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## Mole and mestizaje: race and national identity in twentieth-century Mexico

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FORUM



## Mole and mestizaje: race and national identity in twentieth-century Mexico

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### ABSTRACT

This paper explores ideas of race, class, and gender in the middle of the twentieth century by looking at mole as a symbol of mestizaje. It analyzes the narratives around mole to reveal the tensions within national identity. In the twentieth century, turkey mole was described as the outcome of indigenous and Spanish culture. Defining which culture played a major role in the creation of mole determined its status and opened a discussion about what aspects of the past would be part of Mexican identity. Descriptions of mole reveal the tension between those who wanted to highlight mole's creole/Spanish origin and those who underscored its indigenous roots. The mythical origin of mole within a colonial convent accounts for the revalorization of the dish, but also shows that European culture was seen as superior. Some cookbook writers, however, highlighted mole's indigenous origins and showed the differences across regions. Cookbook writers, particularly women, were instrumental in reproducing and challenging these discourses. Their work proves that presenting mole as a colonial dish allowed it to be served at respectable tables, but the diversity of recipes they incorporated points to the multiple identities within Mexico that cannot be constrained by traditional understandings of mestizaje.

### KEYWORDS

Mole; mestizaje; race; class; national identity; cookbooks; indigenous peoples; domestic technology; women; recipes

*¡Solemne túmulo del pavo, envuelto en su salsa roja-oscura, y ostentando en la bandeja blanca y azul de fábrica poblana por aquellos brazos redondos, color de cacao, de una inmensa Ceres indígena, sobre un festín silvestre de guerrilleros que lucen sombrero faldón y cinturones de balas!*

Alfonso Reyes

In 1954, the Mexican writer and intellectual Alfonso Reyes described mole de guajolote (turkey mole) as the touchstone of Mexican food. A “solemn tumulus of turkey, enshrouded in its red and dark sauce, and flaunting in its white and blue tray made in Puebla by hefty arms, it has the color of cacao, originating in an immense indigenous Ceres, on top of a rustic feast of warriors who wear their large brim hats and bullet belts” (Reyes 2000, 111). His words present mole as a symbol of national identity and *mestizaje*, understood as the mix of indigenous and Spanish culture but where the European/Western aspect clearly dominates. Reyes enshrines the colonial culture by making reference to Puebla as the cradle of mole while the indigenous past seems to contribute only with ingredients native to these lands (turkey, cacao, tomato,



chilies). Reyes makes reference to the Mexican Revolution as the cornerstone of the nation, while the bravery of the ordinary men who fought in it allows all Mexicans to enjoy this dish.

Descriptions of mole reflect the complexities and fluidity of mestizaje. For some authors, it meant embracing the colonial past and highlighting the civilizing power of Western culture, for others it meant embracing indigenous culture or heritage. This paper explores ideas of race and class in the middle of the twentieth century by looking at mole as a symbol of mestizaje. I argue that descriptions and recipes of mole reveal the tension between those who wanted to highlight mole's creole/Spanish origin and those who underscored its indigenous roots. This tension shows different racial and class views of the nation; in other words, who the Mexicans were and how they wanted to be seen. For some, mole was a simple peasant meal, while for others it was a dish created to honor the colonial elite. The status of mole depended on the value given to either the indigenous or Spanish culture/past. Women have a central role in this narrative as most cookbook authors in the twentieth century were women. Furthermore, women were the main cooks at home and the bearers of tradition whose daily work at the kitchen questioned and constructed national identity.

The process of mestizaje that took place in the twentieth century implied that indigenous people or food could be part of the nation and thus become mestizos once they had embraced European culture and adopted middle-class manners and morals. Therefore, after the Mexican Revolution (1910–1921), mole went from being an indigenous or peasant meal to a sophisticated dish worthy of the most elegant banquets. It went from a simple chili sauce to complex creation of baroque cuisine. In this process, national identity and its racial and class assumptions were challenged and reinforced. The way in which mole was described, prepared and served reveal different understandings of mestizaje and the influence of *indigenismo*. According to Deborah Poole, mestizaje was created by white elites of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to “construct a unified national identity by eradicating, denying, or devaluing the cultures and histories of the various indigenous, African, Asian, and Middle Eastern groups who have historically made up the Mexican population” (2011, 182; Sue 2013). The mestizo had “a racial and cultural ascription of being civilized, modern, Western, progressive, evolved and superior” (Castellanos Guerrero, Gómez Izquierdo, and Pineda 2009, 233). Indigenismo, which presented the pre-Columbian past as a glorious era while seeking to acculturate indigenous peoples, reinforced the ideology of mestizaje. Mexico was constructed as nation formed by indigenous and Spaniards, but in this mix Western culture had to dominate.

The origins of these racial discourses could be traced back to creole nationalism, which arose in the colonial era after a group of creoles (born in the Americas but with Spanish ancestry) developed a sense of pride in their culture and background. These creoles identified the Aztec empire as their classical past. Creoles sought to distance themselves from Spaniards and identified with the land and culture in which they grew up (Brading 1985). Creole nationalism influenced intellectuals after Mexico's independence in 1820. However, the importance of indigenous culture and its place in the history of the nation was questioned particularly during the Profiriato. Porfirio Díaz rose to power in 1876 under an antireelectionist banner, but he remained in power until the Mexican Revolution erupted in 1910. His government was heavily influenced by positivist ideas claiming that scientific knowledge was the solution to all human problems. Order and progress was the motto of the Profiriato; everybody had to be

in their right place to move forward. In terms of race, Porfirian intellectuals and politicians followed the path of thinkers such as Herbert Spencer (1864), who inspired by Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution presented human history as the outcome of the survival of the fittest. In Spencer's mind, Caucasians were clearly superior as they were able to conquer the world and develop a material civilization unlike any other. Moreover, the Anglo-Saxons represented the pinnacle of that evolution (Stepan 1991; Arendt 1944, 65).

