Eating Like an Indian
Negotiating Social Relations in the Spanish Colonies

by Enrique Rodríguez-Alegría

Food and eating were important cultural pathways to power in the sixteenth-century Spanish Empire in the Americas. Spanish colonizers in different areas of the empire pursued power by establishing politically rewarding alliances with indigenous people, especially elites, and often consolidated these alliances by eating with Indians and even “eating like an Indian” and participating in indigenous ritual. By “eating like an Indian” I do not necessarily mean lavish feasting with Indians, although, if one accepts Hayden’s (2001:28) broad definition of feasts as “any sharing between two or more people of special foods . . . in a meal for a special purpose or occasion,” then the behavior I examine in this paper is feasting. I simply mean adopting indigenous food, ingredients, recipes, serving vessels, and other aspects of indigenous eating practices, often for the purpose of preparing a hospitable meal to share with Indians. Eating like an Indian helped establish social relationships with indigenous people and euphemize antagonism, and it made the interests of different parties involved in sharing a meal seem friendly and benign. Eating like an Indian often required adopting indigenous material culture related to food service, such as pottery. Thus the negotiation of power in the Spanish colonies often depended on cultural strategies. By combining archaeological and historical evidence, I challenge the idea that Spaniards everywhere in the Americas tried to reproduce a European lifestyle and rejected indigenous material culture related to food service, such as pottery. The present paper was submitted 5 xi 03 and accepted 12 1 05.

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alliances that would help discourage resistance (e.g., Bauer 2001, Lockhart 1992). Examining the ceramic serving vessels in these archaeological assemblages, I show that there was no single or monolithic pattern of consumption or rejection of indigenous material related to food service in the different areas of the Spanish Empire. In fact, these patterns varied from region to region. I consider the possible causes of this variation and ask whether the archaeological patterns in some of these sites might be related to political strategies of negotiating power with indigenous leaders, in part through commensality.

To study this question in depth, I examine historical documents from sixteenth-century Mexico, which often imply that Spanish colonizers were conservative about the foods they ate and attempted to reconstruct their Iberian diet wherever they went (e.g., Bauer 2001:63–68; Coe 1991). At the same time, they provide glimpses of contexts in which Spaniards and Indians ate together, especially in meals hosted by indigenous people that were often part of legal transactions. These documents raise the possibility that the Spaniards were also hosting meals with indigenous people as a strategy for negotiating social relationships and power. Examination of archaeological evidence from four Spanish houses in Mexico City indicates that eating practices varied among Spanish households there as much as they did from region to region. I argue that the presence of Aztec-tradition pottery in some Spanish houses indicates that Spaniards sometimes “ate like Indians,” using indigenous pottery and indigenous foods. I then draw together theoretical work about food and the negotiation of political life, historical references to interethic feasting, and the evidence of Aztec pottery in Spanish houses to suggest that Spaniards often hosted meals with indigenous people and included indigenous pottery and food as part of their show of hospitality. The convergence of theoretical, historical, and archaeological evidence in this model of the politics of consumption in colonial Mexico at once challenges previous interpretations based on ideas of culturally mediated social relations that make production, exchange, and consumption of food possible. Therefore, food occupies an important place in people’s material lives, and it is subject to the judgments of taste that are often applied to material culture.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that taste, whether defined narrowly as an experienced sensation in the mouth or more broadly as an appreciation or fondness for certain kinds of material culture, is not biological, natural, or objective. Instead, it is a socially constructed phenomenon closely related to the educational capital of a person and his or her social origin or class. Bourdieu considers judgments of taste and the accompanying refusals to incorporate certain aspects of material culture into one’s life a strong barrier between social classes. He adds that the opposition of tastes (good or bad, bourgeois, petit-bourgeois, or working-class, etc.) can partly disguise economic differences between social classes by disguising socially constrained options as matters of conscious choice. He emphasizes hierarchical barriers to social mobility, the impermeability of social classes, and social constraints on taste and dismisses strategies of display by people moving between social classes as superficial attempts at hiding their true social origins.

Mennell (1996) partly accepts Bourdieu’s assertion that taste is socialized but argues that taste must be analyzed not only in its sociocultural context but also historically. He considers many aspects of food, including the ingredients used, recipes, and table manners and their relationship to social classes, particular historical moments, and strategies of social differentiation and distinction in Europe. He is critical of approaches that view food and taste as an “expression” of social relationships as if these relationships were static and could not be manipulated and negotiated in eating practices (pp. 13–14). Thus, according to Mennell, taste is politicized, and consumption can be socially transformative.

Mintz (1985), in his landmark study of the relationship between sugar production, consumption, and capitalism, examined how consumption and production of food can in part reflect social arrangements but also transform them. For Mintz consumption is ultimately related to power, specifically as different social classes validate their status through consumption and as relationships of production are transformed and realigned in part to sustain patterns of consumption. As sugar consumption changed from an upper-class luxury in seventeenth-century Britain to a necessity of the working class, there were accompanying changes in labor patterns, ownership of land, use of time, patterns of trade, and production and consumption of other foodstuffs such as coffee, tea, and chocolate. Thus, food consumption and production can have material effects on social arrangements instead of merely reflecting a shared social reality. Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Mennell, and Mintz, I consider how Spanish colonizers used food and pottery in strategies of boundary maintenance and of social transfor-

Food, Pottery, and Social Relations

Food production, preparation, and consumption are imbued with symbolism and social meanings and have been recognized as important aspects of culture and society since the early days of anthropology (see Mintz 1985:4). I consider food part of material culture because it is most often produced and transformed from a natural state much as are other kinds of material culture such as ceramics, cloth, and obsidian and is harvested or gathered and then prepared and served with material implements (agricultural tools, basketry, pottery, ladles, spoons, etc.). Dietler (2001:72) considers food an especially symbolically charged kind of material culture in that it is ingested or “embodied.” In this process the biological need for sustenance and nutrition is conflated with the culturally mediated social relations that make production, exchange, and consumption of food possible. Therefore, food occupies an important place in people’s material lives, and it is subject to the judgments of taste that are often applied to material culture.
Majolica in the Spanish Colonies

Archaeological research in the Spanish colonies often focuses on colonial ceramics, in part because it is easy to distinguish indigenous and European ceramic traditions. The ceramic types found in different areas of the empire vary widely but often include majolica, earthenware covered with a lead-and-tin glaze. Majolica’s surface is often white and shiny, and it was made mostly into serving vessels, including compound-silhouette plates, bowls with annular bases, and porringer, although other forms such as drug jars, pitchers, and candleholders can be found. Majolica is a European introduction to the Americas, most likely brought across the Atlantic by the very first colonists (Deagan 1982, Goggin 1968, Lister and Lister 1982, 1987). Aside from importing majolica from factories in Spain and Italy, colonizers also established majolica factories in Mexico City and in other American colonies in the years following the conquest (Jamieson 2001, Lister and Lister 1982) and tried in various ways to prevent Indians from learning majolica manufacturing techniques (Rodríguez-Alegria 2002). I shall often group majolica produced in Europe and in Mexico together as a category of earthenwares glazed with lead and tin, emphasizing the basic distinction between them and indigenous ceramics at the cost of losing sight of the varied patterns of consumption of local and imported majolica among Spaniards (see Rodríguez-Alegria n.d.).

Majolica was distinguishable from any traditional indigenous ceramics because of its glaze, decoration, and forms. Furthermore, majolica manufacturers in Mexico City ranked their products as fine-grade, common, and yellow, depending on the quality of the glaze and the clays used (Lister and Lister 1982). McEwan (1992) argues that Spaniards in the American colonies valued imported ceramics more than locally produced majolica, but in Mexico City there is no consistent association between household status and consumption of different types of majolica (Rodríguez-Alegria 2002, n.d.). The association between status and consumption of different ceramics both in Mexico and elsewhere in the Spanish Empire will be discussed below and is the subject of ongoing research.

Cultural Continuity in Florida and the Caribbean

Some of the historians and archaeologists who have focused on the material aspects of everyday life in the Spanish Empire (Bauer 2001, Benítez 1993, Deagan 1983, 1998, 2001, Farriss 1984, Gibson 1964, Lister and Lister 1982, Lockhart 1991, McEwan 1991, 1992, 1993) generally agree that the colonizers used European goods, including clothing, furniture, and tableware, to preserve their cultural unity and distinguish themselves from indigenous people. Specifically regarding food, Coe (1991) argues that Europeans in Mexico tried to avoid eating indigenous foods to preserve their European ways. Ideas of cultural separatism are generally, although not always explicitly, founded on definitions of culture that emphasize cultural traits and the idea that colonial domination depended upon a shared interest among colonizers in preserving a unitary Spanish culture abroad. Foster (1960a) held that the Spanish colonizers guided cultural change with the goal of extending an ideal Spanish culture all over America. He believed that they imposed culture traits upon a “recipient” or colonized society. For him acculturation took place as a powerful and complex “conquest culture” extended its domination and forced change upon a weaker and simpler recipient culture (p. 12). The recipient culture would filter and accept some of the change imposed by the conquest culture, and in the end a new culture would “crystallize,” completing the acculturation process.

Kathleen Deagan (e.g., 1983, 1995, 1998) has based her work in Florida and the Caribbean in part on Foster’s model of “cultural crystallization,” emphasizing cultural continuity as a political strategy of domination and distinction among colonizers. Other archaeologists have followed in her footsteps, testing her ideas and conclusions on an empirical level and basing their theoretical approach on Foster’s model as well (e.g., Ewen 1991; McEwan 1992, 1995; Shepard 1983, Smith 1995). They argue that the indigenous artifacts present in Spanish houses at sites such as St. Augustine, Florida (see Deagan 1983), and Puerto Real, Haiti (see Deagan 1995, Smith 1995) (fig. 1), are associated for the most part with putatively female and secluded activity areas of houses such as kitchens and with women’s work such as cooking and weaving. Indigenous ceramics make up the majority of the kitchenware in sites excavated in Florida and the Caribbean. European pottery, including majolica (fig. 2), accounts for the majority of the tableware. Deagan and her colleagues believe that indigenous women brought their cookware into Spanish households mostly to fulfill their obligations as cooks or servants and used it in secluded areas unsupervised by Spanish men. Women were therefore the agents of acculturation or, rather, brought indigenous culture traits (e.g., pottery) into Spanish houses whose residents were otherwise uninterested in it.

