

Beign and to be

present through the gastronomy:
the voice of the traditional cooks.

Andrés López Ojeda

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"My daughters are fanatics of xitlalmolli and when we eat it, I tell them that we are eating the firmament," recalls emotionally Reyna Pérez Vicuña about the traditional mole of the municipality of Tetela del Volcan in Morelos: "they gave it that name because it is prepared with Chile pasilla and the little seeds remain inside the mole as if they were stars". Mrs. Reyna is a retired teacher and traditional cook "because we make known what our ancestors ate like the quelites that now a days are being lost." She adds that being a cook is a pride and says she is excited when people who try and taste their dishes are happy as she prepares to serve what they have prepared for this IV World Forum of Mexican Gastronomy, held last November in The National Center for the Arts (CNART) with the support of numerous public institutions, among which the Secretary of Culture of the federal government; The Ministry of Tourism; The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Breeding, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA); The Ministry of Foreign Affairs; The Ministry of Economy and the Secretariat of Social Development stand out, but also private organizations such as Gruma, MVS, Time Out, The Mexican Wine Council and Four Seasons Hotels.

To this celebration has also attended María Magdalena Ramírez from Totolapan, Morelos, whom comments that she was at the Cervantino Festival last year and participating in this type of event is "a personal achievement because I am demonstrating the capacity that I have to prepare different dishes." In her case, she prepares some dishes based on turkey that are being lost and she laments it, because she says that "we are already reaching modernism and we are letting go of the traditional; the beauty that we have here, we are leaving it aside", because the mole with turkey, was "what identified us as Totolapenses." She also tells us that her husband supports her a lot when she has to leave, "he urges me to continue this, which I like" because, in addition, the "importance they give to us now as traditional cooks in such events, fills us with satisfaction."

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Traditional Cooks from the state of Morelos

For his part Gerardo Murillo, cook from Comalcalco, Tabasco, notes that he attends the IV Forum proudly representing Tabasco cuisine and he is a firm believer in the rescue of traditional Mexican cuisine remembering that it was already declared a cultural heritage of humanity, above all, his propose is to contribute to its revaluation so that "our young people will know it because they have been losing the taste for traditional cuisine." Gerardo is convinced that gastronomy "is what identifies a country in the world, Mexican food is the images, the smells, the flavors that come to mind and that we can taste in an infinity of dishes that we have in the country; We want that a person on the other side of the world can recognize those flavors or be impacted when we are able to talk them, gastronomy is having a culture, a proper identity, is a way of being in the world". For the case of the state of Tabasco, gastronomy shows that it is not only the negative that appears in the news, he comments that "unfortunately, Tabasco has seen it self-invaded by that immense social cancer that is organized crime, but we also have a lot of tourist and Gastronomic corridor which we have to go out and show it to the country and the world, so they see that we are not only a conflictive or problematic state, that is, insecure

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because they assault you, we can also provide the necessary security measures so that people can travel without problems and enjoy the flora, fauna, gastronomy and all the pre-Hispanic architecture that we have."

Being a traditional cook is actually more extensive since it also includes the cuisine of the different indigenous peoples of the country, as Reyna Reyes Harinas tells, who was born in the Otomí community of Xonacatlan, State of Mexico. "I am accompanied by Carmen who is from Temascaltepec, of Matlatzinca origin and Tere from Temascalcingo that is a Mazahua community", emphasizes showing pride of its pre-Hispanic roots. When we say that we are traditional cooks, Ms. Reyna reiterates, we mean that we cook the food of our ethnic groups, which is healthy and also of survival, like the quelites or the nopales: "like our ancestors, we have charal sauces, sauce of peanuts; Now I made morita chili sauce with tacojotes, and I tell a young man that those sauces are for survival: my ancestors and I are still peasants, then, when we have no money, we go to the field to bring the quelites, the chivatos, the turnips, the hearts, the mountain nopales, when it is rainy season there are many clean quelites, that is, they are not irrigated." In order to show the benefits of traditional food, she also comments that "my grandchildren are good nopaleros, I never imagined that they would consume nopales because today's children do not want to eat them, but thanks to god my family continues to consume the same food as I did. In the village there are well-off people who do not make an effort to prepare lunch for the children. What do they do? Well, they give their children Maruchan soups, their sabritas (Lay's), things like that. I think the healthiest thing is to prepare them their lunch that's asked at school, because they ask, spinach with potatoes, nopales, or any vegetable like that, and that we have almost at hand.

