



# **¡QUE VIVAN LOS TAMALES!**

**Food and the Making of Mexican Identity**

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## Apostles of the Enchilada

### *Postrevolutionary Nationalism*



Josefina Velázquez de León, the daughter of one of Mexico's most distinguished families, published a thick book in 1946 entitled *Platillos regionales de la República mexicana* (Regional Dishes of the Mexican Republic).<sup>1</sup> This classic work collected for the first time the country's diverse regional cuisines in a single volume. Moreover, she exalted enchiladas, tamales, and other popular corn dishes as culinary expressions of the national identity. By unifying culinary traditions that had formerly been divided by geography, ethnicity, and class, she created the modern form of Mexico's national cuisine. In a career spanning three decades, from the late 1930s until 1968, she published more than 150 cookbooks. But her enormous energy notwithstanding, she owed much of her success to the industrial and urban transformation of Mexican society during this period. These changes seemed to promise a new era of Mexican history, one dominated by the middle-class ideal of consumerism rather than the Marxist class conflict of Cardenismo.

For three decades, beginning in the late 1930s, the Mexican economy grew more than 6 percent annually, a rate higher than any other country in the Americas and exceeded only by postwar Japan, Korea, and a few others. This economic "miracle," as contemporaries labeled it, coincided with a period of political stability under the authoritarian Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The election of Miguel Alemán in 1946 ushered in a new generation of civilian, professional politicians who sought to manage policy by peaceful compromises among interest groups rather than by divisive electoral battles. Nevertheless, nationalist agreement could not rest simply on political accords. To achieve a genuine social consensus, Mexi-

cans had to feel a sense of belonging within the national community. Mass media and school curricula provided obvious channels for forging a national culture, but television shows and civic lessons often had limited connection to everyday life. Political rituals in particular, such as rallies and elections, held little real significance in an authoritarian government.<sup>2</sup>

Middle-class housewives were more likely to perceive the meaning of *lo mexicano* in the food they prepared for their families. And urban consumers in the postwar era could sample the wide variety of Mexican cuisines to an unprecedented degree, thanks to improved communications. Highway construction lowered the cost of shipping exotic ingredients across the republic, making daily visits to the market into explorations of regional cuisines. The exchange of recipes between neighbors took on a new meaning as internal migration brought together people from all parts of the country. This dialogue expanded still further with the spread of cookbooks, and culminated with the creation of a self-conscious Mexican national cuisine.<sup>3</sup>

The cookbooks of Velázquez de León and her contemporaries served to define a specific middle-class nationalism based on conservative religious and family traditions. This domestic view of *lo mexicano* differed from the ruling party's version of the national history, but at the same time it validated sharp social inequalities and the exclusion of large sectors of the population from the benefits of economic growth. Popular dishes were appropriated into the national cuisine as a means of transforming elements of lower class and ethnic culture into symbols of unity for an authoritarian regime. Yet ultimately, although Mexico's political consensus broke down after the massacre at Tlatelolco in 1968, the national cuisine could at least provide comfort in the troubled times that followed.

### The Labyrinth of Sisterhood

Nobel laureate Octavio Paz wrote *The Labyrinth of Solitude* as a portrait of the Mexican's lonely existence. The poet found his national identity in the role of the macho, who perceived all social relations as struggles of dominance and submission. Shamed by his own heritage of submission, as the offspring of an Indian woman raped by a Spanish man, the macho masked his emotions and derived satisfaction from conquering other women.<sup>4</sup> While rightly critical of such attitudes, Paz defined this national spirit exclusively in male terms.<sup>5</sup> Mexican women also lived in a labyrinth, but not one of separation or solitude. Instead of closed walls, their maze comprised open networks that united people through bonds of family and friendship.

This alternative experience, an equally valid expression of Mexican identity, made up the essence of domestic culture.

These labyrinths of family networks were maintained by the work of "centralizing women," a term used by Larissa Lomnitz and Marisol Pérez-Lizaur to describe particular women who devoted their lives to preserving cohesion within extended families. Using the example of an elite clan they called the Gómez, the two anthropologists demonstrated that such women fulfilled an essential role in the management of Mexican businesses. Women's social networks served as an informal, but nonetheless vital, "interlocking directorate" that coordinated diverse companies managed by family members.<sup>6</sup> In other studies, Lomnitz has shown the importance of similar networks within the public sector as well as the informal sector, where people survived in desperate squatter settlements by relying on family contacts.<sup>7</sup>

The use of the term *family traditions* does not imply that domestic values and rituals existed unchanged since the colonial period; urban middle-class life represented a new experience for large numbers of Mexicans. The growth of university enrollment and government employment allowed working-class youths a chance to gain professional status. The concentration of jobs in the nation's capital fueled a massive internal migration, drawing people from provincial towns to the metropolis. Those who escaped the burgeoning slums found Mexico City to be a consumer wonderland, with supermarket aisles full of canned goods and frozen foods undreamed of in village plazas. Women also raised their expectations in this new world as they entered the workforce and received the vote. To maintain stability, families reshaped old traditions and invented new ones to fit the rapidly changing times. Cookbooks and family magazines dealt with middle-class aspirations and experiences, ranging from the prosaic consumer demand for durable stockings to the life-threatening danger of homicidal bus drivers.<sup>8</sup>

Mexico's culinary library expanded greatly in the postwar era, a reflection of the spread of literacy: from 40 percent of the population in 1940 to 72 percent three decades later.<sup>9</sup> Cookbook authors catered to downscale audiences by publishing inexpensive paperback editions containing economical dishes. Josefina Velázquez de León wrote many books with titles such as *Popular Cooking: 30 Economical Menus* and *How to Cook in Hard Times*.<sup>10</sup> More affluent readers, meanwhile, demanded greater variety and specialization. While nineteenth-century volumes had attempted to meet virtually any need from roasts and desserts to medicines and detergents, twentieth-century works sought to build markets through product differentiation.

