

International Palette:
A Multi-Sensory Experience as a Food Critique
Guadalupe Soriano-Moran
Mexico Diner

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

As one steps into the Mexico Diner's restaurant, you are welcomed by the aroma of freshly cooked meals that make your mouth instantly water, like the *enchiladas y arroz con frijoles*. The host, dressed in all-black apparel from head to toe, greets you at the entrance with a smile and menus in hand. Reservations are not required for smaller groups but are recommended for parties of 6 or more. The host then asks, *Hola Bienvenidos! Una mesa para dos?* meaning "Hello, welcome! A table for two?" One can simply respond with "Yes, please!" or *Si, por favor!* One will then be seated with enough privacy and distance from other guests to enjoy an intimate dinner.

- B. What are the cultural differences you notice? (Use class notes) Using your five senses of taste, touch, sight, smell, & sound (remember Eicher & Roach-Higgins (1992) definition of Dress) describe some of the cultural differences that you are not accustomed to (in comparison to All-American restaurant or restaurant chains, but do not write the actual comparison to American restaurants). 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 in detail. Each of the five senses should be in a separate paragraph).

According to Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992), the terminology of "dress" refers to different ways individuals modify their bodies using their five senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing. These senses help us recognize and acknowledge cultural differences within different cultures. When stepping into the restaurant one notices various details that will instantly transport one to a different place. As soon as one enters, one notices a distinct cultural difference, as if one has stepped into Mexico. The bright yellow lights create a vibrant, sunny atmosphere as if one was home in a Mexican *pueblo*. The aroma of freshly cooked meals will remind one of a home-cooked meal, with the grey ashy smoke escaping the stove, and the sizzling sound of *carne asada* cooking in the kitchen. One will notice a Mexican mantel on the table that protects the table, just like many households in Mexico do. You can feel the stitching on the polyester and lace textile and pattern, adding to the authenticity of the entire experience.

In the restaurant, you can immediately notice the precise attention to detail that was put in to make the place feel like Mexico. One can see that the leather booths are colored in a rich coffee brown shade and have a shiny finish. The tables are matched with the brown leather seats to create a cohesive look. On the walls, magnificent art pieces depict the most historical landmarks of Mexico, such as the *Popocatepetl* stratovolcano. This stratovolcano located on the border of Mexico City and Puebla is a historical landmark because of its constant activity, with approximately thirteen eruptions in the past few days.

Apart from this, the volcano also holds significant cultural importance. According to legend,(Inside Mexico,2024), *Popocatepetl* was a warrior of the Aztecs who fell in love with Princess *Iztaccihuatl*. However, the princess was falsely told that the warrior had passed in battle, which led to her untimely demise because of instant heartbreak. The warrior, unaware of this, returned and mourned his loss. In honor of the princess, he was determined to construct a tomb under the sun and demanded that mountains form around them to lay together in eternity. Eventually, they transformed into the *Popocatepetl* stratovolcano that stands today.

Besides the historical art piece that is illustrated on the wall, there are a variety of decor and religious symbols being displayed all around. One of the most beautiful displays is the figure of the *Virgen de Guadalupe*. In Mexican culture, it is common to have at least one statue in the household for catholic beliefs. Another piece of decor that may stand out to one is the *rebozos* and *sombreros* being displayed. As one admires the decor, it's hard to miss the vibrant colors of the banners, paper flowers, and the Mexican flag, which is displayed in various forms.

One continues to notice details around the restaurant such as hearing music playing from the speakers, music such as *Cumbia sonidero*. One can even feel the rhythm of the music when sitting, with slight tapping on the floor and hand taps on the hardwood table. Cumbia is a dance style that originated in Colombia but became popular in Mexico thanks to migration,(Maria,2023). It is especially loved by the Mexican-American community, particularly first-generation kids from immigrant households. Nowadays, a DJ Sonidero can play cumbia at a club and interact with the audience, and everyone knows to get up and start dancing.

Not only is there music playing but one can also hear everything and everyone else around one. One can hear the staff taking orders, the chefs chatting and making food, and even the cheerful comments from the kitchen. You can also hear the conversation of the family sitting next to you, with the mother telling her son to stop playing with the salt shaker and a baby crying for their mother. The sounds of dishes being put back by the servers can also be heard. All of this is being heard in the Spanish language, which originated from the Iberian Peninsula and was influenced by Latin and Arabic languages. Today, it is spoken in many countries around the world.