Fewer indigenous artifacts have been related to men’s
Archaeologists working with Foster’s cultural crystallization model expected their model to be applicable elsewhere in the Spanish colonies, the material patterns reflecting a general cultural response to European colonization by groups formed predominantly of men who would intermarry with Indian women and have female indigenous cooks and servants working in their houses (see Ewen 1991:43). However, material patterns in other American colonies are remarkably different from those found in Florida and the Caribbean.

Beyond Bundles of Traits: Patterns in Latin America

Archaeological patterns at several sites in Latin America show that a pan-American model of acculturation overestimates the cultural unity and shared knowledge of the colonizers. Spain in the sixteenth century was loosely held together by its monarchy after the centuries of the Reconquista. Elliott (1986:112) suggests that the only force that seems to have unified people from the several kingdoms in Spain was Catholicism. The majority of Spanish immigrants to Mexico during the sixteenth century were from Andalusia (Boyd-Bowman 1968), but Andalusia itself was hardly a culturally or socially homogeneous kingdom (Ruiz 2002). Rodríguez Vázquez (1995:21) argues that with the new wealth brought in from the American colonies, status in Seville was in a state of flux during the sixteenth century, and the new merchant nobility transformed and reinvented status displays that had formerly been the exclusive domain of the hereditary nobility (see also McEwan 1992, Morell Peguero 1986). Not only were Spanish immigrants coming from a loosely united country in which status was being negotiated in new ways but they confronted a variety of options in the Americas. Colonizers surely had a differential awareness of these options and many social interests beyond merely reproducing a Spanish material life. Archaeological remains show a variety of patterns of consumption among them.

Van Buren (1999) has compared assemblages from Tarapaya, Bolivia, and Puerto Real, Haiti, and found the pattern of a seventeenth-century component at Tarapaya different from that described for Locus 19 of Puerto Real (fig. 1). In contrast to those at Puerto Real, the Spanish colonizers in Tarapaya used indigenous tablewares more than European-style pottery: 68.5% of the serving vessels (mostly plates and bowls) are indigenous, 16.6% colonowares,” and 14.9% European-style. The owners of the

3. Colonowares are ceramics produced in European colonies in the Americas with materials and techniques characteristic of indigenous pottery traditions. This broad category, however, controversial and encompasses much variation. Some archaeologists believe that indigenous potters or African slaves attempted to reproduce European forms with their traditional techniques (e.g., Deagan 1987, Emerson 1994, García-Arévolo 1990, Howson 1990, Orser 1996, Smith 1995). Van Buren (1999) uses “colono ware” to refer to serving vessels produced locally, probably by indigenous people, in imitation of the forms of European serving vessels.
house were a wealthy Iberian couple; therefore, Van Buren argues, the pattern cannot be explained in terms of the residents’ being poor, indigenous, or mestizo. She draws the important conclusion (p. 117) that “differences in wealth or the ethnic composition of household heads cannot explain the divergence in consumption patterns” that she has identified.

The patterns from the colonial wineries in the Moquegua Valley in southern Peru (discussed in Rice and Smith 1989; Smith 1997a, b). The Spanish set up wineries in Moquegua in the mid-sixteenth century. Owners may have lived in their respective wineries during times of harvest and other key moments in wine production and returned to urban centers for the rest of the year. Early in the colonial period, Indian laborers made their way to Moquegua to work in wineries and in the production of sugar and other agricultural goods [Smith 1997b]. Indigenous lords of extended groups of households linked by kinship ties, known as kurakas, managed Indian labor in the colonial period just as they had done for the Inka [Andrien 2001]. From a total of 130 winery locations known from the Moquegua Valley, 4 were chosen for intensive excavation—Locumbilla, Yahuay, Chincha, and Estopacaje—and Locumbilla is the only one that has a sixteenth-century component [Smith 1997b].

Once again, in contrast to the material patterns found in the Caribbean, the majority of ceramics found in Spanish wineries in Moquegua were locally made earthenwares. European-style serving vessels account for less than 1% of the sixteenth-century assemblage from Locumbilla, while colonowares and other indigenous ceramics broadly categorized as coarse earthenwares make up 96.4% of the early assemblage [Van Buren 1999:117–18]. The ceramics found at Locumbilla and other sites in Moquegua were largely of Andean manufacture. Most of the serving vessels, lead-glazed pottery, and coarse earthenware was made in Peru (Smith 1997b:168; Van Buren 1999:118), and archaeologists believe that only up to 12% of the tin-enameled ceramics in the Moquegua Valley were made in Panama, Mexico, Europe, or elsewhere in the Andes (Rice 1997). These patterns have been explained as a result of trade restrictions within the colonies and the challenges of transportation across the Atlantic and over the Andes, which resulted in a scarcity of imported pottery in the Andean colonies and reliance on locally produced tin-enameled wares and other local pottery [Rice 1997:178; Smith 1997b; Van Buren 1999]. Van Buren (1999:119) also suggests that ceramic production in the Andes was part of a long tradition of craft specialization in the region. Indigenous pottery production continued after the conquest.

A surprising find at Locumbilla was Inka Polychrome pottery, which was considered a luxury ware in Peru (Smith 1997b). There are no known Inka sites in Moquegua, and Smith suggests that Spanish colonizers or high-status kurakas may have lived in Locumbilla during the sixteenth century and required the use of elite pottery in their homes. However, one might ask whether the presence of these vessels could be evidence of commensality between Spaniards and Inkas instead of merely a diagnostic of elite presence. Feasts were an important aspect of Inka imperial consolidation [Bray 2003, Costin and Earle 1989]. Perhaps the Spanish owners of these
wineries were eating with *kurakas* as part of their strategies for cementing relationships of patronage with those who could potentially control labor on their behalf. *Kurakas* or other Indians could have been interested in establishing alliances with the Spanish colonizers as a way of creating links to the new dominant class and obtaining economic or political favors. Sponsoring periodic feasts or even smaller, less showy meals would have been an ideal way to make relationships of power and domination appear amicable and mutually beneficial. This possible interpretation of the general patterns found in the Andes and specifically of the presence of Inka Polychrome pottery in Spanish wineries should be examined in the appropriate archaeological contexts and in the light of ethnohistorical data.

Rather than focusing only on whether the archaeological assemblages in Ecuador are different at a strictly empirical level, Jamieson (2000) has drawn attention to the need to revise our assumptions and interpretations of archaeological material. Beyond considering them as markers of ethnicity, wealth, or acculturation, we must study instead how material culture served to “naturalize” relationships of domination in the colonial encounter” (pp. 161–62):

Rather than setting up such strict dichotomies between the roles of different class, gender, and ethnic groups, I would prefer to look at the multiple roles that items of domestic material culture played in colonial Cuenca. Household items were used in mediating between these groups, both as objects used to control social action and to resist European hegemony.

Instead of viewing material culture as embedded in public or private spheres, Jamieson considers the possibility that all artifacts were socially visible and had multiple meanings depending on the contexts in which they were used and on the interpretations of those who saw these objects. He argues that women were participants in the economy beyond the domestic sphere, especially in commercial enterprises such as cloth and food production (pp. 202–3). He also examines how Spanish colonizers not only used tableware of traditionally indigenous forms but also appropriated some of the social customs in which tableware was used, such as consumption of chocolate and yerba maté (p. 172). Therefore, reinterpreting Spanish colonial assemblages is not only a matter of pointing out regional differences in material assemblages. We must approach the interpretive process from a perspective that views archaeological material as embedded in social practice.

In what follows, I will examine archaeological patterns in Mexico City in detail, incorporating data from ethnohistorical sources, and consider how different kinds of material culture were used in everyday activities. On the basis of this study I will show how food and food-related items helped transform social relations and power in Mexico under colonial domination.

**Social Organization in Colonial Mexico**

After the military conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, Spanish power in New Spain depended on domination of local, small-scale social structures. Lockhart (1992:15) argues that Aztec society had a “cellular or modular” form of political organization in which several equal and separate parts formed a larger whole and rotated their ritual, economic, and political responsibilities to the whole. The names and functions of different subdivisions of Aztec society are a matter of debate (see Joyce 2000:136), and I will limit my discussion to *altepetl* and *calpulli*, the units that have been most widely discussed in colonial historiography.

An *altepetl* was a territorially defined unit that had its own ruler, nobles (Carrasco 1971:351–53), social hierarchy, religious rituals, and labor and tribute obligations to the Aztec Empire (Smith and Berdan 1996:3). These units competed for political domination over others and for control over natural resources. Residential wards within them, known as *calpulli*, had their own occupational specialization and tribute obligations to the *altepetl* ruler and religious obligations to the *altepetl* community. Aside from these responsibilities, each *calpulli* had a name and a leader, owned tracts of land, distributed rights to work on the land, and controlled the production of crafts. *Calpulli* were also the focus of socialization and education of children, carried out their own rituals, and maintained their own temples. Members of a *calpulli* tended to intermarry.

When the Spaniards conquered Mexico in 1521, they seized political control over what had once been the Aztec Empire not by controlling the empire itself but by dominating smaller sociopolitical units such as *altepetl*. Thus, the *altepetl* generally became the template for the Spanish *encomienda* (a grant of indigenous labor made to Spaniards), the parish, and the *municipio* or town (Lockhart 1992). Spanish *cabeceras*, or “head towns,” were largely congruent with Aztec *altepetl* (Gibson 1964:166). Most of the indigenous elites that the Spaniards assigned to rule over head towns had been local rulers before the conquest and simply reclaimed their power with Spanish approval (Gibson 1964:167; Haskett 1991; Lockhart 1992:30). Furthermore, indigenous rulers continued to be active in local politics much as they had been before the conquest by holding onto power within their *altepetl* (Lockhart 1992).

