

Agro-Food Crafts: A Multi-Dimensional Phenomenon in the South of Guanajuato, Mexico

Dr. Perla Shiomara Del Carpio Ovando

Department of Social Studies
University of Guanajuato
Campus Celaya-Salvatierra
Salvatierra, Guanajuato
México C.P.38900

Dr. Alberto Valdés Cobos

Department of Cultural
Demographic and Political Studies at the University of Guanajuato
Campus Celaya-Salvatierra
Salvatierra, Guanajuato
México C.P.38900

Sergio Jacinto Alejo

Doctor in Education and Professor
Department of Agroindustrial Engineering of the
University of Guanajuato
Campus Celaya-Salvatierra
Division of the Health and Engineering Sciences
Salvatierra, Guanajuato
México C.P.38900

Karla Del Carpio Ovando

Department of Hispanic Studies
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Northern Colorado
Candelaria, Campus Box 87
Greeley, Colorado 80639

Abstract

In this article we introduce agro-food crafts as an economic activity with an intimate relationship with cultural, social, religious, cosmogonical, and nutritional aspects. We undertake a brief review of food as an object of study in the Social Sciences, and then we focus on Mexican gastronomy, specifically agro-food crafts from the Salvatierra region in the south of the state of Guanajuato. Both theory and empirical evidence defend the kitchen as an intimate laboratory of generational encounters, cultural revitalization, inherited riches, health care, and community permanence. In terms of material and symbolical objects situated in time and space, food constitutes a multi-dimensional phenomenon that demands to be addressed as they are a space to form personal, social, and community identities; preserve historical and current culture, and shows how the deep roots in a rural past coexist despite the challenges that represent the drives of globalization.

Keywords: Crafts, food, culture, Salvatierra, Mexico

Introduction

Food, in terms of material and symbolic objects situated in time and space, constitutes a multi-dimensional phenomenon that interests anthropologists, philosophers, historians, sociologists, economists, political scientists, jurists, educators, and other social scientists and professionals in the health sector.

Philosophers are interested in the ethical implications of the personal and collective decisions that we make when buying certain kinds of food at the supermarket (Singer and Mason, 2009). The historian (of culture or food) is interested in analyzing the changes that agro-food artisans have experienced over time.

The food sociologist is also interested in studying the educational, moral, aesthetic, symbolic, and lucid elements of a diversity of different agro-food crafts for class, educational level, gender, age, and ethnic reasons, among many others. In Mexico, food sociology has an empty library; however, in countries such as Spain, they are starting to peak, as Díaz and Gómez (2005) point out:

The Sociology of Food is an area which even Spain has scarcely developed, despite a certain increase in the scientific production in the last two decades. Although, our delay has not been exceptional. It is well known that transversal issues, such as food, has always been especially difficult, not for the object of study but to facilitate a theoretical body that integrates multiple perspectives and dimensions of the phenomenon (in this case of the food phenomenon), and, as is also known, without minimally integrated theoretical frameworks it is difficult to develop and institutionalize a disciplinary area. Historically, this issue has been studied exclusively by disciplines such as social or cultural anthropology, or by sub-disciplines such as rural sociology, not to mention the economics. This circumstance has made it difficult, if not impeded, that the study of these themes be integrated into mainstream sociology (Díaz and Gómez, 2005: 9).

From sociology, the food phenomenon has been an object of study by two parallel traditions without even a connection between the two. On one side, rural sociology has paid attention to these issues, and in the early 1980s the research committee of the International Sociology Association (ISA) changed the old denomination of Rural Sociology to the Sociology of Agricultural and Food. This field is often closely related to agrarian economics, however it also has an ever clearer theoretical autonomy with a clear sociological root and framework of its own. This tradition has concerned itself almost exclusively with food within its analysis of food systems, with a focus on formation of the modern world food system, especially on aspects of production and commercialization.

On the other side, the specific contributions of sociology to food issues are found in the sociology of consumption. The initial orientations are derived from classic economics and consider food consumption as a behavior related to income and the satisfaction of needs, leaving aside irrational processes and motivations. In this line it should be highlighted that research on food are more frequently set in the European environment and explore the variations in food consumption based on official statistics sourced from individual countries (Díaz and Gómez, 2005).