Authors filled entire books with highly specific recipes for holidays and diets, for vegetarians and carnivores, for children and the infirm, and most recently for microwave ovens and vegetarian aphrodisiacs.<sup>11</sup>

The growing market and increasing diversification of cookbooks reflected a larger spread of consumerist values among the middle classes. The United States not only set the example with a binge of postwar spending, it also exported technology and marketing techniques to foment Mexican consumer-goods industries. By the mid-1950s, with the assistance of import restrictions, Mexican appliance manufacturers boasted annual sales of 149,000 stoves and 45,000 refrigerators, although many came from local subsidiaries of General Electric and American Refrigeration.<sup>12</sup> United States supermarket chains such as Piggly Wiggly, meanwhile, inspired the opening of Mexican chains SUMESA in 1945 and Aurrera in 1958. Unlike the mass marketing of United States chains, Mexican supermarkets were located predominantly in upper-middle-class neighborhoods and stocked luxury goods beyond the reach of working-class consumers, who continued to patronize small grocers.<sup>13</sup>

Mexicans even began to accommodate their eating habits to the United States workday, creating a boom in the restaurant industry. From 1940 to 1965, the total number of restaurants in Mexico jumped from fifteen thousand to twenty-five thousand. These included several tourist spots in the Zona Rosa (Pink Zone) along Reforma Avenue, but the majority were small establishments catering to blue- and white-collar workers. Nineteenth-century professionals had gone home each afternoon about two o'clock for an extended lunch, then returned to work until about seven o'clock, but this became increasingly impractical with the growth of commuter traffic in Mexico City. Although workers refused to move their meals forward to the twelve noon lunchtime favored north of the border, they did take shorter breaks at nearby cafeterias and *fondas*, forsaking the pleasures of a home-cooked meal and subsequent siesta in return for a five o'clock quitting time.<sup>14</sup>

Middle-class families faced a still more serious transition as their daughters began entering the workforce. This change came slowly, with trepidation and hostility from both men and women. A scowling father would scrutinize the prospective place of employment—"casing the joint"—before allowing his daughter to work, and even then she went with the understanding that once married she would revert to accepted standards of domesticity.<sup>15</sup> But women had raised their expectations, and continued to enter the workforce despite being confined to jobs such as bank tellers and

office girls.<sup>16</sup> They also expanded their educational goals, although enrollments at the National University likewise perpetuated job discrimination. Women composed only about 20 percent of university enrollments from the 1940s to the 1960s, and they were concentrated in fields such as nursing, social work, teaching, and the humanities.<sup>17</sup>

Although the Mexican middle class resembled its counterpart in the United States, deep cultural differences make it risky to generalize across the Río Bravo. Simple household appliances demonstrate these subtle but important distinctions. For example, Mexicans used their newly purchased refrigerators to store soft drinks and beer instead of a week's worth of groceries. And while the most valuable appliances north of the border may have been electric toasters and cake mixers, Mexicans preferred the electric blender, the juice press, and the pressure cooker. The blender's facility in grinding chile sauces relegated the *metate* to the status of a kitchen curiosity, and the juicer turned Mexico's ubiquitous oranges into daily glasses of fresh juice. The pressure cooker solved the age-old problem of boiling water at high altitudes in central Mexico. Beans can now be prepared in less than an hour, saving on fuel costs as well as time, and the toughest beef can be made edible in minutes.<sup>18</sup> Even these innovations demonstrated the comparative "underdevelopment" of Mexican kitchens: housewives continued to shop for groceries everyday and spurned such conveniences as canned beans and frozen orange-juice concentrate. Yet the Mexican woman's skepticism of the doctrine that time is money may reflect a more realistic view of the limitations of household technology. Ruth Schwartz Cowan observed that mechanizing housework in the United States had the ironic effect of creating "more work for mother." Time saved by laundry machines, for example, was spent in the automobile working as the family chauffeur.<sup>19</sup> Mexican women at least had the satisfaction of feeding their families fresh food.

Emphasis on kinship and friendship also balanced commercialism in the production of cookbooks. The most prominent cooking teacher in the United States, Betty Crocker, was actually the invention of a General Mills advertising worker, Marjorie Husted. The Betty Crocker radio show, which premiered in 1927, offered a disembodied friend to housewives needing advice in the kitchen.<sup>20</sup> Mexican authors occasionally resorted to such tactics; Adela Mena de Castro advertised her cookbook as the solution for young women whose mothers did not have time to teach them to cook. She also forbade readers to pass the book along to others, warning that anyone who wanted to try her recipes must pay for them.<sup>21</sup> But this contrasted

sharply with the hospitality of another author, Faustina Lavalle, who invited readers to her Mexico City home to explain personally any unclear directions in her written recipes.<sup>22</sup>

Josefina Velázquez de León combined religious and family values with entrepreneurial skill and energy to become one of the most influential cookbook authors in modern Mexico. Doña Josefina came from a distinguished family dating back to the conquistador Diego Velázquez and the eighteenth-century founder of the national school of mines, Joaquín. In the nineteenth century her family had taken a political misstep — her great grandfather, also named Joaquín, while serving as Minister of Development under Santa Anna, had authorized the Gadsden Purchase, ceding southern Arizona and New Mexico to the United States. Nevertheless, they kept the family hacienda in Aguascalientes, where Josefina was born in 1899. A few years later the family moved to Mexico City, and along with her three younger sisters, she received a traditional domestic education centered on cooking, drawing, and sewing. About 1930, she married Joaquín González, a successful businessman of about fifty, against her mother's wishes. Her mother seemed to be right, for the marriage lasted less than a year before González died. But as a widow, Josefina could pursue her own goals without deferring to the authority of either husband or father. At first she attempted to run her deceased husband's business, but she disliked the work and sold out to his partners. She had to do something, however, because agrarian reformers had confiscated the family hacienda. To keep the house on Abrahán González Street, about 1935 she transformed the downstairs into a cooking school and obtained sponsorship from General Electric. Over the "Caldrot" stove posters she hung an image of her true patron, Saint Edwiges, and she devoted many works to Catholic charities. Josefina soon won a loyal following among society ladies, at first through word of mouth from enthusiastic students. About 1940 she began submitting recipes to the Poblano women's magazine *Mignon*, and six years later she was publishing books on her own press, Ediciones Josefina Velázquez de León. As the classes grew, two of her younger sisters entered the business. Nevertheless, she continued to work with enormous energy for the rest of her life, teaching classes in the morning and evening, experimenting with recipes in the afternoon, and writing and illustrating books until late at night.<sup>23</sup>

