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Cultural Hybridity in the USA exemplified by Tex-Mex cuisine

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Abstract: The article concerns the hybrid phenomenon of Tex-Mex cuisine which evolved in the U.S.-Mexican borderland. The history of the U.S.-Mexican border area makes it one of the world's great culinary regions where different migrations have created an area of rich cultural exchange between Native Americans and Spanish, and then Mexicans and Anglos. The term 'Tex-Mex' was previously used to describe anything that was half-Texan and half-Mexican and implied a long-term family presence within the current boundaries of Texas. Nowadays, the term designates the Texan variety of something Mexican; it can apply to music, fashion, language or cuisine. Tex-Mex foods are Americanised versions of Mexican cuisine describing a spicy combination of Spanish, Mexican and Native American cuisines that are mixed together and adapted to American tastes. Tex-Mex cuisine is an example of Mexicanidad that has entered American culture and is continually evolving.

Keywords: transculturation, hybridity, ethnic, Mexicanidad, cuisine, Tex-Mex

Introduction

When new immigrants arrive in the USA, the processes of acculturation, hybridization and transculturation begin. Transnational mobility has a large impact not only on the lives of migrants who travel to another culture but also on the host culture itself. Because of the increasingly globalized nature of the world, cultural differences are no longer as clearly defined as they were in the past. The theory of transculturation challenges the traditional idea that cultures are internally cohesive and homogenous;

instead it builds on approaches which maintain that cultures are interconnected and deeply intertwined. Thus, transculturation rests upon a continuous change and transformation of cultures (Flüchter and Schöttli, 2015: 2). 'While transculturation may include processes of deculturation and acculturation, it goes beyond loss and acquisition: transculturation involves the dynamic fusion and merging of cultures to produce new identities, cultures and societies' (Knepper, 2011: 256). Transcultural processes are specially visible in borderlands such as the U.S. Southwest / Mexican border where American and Mexican cultures create cultural hybridity.

The term 'hybridity' was first applied to agriculture, genetics and combinations of different animals. Then, it entered social science, anthropology and linguistics. The process involves mixing, blending and merging. Presently, it mainly focuses on cultural hybridity in e.g. art, identities, lifestyle and music blends (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 223). Knepper provides a postcolonial definition of 'hybridity' as a term referring to 'the heterogenous aspects of cultural formation, the intermixtures of language, culture, politics and race, which emerge through contact and uneven exchange' (2011: 266-267). According to Nederveen Pieterse (2001: 221) 'New hybrid forms are significant indicators of profound changes that are taking place as a consequence of mobility, migration and multiculturalism'. In cultural studies hybridity involves boundary-crossing experiences of diasporic communities and intercultural communication. The process has been more intense and widen in its scope as people has become more mobile. The postcolonial theory uses related terms such as 'mestizaje' and 'creolization' for racial, linguistic, and cultural mixing, however, those terms tend to emphasize the assimilation of indigenous cultures into the colonized culture which is treated as superior. In contrast to the postcolonial theory, Marchi (2013) defines hybridity as a cultural contact between the colonizer and the colonized that negates the dominance of the colonizer. Instead, it creates the 'third space' – the hybrid subject – which is neither the colonizer nor the colonized. It is a new, complex formation having elements of both cultures

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and constantly undergoing transcultural transformations – ‘the process of selectively combining elements of cultural practices and beliefs to make meaning’ (Marchi, 2013: 274-275).

As migration of Mexicans, tourism and international trade have increased worldwide, the role of ethnicity, including ethnic foods, has become more important. While some individuals try to maintain their traditional foodways and eat foods similar to those in the old country, others change their food habits. The two processes co-exist; one provides a continuation of the old lifestyle; the other speeds acculturation. Although older generations continue with their ethnic foodways longer, generally, all immigrants find their traditional foodways altered to some degree (Kalcik, 1984: 39-40).

Food choices establish boundaries and borders. In the Modern Era this process of culinary differentiation may entail major modification of traditional foods; few people today eat exactly what their grandparents ate fifty years ago, and many of us also like to cross group boundaries to ‘eat the other’ (Belasco, 2002: 2).