Political science is concerned with analyzing policies or deliberate government actions that impact the survival or disappearance of agro-food crafts. For example, with the globalization of western lifestyles (consumption of American fast food and genetically modified foods) a series of consequences have occurred for many local agro-food traditions around the world. In the same way, the economy (of food) is concerned with analyzing the production distribution, and consumption of food and its impact on the economy. Similarly, the production or commercializations of agro-food crafts have implications on job generation and the growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in a country such as Mexico.

The law, in conjunction with norms of a coercive character, is concerned with protecting the rights (or patents) of those who produce, sell, and distribute agro-food crafts in a country, for that reason they are bestowed with world heritage site, as the ultimate recognition of UNESCO.

In other areas, such as pedagogy, the issue has been addressed using a series of methods and didactic strategies of knowledge and appropriation of agro-food crafts with diverse social groups. Education, as an area of multidisciplinary knowledge, is concerned with implementing joint actions (cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, and lucid) to rescue, reevaluate, and promote the teaching of agro-food crafts in both formal and informal educational contexts. In the case of anthropology (cultural, or food), we observe a latent interest in exploring agro-food crafts in diverse social environments, times, and spaces from a trans-cultural perspective.

We observe, therefore, that the increasing interest – from the Social Sciences – on the need to address food in both a disciplinary and multidisciplinary manner, in terms of food preparation and consumption, processes of commercialization, as well as the cultural contexts that give meaning and belonging to these foods.

With globalization and its impacts on agro-food crafts, researchers have increased interest in conserving or rescuing traditional knowledge related to the art of preparing and consuming food at all scales: local, national, and global. New hybrids and academic specializations have arisen, such as the philosophy of food, the ethics of food, the history of food, the sociology of food, anthropology of food or of agro-food crafts, where each discipline adds theory and methods and make the study of food of a new field of study.

Concerns for healthier lifestyles, the proliferation of diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and cancer, the expansion of fast food consumption and of genetically modified foods, such as the globalization of Chinese, Italian, Spanish, French, Japanese, Indian, or Argentinian food go hand in hand with the re-discovery of food and agro-food crafts that deserve to be studied and that in the past were considered minor or irrelevant for the social sciences.

Regarding interest in healthy lifestyles, we should underline that in 2008, the World Health Organization (WHO), stated that there were close to 1.7 billion overweight adults and approximately 312 million obese people worldwide, which together represent a third of the world's population, therefore the issue is highly relevant. Additionally, in recent years an increase in these conditions has been observed in the majority of countries worldwide, and an alarming increase in rates in some countries (SAGARPA, 2010: 23).

Being obese or overweight is generally related to cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, arterial hypertension, some kinds of cancer, among other health disorders, which have also increased considerably in the last few decades. Currently, issues of being overweight or obese are one of the main public health problems in the world. The WHO also indicated in 2004 that of the 35 million people that died in the world that year, 60% of deaths were caused by a chronic illness (which includes obesity), and of these, 80% were in developing countries (SAGARPA, 2010). Therefore it is to be expected that addressing the damages and impact that accompany eating habits, lifestyle (sedentary lifestyles for example), and the consumption of harmful foods, are urgent priorities for the health sector. It is therefore necessary to re-educate and teach current and future generations to build new habits, and to live and eat differently.

In this panorama, there is interest from philosophers, anthropologists, historians, psychologists, and sociologists in the agro-food issue in Mexico. All of them, and other social scientists, wonder if we are what we eat, this is telling of the revitalization of their disciplines.

Similarly, the cinematographic production of movies and documentaries on food and its historical, economic, lucid, nutritional, anthropological, and sociological facets has added to the trend of making food a research area as respected as globalization, postmodernity, climate change, international migration, poverty, or terrorism. Additionally, mass media such as television, radio, the press, and the internet, have become catalysts for research and awareness raising of the components and complexity that encompass food, its practices and rituals, processes of elaboration, commercialization, and consumption.

It should be noted that the food of a determined human group allows us to infer, at least a little, the social organization of the group that makes and consumes it, their system of intra-domestic and intra-social hierarchy, the conception of this society regarding the environment and its resources, and hierarchy in terms of age and sex, etc. We cannot omit the ritual component that surrounds the act of eating, such as rules of courtesy and table manners, for example, as well as social bonds that are woven around the dinner table, the pacts that are negotiated, economic or family alliances, and political commitments that are woven around the table and food, etc.