The aroma of freshly cooked food creates a sense of comfort for those who appreciate the Mexican culture. Even before the food is served, one can distinctly smell the aroma of cooked rice, a variety of meats, and delectable desserts from other tables, along with drinks from the bar. As soon as the food arrives, the smoke and heat emanating from the hot plate mix with the spices and guacamole, creating an enticing scent. And when the tamarind drink arrives at the table, its fragrance is simply irresistible. For dessert, the sweet smell of vanilla and cinnamon accompanies the arrival of dishes such as the tres leches cake, which is defined by its combination of dairy and sweetness. It's the perfect way to end a delicious meal.

When one's food arrives at the table one is eager to touch the cold metal utensils that have been resting on a paper napkin, ready to use. While being cautious due to the plate's extreme heat, the first bite of the food is taken. The instant explosion in the mouth fills the taste buds with heat and joy. The enchiladas are highly recommended by the waiter, and they prove to be an incredible choice. The mole is cooked to perfection, and the shredded chicken inside the tortilla is tender enough to melt in one's mouth. The crunch of the lettuce and the texture of the grated cheese combine to form a powerful taste of spice and sweetness. Taking a sip from the ice-cold glass of water, one can wash down the delightful food. The dish creates a cultural delight and brings one to Mexico without leaving home.

- C. Look at the menu. What are the types of foods they offer? What are some unusual food items? Do they describe the ingredients in the food? What are the ingredients? 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? Please write in detail.

While taking a look at the menu, the restaurant offers a variety of traditional Mexican dishes. Like any other traditional Mexican restaurant, one is offered a starter of chips and salsa and a typical glass of water to begin with. As one reads through the menu, one realizes that everything is written in Spanish, with an English explanation subtitled beneath the dish names along with the ingredient description in English as well. The traditional foods that are offered include tacos, sopes, tostadas, huaraches, tortas, quesadillas, and enchiladas. Although the majority of these foods are primarily made during a celebration or holiday such as Christmas, you can experience the culture in one sitting. For instance, on Christmas in Mexico, it is common for households to make pozole and tamales. Pozole is made of kernels of maize and cooked in a pork broth, and later added to one's choice of sauces, whether it be red, green, or *blanco pozole*, which is a classic. The maize used to make the pozole is sacred. The Aztecs and Mayans believed that corn was a sacred crop for the land. So with the corn, the Aztecs would make the pozole as a celebration of the gods and a successful harvesting season.