Spencer's theory had a long-lasting impression in Francisco Bulnes (1899), a Porfirian senator who claimed that indigenous people were an inferior race destined to disappear. The Spaniards tried to civilize them, but their efforts were in vain. Furthermore, indigenous poverty was caused by their own nature as a lazy, evil, and intellectually inferior race. Bulnes argued that maize was at the base of indigenous peoples' "backwardness," and that progress would follow from the substitution of maize with wheat (Pilcher 1998, chap. IV). Discussions about race and evolution gave rise to eugenics, a field created by Sir Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin, to improve human beings by studying the hereditary transmission of phenotypes and family history (Suárez y López Guazo 2005). Eugenicists divided the population into distinct and unequal races asserting differences and creating boundaries. The main point of discussion was if those differences were fixed and natural (biological) or if characteristics could be modified and, if so, how to do it.

While, in the Porfiriato, the biological perspective dominated, after the revolution most eugenicists considered that social improvement was possible, and it was achieved through education and sanitation rather than genetic inheritance and race strictly. Thus, "backward" populations were able to uplift themselves through learning the "right way of living." This approach goes along Lamarckian notions, which proposed the inheritance of acquired characters. In other words, that external influences can alter an individual life. In opposition, Mendelian conceptions of genetics dominant in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany highlighted that successful individuals and groups were genetically and innately well endowed, and thus the poor and unsuccessful were viewed as products of poor heredity. For them, ancestry rather than social life determined different groups, and their success or failure (Stepan 1991, 27; Stern 2003).

Mexican intellectuals went from a Mendelian understanding when talking about the Indian problem, to a Lamarckian perspective in discussing the social question. The poor were poor not because they were lazy or inferior, but as a result of living in unhygienic conditions and ignorance, aspects that could be modified (Stepan 1991, 37). Andrés Molina Enríquez, who wrote *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (*The Great National Problems*) in 1909, presented the history of Mexico as the rise of the mestizo. Land ownership was a key factor to transform Mexico from a subsistence economy to capitalism, and improve the living conditions and the diet of the Mexicans (Pilcher 1998, 87; Lomnitz-Adler 2011, 209). José Vasconcelos, minister of education between 1921 and 1924, solidified the mestizaje narrative through his book *The Cosmic Race* (1925), but more importantly by incorporating this discourse into education. During his time in office, he created the Cultural Missions, an education program aimed at decreasing the illiteracy rate of 80 percent. On top of teaching how to read and write, these missions had the goal of instilling Western values and culture among the peasantry and indigenous peoples. Vasconcelos's program went from teaching

Spanish to reading Greek classics as well as inculcating middle-class moral values in daily practices. Rafael Ramírez, the director of rural education under Vasconcelos, demanded “that children not only learn the Spanish language, but also acquire our customs and lifestyles, which are unquestionably superior to theirs. They must know that Indians call us the *gente de razón* (people of reason) not only because we speak Spanish, but because we dress and eat differently” (as quoted in Pilcher 1998, 91). Ramírez reveals that Porfirian understandings of race were not completely gone in the postrevolutionary era; for him, Indians had hope as long as they assimilated, and thus left their culture behind.

The rhetoric of mestizaje and indigenismo went hand in hand. Indigenismo brought to the forefront indigenous peoples by creating awareness of their situation but also highlighting the importance of their heritage in terms of national identity. Indigenismo, like mestizaje, sought to assimilate indigenous peoples into Western culture. Indigenistas valued the glorious past of the Aztecs and Mayas while ignoring the contributions of contemporary indigenous peoples (Korsbaek and Sámano Rentería 2007; Mijangos Diaz and López Torres 2011). Indigenismo was expressed in literature, music and art. Vasconcelos invited Diego Rivera to paint the walls of public buildings to use them as a way to bring Mexico’s history to the illiterate masses. Nevertheless Rivera, as well as other muralists, portrayed in a more negative light the colonial era and the exploitation resulting from capitalism. His work instils pride in indigenous culture and its food. Amid the rise of mestizaje, mole became a dish that brought together both cultures, but in mole the indigenous influence was already transformed by the Spanish tradition. It represented the potential of mestizaje and thus became a dish suitable to represent the nation.

### **Mole: from a regional dish to a national symbol**

In the nineteenth century, mole was mainly identified as an indigenous dish, and so it had a low status and was not seen as the symbol of the nation. According to the most influential cookbook of the nineteenth century, *El nuevo cocinero mexicano* (*The New Mexican Cook*), first published in 1831, mole also known as *clemole* or *chimole* “comes from the Mexican (nahua) word *chilmulli*, which means made with dry chilies, in particular *ancho* or *pasilla*.” This book includes more than forty recipes of mole, clemole, and *pipián*. The main ingredients are dry chilies, tomato and/or tomatillo, seeds (sesame and pumpkin), and nuts (almonds and peanuts). Those dishes in which nuts dominate are called pipianes (from the word “pepita,” which means “seed” in Spanish). *The New Mexican Cook* does not provide additional information in regard to when or how clemoles or moles were served, but it emphasized its indigenous origin and regional variations. This shows that mole was seen as a dish defined by the use of chilies, nuts, and seeds, but the recipes also included regional ingredients and techniques that speak about different cultures throughout central Mexico.

This diversity could be found in other nineteenth-century cookbooks like *La cocinera poblana* (*The Puebla Cook*), published in 1872, which was a compilation of recipes by Spanish immigrant Narciso Bassols (Pilcher 2003, 203). Although *The Puebla Cook* included sixty-six recipes of mole, including pipian, clemole, and *manchamanteles* (tablecloth-stainer), it gave particular importance to its local version: mole poblano.