Doña Josefina and other cooking teachers owed their success not only to hard work and creative recipes, but also to the importance of cuisine in defining family identity. A sociological study in Querétaro, for example, found that members of the upper-middle class considered eating well as more important to good living than having fancy automobiles or expensive

clothes.<sup>24</sup> Families in the northern state of Sonora, meanwhile, expressed their solidarity through the ritual of *carne asada*, not simply a grilled steak, but an entire social event.<sup>25</sup> Within the Gómez family studied by Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur, weekly dinners united the various branches to plot business strategy or to discuss an upcoming baptism. The recipes prepared for these reunions were closely guarded secrets, passed by centralizing women only to daughters by blood, not those by marriage. Relatively poor women assured invitations to their wealthier relatives' parties — and by extension their status within the clan — through gifts of *buñuelos* and other desserts.<sup>26</sup>

These family rituals reproduced and reinforced the rituals that bound together the national community. Gómez women regarded colonial recipes as expressions of patriotism, similar to their veneration of the Mexican saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe.<sup>27</sup> Independence Day celebrations acquired their own ritual foods, often newly invented traditions such as tricolor rice.<sup>28</sup> Connections between family, food, and fatherland were made most explicitly by "Gourmet," a food and society columnist for the Mexico City daily *Excelsior* in the late 1940s. Her columns followed an invariable narrative of a high-society woman entertaining her family and distinguished friends with some special dish that evoked Mexican patriotism. "Gourmet" concluded with the recipe so that her middle-class readers — who would never actually dine with the likes of ex-president Emilio Portes Gil or composer Carlos Chávez — could at least share the national cuisine with their own family and friends.<sup>29</sup> These efforts to build a national cuisine were hardly new, but divisions of ethnicity, class, and region had frustrated these efforts in the nineteenth century. Twentieth-century responses to these questions reveal much about the evolving nature of Mexican nationalism.

### The Taste of Indigenismo

Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo reigned notorious over Mexico's intellectual vanguard, outraging bourgeois morality with their revolutionary paintings and scandalous behavior. The couple delighted in their Bolshevik reputations — he placed Lenin's portrait in a mural at New York City's Rockefeller Plaza and she had an affair with Trotsky — but they preferred to cloak their radical ideas in nationalist, particularly Native American, mantles. For a dinner honoring former Agriculture Minister and patron of the arts Marte R. Gómez, Rivera suggested an Aztec main course of stewed human flesh, although he eventually deferred to his colleagues' preference for chicken.<sup>30</sup> Kahlo wore indigenous costumes accented with pre-Columbian jewelry

and sought out traditional foods in native markets to serve at her parties.<sup>31</sup> Their *indigenista* taste ultimately became one of the foundations of Mexican nationalism, but only after it had been shorn of all radicalism and made palatable to the middle class they had worked so hard to disturb.

Foreign recipes continued to dominate Mexican culinary literature throughout the 1920s and 1930s, an ironic continuation of Porfirian tastes through the revolutionary period. María Aguilar de Carbia, who wrote some of the best selling cookbooks of the 1930s under the pen name Mari-chu, offered international cuisine to Mexican housewives, although her English-language cookbook, *Mexico through my kitchen window*, presented national recipes to an international audience.<sup>32</sup> Even Josefina Velázquez de León began her publishing career with cake recipes in a women's magazine. The illustrations featured imported figures such as Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny at first, but in 1940 she added national scenes of the China Poblana and mariachi musicians. International recipes likewise filled her first major book, *Manual práctico de cocina y repostería* (Practical Manual of Cooking and Pastry).<sup>33</sup>

Another expression of ambivalence toward native cooking appeared in the original 1926 account of the legend of *mole poblano*. Carlos de Gante first published the story of the nuns of the Dominican Santa Rosa cloister in Puebla who concocted Mexico's national dish. In this version, the mother superior asked the devotees to create a new dish in honor of their benefactor, an archbishop. One sister suggested cooking a turkey, which brought gasps of horror from others. "It's a dirty, stinking animal," they protested. "That's precisely why I have chosen it," responded the first. "Surely we can make something good and original." This dialogue reflected the *indigenista* program for redeeming Mexico's Indians, represented by the "dirty, stinking" turkey, cleansed by indoctrination in the ways of Old World civilization, the spices, to create the Mexican mestizo nation, *mole poblano*.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, folklorists had already begun to replace this contempt with a genuine interest in Indian cuisine. In the 1920s Eugenio Gómez published a number of recipes gathered from villages near the great pyramids of Teotihuacán. These dishes, which he termed Mexico's "vernacular cuisine," included cactus paddles and peasant soups along with various tamales and *moles*.<sup>35</sup> Virginia Rodríguez Rivera became the most prolific scholar of traditional Mexican foods, publishing a now classic volume on nineteenth-century dishes drawn from oral-history interviews.<sup>36</sup> Other students of indigenous cuisine included Agustín Aragón Leyva, José Farías Galindo, and Lt. Col. Santos Acevedo López.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the most prominent collector of village recipes, Mayra Parada, made a fortune as the leading caterer

in postrevolutionary Mexico. From her kitchen on Juantepec Street, she introduced peasant cuisine to the nearby mansions of Lomas de Chapultepec and even the Presidential Palace of Los Pinos.<sup>38</sup>

