

Gastronomy and Conquest in the Mexican-American War: Food in the Diary of Susan Magoffin

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The Mexican-American war has never been analyzed from the perspective of gastronomy and eyewitness reports focus on military aspects as well as on the exotic side –and the “colorful” mores– of the invaded population. Since the late 1980s, the New Historians of the West² have been writing from the viewpoint of those left out by traditional history, nevertheless food is not their focal point. I discuss (colonial and post-colonial) gastronomy and conquest as seen through the eyes of an 18-year old woman, Susan Magoffin following her husband, a 42-year old trader in a caravan along the Santa Fe Trail on the heels of the conquering army. Along the way she kept a diary.³ Not food, but an insider’s view of conquest made her diary a “minor classic”⁴ worth publishing in 1926 and reprinting in 2000. The Magoffin’s 14 wagon outfit left Independence, Missouri, less than a month after the start of the war –an event that remains largely unmentioned in the diary– and followed the “natural highway for wheeled vehicles across the Great Plains that linked New Mexico to the United States.”⁵ Gradually other wagon trains joined their party until it reached 75 or 80 wagons (42),⁶ then 150 (43) explaining why De Voto stated that in New Mexico “Manifest Destiny took the shape of a large-scale freight operation.”⁷

The young woman undertook the trip out of curiosity and was offered luxurious transportation by her husband, a carriage, a maid, three servants, and a prototype tent that had all the amenities of home. She was freed from the usual chores a woman was expected to do on the trail, such as repairing clothes, wagon covers, tents, cooking on a fire on the ground, gathering “buffalo chips” to be used as wood, washing clothes.⁸ She had the leisure to read, sew –for pleasure and she definitely did not mend wagon covers–, knit, pick flowers, throw them away, start anew; she saw herself as a “a wandering princess” (7, 11). The only occupation that looked remotely like work was her learning Spanish on the way, which seemed sensible, not

only because it was the language of the destination of the trip, but also because she had married into an international trading family.

Susan Magoffin is a rare female voice on the Santa Fe Trail; in 1846, the best-selling guide of the trail was Josiah Gregg's *Commerce of the Prairies*, published a year earlier. In his chapter on the geographical position of Santa Fe, listing mostly the interesting natural resources of an area that was not yet part of the United States, he devoted a few lines to New Mexican food.⁹ But his report on exotic food is ethnographic matter, not the heart-felt subject it becomes in Susan Magoffin's diary. Her gender-colored view of foreign cultures is based upon an affective relationship to the person making and/or serving the food, transforming the request of a recipe into a private endeavor.

Females in gender-coded societies tend to avoid fields traditionally assigned to men and find niches of their own. Molly Mullins, in her work on New Mexican culture in the 1920s, found such an enclave in a the (then) newly created field of collecting American Indian and Spanish Colonial arts, because "white women stepped into that opening more easily than they could have in art fields with a more established institutional and masculine structure."¹⁰ When Mrs. Magoffin commented upon Mexican and Native American food, she might have been doing the same thing, investing a field that was not dominated by male authority and where her knowledge was respected.

Gender is also the determining element in Susan's appreciation for interior decorating in the homes visited along the road; it is also a factor in obtaining information through female gossip, an experience that remained unknown to male travelers. Therefore food descriptions in the diary are typical of the "female frontier" defined by Glenda Riley.¹¹ Susan Magoffin's frontier was recorded through "the little circle of her vision" (112) and comprised the usually insignificant elements that are absent from traditional history writing. She writes about her war of conquest, the hardships of the trail, the heat, the millions of mosquitoes, the howling wolves, the storms, a carriage crash that knocked her unconscious (41), oxen dying of exhaustion (33), men dying of disease, buried along the trail (38), murdered by Apaches (202), or killed in warfare (259). She also bore her personal scars and suffered two ill-fated pregnancies on the trip at "a time when pregnancy and childbirth killed mothers and children with greater frequency than men died in war."¹²

While the war between the United States and Mexico remained largely unmentioned; fantasized dangers appear in the diary such as the obligatory “lurking” savages (18, 40), sometimes “blood-thirsty” and ready to jump on the diarist (70). Other vividly imagined risks include wildlife such as the bear, “Mr. Bruen [who] will squeeze you gently till all breath has left you” (88). While he could have been a real danger to Mrs. Magoffin rambling the mountains with her maid, the anthropomorphic description of a bear named like a man and acting in a sexually threatening way when “squeezing gently” his victim until death occurs reminds the reader that the dangers of the untamed wilderness –whether Indians or animals– were often amalgamated. Food, as a socially acceptable oral pleasure, has to be considered in the context of a tempting and dangerous Otherness; through food descriptions we follow Mrs. Magoffin’s progress into Mexico. Firstly, I will attempt to define the categories of indigenous, colonial, and post-colonial food in reference to the situation on the Santa Fe Trail, and more specifically in New Mexico where Hispanic, indigenous, and Anglo cultures meet; and secondly, I will analyze their presence in Susan Magoffin’s diary and establish their link with the territorial conquest.

Indigenous, colonial, and post-colonial food

The affective value of food

Food has a strong affective value; it is an intimate expression of culture and for many indigenous peoples in the Americas, corn, their main crop, personifies the gods themselves.¹³ British expatriate Peter Mayle, who explores the food culture of France with an anthropologist’s eye, links food the sacred, even in western cultures.¹⁴ Eating food transforms an outside element into self-substance and is therefore viewed with suspicion by the traveler who feels implicitly that a change of diet will affect him as surely as the trip itself will transform him.¹⁵ In the 17th century, Puritan Mary Rowlandson, one of the first captives of an Indian tribe, who came back to write a best-seller, tells about being, at first, unable to eat the “filthy thrash” of the savages, but gradually found the food “sweet and savory.”¹⁶ Rejection food was a way to reject the savages’ way of life while accepting it meant more than just a wish to live. Food descriptions by settlers in the New World were often publicity efforts advertising a land of plenty, verbalizing the wishful hopes of the immigrants, even when famine was around the corner. The primitive duality of feast vs. famine is attested in Susan Magoffin’s diary; after a successful buffalo hunt, when masses of meat are consumed, the country is seen as fine place to get fat (43), while

two days later she laments that the caravan will have to shorten their rations (44).

