

- Add parsley and mix well, cooking until fish completely falls apart into small bits.
- Let rest until cool and decorate with olives and chiles. Serve with crusty bread.

### Torrijas

*Ma Primitiva Bermejo Martínez*

*Torrijas* are a Lenten dessert typical of the state of Michoacán. This is the way Primy makes them, which is a bit unusual in that they are coated in the egg batter called a *capeado*. Like the *capeado* for *chiles rellenos*. Most recipes for *torrijas* are reminiscent of Spanish *torrijas*, like French toast. Primy's version contains no milk, and it probably would not matter if the bread used was very fresh. This is something that she rarely prepared because her mother-in-law, Doña Margarita, did not like the idea of a sweet made with spices. When Doña Margarita was persuaded to try these *torrijas*, she liked them so much that she had seconds. Serves 12.

- 4 slightly stale *teleras*, each cut into 3 pieces, or 1 baguette, cut into 6-centimetre slices
- 250 g *queso cotija*, or use an aged white cow's milk cheese like Romano or Sardo
- 3 eggs, separated
- vegetable oil for frying

Hollow out each piece of bread by removing some of the central crumbs, leaving an open pocket. Fill each space with cheese and proceed with the *capeado* as for stuffed chiles.

### Spiced Syrup

- 1 cone of *piloncillo* (crude sugar) or 1 cup firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 8 cm of Ceylon cinnamon (not tough Cassia)
- 5 whole cloves
- 5 whole allspice berries
- around 750 mL of water

Boil all the ingredients in enough water to make a light syrup. To serve, warm the fried bread pieces in the syrup to impregnate them with the flavours and to heat them through. Serve in low bowls with lots of syrup.

## The Centrality of Gastronomy in Social Life

The conjunction of a member of the social group with nature must be mediated through the intervention of cooking fire, whose normal function is to mediatize the conjunction of the raw product and the human consumer, and whose operation thus has the effect of making sure that a natural creature is at one and the same time *cooked and socialized*.

—Lévi-Strauss (1994, p. 336, original italics)

In this book I have approached Mexican cuisine by thinking of cooking as an artistic practice, situating this in the context of Milpa Alta. I offer an interpretation based on the point of view of food as a form of art to argue the following points: flavour is functional in an active sense; flavour is achieved via love (the *sazón de amor* necessary for good cooking); observing cooking shows how actors are acted upon by their actions (following Munn, 1986); gender is not intrinsically hierarchical (cf. McCallum, 2001) and women are able to use cooking to exert power and enact their social value (Abarca, 2006; Melhus and Stølen, 1996); and social organization can be understood as a social-relational matrix with food as indexes within the active art nexus (following Gell, 1998). This means that we can understand different social levels (family-*compadrazgo-mayordomía*) by analyzing food in terms of cooking, from everyday hospitality to fiesta hospitality. In the following sections I will explain these conclusions.

### The Function of Flavour

There are many physiological, cultural and social reasons that people eat and drink certain foods, but flavour, its artistic nature, is always a concern. I argued in Chapter 2, and in other ways throughout this book, that flavour is the most important and functional, active element of food. It is not a superficial, physical characteristic which carries semiotic meaning. If food, or a dish, is thought of as an artwork, the flavour is not *simply* the decorative aspect—or rather, it *is* decorative, and this decoration is precisely what makes food powerful or meaningful. Rather than as an aid to help humans ingest nutrients, the presence of flavour, and the mobilization of different flavours in a cuisine, via cooking, effectively creates social relations. In other words, form and function, surface and depth, are interlinked. Given that any kind of cooking

and eating are food transactions, flavour constitutes the surrounding social relations of the actors (cooks and eaters, family, *compadres* and the wider community). Or, borrowing Tim Ingold's definition of an artefact, food/artwork is 'the crystallisation of activity within a relational field' (2000, p. 345).

In the case of Mexican cuisine, flavour is chile, and chile is salsa. Many dishes are defined by their sauces or chiles rather than the accompanying meat or vegetable that is eaten with the sauce. Examples of this are *chicharrón en chile verde*, *enomatados*, *adobos* or *adobados*, *pipiñanes*, moles, and by extension, *chiliquites*, *enchiladas*, and *chiles rellenos*. The varieties of *pozoles* (hominy soups made with pork, especially a whole hog's head) are differentiated by colour (red, white and green), and the variations are prepared by the addition or omission of a red or green salsa in the cooking process. The same can be applied to most tamales which are differentiated by the salsa used in the filling (such as *tamales verdes*, *rojos*, *de rajitas* or *de mole*), or by the salsa's absence (*tamales*, sweet tamales). Otherwise, there are also many Mexican dishes that are inconceivable to eat without an accompanying sauce, or a pickled chile or fresh green chile to chew on at the side. This includes all sorts of *tacos*, *barbacoa*, and also soups (including rice and pasta dishes), and street foods like *sopes*, *tlacoyos*, *gorditas* and *sincronizadas*. Even fresh fruit, like mangoes, bananas, *jicamas*, and pineapples, are sold with a sprinkling of powdered *chile piquin* and lime juice.

A foodstuff can be eaten on its own, as it is, but when combined with chile or some sort of sauce, *flavour is added, and hence value is added*. Mole, for instance, is the ultimate recipe, combining more ingredients and culinary techniques than most others. It is one of the most laborious and technically difficult dishes to prepare, thought of as representing the best of Mexican cuisine, and not only in terms of flavour. When mole is served to guests, in some ways it can be thought of as representing the whole cuisine in the way that one person represents his or her family (part-for-whole synecdoche). Mole epitomizes some of the best qualities of Mexican cuisine, or it is an example of excellence amongst other salsas. It also carries other meanings when it is served or eaten. It is considered to be 'very Mexican' and 'very traditional', so much so that sometimes foreigners are warned that they may not like it when they try it for the first time, or they may never learn to like it. Otherwise foreigners are expected to like it right away, and to fully appreciate the honour bestowed upon them if they are served mole in someone's home.

In Milpa Alta, the deeper social meanings inherent in the serving and eating of mole are related to ideas of this dish being historical and passed down from generation to generation via cooks in the family and community. The cooks are specifically women, who are highly valued in Milpalense society as wives and mothers, as producers and reproducers. As I described in greater detail in chapter 4, women's morality is circumscribed by their knowledge of cookery and their domestic and extradomestic labour as well as by their sexual behaviour. When women prepare mole from scratch, using family recipes, and for family fiestas, mole acts as the

quintessence of women's hard work, as well as the most flavourful dish in a woman's culinary repertoire.