In the second part of the book, dedicated to Mexican cuisine, Bassols included fifteen varieties of Puebla mole, starting with the traditional Puebla version served with turkey to one served with *pancita* (beef stomach and tripe). In a couple of mole recipes, Bassols acknowledged the name of the cook who shared the recipe with him. He mentioned Ms. Petronila or *nana* (nanny) Chepa as some of his informants. Referring to them by their first name and using the word nanny shows that these women were domestic servants. (Bassols 1887, 297). He also included recipes of more indigenous varieties of mole like green mole, yellow mole, and clemoles.

These nineteenth-century cookbooks describe mole as a sauce or light broth prepared with chilies, tomatoes, nuts, and seeds. Recipes were circumscribed to the central part of Mexico and varied in their ingredients depending on the region as well as in their complexity according to the occasion. Nevertheless Puebla mole gained prevalence in part due to its elaborate process and its number of ingredients, which included: mulato, pasilla, and ancho chilies; several spices like cinnamon, cloves, aniseed, pepper as well as sesame seeds, almonds, and tomato. Indeed most moles, clemoles, and pipianes had fewer ingredients than the Puebla version. Other moles, particularly those coming from Oaxaca and with a stronger indigenous influence, were less common to find in cookbooks. Incorporating mole in cookbooks devoted to middle- and upper-class families accounts for its presence in wealthy kitchens, but at elite tables mole was usually reserved for domestic occasions (Pilcher 2012, 104).

The status of mole began to change after the revolution, but in the early twentieth century mole was still seen as a low-status dish. Alejandro Pardo stated in his cookbook (1917) that mole was a common dish among peasants. After 1920, more cookbooks were written by women like María Aguilar de Carbia, best known as Marichú, Ana María Hernández, and Josefina Velázquez de León, and the number of mole recipes increased (Juárez López 2013). However, it was a discussion among male writers and intellectuals that transformed the narrative about mole and enthroned its Puebla version as a symbol of mestizaje and therefore the nation. In 1926, Carlos de Gante, a lawyer and writer, published an article in *Excelsior* newspaper popularizing the story of mole poblano as the creation of conventional cuisine. The following year, historian Artemio del Valle Arizpe, chronicler of Mexico City, did the same in *El Universal* newspaper. They claimed that mole was first prepared in the seventeenth century at the convent of Santa Rosa of Lima in Puebla de los Ángeles.

This convent was dedicated to Santa Rosa, a creole woman who became the first person born in the Americas to be canonized in 1671, which points to the importance of creole and colonial culture. According to de Gante, mole was prepared for a banquet in honor of bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, and in Arizpe's version it was presented to the viceroy Antonio de la Cerdá y Aragón. Another legend claims that a friar named Pascual accidentally spilled the spice tray into a pot, creating what we know as mole. In all these instances, mole was portrayed as a colonial invention, originating in a Puebla convent; in the version of Fray Pascual, mole was even a product of an accident. Gante and Arizpe argued that the word mole came from the Spanish word *moler*, to grind (Barros and Buenrostro, September 7, 2003; Juárez López 2013, 107–111; Pilcher 1998, 25–27). Although mole, particularly in its Puebla version, has a strong Spanish influence that could be traced back to medieval Spanish cooking with its Muslim influence, it has also deep pre-Columbian roots (Pilcher 2012, 33). However,

this narrative presented mole as the outcome of creole colonial cuisine revealing a disparagement of indigenous culture and lower-class eating practices.

In 1939, historian and writer Rafael Heliodoro Valle argued that mole was not the product of an accident and highlighted the fictional aspect of de Gante's and Arizpe's stories. Valle argued that mole clearly had indigenous roots and developed throughout the centuries. Valle's view on a dish that was gaining visibility as a symbol of mestizaje was to emphasize its indigenous roots. Mole, for Valle, was not created by accident or by an inspired or experienced colonial nun. Its flavor, color, and texture represented centuries of experimentation and tradition in the hands of indigenous women. Valle's interpretation was accurate, but it also shows the influence of indigenismo among intellectuals and educators for whom Mexico's indigenous past was a source of pride and identity.

We find a similar position in the cookbook written by teacher and activist Ana María Hernández. In 1938, she opened a section on mole, arguing against Spanish chef and cookbook writer Alejandro Pardo, who characterized mole as a dish common among peasants, to what Hernandez responded: "mole is served at the tables of the most elegant ladies in Mexico as well as in the homes of our humble peasants and workers. There is no single Mexican woman who does not pride herself in knowing how to prepare it" (Hernández 1938, 74). The disagreement between Arizpe and Valle or Pardo and Hernández shows how different sectors of the population defined Mexican identity. For Arizpe and Gante, mole represented colonial culture and elite culinary practices, whereas for Valle and Hernández, mole was an indigenous dish that had been adopted by households across class. Hernández portrayed mole as a national dish that brings together both rich and poor, families of European descent, and those of indigenous backgrounds, thus representing a view of mestizaje in which indigenous culture came to the foreground. Moreover, having the ability to prepare a good mole was a source of pride and respect for women across class and race. Women according to Hernández were the bearers of culinary tradition, responsible for reproducing culture and feeding their family. Therefore, women had a key role not only in raising healthy and productive citizen-workers, but also in crafting national identity in their kitchens and through cookbooks (Aguilar Rodríguez 2007, 2008, 2016; Juárez López 2013).