These circumstances make food a language, a form of expression in different cultures of the world. That is why it deals with a symbolic system that translates into material facts such as food, the choice of certain foods and certain ways of food preparation and distribution in ways that allow for social adscription and regulate the interior interrelations of the society. It additionally deals with a system influenced by historical, economic, and ecological factors (Torres, Madrid, and Santoni, 2004).

Arriving at the construction of a system such as the human food system in the framework of any world culture, in which ecological, social, economic, and symbolic aspects are involved, that reveal an ideation, an evaluation of the environment in which every culture has developed. It is a way to see the world and the relationship between man and the environment, such as when he faces the difficulties of daily survival. This is reason enough, from our point of view, to consider the kitchens or food systems of the world a worthy heritage to conserve, respect, and promote.

Even more so when we consider that this complex space, which has come to be known as cuisine (exquisite laboratory of traditional and modern alchemy), comprises of a series of wisdom and flavors gauged across the span of human history, as in the wide empirical ecological knowledge related to food.

Food in Mexico

The gastronomic heritage of Mexico is mainly derived from the mestizo origin and occupies second place, only after China, in variety and diversity in world cuisines (Barros, 2004). Said culinary invention is the result of thousands of years of antiquity and the happy coincidence of two primordial factors: 1) Environmental diversity from which a variety of food resources originate, the consequence of being located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, which increases when we consider the world altitudes (Berbers, Andalusians, Angolans, and Filipinos, among others), which fused their cooking knowledge and products with the Mazahuas, Otomies, Nahuas, and Matlatzincas, therefore forming a huge collective gastronomical legacy or heritage, which contains an enormous potential for achieving local and regional development (Barros, 2004).

There are therefore multiple reasons for which it is necessary to study the gastronomy and basic diet of a town, a group, in this case of Mexican cuisine. In this way we may understand, and we can stress that food is a synthesis of culture. Through food we can analyze and approximate, at least a little, economic, political, organizational, wellbeing, and health aspects of those who prepare and those who consume it. It also allows us, we should note, to study ourselves and ways of constructing ourselves.

We should point out following the data presented by the Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación (Secretary of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fishing, and Food) (2010), in *Retos y oportunidades del Sistema agroalimentario de México en los próximos 20 años (Challenges and opportunities of the agro-food System of Mexico in the next 20 years)*, in the case of Mexico, even though a great number of studies that analyze diverse aspects related to the agro-food sector do exist, they have not been able to sufficiently permeate in order to convincingly and effectively influence the improvement of public policy linked to the sector. Said studies make manifest the deficient design and performance of public policy for attending to the great challenges that the agro-food system faces in Mexico in the next decades and implies continuing to act in the same way as in the past, which will additionally mean threatening the wellbeing of present and future generations in an essential variable such as agro-food (SAGARPA, 2010:9)

In the coming decades, this source indicates that one of the more relevant challenges for world agro-food systems, especially for developing countries (such as Mexico), will be ensuring sufficient food supply for their population. The above is due to the fact that the demand for food will intensify with population growth, greater life expectancy, changes in consumption patterns towards healthier, safer, and higher quality food that is produced in an environmentally-friendly way, whose origin may be traced for health reasons, and contain specialized information on their labels; and, due to the demand of a mature growing population with greater expendable income.

In contrast, this source discerns that there will be a greater rigidity of supply, the expansion of cultivable land is practically exhausted, and a greater volume of agricultural products will be used for non-edible products. Which is why the only viable strategy to satisfy future food demand from any country will be to increase the productivity of primary production (SAGARPA, 2010: 13).

Additionally, we should add to the panorama described above, the need to spark food supply as it will be necessary to produce food at an accessible price for consumers. For that reason, besides strategies to reduce production costs, we would also have to reduce distribution costs, for which supply chains will have to become more efficient. Before the important growth of self-service chains in the world food distribution system, tendencies from providers of primary materials point towards the creation of cooperatives to commercialize products directly to supermarket distribution centers. Other skills will have to be developed and other forms of organization (to produce, and to commercialize).