By the mid-1940s class snobbery against indigenous foods had diminished noticeably. Tamales and other *antojitos*, once deemed fit only for the "lower orders," provided the subject for entire volumes. Josefina Velázquez de León even declared chicken enchiladas the "regional dish" of Guanajuato.<sup>39</sup> And *pozole*, formerly one of the "secrets of the indigenous classes," became the symbol of Guadalaajara's cuisine.<sup>40</sup> The legend of *mole poblano* changed to reflect this new attitude. Melitón Salazar Monroy emphasized the delicacy of the "turkey fattened on chestnuts and hazelnuts to finish the dish with such a delicious broth and appetizing meat."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, authors recognized indigenous contributions to the dish in the name *mole*, which came from the Nahuatl "*moli*," meaning sauce, rather than the Spanish "*moler*," to grind.<sup>42</sup> Maize also lost the former stigma of its Indian origins and came to be seen as the most civilized of the world's grains because its tough outer husk allowed it to reproduce only with human assistance.<sup>43</sup> In the early 1950s, one newspaper announced the end of antagonisms between corn and wheat, explaining that sociologists no longer considered the European grain essential to Mexico's development.<sup>44</sup> A leading nutritionist, Alfredo Ramos Espinosa, formulated the simple equation that people who ate only corn were Indians, those who ate only wheat were Spaniards, while Mexicans were fortunate enough to eat both grains.<sup>45</sup>

But upper- and middle-class consumers still demanded a ritual cleansing of indigenous foods such as the black corn fungus *cuitlacoche*, literally "excrement of the gods." As late as the 1940s, cosmopolitan Mexicans considered eating this spore to be a disgusting Indian habit.<sup>46</sup> Gourmet Jaime Saldívar first devised an acceptable way of presenting *cuitlacoche* rolled in *crêpes* and covered with *béchamel* sauce.<sup>47</sup> This association with French haute cuisine removed the lower-class stigma, and by the 1960s Feodora de Rosenzweig Díaz, wife of the secretary of foreign affairs, was serving *cuitlacoche* soup to foreign dignitaries. Within a few more decades Mexicans considered it one of their nation's great contributions to international haute cuisine, a sort of Mesoamerican noble rot.<sup>48</sup>

Middle-class acceptance of indigenous contributions to the national cuisine came at a significant moment in Mexican history. Although this inclusive nationalism had appeared hesitantly in community cookbooks of the late Porfiriato, particularly the work of Vicenta Torres, European styles continued to predominate culinary literature in the 1920s and 1930s. Only after the threat of Cardenista populism had ended in the late 1930s did

cookbook authors embrace Indian foods as a national standard. As postrevolutionary governments downplayed class conflict in favor of social harmony, folklorists rushed to the countryside to collect oral traditions before they were drowned by mass-media advertising and replaced with packaged foods from the United States. Native ingredients and recipes then became the basis for a uniquely Mexican national cuisine.

### Traveling Gourmets

Postrevolutionary governments from Calles onward based their nationalist program on highways as much as on education. Roads unified the country to a previously unthinkable extent by facilitating internal migration and by carrying national markets, and if necessary the federal army, to the most remote regions.<sup>49</sup> One of the most colorful nationalist champions to use the Mexican highway system in the 1940s was Josefina Velázquez de León. Determined to experience Mexico's diverse regional cuisines, she purchased an automobile, hired a chauffeur, and set off with her loyal servant and traveling companion Luisa. She ventured across the country for more than a decade, giving cooking classes, collecting local recipes, and eating virtually anything.<sup>50</sup> The result, a series of cookbooks describing the foods of most Mexican states, reflected broader movements of migration and markers that unified regional recipes into a national cuisine.

In the 1920s, as political bosses jealously guarded their autonomy against federal interference, loyalties to local cuisines remained strong. Francisco J. Santamaría included in a 1921 dictionary an enthusiastic portrait of his home state Tabasco's tamales, which supposedly contained the finest dough and fillings, far superior to those of central Mexico.<sup>51</sup> Manuel Toussaint displayed even more chauvinism when describing the cuisine of Oaxaca with its "succulent" tamales as opposed to the leathery ones made in Mexico City.<sup>52</sup> Salvador Novo perhaps best explained such culinary jingoism, in his history of Mexican cuisine, when he spoke of the revolutionary conquest of central and southern Mexico by *morteño* wheat tortillas.<sup>53</sup>

Yet the increasing integration of the Mexican nation soon replaced aggressive attitudes with curiosity about other regional cuisines. Faustina Lavalle, a native of Campeche living in Mexico City, wrote a cookbook in which she admitted little knowledge of "Mexican" cooking styles, and offered personal recipes so that her new neighbors could appreciate the distinct culture of her home state.<sup>54</sup> Josefina Velázquez de León went to great lengths to explain the correct usage of herbs and chiles that were often

unknown outside their place of origin.<sup>55</sup> Women could reproduce these recipes because improved highways made it economical to ship diverse ingredients to Mexico City and other urban markets. The transportation industry allowed the transformation of regional cuisines from strictly local knowledges to potentially cosmopolitan cooking styles. The national cuisine therefore owed as much to capitalist development as to a search for *lo mexicano*.