Several historians have argued convincingly that indigenous rulers retained much of the political power and other privileges associated with the elite [e.g., Cline 1986, Haskett 1991, Lockhart 1992, Spores 1997]. Spanish officials often even reinforced the authority and power of indigenous rulers as a strategy for establishing productive alliances with politically influential Indians and gaining access to labor and tribute from their respective *altepetl* or *calpulli* (Spores 1997). Spaniards benefited from the power that indigenous rulers retained by forging the appropriate alliances and obtaining support from indigenous governors and other elites when litigating.
against other communities, especially in matters of land tenure and labor [e.g., Hicks 2004]. Positions of authority and power remained contested, however, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ideally, Spanish governors (known first as corregidores or alcaldes mayores and later as gobernadores) and Indian rulers had different responsibilities and jurisdictions. Whereas the Spanish governors were supposed to be involved in all the affairs of communities, internal as well as external, Indian rulers were supposed to handle only certain internal affairs, but the somewhat overlapping jurisdictions of the two kinds of rulers often led to leadership conflicts (see Haskett 1991, Szeczyk 1976). Political power thus remained in flux after the conquest, and charisma, informal leadership, and the right kinds of social relations could help both Spaniards and Indians obtain personal political power, as ephemeral as this sort of power may have been.

Eating Like an Indian in Colonial Mexico

Before the conquest, Indians ate a variety of animals and animal products, including salamanders, shrimps, crawfish, frogs, water snakes, dogs, dragonfly larvae, grubs, and the eggs of the water insect axayacatl. Some historians suggest that the Spaniards were horrified by most of these animal products [Gibson 1964:341–46; Suárez y Faria 1997] and did not want indigenous foodstuffs served to them [Coe 1991]. Indeed, historical sources indicate that European colonizers in Mexico included in their diet ingredients that were common in Europe, such as beef, veal, pork, wine, oil, wheat, olives, onions, garlic, lettuce, radishes, parsley, carrots, eggplant, spinach, chickpeas, lentils, cauliflower, asparagus, melons, cantaloupes, squashes, cucumber, black pepper, and saffron [Stoopen 1997:28]. Some documents imply that chocolate was the only indigenous beverage that European colonizers in Mexico immediately incorporated into their diets. Chocolate was a ritually and symbolically important beverage in Mesoamerica. It was the beverage of choice of the Aztec elite and the last food item served at Moctezuma’s dinners [Coe 1991:101] and was probably what Aztec nobles typically served during banquets offered to the Spaniards. Chocolate drinking was very common among the Spaniards and was declared a vice by the church, which tried on several occasions to prohibit it [Suárez y Farias 1997].

Archaeological remains indicate, however, that Europeans in Mexico incorporated more American ingredients into their diet than some historical documents imply. Botanical evidence from excavations in Mexico City indicates that colonizers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries consumed Mesoamerican staples such as amaranth, squash, chiles, and tomatoes, all of which are of Mexican origin. The animal remains that are generally excavated in colonial houses include a variety of mollusks, most likely from the Gulf of Mexico, as well as fish, armadillos, and white-tailed deer [Montúfar López 2000, Montúfar López and Valentín Maldonado 1998]. Thus, colonial documents and archaeological remains tell somewhat different stories about the incorporation of indigenous food and ingredients into the diet of the colonizers. Even though the colonial contexts analyzed by Montúfar and Valentín date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is apparent from the conquest-period chronicles that Spanish colonizers began eating indigenous products as soon as they arrived.

Chroniclers such as Sahagún (1997) and Díaz del Castillo (1977) describe how Indian lords welcomed the Spanish conquerors with food: “Water, grains of maize, ears of green and of tender maize, boiled ears of green maize, tortillas of tender maize, boiled ears of tender maize, roasted ears of green maize, tamales of green maize, and slices of squash. They lavished and pressed these things upon them, gained their good will, and made friends with them” [Sahagún 1997:71 [book 12, chap. 26]]. Thus Indians hoped to cement the very first relationships with Spaniards, those of potential alliance during the early days of the military conquest, in part through commensality and hospitality.

After the conquest, documents indicate that Spaniards ate with Indians in other situations and probably for reasons other than forging military alliances. In Oaxaca in 1543 Andrés de Tapia the encomendero challenged Melchor Rodríguez, a Spaniard married to an Indian woman, in court (AGI Justicia 19, no. 7, cited in Carrasco 1997: 100), calling on several witnesses to help him to soil Rodríguez’s reputation, including an Indian who declared: He is held to be and is so degraded that he eats with the Indians on the floor like an Indian. . . . It is public knowledge that he has eaten grasshoppers and played batey [an indigenous ball game] with his buttocks and arms with the Indians, and for this among them he is considered to be of little worth and very vile and debased.

Other witnesses declared that Rodríguez ate “maize soup with the Indians” and still others that he ate “other Indian foods and worms” [see Carrasco 1991:18]. In a court case from Tlaxcala in 1546, a Spaniard was accused of drinking until he threw up and of exposing himself, and it was reported that “his habits, conversation, and household have always been with Indians and between Indians, eating with them on the floor and doing their dances” [Carrasco 1991:19, my translation]. These charges can be interpreted in various ways. On the one hand, one might treat them as anecdotal evidence, focusing on “what really happened” in these par-

4. Tapia was being tried for ill treatment of Indians and for demanding excess tribute. The Indians had accused Tapia of stealing some jewels and presented as evidence a painting of jewels. Tapia argued that the painting represented some jewels that the Indians had paid him before the tribute assessment and that Rodríguez had told the Indians to make the painting.

5. “Su común trato conversación e vivienda ha siempre sido con indios y entre indios comiendo con ellos en el suelo e haciendo sus bailes e mitotes” [Carrasco 1991:19].
ticular cases: whether these particular men really ate with Indians and like Indians, whether they were upper- or lower-class Spaniards, and whether the fact that Indians were hosting these meals is evidence that Spaniards ate with Indians only if the Indians hosted the meals. On the other hand, one might view them as commentaries on what really happened or what could happen. The latter approach draws attention away from the charges' empirical value and treats them as descriptions of scenarios that seemed credible to the parties involved. I use these accusations to show possible behaviors that can be examined in connection with archaeological material interpreted within the historical framework of the negotiation for power in colonial Mexico.

The charges of “eating like an Indian” are clearly negative in tone and malicious in intent. They were meant to damage a person’s reputation. But plaintiffs made these charges in part because they were within the realm of possibility in the minds of colonial judges; they were not incredible or ridiculous. I argue that they were simply a pragmatic strengthening of value judgments about eating that were normally flexible, much as drinking to excess in our society may be admired and even encouraged in a variety of social contexts but also condemned opportunistically. In their everyday lives, Spaniards were eating like Indians more than the negative tone of these charges implies. Furthermore, the references to dancing and playing a ball game indicate that interethnic meals, perhaps even feasts, were sometimes accompanied by other rituals that were symbolically charged and socially and politically important for the participants. It is significant that the participants, especially the Spaniards whose behavior was called into question in these documents, were accused not only of eating but also of participating fully in the social customs associated with commensality among Indians. These documents do not merely describe Spaniards shaming themselves for satiating their hunger. They describe people with an awareness of the symbolic potential of sharing a meal and socializing and manipulating their behavior for the sake of solidifying social relationships of interest to them in spite of possible moral judgment from others. These documents indicate that interethnic meals were part of colonial reality.

Sharing meals was certainly of importance to Indians in colonial Mexico, continuing a tradition of feasting in the Late Aztec period (see Brumfiel 1989; Coe 1991; Durán 1994; Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:69–79; Sahagún 1997: esp. books 4 [36, 37], 8 [18], and 9 [2, 6–10]). In the early colonial period, feasts were an essential element of legal transactions among Nahua. Meals usually accompanied small legal transactions between individuals, while large feasts involving food and drink were part of legal transactions between corporate groups, especially when they involved more than one community (Lockhart 1992:149). Lockhart (1999:111) suggests that feasts among Nahua seem “to have had a function like the signature in the Spanish tradition, an indispensable seal and symbol that the action was now irrevocable.” Spanish colonizers sometimes complained that indigenous legal officials insisted on eating and drinking rather than attending to the legal transactions efficiently (Lockhart 1999). But these complaints indicate that while some Spaniards were busy complaining of the eating and drinking habits of Nahua legal officers, others were reaching for more tortillas and pulque in celebration of a new legal transaction.

So far I have relied on fragmentary documentary accounts from different sites in Mexico, on abstractions by Lockhart (1999) based on similar evidence, and on the general presence or absence of different foodstuffs in archaeological contexts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The idea that some Spaniards were eating like Indians and adopting the serving vessels and other aspects of the material culture and customs of indigenous people can be evaluated more closely with archaeological assemblages from Mexico City. Did European colonizers in sixteenth-century Mexico City adopt the pottery, food, and some of the eating habits of indigenous people? Or did those who lived in the capital of New Spain and the home of some of the wealthiest Europeans in the New World maintain European eating habits and material culture as a strategy of cultural separatism from Indians?

**Mexico City in the Sixteenth Century**

Although they left indigenous rulers in power in many altepetl all over the Basin of Mexico, Spanish colonizers appropriated the political, economic, and religious power of the ancient capital of Tenochtitlan by making Mexico City the capital of the viceroyalty of New Spain as well as the religious capital of Mexico. With over 4,000 European settlers by 1523, barely two years after the conquest, Mexico City has been considered the prime focus of colonization in the Spanish Empire (Boyd-Bowman 1968:xv). The central part of the city, known as la traza, was in principle an area of exclusive Spanish residence and was surrounded on all sides by Indian barrios. La traza covered approximately 100 city blocks and included the Metropolitan Cathedral, the viceregal palace, a marketplace, governmental and religious buildings, and the houses of European colonizers (Flores Marín 1970, Martínez 1988). In spite of efforts to make la traza an area of exclusive Spanish residence Indians continued to live and work in the area after the conquest (Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:164–68; Valero de García Lascarúaín 1991:183).

Spanish-Indian marriages were a common living arrangement in la traza, but the composition of households varied. Some Spanish families had live-in indigenous servants, and some Europeans took up residence in Indian houses. For example, Cosme de Orruntia, a Spaniard, lived in Mexico City in the house of an Indian by the name of Pedro. When he died in 1572, he left Pedro 50 pesos in gold “and all of his belongings except for a few precious stones and jewels and one of his weapons, declaring that he held Pedro in the highest esteem” (Archivo General de Indias, Contratación 209 N.2 R.2).
The city’s population grew in the years after the conquest, partly because of the arrival of Spanish settlers and partly because of an influx of indigenous people into the city [Valero de García Lascurain 1991:159–61]. Soon after the conquest, European immigrants began to produce children (whether in wedlock or not) with Indians and later with Africans brought over as slaves, and a population of “racially mixed” people known generally as castas grew quickly [Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:144–47; Valero de García Lascurain 1991:163]. On the one hand, it seems that Spanish-Indian marriages were common because of the scarcity of European women; approximately 6.3% of the immigrants to the New World were women [Boyd-Bowman 1968:xvi]. On the other hand, the choice of mates in Spanish-Indian marriages can be seen as politically and economically motivated. Spanish men often married Indian noblewomen who could offer as dowry. Some European women married indigenous nobles, especially from the former capitals of the Aztec Triple Alliance or from the kingdom of Michoacan [Carrasco 1997].

