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**Wheat *versus* maize**

Civilizing Dietary Strategies and Early Mexican Republicanism

by  
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# Wheat versus maize

## Civilizing Dietary Strategies and Early Mexican Republicanism \*

Sarah Bak-Geller Corona \*\*

*This article explored the role of food in the rise of political modernity in the Atlantic world, toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>. The three food programs analyzed here—the production of a “patriotic” bread, the program of “public and common” meals, and the regime of “hard digestion” founded upon ideal indigenous food habits—shaped one of the first republican discourses in Mexico. These discussions about republic, citizenship and food standards, although they reflected varied, eclectic and often contradictory positions, shared one point in common: they resignified some of the basic notions of the colonial political language, including community, territory, patria and “common good”.*



Freedom is hearty fare but hard to digest;  
it takes very healthy stomachs to tolerate it.<sup>1</sup>

Diet and digestion were among the topics that concerned those who promoted a model for enlightened civic behavior during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J.J. Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1771).

century. Doctors and physiologists, intellectuals and political figures, wrote books and treatises in which they explained the relation between food and human emotions, or between the stomach and psyche—between diet and a society’s political and economic development. Authors like Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu and Rousseau, wrote about the influence of foods upon “life’s general economy”<sup>1</sup>. Some of them contributed articles to the prestigious *Encyclopédie*, where entries like “Diet”, “Bread”, “Wheat”, “Digestion” and “Condiments” spread their ideas on food and the benefits of certain preparations and cooking methods for the constitutions of modern, enlightened citizens.

Moderation at table represented the main dietary guideline among the new political subjects. In culinary terms, the frugal diet translated into consuming food with few condiments and preferably fermented, using rudimentary cooking techniques and uncomplicated procedures.

In New Spain, enlightened food theories were introduced in an atmosphere bubbling with ideas on how food relates to social order. The crisis of the Spanish monarchy in 1808 prompted the intellectual elite of New Spain (currently Mexico) to defend their autonomy against the Spanish crown and discuss new forms of patriotism, government, and civic sociability. The body became the object of many of these concerns, which had to do with the need to create new political subjects. Food was seen as the key to transform the colonial population into stronger individuals with better skills and abilities, who could serve the new *patria* and the “common good”. The imposition of a new diet would supposedly create free and productive persons, which would result in a more united, egalitarian and productive society.

This article explores the role of food in the emergence of republicanism in Mexico, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It discusses food debates among political and intellectual elites, whose common concern was to replace the colonial population eating habits by a suitable diet that could transform the bodies and create modern citizens. Toward this end, I will analyze three of New Spain’s alimentary programs, which inspired colonial authorities and intellectual elites to consider food practices in new terms: of citizenship, liberty, public will and the

<sup>1</sup> The expression is from Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d’Argenville. “Digestion”, *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert (eds), Paris, vol. 4, 1754.

public good. These programs are: production of a bread made with maize flour, supplanting tortillas and known as the “patriotic” Bread of San Carlos; Carlos María de Bustamante’s program of “public and common” meals, and finally, the project by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi to implement an austere, “hard to digest” regimen in New Spain.

Within this context of discussing ideas related to food as a factor for political and social regeneration, the spread of European enlightened ideas among New Spain’s intellectual circles was fundamental. The greatest exponent of the enlightened diet was surely Jean-Jacques Rousseau. With food as impetus, and a sort of theory of the sense of taste, the Genevan developed philosophical reflections that continued throughout his life: upon the regeneration of human beings, and the life of the individual in society. The political and social, not to mention philosophical, dimensions that food occupies in Rousseau’s work become even more prominent if we analyze the transatlantic trajectory of some of the Genevan’s most highly-seasoned postulates.

In searching for the ideal diet according to the population’s presumed needs, Rousseauian arguments were met with marked interest and discussed from various stances, eclectic and often contradictory. These discussions of food and alimentary guidelines turned out to be determining factors in the reassignment of meaning to some basic concepts in the Hispanic American political vocabulary, among them those of *patria*, patriotism and the public good.

## 1. Bread versus tortilla. A physiological and physiocratic debate

Feeding the indigenous population was an important topic of discussion among intellectual and political elites at the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. “Indian food”, composed of simple “tortillas, chile and *atole* [flavored maize water]”<sup>1</sup>, was considered insufficient and inadequate, and this resulted in a substantial problem for New Spain’s economy, in particular when it came to the colony’s underdeveloped agriculture and industry. The shortage of agricultural laborers, ensuing from the indigenous population’s deficient nutrition,

<sup>1</sup> *El Diario de México*, September 8, 1807.

was more than a slight problem for followers of the physiocratic theories of the time, who maintained that agriculture, more than any other activity, constituted the principal source of a country's riches<sup>1</sup>.

Criticism of indigenous eating habits by liberal thinkers was reinforced by the medical discourse of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Physiologists saw digestion as the cause, as well as the solution, for the majority of the ills befalling the human body. The function of digestion was conceived to be a kind of fermentation, where the stomach's heat provoked changes in foods similar to those that could be observed in fermented substances (production of vapors, putrefaction of components, interaction of acids and salts...).<sup>2</sup> This theory, which came to replace that which had explained digestive function in terms of cooking<sup>3</sup>, promoted the advantages of fermented foods, as they would work along with the natural mechanism of digestion. Rousseau himself was a follower of this dietetic stance. Convinced of the benefits of fermented foods, the philosopher made explicit his preference for bread over porridge, alluding to the fact that in the latter "the flour is cooked less than it is for bread, and also it is not fermented"<sup>4</sup>.