The history of ethnic cuisines in the USA is closely connected to the history of immigration. During the 19th century period of mass migration, Chinese, Japanese, Italians and Mexicans influenced eating patterns in the USA, creating the most popular ethnic cuisines in the United States (Lee et al., 2014: 4). The American cuisine preferred by the US white middle classes in the 19th century was largely based on English-inspired cuisine which was perceived as civilized but bland. That type of cuisine, firstly, functioned as part of the project of consolidating colonizing power against the culinary passions of the barbarian or savage ethnic cuisine, but later it became distinguished for its Otherness and its scarcity. Nowadays, America’s multiculturalism, with its ethnic cuisine, is valued for supplementing American cooking with its flavours and spicing (Chez, 2011: 243).

According to Mintel Group research on ethnic foods, the largest segment of ethnic foods market in the USA is Mexican.¹ The migration of Mexicans and corporate marketing of Tex-Mex promoted Mexican cuisine in regions outside Mexico and the American Southwest. However, the transnational processes of migration, marketing and globalization have transformed the ethnic foods. Mexican-American cuisine is an example of border foods resulting from the meeting of two different cultures in Mexico and the USA. Tex-Mex cuisine results from

the cultural hybridity produced in the Mexican-Texas borderlands. Those ethnic foods are then marketed by American corporations and carried around the globe (Pilcher, 2008: 529).

Although the notion of a national cuisine is often dismissed as an artificial construct in the context of globalization, the different versions of Mexican foods are still considered as representative of national cuisine in Mexico. Many Mexican culinary exports are popular across the northern border, especially in Texas, which can be claimed to be a Mexican culinary region. The way the foods are prepared and eaten in the South-western USA resembles culinary customs in Mexico (Pilcher, 2008: 530).

The purpose of this article is to analyse Tex-Mex cuisine as the hybrid formation that selectively combines the elements of Mexican and American culture and constantly undergoes transcultural transformations, creating a sort of ‘third space’ in the USA. When people migrate the societies become more multi-ethnic and food more diversified as mixing of ethnic groups initiates the creation of fusion cuisines. The article indicates that Mexican food culture has developed as a form of fusion cuisine combining the elements of indigenous and Spanish culinary traditions. Then, Mexican cuisine has been incorporated into the array of ethnic cuisines in the USA where it influenced American regional cuisine, creating hybrid food cultures, exemplified by Tex-Mex. The paper shows the struggle between preservation of traditional Mexican cuisine, which is perceived as authentic, and the popularization of various regional cuisines inspired by Mexican cooking. Migrants and their children, at first try to cultivate their cooking traditions by relying on the recipes from the old country, and then, adapt their cooking styles to prevailing American tastes, creating hybrid foods on the basis of traditional cooking techniques and ingredients available at local markets. The paper presents the origins of Tex-Mex, its history, symbolic meaning of the most important plants such as maize, key ingredients and the most popular dishes, distinctive flavours and tastes. It provides an overview of the cuisine of the American Southwest in the transcultural context originating in the mixture of Native American, Spanish, Mexican and Texan foods. Importantly, the article deals with markers that differentiate intraregional cuisines within the Texas area and focuses on a selection of Mexican foods accepted by the American mainstream consumers. The hybrid dishes of South-western cuisine are based on Mexican foods and adapted to American tastes, e.g. combination plates. The paper also gives examples of national chain restaurants and films that popularised the idea of Mexican American

¹ The Mexican segment of ethnic foods in the USA comprises 62 per cent of the FDMx, excluding Wal-Mart sales (food, drug, mass index) (Mintel 2010, 4).

cooking. It provides an analysis of the concept of Tex-Mex, its various meanings and the evolution of consumer attitudes towards this type of food.

In Mexico

Food plays a vital role in Mexican history. Food preparation and consumption are metaphors for continuity of culture and religion. 'As Mexicans go from one location to the next, they are able to acquire and prepare the necessary foods that allow them to survive and forge their cultural identity. Their Mexican identity included specific uses of food in ritual' (Morán, 2008: 15). Food is a key area where one's ethnic identity may be constructed. Cross-cultural eating may be a way to cross interpersonal boundaries and find a common meeting place for the 'American' and the imagined 'ethnic' (Chez, 2011: 234-235).

Like most complex food styles, Mexican cuisine evolved as cultures overlapped across the centuries. Traditional Mexican cuisine dates back 3,000 years to Mayans, who based their diet on corn, beans and vegetables. Many Americans confuse Tex-Mex specialities such as chilli, *chimichangas*, nachos and hard-shell *tacos*, often laden with processed cheese and sour cream, with real Mexican food (Rodriguez 2007). The editors of the first Mexican cookbooks, published in the 1930s, promoted the Aztec origin of national cuisine and even used náhuatl (the native language of the Aztecs) to name some native ingredients. In the post-revolutionary period, Mexican cuisine gained a new image; it started to represent a fusion of Aztec and Iberian culinary cultures, illustrating the process of *mestizaje* between Amerindians and Spaniards (Bak-Geller Corona, 2016: 226-227).