Tracing the origin of mole back to pre-Columbian or the colonial era modified the status of the dish and revealed what aspects of the past would be part of national identity. Scholars like Virginia Rodríguez Rivera and Agustín Aragón presented mole as a mestizo dish and a clear symbol of Mexican identity (Pérez Montfort 2005, 84; Pilcher 1998, 130). Rodríguez Rivera defined mestizo dishes as including "chili, maize, beans or any vegetable of indigenous origin" (1965, 42). Her ethnographic study included twenty-five recipes of mole, some dating back to 1860 and coming from the states of Tlaxcala, Puebla, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Guerrero, Zacatecas, Guadalajara and Mexico City. She incorporated four different recipes of turkey or Puebla mole, one of them coming from 1890 (Rodríguez Rivera 1965, 43–55). Later on, Aragón claimed that mole de guajolote, despite coming from Puebla, has become a national dish (Valle 1989, 429).

Hernández, Rodríguez, and Aragón presented mole as a symbol of national unity and portrayed it as a common dish throughout the country. However, in several states of northern and southern Mexico, mole was not known. For example, even in the early 2000s, Juan Pablo Huerta Rivera shows that people from the northern state of Baja California did not cook or eat mole (2012). Yet at the same time, Enrique, a history

professor from central Mexico interviewed by Huerta, stated that he could not understand how somebody could be Mexican without ever eating mole (2012, 48). This reveals that mole was not a widespread dish, as it was not known in northern Mexico. Cookbooks also show that most mole recipes come from central Mexico. The research of Huerta confirms that mole is seen as the quintessential Mexican dish, the symbol of national identity, a meal that all Mexicans should eat, even if that is not part of their local or family tradition.

Defining mole as the national dish and the symbol of mestizaje clearly leaves out other groups that contributed to the creation of Mexican culture, in particular nomadic indigenous groups and Afro-Mexicans, but also Chinese, Lebanese, Jewish, and non-European groups that arrived to Mexico in the early twentieth century (Yankelevich 2012; Cuevas and Polo 2015). Portraying Puebla mole as the symbol of Mexican identity reinforced the idea that Mexico is a nation formed by Spaniards and indigenous peoples, but this understanding makes reference to a particular group of indigenous peoples: those who were part of pre-Columbian civilizations. In doing so, contemporary indigenous peoples and rebel groups like the Apache in the north and the Mayas in the south were marginalized.

Mestizos were not only the descendants of Spaniards and Indians, but also those who had assimilated, who learned Spanish, who wore shoes and Westernized clothing, who sat at a table, ate with fork and knife, and who prepared and cooked mole. The narratives about mole in the first half of the twentieth century reveal the rise of mestizaje, but also the fluctuation or nuances in what mestizaje meant for different groups of people across class. For some, mole was a dish with indigenous ingredients but cooked for the first time in a colonial convent and thus the outcome of creole/ Spanish culinary culture. For others, mole was a dish crafted throughout centuries by indigenous hands. In both cases, mole was seen as present in every table across class and thus a mythical cornerstone of what Vasconcelos called the cosmic race.

### **The cosmic race sat at the table**

In the middle of the twentieth century, mole recipes became more prevalent in cookbooks. Mole, particularly in its Puebla version, continued to be the most common recipe, but moles from other regions were also included. Cookbooks portrayed mole as a dish that all Mexicans ate, albeit in their regional versions. This section explores the work of two cookbook authors: Ana María Hernández and Josefina Velázquez de León. Their books had different audiences: Hernández wrote for the peasant and working class, while Velázquez de León addressed middle- and upper-class women. Their work identified mole as one of the most representative Mexican dishes and highlighted that each family had its own recipe. However, they also stressed that women from all social classes need to know how to prepare it, which points to its value as a symbol of national identity.

In the late 1930s, Ana María Hernández published a series of home economics and cookery books addressed to peasant and working-class women. Hernández was a teacher and activist. She was born in 1902 in the city of Queretaro, located 136 miles away from Mexico City. In 1922, she became a cooking and baking instructor in Queretaro, and in 1924 she started teaching in Aguascalientes and then became director of the Federal Industrial School. Hernández published her first book, *La última palabra sobre cocina, repostería y confitería* in 1927 (*The Last Word about Cooking, Baking and*

*Candy Making*). In 1938, she participated in the first National Congress of Working and Peasant Woman in Mexico City. Soon after, she published *Cómo mejorar la alimentación del obrero y campesino: libro social y familiar para la mujer obrera y campesina mexicana* (*How to Improve the Diet of the Worker and Peasant: Social and Family Book for the Mexican Working and Peasant Woman*). This cookbook is considered the pillar of the working-class and peasant diet, as most cookbooks before were aimed at middle- and upper-class families. Hernández presented popular food as healthy and delicious, but she highlighted that women had to prepare it properly and under sanitary conditions. Her goal was to teach women how to feed their families on a low budget (Juárez López 2013, 17–28). Hernández tried to improve the life of women by teaching them cottage industries, so they could contribute to the household economy by working from home (*Industrias del Hogar* 1937). She also fought for immediate goals such as mechanized maize mills and land reform, as well as long-term political aims such as women's suffrage and the defeat of fascism (Olcott 2005, 111–112).

In *How to Improve the Diet of the Worker and Peasant* (1938), Hernández included three recipes of mole, the Puebla mole or red mole, and two traditional Oaxaca recipes, green and black mole. Her recipe of Puebla mole included sixteen ingredients, whereas green mole had seven ingredients, and black mole had thirteen ingredients. Puebla mole called for more ingredients and reproduced medieval Spanish cooking in its use of spices. Nevertheless, Hernández did incorporate less Europeanized moles as well as mole de olla (a watery stew prepared with beef, pork or jerk, chilies, vegetables, and *xoconostle*, an acidic cactus fruit). Hernández's book portrayed mole as a common dish that was present in low-income households but that affluent families also ate, and something that women should know how to prepare. By highlighting that mole was served in upper-class households, Hernández was telling her peasant and working-class audience that through food, and particularly mole, Mexicans from different social classes came together. Peasant and working-class women had to know that the food they ate was respectable, and thus worthy of any table. Hernández also made sure that if women did not know how to prepare mole, they could do so after reading her cookbook, and thus join the national table.