Thus most indigenous foods, and particularly the tortilla, the preparation of which implied manipulation of unleavened dough, did not comply with requirements for healthy digestion. Tortillas "lacking the benefit of fermentation", stood for "dough that was crude, compact, viscous and indigestible", and all they provoked were "harshness and wind in stomachs"<sup>5</sup>. Alexander von Hum-

<sup>1</sup> Among the principal physiocrats being read in Spanish America were François Quesnay (1694-1774), Anne Robert Jacques Turgot (1727-1781) and Nicolas de Condorcet (1743-1794).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rachel Lauden, "Birth of Modern Diet", *Scientific American*, August 2000, vol. 283, n. 2, pp. 62-67. As to the definition of fermentation in the *Encyclopédie* see Jean Claude Bonnet, "Le réseau culinaire dans l'*Encyclopédie*", *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, year 31, n. 5, 1976, pp. 891-914. For an anthropological study of the phenomenon of fermentation and its symbolism in various geographic and historic contexts, see Dominique Fournier and Salvatore D'Onofrio, eds., *Le ferment divin*, Paris, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1991.

<sup>3</sup> Antoine-Joseph Dezallier d'Argenville, in his article "Digestion", noted the evolution of medical thought concerning the digestive process. Ancient physicians, the encyclopaedist writes, defined digestion as "true cooking (...) which is to say, stimulation of heat within foods (...), a softening and dilution by the mixture of various digestive juices". *Encyclopédie, op. cit.*, vol. 4, p. 1003.

<sup>4</sup> Juan Jacobo Rousseau, *Emilio o la educación*, México, Porrúa ("Sepan cuantos", 159), 1982, p. 30. hereinafter cited as *Emilio*.

<sup>5</sup> *Gazeta de México*, September 26, 1786.

boldt, in his *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811), shared a general opinion of tortillas and native foods based on maize when he described the indigenous population in terms of its digestive capacities. For the naturalist and traveler, the Indians' besetting situation was simply indigestion.

These and some other gastric complications which the enlightened elite identified as "very common among the Indians"<sup>1</sup>, served as scientific arguments to justify replacing tortillas with wheat bread throughout the land. The conclusion always tended to be the same: "tortillas (...) cannot constitute as perfect a material for alimentation as leavened bread is"<sup>2</sup>.

Within this context of reshaping the local diet original and innovative experiments were designed, seeking to substitute inhabitants' old food customs with new eating habits. The new regimen had to fit itself to the society's reality, which meant taking into consideration New Spain's deep-rooted taste for maize, while at the same time integrating precepts of modern medicine and economic growth objectives from the colonial elites and authorities. Thus it was that in 1786 in the *Gazeta de México*, citizens were challenged to invent a bread based on maize and wheat. This bread would preserve the nutritional properties of the maize grain, but would have advantages from the baking process (particularly the flour's fermentation), as well as being "a softer and tastier breadstuff" than a tortilla<sup>3</sup>. Experiments were done over several months, but the texture and properties of the final product left much to be desired: "although fine in itself, it hardens in just a few hours", wrote one of the project's promoters on one occasion.<sup>4</sup> Finally, in November of 1806, a bread composed of two parts wheat flour and one part maize flour was successfully created. The *Gazeta de México* announced the product in spring of the following year, and it was given the name *Pan de San Carlos*, San Carlos Bread. The product was "unanimously" approved by viceroy José de Iturrigaray and his advisors, who for their part decided to sell it throughout the kingdom, since it was "healthier than wheat alone". Colonial authorities next turned to the task of building a bakery where the San Carlos Bread could be mass produced. The viceroy, excited about these

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Diario de México*, April 30, 1807.

results, ordered that the recipe be shared with the rest of Spanish America<sup>1</sup>. The experiment was interpreted as an act of pure “patriotic” interest<sup>2</sup> and those promoting its consumption did not shy from proclaiming themselves benefactors of the “common good”.

The experience of the San Carlos Bread paved the way for new initiatives that then began to figure among America’s first public alimentary policies. A few months later Carlos María de Bustamante, journalist and editor of the *Diario de México*, published an item relating to the problem of food in the viceregal domain. The author revisited the opinion of the elites as to the important role food played in a society’s development, and specifically addressed the obstacles the indigenous diet posed for the country’s development:

The farmhand or laborer who is not well-fed has not the necessary strength for working, and if he works does so halfway compared with the strong worker: there can be no parallel between our Indian laborers and the workers of Spain, nor may it be doubted that living without strong foods they are famished and lack even the most miserable and ruinous sustenance. Examine for yourself what the Indians eat: four or six tortillas with salt, spread with chile, a mug of *atole* and nothing else (...) This, have no doubt, is the true cause of the backwardness of our agriculture (...) How our Indians have been diminished, and how much this has to do with lack of foodstuffs!<sup>3</sup>