Enjoying food in a demanding environment increases its affective value. After a terrible storm knocked down the tent on the Plains, an event Mrs. Magoffin compares to a “shipwreck on land”, she reports lovingly the first meal her servants were able to prepare, two roasted ducks and baked beans, “a most delightful dinner.” (56). For biochemical reasons, some foods, such as chocolate, have an increased affective value; while staying and traveling in the war zone, Susan Magoffin wrote about enjoying chocolate, and about the comfort brought by a cup of chocolate after a harrowing day visiting battle-scarred Saltillo. Even Josiah Gregg seems to light up when describing chocolate; while he considers all the local dishes of debatable taste, New Mexican chocolate is for him “incomparable”.¹⁷

The affective value of chocolate has deep roots in New Mexico; the product is a classic example of indigenous food adopted by the Spanish colonizer and ‘internalized’, i.e. used as if it belonged to their own culture. Colonial Governor Valverde led a military expedition from Santa Fe to the Plains in 1719 to subdue the Utes and Comanches attacking the Pueblos under Spanish control. He traveled the same region as Susan Magoffin, more than a century earlier, and in his campaign diary he tells about distributing chocolate (and tobacco) as a reward, after a stressful event, and even as a medical treatment for poison ivy rashes –chewed chocolate was to be spread on the affected area– chocolate had after all been a medicine sold in European pharmacies before becoming a comfort food.¹⁸

We have no testimony on the appreciation of food by the tribes on the trail. Among Native Americans, a cultural renewal movement started in the 1970s, fostering awareness as well as pride in indigenous cultures. While the “Indian Pride” ideology pervading official tribal discourse has become a stereotype, it is more rewarding to delve into its literary ramifications. Even young Native American authors, who shun sentimental descriptions of what the white man calls “traditional culture,” have a soft spot for food with an affective value. Sherman Alexie describes –with eulogizing raptures– a dish of oatmeal and shredded salmon prepared by the narrator’s long line of grandmothers and has his character admit that he believes in salmon mush more than he believes in God.¹⁹ In a more ironic mode, newcomer Stephen Jones remembers ancient techniques of obtaining food when he has his Native Americans “hunting and gathering at the supermarket.”²⁰

The affective value of food for the Hispanics of New Mexico is rather well documented, although the sources are contemporary;²¹ in 1846, with the entry of the American Army of the West on their territory, the population of the region had other problems on their minds. Rudolfo Anaya is the most visible author of the Chicano cultural revival movement and the food descriptions feature among the high points of his ethnic detective novels.²² His characters indulge in the most lavish New Mexican meals, historic food, food that bears the mark of colonial hybridizing, affective food contributing to Chicano identity.

When does colonial food become post-colonial?

Let us consider the question of the colonial quality of food. Pre-contact food eaten in the Americas, indigenous food, was necessarily pre-colonial. Corn, beans, and squash were the main items found in northern Mexico before contact; with other foodstuffs from the Americas, such as potatoes and tomatoes, they found their way into every continent. By the time European immigrants reached the shores of the United States, the traditional culinary traditions of their home countries included elements that originated from someone's colony²³ and the recipe collections of immigrants brought back to America the usage of produce that had originated there and had been transformed by other cultures. Colonial food is therefore a hybrid combining the local, the imported, and the re-imported, the way pizza combines Italian bread and olive oil with American tomatoes.

In the United States, the term *colonial food* is used in a restrictive sense, meaning the food eaten by the settlers of the 13 original colonies. In 1783 the King of England relinquished "all claims to the government, propriety, and territorial rights" of his rebellious possessions and the colonies officially became the United States.²⁴ Nevertheless the citizens of the new country did not instantly produce "post-colonial" food and generally conformed to the Jeffersonian way of life of the independent farmer, using local produce. Highbrow culture remained European throughout the 19th century; fancy food was therefore European food and the quasi-colonial areas in the West and the Southwest had pioneer food, cowboy food, or food named after the ethnic group it originated with. The pervasiveness of the European model explains Susan Magoffin's references to New York restaurants while eating buffalo soup on the trail (43), and the presence of

recurrent classics such as oysters and champagne (105). Colonial food was thus consumed a long time after the original colonial situation had ceased.

Food culture in the United States changed with the advent of a large-scale food industry modifying the tastes of customers and creating new portable foods and snacks, industrially processed and packaged items, opening the way for new dietary habits linked to the fast-food franchises. Although some ethnic elements have been included –such as tacos and enchiladas– the packaging follows the standards of the United States and the usage of the food, eaten in non-family groups, often outside regular meal-times, conforms to new habits. The industrial (junk food) diet has become the food of the mainstream and the minorities; it is mainly the food of the poor.²⁵ A wealthy educated class of minority consumers makes the same choices in matters of nutritious diet as the wealthy dominant class.

For Franz Fanon the colonial situation is typified by two opposing classes, the colonizer and the colonized, representing different worlds.²⁶ If we consider food as the signifying element of a social taxonomy, the fact that all the poor classes –whether ethnic or not– are the primary consumers of processed (junk) food signifies that society is in a post-colonial phase.²⁷ In a colonial situation the colonizers chose the foods they want to include in their diets; in New Mexico, a colony that has often been on the brink of poverty, the choice was motivated by necessity and famine. In a post-colonial situation, the choice is linked to class and not (always) to ethnicity. Upscale New Mexican restaurants serve an eclectic variety of fetishized foods –*tacos, enchiladas, burritos, frijoles, tamales, huevos rancheros, sopaipillas*– a composite of indigenous, Spanish colonial and Anglo origins. Their patrons share a kinship of class rather than ethnicity; fetishizing the exotic, which is part of the colonial process,²⁸ has thus transcended the ethnic barrier.