Mexican foods are often grouped according to the region from which they originate. The cuisine from northern Mexico uses beef, cheese and wheat and among its popular dishes there are *machaca*, *arrachera*, and *cabrito*. The foods from the province of Oaxaca are based on corn, beans, and chili peppers and typical dishes include *triques*, *chapulines*, and *7moles*. The cuisine from the province of Yucatán specialises in Mayan food e.g. *cochinita pibil*. The popular dishes from Mexican cities are *barbacoa*, *birria*, *cabrito*, *carnitas*, and various *moles*. The foods from the region to the west of Mexico City are largely based on fish. Veracruz cuisine incorporates a great deal of tropical fruits (Lee et al., 2014: 3).

The Mexican desert flora includes succulents and cacti such as nopal which is an important food item in Mexican cuisine. According to mythology Mexicans find their home when they see the sign of an eagle

perched on a cactus fruit (Morán, 2008: 15). The basis of Mexican American cuisine was laid by people who domesticated maize in southern Mexico. Aztec and Mayan cuisines were based on maize which was an important staple providing sustenance for the creation of their civilisations and religious significance. The plant is respected as Mayan creation stories indicated that the gods created mankind from maize (Janer, 2008: 2). Maize symbolises stability in the everyday and religious life of people in Mexico. Migrating Mexicans bring this basic staple with them and use it in daily meals and also as a significant part of religious rituals. They believe that for cultural and religious continuity Mexicans need: 'their women and children, their god, and their ability to sustain themselves, especially by maize' (Morán, 2008: 16).

The history of ethnic food in Mexico focuses mainly on Native American cuisine and its mixing with Spanish foods. Mesoamerican cuisines adopted the use of lard, meat and other animal products from the Spanish. The maize producing lands were restricted to provide space for the raising of cattle and a meat-based culinary culture replaced a vegetable-based culinary culture. Lard is used, for example, to soften the maize dough for *tortillas* and *tamales* (Janer, 2007: 390). During the colonial era the basic staple foods in the Mexican region were Spanish wheat bread and Native American corn *tortillas*. The recipes for Indian corn *tortillas* and Spanish white bread were combined to produce wheat flour *tortillas* (Pilcher, 2014: 444).

The emergence of national cuisine was disturbed by regional, ethnic, and class divisions in Mexican society. Since the Spanish conquest, Europeans have undervalued the Native American maize, imposing on it the status of an inferior staple in comparison with wheat. Around the 1940s the threat of revolution ended and the middle classes started to accept the plebeian foods of the Mexican lower classes. Nowadays, Indians use coloured maize to distinguish their hand-made *tortillas* from the white, industrial ones consumed by the urban working classes. There are five different varieties of corn: blue, white, red, yellow and speckled (Pilcher, 2008: 530).

All ethnic cuisines have distinctive flavours and tastes which result from the use of various spices and herbs. The spices often used in Mexican cuisine are: cilantro, oregano, thyme, parsley, mint, marjoram, cumin, and chili powder (Jeanroy, 2012). Herbs used in Mexican foods include: acuyo or tlánepa, amaranth, anise, annatto, avocado leaf, balm-gentle, banana leaf, bay leaf, bean powder, chamomile, chaya, chepiche, chepil, chia, cilantro, cuajes, flor de cimal, halachas, hierbasanta,

Indian paintbrush, lemon grass, lemon verbena, lenguitas, marjoram, Mexican safflower, oregano, pápalo, pepicha, peppermint, purslane, quintoniles, sesame, spearmint, sweet basil, Tilia, vervain, watercress, and wormseed (Lee et al., 2014: 5).

In the USA

‘The United States remains a nation of many regional environments, and its culinary and ethnic history has been shaped by regionalism, reinforced by territorial expansion from the Atlantic to the Pacific’ (Gabaccia, 1998: 7). Mainstream American consumers eat a lot of Mexican dishes, e.g. beef *tacos*, *enchiladas*, *burritos*, and *tostadas*. US Latino food is connected with the highly heterogeneous people that live in the USA and whose origins can be traced to Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Latin American and Caribbean countries. South-western cuisine reflects a fusion of different cultural groups and their foodways, bringing together Native Americans, Spanish, Mexicans and Anglo ranchers. People of Mexican heritage are the largest Latino group and the cultural continuity across the Mexican – United States border predates the arrival of Europeans.