Like his contemporaries concerned with perfecting the San Carlos Bread, Bustamante sought to modify indigenous food habits, aiming to integrate them with modern standards of sociability and production. The transformation of Indian food according to specific norms would not only improve the physical condition of this population, but it intended also to end with the social and cultural heterogeneity that prevailed in the territory. The creation of a unique, homogenous and unified society was only possible to the extent that Indian customs (alimentary, language, and other cultural habits) were replaced by a common food culture. Under the pseudonym of *El Melancólico* (The Melancholic One), Bustamante proposed the following solution: “If we want [the Indians] to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* We don’t know the outcome, but do have some data on this phase of the project, such as mentions of receiving said bread at the orphanage and the *Escuela Patriótica* which also sheltered orphans in the capital.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Diario de México*, September 8, 1807.



perfect their use of language [spanish], and make their customs more uniform, accomplishing these goals will be partly due to public and common meetings and meals”<sup>1</sup>.

The project of public meals for indigenous people implied concrete dietary strategies. Lessons in dining would consist of substituting bread for tortillas, and including other foods that were simple but substantial:

I arranged with the Indian for him to give me two *reales* of his daily wage and with this amount I exacted from all, I'd put on a big pot of meat, another of *frijoles*, another of broad beans, I'd omit tortillas and substitute instead this economical bread of San Carlos, its substance being incomparably better<sup>2</sup>.

By means of “public and common” meals, Bustamante inaugurated a new political approach to the problem of indigenous alimentation. The journalist and critic made bread something more than an option within indigenous reach; it became a “necessity”. Bustamante explained this in one of his many announcements of the alimentary education project: “It is proper for any great policy to address needs, and we thus introduce bread for the Indians; for which they'll plant wheat and make this food their own, to supplant the loss of maize”<sup>3</sup>. Inspired by postulates of recognized physiocrats and liberals of the era, and in particular by the work of Frenchman Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Bustamante was sure that imposing new alimentary needs among the indigenous people would stimulate their individual creativity and effort, with repercussions for the economic progress of society<sup>4</sup>. In Bustamante's reformist thought we may recognize liberal ideas of Condillac's about “secondary” needs as driving the enrichment of nations:

I would distinguish two types of necessary things; those of primary necessity related to natural needs; and others, of secondary necessity, that I identify with factitious needs (...) Let us observe when people are limited to the things of primary need. It is a state where, without being poor, one possesses less wealth (...) and finds oneself rather in a

<sup>1</sup> *Diario de México*, October 16, 1805.

<sup>2</sup> *Diario de México*, September 8, 1807.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Bustamante may have come to know Condillac's work through his colleague and partner Jacobo de Villaurrutia, with whom he co-founded the *Diario de México*, and who was well-versed in the French philosopher's theories.

condition of want (...) Now let us look at a stage where [the people] begin to enjoy things of secondary necessity, and where those things may be common to all. When [people] may choose their food, their clothing [...] necessities increase, as does wealth<sup>1</sup>.

Promoting a taste for bread among the Indians represented the ideal way to engage this population in wheat production and assure a fruitful business in New Spain. This urgency to transform the Indians' austere alimentary habits into a view of consumption more in accord with liberal logic, would from this time on be incorporated into the agenda of reformers and critics of Mexican society; a century later they would continue adding incentives for the country's indigenous population to change its palate. As expressed by the author of *Algunos problemas nacionales* ('Some national problems', 1909), one solution for integrating the Indians and promoting their performance and productivity was to lead them towards new culinary practices:

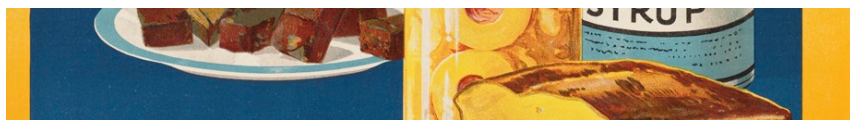
[The Indian's] needs are rudimentary: the physiological need for food and bodily protection requires very little: a handful of maize, another of beans and occasionally some raw sugar (...) All of us who are, fortunately, in different conditions, should concern themselves with adopting the needs of the Indian. The lash of necessity is the best thing for awakening the exercise of will, and with volition comes the power of acquisition<sup>2</sup>.

Both the invention of San Carlos Bread, and Bustamante's later project of "public and common meals", aimed to introduce new bodily ideals and modern principles for sociability among indigenous people. Their promoters delineated the careful selection of foods as a final resource for convincing the Indian to abandon old customs and assimilate with the "sweetness and comforts of civil society"<sup>3</sup>. These arguments, discussed and spread through the pages of New Spain's press, were creating a new political language, transforming alimentary practices into fundamental referents for those authoring the discourse for social regeneration.

<sup>1</sup> Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, "Comment les besoins, en se multipliant, donnent naissance aux arts, et comment les arts augmentent la masse des richesses", *Le Commerce et le Gouvernement*, Paris, Chez Jombert et Cellot Libraires, 1776.

<sup>2</sup> Maqueo E. Castellanos, *Algunos problemas nacionales*, México, Eusebio Gómez de la Puente, 1909, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Diario de México*, October 16, 1805.



