clases desvalidos* (helpless ones).” The goal was to “lift women from their current poor condition without arriving at the exaggeration of making them equal to men.”⁷¹ Similar institutions dedicated to working-class women opened in towns throughout the republic, often with the assistance of philanthropic donations from local elites.⁷²

Behind the lofty rhetoric of moral improvement lay an attempt to ameliorate social tensions by transforming the working classes into replicas of the bourgeoisie. Historian William French has shown that Porfirian reformers sought to transform proletarian homes into cradles of the capitalist work ethic. Eliminating vice from the domestic sphere would encourage orderly behavior on the factory floor. Laborers who accepted middle-class values of progress through hard work would in turn be less likely to resort to violence. The stakes in this campaign were high for Mexican leaders, who hoped thereby to avoid the social upheavals that had erupted in Europe during the early stages of industrialization.⁷³ Teachers at the Escuela de Artes y Oficios praised their young students as “aristocratic plebeians,” and encouraged them to participate in “spiritual fiestas” such as the *kermesse*, a ritual of respectable culture. Cookbook author Jacinto Anduiza summed up the belief that culinary techniques would contribute to the process of education that would level society.⁷⁴

This social leveling did not seek to achieve genuine equality; instead, the goal was to eradicate practices seen as immoral by elites. Sociologists cited by *El Imparcial*, who “proposed the teaching of culinary arts as the obligatory base of female education,” recognized that income differences would remain. Cooks in wealthy homes had to learn the art of truffling a turkey, while those in poor ones contented themselves with frying modest *frijoles*. Yet all were responsible for maintaining the good health of the family they served.⁷⁵ The founders of the Escuela de Artes y Oficios expressly rejected the concept of a liberal arts education for the masses, predicting that if workers gained a broad knowledge they would become insubordinate. This fear may also have motivated the people who took out newspaper classified ads for a cook “who knows her obligations.”⁷⁶

Efforts to change the attitudes of lower-class women focused heavily on their cooking techniques. The editors of *El Imparcial* proposed the establishment of worker kitchens, following a European model, to replace popular foods.⁷⁷ The Escuela de Artes y Oficios held special cooking classes as a

method of attracting students. Police inspectors led in the recruiting campaign, an indication of its perceived importance to the Porfirian order. Instructors emphasized European styles such as modest French family cooking and inveighed against the “disgraceful habit” of eating spicy foods. They even advised the lower classes to eschew popular Mexican dishes in favor of simple English cooking — a drastic measure indeed.⁷⁸ These campaigns attained the status of official policy in a 1908 education law that held it “indispensable to modify the diet to which [the lower classes] are accustomed.”⁷⁹ In this way the Mexican elite hoped the lower classes would follow them down a path to European civilization.

European Fashions, Mexican Tastes

Fanny Calderón de la Barca, the Scottish wife of Spain’s first minister to 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 likened one dish to 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 “Vera-cruz cookery, which two years ago I thought detestable, now appears to me delicious.”⁸⁰ Fanny’s experience revealed that even the most dedicated followers of European fashion imparted a uniquely Mexican flavor to their cooking.

Like the upper crust from New York to St. Petersburg, wealthy Mexicans cultivated a taste for French haute cuisine. France had begun to assert a gastronomic hegemony over Europe at the dawn of the eighteenth century, when the Sun King Louis XIV’s absolutist policies had emasculated nobles of their political power. With few social functions beyond dueling and the salons, bored patricians turned for diversion to the arts, including music, painting, and cooking. This aristocracy of the spoon inspired a *nouvelle cuisine* based on the Enlightenment ideal that cooks should reveal rather than distort the true nature of foods. Following the rise of the restaurant industry in the decades around 1789, Chef Antonin Carême perfected the laborious and expensive techniques of classical French cuisine. Beginning with *fonds*, deeply flavored broths, he performed a complex alchemy of 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 aristocrats, his successors, such as Jules Gouffé, extended *la grande cuisine* to an international bourgeois audience, a process that culminated under Auguste Escoffier in the *fin de siècle* Age of Great Hotels.⁸¹

It is difficult to periodize French culinary influence in Mexico with precision. Many writers date the arrival of continental cuisine to the Second Empire of Maximilian, but this is too late by at least a decade. Eighteenth-century manuscripts displayed an affinity for French titles, but no mastery of the new techniques. The first published cookbooks of the Early Republic demonstrated much greater command of this difficult art, but Hispanic recipes still dominated the texts. 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 lavish hotel.⁸²