When focusing on food, the cultural situation of New Mexico is rendered complex due to several centuries of interaction between the Spanish and the Pueblos. Roots are more important in a state where an “aristocracy” of old Spanish families date their entry to one of the first colonizing expeditions and where Native Americans might move to a neighboring city but keep a second home in their pueblo. The agrarian economies of the Spanish and the Pueblos have been linked for centuries, and so has their food. History and traditions explain why hybrid colonial food is still consumed in private homes, albeit mostly on festive occasions.²⁹ In day-to-day situations only

the wealthier people are able to choose what foods they eat, while the poorer classes do not, or cannot, make the same choices.

When trying to assess the colonial or post-colonial situation of indigenous peoples, we have to bear in mind that the more radical Native Americans reject the idea that colonialism is over. The controversy stems from the fact that the situation of indigenous populations in settler colonies cannot be compared to overseas colonial situations where the colonial power can be removed and the cultural influence lifted. In a settler colony the colonized and the colonizer live in closer proximity and assimilation efforts have usually taken place; last but not least, removing the settler population from the host country is utopian. On a legal basis, while the U.N. has dealt successfully with the decolonization of the overseas possessions of imperialistic powers, it has balked at defending indigenous groups who are still considered as domestic minorities; therefore the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples seems to be shelved indefinitely.³⁰ Since assimilation and integration were incomplete, the indigenous population of the U.S. still has identifiable negative characteristics; statistics of the Indian Health Service show tremendous differences between indigenous populations and the “all-races” category on many items of physical and mental health.³¹ Native American nations can therefore justifiably be considered “internal colonies”³²

Messianic cleansing is another argument in favor of the colonial situation of Native American nations. Cleansing societies from outside influences and returning to an archaic situation, perceived as being better, is often a trend of colonized societies. The Ghost Dance movement that took place on the Plains in the last decades of the 19th century promised the return to a pre-colonial situation; another such movements occurred in 1680 in the Southwest; when the Spaniards were ousted by the Pueblo Revolt, one of the leaders of the revolt, Popé, advocated the destruction of Spanish artifacts and the return to ancestral laws.³³ Today, health practitioners among Native Americans attempt to reject “alien” food, food of the colonizer, although the term is not used. Following example is taken from the website of the Northern California Indian Development Council, urging Native Americans to return to indigenous eating habits:

“I don’t see any overweight Natives in the Edward S. Curtis photos, or those from the Smithsonian. Most Natives ate vegetables, acorns, corn, squash, pinion nuts, berries, potatoes, tomatoes, mushrooms, etc. We also ate a lot of protein: deer, elk, rabbit, salmon, prairie dog, turkey, squirrels, sturgeon and bugs. We ate tortillas and some bread like things, but not too much...”

Nowadays we have fry bread butts: too much grease, refined foods and extra sugar. We spend too much time watching the DVD or pretending to exercise by playing the game console. "Fry Bread Power," does not mean Native Power."³⁴

The difficulty of reverting to unprocessed food is overwhelming and educational efforts are often unsuccessful, although they do raise the awareness of the targeted group. Santa Ana Pueblo, a small Native American nation in the Rio Grande Valley north of Albuquerque in New Mexico, is an example of how food awareness can lead to success and subvert colonial domination. In 1846, Susan Magoffin must have been driven by this Indian village and she fondly mentions tortillas made the Pueblos (173). Today, 150 years later, Santa Ana Pueblo has survived the closeness of a large thriving city; the Pueblo owns a successful tribal enterprise with the ubiquitous Indian casino but also a more traditional Indian food shop, marketing locally-grown blue corn, the indigenous food of the tribe, under the upmarket brand name Tamaya Blue. Of course, today, the food shop often caters to Anglo-American customers who believe in "helping to expand the market for Indian food products."³⁵

While blue corn is still used in a broad spectrum of Hispanic and Native American households, it is a classic example of (1) indigenous food that (2) has become colonial food of the Spanish conquerors; (3) has lost its appeal because it did not conform to mainstream processed food, due to its strange blue-grayish—even greenish-blue—color;³⁶ (4) has been raised to the status of (post-colonial) fashion food by the upper-class mainstream in the wake of the ethnic wave and also because in Santa Fe, accepting or rejecting blue corn as food is a marker of being cognoscenti, an insider, vs. being a "mere tourist".

Food in Susan Magoffin's Diary

Imported trail food

The first vision of food in Susan Magoffin's diary is the imported trail food, a necessity for all traveling and exploring parties. The caravan carried live chicken (7), in the same way the Spanish brought cattle on the hoof. Trail food had to be efficient, such as Lewis and Clark's "portable soup"; flour and bacon were the mainstays of the traveler's fare, with some coffee and sugar.³⁷ Obviously, Susan Magoffin did not undertake the trip for the food; in the first weeks she mentions grazing for the animals—whether good, scarce, with or without water—more often than food for the people of

the caravan. She describes hasty meals and early breakfasts that became the norm (2, 6), but also the lovely first meal in her own house, i.e. her tent, where she had “fried ham and eggs, biscuit and a cup of shrub” (6), the berry drink that was common among western travelers. Susan got used to tin cups, making do with crackers and a little ham, and calling the lunch stop ‘nooning it’ in the parlance of the caravan drivers.

Travelers were oblivious to the vital connection they maintained with the settled regions of the United States; on her 5th day on the trail, Susan writes in an elated way that “there is such independence” (10) while she was being taken care of by husband Samuel, maid Jane, and three Mexican servants. Her view of “such independence” is not concerned with the fact that most of the food she eats has been produced in the settled areas of “the States” and that without logistic support the caravan could not have undertaken the trip into Mexico.³⁸ In the same entry, she records meeting “a company of U.S. Dragoons that have been ordered out for the protection of the traders” (10), adding military support to technical logistics, something she does not comment upon.

