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BUF 4300 Global Sourcing and International Retail Trade
International Palette Assignment

Evelia's Tamales: Mexican

a. How were you addressed when you entered into the restaurant? Did you need to make reservations? How long was the wait before you were seated?

The Mexican restaurant Evelia's Tamales Restaurant is located at 96-09 Northern Boulevard in Queens, New York. The story behind Evelia's Tamales is amazing and inspiring. The owner, Evelia Coyotzi, left her hometown of Tlaxcala, Mexico in the year 2000. She migrated to the United States and acquired a job at McDonald's near the World Trade Center a year after she left Mexico. Due to the tragic events of 9/11, the McDonald's had to shut down and left Evelia without a job. She took it upon herself to sell tamales for a living in her neighborhood in Queens. She started selling tamales underneath the elevated subway station of Junction Blvd on the 7 line and began to attract customers from local commuters. Evelia did this for 20 years to get by and support her family. In the beginning of 2020, Evelia took out a lease for a storefront not so far from where she would post up with her tamales. Due to COVID, she was unable to open her restaurant immediately. But in March of 2022, Evelia was able to make her dream of opening her restaurant into a reality ("About Us", n.d.).

Upon entering Evelia's Tamales, one is greeted by the cashier/waitress that is across the entrance with a "Hola, cómo estás", which translates to "Hello, how are you?". The entire staff is of Latin descent, and the cashiers/waitresses wear an all-black uniform with a black apron while the chefs wear a white chef uniform. This restaurant doesn't require you to make a reservation, one can either dine in, take out, or even order online and pick up for convenience purposes. Majority of Mexican restaurants offer these options and don't require one to make a reservation in advance but if there's no available seats, there will be a queue outside the restaurant. At Evelia's Tamales, one simply goes to an open table and then orders at the register or just orders for take-out. The cashier/waitress will always ask "Para aquí or para llevar" after you order, which translates to "For here or to go?".

b. What are the cultural differences you notice? (Use class notes) Using your five senses of taste, touch, sight, smell, & sound describe some of the cultural differences that you are not accustomed to in comparison to All-American restaurant or restaurant chains. For example, one can describe but not limited to the sights in the restaurant décor, odors from unusual foods, and sounds from music. One should use all five-senses in this cultural experience.

Culture is the socialization process of an entire society or "primary socialization" which includes symbols, meanings, a shared understanding, the classification of the world, and coordinated activities. Culture is shaped by gender, religion, ethnicity, region, social class, and religion (Adomaitis, 2023, International, p.1). Mexican culture is displayed at Evelia's Tamales but it has more of a modern influence so it can appeal to more than one culture.

One of the first things one will notice about how different Evelia's Tamales is from All-American restaurants is the amount of Spanish that is used in the restaurant. The staff will be speaking to its customers in Spanish and customers will be speaking to one another in Spanish. Although Spanish is the primary language spoken at the restaurant, one will also

hear some English from those who aren't of Latin descent to even those who are but have trouble speaking Spanish. Not only will one hear Spanish coming out of another person's mouth, but they'll hear Spanish coming from the speakers as the restaurant was playing Spanish music. The music they were playing was a mix of Mexican and Spanish music such as reggaeton, cumbia, and norteña, to appeal to the young and old crowd.

Another difference one will notice is the kitchen set up. In All-American restaurants the kitchen is usually far away from the dining area or the customers, but at Evelia's Tamales the doorway to the kitchen is right behind the cash register. When one is ordering, they'll catch a glimpse of the kitchen as the doorway to the kitchen is always opening and closing or wide open to allow the staff easy access to the kitchen. The staff aren't the only ones who go in and out of the kitchen, so does the steam and scent from cooking all the meats and tamales as well. The steam will come out of the kitchen, past the register, and up into the noses of customers causing their mouths to water and crave their orders. One can definitely say this about the chorizo, such a rich and strong scent to let one know they're in a Mexican restaurant.

A third cultural difference was the way the dining tables were set up. There are about ten small tables at Evelia's Tamales that sit between one to four people. All the tables have two layers of covers on top of them. The first layer is a red Mexican serape cover with a design going vertically across the table and in the middle of it is the logo of Evelia's Tamales embroidered on it. The second layer is a plastic dining table covering the table and the Mexican serape cover. One can slide their fingers across the plastic cover and hear a "eeeeeeeee".

c. Look at the menu. What are the types of foods they offer? What are some unusual items? Do they describe the ingredients in the food? List various food items from the menu. What menu items did you order? Is there more than one language used to describe the foods on the menu?

Given the name Evelia's Tamales, one will think this restaurant only serves tamales, but they don't. At Evelia's Tamales, they offer tamales and other traditional Mexican foods. They offer all-day Mexican desayunos (breakfast), quesadillas, tacos, a variety of tamales, tortas, tortitas, Mexican platters, sandwiches, small antojitos (appetizers), sides/extras, and even a small kid's menu. Most of the items in the menu are offered at most traditional Mexican restaurants, but one thing that does make Evelia's Tamales stand out from other traditional Mexican restaurants is the variety of tamales that they offer or the fact that they offer tamales.