Yet in spite of this, the technical knowledge necessary to produce quotidian dishes or daily family food is in some ways more complex than what is necessary for large fiestas. Of course there is no denying that mole is a complex and sophisticated dish, but in an area like Milpa Alta its preparation is common knowledge. Everyone knows how to make mole, though some moles are better than others. Not everyone is considered a good cook or has the same range of culinary expertise which is fully explored only in the familiar sphere. This discussion indicates that there is greater creativity involved in domestic cooking, and therefore more culinary agency and freedom in daily life. Particular flavours are not just the guiding principles of social events and their organization. By preparing particular dishes for personal or commercial reasons, cooks deliberately produce certain flavours (chile/salsa/mole) for their own social ends. They might prepare mole for a fiesta, *barbacoa* to sell in the market or family favourites for loved ones. Depending on who cooks what, when and why, the production of particular flavours is the primary concern in food preparation. Rather than an incidental characteristic of food, flavour is a central and active element, cooked in for specific reasons and for specific others/eaters.

### The Importance of Cooking in Social Life

So if chiles appear to be symbolic ingredients in Mexican cuisine, it is in a deeply meaningful way because there is a sophisticated gastronomic technology that actors learn and can mobilize via their cooking. The manipulation or mobilization of flavours in cooking is as much a social activity as human agents interacting (cf. Gell, 1998). That is, we can make sense of the culinary system of Milpa Alta only in relation to other local social systems, and how Milpalenses use their cuisine, or the moral notions surrounding cooking, in their social interaction.

Together chapters 3, 4 and 5 addressed this topic. Discussing *barbacoa* in Milpa Alta, I showed that the production of this culinary work of art is an all-encompassing social activity. The *barbacoiras* of San Mateo enjoy a social position and value related to their economic capital in comparison to the other barrios or towns of Milpa Alta. This value was achieved only by means of skilful production of a socially desired flavour that ultimately produced successful business and sociality. Conversely, to some extent the taste judgements or values placed on certain flavours within the cuisine (or certain dishes) are determined by the social values of the dominant actors (Bourdieu, 1984).

The traditional methods to prepare *barbacoa* involve a commitment to a way of life that is ordered by the demands of the market economy and the elaborate recipe. It also requires cooperation within the primary social unit, the nuclear family, or, more specifically, the ideal relationship between a man and a woman, that of husband and

wife. The production of *barbacoa* provides a good example of what Munn refers to as 'intersubjectivity'. '[A]gents,' she writes, 'not only engage in action but are also "acted upon" by the action.' Practices form types of social relations and also form the actors who engage in them (1986, pp. 14–15; cf. Ingold, 2000).

A final observation is that only married men prepare *barbacoa*, but (previously married) women without husbands are also able to prepare *barbacoa*. If a woman's husband dies or abandons her, she may continue to rely on *barbacoa* as her means of livelihood, by hiring men to perform the slaughter and disembowelling for her (the '*matador*' already mentioned). What is less common is for a man to continue to prepare *barbacoa* without his wife. It must be reiterated that the wife's basic role in preparing *barbacoa* is to prepare the salsas and the *panza*. These are the most culinary activities of the whole process. Since one of women's domestic roles is to be a cook, it is not accidental that women are expected to perform these tasks. In this way, women are related as much to men as wives (or lovers) and mothers as they are related to the preparation of food, which is represented by the preparation of salsas/chile/flavour.

When widowers do continue with their businesses, some hire women to help them with the salsas and anything else that their wives would have normally done. I was told that generally a *barbacotero* widower's business does not flourish the way it did when his wife was alive. This occurs unless he remarries, which is more likely than it would be for a *barbacotera* widow to do. It is said that only then does his business regain similar success as with his late wife. Perhaps he needs the support of a wife's loving touch to produce salsas for a successfully flavourful *barbacoa*!

The preceding and my discussion in Chapter 4 indicate that cooking is not part of housework as invisible labour, but it is a creative task based on culinary agency and skill, on the value placed upon the home, and on women as lovers and mothers, as providers. The cuisine is a material embodiment of a woman's role in the family, as a sexual partner for her husband and as a mother and nurturer for the next generation. But though cooking is embodied and gender is embodied (McCallum, 2001), cooking is not an activity of performative gender roles per se. They are not necessarily causally linked, although food is used as the nexus of social meaning by which cooks (women as individuals or as representatives of their families) construct their social world. As my material on Milpa Alta shows, as a loving dimension of women's (house)work, good cooking can lead to the development of a 'traditional' cuisine as much as the production of social relations.

Culinary creativity can therefore be seen as the outcome of quotidian domesticity and the social dynamics of men and women, as individuals or groups. Women and men have roles and expectations which seem to dictate the limits of their behaviour, but which also allow them to achieve social and material ends through complementary action. For men this includes working in the fields, as pork or lamb butchers and/or in another professional job (such as teaching). For women it includes cooking, housework and caring for children, as well as extradomestic labour (such as selling

in the market). Whilst the unit of wife and husband is crucial to the establishment of links of *compañazgo*, and to the fulfillment of the *mayordomías*' role for the community, in Milpa Alta, this unit is also thought to be at the core of business success.

### *Agency and Intention*

Thus cooking is an activity performed for the sake of social interaction (cf. Simmel, 1994) as much as for making food edible or tastier. The technical mastery required to cook is also socially learnt and socially salient. Married women cook for their husbands and children, and other (usually unmarried) members of the household. They also cook particular dishes during fiestas for *compadres* and the wider community. In other words, women cook with particular eaters in mind. Although the way that they prepare some dishes may be nuanced by their own taste and pleasure, they still are cooking with the intention of feeding (or offering food to) someone else (a recipient). What they prepare is dependent upon their relationship with the eaters. Hence, they use their culinary agency according to the network of intentionalities in which they are entangled as social beings.

Gell's conception of intentionality is based on defining the nature of causation. '[I]ntentions cause events to happen in the vicinity of agents' (1998, p. 101). Rather than searching for a chemical or physical explanation of why something caused another thing to occur, '[T]he explanation of any given event (especially if socially salient) is that it is caused intentionally' (p. 101). So this is why food has flavour, that is, why flavour is a social (and also cultural) aspect of food. It is not because of inherent biochemical properties in the foodstuffs themselves, rather it is in the *deliberately induced reaction* of foodstuffs when cooked or combined in a particular way. Food served to be eaten has flavour because a cook *intends* to bring out or produce these flavours in the meals that she prepares for other people with whom she has specific social relations.

The idea of a cook/artist's intentions can be better understood when applied to feast food, in the example of the Days of the Dead. Food set out on the family altar, the *ofrenda*, is offered to the dead relatives of the family. Mole with chicken is always present, as well as yellow fruits, tamales, sweets and some favourite foods of the dead. The dead are believed to eat the essence of the food when they come, and afterward, when the living eat the food that had been set out, it no longer has any flavour. Although not everyone says that they believe it, it is thought to occur in this way, and this is how it has been reported to me by people in Milpa Alta (see also Lok, 1991; Long and Vargas, 2005, p. 150). In this case of food for the dead, although it may have been prepared with the same culinary principles as always, the food loses its flavour because of the presence of the dead who come to eat its essence. The explanation for this is no more mystical than the relationship between the cook (culinary agent) and the expected recipient of the food, the dead. Although other living

people, related to the cook, eventually may eat the food, the food was cooked with the intention of feeding the dead, and not to feed the living. Therefore the flavour was cooked in for the dead to take away, and the acceptance of this offering within this network of intentionalities is confirmed when the food is eaten by the living the next day and they can verify that the food has lost its flavour.

