

I drew a deep breath and ducked into the city market. Dodging the crowds, I hurried past the butchers' stands and the smells to which I would never become accustomed. Heading for the safety of fruits and vegetables, I began buying my week's provisions. Eventually, arms full of cilantro, tomatoes, onions, avocados and a few bunches of flowers to brighten my kitchen, I was ready for the final item on my list. I stood still for a moment in the chaos, searching for it. I spotted a woman seated on the floor nearby with a towel-covered basket in front of her. I darted over and lowered myself to the floor, next to her and out of the way of passing feet. We had finished our negotiations and she was wrapping up some of her still-warm tortillas for me when I felt a hand gently stroke my hair. I looked up into the face of an elderly woman. She returned my look with a near-toothless smile and a sharp nod. "What a smart gringa you are to know that hand-made tortillas are so much better than the ones from a machine," she approvingly purred.

It was only a moment in an otherwise unremarkable Saturday, and I was "off-duty." My notebook, camera and tape recorder were at home. I wasn't in the market to research food, but to stand alongside my neighbors and purchase it. Yet in that fleeting exchange, the woman, a stranger to me, summed up much of the tensions surrounding the preparation of food that I identified during my ethnographic research in the village of La Soledad Morelos and archaeological research at the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla. Who prepares food and how that food is prepared is of central importance in highland Mexico today, and studies of Precolumbian Mesoamerica suggest that this emphasis is not new. My ethnographic research supports the argument that cooking and foodways are of primary importance among the modern population. On the other hand, archaeological and oral historical research suggest that a period of profound disruption in family and social structure driven by the introduction of capitalist modes of production during the second half of the 19th

FOODWAYS AND IDENTITY AT THE HACIENDA SAN MIGUEL ACOCOTLA

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century resulted in a transformation of who prepared food and how. In this paper, I will explore these data and the tensions they suggest.

My research draws on ethnographic and archaeological research conducted in Puebla, Mexico between 2004 and 2008. **(SLIDE 2—MAP OF REGION)**. The Valley of Atlixco is located in the western portion of the modern day state of Puebla. The Valley sits at approximately 1,800 meters above sea level and east of a line of hills that run south from the summit of the Popocateptl volcano. When the Spanish began to settle the area in the mid-16th century, they found that the climate and agricultural conditions were ideal for the production of wheat. Within fifty years, Atlixco became one of the primary production centers for the European-introduced domesticate, with more than 90 haciendas dedicated to its cultivation (Chevalier 1963:64).

(SLIDE 3—HAROLD AT CHAPEL) During this project's initial phase, Dr. Harold Juli of Connecticut College conducted an informal visual survey of ten haciendas in the Puebla and Tlaxcala region to develop an understanding of the nature of regional settlement patterns, site preservation and the potential for archaeological and ethnographic research. The more than four hundred year old Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla was ultimately selected as our research site. While the main house, or *casco*, is in a poor state of preservation, the area of worker housing, called the *calpanaría* **(SLIDE 4—CALPANARÍA WITH VOLCANO)**, along the *casco*'s south wall, was sufficiently well-preserved to suggest that a profitable archaeological study focused on the indigenous worker population would be feasible. This zone is comprised of 37 small adobe rooms adjacent to a fallow field that was the area of domestic activities during at least the 19th and 20th centuries, if not during the earlier colonial era as well. Further, the village of La Soledad Morelos, located two kilometers to the south of the Hacienda ruins, is home to former hacienda workers and their descendants. Nearly 2,000 people inhabiting 384 houses and house compounds currently live

in La Soledad. The people support themselves primarily by growing cash crops on former Hacienda lands for the nearby markets in Atlixco and Puebla, an activity which is supplemented with remittances sent from the United States. Today, the people of La Soledad Morelos speak Spanish, but as recently as the 1950's, *Nahuatl* was the dominant language.

(SLIDE 5—WOMAN IN FRONT OF HOUSE) Ethnographic research in La Soledad Morelos focused on detailed mappings of domestic space and interviews with at least one member of the household, though we interviewed multiple household members of differing sexes and ages whenever possible. With the assistance of students from the University of the Americas in Puebla, we mapped and interviewed 5 percent of the total households in La Soledad Morelos. The interviews focused on domestic life and oral histories relating to hacienda life and the Mexican Revolution. This phase of research resulted in more than 1000 pages of typed field notes and more than 20 detailed maps of domestic compounds.