Dinner was often late, after 10 PM when they were delayed on a muddy trail (8), or missed altogether when the caravan rolled on in the rain (15), when there was no wood for breakfast (26), or when breakfast came at noon in the form of a single cup of tea (35). When food could be prepared properly, the meal had a festive feeling; after a period of deprivation, Susan is happy to describe a fine meal:

“We had a fine dinner today and I enjoyed it exceedingly, for I had eaten nothing but a little tea and half a biscuit since yesterday dinner. It consisted of boiled chicken, soup, rice, and a desert of wine and gooseberry tart. Such a thing on the Plains would be looked upon by those at home as an utter impossibility. But nevertheless it is true” (37).

Hunting and gathering on the trail

Some of the trail food was hunted and gathered, bespeaking the traveler’s propensity to revert to nomadic Indianness, and to live by the laws of the wilderness.³⁹ While Susan limited her activities to (largely unsuccessful) fishing (12, 16), we see her picking “raspberries and gooseberries, of which there are in abundance” (12, 27), as well as wild cherries (79), and the local piñon nuts with “a sweet, rich, oily taste” (76). Numerous female diaries mention how traveling homemakers adapted their “ideals of domesticity” to less than perfect conditions and used a variety of raw materials

supplemented with gathered wild fruits to manufacture appetizing foodstuffs.⁴⁰ Emigrant women stressed the importance of making good meals out of nothing.⁴¹ Therefore, in order to be considered a “real” pioneer, able to adapt home food to unusual surroundings, Susan emphasized her participation in the baking of berry pies (37). Notwithstanding the fact that the absence of details might mean that her input was limited to berry gathering and sorting.

Hunting was reserved for her male companions who killed buffalo, “ugly, ill-shapen things”, but good to eat (39, 49). Once, the caravan came upon a large buffalo herd and soon the camp at Pawnee Fork looked like an Indian hunting camp with “fine fat meat stretched out on ropes” to dry for the trip (42-43). Game compared favorably to city food; the largely invisible cooks of the caravan made soup with the hump ribs “one of the most choice (sic) parts of the buffalo. I never eat its equal in the best hotels of N.Y. and Philadelphia. And the sweetest butter and most delicate oil I ever tasted tis (sic) not surpassed by the marrow taken from the thigh bones” (42-43). As long as they were not in the war zone, game provided food for the travelers; “two nice hares” were used as a present and made a fine dinner (75); an antelope lasted them a day or two (75); the mountains around the Raton pass furnished abundant game (85); but some fowl had to be boiled all night in order to be “tender and nice” (152).

Disliking the first taste of Mexicans food

After entering Mexico, trail rules prevailed –i.e. eating trail food, hunting game– along a portion of territory devoid of inhabitants. The first contact with (rather friendly) Mexicans brought strange food to the table. Even before they entered the village of Mora, the Magoffins were met by local “rancheros” trying to sell “*aguardiente, quesos, y pan*” (brandy, cheese, and bread) (89-90). While foreign language did not come as a shock to Susan who had been preparing herself for a linguistic encounter with Mexicans, and who dutifully wrote down in her diary the Spanish names of everything, she was not prepared to taste their food. That night, the caravan had no wood for cooking but Susan found that fasting was better than eating their “very hard” bread and their “very tough, mean looking and to me unpalatable (sic)” cheese (90).

In the diary, houses and food are often linked; likeable houses tended to produce nice food. Therefore, in keeping with the food, the houses of Mora were seen as hovels that would have been fit for pigs in the States (90).

Even if it remained untasted, the food of the village was limited to “a little cheese made of thin milk, a little *pan de mais* (corn bread) –and such fruits & nuts as they can collect in the mountains” (91). The diminutive quantities of cheese and corn bread, the former being made with “thin milk”, supplemented only with items gathered in the wild, present an image of stark poverty. The diarist does not tell us how the facts about local nutrition were obtained whether she heard her servants speak about local produce or whether she witnessed it herself. She writes about her hope to find “dos or tres huevas o un pollo” (two or three eggs or a chicken) (91), an endeavor she does not undertake herself because someone of the caravan has been “sent to all of these ranchos” (91). That the ranchos who, in the previous days, had seen the American “Army of the West” going through their valley, might cautiously be hiding their eggs and chickens remains unsaid, although general Kearny’s men were rather civil and obeyed orders not to plunder the invaded population.

Susan took her first meal among Mexicans in Las Vegas, a village of northern New Mexico, where 11 days earlier general Kearny made his first official proclamation to the population announcing that they would not be molested, could retain their customs (i.e. Catholic religion), but were forbidden to revolt against the conquering power.⁴² Mrs. Magofin was as curious about the locals as they were about her, although the “constant stare of the natives” made her feel like a “monkey show” (92). The smoking of little *cigarittas* was foreign to her, as were the table manners. The tablecloth was “black with dirt and grease”; the tortillas were of blue corn, giving the finished product an unusual –at first look unappetizing– color, and above all they were wrapped in napkins that matched the tablecloth. The same cheese she refused to taste in Mora was served; only now it was “entirely speckled over”. By that time Susan’s heart and stomach sickened and she was unable to eat a stew of “meat, *chili verde* (green pepper) & onions boiled together” being unused to the spicy New Mexican food (94). The young lady was simply overwhelmed by the otherness of her first Mexican meal, but she bounced back quickly, an attribute that would prove helpful on the trip. Despite the negative impact of the chili stew, and what she sees as filth, she is able to enjoy “some roasted corn rolled in a napkin rather cleaner than the first” and a very homely fried egg.

Learning to love (and buy) foreign food

The day after Las Vegas, Susan enjoyed a meal in San Miguel where she had “fine fried chicken, corn and bean soup” for lunch on the trail (95), a

menu she does not present as being exotic. While fried chicken is a typically mainstream recipe, with Euro-American roots, the corn and bean soup can be traced to the New World and are part of what Jack Weatherford lists as exported gastronomy.⁴³ The American traderess advancing into –and colonizing– Mexico was thus eating imported food with pre-colonial roots.