The foodways based on maize, beans and squash, domesticated in Mesoamerica, gradually diffused through much of North America (Pilcher, 2004: 200). The South-western cuisine is known for extensive use of beef, pork, chili, pinto beans, rice and corn. The use of different varieties of chilli peppers reflects regional diversity. In Texas, *jalapeño* chillies are often used and *habanero* is one of the hottest chilli pepper varieties. Within this large area, the intraregional variation of cuisines is constructed by different combinations of similar ingredients. Important markers that differentiate intraregional cuisines consist of subtle differences in the types of beans or method of preparing the ingredients, e.g. Tex-Mex cuisine uses beef, pinto beans, cheese, red chilli and cumin in the red chilli sauces. Chilli gravy or *enchilada* sauce is used for seasoning (Albala, 2011: 358-359).

Only a selection of Mexican foods have been accepted by American mainstream consumers, although the dishes they have chosen generally come from the Mexican lower classes. The 1980s was a decade of commodification of peasant foods from provinces like Oaxaca or Yucatán, which started to appear in cookbooks, restaurant and tourist guides. This trend was accompanied by gentrification of working class dishes and Mexican food began its upgrading both at home and in the USA. However, wealthy American families prefer more

expensive dishes such as *moles* and *pucheros*.² Although ethnic restaurants in the USA have a huge economic potential, Mexican restaurants cannot charge the same prices as French ones (Pilcher, 2008: 538). In the 1990s there was a trend in the USA towards a casual family atmosphere which resulted in greater popularity of Mexican restaurants. Although consumer perceptions of the degree of authenticity at Mexican restaurants differ depending on geographic locations, generally, American images of Mexican restaurants are positive and include such descriptions as ‘casual cantina atmosphere’, ‘plenty of vegetables’, ‘healthy’, and ‘rich and diverse’ (Lee et al., 2014: 5).

Americans love combinations of *tortillas*, chillies, beans, cheese, tomatoes and corn. Salsa now outsells ketchup in the USA; nachos are common snacks at football and baseball games. South-western recipes have been Americanized to include more animal protein, more meat. There is even a fast-food *taco* that includes bacon (Bentley, 2011: 210). The fast food *taco* was invented in southern California in the 1950s from Mexican American street vendors. The corporate founder Glenn Bell came up with the idea of the ‘taco shell’, a pre-fried *tortilla* that could be easily filled with stuffing and served fast so the customers did not need to wait long. This way of preparation distanced that particular type of Mexican food from its ethnic roots and facilitated the globalization of *taco*. Nowadays, people no longer need to cook fresh corn *tortillas* because they can easily obtain the mass-produced *taco* shells which are becoming extremely popular round the world (Pilcher, 2008: 540-541). Mexican *taco* has dual representation by the *taco* shell and the fresh corn *tortilla*. Although corporate mass-production makes Mexican food widely available all around the world, it is very likely that the culinary skills of cooks will decline if people continue buying almost ready-made precooked products. In contrast to other Mexican dishes whose names are derived from indigenous words, ‘taco’ is a Spanish name. This word came into regular usage at the end of the 19th century in Mexico City, where restaurants serving *tortillas* were called *taquerias*. According to Pilcher the first fast food *taco* franchises succeeded by marketing a form of exoticism connected with Mexican cooking (Pilcher, 2008: 26).

South-western chains serving Mexican American food did not attain national presence until they were taken over by non-Mexican corporations such as Taco Bell. National chains such as Chipotle, Taco Bell, Pulidos in Texas and El Chico in the Southwest have made the concept of Mexican

² *pucheros* – stews with chilli pepper.

food familiar to Americans. Mexican American traditions and cooking have also been popularised by films such as *Tortilla Soup* (dir. Maria Ripoll, 2001) or *Like Water for Chocolate* (dir. Alfonso Arau, 1992) (Long, 2015: 417). The main concept in those films is the food that is used to represent ethnicity and culture in a Latino family.