Desayunos - Breakfast	
CHILAQUIES (VERDES O ROJOS) (Pollo, Bistec o Huevos)	\$8.95
Tortilla chips with choice of chicken, steak or eggs cooked with red or green sauce	
HUEVOS RANCHEROS (Salsa Verde o Roja)	\$6.95
2 fried eggs between soft corn tortillas smothered ranchero sauce (red or green)	
HUEVOS AL ALBAÑIL Chorizo, fried cheese and jalapeño	\$7.95
HUEVOS A LA MEXICANA	\$6.95
Scrambled eggs mixed with onions, jalapeños and tomatoes.	
HUEVOS CON CHORIZO Scrambled eggs mixed with Mexican Chorizo	\$6.95
BURRITO MANANERO	\$6.95
Scrambled eggs mixed with onions, cilantro, tomatoes and cheese	
Aperitivos - Appetizers	
GUACAMOLE DE LA CASA Freshly made guacamole served with nachos.....	\$6.95
PICO DE GALLO CON JALAPEÑO Served with nachos	\$4.95
FLAUTAS DE POLLO O BISTEC	\$7.50
EMPANADAS Rellenos de pollo con hongos, lechuga, tomates, crema	\$3.00
With chicken & mushrooms lettuce, tomato and cream	
GORDITAS DE CHICHARRON con lechuga queso y crema	\$2.75
W/lettuce cream and cheese	
NACHOS CON CARNE AL GUSTO CHOICE OF MEAT	\$8.95
Con queso, frijoles, queso fresco, crema y jalapeños	
Choice of meat topped with refried beans, melted cheese, cream and jalapeños	
TAMALES OAXAQUEÑOS en hoja de platano w/ rapped in a banana leaf..	\$3.00
ALITAS DE POLLO EN SALSA PICANTE (6pcs.)	\$5.95
Buffalo Wings in hot sauce	
SWEET WINGS (6 pcs)	\$5.95
Ensaladas - Salads	
ENSALADA REGULAR House salad.....	\$3.50
ENSALADA DE AGUACATE Acocado salad	\$5.95
ENSALADA DE POLLO 6 BISTEC	SM\$6.95 LG\$8.95
Con lechuga, tomate, rabanos, cebolla, queso y crema.	
Chicken or Steak salad with lettuce, tomato, radishes, onions, cheese and fresh cream	
with avocado (extra)	\$2.00
ENSALADA DE CAMARONES Shrimp salad.....	SM\$7.95 LG\$9.95
TACO SALAD CON POLLO 6 BISTEC , Chicken or Steak	\$10.95
Con lechuga tomate y frijoles, crema, queso, salsa, cebolla, cilantro y guacamole in tortilla shell.	
TACO SALAD CON CAMARONES Taco salad with Shrimps.....	\$13.95
Burritos \$7.50	
Tortilla de harina relleno de arroz, frijoles, tomate, cilantro, cebolla, cubierto con queso y crema; con carne al gusto.	
Flour tortilla stuffed with rice & beans, onions, tomato, cilantro and topped w / cream and fresh cheese, with choice of meat	
VEGETARIAN	\$7.50
CON CAMARONES WITH SHRIMP.....	\$9.95
Chimichanga de Pollo	
POLLO Chicken	\$8.95
BISTEC Steak.....	\$8.95
CAMARON Shrimp.....	\$10.95

Figure 1: Menu of Mexico Diner

When it comes to foods in Mexican culture, there are going to be combinations that may not make sense to anyone else. However, it being unusual does not prevent the food from being delicious. Some of these unique foods include *Huevos Rancheros*, *Nopales Asados*, and *Chiles Rellenos*. *Huevos Rancheros* consists of two fried eggs served on top of soft tortillas and green sauce, making it the perfect breakfast in Mexican culture. While it might seem unusual to some in the United States to eat hot sauce for breakfast, it is a common and delicious tradition in Mexican cuisine.

Nopales Asados stands for grilled cactus pad. Although it may not be the most flavorful side dish, it is a dish that holds a special place in Mexican culture. The cactus is a significant part of the culture and can be found all over the country since it can grow almost anywhere, whether it is dry or humid. It is especially found in deserts and small *pueblos*. Many people in Mexico eat nopales because of the numerous health benefits it provides, such as containing vitamin C and helping with high cholesterol and diabetes. The cactus plant also helps in hot weather as it holds water, but one should be careful of its thorns.

One may wonder why there are so many spices used in Mexican cuisine. The answer is quite simple - chile peppers are the main ingredient in most dishes, whether it's tree peppers, jalapenos, poblano peppers, or even Guajillo chili. One popular item on the menu is *Chiles Rellenos*, which means stuffed peppers. In this dish, the pepper itself is the main course. A poblano pepper is cut in half, and the inside seeds are removed. These seeds are usually used to make salsa for the course meal. A cube of fresh white cheese is then added to the pepper's inside,

and toothpicks are used to keep the pepper intact. The pepper is then coated in an egg wash, dipped in flour, and fried in canola oil. Finally, the dish is served to those who enjoy the cuisine.

While at the restaurant, I ordered the enchiladas with chicken. Enchiladas are made with mole, a sauce that typically includes dried-up chile peppers, sesame seeds, chocolate, cinnamon, and sometimes anise. The soft tortilla is dipped in the mole sauce, then filled with shredded chicken, and finally rolled up like a taquito. The dish is garnished with chopped lettuce, grated cheese, and onions. It also comes with a side of black beans and Mexican rice. This meal is one of my favorites to eat and make at home with my mom. In our household, we cherish family recipes, and one of our most cherished recipes is my grandmother's mole recipe from Mexico.



Figure 2: Enchiladas de Mole (Main course)

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? Describe each in detail.

