



Diálogo

---

Volume 18 | Number 1

Article 1

---

2015

## Sharing Community: Histories and Traditions in Food Preparation

Elizabeth Coonrod Martínez  
*DePaul University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo>



Part of the [Latin American Languages and Societies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Coonrod Martínez, Elizabeth (2015) "Sharing Community: Histories and Traditions in Food Preparation," *Diálogo*: Vol. 18 : No. 1 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/dialogo/vol18/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Latino Research at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Diálogo by an authorized editor of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact [digitalservices@depaul.edu](mailto:digitalservices@depaul.edu).

# Sharing Community: Histories and Traditions in Food Preparation

ELIZABETH COONROD MARTÍNEZ  
DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

In 2012, when we were newly embarked on the expansion to biannual publication of *Diálogo*, we began advertising a series of themes on these pages to identify interests in Latin American and U.S. Latino topics, as well as new directions in scholarship. Our ideas were presented in general terms to allow for particular disciplinary, and interdisciplinary, interests. A few of our Editorial Board members stepped up to explore some of these themes, beginning with last year's issue on Poetry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, compiled by Norma E. Cantú and Juana Iris Goergen.

For the present volume, Editorial Board member Rafael Chabrán, emeritus professor at Whittier College in California, expanded the idea for a suggested theme on *mestizaje*, to "Mestizaje and Gastronomy: What Latinos Eat." The response from contributors brought a wide array of disciplinary approaches, from perspectives on agricultural origins in the Americas to diet to popularized practices and political economies. They represent a variety of regions, both in the U.S. and Latin America, with dialogues around Indigenous and African influences, fusion with European practices and ingredients, and contemporary productions. The contributors engage disciplines of history, science, anthropology and ethnography, literature, economics and popular culture. The final result is a stupendous collection of provocative articles and interviews.

It is always fun to talk about food. I can't help but wonder if the idea came to Dr. Chabrán in the autumn of 2012, when we hosted wonderful Guatemalan writer/critic Arturo Árias here on our campus, to celebrate his lead article in our 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue. Editorial Board members Chabrán and Hilda Chacón were present as we celebrated with dinner at a local restaurant after the reception; Arturo and Rafael talked on and on about the cuisine of various nations and cultures, a conversation as delectable as any items described.

Several years ago it generated great interest in Mexico when the magazine *Arqueología mexicana* released the special issue, "La cocina prehispánica," with images from the ancient codices: tamales, and other foods native to Mesoamerica, brimming in pots set before rulers. That

issue promoted a majority of recipes and ingredients with pre-contact origins, which inspired new interest in products and practices native to this hemisphere. Since then, other special issues of *Arqueología mexicana* have featured "The *chiles* of Mexico" (more than 200); *El maíz* (the special gift from the gods, as often portrayed in Mesoamerican literature); the sumptuous *El cacao*; the versatile *El maguey*; and *La calabaza, el tomate y el frijol* (similar to the Mesoamerican indigenous peoples' reference to the "three sisters" of corn, beans, and squash). Those issues and recent books and scientific studies have now brought credit to important "foods the Americas gave the world" (to borrow from the title of one book).<sup>1</sup>

Scientists refer to the significant era after European contact as the Columbian exchange (I'll leave aside my sentiment that it should have been the "Indigenous exchange"), the process during initial colonial decades when European livestock and crops such as wheat brought change to the American continent, while Native agricultural products were transported to Europe and changed lives. Potatoes, previously unknown outside the Americas (cultivation beginning between 8 and 5000 BCE in the Andean region), fed Spain's armies throughout Europe, quickly contributed to the economy in England, became a staple for Ireland, and constitutes an important ingredient for Russian vodka. Maize and peanuts grew especially well in areas of southern Africa, where such crops were much needed. Historians document that this "exchange," an Indigenous gift to the world, kept people in Europe and Africa from starving, and in fact, aided in the expansion of populations. For the thirteen British colonies during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, maize, squash and fish made possible their survival, as well as that of the incipient nation-to-be.

We could not live today without the exotic vanilla and chocolate indigenous to this continent, which became popular in Europe (the latter once mixed with milk), and now, centuries later, we celebrate the exchange (diseases and other problems caused by European contact are a separate conversation), and enjoy culinary practices and fascinating recipes of ancient heritage and fusion in contemporary renditions.

What has come to be termed “Latino” or “Mexican” cuisine, even “Tex-Mex” and a variety of other terms in the U.S. and the Caribbean, is highlighted in popular culture through non-Latino U.S. chefs and cookbooks, in Hollywood film, and through globalization and commercialization. But in many cases—as the articles and interviews in the present issue demonstrate—popular practices do not sufficiently credit, or truly represent, the rich history of “food” practices native to the Americas. From the colonial process to traditional feasts, to mass production and merchandising, the issue before you traces a history of cultures and peoples. The balance of articles a nearly equal presentation in English and Spanish, we hope readers will enjoy discovering the perspectives here and develop new ideas for further research.

The collection begins with two articles on the early colonial manuscripts of a Spanish botanist whose travel and studies of plants and lifestyle routines among southern Mexican Indigenous populations elicited some of the initial information received across the Atlantic on Native American products and practices. These are followed by a scintillating article on the history of the *tortilla* (especially enjoyable is the Disney version toward the end of the article), demonstrating the removal of credit due the earliest people of this continent, who first cultivated maize and created the tortilla. When addressing the roots of authentic Mexican cuisine, we tend to think of Oaxaca, and/or Nahua-based food and terms, but the article on Indigenous cuisine in Michoacán demonstrates the continuity of *p'urépecha* traditions and preparations in that state, including the delicious appeal of *corundas*—featured on this cover—through the striking photos of Adalberto Ríos Szalay and Lorena Ojeda.

One article surveys a popular cookbook for up-and-comers in South American society shortly after independence, with commentary on customs designed to celebrate *criollo* practices originating on this continent; another brings focus to sensory memories of traditional foods and practices imported from Africa, often subsumed under a category of “Latino;” and another article discusses African origins in Mexican cuisine. Articles based in U.S. experience review health factors resulting from the Americanization of diets in second-generation Latinos; another paints a loving portrait of Mexican immigrant mothers, through community practices around maize preparation and *convivencia* with other women. The shorter essays study the uniqueness of classic *New*

*Mexican* food; a history of *tacos* through experts’ books; and the livelihood of food cart vendors in the Chicago Mexican neighborhood of Pilsen.

The two interviews included in this issue are especially fascinating, in-depth perspectives on the coming together of community, organic eating, and food-blogging in the Los Angeles area. As usual, we include a short section of creative work, delicious taste sensations and extant childhood memories, and an array of book reviews on texts about food, followed by reviews of two other texts, and a film review of *Chef*.

From the relationship developed with the guest thematic editor to the community of scholars, writers and artists (even expert reviewers we locate) that is created through each special issue as it unfolds, each issue is an experience treasured by Cristina and myself. Each participant contributes to the personality of a special volume, a creative and scholarly act in itself. Our hope is that our readers find this issue as delightful as we have.

The second issue of 2015, this Fall, highlights a theme important to current society, that of “Reframing Immigration” in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, again initiated by an Editorial Board member, Dr. Gilda Ochoa, expanding to a team with two other scholars. This collection promises to constitute an issue of important perspectives from scholars as well as human rights workers and activists. That volume will promote the beautiful images of U.S. Latino artist, Malaquíás Montoya.

Until we meet again on these pages, please savor the histories and processes described here, which we hope leads to your own memories and concoctions.

#### ENDNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> *From Chilies to Chocolate, Food the Americas Gave the World* (U of Arizona P, 1992).