The United States has copied certain recipes and ingredients that reproduce the cuisine of Mexico's north, where the food is simple and unsophisticated because of its desert regions and unlimited vegetable production. This is where the Spanish settlers started cultivating wheat to substitute for corn which in turn created the flour *tortilla*. Part of this was reinterpreted in Tex-Mex cuisine. It is not unusual to see somebody from Michoacan or from Central Mexico be surprised when they see Tex-Mex tacos folded like small wallets, fried and stuffed with meat, instead of fresh tortilla laying flat on its plate with accompanying food on the side. Mexicans from central and southern regions do not appreciate yellow cheese and cabbage salad or Tex-Mex. They are disappointed by the lack of variety of hot peppers, when more than 50 kinds are cultivated in Mexico. They find this type of cuisine very simple, repetitive in its ingredients and far removed from the real Mexican gastronomy (Semenak, 2010: C3).

According to *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (2007), the Mexican government worries so much about the global proliferation of deep-fat-fried *chimichangas* and *fajitas* that it is organizing trainings for American restaurateurs to inform them about real Mexican food. The forum for the restaurateurs was organized by the government's Institute for Mexicans Living Abroad. The executive director of the institute, Carlos Gonzales, said: 'Mexican food gives prestige to the country, promotes its image. ... what we want is for these restaurants to promote Mexican culture through the food'. Rosa Maria Barajas, the owner of 'Rosa's Plane Food' in Calexico, California, was among the restaurant owners, the government offered a trip to Mexico City to hear culinary historian's lecture on the importance of the nation's food and to sample traditional dishes from the state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. After returning, Barajas banned cheddar cheese from her restaurant and started to use only authentic Mexican cheeses like Cotija or fresh white cheese. Besides, she started to serve food with homemade *tortillas*. However, there are restaurateurs who believe that it is important to promote the real Mexican food, but there is a need for flexibility as lots of people in the USA have developed a taste for American versions of Mexican food. Jeanette Avila, who owns 'El Rancho' restaurant in Detroit, keeps two menus: Tex-Mex and traditional. Both menus sell evenly well and non-Latinos seem to be more open to try

traditional Mexican food (Rodriguez, 2007). Although the Mexican government tries to promote traditional Mexican cuisine, American customers prefer to have a choice of the 'authentic' option or the hybrid Tex-Mex.

Hybrid cuisine: Tex-Mex

Cuisine, like culture, is never static but in a constant state of change, adding and subtracting elements. The hyphenated Tex-Mex is a product of the place where Mexico and the USA intersect and influence each other (Bentley, 2011: 211). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'Tex-Mex' was used for the first time in 1973 in the English-language newspaper *Mexico City News*. The OED defines Tex-Mex as 'designating the Texan variety of something Mexican'. Tex-Mex was also a nickname for the Texas and Mexican Railway, which was chartered in 1875. Newspaper railway schedules used the abbreviation 'Tex. Mex.' for the rail line which ran from Laredo to Corpus Christi. Then the term came to be used in the USA to describe people of Mexican ancestry in Texas (Walsh, 2004). Nowadays, the term designates the Texan variety of something Mexican; it can apply to music, fashion, language or cuisine.

Mexican vendors began selling *tamales*, *enchiladas* and pecan candies from carts and food-stalls in Texas before the turn of the century. The street vendor business was started by Hispanics but there were also African American and American Indian vendors who sold their own unique style of *tamales*. Ever since the term 'Tex-Mex' was first applied to Texas-Mexican food, Mexican restaurant owners considered it an insult, meaning that their food was not authentic. They tried to convince customers that their cooking was something else and used confusing terminology, e.g. Fresh-Mex, Mex-Mex, Mix-Mex and 'authentic Mexican'. Meanwhile, consumers who enjoy Tex-Mex foods have increased in numbers and Mexican restaurants have become more popular among American mainstream consumers.

It was the Cuellar family, founders of 'El Chico', that laid the foundation of the Tex-Mex culture in Dallas. The family matriarch was Adelaida Cuellar who emigrated from Mexico and settled in Kaufman, where she decided to sell *enchiladas* and chilli at the Kaufman County Fair. All Cuellar children, somehow, ended up following Mama's footsteps, making and selling Mexican food in Oklahoma, Louisiana and Texas. In 1940, they all returned to Texas and opened the fort 'El Chico' restaurant in Dallas. By 1949, they were the largest Mexican food organization in the country. The Tex-Mex boom was fuelled not only by the

taste of food but also by technological advances. Mexican food menu items, such as *tortillas*, *taco* shells, and chips are all made from masa. In the early 1900s, making masa for a restaurant was a time-consuming process, and the product spoiled quickly. In 1909, Jose Martinez of San Antonio patented the Tamalina process that produced dehydrated corn masa. The end result, masa harina, was easily shipped and stored and facilitated in the preparation of the basics of Mexican food (Gubbins et al., 2006, 58).