The commodification of regional cuisines reached a peak in the tourism industry, one of the most important sectors of the Mexican economy. While promoters could lure tourists with beaches and pyramids, they also had to offer good food, and the 1950s became a golden age for Mexican gourmet restaurants. Chefs at César Balsa's Presidente Hotel in Acapulco introduced wealthy tourists to *cebiche*, a dish once made only by poor fishermen of freshly caught seafood "cooked" in the citric acid of lime juice.<sup>56</sup> The Gulf Coast port of Veracruz, meanwhile, attracted such celebrities as film director Emilio "El Indio" Fernández to dine on the delicious stuffed crab.<sup>57</sup> Cuernavaca, the vacation home of Mexico's elite from Moctezuma to Maximilian, enticed twentieth-century tourists to the Casa de Piedra for the highly acclaimed cooking of Doña Rosa Trías. This Catalan beauty transformed her Stone Castle into a restaurant and hotel when her husband, the Spanish Marques de Castellar, abandoned her. Spain's loss was Mexico's gain, and people flocked from the capital to sample her *mole poblano* and almond chicken.<sup>58</sup>

But with all due respect to the marquesa, the culinary heart of the republic lay in Mexico City, particularly in the Pink Zone, where some of the finest regional chefs gathered to exhibit their skills. José Inés Loredo, the most flamboyant of these restaurateurs, had already served as municipal president of Tampico before moving to Mexico City in 1943. His most famous creation, *carne asada a la tampiqueña*, butterflied filet served with grilled cheese and green enchiladas, took the capital by storm, and he soon parlayed his initial restaurant, the Tampico Club, into a gourmet empire.<sup>59</sup> Delicious regional cuisine could also be found at the Circulo del Sureste, featuring Yucatecan *cobinita pibil* (pit-barbecued pig), and at the Restaurante Los Norteños, specializing in Monterrey's *cabrito al pastor* (barbecued goat). Restaurants such as the Fonda del Refugio, Café de Tacuba, and Prendes blended a variety of traditional dishes from different regions.<sup>60</sup>

Fiestas provided another natural meeting ground for Mexico's regional cuisines. The society columnist "Gourmet" reported that a distinguished Oaxacan accountant living in Mexico City, Antolín Jiménez, celebrated his birthday with a Guelaguetza danced in traditional folk costume, followed

by a buffet of Oaxacan regional foods. At another gathering, the Coahuilan General Alfredo Breceda invited the Yucatecan gourmet Benito Guerra Leal to prepare a *cochinilla pibit* that guests could combine with Mexican dishes prepared by the hostess Nena Roth de Breceda. This particular party was intended to welcome some intimate friends returning from Europe with an "*ambiente tan mexicanismo*," a very Mexican ambience that continued long into the night and did not end until after the governor had danced *la bomba* with the Swedish minister's wife.<sup>61</sup> This mixing of traditions from throughout the republic broke down regional divisions to create an inclusive national identity open to all Mexicans—and to Scandinavians as well.

The combination of regional dialects into a national cuisine was most evident in the culinary literature of the postwar era. Josefina Velázquez de León's influential volume *Platillos regionales de la República mexicana* made it essential to include recipes from each state in any work attempting to represent the national cuisine. Perhaps the most crudely patriotic of these cookbooks derived from the collaboration of a number of senators' wives during the administration of Adolfo López Mateos (1958–64). Each woman provided recipes from the foods of her constituents, but because so many of them were actually natives of Mexico City they collaborated on the dishes of the Federal District.<sup>62</sup> This pattern conveyed a subtle civic lesson to women, transforming their conceptions of space. By arranging dishes in neat categories from Aguascalientes to Zacatecas, the books reformulated a state's symbolic meaning from a unique *patria chica* to an interchangeable federal entity. This change in perspective also facilitated the growth of national identity by emphasizing distinctions between Mexican cuisine and the foods of foreigners.

### Confronting International Cuisine

The proliferation of industrial packaged foods in the twentieth century prompted fears that mass culture from the United States would overwhelm local traditions, reducing diverse national cuisines to the bland uniformity of a McDonald's franchise. The theory of cultural imperialism gained credence not only from the significant share of food markets held by multinational food companies, but also by the virtual domination of the Mexican advertising industry by United States firms.<sup>63</sup> Yet Mexicans are not in any imminent danger of abandoning their traditional cuisine, notwithstanding the efforts of PepsiCo and its subsidiary Taco Bell. Immigrant cooks have

made important contributions to modern Mexican cuisine, and contact with foreigners may even have stimulated new interest in indigenous ingredients once shunned by elites.

Wealthy Mexicans maintained their infatuation with continental haute cuisine, from the Porfirian gilded age to the postrevolutionary miracle. Tourist guides boasted a number of exclusive international restaurants, most notably the San Angel Inn, Ambassadeurs, Alfredo, and Papillon. These establishments kept up with the latest European fashions, shifting from the stuffy Parisian standards of Carême and Escoffier to the sunny Mediterranean cuisines of Provence and Italy. Antonio Costa, the midcentury counterpart of Portfrian chef Sylvain Daumont, fled the German occupation of France in 1940 to open Papillon, where he introduced Mexicans to the finest cassoulet and civet from the south of France. Alfredo Bellingheri, a flamboyant Sicilian, maintained equally high standards of Italian cooking and living in his eponymous restaurant.<sup>64</sup>

Members of the middle class, meanwhile, adopted culinary standards set by mass media and food manufacturers from the United States. A 1945 newspaper advertisement for Aunt Jemima-brand pancake mix exemplified this process of culinary influence. The first scene depicted a cartoon figure suspiciously eyeing a stack of pancakes; he chewed the foreign food thoughtfully in the next panel, then finally broke into a broad grin of approval. By the late 1950s, anthropologist Oscar Lewis found that pancakes had become an established tradition among middle-class families, replacing the old breakfast of fried beans, tortillas, and chiles.<sup>65</sup> Many misguided consumers also abandoned fresh crusty *bolillos* (rolls) from neighborhood bakeries in favor of chewy, plastic-wrapped *pan de caja* (bread from a box). The Ideal Bakery came out with the first Mexican version of Wonder Bread in the 1930s, but after 1945 it lost customers to the current market leader, Bimbo Bread. Housewives not only began making geometrically precise sandwiches instead of lush *tortas campesinas*; they also conducted bizarre experiments with mass-produced ingredients to create such hybrid dishes as shrimp and cornflakes, calf brains with crackers, macaroni and milk soup, and pork loin in Pepsi Cola.<sup>66</sup>