The Mexican Chef, the anonymous author of the first published cookbook, had helped launch this penchant for Parisian cuisine as early as 1831. He began his work, in the tradition of classically trained French cooks, with a discussion of stocks, noting that these served as the foundation for all other preparations. Moreover, he admitted with rare humility that the most famous chefs’ *fonds* were scarcely different from the broths of a common housewife. His allusions to French gastronomic culture included the saying that “man does not live on what he eats but on what he digests” — the same aphorism used by Alexandre Dumas in 1870 to begin his renowned *Dictionary of Cuisine*. The Mexican author likewise gave a recipe for “epigrams” of lamb, a dish invented in Paris early in the nineteenth century.⁸³

French influences came to permeate nineteenth-century Mexican cooking literature. Kitchen manuals contained recipes for the basic sauces *espagnole*, *velouté*, *béchamel*, *tomatée*, and *hollandaise*; stylish appetizers such as quenelle soup and salmon genovese; classical entrees including veal blanquette and quail *en papillote*; and luscious desserts like mocha eclairs and the Gateau Saint Honore.⁸⁴ The women’s pages of newspapers were filled with instructions for Parisian soup, truffled pheasant, duchess potatoes, vol-au-vent *à la financière*, and *bifteck à la Chateaubriand*.⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶

Sophisticated women prided themselves on their ability to reproduce French haute cuisine when the occasion demanded. Vicenta Torres named as one of the most beloved foods of provincial Michoacán the *galatine*, a French dish prepared by boning poultry yet leaving the skin intact, then stuffing it with forcemeat and poaching it in broth. She recalled glowingly that in 1875 this dish had graced a banquet in honor of Governor Rafael Carrillo.⁸⁷ For women unwilling to invest hours in preparing such a dish 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.⁸⁸

Aspiring gourmets also 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 *bécassines à la cavaliere*. 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 and catered to wealthy people fleeing the urban hustle of Mexican City, particularly during the riotous celebrations of Holy Week.⁸⁹ By the end of the century, fine restaurants such as the Maison Dorée, Café Colon, Prendés, and San Angel Inn competed for the services of Paul Laville, V. Barattes, and other French chefs. Excellent kitchens also graced the numerous social clubs of the Spanish, British, American, and German colonies, as well as the capital's elite Jockey Club located in the fabulous House of Tiles.⁹⁰ 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.⁹¹

Banquet menus from these establishments testify to the cosmopolitan tastes of the country's leaders. An anonymous mid-nineteenth-century painting portraying a feast for a General León of Oaxaca reveals 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 a balcony, a significant indication of their exclusion from full citizenship in this patriarchal

nation. Provincial elites paid lavish sums to rent French chefs from Mexico City restaurants for important events such as a 1903 Monterrey banquet for Governor Bernardo Reyes. The quest for imported civility reached its pinnacle in 1910, at the centennial 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.⁹²

Notwithstanding this desire to appear cosmopolitan, Mexicans demanded a uniquely national flavor in their haute cuisine. Foreigners such as Fanny Calderón often made scathing comments about their inability to execute properly European culinary techniques. Critical Mexicans 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.⁹³ These differences, while appearing outlandish to contemporaries, provide modern readers with valuable clues about 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. Patriotic authors bitterly refuted the European opinion of peppers as poisonous, and condemned the continental "war against stimulants, principally chiles."⁹⁴ The love of chiles had become a significant distinction between Mexicans and foreigners and thus formed part of the national identity.

Another characteristic of Mexican cuisine, at least among the elite, was the profusion of meat. A quick glance at any nineteenth-century cookbook reveals an enormous variety of seasonings and dressings for meat.⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ But 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.”⁹⁸ 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 in 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.⁹⁹

National tastes therefore showed through even in the midst of foreign cuisine. The unique flavor that Mexicans imparted to their foods served as one way of forming a distinctive national identity. Yet patriotism ultimately derives as much from the devotion to one’s own community as the distrust of outsiders. And the love of childhood food provides one of the means of acquiring this nationalist affiliation.