### Fiesta Food in the Culinary Art Corpus

It is appropriate now to recall the theoretical basis of food as art as I have been using it.<sup>2</sup> Gell's theory of art uses a conception of a body of artworks as if it were a body of a person. The entire art corpus of a single artist or a collective style of art can therefore be looked at as if it were pieces of one body distributed over time and space, a 'distributed person'. Anything that comes from a person, including visual appearance and things he or she produced, is detachable from that person and can be physically touched as well as seen. Part and whole, individual and group, are divisible and indivisible. In effect, art objects are *exuviae*, which are detachable and also exchangeable, and can link social beings in the way that Mauss's *hau* or Munn's *kula* valuables transform value from one person to the next.

With respect to Mexican cuisine, this means that food is involved in interrelating social networks amongst individuals or groups. During fiestas, individuals act on behalf of social groups (families, neighbours, towns) to maintain the circulation of value (food/virtue) in the indefinitely enduring cycle of festivity. Food giving and receiving occurs in different directions amongst individual actors who perform the roles of hosts or guests on specified days during the year. These gifts of food are offered by obligation and their acceptance is obligatory as well, so much so that even those who do not attend are given food in their absence. Guests may even be reluctant recipients, but they accept the food nonetheless.<sup>3</sup> Hospitality begets further hospitality, and actors expect an ultimate balance of give and take, though competition and one-upmanship exist as well. This means that special foods are significant, but only in relation to how they compare with other dishes in the cuisine, and with the social relationships of the cooks and eaters.

The fiesta cycle revolves around the religious timetable and notions of respect, social distance and hospitality amongst the relevant actors. Whether *compadres*, *mayordomos* or other guests, no one need demand to be fed upon arrival at a fiesta. Rather, all assume that they will be, and they expect elaborate food and entertainment at these events. Not only this, the same kind of food—effectively, the same gift, the same personhood—is awaited on each occasion. Mole, or a socially approved substitute, is coercively given and received, in a sort of Maussian social contract. Competitively bigger and better versions of the same meal are circulated endlessly amongst *compadres*, *mayordomos*, relatives and neighbours and thereby maintain community viability.<sup>4</sup>

Children and unmarried adults do not formally participate in these systems of reciprocity, except for the occasional unmarried woman who is asked to be a *co-madre* (cf. Saul, 1985). In the same way children and unmarried adults are not responsible for food provision, though they may help married women who are. In the fiesta cycle, they are treated as extensions of their families, on whom they depend for their food and on whose behalf they are expected to perform minor duties such as shopping, fetching or delivering things, including gifts of food.

The individual actors who take responsibility as official representatives are highly respected church-married couples, morally recognized as capable of cooking the *mole de fiesta* and able to legitimately reproduce the next generation. Indeed, the desire to participate in the *mayordomía* or to engage in relations of *compadrazgo* is sometimes an instigation for couples to hold a church wedding, even after many years of cohabitation and the birth of several children. But while women are in charge of cooking for feasts, current popularly served dishes like *barbacoa* are prepared jointly by women and men. In fact, fiesta hospitality and the corresponding food are products of gender complementarity and family cooperation, although women are thought of as the family cooks. So in other words, in the fiesta sphere, women's culinary agency is distributed and shared amongst her family, *vis-à-vis* the wider public.

When people in Milpa Alta talk of '*el mole de fiesta*', the mole of the feast, or '*el lujo de barbacoa*', the luxury of *barbacoa*, the dish that they speak of is a nexus of interacting social relations within the cuisine as well as among the human social actors who perform value transactions via food hospitality. A particular recipe is placed in a hierarchical relation to the indexes of other dishes in the corpus of its cuisine (cf. Gell, 1998; Goody, 1982). The dish can be judged as delicious or flavourful because it is accepted with gastronomic awe from the perspective of the eater, who can imagine the complexity of the production of the dish from his or her informed culinary knowledge. As should be clear by this point in this book, this effect is encapsulated in Gell's notion of the 'technology of enchantment' (1996). Finally, the hosts' decision to serve these dishes to others in formal hospitality bestows value on their guests, while at the same time it allows the hosts to mobilize the value of the dish (or vice versa) because of the social prestige connected with the preparation of the dish (Bourdieu, 1984; Munn, 1986).

As an example, then, mole, in fact, becomes representative of the whole distributed object of Mexican cuisine. The whole cuisine, produced through daily cooking, mediates the domestic realm with the public sphere, or the everyday and the ritual, similar to how Simmel (1994) allocates value to daily meals. As the relational node of a culinary matrix of interrelating social spheres, the power and value of women (or cooks) are transformed into ongoing social relations. In short, the value of mole can be understood as effectively equivalent to the value of women in Milpalense society.

In the wider social context, family honour can be distributed and properly enacted only with fiesta commensality, serving mole, or its substitutes, which all effectively

represent the whole cuisine. This means that social interaction is effective when food is offered, cooked with culinary artistry (or technical mastery). Mole as a special dish indicates celebration, but it is special not only because it is difficult to make. Other dishes in Mexican cuisine are difficult to make. Mole differs from other dishes within the cuisine because its preparation epitomizes the wide variety of culinary techniques and ingredients that women have adopted and adapted into 'traditional' Mexican cuisine. Its complex history involves the invasion of foreigners who brought ingredients and technical knowledge to Mexico, and who influenced the religious and domestic realms, altering social interaction while simultaneously altering women's relationship with food and cooking. In one recipe the interrelating value systems and complex of intentionalities that exist in Milpa Alta are found: 'tradition'; land; *compadrazgo*; sexual, religious and maternal love; women; and especially flavour. Mole represents salsa, which represents flavour, which represents women, who are ultimately governed by an honour code of giving and respect to their children, partners, loved ones. In effect, women are representing the family, although men may be the public or official representatives. Therefore social interaction circulates around women and women's culinary labours, via women's culinary agency. In this way, the fulfillment of gastronomical ideals or desires is central to social life in Milpa Alta.

If the preceding are the ingredients necessary to successfully prepare mole (or any other recipe), then how do professional chefs achieve culinary mastery in Mexican cuisine? In Chapter 1 I described some of the ways that chefs thought of proper Mexican cooking.<sup>5</sup> The teaching of cultural events and Mexican history were included in the curricula of some cookery schools. Urban students were encouraged to go back to the pueblos to search for unwritten recipes and culinary tips from anonymous *mayoras* and *señoras* who were unrecognized culinary artists. According to them, superior flavour could be achieved by technical culinary skill, top-quality ingredients, an understanding of traditions and Mexican culture and, as a final garnish, a *sazón de amor* (a sprinkling of love).

### Food and Love, Chiles and *albur*

In different ways throughout this book I have discussed the interconnections between notions of love and food in Milpa Alta, which revolve around women and their roles in the family. In the remainder of this book I would like to make a few final comments on cooking and love and our perceptions of food and flavour.