Archaeology in Mexico City

The Programa de Arqueología Urbana (PAU) has conducted excavations over part of la traza since 1990 in seven urban blocks in what is known as the centro histórico of Mexico City [Hinojosa Hinojosa 1999, Matos Moctezuma, Hinojosa, and Barrera Rivera 1998]. Most if not all of these excavations have begun as salvage work inside modern buildings built on top of colonial house ruins and the Aztec temples of Mexico-Tenochtitlan. Several of the excavations have continued beyond the immediate needs of salvage operations to include archaeological sampling guided by more culture-historical, scientific, or anthropological questions [Barrera Rivera 1999, Matos Moctezuma 1999]. Of the sites excavated by the PAU, I chose eight for my research (Rodríguez-Alegría 2002) and draw on the data on ceramics from these eight sites in making generalizations about Mexico City. The sites include the Metropolitan Cathedral, Guatemala 38, Justo Sierra 33, Donceles 97, Licenciado Verdad 8, Argentina 15, Correo Mayor 11, and González Obregón 25 (see Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:169–95). Guatemala 38, Justo Sierra 33, Donceles 97, and Licenciado Verdad 8 are particularly appropriate for this discussion because they were excavated extensively and had several contexts identifiable as primary deposition contexts or household trash pits. Furthermore, there is historical information on the families that lived at three of these sites that will help place the archaeological patterns in a broader context.

Guatemala 38 is located in front of the Aztec Templo Mayor and rests partly on top of the front stairs of the temple (fig. 3). The house originally belonged to Padre Luis Méndez, an Andalusian priest [Rivera and Carrillo Villena 1994]. Archaeologists have interpreted a layer of ashes, carbon, and wood beams found in all the excavated areas of the site as evidence that the house burned and collapsed and was then rebuilt during the sixteenth century [Rivera and Carrillo Villena 1994, Carrillo Villena 1998]. Underneath the layer of ashes were potsherds that could be pieced together into several complete pots, suggesting that the house was abandoned quickly when it burned, most likely by accident. A layer of compact, humid soil found in several trenches has been interpreted as a second episode of abandonment of the house and linked to one of the major floods in Mexico City during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries [see Gibson 1964:237]. The final context considered to consist of household garbage is a small trash pit in one of the trenches.

Justo Sierra 33 belonged to two politically powerful and influential men in colonial Mexico: Diego de Soria, a conquistador who gained ownership of the plot in 1529, and Licenciado Gerónimo Gutiérrez de Montealegre, a government official in the city in the early seventeenth century [Mariscal n.d.]. Among the contexts considered to be household deposition contexts and not fill brought in from outside the house are three small household trash pits and a few thin stratigraphic layers sealed beneath floors that do not appear to be part of thicker layers of fill. Most of the material considered household refuse comes from the three trash pits (Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:185).

Donceles 97 is located half a block northwest of the Templo Mayor (fig. 3). Given that it is on Donceles Street, the “Street of the Nobles,” it probably belonged to a noble household. Interpreting the ceramic remains will depend partly on this possibility and partly on the internal logic of the assemblage. Five small household trash pits were uncovered at this site, including a colo-

**FIG. 3. Sites in la traza discussed (based on Matos Moctezuma 1999).**
nial well that was filled with ceramics and kitchen debris such as plant remains and animal bones.

Licenciado Verdad 8, although better known as the site of the seventeenth-century Convento de Santa Teresa la Antigua, was owned in the sixteenth century by Don Luis de Ribera, who donated the plot and some money to the nuns in 1614. However, historical documents make it clear that he did not live there. The families who lived in the houses located there refused to leave when Don Luis gave the plot away, and the police intervened to evict them [Barrera Rodríguez, Medina Martínez, and Rivera García n.d.]. This indicates that they were not living on their own property and therefore were probably poor and that they were not so influential that colonial authorities would have had qualms about evicting them. The plot remained empty for decades before the nuns began building their convent in 1684.

Archaeological Patterns in Mexico City

If the European colonizers who lived in la traza accepted indigenous material culture related to eating, one would except to find Aztec-tradition pottery in these houses. If they were “eating like Indians,” Aztec plates and bowls, the pottery forms typically used to serve food, should be found in all colonial contexts. If, in contrast, they rejected indigenous material culture related to food service, this attitude should be evident in an overwhelming presence of European majolica and Asian porcelain and little or no Aztec-tradition pottery in Spanish houses. After all, Mexico City had prime access to trade goods from Europe and Asia (see Fournier García 1990), and European potters who made majolica tableware settled in Mexico City only a few years after the conquest [Lister and Lister 1982]. If the colonizers rejected indigenous material culture related to food service, the indigenous pottery, if any, found in Spanish houses would be mostly forms suitable for cooking such as large pots, basins, and jars or limited to certain areas of the house occupied by indigenous servants. Do archaeological patterns in Spanish houses in Mexico City confirm either of these possibilities?

From long before the Spanish conquest until sometime after 1625, indigenous people made earthenware that we know as Red Ware [fig. 4] because of its highly burnished red slip (Charlton 1979). Red Ware was made mostly into serving vessels such as bowls and dishes, although one may also find Red Ware jars and other cookware (González Rul 1988:fig. 3c; Charlton, Fournier, and Cervantes 1995; Parsons 1966; Rodríguez-Alegria 2002). A few historical sources indicate that Spaniards used indigenous pottery. One of these is a report that Martín Cortés, son of Hernán Cortés, used ceramics from Cuauhtitlán, an indigenous pottery production center, to celebrate his son’s baptism: “Alonso de Ávila [encomendero of Cuauhtitlán] invited the marquise to a feast. . . . The masquerade was very joyful, and then the dinner, which was very well made and very expensive, and in which they used cups that they call alcarraras and earthenware jars, and these were made in Alonso de Ávila’s town in Cuauhtitlán where they made much pottery” (Suárez de Peralta 1990:185, my translation; see also Charlton, Fournier, and Cerrantes 1995, Fournier García 1990). Another document that indicates that Spaniards used or at least purchased Aztec-tradition ceramics is the so-called Códice de los alfareros de Cuauhtitlán, a painted document created by indigenous potters in 1564. In this document the potters protested that their mayor had purchased pottery from them but then refused to pay. The document includes drawings of the pottery in question, as well as an appeal to the Spanish authorities (see Barlow 1951).

The Spaniards began importing majolica from Europe and set up majolica factories in Mexico City and elsewhere in the early years after the conquest (Deagan 1987; Fournier García 1990; Goggin 1968; Jamieson 2001; Lister and Lister 1982, 1987). Although archaeologists have found several other ceramic wares in colonial sites in Mexico, including Asian and European porcelain and other indigenous wares (see Charlton 1979, Deagan 1987, Fournier García 1990, Rodríguez-Alegria 2002), I focus on majolica and Red Ware because they were produced in different contexts by different populations (Europeans and Indians) and have therefore been associated, at least in the archaeological literature, with different racial or ethnic groups.

In this study I focus on serving vessels, considering cookware only when it facilitates preliminary comparisons with patterns from other sites. [A complete analysis of cooking vessels, including lead-glazed and plain cookware, in these house sites is forthcoming.] Furthermore, I examine only the ceramics in Spanish houses. It would be ideal to include a comparative sample from indigenous houses, but no such sample exists at present. The empirical question is whether the Spanish colonizers transformed their own eating habits to negotiate social relations with Indians, and the appropriate contexts for examining this issue are Spanish houses. [Whether indigenous people changed their own eating habits is another question.] Finally, analysis of the faunal and botanical remains from the houses excavated by the PAU is still in progress at the Museo del Templo Mayor in Mexico City, and therefore I focus on the ceramic vessels found in these sites and, to a lesser extent, on references to food and eating practices in historical documents and on a few archaeological contexts excavated at other colonial sites.

The overall pattern in the eight house sites analyzed...
here is clear: Spanish families living in *la traza* were using indigenous pottery in large quantities (table 1). Spanish majolica, whether imported from Europe or produced in Mexico City, makes up 50.1% of the potsherds in these houses and is clearly the ware with the highest frequency, but Red Ware sherds make up 29.2% of the total sherds of serving vessels. Furthermore, Red Ware cookware sherds (including large basins, jars, and other storage and cooking pots) have a lower frequency than other Red Ware sherds. If one takes into consideration only rim sherds, majolica makes up 40.3% of the sample and Red Ware cookware 42.0%. In spite of the differences between percentages of rims or all sherds, one generalization is true: Red Ware serving vessels were an important part of the pottery assemblage in Spanish houses in Mexico City. This is an important contrast with the patterns found in Florida and the Caribbean, where archaeologists have found higher frequencies of indigenous cooking vessels compared with much lower frequencies of indigenous serving vessels in Spanish or criollo houses (e.g., Ewen 1991, Smith 1995). Red Ware was not brought into Spanish houses in Mexico City only as cookware for indigenous women; it was used mostly for serving food.

This general pattern becomes more meaningful when we compare the assemblages found in the four houses that contained primary contexts of deposition. In Guatemala 38, the priest’s house, majolica is clearly preferred for serving vessels, making up 80.3% \( n = 151 \) of the total sherds (table 2). Aztec Red Ware makes up only 9.0% \( n = 17 \) of the total. The abundance of majolica remains overwhelming if one considers rim sherds only: 80.3% of rims \( n = 94 \) are of majolica and 12.0% \( n = 14 \) of Red Ware serving vessels (table 3). Furthermore, all the bowls found in this house are majolica, and of 77 plate sherds 74 are majolica, 2 Asian porcelain, and only 1 Red Ware. Of the 17 Red Ware sherds, 14 are fragments of very small jars, perhaps used to transport liquids or as drinking cups but not necessarily as useful at the dinner table as bowls and plates. The assemblage at Guatemala 38 is in agreement with the general pattern one would expect as the result of a strategy of cultural separatism and boundary maintenance. Priests were often involved in attempts at colonizing the consciousness (following Comaroff and Comaroff 1989) of indigenous people and creating Europeanized material worlds for them. I argue that the strong preference for European pottery in Guatemala 38 is evidence of the priest’s rejection of indigenous culture. This household used a variety of majolica made mostly in Seville and Mexico City. A total of 29 sherds from Guatemala 38 are from Seville, 37 are Mexico City fine-grade sherds, and 44 are Mexico City common-grade sherds. Thus, the preference of majolica over Red Ware serving vessels could be achieved by using a variety of local and imported products.