Culinary Patriotism

A sense of national identity and patriotic loyalty ultimately derives from participation in the national community. The patriarchal Mexican nation based on Western European models envisioned by most domestic manuals may have held little attraction for women and the popular sectors, who were largely excluded from citizenship. After all, French cuisine never reached beyond a small elite, notwithstanding cooking teachers’ attempts to make it accessible at least to middle-class families. Mexican women began to write their own manuscript and community cookbooks in the late nineteenth century, and in so doing they created their own visions of the Mexican nation. For them, domestic culture offered as valid a means for building communities as did politics. Yet the competition between European and Mexican models instilled a deep sense of ambivalence about the national culture.

The formation of a national community in the kitchen grew out of the basic sociability of Mexican women, for housewives carried on a brisk market in recipes as well as gossip. María Luisa Soto de Cossío, for example, 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.¹⁰⁰ By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the

exchange of cooking tips had reached beyond the extended family to become the focus for Catholic charities, 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.¹⁰¹

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.”¹⁰²

Torres and her collaborators conceived of their work as a community cookbook, first for the state of Michoacán and later embracing the entire nation. Members of this extended community shared 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.¹⁰³

By printing recipes from throughout Mexico, Torres provided the first genuine forum for uniting regional cuisines into a national repertoire. 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. In this way 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 them in didactic literature.

Women 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 even recognized by anticlerical liberals such as Ignacio M. Altamirano. The Porfirian regime acknowledged the Virgin’s power as a national symbol in 1895 by formally crowning her the patron saint of Mexico. Vicenta Torres paid homage a year later by publishing a recipe for *gorditas* (small corn griddle cakes) from Guadalupe Hidalgo, the location of her shrine.¹⁰⁴

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 griddle cakes to visiting pilgrims. 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*? ”¹⁰⁵

This exchange of recipes even began to cross established class and ethnic lines to create a genuinely national cuisine. Unlike the usual practice of segregating enchiladas into a ghetto labeled “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.¹⁰⁶ 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 Porfirian audience, she carefully set them apart with the label “*indigenista*. ”¹⁰⁷

Ambivalence thus remained about the acceptability of the national cuisine. An 1897 editorial entitled “The influence of *mole*,” signed by the anonymous Guajolote (Turkey), likewise 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.”¹⁰⁸

Fanny Calderón de la Barca, always the trenchant observer, wrote simply, “all national dishes [are] unfashionable, but in reality much liked by the natives.”¹⁰⁹ Foreigners and exiles therefore became, by default, the leading advocates of nineteenth-century Mexican cuisine. Manuel Payno wrote his nationalistic novel *Los bandidos de Río Frío* in Europe, just as a century earlier the Jesuit priest Francisco Clavijero had penned a nostalgic account of Aztec foods after his expulsion from New Spain. Payno denounced the etiquette that forbade the consumption of corn tortillas and stuffed chiles because of their plebeian image, obliging fashionable Mexicans to eat English *roastif*. Moreover, the nineteenth-century’s finest collection of *mole* sauces, *La cocinera poblana*, was assembled by a Spanish immigrant, Narciso Bassols.¹¹⁰

The Mexican Chef likewise illustrated the interest in indigenous foods shown by outsiders. Although his devotion to Mexican nationalism was beyond reproach, he betrayed an unmistakable European attitude toward Indians. Not only did he give recipes for tamales, he positively exalted the primitive delicacy of Native American cooking. Steamed tamales, like the barbecued elephant of African Hottentots and the grilled fruits of Tahitian islanders, reflected the “simplicity and lack of artifice” common to all “savage nations.” He lamented that “civilization, in trying to purify good taste, had deprived it in some things.”¹¹¹ In contrast to such liberal authors as José María Luis Mora, who saw the rural masses as vicious brutes, the Mexican Chef viewed them through the Enlightenment lens of the noble savage. His language indicates a certain distance from Mexican society that may have resulted from prolonged exile. Perhaps the anonymous chef resembled another New World patriot, Francisco de Miranda. The Venezuelan freedom fighter had traveled widely in Europe, winning the favors of the Russian Queen Catherine the Great and becoming a general in the French revolutionary army, before returning to fight with Simón Bolívar in the liberation of Spanish America.