A tamale is made from masa, which is a corn dough, and is filled with a variety of fillings such as meats, cheese, and sauces that is then steamed to cook. It is said that tamales originated from Mesoamerica which is "the land between North and South America" (Blazes, 2023). Evelia's Tamales offers traditional tamales such as the *tamale de mole* which is also a quite popular one. According to Olaechea (2021):

Mole is a term used in Mexican cuisine to describe a type of sauce. The word mole (pronounced MOE-lay) comes from Nahuatl, the language of the Aztec Empire and the modern-day Nahua people, who are the largest indigenous group in Mexico. The original Nahuatl word is molli, which simply means sauce.

They also offer an option to put your tamales on a bread called *tamal con torta*. They also offer *tamales de dulces* (sweet tamales), *tamales gourmet*, and *tamales oaxaqueños* (a tamale on a banana leaf, instead of a corn husk).

The menu at Evelia's Tamales has their items labelled in Spanish but there some English tossed into the menu for those who don't understand Spanish. What Evelia's Tamales

does well with the menu is describe the menu items in English for non-Spanish speaking customers. If one does speak Spanish but is quite confused about the ingredients in a menu item, they can ask the staff what's in it and the staff will respond with the ingredients.

The *mole tamale* is an item that should be in one's order. It comes out hot and steaming. The corn dough is soft and breaks down nicely in one's mouth. The mole sauce has a spicy yet sweet taste to it, it's one of those sauces that starts off spicy but ends up being sweet as it goes down one's throat. The chicken is also soft and chewy, easy for one to break down and swallow.

The *taco carne asada* is also an item that should be in one's order. The beef steak is cooked well done, it comes out very juicy and chewy for one to digest easily. The corn tortillas are hot and very soft to bite into. The cilantro, diced onions, and the sliced limes give the tacos an extra flavor of sourness. One cannot forget to add the extra condiments of green sauce and red sauce that come with the tacos to give it an extra taste of spiciness.

The *torta mexicana* is another item one should add to their order. The toastiness of the bread to give that crunchy taste. Also, the crunchy taste of the breaded chicken, the soft and easy to pull cheese, the spread of the avocado and beans, with a hit of spiciness from the jalapeño. The best part of the *torta mexicana* is the chorizo with its spices and juiciness when one takes a bite of it. In Mexico, chorizo is fresh pork sausage seasoned with chili and paprika mixed with red peppers ("Chorizo", 2022).

d. Is a traditional salad offered? If not, describe what is offered. What types of breads are offered (flat, pita, tortilla chips)? What type of desserts (cheesecake, fortune cookie, coffee)? What are they like?

Unfortunately, no traditional salad is offered at Evelia's Tamales. But they do offer a small appetizer that can be a replacement for the traditional salad to some. This appetizer is the *sopa de tortilla* which is a soup with corn tortilla strips, diced avocado, and cheese. Evelia's Tamales does offer two options of tortilla chips which they refer to as *totopos*. The first one is *totopos con salsa* which is tortilla chips and salsa sauce. The second one is *totopos con guacamole* which is chips and guacamole dip. The sweets that are offered at Evelia's Tamales are *café* or coffee. They offer *café regular* (the regular traditional coffee), *café de olla* (a traditional Mexican coffee), *cappuccino*, and *latte*. The *café de olla* was created in Mexico during the Mexican Revolution in 1910 and it is made combining spices such as cinnamon sticks and coffee in a clay pot to give it a "pleasant, earthly flavour" (Valencia, 2021). There is another item that can be considered a sweet or dessert at Evelia's Tamales which is the *tamales de dulces* which was mentioned before as sweet tamales. They offer a tamale made with sweet corn dough and filled with either raisins or pineapple. It is up to the customers to decide if these tamales are desserts.

e. What types of beverages are offered? Do they have an alcohol menu? What is not typically offered in an American chain restaurant?

The beverages offered at Evelia's Tamales are *aguas frescas* (freshwater beverages) like *Tamarindo*, *Mexican sodas* such as Mexican Coca-Cola, *regular soda* beverages that one can get in all-American restaurants, and bottled water. They also offer *bebidas calientes* (hot beverages) such as *arroz con leche* (rice with milk) and *champurrado* (a thick hot chocolate). For the freshwater beverages, Evelia's Tamales offers a medium or large size option. For the hot beverages, they offer small, medium, and large size options. Unfortunately, Evelia's Tamales does not offer an alcohol menu or carry any alcoholic beverages, but any of the beverages they offer pair up great with any of the foods, if not better than alcohol. The

traditional Mexican beverages Evelia's Tamales offers is what makes the restaurant unique because the beverages are not offered in Mexican American restaurant chains like Chipotle.

f. How is the food reflective of the cultural geography and the economic geography (Use class lecture notes)? (i.e. spices are abundant in India which is rich in spices & fish (sushi) is popular in Japan & it is part of the G8). Describe approximately where in the world (continent & location) and from country this culture's food is best known.