These examples may well illustrate a dark side of mass production, but they do not depict the complete annihilation of Mexican gastronomy. Indeed, many foreign manufacturers won customers by demonstrating the utility of their products for making national dishes: Glasbake Cookware ran a series of newspaper advertisements featuring recipes for Mexican regional dishes such as *mole michoacano*. Appliance makers depicted giant *cazuelas* simmering on top of their modern stoves, and an advertisement for pres-



sure cooks made the justifiable claim that "Mexican cooking enters a new epoch with the *Olla presto*." Even that agent of cultural imperialism, Coca Cola, appealed to Mexican customers with nostalgic scenes of *tamulada* picnics.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, Mexicans often appropriated elements of foreign culture to their own purposes. Domestic soft-drink manufacturers such as Munder competed with Coke and Pepsi by introducing lines of soda flavors adapted to Mexican tastes for orange, mango, and apple cider. Hollywood movie stars were unknowingly drafted into the service of Mexican culture; for example, the "My Best Recipes" page of a women's magazine paired photos of Jane Powell with Tlaxcalan *barbacoa* and Lucille Ball with tortilla soup.<sup>68</sup> The habit of eating eggs for breakfast, when transferred from the United States to Mexico, stimulated creative experimentation rather than slavish imitation. In searching for national counterparts to Eggs Benedict, Mexican chefs served *buevos rancheros* (ranch-style eggs) fried with tomato-and-chile sauce, *buevos albaniles* (bricklayers' eggs) scrambled with a similar sauce, and *buevos motuleños* (from Motul, Yucatán) fried with beans, ham, and peas.<sup>69</sup> Soon, no hotel with pretensions to luxury could neglect its own "traditional" egg dish on the breakfast menu.

Mexico also enriched the national cuisine through its open door to refugees, particularly Spanish Republicans after the Civil War and Middle Easterners fleeing turmoil in their homelands. Although Spanish cuisine was already well established in Mexico, immigrants from the Eastern Mediterranean brought new traditions such as the *gyro* method of roasting lamb on a portable cooker made up of a vertical spit next to a small gas flame. In the 1930s, Lebanese immigrants to the city of Puebla began selling this meat with flour tortillas, similar to pita bread, under the name *tacos arabes*. Elsewhere in Mexico, street-corner vendors adopted these cookers to make *tacos al pastor* (shepherd's tacos), originally a name used for a rustic form of *barbacoa* served with corn tortillas in the sheep country of Hidalgo.<sup>70</sup> Young people in Mexico City took this Middle Eastern and Mexican blend one step further, with a play on the German shepherd, to call them *tacos de perro* (dog tacos). German immigrants to the Pacific Coast state of Tepic naturalized their own traditions in the form of herring. Just as descendants of Spanish conquistadors celebrated Christmas Eve with Iberian dried cod, German settlers keenly anticipated the annual ship bringing canned fish, which along with Christmas cookies recalled life in the old country. Nostalgic immigrants cared little that people in Germany never thought of eating an everyday food like herring salad under the *Tannenbaum*.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, the authors of national cookbooks needed foreign foods to

distinguish against their own creations. Indeed, the emotional fulfillment of nationalism, a person's pride in the value and legitimacy of their national community, may depend in large part on acceptance by this "other."<sup>72</sup> Mexicans certainly sought such approval of their national cuisine. The food writer "Gourmet," for example, trumpeted the conquests of *mole* over French taste buds when the nationalist painter Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo) brought his cook to Paris. In another column she praised the visiting Austrian Prince Kilimanzay, who reportedly preferred Mexican *antojitos* to the most exquisite continental delicacies. "Gourmet's" newspaper, *Excelsior*, noted in 1945 that the Baltimore-Ohio Railroad offered tortillas and other Mexican foods on the daily menu, but added with chagrin that these were intended for migrant workers rather than passengers.<sup>73</sup> Within a few decades, however, the tables turned as Mexican restaurants gained popularity in the United States.<sup>74</sup>

But the foreign role in creating Mexico's national cuisine went far beyond polite applause. The nineteenth century's finest collection of *mole* recipes, *La cocinera poblana*, was written by Catalan immigrant Narciso Bassols. Another Spanish chef, Alejandro Pardo, arrived in Mexico about 1912, and while his European confections dazzled society women, he soon became intrigued by Mexican recipes and his columns in leading women's magazines began featuring *tortillitas* and *chapultitas*.<sup>75</sup> The modern apostle of Mexican food, Englishwoman Diana Southwood Kennedy, has achieved such renown in spreading the gospel of popular cuisine that she received the Order of the Aztec Eagle, the Mexican government's highest honor open to foreigners. The work of these immigrants did not detract from the invaluable research of Josefa Velázquez de León, Virginia Rodríguez Rivera, and many others. Nevertheless, foreigners have taken an undeniably important role in exploring the country's gastronomic traditions. This resulted in part from the almost religious enthusiasm of converts to a new cuisine, but also because they did not share the Mexican elite's disdain for the Indian masses and anything pertaining to them.

The eventual acceptance of native foods such as *cuitlacoche* may derive largely from the search for distinctively Mexican contributions to international cuisine. The 1980s *nouvelle* Mexican fashion of using European techniques to prepare indigenous ingredients owed its modern origins to Jaime Saldivar's corn fungus *crêpes*. Exclusive restaurants offered elegant plates of *chapultines*, tiny grasshoppers, cooked with chipotle chiles and garnished with guacamole. Chefs also prized *gusanos*, worms from the maguery plant, which were usually sautéed in butter to disguise the fact that they did not come fresh from the fields. Eating bugs became a source of national distinc-

tion, even pride, offered by middle-class families to visiting students from the United States. After centuries of neglect, Moctezuma's dinner finally made a comeback as Mexico's contender in the highly competitive restaurant world. This reevaluation of popular cuisine represented part of a broad attempt to come to grips with the nation's past.