This gastronomic Miranda’s vision of the Mexican national cuisine proved far too radical for his publisher, Mariano Galván Rivera. In 1834, when the first edition had sold out, the moderate Galván revised the work drastically. He deleted the nationalistic language, adopted the Castilian

spelling of "Méjico," and wrote a new introduction apologizing for defects in the previous edition.¹¹² Subsequent versions incorporated other changes; by 1841 it had become the *Nuevo cocinero mejicano* and four years later it was reorganized in dictionary form. This 1845 edition wrote tamales completely out of the national cuisine. Corn confections gradually returned to the work over the decades, but a lower-class stigma continued to mark pre-Columbian foods.¹¹³

One last foreign salute to Mexican cuisine came from the Austrian Archduke Maximilian. The French-imposed emperor and his consort Carlotta adopted many aspects of the native culture, including *mole*. They first tasted the national dish in the village of Acultzingo, Veracruz, and although the chiles brought tears to their eyes, they nevertheless incorporated it into their banquet menus.¹¹⁴ But such gestures were not always welcomed by conservatives eager for what they considered to be the civilizing influences of European culture. The *Calendario del cocinero* (Chef's Calendar) reflected the resulting confusion among the wealthy. First published in 1865 in the wake of the archduke's arrival, it celebrated the elite taste for such cosmopolitan dishes as Flemish leg of lamb and kidneys sautéed in champagne. But when national dishes began appearing on the imperial table, the publisher revised the 1866 calendar—inserting three different *moles*, *pipán* (pumpkin-seed stew), and even tamales—in an effort to follow this unexpected fad for Mexican food.¹¹⁵

Nineteenth-century Mexicans clearly recognized their national cuisine in the forms of pre-Columbian tamales and colonial *moles*. Women continued to prepare these foods, both within sheltered domestic spaces and in boisterous street festivals. Yet male leaders proved remarkably unwilling to acknowledge such dishes as legitimate expressions of the national culture, leaving European cuisine as the standard for public banquets. Moreover, after 1900 Mexican elites, who had once dismissed maize as simple Indian fodder, began to attach a sinister new meaning to the Native American grain, considering it to be one of the greatest impediments to national development.



Provincial banquet in Oaxaca, about 1850, with the geometrically placed dishes, numerous wine bottles, and elaborate centerpiece of European haute cuisine.

(Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia)



Mexico City street corner restaurant, about 1900, equipped with *cazuelas*, tortilla baskets, dishes, coffee cups, and a water bucket.

(Archives of the National Library)

MEXICAN WOMEN MAKING TORTILLAS



Florentine Codex: Aztec kitchen with *metate*, *molcajete*, and corn basket on a woven reed mat.
(*Archivo General de la Nación*)



About 1900: The technology of this lower-class kitchen in Mexico City had not changed since the Conquest.

(*Archivo General de la Nación*)



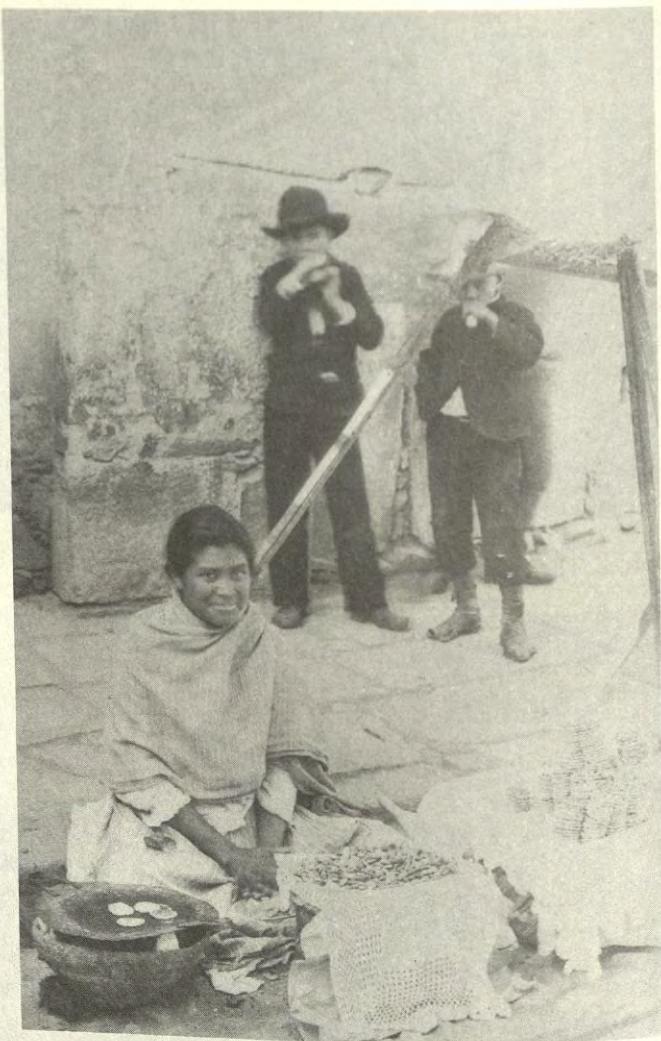
Colonial period: Roadside restaurant serving muleteers in the Tierra Caliente. Sexual innuendos about women grinding corn were common.