In the primary contexts of Justo Sierra 33, where important political and military figures of the conquest lived, Red Ware makes up 58.6% \( n = 174 \) of all sherds (table 2) and majolica only 15.8% \( n = 47 \). Other indigenous ceramics, probably from Cholula (see Rodríguez-Alegría 2002), make up 17.2% \( n = 51 \) of the sherds and are mostly from plates (43 sherds) and other serving-vessel forms. Red Ware rim sherds make up 64.9% \( n = 161 \) and majolica only 10.5% of the total. Red Ware at

**Fig. 4.** *Red Ware sherds excavated by the Programa de Arqueología Urbana in Mexico City.*
TABLE 1
Total Ceramic Frequencies in Eight Mexico City Houses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Frequency</th>
<th>Total Percentage</th>
<th>Rim Frequency</th>
<th>Rim Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cholula</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majolica</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian porcelain</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Ware serving vessels</td>
<td>2,078</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>1,976</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red cookware</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7,121</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>4,702</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a*The classification of ceramic sherds in the collections as Cholula pottery is based on their decoration, which consists of geometric motifs in white, orange, and red outlined with thick black lines on an orange background. This classification, however, is tentative, and more work needs to be done to conclude whether the ceramics are from Cholula. Their forms include hemispherical bowls, plates, and drinking cups [see Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:231–45, 382–91].

...this site took a variety of forms that could be used for serving food, including bowls (80 sherd) and plates (75 sherds).

The high proportion of Red Ware at Justo Sierra 33 raises the possibility that indigenous servants lived in the house and used it there. If so, one would expect that the frequency of Red Ware sherds would be significantly higher in areas of the house where indigenous servants lived or ate. Only two trash pits have enough ceramics to permit consideration of a possible association between certain spaces of the house and indigenous serving vessels. Trash Pit 1 is located toward the back of the house and contains 48 sherds, 21 of them majolica, 7 Asian porcelain, 7 Red Ware, and 4 Cholula. The Colonial Trash Pit is located toward the front of the house and contains 366 sherds, of which only 10 are majolica but 162 are Red Ware and 45 are Cholula. There is no Asian porcelain in this pit. A chi-square test suggests that the distribution of pottery sherds in these two trash pits is not the same ($\chi^2 = 168.524$, d.f. = 5, $p < 0.001$, Cramer’s $V = 0.638$ [see Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:301]). The frequencies of indigenous ceramic sherds are much higher in the front part of the house than in the back (Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:297–304).

This pattern could confirm a pattern of segregation of spaces in which servants ate in the front part of the house and discarded broken pottery where it was broken while the Spanish colonizers ate in the back, but this would be the only evidence for such segregation of spaces that we have for this site. There is in fact a better explanation for this pattern. In sixteenth-century Mexico City the front part of the house was often where house owners lived, while the back was the living quarters of servants. Although houses in Mexico City were not initially elaborate, a few ostentatious families indulged in iron grilles for their windows and iron door handles [Kubler 1948:197–99]. House porticoes in the center of Mexico City, especially those surrounding the main plaza, had to adhere to specific dimensions, and historical documents describe the destruction of porticoes that exceeded those dimensions [Kubler 1948:75–76]. If the colonizers who lived in Justo Sierra 33 wanted to offer a feast to indigenous elites, the best place to do so would be in the front of the house, where they typically engaged in ostentatious display and where political negotiations and the simulacrum of amicable relations between Spaniards and Indians would be most public and therefore most effective. They would have used indigenous wares to show their hospitality and provide an acceptable meal for their guests. I argue that this was the case at Justo Sierra 33.

The patterns in Donceles 97 are somewhat difficult to explain because there is no information on the families that lived there. As is the case with Justo Sierra 33, there is much more Red Ware than majolica. Red Ware accounts for 70.8% ($n = 75$) and majolica for only 11.3% ($n = 12$) of the sherds in primary contexts. The percentages of rim sherds are roughly similar; Red Ware makes up 77.8% ($n = 70$) of all rims and majolica only 8.9% ($n = 8$). In contrast with the situation at Guatemala 38 but similar to that at Justo Sierra 33, the Red Ware in Donceles 97 was made into serving vessels, including bowls (32 sherds), and plates (27 sherds). Thus, whatever the socioeconomic status of the people who lived at this site, they used both majolica and Aztec-tradition serving vessels. A pattern of rejection of indigenous pottery in houses in la traza is not supported by the evidence from this site. In the four colonial trash pits in Donceles 97, the proportions of majolica, Red Ware, and other serving vessels are similar. With the ceramic data, it is not possible to argue that the spaces in which Red Ware and majolica were used were different [Rodríguez-Alegría 2002:290–93].

At Licenciado Verdad 8, where apparently poor families lived in houses that belonged to Don Luis de Ribera, the ceramic assemblage has yet another pattern: 60.4% ($n = 163$) of the sherds found there are majolica, while only 17.0% ($n = 46$) are Red Ware serving vessels (table...
Once again, if we consider only rim sherds, the pattern is similar: majolica makes up 52.9% (n = 72) and Red Ware makes up 30.9% (n = 42) (table 3). Majolica accounts for 73.5% of all bowl fragments, 20% of all simple plate sherds, and 88.7% of all compound-silhouette plate sherds. At the same time, Red Ware accounts for 20.6% of bowl sherds, 80% of all simple plate sherds, and 3.2% of compound-silhouette plate sherds. It is difficult to interpret the pattern of vessel forms at Licenciado Verdad 8, but it is safe to argue that majolica was the preferred serving vessel, although Red Ware was used frequently as well. It is possible that the people who lived in these houses received some of the majolica as gifts from other Spaniards, just as they lived on land that belonged to someone else. The majolica and porcelain at this site could have been hand-me-downs from wealthier households. Alternatively, it is possible that lower-status families had little to negotiate with indigenous people and much to lose if they adopted indigenous material culture. Perhaps they benefited the most from using and displaying European material goods in pursuing their distinction from Indians. In any case, the pattern of use of European and indigenous pottery is clear. A rejection of Aztec material culture in Licenciado Verdad 8 is not supported by the material evidence, and neither is the idea that simply because the families were poor they did not use European pottery.

The archaeological patterns in these houses permit several generalizations. First, Spaniards in Mexico City, in general, used Aztec-tradition serving vessels. There was no blanket rejection of indigenous material culture, at least in terms of the paraphernalia used for eating. Second, Spaniards in Mexico City also used majolica. Instead of merely choosing between majolica and Red Ware or European and indigenous products, they generally combined the two. Third, the use of indigenous pottery in Spanish houses varied. Some houses used indigenous serving vessels as their primary tableware, while others used it very little and in a very limited array of forms. I would argue that such variation was purposeful and strategic, not simply a matter of chance. Furthermore, variation in the use of European and indigenous ceramics among Spanish colonizers was not simply a regional phenomenon or a function of problems of trade, supply, and availability in different colonies in the Americas. The varied patterns of consumption of indigenous serving vessels in la traza, one of the places in the Spanish Empire with the best supply of local and imported ceramics, were a result of the choices of individual Spaniards and the ideas they had about negotiating power by cultural means. Finally, the use of European or indigenous pottery was not just a function of wealth, in fact, at Licenciado Verdad 8, probably the poorest houses excavated, majolica forms an important part of the colonial component (see also Rodríguez-Alegria 2002, n.d.).

Conclusion

The meaning of these archaeological patterns becomes clearer when we consider their implications for social practice in sixteenth-century Mexico and the consequences of this practice for social relations and power. Spanish men (and even some Spanish women) were marrying Indians, often high-ranking nobles, in Mexico, and inviting indigenous lords to eat could have facilitated plans for such marriage. Sahagún ([1932]) describes the typical rituals and transactions for a marriage between Indians, including visits to the parents of the bride by marriage brokers sent by the groom’s family, meetings between the two families, and finally, a large feast that included the two families and members of the community in which they drank cacao or (for elders) pulque, ate, decorated with flowers, burned incense, and presented offerings of cloth and corn. Appropriate meals could have helped the Spanish colonizers to marry elites who could offer them land and wealth. Indigenous people who participated in those rituals would also have had the opportunity to form relationships or alliances with the colonizers, a powerful new class.

Spanish colonizers often depended on the power of indigenous leaders to mobilize labor and obtain tribute. I argue that eating with calpulli leaders and especially with heads of altepetl made it seem appropriate and desirable for indigenous elites to control labor and tribute flows on behalf of the Spaniards. Before the conquest, the Aztec kings often brought lower-ranking lords and rulers of altepetl from all over the empire to Mexico-Tenochtitlan for feasts and other rituals in which the king would give his guests gifts of cloth, fine clothing, and other symbolically charged objects and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Cholula</th>
<th>Indigena</th>
<th>Majolica</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Cookeware</th>
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<tr>
<td>Guatemala 38</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td>80.3</td>
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</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
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<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>17.2</td>
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<td>.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Licenciado Verdad 8</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>5.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>43.3</td>
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### Table 3

Sherd Frequencies per House Site for Houses with Trash Pits

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regalia that were exclusive to the nobility (Brumfiel 1987, Smith 1986). In the colonial period, some Spaniards gave European clothing, armor, shields, and weaponry to Indians, who sometimes coveted these items as symbolic of their alliance with the powerful [Haskett 1991:161–64]. I suggest that this kind of exchange sometimes took place during eating rituals in some of the houses of la traza—that Spaniards offered Indians appropriate meals, including indigenous ingredients served in fine Aztec-tradition pottery, and offered gifts of Spanish clothing and other items to make friendships and alliances with them more attractive. Thus food and eating, especially the right kinds of food served in the right kinds of plates and accompanied by the appropriate ceremonies, served to recognize indigenous power, mobilize labor, and create social links between the two groups for other important political purposes, all the while transforming the material aspects of the daily lives of both Spaniards and Indians in New Spain. Eating like an Indian was clearly at odds with moral judgments against adopting indigenous material culture and cultural practices and with strategies for creating Spanish hegemony by maintaining a clear division between the conquerors and the conquered, but the immediate interests of some colonizers made eating like an Indian seem an attractive strategy for negotiating power.