## 2. The patriotic menu and the creation of new political subjects

A short time after having published Bustamante's articles, the notable and prolific essayist José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, known also as "El Pensador Mexicano" ("The Mexican thinker", for his role as editor of the gazette of the same name), presented his own remedies for a problem that was becoming ever more pressing among the intellectual elite: what should New Spain be fed? The *Proyecto fácil y utilísimo a nuestra sociedad* ("Easy and most useful project for our society", 1814)<sup>1</sup> was an ambitious program outlined during the first years of the war with Spain. In this document, Lizardi was making a kind of diagnosis of the main problems viceregal society suffered, and proposing various actions for resolving them. Most notable among these complaints were the lack of unity, will and vigor with which Lizardi accused the greater part of New Spain's population. The cause of some of these problems, wrote the author, was nothing else than the bad upbringing they received, from early childhood on. Parents inflicted corporal discipline upon their children, a practice that, in Lizardi's words, impeded them from making full use of their physical faculties. The "Pensador Mexicano" called parents to instead adopt childrearing methods that would let their offspring develop their natural instincts: "permitting them as much exercise as they want in the fresh air [...] running, throwing stones, lifting some sort of weights, wrestling with other children their size, etcetera (...) as anything else is to oppose their nature"<sup>2</sup>. This would guarantee not only that children grow stronger and happier, but that they develop physical capacities for facing any setback or difficulty. The *Proyecto fácil y utilísimo* set out,

<sup>1</sup> Fernández de Lizardi, *El Pensador Mexicano*, México, Printed by doña María Fernández de Jáuregui, 1814, vol. IV (Facsimile edition in México, Centro de Estudios de Historia de México Condamex, 1987), pp. 51-74.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 60.

then, the need to instill from childhood a way of life that was ‘rustic’ and subject to a human being’s basic needs:

We are trying to correct an error whose pernicious consequences are clear to any sensible man; advising parents who love their children, that they not send them to schools before the age of five but to the countryside, to walk barefoot now and then: not to bind their bodies oppressively, let them sleep on straw mats with thin pillows or none, and bathe in cold and, if possible, running water<sup>1</sup>.

Inhabitants of the countryside, and particularly Indians, personified this model of healthy living. They were better prepared than anyone to face life’s obstacles, thanks to their custom of rising early, being exposed to the elements and in contact with nature:

thus they will raise [their children] healthy and hearty, and if some day they lack work, they are less sensitive to it, because while born rich, their children are raised like those of poor Indians or ranch hands<sup>2</sup>.

To his admiration for the Indians’ routine habits, Lizardi added a profound interest in the indigenous model of community, which he compared to the purest republican ideals. The sense of belonging shared by community members, added to the ‘national’ spirit of the population, represented for the erudite *criollo* a model for society. Their sense of sacrifice and moderation, their capacity for pulling together in critical situations and their unity and commitment to directing collective interest toward a shared objective, were among the republican values Lizardi stressed:

Have you seen people who are more united, or a more deep-rooted love of nation? If they build a mill in their village, all do it together; if planning a small celebration, all together; if a pilgrimage, all together; if they appoint a priest or government representative, all together; if there’s a disaster or public evil, all together<sup>3</sup>.

Fernández de Lizardi was seeking to promote among Americans a similar sense of affiliation and sacrifice for the common good. A new food model,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. IV, “Suplemento extraordinario”, p. 23.

founded upon a regimen of “tough digestion”, would permit implementing his “patriotic” project for the colony. The “public and common meals” program Bustmante introduced in 1807, which aimed to abolish tortillas for the good of the country, was being confronted. Appearing in its stead were new patriotic values, which in their turn promoted new food comportment. Moderation, humility and restraint, characteristics identified with the Indian way of eating, were becoming new alimentary and patriotic reference points. Tortillas, chile, *carne asada* or grilled meat (opposed to boiled or cooked) and, in the words of one author, “any food that’s tough to digest”, complemented one another and made up the patriotic menu:

In this age, we should become accustomed to (...) eating sparingly of *tortillas, chile, grilled beef* and in a word, *all sort of food that is hard to digest*, and [this] along with rising early and exposing ourselves often to fresh air, [will give] our stomachs the strength to digest<sup>1</sup>.

The idea that Indians are healthy and robust because of their frugal eating was shared by other critics of society in New Spain, who made their opinions public in the pages of the *Diario de México*. The daily newspaper published some of these testimonies. In one of them, the author created a caricature of a dialogue between indigenous grandfather and grandson, making very clear the role of food as a determining factor for the Indian character, and particularly the inclination to arduous work and sacrifice. The old man advises the grandson about the dangers of changing his usual, modest food habits for foreign ones (bread and meat) :

Sit there in your shack, eating tortillas and chile, drinking *atole* as is your custom, and don’t get ahead of yourself like the burro who eats up the stubble in the field just fine, but when he first tastes barley won’t haul jugs or straw, loses his fur, even his tail (...) The more bread and meat you eat, the lazier you get; you scratch your belly, and get sick, and the owl sings for you, and you die, and they bury you in a nice deep grave.<sup>2</sup>

For Enlightenment authors, austerity in dining guaranteed that individuals would be strong, with greater skills and abilities, along with their being less egotistical and cruel. This would result in free and productive subjects, and a

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 60. Italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Diario de México*, December 26, 1807. See also *Diario de México*, November 18, 1807.