Josefina Velázquez de León was the most prolific cookbook writer of the twentieth century. She published more than 150 cookbooks between 1930 and 1968 (Pilcher 2003, 200). Her cookbooks portrayed mole as a dish of indigenous roots that was transformed by Spanish cooking. Velázquez de León was born in Aguascalientes in 1899 into a well-off family who traced back its history to the Spanish conquistador Diego Velázquez. When Josefina was 30 years old, she married a man 20 years her senior who, in less than a year, passed away. Becoming a widow gave her freedom to pursue her interests, so in the late 1930s she published her first cookbook, and later on she opened a culinary institute. Velázquez de León taught at her school but also offered cooking lessons via mail and sold molds, utensils, and sugar figurines to decorate cakes. In the 1940s, she published a magazine entitled *El arte de cocinar* (*The Art of Cooking*) and continued to collaborate in several women's magazines like *Mignon* and *Negro y Blanco* (*Black and White*). In the 1950s, Velázquez de León had a radio program, and later on she had a daily TV program (Juárez López 2013, 59–71). Her early work focused on international cuisine, but in 1946 she published *Platillos regionales de la república mexicana* (*Regional Dishes of the Mexican Republic*). In this cookbook, as well as her subsequent

publications, she included mole recipes coming from several states in central Mexico. Velázquez de León toured cities and towns where she would teach classes and encourage women to share family recipes, which she incorporated into *Regional Dishes* and other cookbooks.

The work of Velázquez de León is particularly interesting not only because of the amount of recipes that she compiled and created, but also because of the importance she gave to mole. Mole in Velázquez de León's work is far more prevalent than in any previous cookbooks. In her cookbook of regional dishes, she included moles from Michoacan, Morelos, Puebla, and Oaxaca. She incorporated various of the famous seven moles from Oaxaca like the green mole prepared with green chilies, *hoja santa* (an herb that has an aniseed-like fragrance) and *epazote* (an herb with a pungent and lemony flavor). Yellow mole with its unique ingredient: *chilcotle* (chili coptic means yellow chili) or *cuicateco* chili (native of Cuicatlán, Oaxaca) as well as *chayote* (mirliton) and green beans. She also included a recipe of *chichilo*, which had cacao shells as one of its ingredients (Velázquez de León 1946, 262–265).

Incorporating local and indigenous ingredients as well as several recipes of mole revealed a richer and complex view on Mexican cuisine and identity. These dishes had been cooked for centuries in rural areas, particularly in Oaxaca, but now they were incorporated into the repertoire of Mexican cuisine. Finding local ingredients like the cuicateco chili was certainly not easy and having certain recipes in cookbooks does not account for the consumption of these dishes beyond their places of origin. But cookbooks, as Arjun Appadurai and Jeffrey Pilcher have argued following Benedict Anderson's argument on nationalism and the printed media, played a key role in nation-state formation, as people from other parts of the country were able to learn and adopt recipes they had never encountered before (Pilcher 1998; Appadurai 1997; Anderson 1991). Cookbooks, like *Regional Dishes*, generated a sense of unity across Mexicans, particularly within middle-class households that could acquire them. Now women from the northern state of Chihuahua could prepare their version of Oaxaca mole and learn about culinary traditions at the other end of the country.

In 1947, Velázquez de León issued a bilingual book (in Spanish and English) dedicated to the American audience. In *Mexican Cook Book: Devoted to American Homes*, Josefina provided several regional recipes, including mole. She described ingredients and techniques and included a narrative that is not present in most of her cookbooks. At that time, authors would write short prologues in which they frequently highlighted that learning how to cook would keep their family happy and healthy. Women were responsible for feeding their family, so, depending on their economic status, they had to either be able to cook by themselves or provide instructions to their domestic servants. Marichú, another well-known author, stated that her cookbook was there to help women when their domestic servants or cooks left, so they could prepare a decent meal (Aguilar de Carbia, 1939). Velázquez de León had the same objective when she dedicated her *Mexican Cook Book* to all the American housewives so that their husbands could "satisfy their palate and stomach with a succulent and well-seasoned dish." She justified the publication of this book by stating that Americans liked French food and "like the Mexican derives from that one, by our ancestors who inherited, the good taste for food" (1947, 5).



Velázquez de León presented Mexican cuisine as the descendant of European cookery, particularly French. It could be argued that she made that point to appeal to the American audience, who thought that European culture was superior to Mexican or indigenous practices. Nevertheless, the idea that European culture represented the civilizing factor correlated with understandings of mestizaje. Velázquez de León did not use this word, but she defined Mexican food as “extremely diverse as it responds to the customs, the climates and spirit of the race” (1947, 11). Mexican customs and their spirit, according to this narrative, resulted from a mix of indigenous and European culture, but this latter dominated and became the civilizing factor. The European aspect of Mexican cuisine works as a bridge to connect with her audience in the United States.

After pointing to Mexico’s diversity she introduced turkey mole, that is Puebla mole. Velázquez de León claimed that mole was “known since the days of the Aztec Empire before the conquest by Cortés since the name *mollí* or *mullí* means sauce or gravy” (1947, 12). She then mentioned other dishes of indigenous origin like enchiladas, quesadillas, adobos, tacos and stuffed chilies. She pointed out that Spanish conquest brought a new cooking tradition that was preserved in convents by nuns who prepared food delicacies and pastries. The next important chapter in the culinary history of Mexico according to Velázquez de León was the French attempt to establish the empire of Maximilian of Hapsburg in 1863. At this moment in time, French, Austrian, and Italian cuisine merged with Mexican cookery, and that is “the reason for which the Mexican cookery is so rich in its variety and exquisiteness of dishes (...) which contributes to the integration of our nationality as much as our music and our paintings” (Velázquez de León 1947, 13). From the perspective of Velázquez de León, the European influence dominated Mexico. Spanish, French, and Italian contributions are what made Mexican food so special, and thus the colonial and European influence was what Velázquez de León wanted to highlight in her definition of Mexican cuisine, culture, and identity. Indigenous culinary tradition was not seen as valuable enough to appeal to American housewives.