Other sites in the Spanish colonies, especially in the Andes, have material patterns that could also be interpreted as the result of commensality between Spaniards and Indians, but this possibility remains understudied. In Locumbilla, Peru [Smith 1997ab], and perhaps in Tarapaya, Bolivia [Van Buren 1999], for example, it is possible that Spanish colonizers were eating with kurakas for the purpose of establishing alliances with them for the management of labor on the colonizers’ behalf. Could the presence of Inka Polychrome pottery at Locumbilla be evidence that the Spanish made attempts at providing the appropriate serving vessels and perhaps even indigenous food for these rituals? This is a possibility that can be examined in depth with the appropriate archaeological and historical evidence only if we abandon the idea that the Spanish colonizers would never have purposefully adopted the material culture of the indigenous people.

The archaeological patterns in Florida and the Caribbean discussed by Deagan [1983], Ewen [1991], McEwan [1992], Shepard [1987], and Smith [1995] are different from patterns in Mexico and the Andes. In the years following the discovery of the islands of the Caribbean in 1492, Spanish colonizers recognized the power of caciques and negotiated alliances with them for the organization of tribute collection (Gibson 1987). Spaniards also married indigenous cacicas [female chiefs], probably to form alliances with Indian elites [Hodges, Deagan, and Reitz 1995:80]. Thus the context and practices of the negotiation of power in these colonies are in some ways similar to these in other areas. However, the power of indigenous elites in the Caribbean may not have lasted into the sixteenth century because of catastrophic depopulation and forceful subjugation of the indigenous people. Therefore, negotiation was not the main strategy of Spanish conquistadors in the islands of the Caribbean, at least not for more than a few years.

In contrast, indigenous populations in Florida, although decimated by disease, continued to exist for over 200 years after the Spanish conquest [Merritt 1983]. Merritt has argued that the strategy of the Spaniards in Florida was to negotiate and form alliances with caciques for the sake of controlling access to labor and tribute while at the same time transforming them culturally. He suggests that Spanish colonizers in Florida hoped to Europeanize the daily life of caciques and use them as examples to facilitate the similar transformation of others. Thus, their strategy was to preserve as much of their European lifestyle and material culture as possible, given the constraints of life in a colonial outpost. This strategy of separatism certainly characterized the house of a priest [Guatemala 38] in Mexico City and has been discussed elsewhere as well [e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 1989]. Although Spaniards in St. Augustine did incorporate indigenous foodstuffs into their diet, Reitz and Cumbaa [1983] interpret the archaeological patterns as an adaptation to local conditions, including the environment, agricultural productivity, and problems of supply from Spain and elsewhere because of infrequent and insufficient shipments of food and other commodities.

I argue that, more than just a strategy of separatism, food and eating practices were cultural means for negotiating power in the Spanish colonies. The widespread patterns of incorporation of indigenous food and

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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>33.8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total              | 591         | 48           | 8.1          | 4         | 7       | 5.8          |
pottery by Spanish households in the Americas clearly point to commensality as a productive avenue for understanding cultural and social change in colonial sites. A broader generalization to be drawn from this discussion is that power in the Spanish Empire was often negotiated culturally and not just by coercion or through governmental or administrative paths. Furthermore, cultural change in the colonial period did not simply happen, entirely devoid of agency and political motivation, as people acted as carriers of culture traits. Change often occurred in very strategic ways as the agents of colonization manipulated culture with political motivations. Finally, there was a high degree of variability in the strategies for cultural change within the Spanish Empire. Change occurred according to the political situation and the motivations of individuals, and one of the ways of manipulating change, culture, and power was eating like an Indian.

Comments

Solange Alberro
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It is obvious to any historian of the colonial period in Spanish America that the Spaniards of the American viceroyalties and their dependencies adopted indigenous practices and therefore experienced acculturation. Looking at the way Spaniards adopted eating habits from the Indians, Rodríguez-ALEGRIA makes an assumption which soon becomes a thinly veiled assertion: that the Spaniards of New Spain who ate like Indians did so because they ate with Indians as a way of negotiating power with them. To support his hypothesis, he focuses on the archaeological remains of pottery found in colonial Spanish houses and compares the distributions of indigenous wares and European and Creole ones in Spanish settlements in the Caribbean, the Andes, Peru, and Mexico City. With some variations due to distance and types of communications and settlements, he finds indigenous ware everywhere not only present but important. For him this has a clear explanation: that in order to establish good relations with Indian elites and to obtain certain advantages, Spaniards invited them to their homes and served them meals in indigenous dishes.

The historical background for this assertion is insufficient. The historical bibliography is as poor as the anthropological one and like it almost entirely restricted to recent and North American authors, and there is a little use of chronicles and none of other documents such as notarial archives (with wills, for example), records dealing with dowries, properties, sequestrations, and sales of goods, and guild and town council regulations. Consequently, the archaeological facts are the only ones considered, and the sixteenth century is reduced to a homogeneous period notwithstanding the vast difference between the first postconquest decades and the final decades of the century, when the great epidemics had wasted the indigenous population, destroyed the traditional powers of the Indian elites, and firmly established monarchic institutions throughout the viceroyalty. Beyond this, it is difficult to isolate ways of eating from the adoption of escaupiles (protective waistcoats), feather pictures and mitres, and maize-marrow crosses in churches, cathedrals, and houses, the introduction of indigenous terms into American Spanish, the generalization among Spanish people of forms of sociability and courtesy of clear indigenous origin, and many other manifestations of the powerful processes of acculturation and syncretism.

The main point, however, is that we cannot assume that the Spanish served Indian noblemen meals in European and indigenous vessels their homes. Can we imagine the British governors of Queen Victoria’s time inviting African or Australian chiefs or other authorities into their residences and eating their own food with them in their own ways, probably with their fingers and perhaps seated on the ground or on straw mats? Only frontiersmen, soldiers, and conquerors could have done so, as an acceptance of the local customs of their “hosts.” The treatment of guests consists in receiving them with one’s best food, tableware, and table manners. The Indian principales of Mexico City, for example, who spoke, read, and wrote Spanish, whose sons studied Latin in Franciscan or Jesuit schools, who wore mostly the clothes of Spanish hidalgos because they were considered as such, and who perhaps owned Flemish tapestries, books, and chinaware, would not have felt honored by being treated “like Indians.” In fact, they expected to be served the best of Spanish cuisine from the finest European or Asian wares, because it is a universal rule of courtesy and diplomacy that the host who is seeking favors or advantages from his guest must display the excellence of his own culture.

Furthermore, why postulate that the Spanish used indigenous items only when they ate with Indians? If they appreciated feather pictures and maize-marrow crosses and images exclusively for their beauty, they may also have valued fine Aztec Red ware for its practical and aesthetic qualities and used it regularly. Finally, the assumption that Europeans adopted indigenous items and eating habits in order to obtain individual advantages from Indian elites shows that, although Rodríguez-ALEGRIA recognizes the acculturation of the Spaniards, he does not conceive it as a global process with multiple causes. After the dictatorship of unique explanatory factors such as class struggle, racial and ethnic conflict, resistance against domination, and ultimately, gender, we must consider any social fact as the product of numerous and complex causes, economic, social, political, ideological, cultural, and symbolic.
Prudence counsels letting the archaeologists argue among themselves, especially since hard evidence seems to be missing for several of the links holding Rodríguez-Alegría’s thesis together. To cite one example, he takes for granted that service in Aztec pottery is equivalent to “eating like an Indian.” One would think that the latter involved other imponderables, above all exactly what was served in the dishes and bowls. That Rodríguez-Alegría goes beyond what his data strictly suggest is clear. The question is, is he wrong to do so?

None of the assertions in the closing paragraphs strikes me as particularly far-fetched. This is especially true of the essay’s larger point: that the Spanish Empire housed a broader range of practices than those found in Florida and the Caribbean, where separate identities based on cultural continuities proved strongest. The problem is not one of Deagan et al’s having misinterpreted their data but one of extending their findings to characterize colonial America as a whole—as if there were a single “Spanish” consumption pattern, separatist or not, away from home.

What little is known of contemporary practice in Spain sheds scant comparative light on the situation in the New World. The signals there are far too mixed to be read with the clarity both Deagan et al. and Rodríguez-Alegría bring to their differing interpretations. The clearest peninsular parallel was the former Muslims known as moriscos, who were often referred to as the indios de acá, or “Indians over here.” Most of the members of their clerical and political elites emigrated after the surrender of Granada in 1492 and the 1502 edict that ordered remaining Muslims to convert. “Old Christian” leaders felt little need to pact with the remnant of morisco leaders that stayed in Spain, although they had little objection to absorbing this handful of lineages into the Granada oligarchy. At the same time, royal edicts repeatedly mandated the reform or abolition of traditional morisco customs, which were seen as the principal obstacle to the adoption of Christian beliefs and behavior.

It is telling that foodstuffs did not feature in such lists alongside other fundamentals such as dress and language. Neither were they mentioned in the detailed counterattack in defense of the moriscos known as the “Memorial of Núñez Muley” of 1567. This was not because moriscos were seen as lacking their own foodways. Contemporary documents frequently acknowledged the existence of separate foods and dietary practices, placing special emphasis on the fact that New Christians of both Jewish and Islamic origin avoided pork and cooked with oil instead of lard. Explicit rejection of morisco foodways appears most frequently in popular milieux—in, for example, Old Christians’ denunciations of crypto-Muslims to the Inquisition. The same sources, along with the rest of the documentary record, make no reference to communal dining at higher social levels. Within the peninsular context, it seems that Spaniards in all sociopolitical berths felt little need to accommodate moriscos either as a political group or as bearers of distinctive customs meriting recognition and respect. Old Christian material culture and daily practices certainly wound up absorbing many foodways of Islamic and North African origin. However, there is little evidence for the existence in the domestic colonial context—which would include the North African garrisons as well as most of southern Spain—of the sort of table-top negotiation that Rodríguez-Alegría finds among the pottery shards of sixteenth-century Mexico City.