more egalitarian and utilitarian society. The greatest exponent of the enlightened diet was surely Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's ideas about food resonated in the ears of the American revolutionaries themselves, as may be observed in the Angostura Discourse Simon Bolivar pronounced in 1819. In his efforts to make Venezuelan legislators aware that nation building was a complicated task, Bolivar recalled Rousseau's metaphor about freedom as being a food "difficult to digest". In effect, Rousseau wrote in his *Considerations on the Government of Poland* (1776) that "Freedom is hearty fare but hard to digest. It takes very healthy stomachs to tolerate it." Bolivar adopted Rousseau's comparison between politics and digestion, and wrote himself about the arduous, gradual and constant but ultimately gratifying process of what it meant to fight for the peoples' freedom. In words of Simon Bolivar: "Liberty, is a succulent morsel, but one difficult to digest. Our weak fellow-citizens will have to strengthen their spirit greatly before they can digest the wholesome nutriment of freedom"<sup>1</sup>.

It is impossible to miss allusions to the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Lizardi's republican postulates, when he discusses certain theories about savage man, primitive food and the ideal state of society the Genevan philosopher had developed. Rousseau's food pedagogy was widely disseminated in Hispanoamerica, not only in erudite circles but also among the wider public. Despite never having read the Genevan, these readers had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with his principal postulates, including those related to food, via the novel *Eusebio* (1786-1788), written by the Spaniard Pedro de Montegón, the 'Spanish Rousseau'; a book better known, correspondently, as the 'Spanish Emile'. Eusebio tells the story of a six-year-old boy who reaches the United States after a shipwreck and is educated by the Quakers. The work reproduces Rousseau's pedagogy, but in an American context. Young Eusebio, like Emile, is initiated into new eating habits, which are related to the model of citizen comportment developed throughout the work. Emphasized in particular are principles of moderation and austerity at Eusebio's table: "A piece of bread and cup of water is no very agreeable thing, but it is better to find in this repast heavenly acceptance, born of voluntary deprivation of those things denied the taste and appetite by temperance."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Simón Bolívar, *Discurso de Angostura*, 1819.

<sup>2</sup> Pedro de Montegón, *Eusebio*, Madrid, Antonio Sancha, 1786-1788, first part, third book.

But Lizardi didn't just read or reproduce the principal reasoning seen in *Emile, or On Education* (1763) and the *Discourse on the Origin and Bases of Inequality Among Men* (1754): he built his own position on the indigenous American diet, and notion of civilization, upon an imagined argument with Rousseau.



### 3. Two apostles of the “hard to digest”: J.J. Fernández de Lizardi and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The Rousseauian theory of the decadence of modern society was in its day one of the era's most audacious and innovative philosophical proposals. For the philosopher, humanity's decline began the moment man took on the notions of property and law, principles which were in turn identified with one event in particular, source of all social ills: the invention of agriculture<sup>1</sup>. This “great revolution”, as Rousseau called it, occurred when men, carried away by the desire to satisfy wishes beyond their vital needs, first deemed certain foods preferable to others, and learned to produce them<sup>2</sup>. The rest of history, as Rousseau relates it, could not be any less dire: disputes began over the surplus, men no longer thought of producing but possessing; they put aside their taste for goods that were within reach and became ambitious for future and abstract possessions.

<sup>1</sup> “The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying *This is mine*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society” Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, Paris, Ellipses, 1999 [1755], p. 164. Translation to Spanish mine; to English this and other Rousseau passages adapted from G. D. H. Cole translations. Diderot, in his article “Agriculture”, published in the *Encyclopédie*, supports the same theory, identifying agriculture as the foundational act for civil society. *Encyclopédie, op.cit.*, vol. 1, 1754, pp 183-190.

<sup>2</sup> Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.

The invention of agriculture thus wiped out the ‘natural’ balance between need and desire, restraint that up until then had guaranteed primitive man a state of contentment. From this Rousseau would conclude in his celebrated *Discourse*: “it was iron and wheat that civilized men and ruined the human race”<sup>1</sup>. From the Eurocentric view of civilization Jean Jacques divided humanity into savage and civilized, but with an inverted value scale: the people who achieved domestication of wheat who were thus civilized, found themselves removed from society’s ideal origins. Following this same logic, the absence of wheat in America was the determining factor for the continent’s lower place on civilization’s evolutionary scale; a situation which nevertheless favored the inhabitants:

Metallurgy and agriculture (...) were unknown to the Savages of American who have therefore always remained such (...) And perhaps one of the best reasons Europe had political order, if not earlier then at least more continuously and better than other parts of the world, is that it is the most abundant in iron, and the most fertile in wheat<sup>2</sup>.