Although mole is presented as a dish known by the Aztecs, it was transformed and improved by colonial culture. In doing so, Velázquez de León emphasized Western culture over indigenous traditions and practices. In the chapters dedicated to poultry and meats, she included six recipes of mole (turkey mole, green mole, mole de olla, *adobo*, *pipián*, and *revoltijo*). In the last part of her *Mexican Cook Book*, she incorporated a chapter on regional recipes. The state of Oaxaca was represented by black mole, which she defined as a very old recipe made by nuns (1947, 308). Mole was also the first dish in the section on Puebla. Velázquez de León reproduced the mythical story of Puebla mole as being the creation of “some Nuns of Puebla to offer as a present to one of the Viceroy at the epoch of the conquest” (1947, 312). Therefore, mole was not a peasant food any longer as Pardo had argued almost thirty years ago; now, it was a dish prepared for the elite, a meal created to satisfy the most sophisticated palates. Thus, mole was de-Indianized and portrayed as an elegant meal worthy of upper-middle-class and upper-class households in Mexico and beyond. Mole was associated with European culture, an aspect that the discourse of mestizaje highlighted too.

Another element that allows us to see how mole acquired a higher status is by looking at the names of women who shared their recipes with Velázquez de León, particularly in her regional cookbook collection that began to appear in the 1950s.

These recipes were gathered when Josefina toured Mexico teaching cooking lessons. In her cookbook dedicated to Oaxaca first published in 1964, she included recipes by Ms. Concepción Portillo de Carballido, Miss Concepción Boborques, Ms. Rosa Jarquín de Laviega, Ms. Alicia Iturribarriá de Harp, and Miss Aurora Canseco Luna (Velázquez de León, 1991). The last names of some of these women point to their high social status, and thus the presence of mole in affluent tables. For instance, María Concepción Portillo de Carballido taught cooking lessons at an elementary school in her native Oaxaca. She came from a prosperous family. Her grandparents were Concepción Abascal and Andrés Portillo, a historian in Porfirian Mexico (Sánchez Islas 2010). Meanwhile, Alicia Iturribarriá de Harp, the mother of the singer Susana Harp, came from a prominent family of intellectuals and politicians. She married the son of a wealthy Lebanese family of merchants, Antonio Harp Abud.

The work of Velázquez de León shows that mole became more prevalent among well-off families, revealing an understanding of mestizaje in which European culture prevailed. Presenting mole as a colonial dish allowed it to be seen as respectable dish worthy of upper-class tables. Mole stopped being an indigenous or peasant meal and became a sophisticated recipe created by creole women who dedicated their life to serve God and satisfy the exigent palates of viceroys and bishops. Despite using indigenous ingredients and techniques, mole was seen to be heavily influenced by European cookery. Both Hernández and Velázquez de León portrayed mole as a sophisticated and respectable dish. Therefore, by eating mole, working and peasant families would become respectable. The lower sectors of the population could feel proud about serving mole at their celebrations. Meanwhile, middle- and upper-class families embraced mole as a colonial dish and could feel like the viceroys and bishops who enjoyed this delicacy. In any case, all sectors of the population could seat at the national table and savor mestizaje in every mouthful of mole.

### Cooking technology and mestizaje

Preparing mole from scratch was a source of pride among women, as both Hernández and Velázquez de León have shown. Women were proud of their family recipe and the amount of effort they had to put in to prepare mole. However, grinding by hand made cooking mole a time-consuming endeavor. With the arrival of domestic technology, particularly the blender, this process was simplified. Before, women would grind all the ingredients in the *metate* (three-legged grinding stone). Grinding in a metate required a lot of effort and was a skill that took several years to acquire, whereas pushing the button of a blender could be done by anybody with no effort. Still, women had to know which ingredients to mix and its quantities. With the help of the blender, however, women could prepare mole more frequently and add more elaborate recipes, such as Puebla or Oaxaca mole, to their daily repertoire.

In 1950, Velázquez de León published *Como cocinar en los aparatos modernos* (*How to Cook Using Modern Appliances*). In the first volume, she claimed that this book was a response to questions from several women about how to use kitchen appliances. She described the use of pressure cookers, ovens, mixers, and blenders.

She informed readers about how to use a Birtman blender, the brand that sponsored her book along with other companies, and gave recipes such as turkey mole and tamales (254). Velázquez de León argued that elaborate dishes could be prepared easily and in less time with the help of technology. She claimed that Birtman blenders made it possible to cook complex dishes such as those prepared by nuns in colonial convents in less time.

Figure one shows how Velázquez de León integrated traditional cooking and modern technology by juxtaposing the image of a professional cook dressed in an apron and chef's cap while using a blender with the image of a nun wearing her habit, veil, and crucifix while preparing food by hand. Velázquez insisted that electrical and modern appliances allowed housewives to preserve traditional cooking and cook it as part of everyday meals. Instead of spending hours bent over the metate, women could grind ingredients in minutes and without any effort. Another image, which precedes the turkey mole recipe, depicts a grandmother who is looking from above, and thus we assume she has passed away. She is giving her granddaughter the written recipe of mole, but the modern chef, instead of grinding ingredients by hand in a metate, uses a blender, which facilitates the preparation of such a labor-intensive dish. Velázquez's discourse stressed that modern women have to use electrical appliances to keep cooking what their ancestors cooked, that is, colonial women of European descent. Moreover, presenting the metate as backward, and electrical appliances as modern, reinforced the superiority of Western culture ingrained in the discourse of mestizaje.