One of the basic staples of Tex-Mex cuisine is *frijoles*, or beans. These were first domesticated in Mesoamerica and then spread throughout the Southwest by indigenous farmers. Mexican and Spanish settlers then brought the custom of eating beans to the USA. Beans are boiled in a clay pot and eaten as *frijoles enteros*. When the beans are fried they are called *frijoles fritos*. Finally, they are mashed and refried in lard with green chillies and onions or garlic. Then they are used as a filling for *burritos* or served as side dishes called *frijoles refritos*. Combined with other foods, beans may be served as *frijoles a la charra* (beans cooked with tomatoes, onions, cilantro and chillies) or *frijoles con queso* (beans with grated cheese). *Borracho* is a soupy bean dish, cooked with beer, pork and peppers.

Another vegetable popular in Tex-Mex cuisine is the squash which consists of different varieties: pumpkins, acorn, cushaw gourd squashes. Squash may be boiled as *calabaga cocida* or sliced and dried as *rueditas*. Squash cooked with meat into a type of stew is called *calabacita con carne*. If it is cooked with chicken it becomes *calabacita con pollo*. (Albala, 2011: 360-361).

Among Tex-Mex appetisers there are various sauces, often eaten with *nachos*, that is *tortilla* chips topped with cheese and jalapeño slices and broiled until the cheese melts. This snack is eaten with toppings of *guacamole* or sour cream. Among various sauces there is *mole* - a dark brown sauce made from dried chilli peppers, spices and chocolate; *guacamole* - a sauce made from avocado and spices; *verde* is a tomato-based green sauce (Walsh 2004). Another popular sauce is *salsa* - made of raw chopped onion, tomato, and chilli peppers. Chillies, while forming the base for many kinds of *salsa*, are often a main or side dish on their own (West, 1988: 217).

Snack foods in the Southwest draw on the rich heritage of Mexican cuisine. Corn *tortillas* form the basis of numerous dishes - *enchiladas*, *tacos*, *chalupas*, and others. *Taco* in Mexico is a meal item consisting of meat and a little *salsa* wrapped in a soft corn *tortilla*. In the USA it is filled not only with meat, but also lettuce, cheddar cheese, sour cream, or even bacon. Tex-Mex *tacos* often take the form of *tortillas* fried into a U-shaped shell

(Bentley, 2011: 211). *Chalupas* (also known as *tostadas*) are made by frying *tortillas* into a flat shape, then topping them like *tacos*. In Mexico *tostadas* are generally fried *tortilla* quarters, whereas in Tex-Mex cuisine, *tostadas* are more often fried *tortilla* chips, topped like *tacos* with beans and cheese. *Enchiladas* are corn *tortillas*, softened in hot oil and then dipped or cooked in a chilli sauce. Originally they were served without a filling and topped with a little Mexican white cheese. Tex-Mex *enchiladas* are typically rolled with a filling of either meat or cheese, then garnished with a little more sauce and cheese (Walsh, 2000). Among *tortilla*-based food items, the most famous is *burrito*, originating in the Mexican state of Sonora, consisting of a large *tortilla* wrapped around ingredients including either chopped meat with red chilli or mashed pinto beans with grated cheese. Meats used in *burrito* include beef or pork with *mole*. A deep fried *burrito* is called *chimichanga* (Albala, 2011: 364).

Another popular Tex-Mex dish is *tamales*. ‘Tamales illustrate the successive cycles of conquest, travel, and transculturation that have shaped modern Mexican cuisine’ (Pilcher, 2014: 444). Native Americans learned from the Spanish how to beat pork fat into corn dough so the formerly indigenous dish acquired a Spanish identity. *Tamales* are made from corn-meal dough, blended with pork lard to the consistency of whipped cream. They contain meat, usually pork and red chilli. This dish is labour-intensive, requiring hours of manual labour to construct and roll *tamales*. There are bean and spinach, vegetarian *tamales* which are made without any lard. The beef, pork and chicken *tamales* have lots of meat and are often eaten with chilli gravy topping (Albala, 2011: 365).