To recapitulate, women in Milpa Alta have two kinds of responsibilities: housework and cooking (production) and family (reproduction). Equivalently, there are two kinds of human desires: for food and for sex. Recognizing the deeply symbolic value of cooking as a part of women's work, we can take sex into account as part of the socialization of women as members of the community as well as in their relations

with men. Once girls are able to cook, they are ready for marriage, or, put another way, they have acquired the skills necessary to participate in the community-wide systems of food giving as well as the skills necessary to demand and offer food and sex to a husband. In Chapter 4 I discussed the kind of sexual/gastronomical reciprocity that exists between husbands and wives. The marital relationship is both moral and imbued with social obligations. In Gow's (1989) article on the Piro, he argues that the desires for food are linked to specific food providers, 'systematically related to *certain types of social relations*' (p. 568, italics added). He continues, '[R]elationships are predicated on the satisfaction of particular desires experienced by the partners in the relationship' (p. 568).

Home cooking is highly valued because of the moral value of women, who are the producers of this food. At the same time, food that is thought of as particularly delicious is food cooked with love. Thus an individual would be prone to prefer his mother's cooking over others', as a husband should also value and prefer his wife's cooking, perhaps even more than his mother's. In this way women are understood to be powerful agents within their local social spheres. The food sharing inherent in hospitality and family eating is considered to be moral and ethical and in a wider sense can lead to community viability.

Yet one other dynamic of food and love is worth describing for a more nuanced picture of how flavour and morality are intertwined. As I explained in Chapter 1, in Milpa Alta people use the words *salsa* and *chile* interchangeably, even if there is only a small proportion of chile in the recipe for the *salsa*. Chiles are central to Mexican gastronomy and are arguably the basic unit of the cuisine. They are also central to a variety of jokes in which the chile is spoken of metaphorically as a man's penis, most used in *albur*.

*Albur* is a kind of wordplay used almost exclusively amongst men (see Jiménez, 1991; Lomeli, 1991, pp. 20–6). It is very rare for women to speak using *albur*. If they do, it is amongst other women (not in mixed company) and is of a milder sort. This is because there are overt sexual connotations in the speech games in *albur*. *Albur* and derivative word games can be used in mild to increasingly aggressive ways, and yet also are considered funny. Men are able to speak with their friends (*chistes*, those *en confianza*) in terms of sexually penetrating them without being considered homosexual. As long as a man is the one penetrating, rather than the one penetrated, he would still be performing within what is considered normal male behaviour. He can continue to consider himself to be heterosexual, even macho (see Gutmann, 1996). A man using *albur* plays upon these sensibilities, as well as on linguistic twists, and depends on speed and wit.

One of the central metaphors used is the chile, which stands for the penis. Since chiles come in so many different shapes and sizes, there is ample opportunity for innuendo. However, people use other food metaphors in joking conversation to refer to male and female sexual organs. Usually it is obvious why they are chosen, though sometimes the analogy is more obscure. For the vagina there are words such as

papeya, *mamey* (a type of fruit), *pamocha* (crude sugar), *pescado* (fish), or *mondongo* (a dish made of tripe; Jiménez, 1991, pp. 82, 201). Some other food metaphors for the penis are *longaniza* (a type of sausage), *camote* (sweet potato), *ejote* (young corn on the cob) and *zanchoria* (carrot; p. 202). If these metaphors appear unsystematic, even random, that is because they are not used in an alternate discourse to encode another arbitrary symbolic structure. Rather, as Gow argues,

... these metaphors are not structured simply by direct reference to the objects themselves, whether foods or genital organs, but at the level of desire. The use of foods as metaphors for the genitals occurs only in joking, for native people have standard, non-euphemistic, names for the genitalia. The use of food metaphors in joking, I would agree, continuously draws attention to the metaphorical relationship between oral and sexual desire, rather than that between food objects and genitals as objects. (1989, p. 575)

Sexual food metaphors may therefore reveal notions about oral and sexual desire—or I would rather say ‘appetite’—and not so much about the relations between specific fruits or vegetables. The significance of *albur* is that food, especially the chile, is subject to linguistic and conceptual manipulation by men, explicitly relating it to sex. On the other hand, more generally and among women, the chile is manipulated in another, culinary way, and is explicitly related to eating and flavour. The relationships among food and cooking and love and sex can be understood through *albur* to have ramifications in the assessment of flavour and morality in terms of eating a meal cooked at home or enjoying snacks in the streets.

### Daily Meals, Home Cooking and Street Food

I have already explained at length that food prepared at home (i.e., with love) has connotations of being tastier and better for you (nutritionally and socially) than food prepared commercially. Having established that the values and virtues of women are materialized in home cooking, we can extrapolate from this that it can reflect badly on a woman if she fails to prepare a home-cooked meal and instead decides to buy ready-made food in the streets like *tortas*, tacos or tamales. Eating out in Milpa Alta is uncommon, partly because of the belief that food prepared at home is better.

Local Milpaltenses go home for their meals, or, if they really wish to eat out, they travel to the centre of Mexico City. A few Milpaltenses told me, with some pride, that there are only two restaurants in Villa Milpa Alta. These restaurants serve *comida casera*, homestyle food, and they cater mainly to outsiders (from Mexico City) who work in the municipality rather than to locals. Those usually found eating in market stalls are youths having a snack after school or people who do not live in Milpa Alta and thus have no family nearby to go home to for their meals.

I was told that eating out in the street indicates that the women of the house are lazy (*‘son perezosas’*), too lazy to prepare a meal at home. Though not specifically

investigating Mexico, Tinker (1987) observes that ‘[i]n most countries the traditional foods eaten at home take a long time to make, so that busy housewives or working women will avoid this effort by feeding their families street foods’ (p. 55). She also notes that some street foods take longer to make than some typical daily meals. Mexican street food is one of the broadest-ranging parts of the cuisine. In Milpa Alta, most women know how to make many of the foods that can be bought in the streets, like different kinds of tacos, quesadillas, *pambazos*, tamales, *huaraches*, *garnachas* and various other snacks. Some things are not easily made at home, however, such as *barbacoa*, too cumbersome for the domestic kitchen or for daily cooking. Perhaps there is also an element of taste involved in the decision to buy food in the street.

In Milpa Alta there is a specific verb for this idea of eating out that is used only in the region: *chinguinear*. *Chinguinear* means to eat snacks in the street and it encapsulates shirking one’s household, or even womanly, duties. So although there may be times when a woman is too tired, too busy or indeed too lazy to cook for her family, she tries to be discreet about it. If she decides to buy ready-made food in the market, she most likely will buy it to take away. She can then take it home to eat in privacy so that no one will see her and her family eating in public and later be able to accuse her of *chinguinando*.

Another instance when Milpaltenses might eat in the streets is when they eat alone or with only one other person. Cooking is almost never done for the sake of the cook alone, nor would this be normal behaviour in Milpa Alta. A complete Mexican meal requires much time and effort and is difficult to prepare in single servings. Sometimes when Doña Margarita and I were on our own, for instance, she would suggest to me that we eat in the market. She would have a mischievous glint in her eye as she said, *‘Vamos a chinguinear’*. At the stand she chatted guiltily with the food vendors as if they shared a naughty secret, because we could have or should have prepared food for ourselves. The food sold by the vendor might be particularly delicious, perhaps could not be the same if made at home, or was more work to prepare than we wished to do.