For Rousseau as for the encyclopedists, using condiments resulted in degradation of the “primitive” cuisine and its transformation into practices pernicious for health and morally perverse. However, unlike Rousseau the enlightenment writers promoted moderate use of spices, which represented civilization par excellence: “Only savages can adapt themselves to the available products of nature without condiments, just as they come from nature. But there is a middle ground between that crude state and the refinement of our chefs”<sup>3</sup>. French recipes of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century also adopted a critical approach to excessive use of condiments, but their arguments are social: it is the rise of bourgeois cooking that strives for democratization of culinary arts. Among other features, this implied abandoning spices and condiments<sup>4</sup>. Now, the absence of wheat and condiments meant that the peoples of America had preserved a primitive sense of taste. Their dietary preferences, less exclusionary and wider-ranging than those of the corrupt Europeans, translated to the American savage’s physical and moral superiority. Rousseau carried this contrast to an extreme in his own

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> “Assaisonnement”, *Encyclopédie*, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, *Histoire de la cuisine bourgeoise, du moyen âge à nos jours*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2001.



interpretation of the Conquest, where he relates the first encounter between Spanish and indigenous as highlighting the exceptional physical capacities of the latter:

We must not therefore be surprised (...) that the savages of America should have tracked the Spaniards with their noses, to as great a degree of exactness, as the best dogs could have done; nor that all these barbarous nations support nakedness without pain; use such large quantities of chile to give their food a relish, and drink like water the strongest liquors of Europe<sup>1</sup>.

That said, if wheat, and the techniques for procuring it, distanced man from his own nature and led him toward his own perdition, the retroactive effect was also possible, an optimistic Rousseau insisted, as long as the sense of taste was reeducated. Taste has, in effect, a primordial place in Rousseau's thought, since differently from sight, smell, hearing and touch, it appears as a strictly physiological sense, approaching the corporeal and tangible meaning of being human. In *Emile* Rousseau explains: taste is "entirely physical and material; it is the only one which says nothing to the imagination"<sup>2</sup>. For the philosopher this is nothing to disdain; in the imagination and in all that tends to derive from it—yearnings, pretension, vanity—he saw society's perdition. Thus the philosopher, congruent with this hypothesis, argued that greed and gluttony, though inadvisable behavior, were less noxious than other senses carried to excess:

The motive of gluttony is preferable to that of vanity, inasmuch as the former is a natural appetite, immediately depending on the senses; whereas the latter is the effect of opinion, subject to human caprice, and to all manner of abuse<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine...*, *op. cit.*, p. 141. Rousseau was an avid reader of travel journals and Chronicles of Conquest. For a study of sources Rousseau consulted, see: Jean Morel, "Recherches sur les sources du *Discours de l'inégalité*", in *Annales J.-J. R.*, t. V, 1909, pp. 119-198; Gilbert Chinard, *L'Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au XVII<sup>e</sup> et au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Droz, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> The gastronomic knowledge that arose at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century will introduce a contrasting idea of alimentary practice, based upon an aesthetic and metaphoric concept of food. Cf. Grimod de la Reynière, *Almanach des Gourmands*, in *Écrits gastronomiques*, 1803-1812; Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *Physiologie du goût*, 1826. This work was first translated to Spanish in Mexico: *Fisiologia del gusto*, Méjico, Printed by Juan R. Navarro, editor, 1852.

<sup>3</sup> *Emilio*, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

The author of *Emile* concluded that there's no more propitious means for shaping new citizens than, literally, through the mouth: "While taste seems to be beneath the other [senses], and more contemptible the inclination that delivers us to it, I would conclude [...] that the most suitable means for governing children is to lead them by their mouths"<sup>1</sup>. And in effect, by means of gustatory experience, Emile receives important lessons about how a model citizen should behave. The philosopher's pedagogic formula, based on a frugal way of life accommodating itself to the conditions of its natural surroundings, makes hunger one of the most formative experiences in a child's life. Rousseau's arguments seem to have been taken up almost literally by Lizardi, who we recall presented his idea of "sparing" and "frugal" life in the same terms<sup>2</sup>:

Experience teaches that more children who are delicately reared die than others (...) Give them practice, then, in the trials they will one day have to endure. Inure their bodies to the inclemencies of the seasons, of climates, of elements; to hunger, thirst, fatigue...<sup>3</sup>.

In this sense, what predominates in Emile's educational process are not the trivial pleasures eating can produce, but appetite as an incentive to develop and sharpen the individual's natural capacities and instincts: "Emile doesn't see the cake I've placed on the rock as a reward for having run well, but knows running as the only way to reach it before anyone else"<sup>4</sup>.

Emile eats no more than what satiates his hunger, and grows up indifferent to delicacies that only tempt enjoyment, without restoring the diner's strength. His diet consists of foods devoid of delectable ingredients or sophisticated culinary techniques. Condiments, flavor boosters like salt and fats, methods like cooking in sauces and frying, disappeared from the Rousseauian table, upon which only foods in a state closest to natural were permitted:

Let us preserve to the child as long as possible his primitive taste; let its nourishment be common and simple, let not its palate be familiarized with any but natural flavors, and let no more exclusive taste be formed (...) Reform the rules of your kitchen; let there be no frying, nor delicacies made with butter; [under no condition] should salt, milk or

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. footnote 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Emilio, op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 103.

butter be brought near the fire; don't season vegetables cooked in water until they are placed steaming upon the table<sup>1</sup>.