European food animals also became part of Southwestern foodways, including sheep, cattle, goats and pigs. The most common meat in the Southwest is beef. Beef stew from Texas is known as *chuckwagon* stew or *chili con carne*. It is made with ground beef, tomatoes, red chili powder and beans. It is now recognised as the official dish of Texas (Albala, 2011: 363). *Chili con carne* spread across the USA in the early decades of the 20th century. Chilli entered the recipes of regionally diverse American cuisines; in Memphis ‘chili mac’ was served with spaghetti; in Ohio and Michigan hot dogs with chilli were known as ‘coveys’. A unique tourist attraction of San Antonio and Los Angeles were the so-called ‘chili queens’ (Pilcher, 2014: 449). Those Mexican women trying to earn a living through selling chilli were banned from street vending by health authorities concerned over hygiene. Finally the dish was exiled to the town of Terlingua in West Texas where ‘chili cook-off’ competitions are organised for the best *chili con carne*. ‘“Chili queens” provides a case

of cultural appropriation whereby Anglos transformed the spicy foods of Mexican women into a symbol of the dominant, masculine culture, Texas chili' (Pilcher, 2008: 173).

Another Tex-Mex dish including beef is *fajitas* which originally meant strips of marinated skirt steak sautéed with onions and served with flour *tortillas* (West, 1988: 213). *Fajita* now includes any grilled meat served with flour *tortillas* and condiments. There are a number of reasons for *fajitas*' popularity. First, the trend towards eating low-fat dishes turned Americans' attention to grilled food, and *fajitas* were immediately included in the new diet. Second, the popularity of ethnic cuisines made Mexican dishes more familiar to American customers. And third, *fajitas* seemed more authentically Mexican than combination plates or other Tex-Mex dishes. In fact, *fajitas* originate in West Texas and the Rio Grande Valley so this food is not authentic Mexican but authentic *Tejano*.³ Although meat is also grilled in Mexico there are differences between Mexican and *Tejano* cooking and the ingredients. American beef is tender than the tough range-fed Mexican beef which needs longer grilling. Mexican cowboys marinate meat to make it tender but *Tejano* meat from Midwestern packers is tender enough to prepare steaks easily (Walsh, 2000).

Even eggs in Texas are served in several distinctive Mexican American ways. *Huevos rancheros* (ranch-style eggs) are served on top of a *tortilla* and covered with salsa. *Huevos con papa* are eggs scrambled with diced boiled potato, usually with a little salsa. *Huevos con chorizo* are scrambled with fried crumbs of Mexican sausage. *Tarta de huevo* is an omelette but with chopped onion, tomato, and jalapeño peppers added to the cheese, milk and eggs. *Migas* are scrambled eggs with sautéed onions (West, 1988: 218).

Another example of transculturality in the case of Texan food is the combination plate that originated in Texas in the early 20th century as an adaptation to Anglo customers. Mexicans like small meals such as *tacos*, *enchiladas*, *tostadas*, and *burritos* which had long provided quick meals to working-class Mexicans who ate them standing on a street corner. Anglos prefer plates full of food which encouraged cooks to combine a main Mexican dish with rice (Pilcher, 2004: 210).

Tex-Mex desserts include a type of bread pudding, called *capirotada*; a rice and milk dessert with raisins and sugar known as *arroz blanco con leche cocido*; and a delicious custard called 'flan'. There is also *pastel de tres*

leches which is sometimes known as Mexican wedding cake (Busby, 2004: 249). Mexican alcoholic beverages popular in the Southwest include mescal and tequila which is the basis for preparing a Margarita cocktail. Mexican beers popular in Texas include: Corona, dos Eguis, Negra Modelo, Tecate.

Although cuisine found closer to the US-Mexico border vary greatly from the ones in the North, Mexican food and its variations occupy a special place in the culinary world of Americans. Texas food reflects the cultural variety of the region. In West Texas, for example, *enchiladas* are usually flat because the *tortilla* is dipped into hot grease and then into the chilli sauce and next covered with grated cheese and chopped onions. Beef and chicken are typically used for the rolled *enchiladas* popular in South Texas. *Fajitas* are popular in South Texas but not in West Texas. *Morcilla*, made of pork blood is common in West Texas but not in South Texas.