Another eater makes a cook more willing to go through the trouble of preparing the several parts that make up a meal (cf. Abarca, 2006, pp. 92–3). A social activity by nature, food preparation entails an emotional commitment from cooks and eaters. Abarca (p. 93) also emphasizes this point, referring to Silva, one of her ‘critical thinkers’/informants: ‘The desire to have her family surround her table gives her the impetus to create laborious meals ... The merit of culinary creation for Silva is inseparable from the participation of her audience.’

In other words, part of the social significance of a meal prepared at home stems from the caring involved in cooking food with flavour for specific eaters. In Milpa Alta, if a woman forgets to place salsa on the table, she may be teased as being *envidiosa*, keeping all the flavour to herself, effectively failing to fulfill her obligation to feed her family or guests. The words *envidia* and *envidioso* are used to describe a range of characteristics from envy to greed to being overprotective over family

members. In Milpa Alta, someone who somehow displeased another was often described as being *envidioso*.<sup>6</sup> A person who is *envidioso/a* refuses to share or lend food or other material belongings. He or she lacks *confianza*. *Envidia* is conceptually opposed to the notions of generosity, love and hospitality of home.

### Appetite, Morality and Taste

In a perhaps simplified way, I have used the word love to explain how culinary technical mastery is achieved, and I have also described how love is the instigation for culinary activity. While community relationships are characterized by respect and social expectations, family relationships are characterized by love, moral obligation and gender role expectations. Within the family, on a daily basis, all different kinds of food are demanded and supplied, given and received. However, food in this case is not actually *exchanged* between culinary agents and recipients.<sup>7</sup> Unlike in the fiesta cycle, in daily meals food is not circulated, and it is not exchanged for an expected return of food reciprocity on another occasion. This is partly because of the asymmetrical relationship between parent and child or married woman and her in-laws (see Gell, 1999a; Gow, 1989). Parents do not expect anything from children in exchange for feeding and raising them, at least not until many years later in old age. I think that that is far too long-term to establish an exchange relationship via food. Raising children is more simply a moral obligation and, as I mentioned earlier, children are considered as extensions of their parents in the community-wide systems of (food) reciprocity and exchange that do exist in fiestas. For daily meals, food is demanded by children, husbands and in-laws, a woman supplies it, and then all of it is eaten.

I have already described how the full artistry of Mexican cuisine is explored daily in the family kitchen. Flavour and variety are sought after for everyday meals, and in this way good cooking works like a well-designed trap, enticing the family and ritual kin to maintain their ties to the cook. Ideally, women prepare food for their husbands and children and other members of the household. Women's culinary activity is a source of social agency that gives deeper meaning to the home-cooked meal or the food prepared for family and relations of *confianza*. Daughters rarely take full responsibility for meal provision, but if they do, it is only within the domestic realm. Once they marry, women's culinary agency becomes directed to their husbands and their new households. Failure to feed their husbands can be judged as shirking marital as well as womanly duties, not because of some deep-seated subordination of women to men, but because of the centrality of the marital bond as the source of social (and sexual and gastronomical) fulfillment.

It also then follows that when the relationship between cook and eater is very close, like family, the eater is more likely to judge the food as tastier and better because of the social relationship that exists between them, though of course, a cook's

talent must also be considered. A cook's culinary agency and artistry can be seasoned by a *sazón de amor* that emanates from her feelings toward the intended eaters of her food; hence the importance of a home-cooked meal. This implies that in the case of home cooking, the food is exchanged for the love, loyalty and appreciation of family members, and not for a return of yet undetermined food hospitality in future. As I described in Chapter 4, this extends to the gastronomical and sexual loyalty of potentially unfaithful husbands.

In other words, among family and friends, there is a moral obligatory force involved in giving and receiving food. Since giving food is as much an obligation as receiving it, the food given is not a 'pure gift' in the way that we would like to think of the freely offered love that stems from the intimacy of home. Rather, I dare say that home cooking is offered in a most complex bounded way, as a sophisticated culinary trap couched in the ideology of generosity and the virtue of women's suffering and sacrifice.

Understanding this, it makes more sense that the appeal of home cooking is based upon its intrinsic meaningfulness, as socially controlled, socially sanctioned sexual desires, instrumentalized for the production of legitimate members of society. Conversely, other cooking, presumably prepared for selfish, economic ends, is meaningful in a different way. We can think of food-giving as generating positive social meaning (community viability) and eating as correspondingly negative (cf. Munin, 1986). Applying the same logic to cooking, home cooking generates positive social ends, whereas commercial cooking would then generate antisocial (individual) ends. A home-cooked meal should then taste better and should also *be* better than snacks bought in the street. Yet street foods are known to be desirable, marketable, commercially viable and delicious.

This being the case, I now return to the question I posed in the introduction of this book: if mother's home cooking is the best and tastiest food, then why is it that street food is considered to taste so good? Though any woman who cooks may know how to make the same *antojitos*, somehow, this food may seem to taste better in the streets. How can an anonymous food vendor prepare food with the flavour of love that competes with the nourishment of home and the socially sanctioned marital bond? I will continue exploring the notions of exchange and reciprocity to explain how this can be so.

Among other writers, Vázquez García (1997) describes the marital relationship as reciprocal in a Nahuatl community in southern Veracruz, Mexico. This reciprocity has material manifestations in access to land or other resources as well as in cooking: '[T]he activities of men and women are complementary in the sense of women depending on men for the corn, but men depend on women for the tortilla, the final product' (p. 171, my translation). Vázquez discusses the domestic economy of first and second wives in both monogamous and polygamous unions. She notes that men inherit land and women receive kitchen equipment upon marriage. She also observes that many women who sell home-cooked food in the streets are unwed

mothers or 'second wives' of men whose legitimate wives exert domestic (marital and gastronomical) rights.<sup>8</sup>

Recall now that cooking is an activity like building a trap-as-artwork, with the intention of constructing bait in a particular way to ensnare the loyalty of kin and ritual kin. This intention would be no different from the desire of a food vendor to entice customers with a certain taste to her own delicious food. So the culinary agency involved in preparing food for sale or for loved ones is actually one and the same. Abarca's (2007) recent article on Mexican food entrepreneurs argues that some successful women recreate the spirit of home and cultural heritage when they prepare and sell their food. In Chapter 3 I also mentioned how Primy would proffer special treatment to regular customers, as the vendor-client relationship can blur over time to approximate friendship. There will always be differences in a cook's activities depending on her specific intentions, or her intended food consumers, with respect to her agency. Both the vendor and the home cook wish to attract and appease the appetite of the same consumer, and so the vendor directs her agency to this competition. Yet more pertinent to this point than Gell's discussion of artworks as traps, however, is how Gell (1999a) dismantles the idea that commercial activities should be less moral than non-commercial/gift-giving and gift-receiving.