While camping close to San Miguel, Susan Magoffin met the *mujeres* (women) who came to bring her “some tortillas, new goat’s milk and stewed kid’s meat with onions, and I found it much more palatable than the dinner at the Vegas” (98). Learning to love foreign food came quickly for Susan Magoffin, who did not balk this time at the culinary hygiene, or the fact that the tortillas were meant to be used to scoop up the stew, or the goat’s milk, which was probably unusual for her. The food that seemed so scarce in Mora, only a short distance away, had become more plentiful and, although no explanation is given in the diary, a plausible reason might be the fact that the locals and the traders knew each other, probably did business with each other, and, as the American army had left for Santa Fe, the Mexicans felt safe to show their supplies.

Arriving in Santa Fe, “under the Star-spangled banner” (102), Susan had a house ready for her, prepared by her brother-in-law, trader and negotiator James Magoffin.⁴⁴ Although the thick-walled *adobe* (raw earth) building, whitewashed on the inside with shutters to keep out the sun, must have been very different from the Victorian homes she knew in Kentucky, she immediately saw it as being “nice” and “pleasant” (103-104). She was “delighted with this new country” (114) and such a positive view of a foreign environment parallels the food descriptions.

Mrs. Magoffin did not leave home un-chaperoned although wandering in the occupied city was not considered dangerous; besides, the army was camping in the vacant lot next to their house, although their “fine protection” was offset by the “everlasting noise” that was quite shocking to her “delicate nerves” (110, 114). She was seemingly famished for contact with Mexicans and their culture and sat at the window “on the look out for vegetables” (130), expecting farmers hawking their produce on the streets. Thus, she frequently met with “market people”, coming to her door to sell produce (114), and she comments upon what was in season –peaches, grapes, melons, and apples (115, 145).

Two of these street vendors are detailed in the diary; one of them being a six-year old girl, selling peas, green corn and squash, who became her protégé (112, 130), and brought her cakes wrapped in napkins. While the food-wrapping napkins of her first New Mexican meal were considered dirty, the little girl brought “nice” ones (131), confirming that comments about the lack of hygiene are often linked to a lack of knowledge of the people being commented upon. The girl’s clothes were “in something of a tattered condition” (131-132), indicating poverty, an element that travelers easily associate with an unwashed condition but the fact that Susan uses only positive adjectives to describe the girl is a sign that she is open to intercultural understanding. Little (foreign) girls usually have a more ingratiating way than boys, but young Mrs. Magoffin knew how to tackle a half grown boy selling melons. When he wanted too much money for his produce, she started to barter and “[looked] at him straight in the eye”, saying “*hombre* in a long voice, as much as to say ‘man have you a soul to ask so much!’” (132), clearly enjoying her new skills in Spanish, in market knowledge, as well as in finding the best deals for her family.

This bartering event –showing that Mrs. Magoffin’s integration into her trading family was well under way – was reported 17 days after Susan’s arrival in Santa Fe. Shortly afterwards, a dinner (which would be called a lunch today) was given in the city on September 19, 1846, by the trans-national trading families to honor the occupying Army of the West, celebrating the combined action of international marketing and military conquest. In the diary, the menu is reported with a wealth of Spanish vocabulary:

“First came sopa de vermicile [vermicelli soup], then sopa de otro [another kind of soup], this is their custom to bring something light preparatory to the more weighty dishes. This sopa is pretty much a substitute for our fine soups. The rice is boiled, dressed with little butter, salt &c. and then covered over with slices of boiled eggs. Next came the several dishes of carne de asado, carne de cocida [roasted meat, boiled meat], and some other carnes, all of which they placed in plates before me, and of course I tasted them. The champain (sic) went round without reserve... For desert we had a dish made of boiled milk and seasoned with cinnamon and nutmeg, and it was very good, the recipe I should like. An other of cake pudding –both Mexican and new to me, fine cool grapes, to which we all did justice.” (135)

Only one (minor) negative element is reported in the diary; the two kinds of soups are “a substitute for our fine soups”, hinting at the inferiority of the foreign product. The dishes have all been placed before the young lady, probably to honor her status as the only female American trader at the table

and –“of course”– she tasted them all, a matter-of-factly declaration that is typical of her openness of mind in culinary matters. The diarist’s sweet tooth shows in her appreciation of the cinnamon and nutmeg desert and her request for a recipe of what might have been a *flan* (custard) or *leche quemada* (“burnt” milk) while the cake pudding probably was a *capirotada* or bread pudding, a Mexican favorite.⁴⁵ Not giving the original names of these dishes is unusual for the young author who enjoyed improving her Spanish and used more and more of the foreign language as she progressed into Mexico. The international traders of Anglo-European-Mexican origin did not serve *tortillas* and *chili verde* for a fancy meal; in 1846, these dishes had not reached their status as post-colonial fashion foods. The colonial crowd appreciated them, when they had to eat with the locals, but the conquest was a period when stereotypical international food –especially champagne– were served as a status symbol of colonialism and imperialism, in situations where the colonizer made a show of force

The spirits of conquest

Champagne appears frequently in the diary and the spirits of conquest, to paraphrase the title of a book on alcohol consumption among the founders of the United States,⁴⁶ flowed freely among the conquerors. When Susan arrived in Santa Fe, she was greeted by her brother-in-law who welcomed them with oysters and champagne (105). For readers who wondered about how the oysters reached Santa Fe, culinary historian Sam Arnold, author of *Eating Up the Santa Fe Trail*, mentions that “the oysters Susan enjoyed would have been canned, although fresh oysters were available along the trail in the cooler months, packed in barrels, shells opening upward, so that they could be fed; at every stop chipped ice would be packed in, cornmeal sprinkled on top”.⁴⁷