At the Mexico Diner, you can find a variety of traditional salads, such as the house salad, chicken salad, and avocado salad which are available upon request. Even though it is a Mexican restaurant, there are still menu items available for those who are not fond of what is provided on the menu. As mentioned earlier, complimentary tortilla chips with salsa are served as an appetizer. Similar to most restaurants, you can choose to have your tortilla chips with either guacamole, cheese, or salsa. Soft tortillas are also offered, usually served with any meal that contains a protein. In Mexican cuisine, tortillas are a staple as they are made from corn, a sacred crop, as mentioned earlier.

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

LUNCH SPECIAL
Served with black beans, Mexican rice, corn tortillas
Comes with free cup of flavored water

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- ENCHILADAS VERDES O ROJAS** (CON POLLO, BISTEC O QUESO CHICKEN, STEAK OR CHEESE)
Two soft corn tortillas rolled with choice of stuffing in red guajillo sauce or green sauce, topped with Mexican cream, lettuce, queso fresco and red onions
- PECHUGA BISTEC A LA MEXICANA**
Chicken or steak sautéed with onions, jalapeños and tomatoes.
- PECHUGA OR BISTEC ENCEBOLLADOS**
Chicken or steak sautéed with onions
- MILANESA DE POLLO**
Fried breaded chicken outlet
- QUESADILLAS** (ORDEN DE TRES EN TORTILLAS DE MAIZ O TORTILLA DE HARINA DE 10")
Three 10" soft corn tortillas stuffed with cheese and topped with cream and queso fresco
- BURRITOS** Tortilla de harina relleno de arroz, frijoles, tomate, cilantro y cebolla cubierto con queso y crema / Flour tortilla stuffed with rice & beans, onions, tomatoes, cilantro and topped with cream and queso fresco
- CHULETAS FRITAS O ENCEBOLLADOOS**
Pork chops fried or sautéed with onions
- FLAUTAS DE POLLO O BISTEC** CHICKEN OR STEAK

\$8.50
AVAILABLE Monday - Friday 11AM - 4:00PM

EXTRAS

Arroz y Frijoles Rice & Beans	\$3.25	Aguate Avocado	\$3.50
Arroz Rice	\$2.50	Queso Asado Grilled Cheese	\$3.00
Frijoles Negros Black beans	\$2.50	Tortillas	\$1.25
Nopales Asados Grilled cactus pads	\$3.50	Papas Fritas French fries	\$3.00
Cebollines Azados Grilled bulb onions	\$3.00	Crema Mexican cream	\$1.00
Chiles Toreados Grilled jalapeños	\$2.00	Platanos Fritos Fried sweet plantains	\$2.75

BEBIDAS CALIENTES (HOT BEVERAGES)

Café de olla Mexican coffee	\$2.00
Te Lipton tea	\$1.00
Champurado	\$2.00
Arroz con leche Rice pudding	\$2.00

BATIDAS
Fresa / Strawberries
Papaya
Platano / Banana • Mango

REFRESCOS (REFRESHMENTS)

Jarritos	\$2.00
Pepsi or Coke Bottles	\$2.00
Soda de Lata Can soda	\$1.25
Snapple	\$2.00
Agua de Botella Bottled water	\$1.25

POSTRES (DESSERTS)

Flan	\$3.00
Flan de Coco	\$3.00

JUGOS NATURALES (NATURAL JUICES)

Zanahoria Natural Fresh Carrot	\$3.00
Naranja Natural Fresh Orange	\$5.00
Jugo Verde Fresh Natural Juice	\$5.00

AGUAS NATURALES

Flavored waters	\$2.50
Horchata Rice w/ cinnamon & almonds	
Tamarindo Tamarind • Jamaica	
* Sabor del Dia / Flavor of the day	

The menu offers a variety of beverages including hot drinks, shakes, refreshments, flavored waters, and alcoholic drinks which are only served at the bar. The hot beverages include *Café de olla*, which is a type of Mexican coffee, and champurado. Champurado is a thick chocolate rice porridge typically enjoyed during colder weather and holidays. Flavored waters, also known as *agua frescas*, are a popular choice in Mexican culture and can be made with a variety of flavors such as *tamarindo* or Jamaica. Local vendors in Mexico sometimes sell *agua frescas* in plastic bags with ice to keep others cool during hot weather. In the United States, you would typically not see your *agua frescas*, *champurado* is arroz con leche. One will ideally see more refreshments such as fountain sodas, juices, and bottles of water. The restaurant did have an alcohol menu which included your basic cocktail bar menu, such as a tequila sunrise, sex on the beach, lemon drop, classic beers, and red or white wines.