If we follow Gell's (1999a) logic about commodity exchange, rather than being an unethical commercial venture in opposition to the ethical food-giving at home, buying and selling street food would constitute a food transaction of supreme reciprocity. A customer hands over money and the vendor hands over flavourful food. Both the customer and the vendor indeed 'sacrifice' something of value (money/food) in exchange for something that they value more (food/money). This immediate-return exchange is instant gratification. The goal of this and other kinds of commodity exchange is a simple transaction, completed on the spot, *without any moral obligation* on the part of the buyer or the seller. Things are exchanged for things, wherein each actor values the other thing more than the thing he or she gives up. There is quantitative equivalence, though each leaves the transaction happier with his or her newly acquired money or food than before. What is given over is a thing that the giver values less than what is received. What is given is not a gift, nor is it obligatory. I can choose to buy food from this or that vendor, and neither I nor the vendor I choose engage in any realm wherein either of us can be judged to be generous or *envidiosa*. In fact, the food is transacted in a mercifully simple, satisfying way.

Briefly put, then, food in the street provides the flavour of Mexican cuisine without the effort or social investment. Indeed, especially if one eats alone at a street stand, there are no social relations involved to complicate one's enjoyment of the flavours. Street food is commoditized cooking, and its appeal lies in the link between eating and sex.<sup>9</sup> It is as delicious and clandestine as an illicit love affair, akin to the pleasures of sex without the entanglements of love (amongst social relations).

To conclude, then, there are two ways of experiencing food as delicious. Home cooking has the status of the highly moral marital bond, and the value of food sharing,

even if under a coercive system. Because of the many rules of greed and generosity surrounding home cooking, interrelated with the social systems of *compadrazgo* and the *mayordomía*, the meal is heavily emotionally laden. In contrast, to snack in the streets is considered a pastime; it is an act of freedom, eating to satisfy appetite without emotional entanglements. Though different vendors produce different qualities of flavours, and some things do taste better when prepared at home, there is no contradiction if it is accepted that we have preferences and opinions about food, just as we have preferences for and opinions about people with whom we socialize.

To summarize, in Milpa Alta, married women prepare food for their husbands and the rest of the household as part of their domestic role. More specifically, if a woman does not cook at home for her family, she can be criticized, and if she chooses to eat in the streets, she is *chinaqueando*, naughtily enjoying someone else's cooking as she shirks her own duties to cook. Likewise, being seen in the streets invites digestion and the potential for extramarital love affairs. *Chinaqueando* is an occasional delight, an individual practice more commonly engaged in than openly admitted. Eating in the streets is thus an illicit pleasure, without the social significance attached to eating in someone's home. Because of the meanings attached to home cooking (food prepared by women, primarily for their husbands), to eat in the street is equivalent to having an illicit love affair—equally or arguably more delicious food prepared by others, not one's wife.

Furthermore, rather than there being a power struggle between genders (Gregor, 1985), Milpa Alta society is characterised by gender complementarity, as has been shown to exist in other Latin American societies (e.g. Descola, 1994; Gow, 1991; McCullum, 2001; Vazquez García, 1997). A man should find the greatest pleasures with his wife, but of course, there are deviances from the norm, and men and women are known to have extramarital affairs. After all, given that I have been arguing throughout this book that we do not eat solely for the sake of nutrition, it would be naive to suggest that sex is solely for the sake of procreation. Likewise, food that is not cooked at home is also considered to be delicious in a different, almost sinful sense. The appeal of one is analogous to that of the other—the temptations of an extramarital affair are similar to those of the appetizing snacks sold on the street. Neither are necessarily offered for the purpose of nourishment or the propagation of society, but they both provide temporary satisfactions of desires fulfilled for the sake of pure pleasure.

### Recipes: Variations on a Theme

Despite the apparent impossibility of learning to cook Mexican food with only recipes, I invite readers to experiment with some variations on the theme of basic dishes in Mexican cuisine, to join in the activity, or to cook tradition, as Ricardo says. Please note that this is just a sampling of recipes, and quantities can vary with every cook's taste.



## 1 Variations on Salsa

### 1.1 *Salsa roja cruda* (Raw Red Salsa)

- 2 large ripe red tomatoes, cut into pieces
- ½ medium onion, roughly chopped
- 2 small green chiles, chopped
- salt to taste

- Chop all ingredients and mix well. If left chunky, this is the classic *salsa mexicana*, which is often used to accompany grilled fish or meat or eggs. In any case, this is a table salsa.
- The ingredients can be more mashed or liquefied and other ingredients added.
- Mash in a mortar with a pestle or put all in a blender with a little water if necessary. Blend to desired consistency.
- Fresh, raw salsas are nice left chunky. This is a perfect accompaniment for guacamole and tortilla chips as well as for eggs, grilled meats or fish, or anything.

### Variations to Add or Substitute

- chopped coriander
- olive oil
- lime juice
- garlic
- fresh red or other chiles or a combination of different chiles
- green husk tomatoes (*tomates verdes* or *tomatillos*)—in which case it becomes green salsa.

### 1.2 *Guacamole*

Raw red salsa with mashed avocado added. Variations or optional ingredients, as with raw red salsa

#### 1.2.1 *Guacamole*

- 2 large ripe avocados
- 1 small tomato, finely chopped
- ¼ white onion, finely chopped
- 1 small green chile (serrano or jalapeño), finely chopped (optional)
- salt to taste
- coriander (cilantro), finely chopped (optional)
- lime juice (optional)

- Mash all together with fork.
- Serve with avocado pits in the sauce to prevent blackening—but a surer way to prevent blackening is to peel and pit the avocados and leave them in fizzy water or iced water for 30 minutes before using.
- Serve as a dip with tortilla chips (*totopos*) or alongside grilled or fried meat or fish, to roll into tacos or use in sandwiches.

### 1.3 *Salsa Verde* (Green Salsa)

Substitute green husk tomatoes (*tomates verdes* or *tomatillos*) for red tomatoes, and proceed as for raw red salsa.

### 1.4 *Cooked Salsa*

Blend salsa ingredients until fairly smooth. You may need to add a little water. Heat oil or lard in a saucepan, and when the oil begins to smoke, pour in the liquefied salsa. Cook until it changes colour and the flavour changes, about 10 to 15 minutes.

### Variations for Cooked Salsa

- Add spices (use all): cloves, cinnamon ('true' or Ceylon cinnamon sticks, with soft thin bark; not cassia), allspice, cumin, black pepper.
- Add herbs (use one): dried oregano, fresh coriander, *epazote*, marjoram.
- Boil tomatoes (peel husks off green tomatoes first) and fresh chiles before liquidizing, using some of the boiling broth in the blender.
- Before blending, roast tomatoes, chiles, onions, garlic and spices on a dry griddle, *comal* or frying pan.
- Tomatoes, fresh chiles, onions and garlic should be roasted unpeeled until the skin blackens (green tomatoes should have papery husk removed). It is not necessary to peel tomatoes or chiles after roasting them, as the charred skin contributes a nice smoky flavour.
- With dried chiles and spices, be careful not to let them burn or they will taste bitter.
- If using dried chiles, soak them in hot water for a few minutes after roasting, to soften them. Use some of the soaking liquid in the blender.