Yet in the end, neither does the peninsular record rule out such commensality overseas. Rodríguez-Alegría carefully circumscribes his argument to the early phase of the colonial period, but why stop speculation here? One wonders what his Spanish-Indian elite table talk looks like in the long run. Is there in fact a long run, or does the Mexico City pottery mixture capture one particular moment in time? The historical record is likely to be of greater assistance here by establishing how long Spaniards actually engaged in the sort of dealings with Indian lords that called forth this particular form of sociability. One likely scenario would entail the displacement of these encounters to the provincial towns and countryside. Such a relegation—whenever it took place—would have helped mark the capital as a locus of political as well as cultural segregation. Another possibility is that the latter may well have been intensified by criollos eager to distance themselves from the indigenous population. Clearly, further work by both archaeologists and historians could aid in devising a more precise chronology and geography for the persistence of a mode of colonial domination complex enough to require not only negotiation but also diverse forms of ritual recognition of the overlapping hierarchies involved.

For some time now, important changes have been taking place in the study of the American societies of the colonial period. As opposed to a simplifying image shaped in dichotomous terms and imbued with essentialism (Spaniards/Indians, masters/slaves, conquerors/defeated, dominating/dominated), more and more research work offers us a complex and extremely rich panorama of the relations and the social and cultural processes triggered by the conquest and subsequent colonization of those territories. Rodríguez-Alegría’s paper can be considered an example of this. It has two novel aspects that I would like to bring out. The first is the unusual focus on cultural changes undergone by the Spaniards and not by the Indians, and the second is its dependence primarily on materials from archaeology, a discipline that in Latin...
America has mainly focused on the study of pre-Columbian cultures and only recently on the postconquest periods.

I share with Rodríguez-Alegría not only his criticism of Foster’s “conquest culture" model but also his opposition to the notion that “Spaniards everywhere in the Americas tried to reproduce a European lifestyle and rejected indigenous material culture.” As he suggests, this type of interpretation is usually based on the idea of cultural continuity and the maintenance of well-defined and impermeable frontiers between Spaniards and Indians and linked to an essentialist conception of identities.

Both the historical documents and the archaeological assemblages offer good evidence to the contrary: those frontiers were rather porous and at times even diffuse, and the interaction between the different groups gave rise not only to changes in the different cultural universes but also to multiple processes of cultural creation and invention.

Rodríguez-Alegría shows that food and food-related items are a privileged study field for the verification of these phenomena. His work opens new, almost unexplored paths that could prove to be very fruitful. I would like to comment on two aspects of it with the aim of exploring paths that could prove to be very fruitful. I would like to comment on two aspects of it with the aim of introducing other nuances. Before I do, however, I must point out that, given that he discusses the changes undergone by the Spaniards in Mexico, I am surprised that he has not taken into consideration the work of Alberro (1992). Although his theoretical perspective is different, this study would have provided him with additional historical information for his argument.

The incorporation of American products into the Spaniards’ diet, a subject on which there is a great deal of historical information, was unacceptable during the conquest period and in subsequent years. The colonizers’ very survival depended on it. The introduction of the basic products of the Mediterranean diet (wheat, wine, oil, cattle) and their production at a sufficient level required time and peaceful life conditions. In the Andes, for example, the lengthy conquest period was followed by nearly 20 years of civil war, with herds constantly impoverished and harvests either destroyed or nonexistent because of the lack of opportunity to plant. Circumstances played a sometimes decisive role in the consumption of autochthonous products, thus helping to overcome prejudices against new foods.

This incorporation of products was not neutral but mediated by the autochthonous cultures; indigenous experience served as an immediate reference in the establishment of what was edible and what was not. In the same way, the first meals that were cooked with those products—the first dishes tasted by the Spaniards—were indigenous. The conquering armies brought with them women of European or African origin and numerous Indian women, either as servants or as sexual companions.

Later on, Indian women—together with blacks and half-castes—took over the kitchens of many prominent Spanish homes, where they put into practice and undoubtedly shared their culinary knowledge. In the homes of more humble Spaniards, the women who took over the kitchen, the table, and the master’s bed were all Indians. What ingredients, recipes, utensils, and table manners had priority in these homes?

Finally, in addition to the everyday commensality between Spaniards and Indians resulting from, for example, cohabitation with an Indian wife or mistress, I think that there were cases of extraordinary commensality which favoured the negotiation of social and power relationships in specific situations as Rodríguez-Alegría suggests. This type of commensality is not only found in the Mexican or Inca cultural tradition but also a part of other traditions, amongst them those of the Iberian Peninsula.

The approach of Rodríguez-Alegría in this article is a good one and reinforces some recent trends in writing on colonialism which suggest that early writings incorrectly simplified the complex process of cultural interactions. Not only do colonized peoples have more agency than has been allowed them but colonizers themselves bear witness to the impact of the colonized on their bodies and lives.

I would like to suggest a few questions that may enrich future work in this area and present an example that extends Rodríguez-Alegría’s discussion. The analysis of food practice offers a potentially rich source of information about colonial (and other) forms of encounter. It is well known that the initial form of behavior expressing welcome of foreign strangers in the Americas was the offering of food, although indigenous peoples meant their offerings as an initial sally in what they anticipated would be reciprocal exchange while Europeans, notably the Spanish, accepted these food gifts as offerings or tributes (Gutierrez 1991). Thus, there is also a possibility that some of the Aztec redware dishes used in the four households analyzed here represent gifts brought by indigenous visitors, either with foods in them or empty.

Information on the nature of the relationships between colonizers and colonized comes from a number of kinds of material culture, including ceramics and food remains; when the faunal and botanical analyses of these sites in Mexico City are complete, the story will be a richer one. In fact, although Rodríguez-Alegría speaks of the significance of food, he presents data only on ceramics. He does not consider what kinds of dishes might have been served in these bowls and plates, nor does he consistently consider differences in ratios of bowls/plates between majolicas and Aztec redwares. If there are data on Aztec cuisine, the uses of bowls versus plates may provide additional information, even before food remains have been

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1. In using the term “different groups” I am thinking not of the agglutinative categories Indians/Spaniards/Negroes but of the multiple differences (cultural, social, ethnic) that underlie each of these categories.
analyzed, on what was being served in the meals he sug-
gests were being offered to indigenous elites. But cer-
tainly the inclusion of information on the relative reli-
ance on European or indigenous cuisines will add a great
deal to this analysis.

While I appreciate the complexity in marital patterns
that Rodríguez-Alegría describes, there is another form
of complication that should be acknowledged, and that
is time and its impact on social relationships. As noted
by Rogers (1990), uses of European goods varied in Ari-
kara domestic deposits in relation to specific historical
circumstances, increasing initially and then sometimes
decreasing. If these deposits vary temporally or if there
are stratified contexts within them, it would be interest-
ing to see whether the use of Aztec redwares remains
consistent within households.

Finally, in the interest of extending the concept of “eat-
ing like an Indian” to other settings, a series of Pueblo
and Hispanic sites in the Rio Grande River valley offers
evidence of a different kind of colonial interaction
(Rothschild 2003). The Spanish colony in the American
Southwest was marginal to imperial interests; there were
relatively few resources of economic value to be acquired
there [minerals were notably absent], and the colony was
maintained in large part because the Spanish did not
want other European nations to have the land. Life in
the colony was difficult for Europeans, and their de-
mands on indigenous labor, along with the decimation
of that labor force through disease and other factors,
made life difficult for all. The Spanish and later Hispan-
ics ate in large part like Indians—although they did in-
troduce European crops such as wheat, peaches, and mel-
os, and domesticated animals, especially sheep, they
relied on a large extent on native corn and other crops
and to some degree on wild animals and fish. They also
relied heavily on indigenous ceramics, using majolica
when they could, especially among the elite, but induc-
ing indigenous potters to create Spanish forms of pottery.
As there were few Spanish women or wives in the colony,
it is not surprising that domestic behavior was heavily
influenced by indigenous ways. Both local and Mexican
indigenous women would have had a major impact on
the cooking and serving of foods in the colony. And the
impact was again a reciprocal one; there are examples
from the Southwest (Mills 2003) and elsewhere in Latin
America [Weismantel 1988] of the enduring effect on
contemporary foodways of Spanish influence. The in-
terconnections between Europeans and indigenous peo-
oples extend beyond foodways. In many Hispanic sites
of the Southwest, tools were made of stone as well as metal
into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century
(Atherton 2005).

I applaud Rodríguez-Alegría’s efforts and hope that
continuing research on this topic will add to our knowl-
edge of colonial interactions and their expression in
foodways.

Rodríguez-Alegría has made a laudable and in some re-
spects successful intervention into the social and cul-
tural history of early colonial Mexico, demonstrating
the suggestiveness of combining the urban archaeology of
the postconquest period with historical documents about
social practices and material culture, especially food us-
ages. In Mexico City Spanish conquerors and indigenous
subalterns were not hermetically sealed off from each
other; the Spanish made strategic choices about the adop-
tion of elements of Indian material culture in order to
ensure their access to economic and political resources
through the mediation of the indigenous notables with
whom they presumably shared their domestic tables. His
 treatment presents several problems, however, all of
which stem from not having delved deeply enough into
the history of the period to substantiate some of his in-
terpretive claims. From the point of view of a historian,
this is not a matter of criticizing the poaching of one
by another’s territory, since historians are often
sympathetic to interdisciplinary methodology. But when
an inquiry depends so heavily upon historical docu-
ments, it seems incumbent upon the researcher not only
to know something of the context of the claims he is
making but also to take into account the nature of those
materials in much the way a historian would.