(*Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*)

A century later: After the revolution of mechanical corn mills and automatic tortilla machines.
(John F. Schwaller)



STREET FOODS IN MEXICO CITY



Gorditas of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Corn and brown sugar griddlecakes for sale to pilgrims outside the basilica of the national saint.
(Archivo General de la Nación)

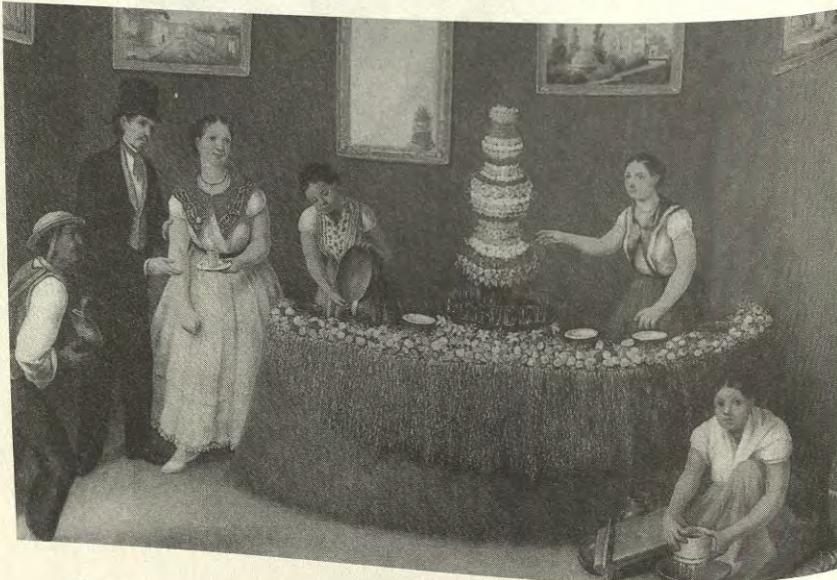


Enchilada maker with a basket of crisp tortillas and two different chile sauces.
(Archivo General de la Nación)



Flirting with cooks in a well-furnished kitchen containing a *fogón* with two burners, several *cazuelas*, a rack of wooden spoons and paddles for fanning the cooking fires, a dish cabinet, and the essential water barrel.

(Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia)



Supplying an *aguas frescas* stand, decorated with flowers like those on street corners, but exposed to nothing more boisterous than landscape paintings.

(Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia)

FOUR

The Tortilla Discourse

Nutrition and Nation Building



Senator Francisco Bulnes delighted in his reputation as the most controversial member of the Porfirian intellectual elite. While others composed eulogies to celebrate the 1906 centennial of Benito Juárez's birth, Bulnes derided the hero of the liberal reform as a dull and incapable president. His attack on the symbol of national unity followed an equally infamous condemnation of the national character. In *El porvenir de las naciones Hispano-Americanas* (The Future of the Hispanic-American Nations), published in 1899 in the wake of the Spanish–American War, Bulnes attributed Mexico's backwardness to a combination of Iberian conservatism and Indian debility. He explained the natives' weakness, using the recently developed science of nutrition, by dividing mankind into three races: the people of corn, wheat, and rice. After some dubious calculations of the nutritional value of staple grains, he concluded that "the race of wheat is the only truly progressive one," and that "maize has been the eternal pacifier of America's indigenous races and the foundation of their refusal to become civilized."¹

Bulnes's provocative book catapulted the tortilla to the center of elite discourse. For the next half-century, the language of nutritional science largely shaped Mexican leaders' understanding of and attempts to control social relations and cultural practices. Porfirian intellectuals considered the Indians, whom they mistakenly conflated with the largely mestizo rural population, to be one of the fundamental barriers to Mexican development because of their apparent refusal to participate in either the market economy or the national community. Unlike Creole intellectuals of the Early Republic, who saw little hope for incorporating the indigenous masses into the national life, the Porfirian elite, composed of mestizos from President