### 1.5 *Variations with Cooked Salsa and Other Ingredients*

Often meat, vegetables, stuffed chiles, omelettes or vegetable or fish *tortitas* (croquettes) are cooked into or served heated in thin, smooth cooked salsas or *calditos*. Variations are endless. Examples follow.

### 1.5.1 *Chicharrón en chile verde* (Fried Pork Rinds in Green Salsa)

This is very common in Milpa Alta. Break fried pork rinds into pieces. Heat in cooked *salsa verde* until soft. Serve with boiled beans and warm corn tortillas.

### 1.5.2 *Calabacitas con queso* (Courgettes with Cheese)

Cook cubed courgettes and *panela* cheese in red tomato *caldillo* with fresh *epazote*. This is usually served with white rice, beans and corn tortillas.

## 2 Tortillas

Tortillas can be made by boiling corn with lime (CaOH), grinding it to a soft dough, masa, and patting out by hand, pressing out with a tortilla press, or putting masa through an industrial *tortillera* machine. Tortillas can be thick or thin, large or small, long or short. Well-made tortillas puff up as they bake and have two different sides, a front and a back.

### 2.1 *Gorditas* or *Tortillas Pellizcadas*

These are fat tortillas which have been pinched on the thin side to make a rough surface. The rough, pinched side is smeared with melted lard, then topped with refried beans and things like crisply fried crumbled *longaniza*, salsa, onions and cream.

### 2.2 *Tostadas*

Fry whole day-old tortillas until crisp, keeping them flat—these are now called *tostadas*. They are served alongside *pozole* (hominy soup) with *crema espesa*, avocados, lime, onions, sliced radish, shredded lettuce and chopped coriander.

*Tostadas* are also eaten on their own, topped with a variety of different things, always with some kind of salsa or chile on the side. Some other optional toppings that can be combined as you wish are as follows:

- refried beans
- shredded lettuce
- shredded boiled chicken or pork
- salpicón*
- avocado
- sliced onions
- crema espesa*
- crumbled, grated or shredded cheese

- chopped coriander
- crumbled, crisply fried *longaniza* or chorizo (sausage)

### 2.3 *Tacos dorados*

Roll shredded chicken in corn tortillas. Secure each roll with a toothpick and deep-fry. Serve drizzled with salsa and cream and with chopped onions, coriander and grated white cheese (all optional).

### 2.3.1 *Variation: Flautas*

Make *tacos dorados* using shredded *barbacoa de borrego* as filling. Many people make thin, extra-long, oblong tortillas from fresh masa so that the *flautas* will be long like flutes. Drizzle the fried *tacos* with green salsa, cream and grated white cheese.

*Flautas de barbacoa* are sometimes served alongside a bowl of *consomé de barbacoa*. They are usually bought in the market or in a street stall.

### 2.4 *Tlacoyos*

This is typical street food in Mexico City. Prepare masa for tortillas and refried beans. Before pressing out the tortillas, place a length of beans in the centre of a ball of masa and press it out into an oblong shape, about 10–15 cm long, 8 cm wide, and 1 cm thick. The beans should be encased in masa. Bake on both sides on a hot *comal*, dry frying pan or griddle. Top with cooked salsa, chopped onions, grated cheese, chopped coriander and cream.

### 2.4.1 *Huarachas*

*Huarachas* are like *tlacoyos* but are much wider, thinner and crisper. Señoras sell them on street corners and outside metro stations in Mexico City. They can be up to 40 cm long and 25 cm wide and are served with the same toppings as *tlacoyos*.

## 3 Variations with Cooked Salsa and Tortillas

### 3.1 *Chilaquiles*

- The night before, cut leftover corn tortillas into 8 triangles each. Leave them out to dry overnight. The next morning, fry them in hot oil till crisp.
- Make thin red or green salsa in any way you wish. You may use chicken broth or water to thin it out further. Make sure to liquefy it long enough to get it very smooth.

- Strain into hot oil, fry and cook the salsa with *epazote*.
- Toss the tortilla chips in the hot salsa. When they are well coated, place on plates, and put on toppings and side dishes before serving.

### Typical Toppings

white onion, sliced into very thin wedges, rings or half-rings  
 shredded or crumbled white cheese (*queso oaxaqueño*, *queso fresco*, mild feta)  
*crema espesa/de rancho/ crème fraîche*  
 chopped coriander/cilantro

**Variations:** optional side dishes to place on or beside *chilaquiles*

- fried egg
- fried or breaded thinly pounded chicken breast, pork or beef fillet (*milanesa*)
- fried crumbled Mexican *longaniza* (sausage)
- shredded boiled chicken
- *frijoles refritos* (refried beans, see below)
- *bolillos* or *teleras* (crusty white bread roll)

### 3.2 Enchiladas

corn tortillas  
 thin cooked salsa, as for *chilaquiles*  
 shredded boiled chicken, pork or beef or boiled potatoes  
 chopped white onions  
 grated cheese

- Heat 1 cm oil in a frying pan beside the pan where the salsa is cooking.
- One by one, dip each tortilla in the pan of hot salsa and pass it through to quickly coat it. Then pass it through the hot oil to soften it a bit and make it pliable.
- One by one, lay tortillas on a plate or ovenproof serving dish, place about a tablespoon of filling in the centre and roll into a cylinder. Arrange rolls side by side.
- Sprinkle with chopped onions and grated cheese.

#### 3.2.1 For *Enchiladas suizas*

Use green salsa, shredded chicken and yellow melting cheese and drizzle over *crema espesa* or sour cream. Arrange in ovenproof dish and bake till heated through and cheese has melted.

#### 3.2.2 *Enmoladas* or *Enchiladas de mole*

For salsa, use leftover mole that has been thinned down with water or chicken broth; use shredded chicken as filling, and top with sliced onions, crumbled white cheese and *crema espesa*.

#### 3.2.3 *Enfrijoladas*

Use thin, very smoothly liquefied beans (*frijoles de olla* or *frijoles refritos*) instead of salsa, and either corn or wheat flour tortillas (flour tortillas need not be passed through hot oil); the filling can be shredded chicken, ham and/or cheese.

#### 3.2.4 *Pastel azteca*

Arrange tortillas in layers in an ovenproof dish like lasagna. The other layers: shredded boiled chicken, thin refried beans, *crema espesa*; place grated melting cheese on top and bake in oven till cheese melts and all is heated through.