Previously exotic items, such as *enchiladas* have become naturalized to the degree that these are now standard dishes on the tables of 'nonethnic' mainstream American restaurants. Although these dishes have been gaining popularity, it can be argued that these foreign contributions have suffered, losing authenticity and becoming Americanized as most ethnic cuisines have been adapted to prevailing taste in the USA (Zelinsky, 1985: 53). However, it is not American food, but Mexican-inspired regional cuisine in the USA as Latino chefs base their recipes on family memoirs and ingredients available at local ethnic markets. The *New York Times* (2012) describes the culinary style of Mexican American chef – Jair Téllez – who used to work in New York, San Francisco and Mexico City. His cooking is not indigenous but rather American-influenced Mexican cuisine with local ingredients. The author of the article describes Tellez's cooking as 'Amerexican' because in his dishes 'you can plainly see the tension between what's Mexican and what's not' (Bittman, 2012: SM46). The *Boston Globe* (2015) presents the Tex-Mex food prepared by Amanda Escamilla – the chef of 'Tex Mex Eats' diner in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Escamilla grew up in Texas and takes an inspiration from her mother's recipes but experiments with her own style of cooking, creating what she calls 'Texachusetts flavors'. She buys most of the meat and vegetables from local farms and still relies on trusted sources from her youth for Mexican oregano, smoked paprika, and corn husks for tamales (Pyenson, 2015: G9). *Nation Restaurant News* (2007) reports that research chefs gathered at the Johnson & Wales University campus to explore the foods of Latin America, at the conference titled Global Culinary Expedition, sponsored by Smithfield Foods. The

³ *Tejano* – a term used to identify a Texan Mexican American (Spanish for 'Texan').

researchers observed that authentic Mexican food has not taken the country by storm. Rather, Americans seem to prefer dishes that have been inspired or influenced by Mexican cuisine or that use Mexican ingredients. The model of not striving for authenticity helps popularise the hybrid cuisine inspired by Mexican style of cooking (Thorn, 2007: 130).

Conclusion

The food revolution prompted by the colonization of America had long lasting consequences as it changed the variety of available foods and brought together peoples with different culinary values and techniques. As South-western cuisine has been introduced into the lexicon of mainstream American foodways other Latin American cuisines have followed, entering as 'others', e.g. Cuban, Brazilian, Caribbean. This fusion of ethnic foods into the American mainstream reflects the importance of migrant tastes in shaping the national life of the USA as a nation of multi-ethnic people. Moreover, the Spanish names of Mexican dishes are not translated into English, although they are cooked, served and consumed in the USA. When Spanish words enter the American lexicon it is an example of transculturality in the linguistic sphere. Even non-Spanish-speaking consumers of the American Southwest understand the Mexican names of Tex-Mex dishes.

Ethnic cuisines in the USA can be analysed as a metaphor of multiethnic society. The growing numbers of Mexican Americans reflect the impact of Latino culture and culinary traditions which take different shapes in various American regions. US Hispanics reproduce their culinary traditions while blending Native American, Hispanic, and European foods so their dishes are products of hybridization from different gastronomic heritages. As Mexican cooking is the example of fusion cuisine, it has become even more hybrid after adapting to the prevailing American taste. Tex-Mex cuisine is a *mestizo* mixture of Spanish, Indian and Mexican influences that combined in the American Southwest and adapted to the regional environment of the host culture. Although the terms Tex-Mex and Mexican American mean the same while speaking of food, there is a difference between Mexican cuisine and Tex-Mex cuisine. Firstly, Tex-Mex cuisine has been adapted to suit the Anglo taste while Mexican food has almost no influence from the USA. Secondly, Tex-Mex is also used for dishes originating in areas other than Texas, e.g. California. Thirdly, Tex-Mex food is not Mexican but Mexican-American. However, the terms: Mexican American dishes, South-western cuisine and

Tex-Mex food are often used interchangeably.

Foods provide an example of ethnic borderlands. Some Indian foods originating in a pre-Hispanic period were carried by the settlers to the northern borderland where the dishes acquired Hispanic identity and became central to the *mestizo* regional cuisines. The inclusion of food in the migration of Mexicans transforms the role of food from a simple consumption function into a marker of ethnic identity. Moreover, food substances are always changing through their natural growing cycles as well as when raw materials are transformed into cooked foodstuffs. Because of its transformative nature food serves as a metaphor for changes that occur in human life so food can be analysed as an area where ethnic identity is constructed. 'Diaspora is a space where food practices can acquire power to help migrants reinforce their notions of identity and to contest previously learned notions about themselves' (Alfonso, 2012: 176). Ethnic food habits are part of transnational flows that link migrants' homelands and receiving countries. At the beginning migrants try to maintain their cooking habits but with time they have to adapt their traditional recipes to the ingredients available and local tastes. However, there are tensions between different forms of authenticity and dishes that were first perceived as exotic acquire local qualities. Mexican cuisine, like other ethnic foods in the USA, has been incorporated into the American mainstream and adapted to the local environment creating the cultural hybridity known as Tex-Mex.

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