The moment of sharing food with others also forms part of Emile's learning. Rousseau here offers one of the most splendid images of the primitive table, where furnishings, ways of serving dishes and codes of etiquette give way to life *au naturel*; to tree branches, improvisation, equality and liberty:

Every meal would be a feast, where plenty will be more pleasing than any delicacies. There are no such cooks in the world as mirth, rural pursuits, and merry games (...) Our meals will be served without regard to order or elegance; we shall make our dining room anywhere, in the garden, on a boat, beneath a tree; on the fresh green grass (...) the turf will be our chairs and table (...) and our dessert is hanging on the trees (...) Dishes will be served in any order, appetite needs no ceremony; we will be our own servants, in order to be our own masters, all serving themselves (...) I too shall have the joy of feeling my heart stirred within me, and I should say to myself—I too am a man.<sup>2</sup>

In Rousseau's work, different discussions of food contained within theories of the invention of agriculture, of the sense of taste, of the social advantages of difficult digestion and the fight against the artifice and sophistication of the bourgeois table, constitute something more than simple dietetic watchwords. The philosopher established a moral and political language of food, not to be confused with mere criteria for health and nutrition<sup>3</sup>:

I am not investigating here whether this way of living is healthier or not; that is not the way I am looking at it. For me to prefer it, it suffices to know that it conforms most to nature and is the one most easily adaptable to every other<sup>4</sup>.

Up to this point, our reading of Rousseau's work has familiarized us with the ideas of culinary austerity and 'difficult digestion' contained in Lizardi's food program. It would, however, be impossible to understand Lizardi's patriotic reasoning if we confined ourselves to this first reading. In the next section,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> Rousseau attributed the invention of diet to the medical science of ancient Greece, which took on the denaturalization of primitive alimentary practice: "diet, which is now so necessary, was first invented by Hippocrates". See Rousseau, *Discours sur l'origine, op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup> *Emilio, op. cit.*, p. 101.

we shall analyze Rousseau's critics in the Lizardian alimentary discourse, while at the same time examining the unique and original approach to shaping a new social order in the erudite's thought.



#### 4. Gastro-political discourse in shaping the Republic

The theory of the degradation of humanity that runs throughout Rousseau's work is based on an ideal referent, hypothetical in character and thus abstract; which is that of the state of nature. In Rousseau's thought the human beings' natural state may not be identified with any specific time or place; it deals with a principle beyond the course of history. About the purely theoretical state of nature, the Genevan writes: "[It is impossible] to perfectly know a state that doesn't exist now, that perhaps never existed, that probably will never exist and of which it is nevertheless necessary to have notions just to be able to correctly judge our present state"<sup>1</sup>.

Alimentary prescriptions that Rousseau promoted in order to reconcile mankind with its natural state were consequently general and purely philosophical, lacking in historical and social sense. This series of hypothetical, universal and extra-historical arguments must be in turn contrasted with the concrete, pragmatic and patriotic dimension of alimentary discussions on the other side of the Atlantic.

In New Spain's food programs, there existed neither the conjectural nor the hypothetical. Contrary to the historical pessimism of Rousseau, for whom history was essentially the course of humanity's degradation, Lizardi was transforming cold tortillas, chile, grilled meat and every food 'difficult to digest' into

<sup>1</sup> *Discours sur l'origine...*, *op.cit.*, Preface.

material agents of progress and civilization. Consumption of these foods, more than mapping the return to an ideal state ‘that perhaps never existed’, led the way toward a new social and political order that would be accompanied by wealth and well-being.

In this sense the idea of an austere and frugal menu set different social transformative challenges and possibilities for the Genevan and the thinker of New Spain. Among the foods advised by Rousseau we find, for example, trout and pork leg. The philosopher justifies these choices because they are dishes usually eaten without condiments and thus better preserve their *au naturel* taste. It mattered little, in this case, that they were costly foods, accessible only to the European elite<sup>1</sup>. In the same way, Rousseau expressed his categorical rejection of all those culinary specialties disregarded by a primitive and universal taste. National preferences were particularly noxious because they corrupted the primal sense of taste, which originated in no country nor gastronomic culture<sup>2</sup>. In fact, one of the most significant formulations Rousseau developed in *Emile* for the principle of universal citizenship alludes to the image of a palate that distinguishes neither regional recipes nor seasonings, and doesn’t recognize borders between countries. *Emile* learns indifference to national gastronomic specialties, so he can live as a free man, subject only to the laws of nature and the social contract:

The man who is not yet of any country will adapt himself without difficulty to the practices of any country whatsoever, but the man of one country can no longer become the man of another (...) In everything let us not give him a form so determined that it costs him too much to change it in case of need. Let us not make it so that he will die of hunger in other countries if he is not everywhere attended by a French cook, or that he will say one day that only in France do they know how to eat. That is, parenthetically, amusing praise! As for me, on the contrary, I would say it is only the French who do not know how to eat, since so special an art is required to make dishes edible for them<sup>3</sup>.

Rousseau’s anti-national stance could not be more contrary to the patriotic spirit of Lizardi and of many of his contemporaries, who sought to reconcile

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bonnet, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> “The farther we are removed from the state of nature, the more we lose our natural tastes; or rather, habit gives us a second nature that we substitute for the first”. *Emilio, op. cit.*, p. 505.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

the middle strata of colonial society with the country's specific foods. Tortillas, chiles and other "hard to digest" dishes had nothing to do with Rousseau's universal, utopian and ahistorical diet. On the contrary, the frugality and austerity of this menu was explicitly associated with a specific political and social context: that of republic-building, and of the values of work and sacrifice represented by the figure of the Mexican Indian.