Brother-in-law James, the flamboyant negotiator hired by President Polk to obtain the mysterious surrender of the Mexican governor in Santa Fe,⁴⁸ is often associated with champagne. The wealthy trader, who was fluent in Spanish, would later be arrested by Mexican authorities near El Paso while on his way to Chihuahua, on another “peace” mission. According to apocryphal history, a congratulatory letter by general Kearny was handed unopened to James Magoffin by his Mexican guard. It allegedly contained written proof that the recipient was working for the Americans and would have led to his execution. But the guard had become so fond of him that he closed an eye, mainly due to the fact that James Magoffin had spent between 2900⁴⁹ and 3392⁵⁰ bottles of champagne on his captors. Most

meals James Magoffin partook in the diary feature champagne; before leaving on his ill-fated Chihuahua mission, he dined on champagne and oyster soup with Susan Magoffin and her husband (107). Oysters and champagne have been for a long time the trademark of the successful and the worldly-wise in the Western world. Champagne is, and was, the mythical drink of conquerors and businessmen who downed large quantities before (and after) general Kearny's toast to the two countries: "The U.S. and Mexico –They are now united, may no one ever think of separating" (135, 137), a celebration antedating the NAFTA⁵¹ treaty by approximately a century and a half. When the Magoffins entered the war zone, further south in Mexico, champagne made one fleeting appearance when general Taylor, "Old Rough and Ready" who became two years later the 12th president of the United States, served them "cake and champagne" in the surreal setting of his camp surrounded by battle fields (253).

Alcohol, more specifically an overly high consumption of it, is mentioned frequently in the diary during Susan Magoffin's Santa Fe days when homesick officers visited her daily (126). They were usually welcome unless they had "taken a little more of *the ingredient*" than they should have (145), something that happened several times (146). Drinking was quite a problem, especially among some of the volunteers of the Army of the West, inexperienced in desert conditions, who "would replace the water in their canteens with whiskey, sip it through the torrid hours, and to ride retching in the wagons."⁵²

It is to be noted that tribal inebriation was not tolerated by the military. After the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), transferring a large portion of Mexico's north to the United States, the Americans set to the task to subdue the warlike tribes of Apaches who had murdered travelers along the trail. When they finally captured the small band of Mescalero Apaches roaming southern New Mexico and deported them far from their homeland to the Bosque Redondo reservation, the military hierarchy realized that their wards were brewing *tiswin* with the corn that was supposed to feed them. From then on, the Mescaleros were forbidden to plant corn and were issued cornmeal as food.⁵³ Indian alcohol consumption was often treated in a different manner than military alcohol consumption and also seen as more threatening, although the commander at the time of the deportation, brigadier-general Carleton, was rather equalitarian in the matter and tried to eradicate alcohol wherever it was to be found.

Food talk as international communication

After leaving Santa Fe, the caravan had not traveled more than 15 miles, when the diarist started mentioning food again. They had reached “a little farm, a rancho” growing “only a little corn, beans, and an abundance of *chile verde* [green pepper].” Camp was set up, and fresh green *chile*, a New Mexican delicacy, was bought (150). Further south, the Magoffins entered disputed territory; the diarist was aware of Apache danger, Indians who “drive off stock and kill the inhabitants” if they have the opportunity, “notwithstanding the troops now among them” (149). Susan writes with anguish about an Apache attack on brother-in-law James Magoffin, who had been ahead of them on the trail, and who managed to escape without losing his scalp (151). Others did not fare so well; a young Mexican boy, whose mother had died and whose father had been killed in an Apache attack had spent three years as a prisoner of the tribe, fled, came under the protection of a Mexican where his life “was not better than with the Indians” and asked the Magoffins to buy him for 7 dollars (163).

While the Apaches and Navajos were dangerous in 1846, Susan knew that the agricultural Pueblos were friendly tribes; she met them in the lower Rio Grande valley where they “[supplied] the Mexican inhabitants with fruits, vegetables &c.” (151); when they stopped at a Pueblo, the Indians sold or traded eggs, watermelon, onions, apples, tortillas and grapes (153-156). They were fond of empty bottles, “especially thick black ones,” probably because of their resemblance with obsidian, volcanic glass used in ceremonial objects, and Susan saw herself making a profit with full bottles bought in the States, drinking the liquor and selling empty bottles to the Pueblos (153-154). The friendliness of the Magoffins with the local population can be seen in terms of market requirements; these people were after all their customers, and, although it was Susan’s first trip, her husband had often traveled the road before. Nevertheless, the reader of the diary has a feeling that Mrs. Magoffin’s contact with the Natives went beyond commerce and that she enjoyed mingling with the women, bartering food, selling material, showing off her dressmaking skills, and talking about female matters such as having children and managing husbands (158, 160).

As the caravan drove into Mexico, Susan reported the daily rumors about the war while involving herself with Mexican food and home decorating, the small joys of her life. When the caravan stopped for a day in a town, south of Albuquerque, the Magoffins lived “on the fine Mexican tortillas” (157). Mrs. Magoffin did not comment on any inconvenience of “going

native” in culinary matters; she did not lament the absence of food unavailable to her. On the contrary, in two entries of her diary, she describes how to make tortillas, a process that is so different from Anglo-European bread baking that travelers always reported it. Not everyone enjoyed them, half a century later Susan Wallace, wife of territorial governor Lew Wallace, wrote that "when done they are the color of a hornet's nest and tasteless as white paper", an unappealing description that is barely offset by the mention that "once accustomed to them strangers become very fond of tortillas."⁵⁴

Susan's first description is rather conventional and theoretical and describes the cooperation between at least three women participating in the cooking process. It starts with soaking corn in lime to remove the husk, mashing it on a stone, making it into flat round cakes that are cooked on a griddle of thin iron or stone, and serving the tortillas in a napkin (157). Since the first tortilla that was so disastrously served in an unclean napkin in the town of Las Vegas, New Mexico, 52 days have gone by. The change in the diarist is tremendous and the nervous young lady who tried to escape being a "monkey show" (92), and who was happy to eat something less exotic than *chile verde*, has become a culinary journalist who remarks that "with a good dish of frijoles [refried beans] or any thing of the kind, one does not eat a bad dinner" (157). The second description of tortilla making is a hands-on approach; Mrs. Magoffin went down on her knees to grind the corn on a stone *metate* and the reader gets a feeling of the strenuous backbreaking work it represents (167-168), something that Mrs. Wallace is not likely to have attempted. Josiah Gregg, describing the same process, also did not try his hand at it and simply declared that women "appear to be better adapted to this employ than the other sex,"⁵⁵ a statement that exonerates Mr. Magoffin for not persevering in her job.