### Cooking History

Virtually all Mexican politicians of the 1920s and 1930s attributed their legitimacy to national service in the Revolution of 1910. These officials used the label "reactionary" as a political anathema even as they pursued increasingly conservative policies, stifling the radicalism of peasant and labor movements. To resolve this dissonance, they sought to reshape the popular memory of revolutionary leaders. Eulogies of Emiliano Zapata, for example, downplayed his support for village democracy and depicted him instead as an agent of the revolutionary state.<sup>76</sup> Even traditional conservatives could employ parts of the revolutionary past for their own purposes, viewing Francisco Madero as the true spirit of 1910 while representing Lázaro Cárdenas as a communist corruption of this democratic movement.<sup>77</sup> History thus became a tool of ideologues seeking to forge a national memory suited to their own political ends.

Cookbook authors likewise imagined the national cuisine in historical terms, and often began their works with brief accounts of Mexican gastronomic history. These narratives, together with a few longer essays, illustrated many of the beliefs and aspirations of middle-class housewives. Adela Fernández, daughter of "El Indio" Fernández, perhaps best articulated this distinctive ideology in a description of her culinary education in the 1940s. María Elena Sodi de Pallares wrote a well-known essay on Mexican culinary history in 1958 for a food industry trade fair sponsored by the Ministry of the Economy. Two book-length studies appeared in the late 1960s, one by Salvador Novo, Mexico City's official chronicler, and the other by Amanda Farga, a Spanish immigrant and editor of the Mexican Restaurant Association's trade magazine.<sup>78</sup>

The periodization of this culinary history followed a predictable course, beginning with pre-Columbian foods. Authors glorified Tlaxelolco's market and Moctezuma's banquets, reverently quoting the accounts of Spanish conquistadors and priests. Food critic Miguel Guzmán Peredo paid homage to the Aztec ruler as America's first gourmet, comparable to the French author Brillat-Savarin. Cooking teacher Florencio Gregorio even

attempted to date the invention of certain Mesoamerican foods to successive rulers of Xochimilco. He imaginatively associated Xaopantzin (1379-1397) with the vegetable dish *huanabzomiles*, Ozoltl (1397-1411) with enchiladalike *chilaguiles*, and Tihuatzin (1437-1442) with herb-stuffed *quihuanales*.<sup>79</sup>

The colonial period constituted the second great age of Mexican cooking and the origins of the mestizo cuisine that became the national standard. Salvador Novo declared the first mestizo dish to be pork tacos, which he imagined were served at a banquet for Fernando Cortés. The greatest triumph of the "baroque" kitchens of New Spain was of course *mole poblano*, the heavenly dish of the sisters of Santa Rosa. This association gained added tourist appeal in 1968, when the former Dominican convent, closed down by the Reform, was converted into a museum of regional folk art. Another component of mestizo cuisine came from the romantic voyages of the Manila galleon, which sailed once a year between the Philippines and Acapulco. This majestic ship supposedly carried to Mexico both rice and *mancha-manites* (tablecloth stainers), delicious mixtures of tropical fruits and spicy chiles reminiscent of Chinese sweet and sour sauces.<sup>80</sup>

With independence in 1821 came the first national dish, *chiles en nogada*. The people of Puebla created this dish of green chile peppers, white walnut sauce, and red pomegranate seeds to honor the tricolor flag of Agustín de Iturbide, first emperor of Mexico. The Second Empire of Maximilian and Carlota introduced still another influence in 1864, French cuisine. Although Mexicans expelled the invading French army three years later and executed the unfortunate archduke, European dishes continued their occupation of the country throughout the presidency of Porfirio Díaz. The development of Mexico's mestizo cuisine culminated in the revolution with the expulsion of French banquets and the mixing of various regional foods by *soldadera* camp followers, who carried wheat tortillas from the north and corn tamales from the south. This new national cooking style incorporated elements from America, Asia, Africa, and Europe, forming a universal cuisine that mirrored the "cosmic race" of mestizos.<sup>81</sup>

The significance of these culinary narratives lay not in their (often quite dubious) historical accuracy, but in what they revealed about modern Mexico. Cookbook authors paid little attention to traditional civic heroes such as Benito Juárez and Emiliano Zapata. Instead, they enshrined conservative religious figures as founders of the national cuisine. The seventeenth-century nuns who invented *mole poblano* became the symbolic mothers of the mestizo nation; the often-reviled first emperor Agustín Iturbide received credit for *chiles en nogada*; and the misguided Second Empire of

Maximilian and Carlota was recalled for its glorious European court life. This domestic construction of the past differed noticeably from the official PRI version of Mexican history, embracing instead a more conservative vision of the national past.<sup>82</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm has attributed such "invented traditions" — and nationalism more generally — to a search for stability in times of modernization.<sup>83</sup> Mexican women of the postwar era displayed a mania for preserving their culinary past, even as it began to slip away. When electric blenders finally allowed women to make *mole poblano* without a grinding stone, the food columnist "Gourmet" warned women to save their *metates*, "because this Mexican cooking utensil has still not been supplanted by any modern appliance."<sup>84</sup> Josefina Velázquez de León, in a guide to domestic appliances, made special efforts to create links with the past by juxtaposing modern housewives with stereotypes of historical figures. The cookbook's illustrations showed fashionable women effortlessly using blenders and pressure cookers to make tamales with peasant girls, *pulques* with maguey planters, and sweets with colonial nuns.<sup>85</sup> Editorial houses turned out facsimiles of nineteenth-century cookbooks, and magazines included whole sections devoted to archaic recipes.<sup>86</sup> A few people even published manuscript cookbooks they inherited from their grandmothers.<sup>87</sup>

The invention of tradition is particularly apparent in the creation myth of *pozole*, a hominy stew of the Pacific Coast. Cooking legends, like fairy tales, follow a set formula including an accident and an important personage. This story, set in eighteenth-century Chiapa, Guerrero, told of the dilemma facing women preparing for the visit of the Archbishop of Puebla. They had too much corn to grind, so instead of making tortillas they simply cooked the *nixtamalized* kernels with pork to make a stew, *pozole*. The choice of a *poblanito* prelate is important, because in Mexican gastronomic mythology Puebla was the home of *mole*. The bishop's benediction thus sacralized *pozole*, giving it a legitimate place in the nation's culinary pantheon.<sup>88</sup>

Cookbooks also helped foment national consensus by downplaying class and ethnic struggle. They portrayed the conquest not as a brutal war of cultural genocide, but as a "happy encounter" of two culinary traditions. Cuisine even provided symbols for the cold war against international communism. A 1947 editorial cartoon in the newspaper *Excelsior* depicted the spread of communism in Chile as a voracious Joseph Stalin about to devour a pepper. The caption, however, warned him away, saying, "it's very hot and causes indigestion."<sup>89</sup> Latin American food thus served as a metaphorical defense against foreign influence. But the real threat of communism in the hemisphere lay not in outside agitation by Russian agents, but in the dis-

affected masses who rallied behind Fidel Castro. In Mexico, the middle classes themselves ultimately began to question the success of their authoritarian system.