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Traditional Cook form the State of Tabasco



Traditional Cook form the
State of Mexico

Pech means tick and Poot is a spider that jumps, leaps and stings, says Mrs. Mary Ady about her surnames. She was born in the state of Quintana Roo and says that "we feel very fortunate to be invited, especially since they allow us to preach what is the traditional cuisine of the Mayan communities, because this was eaten by our Mayan grandparents from many years ago ". Mrs. María Ady learned to cook when she was 6 and she did it through inherited knowledge, the main way in which the tradition is accessed and appropriated: "I do not know how but I already knew how to make atole, to make tamales; When I realized I was already cooking and one does it because they tell you, then one does, obey, and realizes that it is learning from our grandparents and our grandmothers; And how nice it is that this meeting is taking place because it means that they are still interested in our culture that is very forgotten, few people pay attention to what we do." She even mentions that through the kitchen they have been able to rescue what the field gives them, for example, she says that "we have always cultivated, sowed the maize fields, sowed everything, and we do it because our grandparents did, not only one thing is sow, beans are sow, sweet potatoes, yucca, potatoes. And then there is

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another potato that is little thorns that is put inside the food and we are already rescuing it". The land, the field, for María Ady is something constitutive for everything it provides, especially for the food, so she suggests that it should be much more respected: "we do not starve because everything is there in the maize fields, in the field there is always food, because mother earth feed us, dress us, give us shoes, give us blankets, it gives us a ceiling, it gives us food. We have mistreated it, trampled it, and that we are going to pay it very costly and it will be charged with profits."

Mrs. Josefina Olivas González, better known as Chepa, dresses her daily dress from the Tarahumara's mountains, simple, but showy compared to the exuberance of other traditions. She tells that they ask her frequently if the clothes she brings are hers, how they are call and she responds that's Tarahumara. In a Spanish that she acquired as a second language, she says in an impressively correct and unhurried way that where she lives she makes handmade tortillas "that we call quesadillas", she also cooks quelites, Cactus and pumpkin seeds. To the quelites they call them "asolí", that in Spanish means "quelites from water". She also comments that in Cuauhtemoc city she also cooks, makes blue tortillas and that there's where she was invited to come to the IV Forum, they told me: "We are going to go to Mexico and I did not believe; 15 days before they called me and told me to get ready; They told me that by plane and I told them that I have never traveled by plane but since I have already told them that I was going to come, so here I am." She adds that she was encouraged even more because she wanted to meet people from other parts of the country and "yesterday I had to do the food", something that she values a lot because "for me is to not lose the culture, that is, I want to continue doing the food that my mother taught me, I learned it when I was 12, only that there in the mountains we had to put the fire outside and we made corn tortillas or the food."

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Traditional Cooks from the State of Chihuahua

Also from Chihuahua, Mrs. Aurora Otila Concha Baca, also known as Tilita, says that she goes to promote the striped that is a typical bread from Parral, for her the traditional cuisine is "the food that our families make". She is an experienced one on this type of meetings, she even has been in the three previous editions celebrated in Acapulco, Puebla and the last two years in the CNART in Mexico City, thanks to the opening and recognition that was granted to them, first from CONACULTA, and now the Federal Secretariat of Culture. Thanks to that, she adds that she is now better known, "they invite me to different places to present dishes, we treat other comrades from other states and we share our knowledge, for me it has been very beautiful all this". She even adds that thanks to it, his family "is proud of me because I have grown as a person, I have grown up in that level; gastronomy has given me that experience and that of meeting nice people".

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Knowing other places of the country and other people from different states is also what motivates Mrs. María Estela Vargas and Mrs. Serapia Florencia of the community of Ztacuala in the municipality of Acaxochitlán, Hidalgo, for whom to travel to other places promoting their gastronomy, allows them to expand their knowledge: "we realize that to prepare the dishes we use the same things; and in the type of food that we each bring what changes are sometimes the pots of clay or metal, the molcajete, now it is an exchange."

Among the dishes that she shares is the pork meat in Chile piquín (Hot chili) with tomato and mushrooms, as well as beans in mole; She explains that the latter preparation carries cocomoles, that is, little pieces of corn dough that are put in the chili broth and that makes it thick, "is a very old food," emphasize with the pride that gives her to know that is a unique dish and adds that "when we say cocomol it comes to mind that we are going to eat bits of tortilla".



Traditional Cooks from the State of Puebla



Traditional Cooks from the State of Quintana Roo



Traditional Cooks from the State of Hidalgo

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Another traditional cook who has participated in all the forums is Mrs. Victoria Contreras from Cuetzalan, Puebla. She is also very proud of what she does because she wants to "show what we have, what we do". To participate in the event, from her point of view, serves his municipality to have more promotion, to get more tourism and, takes advantage to recommend the mole with chicken, the pipián, the tlayoyos which is the most known in Cuetzalan. Victoria feels very grateful that you have invited her again and, personally, what she wants is "to exchange experiences with other states, to know from other states and that they know about us." And that is because, being a traditional cook has also allowed her to have her own restaurant, participate in a women's organization that manages a hotel called "Taselotzin" (place of tender plants) and raise her self-esteem that has allowed her to interact in other meetings in a relevant way: "I participated in the international meeting of the Mexican Foreign Ministry, I was sharing with people from other countries; here in Mexico I was in the forums and I liked it because I had never participated as a speaker." In short, to strengthen being a traditional cook and to make presence showing to society the important role that they play in safeguarding a living cultural heritage.