As the caravan traveled further south, and some traders decided it was too dangerous and went back to the States, mentions of war appear in the diary, rumors of battles won or lost by the Americans, and of advancing Mexican troops (161). Despite the danger, and the necessity to form a wagon corral for protection, Susan Magoffin had not lost her adventurous spirit and managed to reach a sand-bar in the middle of the Rio Grande River (161-162). Near Socorro, it appeared that the traders would have to wait out for an American victory south of El Paso before proceeding and the Magoffins rented a house (166). Susan's immediate reaction was to draw up a list of everything she would have time to learn in matters of "New Mexican way of living" such as making Mexican shawls, the ubiquitous tortillas, cooking

with chili peppers, and whipping up drinking chocolate. Although for the latter, she was proud to have already produced “a passable cup this afternoon” (164-165), sweets and deserts being her strong side. Unfortunately, she does not list the ingredients, whether the chocolate was of the typical Mexican water-based kind, or whether the creamy froth was due to egg yolk and cream.⁵⁶

News from the front did not spoil the diarist’s appetite, malarial fever did, but on the day the village celebrated the church’s saint, she managed to enjoy the elaborate dinner brought by their landlord, mutton and chili stew, chicken and onion stew, and the typical Mexican bread pudding with grapes, something “the good people of the village” have been preparing for a week (165). Her open minded attitude set the tone for the months to come and shows how her love of foreign food would shape her interaction with the Mexicans. Her winter home in San Gabriel came with decorations, something she did not mention about her house in Santa Fe, and the bedroom was adorned with religious paintings and two small statues, one representing a saint and the other the Virgin Mary. In the 19th century, Protestants usually showed little regard for the trappings of Catholicism and even less for the representation of saints; Susan’s first reaction when attending Catholic Mass in Santa Fe had been to comment disparagingly on the pictures in church (138). Her positive view of the “Savior’s mother, with a crown on her head, and standing with her hands raised as if in the act of blessing the poor mortal” (166) attests her wartime worries with salvation.

Times became darker; food and fun made rare appearances when Mexican villagers sent her tortillas, cheese, and sweets (173). Most often, Mrs. Magoffin imagined a disastrous outcome of her Mexican adventure, being at best imprisoned, and at worst murdered. Her thoughts turned to eternal salvation (176-178) while she tended her sick husband, the young Mexican orphan, and others of the caravan and in the surrounding villages (183). She even gave medicine to a Mexican patriot fighting U.S. occupation, and was thanked with a gift of pork and mutton meat (183-184). Meanwhile in the north of New Mexico, other patriots killed the American governor and his staff a few weeks after the departure of the Army of the West for California (188-192). For the caravan the way home was cut off and the only way out was through Mexico, hoping American forces would pacify the country so as to allow them to reach the Atlantic seacoast.

Culinary delicacies were for the time being out of question for Mrs. Magoffin who filled the pages of her diary with wild scenarios imagining one dreadful outcome after the other. Fire arms were cleaned and reloaded, a sentry set up on the house top, and God's mercy prayed for; Susan listed the couple's weapons as "twelve sure rounds, a double-barreled shot gun, a pair of holster and one pair of belt pistols, with one of Colts six barreled revolvers" adding that it represented "a formidable core for only two people to muster" (193). Apache danger and Mexican revolt combined in the last stretch of road before El Paso, and graves lined the trail (199-202); Susan Magoffin hunted for souvenirs on a battlefield and brought back "two cartridges one Mexican the other American" (202).

Before reaching the town, Mr. Magoffin stopped for one night at the home of an old friend, Don Agapita, offering the travelers a little respite in the turmoil of the war. This was reason enough for Susan Magoffin to describe a couple of meals, a four course dinner with "delightful" Mexican dishes, meats stewed with onions, cabbage, and tomatoes, served with beans; apples and grapes as desert, as well as brandy and wine. She also mentioned that if Americans knew such a nice Mexican family, derogatory comments upon a foreign population would cease (205-207). Susan Magoffin probably didn't read the American press declaring the Mexicans a race that needed to be "regenerated"⁵⁷ but she might have been aware of the negative feelings of some of her fellow citizens.

To ensure the safety of the traders in El Paso, Colonel Doniphan's troops, who were opening American access to the south, had taken "five or six of the most influential citizens as hostages for the good behavior of those remaining" (201-203). Thus, the Magoffins could stay at the home of hostage Padre Ortiz (207) under the care of his sisters. Whether naïve or charming, Mrs. Magoffin found them "exceedingly kind", polite and welcoming; she mentions –but does not comment upon– a case of measles in the family, a disease brought by the American troops that has wreaked havoc among Mexican children. Edwards, the chronicler of Doniphan's command, gives a heartrending description of endless funeral processions in Santa Fe where children fell prey to the disease.⁵⁸ Whether Susan knew about the highly contagious disease or not is unclear; but the entries close to El Paso mention realistic risks of war, replacing the fantasized ones; moreover her frequent contacts with the Mexican female population would have informed her of the spreading disease. We can only imagine denial of the truth as a possible reason for the absence of comment upon the disease.