The sampled domestic compounds present a few attributes that may be generally discussed. **(SLIDE 6—DOMESTIC COMPOUND MAPS)** On average, they measure 559 square meters, but range widely from 256 to 1,575 square meters. This space includes both indoor and outdoor activity areas. With one exception, the studied compounds were bounded on four sides by cornstalk, adobe, or cement block walls. Rooms were single-storied and constructed out of adobe and pan tiles or cement block and corrugated tin roofing. Only one compound had rooms with windows, and very few of the rooms had doors in the doorways. Most people simply hung a curtain for privacy. The number of rooms and activity areas in each compound ranged from two to nine, but between five to eight identified areas was most common. Most compounds had a single living structure for each nuclear family, though occasionally, either multiple living structures were identified for a single family, or more commonly, one structure was identified for multiple families.

In addition, each compound contained a separate kitchen area for each nuclear family. All compounds contained space for animals, though it varied as to what species of animals were accommodated. Pigs were identified frequently, as were goats and turkeys. Many compounds also contained dedicated space for burros, horses, sheep and chickens.

On average, housing compounds contained 4.5 people per compound, though the populations ranged from one individual to eight. Most commonly, 6-8 people inhabited the same compound. Of the twenty households surveyed, only two had men in residence between the ages of 15 and 60. All but these two households mentioned having at least one man, husband or son, absent and working in either Mexico City, or, more commonly, the United States. It was not uncommon to find houses inhabited by three generations of women, grandmother, daughter, and granddaughter, in La Soledad.

All of the households had running water and electricity, though our informants did not consider the water potable. Running water was generally limited to one or two taps located outdoors in the center of the compound, which were used for washing dishes, watering plants and animals, and for bathing. None of the houses had a connection to municipal drains or sewers. None of the houses studied had indoor plumbing. Electricity was used almost exclusively to power small black and white television sets. Though a number of families owned refrigerators, these were never plugged in and were used instead like coolers to keep food from getting too warm. Modern gas stoves were common but were used mainly when it rained. Most women preferred cooking over an open fire in the semi-open, detached kitchen areas, called “smoke-kitchens,” that are found in all of the compounds.

The focus of my discussion today is kitchenspace. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, ethnographic research revealed that kitchenspaces are of primary importance for women and families in La

Soledad Morelos, and that these spaces are heavily gendered. Depending on size, they are a space not only for cooking and preparing food, but a place where women and children gather to gossip, sew and play while keeping an eye on simmering food. Men enter only occasionally and uncomfortably. Kitchenspaces provide warmth from an open fire in cold weather, and shade from the sun during the warmer times of day. When a woman visits her neighbor, she heads for the kitchen and settles in comfortably to share a cool drink and trade gossip. In La Soledad, the kitchen is the nucleus of domestic life.

(CLICK) The most significant point to emerge from the study of maps of domestic space in La Soledad Morelos is that smoke kitchens are present for *each* nuclear family sharing a compound. The primary purpose of these kitchens is ostensibly for the production of tortillas, though in many cases, only one kitchen is so used, and as already indicated the spaces are used for much more than just cooking. **(SLIDE 8—PIC OF TORTILLA PREP)** Often, daughters-in-law sharing a compound with their husband's parents supply the tortillas for the entire compound, but the mother-in-law retains a distinct architectural area dedicated to this purpose. Certainly, the hearth and its associated responsibilities have been central to *Nabua* conceptions of femininity for hundreds of years (Kellogg 1995). The centrality of food production is illustrated by my exchange with the woman in the market described in the introduction. She clearly valued hand-made tortillas above machine made tortillas. The matter was important enough to impel her to offer approval to a stranger and a foreigner. Her opinion was representative of that of many of the older women in La Soledad. Though grinding machines are available for corn, many women in the village grind their own corn and cook their own tortillas on ceramic griddles over open-air, wood fires. For some, it is a matter of economy, and for others, it is a point of pride. Though it is commonly said that the

tortilla machine liberated the women of Mexico, La Soledad's female inhabitants scorn its use and vociferously express disapproval of women who opt for the "easy way out."

In *Nahuas After Conquest*, James Lockhart explores the idea of a *cibuacalli* or "woman house," an architectural space identified in 16th and 17th century documents (1992:66-67). He notes that, in wills, the "woman house" does not pass with the rest of the compound to the male inheritors, but instead remains with the widow or daughter. He is uncertain if this space is a kitchen, though that is exactly what the Spanish called it, or if it is a room used for other activities, such a weaving, or a space where women gather (Lockhart 1992:66). Though "kitchens" are identified as such in La Soledad Morelos, they are used for all the activities Lockhart mentions as possibilities for the "woman house." If the impermanent, semi-open air nature of the La Soledad structure is taken as a model, it would explain why Lockhart finds numerous textual references and only a single illustrated example. Further, the presence of multiple kitchens, one for each married woman in a household, suggests a situation similar to the inheritance patterns traced by Lockhart. Finally, in La Soledad, it is an understood, but unspoken, rule that adult males do not enter the kitchen area, arguing that the kitchen is, very much, a "woman house" of some sort.