### The Miracle's End

As hosts of the 1968 Olympic Games, Mexicans hoped to exhibit to the world their economic development, but instead revealed to themselves the failure of their "miracle." The political consensus of revolutionary nationalism began to unravel in the summer of 1968, when university student demonstrators began calling for democracy. Fearing disruption of the games, the government responded with repression, and confrontations escalated between protesters and police. On October 2, 1968, about five thousand students and spectators gathered at Tlatelolco, site of the great pre-Columbian marketplace and of the Aztec ruler Cuauhtémoc's last stand. When the students refused orders to disperse, army units attacked them with billy clubs and tear gas. Shots were fired, either by student snipers or government *granaderos*, and then the carnage began. Soldiers opened fire with high-caliber machine guns, killing more than three hundred men, women, and children. At least two thousand people suffered injuries in the fighting and as many more were arrested, beaten, and tortured.<sup>90</sup>

The massacre of Tlatelolco struck a grave blow to the ruling party's legitimacy, and it was only the first of many. The gains of the previous decades had gone primarily to the wealthy. In 1950 the poorest 20 percent of the population received only 6 percent of the national income; by 1987 their share had fallen to less than half that figure.<sup>91</sup> Glaring inequalities encouraged leftist guerrilla movements in the 1970s, which the army suppressed with terror tactics. At the same time economic growth faltered, forcing major devaluations of the peso beginning in 1976. By the mid-1980s, the foreign debt had increased to nearly 100 billion dollars and the peso plummeted to a rate of 3,000 to the dollar.<sup>92</sup>

Under these circumstances, Mexicans of all social classes questioned the viability of one-party politics and trickle-down development. The wealthy protected themselves by sending tens of billions of dollars abroad to United States and European banks, further compounding the country's economic crisis. The middle class, their savings wiped out by devaluations, gave up beach vacations and luxury goods. The poor simply ate less, especially after the government cut food subsidies as part of an International Monetary Fund austerity program. Economic hardship, in turn, fueled support for

opposition political parties. The conservative National Action Party (PAN) began winning local elections throughout northern Mexico, while leftist members of the PRI defected under the leadership of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the former president. It is widely suspected that the ruling party resorted to electoral fraud in the 1988 election to assure the victory of Carlos Salinas de Gortari over the Cardenista opposition. And as president, Salinas repressed attempts to open the party, thereby broadening the split between technocrats and populists. Demands for democracy and social justice grew violent on January 1, 1994, when the Zapatista National Liberation Army launched a rebellion in the southern state of Chiapas. Four months later, the PRI's reformist presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio was gunned down at a campaign rally in Baja California. The possible implication of party members in the assassination wrote the requiem for the peace of the PRI.

With the end of the miracle came the close of another era in Mexican history. On September 19, 1968, just two weeks before the massacre at Tlatelolco, Josefina Velázquez de León passed away. At sixty-nine, she had already slowed down in her work, but had agreed to give a three-day cooking class in the city of Veracruz for Catholic charities. She fell ill in the port city and died a short time later. Her sisters attempted to carry on the business, but eventually closed the school and sold the rights to her books. The ground floor of the family house on Abraham González Street, where Doña Josefina had given her first cooking classes, was rented out as an auto parts store.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, her culinary legacy remained as a source of comfort for the Mexican people. Some of her first books to be reissued in the late 1980s were *How to Cook in Hard Times* and *How to Use Leftover Food*.<sup>94</sup> And when an earthquake devastated Mexico City in 1985, one of the first projects to aid the victims was, not surprisingly, a charity cookbook.<sup>95</sup>

## SEVEN

### Recipes for Patria

#### *National Cuisines in Global Perspective*



"If there is anything we [Chinese] are serious about," wrote Lin Yutang in 1935, "it is neither religion nor learning, but food." The philosopher went on to define patriotism as a "recollection of the keen sensual pleasures of our childhood. The loyalty to Uncle Sam is the loyalty to American doughnuts, and loyalty to the *Vaterland* is the loyalty to *Pfannkuchen* and *Stollen*, but the Americans and the Germans will not admit it."<sup>1</sup> Mexicans have tended toward the Chinese gastronomic impulse rather than Anglo-German reticence; poet Ramón López Velarde began the first act of his *Suave patria* (1921) with the words "Fatherland: your surface is maize," and architect Fernando González Gortázar cited cuisine along with art, language, and landscape as among the things most evocative of the national identity.<sup>2</sup> Although this Proustian notion requires historical and comparative perspective, it nevertheless helps explain the sense of belonging that inspires nationalism.

The first qualification arises from the need to distinguish nationalism from bonds of family, religion, or native land. Nations are communities of people who claim the right to self-government based on shared and distinctive cultures, which are themselves modern constructions. National political rituals, from the mass rallies of fascist states to the election days of parliamentary democracies, therefore emphasize the unity of the people.<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson noted that an essential step in the rise of national identity was the eighteenth-century decline of loyalties to older communities such as monarchies and religions.<sup>4</sup> Yet the nation need not be an individual's only, or even primary, affiliation. In the same way, tamales convey many levels of identity. Individual quirks of taste and texture allow Mexican