Had Rodríguez-Alegría ventured deeper into the vo-
oluminous historiography of colonial Mexico, his argu-
ment would have been more convincing. His main con-
clusion, adumbrated in the opening pages of the essay—
that “relationships of power in Mexico . . . were negoti-
ted not just with swords and gunpowder but also in
cultural terms”—depends for its revisionist leverage on
the knocking down of a Black Legend straw-man of Span-
ish brutality largely dismantled by the work of historians
during the last half-century. In religion, economic rela-
tions, reproductive patterns, and many other areas of co-
lonial life, domination of indigenous people may not
have been pretty, but it was not necessarily violent and
certainly functioned more on a terrain of cultural ne-
gotiation than on one of military force. Descending to a
level of greater specificity in the analysis, we find an-
other questionable implied assertion arising from his cri-
tique of “previous interpretations” (most of which he
finds in the work of archaeologists, by the way, rather
than of historians) of the colonizers’ material life in the
New World. This is that either the Spanish, out of the
natural conservatism of colonists, tried to reproduce
their lifestyle, including their eating habits, wherever
they settled in the New World or they were amenable
to “eating like Indians” to forge strategic linkages with
members of the indigenous elite through forms of com-
mensality. But there is nothing at all incompatible be-
tween the two practices. We know that colonists ate
tortillas, used indigenous condiments, consumed native
fruits and vegetables, and so forth, all the while insisting

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on having wheat, wine, and olive oil whenever they could get these. Moreover, greater awareness of the social geography of mid-sixteenth-century Mexico City might also have suggested that the priest who lived at Guatemala #38, in the center of the Spanish city (traza), probably had little to do with indigenous people as parishioners, was unlikely to be “colonizing the consciousness” of urban Indians, and was therefore equally unlikely to be “creating Europeanized material worlds” for them by using imported majolica pottery rather than Aztec Red Ware. Maybe he just preferred majolica.

A more careful (even if not exhaustive) reading of not only what historians are finding but how they handle their sources might have steered Rodríguez-Alegría away from his implicitly too reverent attitude toward “documents,” invoked at several points from the glosses of other writers as supporting evidence for his arguments. Documents are no more transparent than deposits of potsherds, and the manner of their writing and the motives for it need to be interrogated. Thus, testimony from Don Fulano that Don Sutano “ate like an Indian” may or may not have been “true” in the normal sense of the word but may also have been triggered by any number of malign motives—personal animosity or political, economic, social, or amorous competition, for example. He actually handles this issue quite eloquently in discussing the 1546 case of the Spaniard in Tlaxcala accused of having gone native on the basis of his excessive drinking and his eating with Indians (although what exposing his genitals had to do with this is not immediately clear, since this was not part of indigenous commensal behavior, as far as I am aware). Here Rodríguez-Alegría tells us that it is a matter of indirection whether the statements describing the Spaniard’s behavior were true or not and that what really counts is that people could think them to be true. While this is an interesting point, it really does not let him off the evidentiary hook, especially when the documented existence of such behaviors is essential to the interpretive structure with which he has reconstructed practices of commensality between indigenous people and Spaniards.

Reply

ENRIQUE RODRÍGUEZ-ALEGRÍA
Austin, Tex., U.S.A. 26 v 05

The comments on my paper are a sample of some of the theoretical, methodological, and interpretive problems that characterize current studies of daily life, politics, and cultural and social change in the Spanish colonies. I see gaps between some commentators’ theoretical stances and their interpretations of empirical patterns and between their ideas about methodology and their critiques of my research methods. First, whereas most scholars agree that models of cultural change must include power (see Cusick 1998, Howson 1990), Alberro, Amelang, and Van Young suggest interpretations that leave power altogether unexamined. Second, while there is agreement at an abstract level that Spaniards were not a homogeneous group, these commentators imply that the strategies of colonists were the same everywhere (Alberro) or varied uniformly through time, according to geographic location, or along class lines (Amelang). Third, most of them (but see Alberro) agree that indigenous people retained power, but they are unwilling to examine the social relationships with Spaniards that enabled them to use that power. Fourth, although Ares-Queija and Rothschild are willing to engage in interdisciplinary research, Amelang, Alberro, and Van Young show little knowledge of interpretive strategies and epistemologies of disciplines other than history or are altogether dismissive of archaeological evidence in favor of written sources.

For several decades models of acculturation have been critiqued for not addressing the effects of power upon cultural change. When these models consider issues of power, they go only as far as addressing the imposition of colonizers’ culture traits upon others (see Cusick 1998, Droogers 1989, Howson 1990). Most scholars today agree that this approach can only partially explain cultural change. I am therefore surprised that Alberro and Van Young have called for an interpretation of my archaeological patterns that would create a model of the incorporation of indigenous pottery into Spanish houses that depends simply on the casual preference for certain pottery or omits any possibility of negotiation. Taste is politicized, and consumption is part of social and cultural strategies for obtaining power. I agree with Alberro that there were multiple reasons for cultural change in the Spanish colonies, but I disagree that to address power is to abandon all other explanations. Ares-Queija, for example, argues that Spanish colonizers got used to eating indigenous food, in part because there was little else to eat, but she does not suggest that this idea is incompatible with my model of political organization. Rather, this was one of many possible ways in which Spaniards got acquainted with indigenous food and customs, which they then reproduced during feasts with Indians.

Rothschild also presents other explanations for the incorporation of indigenous pottery into Spanish houses, including gift giving. While the variety of forms and the high frequencies of Aztec pottery found in different houses seem to me to indicate that it was being obtained as sets useful for meals rather than as occasional gifts, Rothschild’s idea deserves attention in future research. It represents a different take on the strategies for political negotiation between Spaniards and Indians that interest me. Furthermore, gift giving probably accompanied commensality, and the archaeological record could in fact reflect both.

Ares-Queija correctly links the belief that Spaniards were a monolithic force to essentialist conceptions of identities, and Rothschild adds that historical documents have oversimplified the actual behavior and agency of colonizers. But Alberro argues that if the British did not feast with Africans, the Spaniards would not
have feasted with Indians. I cannot stress enough that we must move beyond essentialist models of identity in colonial situations and recognize the varied behavior of colonizers everywhere.

Amelang argues that eventually Spaniards in Mexico City could have been characterized mostly by a rejection of indigenous material culture or that criollos would eventually have tried to distance themselves from Indians. I agree that such possibilities exist and that they could be examined with historical and archaeological sources. However, I emphasize the variability that existed in the sixteenth-century components I examine in this paper.

The ways in which indigenous people engaged with colonialism and cultural change also varied geographically, locally, and through time (see, e.g., 1968, 1970, 1979; Lockhart 1992). Alberro claims that indigenous lords would have been insulted to be served their traditional foods in indigenous pottery and that colonialism and especially epidemics “destroyed the traditional powers of the Indian elites.” Many scholars have argued, however, that indigenous lords retained or even increased their power after the conquest (Cline 1991, Haskett 1992, Lockhart 1992, Spores 1997). Pasztory (1983, 1984) has demonstrated the preservation of indigenous symbolism after the conquest. Colonial figurines sometimes depict Indians wearing Spanish costumes as well as indigenous jewelry (Von Winning 1988). Haskett presents a document listing both Spanish and indigenous items of display as part of an Indian governor’s belongings. These three examples suggest that Spanish material culture did not entirely replace indigenous material culture everywhere and that it was possible to show hospitality to Indians by using indigenous products, including food and pottery. Furthermore, the fact that so many indigenous lords retained power underscores how important it was for Spaniards to negotiate with them to obtain access to labor and spouses and to forge alliances.

Van Young’s comment that “historians are often sympathetic to interdisciplinary methodology” is far too optimistic given the scarcity of historical literature that incorporates archaeological sources and data. Amelang ignores the ethnographic analogies that allow me to argue that the archaeological pottery found in these houses is evidence of commensality between Spaniards and Indians. Alberro and Van Young focus on my use of documents, ignoring the archaeological evidence entirely. These three commentators assert or imply that anecdotes captured in documentary sources are better evidence than patterns found in archaeological contexts.

Instead of heeding Amelang’s advice to “let the archaeologists argue among themselves,” historians could enhance their ability to do interdisciplinary work by becoming more familiar with interpretive strategies and epistemologies in other disciplines. Prudence counsels incorporating as many lines of evidence into one’s work as possible and fostering rather than attempting to stifle interdisciplinary work. Recent reviews point to the limitations of historical sources and outline the roles that archaeology can play in debunking myths and master narratives embedded in historical writings (Brumfiel 2003), supporting or supplementing information in historical documents (especially information that is often omitted from historical sources but accessible archaeologically, such as the use of space and everyday material culture [see Paynter 2000a], providing greater time depth to historical arguments [see Brumfiel 2003], documenting the lives of “people without history” such as African slaves and indigenous people living in areas with scant historical documentation [Paynter 2000a, b], and providing a broader context for interpreting historical sources and evidence. Archaeologists have also been active in developing research strategies for combining archaeological and historical evidence, addressing issues of epistemology and methodology (e.g., Kepecs and Kolb 1997, Wilson 1993). Art historians have also been successful in supplementing and questioning information available in historical sources by relying on material culture (e.g., Cummins 1998, Boone 1998).

I have used archaeological data to research an idea I developed from historical documents in which Spaniards were accused of “eating like Indians.” Van Young, mistakenly believing that the documents were my main line of evidence, focuses more on the passing mention of a Spaniard who exposed himself during a meal with Indians than on the archaeological evidence I have presented and discussed at length. Rather than limit my reading of the documents to the discussion of motivations, he suggests, I went beyond this to include a line of evidence that historians rarely if ever include in their work: material evidence. My supposed reverence for historical documents ended once the archaeological remains allowed me to place the fragmentary and vague historical sources in a much wider context. Archaeological remains also gave me access not just to what Spaniards said they did but also to their own houses and material inventories. To interpret the material remains, I relied on analogies with the consumption of food in other situations. Analogical reasoning is a basic tool for interpreting archaeological remains and reconstructing past social and cultural behavior (Stahl 1993). Therefore, whether a document that narrates an anecdote in which a Spaniard ate like an Indian is true or not is of little importance compared with the robust archaeological patterns found in these houses.

Finally, Amelang and Rothschild address the applicability of this model to other Spanish colonies. Amelang finds that in southern Spain and northern Africa there is little evidence for the negotiations that I argue took place over food in Mexico. His conclusion is not surprising, given the omissions that, as he himself recognizes, characterize historical sources. Furthermore, patterns varied in different regions in the Spanish Empire. Perhaps these negotiations never took place in southern Spain and North Africa, but the possibility can be researched further with diverse lines of evidence. Rothschild argues, in contrast, that in the Rio Grande Valley Spanish colonizers ate like Indians without entirely abandoning their European foods and pottery. She reaches this conclusion by drawing from historical and
archaeological sources. I agree with her that my study could be enriched by faunal and botanical data from the houses in Mexico City. The fact that another archaeologist has reached a similar conclusion in an entirely different region of the Spanish Empire not only adds credibility to my model but also underlines the possibility of doing similar research in other places and time periods.

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