In turn, this ideal diet testified to an opposite and negative image of the ideal Indian's alimentary habits. It dealt with the urban-dwelling Indian, who possessed all the defects of which the rural Indian had been absolved. Town Indians appeared as those who broke their original link with nature in order to install themselves in the city, thus abandoning the "inconformities, risks and dangers"<sup>1</sup> of life in the country; conditions that assured a life of effort, work and sacrifice. At the same time they lived without adapting to the exigencies of civil and urban society. These are the Indians the anonymous author of a *Diario de México* item, published in 1806, was not shy about calling 'the kingdom's true savages'. The description of these town Indians was directed at Rousseau himself, who was being reproached for not having considered this other kind of 'savages' when defending the state of nature as humanity's ideal. The editorial writer, in a superior tone, criticized the Genevan philosopher for his ingenuousness and ignorance regarding the life of the savage.

If Jean-Jacques had known these entities that join the advantages of the natural state with those of the civil, without experiencing the discomforts, risks and dangers of that, nor subject themselves to this, he would not have defended the savage life. [Instead] his ideas would have been concrete and [put into] practice; something beyond that imagined by his delirious and unbridled fantasy<sup>2</sup>.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's impact was making itself less apparent in the debates on food, republic and nation which continued in Mexico throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The theory of 'difficult digestion' founded upon indigenous food habits lost its attraction when confronted with new alimentary paradigms, the main characteristic of which was to banish the figure of the Indian from the cultural and political revindications they promulgated. Nationalist discourse as-

<sup>1</sup> *Diario de México*, September 27, 1806.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

simulated the Indian into the country's poor and anonymous class, and proposed transforming foodways according to a general plan for developing a work force from the country's most socially marginalized<sup>1</sup>. The tortilla once again came to be considered an enemy of the country's progress.

But the mark of the philosopher did not totally disappear from the Republic's gastronomic scene, neither the debate about the convenience of a more frugal diet, based on maize and other 'Indian foods'. Rousseau's ideas on the advantages of vegetables over meat were a controversial topic among authors of the first Mexican cookbooks, published at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The author of the *Cocinero Mexicano* (1831), the 'Mexican Cook', dedicated a whole section to recipes prepared with maize, vegetables, roots and herbs, with which he was seeking to please those readers influenced by "celebrated philosophers who were enemies of the spilling of animal blood". Within the framework set by Rousseau and other enthusiasts of meatless diets, recipes like "Chayotes in *pipián* [pumpkin seed] sauce", "Stuffed lettuce" and "Mock capon chiles", were incorporated into the first cookbook of national cuisine. Nevertheless the author, unconvinced of the benefits of vegetarian regimens, set out to establish the first true principles of food for Mexicans. The plan for a modern nation, formulated in this first repertoire of Mexican cuisine, proposed a direct relation between eating meat and the image of the strong, agile, hardworking citizen:

Those celebrated philosophers who are against spilling animal blood (...) have defended the system in which a man need feed himself nothing but vegetables (...) This may be, but it is also certain that, as is witnessed in daily experience, those who eat meat are stronger and more robust than those who confine themselves, out of poverty and not philosophy, to vegetables and other insubstantial foods, always walking around pale, weak, flinching, and with no aptitude for undertaking anything of value.<sup>2</sup>

Almost a hundred years later, maize and tortilla foods made their triumphant entry into the national cuisine. The post-revolutionary intellectual and political

<sup>1</sup> Francisco Pimentel, *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de México, y medios de remediarla* (1864); Francisco Bulnes, *El triste porvenir de los países latinoamericanos* (1899) and *Los grandes problemas de México* (1926); Andrés Molina Enriquez, *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (1909); Manuel Gamio, *Forjando patria* (1916) and "Dietética popular" (1935).

<sup>2</sup> *Cocinero mexicano*, México, Dirección General de Culturas Populares, 2000, v. 1, p. 159.

elites made maize a symbol par excellence of the Mexican Republic<sup>1</sup>. Maize and tortillas were portrayed in cookbooks, paintings, museums and textbooks as the expression of a unique, ancient national culture (which dates back to the days of the Aztec empire) and shared by all the inhabitants of the country.



Rousseau's ideas survived the turn of the century and the nationalist concerns of the post-revolutionary era, if only through one of the lesser-known manifestations of national cuisine: vegetarian food. The first treatise on vegetarian cooking in Mexico, published in 1918, paid homage to "J.-J. Rousseau of Geneva, vegetarian and well-known, world-famous philosopher"<sup>2</sup>. Poet Amado Nervo wrote the prologue and introduced Mexicans to a way of life that had been enunciated more than a century before, by Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

It is of the utmost importance to preserve (...) the primitive taste and not to render [children] carnivorous, if not for health reasons, at least for the sake of their character. For, however the experience may be explained, it is certain that great eaters of flesh are, in general, more cruel and ferocious than other men (...) this cruelty proceeds from their food<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the first national culinary discourse in Mexico and the role of maize in the construction of a national identity, *vid.* Sarah Bak-Geller, "Narrativas deleitosas de la nación. Los primeros libros de cocina en México (1830-1890), *Desacatos. Revista de antropología social*, 42, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Blandina Torres, *La cocinera vegetariana*, México, Centro Naturista de México, 1918, p. XIV.

<sup>3</sup> *Emilio, op. cit.*, p. 103.



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