*How to Cook Using Modern Appliances* portrayed indigenous culture in a negative way by identifying peasant women with lack of sanitation. Figure two shows an old, fat, and untidy woman using her hands to mix ingredients while a well-groomed cook pushes a button without touching the mixture. This image reveals social and

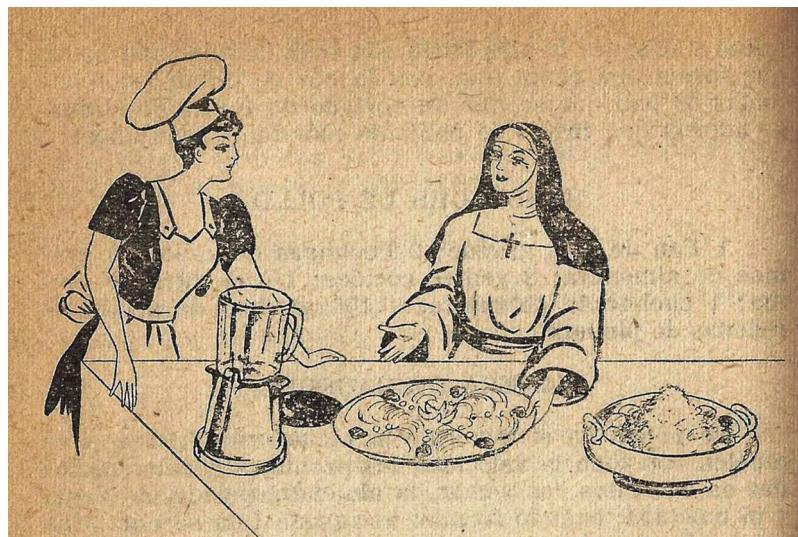
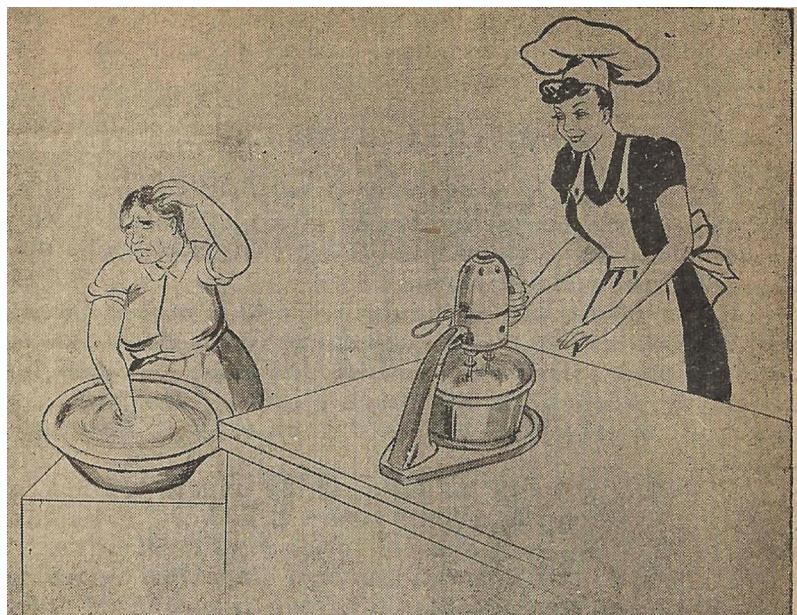


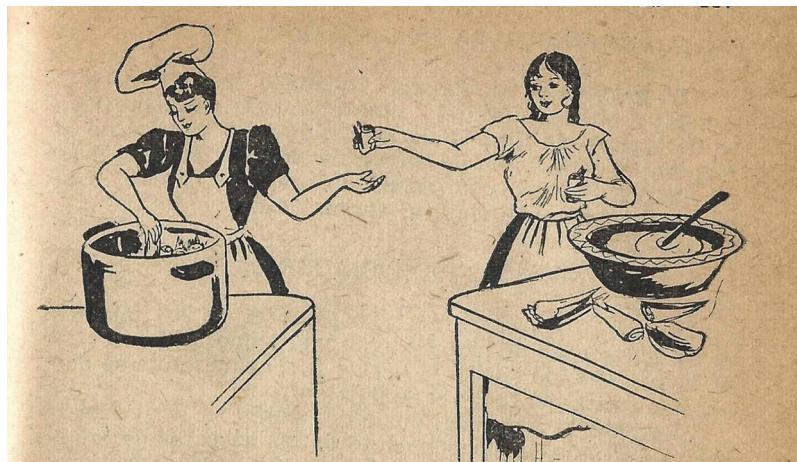
Figure 1. Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Mexico City. (Velázquez de León, 1950).



**Figure 2.** Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Mexico City. (Velázquez de León, 1950).

racial differences. The old woman looks shorter and is dressed with simple clothing, similar to what peasant women of indigenous backgrounds would wear. Meanwhile the woman dressed as a professional cook towers over her and even looks happier and well rested. She is not touching the dough while the peasant woman mixes the dough with one hand while she scratches her head with the other hand. This lack of sanitation was identified with the poor and uneducated, who usually had indigenous backgrounds. In contrast, those who used modern appliances had knowledge about hygiene and money to buy this new technology. Using electrical appliances, according to this cookbook, facilitated cooking, and thus women were less tired, could do more sophisticated meals and more housework, and better welcome their husbands or guests. They were preserving a culinary tradition, but simplifying and modernizing the cooking process (Aguilar Rodríguez, 2013).