Figure 3: Drinks Menu

F. How is the food reflective of the cultural geography and the economic geography (Use class lecture notes for each definition)? (i.e. spices are abundant in India which is rich in spices & fish (sushi) is popular in Japan & is part of the G8). Describe approximately where in the world (continent & location) and from country, this culture's food is best known. Be sure to research the country about geography, spices, foods, etc.... Be sure to use APA in-text citations and references.

Mexico's geography and economic development have a significant impact on the country's culture. The country's climate ranges from arid deserts in the north to tropical rainforests in the south, which contributes to the diversity of its culture and way of life, (Mexico,2024). With years of living in such a climate the individuals living have adapted to the country's land. Different *pueblos* of the country adapt to their own culture, traditions, and beliefs, creating a community for those with similar systems. Because of Mexico's climate, the land has “historically been a hub for agriculture. This region's culture is closely tied to agriculture, and it has been a central area for the development of traditional Mexican cuisine”, (Mexico,2024). Food is reflective of the cultural geography because in Mexico the adaptation and resources are not as advanced as the ones here in the United States. Many individuals have to find sources themselves whether it be through trading with other pueblos or going out of town to purchase the necessities.

Mexico has a lower ranking in economic geography due to its low level of development. While Mexico City may seem to be industrialized and gradually becoming gentrified, the other smaller states still lack in terms of basic economic indicators. Many people in these states live in poverty, earning less than the minimum wage and struggling to access basic resources for survival (Sternquist, 1998). Despite the poverty prevalent in these smaller towns, trade within small businesses remains active, particularly in the gathering and exchange of food and resources. Growing crops on one's land can be an advantage for exporting goods to trade with other individuals.

- 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 the Eicher-Roach-Higgins (1992) article to define dress and answer appropriately. This must be used and written in at least 2 paragraphs with correct in-text citations and references discussing all five (5) senses.

When it comes to dressing professionally, it's not just about what you wear, it's also about the effort you put into your appearance. This includes body modifications that change and enhance your features. At the restaurant I visited, all the employees were dressed in black attire. They wore black sneakers to prevent slipping while serving customers. The waiters and hosts distinguished themselves by wearing all-black outfits, while the kitchen staff wore hairnets. All servers wore name tags to identify themselves.

My server, Jessica, had her hair slicked back and had Chicano-style tattoos on her arms. Her nails were painted red to complement her skin tone. She wore large hoop earrings that elongated her face. I could smell the scent of Chanel number 5 on the host, who wore black

square-framed glasses, black sneakers, skinny jeans/jeggings with no pockets, a black button-up shirt, and an apron that held her notepad, Adyen machine, and pen. The waitress wore bold black eyeliner with ruby red lips, thick brown brows, powder foundation to clear skin, and a hint of blush on her cheekbones.

- 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. Use details to explain

I would give Mexico Diner an overall rating of A. The authenticity of the restaurant made me feel as if I were back in my pueblo in Mexico. The food was excellent in terms of taste, texture, scent, and spice level. Being a Mexican American, I thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of this restaurant. The decorations around me made me realize how much more there is to learn about different cultures and appreciate their cuisine. The prices are affordable, making it an ideal place for a date night or a family outing. It's also a family-friendly environment. The staff was super friendly and was always ready to assist us while still giving us our privacy.

- I. What did you learn from this experience that you could contribute to a multi-cultural experience in a class discussion? Give details in your writing of a complete Paragraph.

I have come to realize, through this experience, that I am curious to learn more about different cultures and how they adapt to their cultural geography. Before this assignment, I did not fully appreciate the dress modifications and cultural differences that surround me, even in restaurants. However, now I can walk into a restaurant with an open mind and appreciate the efforts that individuals make to create a delightful experience for everyone. Whether it is the decor around the restaurant, the enjoyment behind the kitchen doors as the chefs prepare the food, or the beautiful music playing to entertain us while we wait; it has been a wonderful experience to learn more about different cultures and to adapt to more knowledge about them.

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