Cultural geography is "how people live their lives in different regions of the world or country" (Adomaitis, 2023, Fashion, p. 1). The food served at Evelia's Tamales is truly symbolic of Mexican culture. Corn being a key ingredient in many of Evelia's Tamales foods such as the tortillas and tamales, displays how the restaurant keeps Mexican culture intact. The use of corn in Mexican foods was introduced by the Mayans in 1200 BCE. Corn was "domesticated through a system called Nixtamalization where the corn would be treated with lye to soften it for grinding. Nixtamalization lead to the use of tortillas and other types of corn based breads" (Mexican Food, 2015). The use of corn has been passed down by many generations and making it a part of everyday life for Mexican culture.

Economic geography is the "distribution of industrialization or wealth" (Adomaitis, 2023, Fashion, p. 2). The use of avocados in Evelia's Tamales such as the *guacamole* is a perfect example of wealth distribution. As mentioned by Krishna (2021), "Avocados, tomatoes, onions and bell peppers are popular vegetable imports from Mexico. The U.S. imported... \$1.7 billion of avocados from Mexico in 2018." This is great news because in the years to come it'll generate more jobs and expand Mexico's economy. This also helps Mexico's economy because the United States is a part of the G7 which means other countries can conduct trade with Mexico due to their trade history with the United States. Not only that but Mexican foods is most liked and well known in the United States.

g. Describe the dress? (Dress is inclusive of all five senses – you smell perfume, hear jewelry, see make-up, etc....) What are the employees, such as hostesses or wait staff wearing? Please use Eicher-Roach-Higgins (1992) article to define dress and answer appropriately. 16

The waitress/cashier was wearing an all-black outfit from head to toe. She was wearing a black hat with a dark yet bright red underbrim, which hid her *hair* and only showed her shiny pony tail which she probably washed with shampoo and conditioner the night before. She wore a black three button polo shirt which stood out as her *skin* was light skin. She also had a black apron which covered the chest area of her shirt and had a length of about her knees. She wore slightly faded black jeans that *wrapped* around her legs and were *pre-shaped* to have a length that *wrapped* her ankles. To top off her outfit she wore black sneakers. As she spoke one can see the lip gloss reflect from the light off her lips and display the moisture and smoothness of them. One can also see braces bonded to her *teeth* which hid her white *teeth*. One can also see she applied black eyeliner around her eyelids to match her outfit. While one is waiting for their food, they'll hear a sound come from her hand which is her smart watch *wrapped* around her wrist.

h. Rate your experience as a food critic (as in the LA Times or Houston Chronicle). Ratings should be dependent on taste, service, décor, cleanliness, authenticity, quality and price and should range from A-F ("A" being the best). Explain why you chose this rating. Be thorough and detailed in your explanations. Be sure to write at least 2 paragraphs.

Evelia's Tamales deserves an A rating, everything about the restaurant is fantastic. The waiters/cashiers are very friendly and welcoming, their greeting can make one feel like their home. If one has trouble understanding the menu, the waiters/cashiers will help one all the way through. The restaurant itself was well maintained, the daylight white lighting made the tiles shine bright and reflect off the walls. Although the restaurant used a daylight white lighting, the orange color of the walls gave a warmth vibe to the establishment like traditional Mexican restaurants. The Spanish music playing in the background and the Mexican serape table covers really set the vibe of actually dining in a restaurant in Mexico.

The food was amazing. Both the corn dough and chicken filling of the *tamale de mole* were soft and chewy, steaming as one takes a bite. The mole sauce was spicy yet sweet at the same time, as if both tastes were fighting each other. The beef steak from the *tacos carne asada* was spongy and airy. The combination of the beef steak, lime, cilantro, onion, and tortilla gave the taco such a juicy and toothsome. The smell from the *torta mexicana* will one's mouth-watering as the spices from the chorizo gives the torta a number of tastes all at once. On top of all that, the *agua de horchata* really hit the spot as it was the perfect amount of sweet. The price of the food items is justifiable for the experience one gets, not just from the service but the taste and how filling it is. Evelia's Tamales is 100% authentic and stays true to its Mexican roots.

i. What did you learn from this experience that you could contribute to a multi-cultural experience in a class discussion?

One can learn so much about a culture through the foods. One doesn't necessarily need to go to a different country to get that full experience, they can get that full experience at a restaurant. Even though Evelia's Tamales is not located in Mexico, one can still get an experience of Mexican culture from the foods to the customers in the restaurant. One can learn about Mexican culture and history from the foods at Evelia's Tamales.

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