Anyway her goodwill was rewarded with an unexpected friendliness from the enemy, the Ortiz family “exerting themselves so much to make me enjoy myself” as she puts it, making her chocolate twice a day, serving her “dishes so fine” (208, 209) that it reminded her of starting a recipe book to cook them for her friends back home. Other Mexican families visited her at the Ortiz home showing that the invaders weren’t shunned, although the fact that each family had at least one member held hostage by Col. Doniphan’s regiment must have cast a certain gloom over the gatherings. Susan reports only one political conversation, with a Mexican, Don Rouquia. The subject was rarely discussed by women in the middle of the 19th century, and in the diary this mention of politics appears after the obligatory description of the most pleasing house the family lives in, the *placita* [courtyard] decorated with “tastefully arranged” fruit trees and a central flower bed. Only after having praised the industriousness of the housewife and the studiousness of the children did Susan venture to write that Don Rouquia believed the war was against the principles of George Washington who would never “[have invaded] the territory of an other nation (211).”

Of course conversations did not always go so smoothly, one woman whose husband was a hostage of Doniphan’s, hinted at a possible affair Mr. Magoffin could be having unbeknownst to his wife; he was after all a frequent traveler and had visited El Paso before being married. The young wife, who had celebrated her first wedding anniversary four months earlier, was so distressed that she cried her eyes out, spent a gloomy week without writing in her diary, and became half deranged with a headache (212). Nevertheless, Mrs. Magoffin went on with her social activities, showing *modas Americanas* to the ladies of El Paso and letting them copy the patterns of her dresses. While writing about rumors of American defeat in San Luis Potosi, and possibly in Chihuahua, she pondered the words of a Mexican who informed the Magoffins that none of them would be spared (213-215). But on March 2, 1874, the Americans entered Chihuahua and the caravan was able to proceed into Mexico. As soon as she was on the road, Susan missed the good food at the Ortiz home (224).

The country became less pleasant, the heat was overwhelming and the caravan traveled at night (228); in Chihuahua, the inhabitants, including James Magoffin’s in-laws, had fled the city and Mrs. Magoffin was shocked by the way the American soldiers defaced the town. The Magoffins occupied a fine home abandoned by its owners (229), but the war was closer now and the diary no longer mentions Mexican women

willing to share their culture and indigenous tribes trading with the caravan. Even the lovely meals were spaced further apart and happened by chance, as when Susan met an English couple where the husband worked at the mint; they dined and supped and visited (229-230). But troop movement came closer to the caravan, war reports started to fill the diary; the Magoffins counted and baled up the money while cleaning and reloading the pistols (233).

Susan watched apprehensively as young American soldiers marched into battle (235-236); she felt isolated herself and far away from her family. In Saltillo, she was unable to rejoice with the American military who loudly celebrated the 4th of July on a Sunday instead of observing the Sabbath. She was therefore grateful for a dinner invitation at the home of an army doctor, Mr. Hewitson and his wife, who served her the last Mexican style dinner she described in her diary, a meal with “a nicely stuffed and roasted cabrita [young goat], and good desert” for which Susan asked the recipes (236). During her last days in Mexico, she tried with all her might not to see the war anymore and focused her attention on anything pleasant, however insignificant. She enjoyed tourism whenever possible, visiting a cotton factory, the magnificent church of Saltillo with its gilded decorations and the convent. The war kept creeping into her discourse; the life-like statue of Christ made her shudder when she saw “his accusations written above on a plate of solid gold” (242), and she noticed that the convent had become an American arsenal (243). But at the end of the day she gladly accepted a cup of chocolate served by Doña Josepha (243). The sorrows were many; news came that brother-in-law James had been murdered (244) and the information that it was false news; robbers attacked at night; the Magoffins had to follow military marching orders (247).

General Taylor’s invitation came as an unexpected relief; despite his nickname, he was “mild mannered and polite” (252); he also was an old friend of Susan’s “Granpapa” (258), invited them to his “beautiful camping spot” – i.e. army encampment– close to Monterey. His tent had “a large awning affording a pleasant shade”, it was his “*drawing-room*” where he served them “cake and champagne and proved himself exceedingly hospitable” (253). Susan Magoffin was now back to colonial food in a colonial context, the indigenous inhabitants of the land had disappeared, so had the Mexicans, who appeared in the diary only as dangerous thieves and murderers in a countryside littered with the bones of murdered Americans and the “remains of burned wagons” (259).

* * *

The foods recorded so accurately by Susan Magoffin trace the history of the conquest of the Americas and present a little known side of Manifest Destiny. Within the circle of international traders, who were the main lobby behind the ongoing invasion, an early form of “world food”, with European dishes and lots of Champagne, was already fashionable. Champagne was also the drink of the conquerors, allegedly used as a bribe by negotiator James Magoffin when he was jailed in Mexico, and served by General Taylor, on his battle field camp, to the young traderess who visited him. Mrs. Magoffin was able to show an appreciation of exotic food in the worst situations. When confined to her home in San Gabriel, at a time when Mexican patriots started to organize armed resistance, she learned the art of making tortillas, the archetypal New Mexican food. In El Paso, under war time conditions, with prominent Mexicans used as hostages by the American army to safeguard the wellbeing of the traders, she started a recipe book and found her host family delightful and the meals they served delicious. Whenever danger threatened, she found solace in a cup of New Mexico’s incomparable chocolate. Food enabled an interaction between women of different cultures; it was an acceptable focal point at a time when conversations between people, who were technically enemies, were difficult. The appreciative remarks of the traderess were part of a diplomatic effort.

Today, the foods described in the 1846 diary have reached a trans-ethnic, trans-national post-colonial status. Chili, red or green, has become the traditional question asked in New Mexican restaurants, and *chili con carne* has gone world wide. Other foods that go by their un-translated Spanish names -*tacos, enchiladas, burritos, frijoles, tamales, huevos rancheros, margaritas, sopaipillas*- are part of the food landscape of New Mexico for indigenous peoples, Hispanics, and Anglos.

Notes

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