### 4 *Frijoles de olla* (Brothy Beans Cooked in an olla)

- An *olla* is a traditional pot used in Mexico for cooking beans or preparing coffee.
- The beans—black turtle or Veracruz beans, pinto or any other beans—should be rinsed and all stones and empty beans removed. They do not need to be soaked.
- Put beans in a pot with about triple the amount of water, cover and simmer over medium heat with some onion and lard or vegetable oil. Stir occasionally, and after at least 2 hours the beans should be soft. Only after they are very soft may you add salt. If you add salt too soon, the beans will never soften.
- If you need to add water, add hot water. Adding cold water will temporarily halt the cooking process. Traditionally, a small clay *olla* with water is placed on top of the big clay *olla* where the beans are cooking. If water needs to be added, the water in the small *olla* is at the same temperature as the cooking beans.
- Beans are best prepared in advance since you cannot be sure how long they will cook (this depends on how old they are). They also taste better after they have settled.
- Beans are often eaten after the main course, or with any sauce that remains on the plate after the meat or fish of the main course is finished. They are also served together with the main course or with rice as well.

- For black beans, most people add a sprig of *epazote* to the pot toward the end of the cooking time. Chopped coriander also goes well with any beans.

#### 4.1 *Frijoles refritos* (Refried Beans)

- Over a medium flame, heat lard or oil in a frying pan. When it begins to smoke, add some sliced white onions. Stir these and cook them until they are dark brown and almost burnt.
- Only then add the beans with some of their broth. Mash them continually in the lard and incorporate the onions until a smooth paste is formed.
- Beans cooked like this go well with any dish with a sauce and are also used to spread into sandwiches made with crusty bread, a slice of avocado, some pickled chile and cheese and/or cured or roasted meat to make *tortas*.
- You can serve these with scrambled eggs and salsa, or you can scramble them into eggs. They are also often served with crumbled white cheese (*queso fresco* or *queso añejo*, or substitute feta or white Lancashire).

#### 4.2 *Sopa de frijol* (Bean Soup)

Prepare beans with a lot of water or add chicken or other stock before liquefying them.

#### Optional ingredients to add, before or after blending to a smooth soup:

- dark or crispy fried onions
- garlic
- oregano or *epazote*
- roasted or raw tomatoes or cook them into the soup
- green, red, fresh or dried chiles

#### Optional ingredients for serving:

- tortilla chips (*tostitos*) or crispy fried strips of corn tortillas
- crumbled or grated cheese
- pickled chiles
- strips of roasted chiles
- crème fraîche (*crema espesa*) or sour cream
- chopped (skinned) tomatoes
- avocado
- chopped coriander
- chopped onions

#### 4.3 *Enfrijoladas*

See 3.2.3 above.

#### 5 *Sopa seca* (Dry Soup)

This is rice or pasta without broth, usually served as a first or second course, often eaten on its own with salsa on the side. It is served after a vegetable soup or meat or chicken broth with hot corn tortillas, salsa, and sometimes avocado and lime. Sometimes, rice is stirred into the broth or eaten with the main course or with the beans after the main course.

##### 5.1 *Arroz blanco* (White Mexican Rice)

- 1½ cups long-grain rice, soaked in hot water, drained well
- ¼ cup oil
- ½ white onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- ½ cup each carrots (soaked in hot water), peas, corn kernels, cubed potatoes (soaked in hot water) (all optional)
- 2½ cups water or chicken broth
- salt
- spring of coriander or *epazote* (optional)
- 1 whole green chile (optional)
- Heat the oil until it begins to smoke. Fry the rice (and carrots) until it is lightly golden.
- Blend onions and garlic with a bit of water until smooth. Add to rice.
- Stir well and allow to cook. Add vegetables and salt and top up with enough water or broth to cook the rice well. Add salt to taste. Keep the heat high for a few minutes so that the veggies cook, then lower the heat to a very low flame, cover and let simmer until the rice is cooked.
- Cover the lid of the pot with a tea towel before placing it over the pot to absorb excess moisture, if you wish.
- Add coriander, *epazote* or chile to the top of the rice toward the end of the cooking time.

Note: This rice should be dry. It should not be soft and milky like risotto; rather it should be more like pilau, with separate grains.

### 5.2 Arroz rojo (Red Rice)

Prepare *arroz blanco* (see preceding recipe). To make red rice, add 1 or 2 tomatoes to the garlic and onion mixture and blend well, like a smooth red salsa. Strain this into the hot oil and fried rice. Fry a bit before adding the optional vegetables, salt and water or chicken broth.

### 5.3 Sopa de fideos/Macarrones

Substitute vermicelli or pasta elbows (macaroni) for the rice and prepare as for *arroz rojo*, frying the dry pasta in oil until it browns a little, before stirring in the salsa and water to cook. The pasta should remain dry, without a sauce, when it is done. Sometimes dry pasta ‘soups’ are served with cream (crème fraîche) drizzled over.

### 6 Frutas en almibar (Poached Fruits in Syrup)

Make a light syrup by boiling and simmering sugar in abundant water with some grated lime rind and a stick of Ceylon cinnamon. You might want to add a bit of lime juice so that it is not too sweet. When the syrup is ready, put peeled prepared fruits in to poach for about 10 minutes or until they are cooked. Allow the fruit to cool in the syrup and then refrigerate. Serve cold.

This is good for pears, guavas, and other fruits that do not disintegrate (e.g. *tejocotes*, peaches, pineapples).

#### Variations

- combine 2 or more types of fruit
- stir in chopped mint before serving
- serve with *crema espesa/de rancho* (crème fraîche)

## Notes

### Introduction

1. Abarca (2006) takes a political and feminist standpoint to analyze the same topics of food in Mexico that had also struck me as most important—namely, *sazón*, food as art, and cooking as a source of women’s agency and empowerment. Any researcher of Mexican food would find them to be part of the reality of Mexican culinary culture. Yet while her treatment of these subjects appeared to overlap with mine, in fact her approach is necessarily different, given our different disciplinary training and personal backgrounds: Abarca draws from literary, gender and cultural studies and is herself a native Mexican. She grew up with the creative artistry of Mexican cooking as part of her normal daily life. So for her, her experience was intellectualized before she revalued and reevaluated her appreciation of the Mexican kitchen. In my case, I approached Mexican cuisine with the curiosity, sense of adventure and discovery of an outsider or tourist, and indeed of an anthropologist. As can be expected, there are certain things which non-natives notice that natives may not immediately see or may take for granted, and vice versa. Our different perspectives can only further enrich our understanding of food and cooking and Mexican gastronomy.
2. ‘Where . . . food production depends on the skilled handling of tools, and indeed of one’s own person, the productive forces appear as the embodied qualities of human subjects—as their technical skills’ (Ingold, 2000, p. 318). Sutton (2006) also discusses how acquiring cooking skill is a matter of learning bodily habit memory and not simply following a simple set of rules.
3. The regional cuisines of the Middle East, India and China are comparable in their complexity of everyday cooking.
4. The mixing of cuisines and culinary culture is far from a simple matter, of course. This is very well explained by Wilk (2006, Chapter 6) in his discussion of the creolization of Belizean food.
5. At the time of my research in the nineties, the population was only about 1 per cent of the Federal District (81,102 for Milpa Alta and 8,489,007 for the whole city), though it occupied 19.2 per cent of its area. Most of this land was put to agricultural use, 3.5 per cent was inhabited, and 1 per cent was used for urban buildings and other purposes (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática 1997, pp. 21–2). The people of Milpa Alta rarely