(SLIDE 9—SURVEY WITH EXCAVATION AREAS) With such emphasis placed on kitchenspaces amongst members of the descendant community and evidence for this importance extending back through the colonial period and into Precolumbian times, I expected that kitchenspace would occupy an equally important place in the Hacienda's *calpanaría*, something I hoped would be identifiable in the archaeological record. A survey of the collected oral histories suggested that memory of kitchenspace was conflicted. We asked informants about the provisions made for food preparation in the *calpanaría* and received three answers. First, that each family had been allotted two rooms, one for living and one for cooking. Second, that each family had a space

in front of the *calpanaría* for cooking. Finally, that a single kitchen had been constructed and was staffed by a woman from the nearby village.

Twelve weeks of archaeological investigations were designed to explore these three sets of memories in the *calpanaría* at the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla. The program of investigations involved intensive surface survey and excavation in both the field fronting the *calpanaría* and within individual rooms, all of which resulted in the collection of more than 87,000 artifacts. **(SLIDE 10—KITCHEN UNIT)** Data from the surface survey led us to the easy discovery of a single kitchen space located across the field from the *calpanaría*. The architecture matched the construction described by two of our informants, and inside we found a mano and metate placed next to a pot sitting in a hearth. No other kitchen spaces were encountered, and excavations inside the rooms of the *calpanaría* indicated that these rooms had not been used for cooking, but had most probably each held a single family.

Why, then, the dissonance of memory and reality, and why the disruption of age-old practices in domestic organization? The excavated contexts dated to the second half of the 19th and early years of the 20th century. These archaeological data combined with evidence drawn from the historic record indicate that the *calpanaría* had been designed and constructed around 1860. During this period, both the Atlixco region and Mexico as a whole were undergoing dramatic modernization. In the Valley of Atlixco, international corporations were building factory-towns to support the production of textiles, bringing with them ideas about wage labor and capitalist production. Perhaps this ethos was filtering into methods of agricultural management.

Many of our informants told us that women and children had been put to work regularly on the hacienda lands, something that was surprising given that historical documents listed only adult males as paid workers. In addition, one elderly woman told us that her mother had been employed

as cook in the *calpanaría* during the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution. Her mother, she told us, had been responsible for making lunches for the workers and taking food to the fields, and her mother, she said, had worked at this alone. Data from the excavations at the Hacienda San Miguel Acocotla, supplemented with documentary and oral historical evidence suggests that the fifty years leading up to the start of the Mexican Revolution were a period of social and domestic redefinition. Women were forced to abandon their long-established, traditional roles based in their kitchenspaces as reproductive labor was transformed into capitalist-driven productive labor.

(SLIDE 11—CONCLUSION) Historians and anthropologists have debated the origins and causes of the Mexican Revolution for nearly a century. The work discussed in this paper is preliminary, but suggests that the transformation of family labor was an important factor in the origins of rural rebellion. Amongst the *Nabua* peoples, a woman's identity was based in her skill in the kitchen. The Aztecs told Sahagun that a good woman "would have food and drink available. She would have food for others to eat; she would invite others to feast. She would be respectful. She would be visited by others; she would revive and refresh the spirits and bodies of those who lived in misery on earth..." (Sahagún 1950:4.1.2, quoted in Kellogg 1995:570). The mores that were introduced through capitalist modes of production during the second half of the 19th century were at odds with this traditional definition of a woman's role in the community. The social identities of women, children and families were altered as women were pulled from kitchenspaces and thrust into wage labor. It was an unprecedented attack on indigenous communities, and one that ended with the Mexican Revolution. In the Valley of Atlixco, a short 50 km journey from Emiliano Zapata's birthplace, women abandoned the forced transformations of wage labor and returned to their roles in the kitchen and family at the end of the Mexican Revolution. Today, tensions faced by women and families during the second half of the 19th century have been reintroduced. Young women in La

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Soledad Morelos are leaving the home and entering the workforce out of both necessity and desire in numbers unprecedented since the years leading up to the Mexican Revolution while their mothers and grandmothers watch with disapproval from their places beside the hearth. The slow abandonment of hand-made tortillas is a sign of this process. Busy, professional woman don't have time to perform this time-consuming task and instead serve machine-made tortillas to their families. That Saturday in the market, my choice to seek out hand-made tortillas, and to pay a bit extra for them, garnered approval from the elderly woman who saw my choice as an affirmation of the food-values, and by extension, social identity, she espoused.