In these images, we can find a different reading of mestizaje, one that embraces the domestic technology coming from the United States. The use of modern appliances came to symbolize progress, moving away from communal preparation of mole or tamales reserved for special occasions to preparing these time-consuming meals by an individual woman in a shorter period of time. Through the acquisition of domestic technology and knowledge about how to use it, Mexican women were going to be like their peers in the Western world. Mestizaje continued to be an acculturation, but in the 1950s and 1960s it moved away from Europe to the United States. Women were in charge of this acculturation within the home. Mixed-race Mexican women would become modern and hence whiten themselves and their families by embracing modern technology. Affording domestic technology became a symbol of middle-class status, allowing families to become respectable and distance themselves from their peasant or indigenous background.



**Figure 3.** Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Mexico City. (Velázquez de León, 1950).

Velázquez's books promoted the preservation of what she defined as traditional Mexican cooking, including mole. However, the industry tried to introduce new dishes that were perceived as modern because they were produced by new domestic appliances. These foodstuffs and the technology to prepare them represented U. S. culture, and in most instances the companies that produced them were also owned by Americans. Publicity revealed how companies tried to juxtapose images of the old and new to highlight that modern technology and the dishes prepared with it were superior. An H. Steele company advertisement included an image of a traditional brazier and a big earthenware pot similar to that used to prepare mole (*Enciclopedia del Hogar* 1945). The chicken burned because the cook lost track of time as a result of not having a clock, which is what the advertisement is trying to sell. In contrast, a well-groomed woman carried a roasted chicken clearly not cooked in a clay pot, but in an oven and that had to be carved at the table. The Westclox advertisement portrayed traditional cooking methods, cooking with charcoal using earthenware pots, and dishes like mole as backward. It associated modernity and progress with the cultural practices of the middle and upper classes who could afford an oven, eat meat frequently, and preferred to roast it rather than serving it with mole:

Moreover, this advertisement depicts a light-skinned woman, thus associating her with Europe or the United States and not with indigenous Mexico. Making this racial and ethnic statement identified her with the middle and upper classes. Although dark-skinned women could not change the color of their skin, they could buy a gas stove, a clock, and the ingredients to roast a chicken. They could whiten themselves and join the middle class through consumption and their eating patterns. For cookbook authors like Josefina Velázquez de León, Mexicans had to preserve their traditions, their roots in pre-Columbian times, and colonial culture, and continued cooking mole with the help of blenders. Meanwhile, the food-processing industry saw an opportunity in the mass production of elaborate foodstuffs, such as mole.

In 1955, mole Doña María was released by a company based in San Luis Potosí. Doña María was founded by a woman of French ancestry, María Pons Nicoux de Degetau, who, in the early 1950s, began commercializing her home-cooked mole. After her success, she and her



**Figure 4.** Courtesy of Hemeroteca Nacional, Mexico City (*Enciclopedia del Hogar, 1945*).

"We live in 1945! Do not burn a great delicacy! Your Westclox wakes you up on time and will let you know when you have to remove a pot from the fire while you do other activities."

husband established a food-processing plant to mass-produce mole. In the 1970s, Doña María was sold to Grupo Herdez, owned by Doña María's nephew Enrique Hernandez Pons (Nuestra Historia 2017). Nowadays, Doña María is the most popular brand of mole in Mexico and has a strong presence in the United States. Mole became an industrial commodity, going from a home-made, labor-intensive meal to a dish that anybody could eat at any time by just opening a jar. Although the quality and flavor of industrialized mole have nothing to do with its home-made counterparts, Doña María mole might have helped to truly popularize mole, particularly beyond central Mexico, and thus strengthened its symbolic value as a national dish.

## Conclusion

The study of mole and the values associated with it reveal how understandings of national identity changed in the twentieth century. Coming from an unstable

nineteenth century where United States and French interventions challenged Mexico's sovereignty to a postrevolutionary nation-state formation process, cookbook authors set themselves to define what constituted Mexican food and thus national identity. The cookbooks of Ana María Hernández and Josefina Velázquez de León reproduced the discourse of mestizaje and show the fluidity of this idea. Mestizaje, following Molina Enríquez and Vasconcelos, brought hope to a nation populated by mixed-race people. Nonwhites could elevate themselves through education and access to land. Education always meant acculturation, stopping being Indian, and embracing Western culture. The rhetoric of mestizaje honored and recognized pre-Columbian civilizations while disparaging contemporary indigenous peoples because they were seen as lazy, filthy, and ignorant, while their cultural practices had no value.

The legend of mole's origin crafted in the 1920s recognized its Aztec roots, but the dish was seen as the outcome of colonial kitchens highlighting the civilizing power of Spanish culture. Mole went from a dish identified with peasants to a respectable meal that even upper-class households would serve. This new interpretation allowed women like Ana María Hernández to revalorize rural and peasant eating practices and present mole as a respectable dish. Josefina Velázquez de León reinforced the idea that mole was suitable for any occasion, as it was one of the most representative Mexican dishes. She built a bridge between traditional cooking methods and domestic technology through her cookbooks. Women could prepare mole more frequently with the help of a blender. Domestic technology did facilitate women's daily cooking, at least for those who could afford it, but the use of these appliances came with a series of implications about class and race. Poor and rural women were closer to the indigenous world, while middle-class urban women were identified with advanced, modern, capitalist, and white societies. The indigenous world was inferior, and the European-Anglo world was superior. Associating mole with domestic technology, and later the food-processing industry, connected Mexico's past and future. Mole, as well as Mexican identity, could adapt to the future without betraying its origin, an origin that failed to recognize the value of contemporary indigenous cultures and Mexico's diversity beyond precolonial times. Mole, hence, becomes a trope of Mexican identity and the constant tension between class and race.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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