We are concerned about these trends in the place and position, of small and medium sized traders, who produce for self-consumption, but also to commercialize their products (in their community or city). We are concerned about these realities, especially those that have to do with the rural sector, with the countryside, and those that transform raw materials at a small scale, with little technology and financing.

We are referring to those that make cheeses, jams, candy, preserves, bread, tortillas; all hand made products that respond to a logic of self-consumption and commercialization at a small scale (although this can vary). We refer to, then, agro-food crafts.

Agro-Food Crafts: Some Notes

Alejo, Herrera, and Ruiz (2012) inform us that if we succumb to the linguistic sources and forms of information registration, we will find the name of the 'agro-food craft'. Next, perhaps, could be the handmade way, as a productive practice carried out by concrete social sectors in territories that persist on the external margins of progress. Being an activity, generally realized in the field or in rural areas, that uses manual techniques with little industrial technology it is associated with the backward, the old, and the obsolete.

Warman (1982) cautions that when indicating that our tradition in the past, in what is considered 'expired and obsolete' it identifies with the rural, provincial, rustic, with the 'not modern', and in radical versions, modernization is a racist argument when it identifies 'symptoms of backwardness' with characteristics inherent and inherited from the population.

Be warned, then, that social and productive practices represent the point of departure for describing the evolution of the most elemental articles of mass production processes. Primary producers and processors face typical technological and commercial situations as the weakest and riskiest links, which makes it hard to find partners within the chain.

With certain distinctive features, agro-food producers face multiple challenges, in the same way as artisans dedicated to other fields: basket weavers, textiles, woodwork, and multiple artisanal branches whose actors have a lack of training or information on support programs, besides discrimination, exclusion, little acknowledgement and social prestige; long working hours, health impact and effects caused by dedication to certain professions, little economic income, etc. (Del Carpio, 2012).

Regarding this type of production (agro-food) we should point out that, for example, traditional Mexican cuisine, according to UNESCO, is a complete cultural model that comprises agrarian activities, ritual practices, ancient knowledge practices, culinary techniques, customs, and forms of ancestral community behavior. This has been made possible thanks to the collective participation in the traditional food chain: from sowing and harvesting, to food preparation and tasting.

The basic system elements are: corn, beans, and chili. Unique methods of cultivation in their genre are: the *milpa* (cultivation by rotation of corn and other plants, with tilling and burning the earth), and the *chinampa* (artificial cultivation islands in lacustrine zones), procedures of food preparation such as the *nixtamalización* (husking corn with water and lime to improve its nutritional value), and special utensils such as grinding stones and mortars. To these basic food products, indigenous ingredients are added such as a diverse variety of green tomatoes, pumpkins, avocados, coco, and vanilla.

Such is the case of fertile land in the state of Guanajuato where we observe multiple crops that enrich the gastronomy of families in the urban and rural context. Table 1 shows the main products in this state in the center of the Mexican Republic.

In Guanajuato, as in other parts of Mexico with similar characteristics, we observe that this large variety of crops stimulates and propitiates that the Mexican culinary art is very elaborate and is also charged with symbols. In all of the Mexican territory, we may find groups of chefs and other practitioners of culinary traditions that are dedicated to the improvement of crops and traditional cooking. Their knowledge, techniques and abilities are an expression of identity at a national, regional, local, and community level.

An example of this is the presence of countryside fruits that are always present in parties, rituals, social, family, and cultural events.

Salvatierra: The Study Region

In January of 2013, the transdisciplinary research group started conducting field work (although in 2005 and 2010 we had already done a census of the agro-food production in the region). When we asked about the crafts made there, the inhabitants emphasized the elaboration of foods such as the guava *ate* (a fruit paste candy), and other candy made from peanuts, milk, sweet potato, and preserves, jams, and other products resulting from the transformation of raw materials such as hand-made tortillas (from Urireo, a community in the region).

In addition to the aforementioned food items, they also mentioned local foods such as *largas* (oblong or elongated tortillas with fillings), and more elaborate foods such as *mole* (a term that refers to various kinds of sauce), or *montalayo* (meat roasted in an earthen oven). This was the shared and constant social representation, regarding the artisans. This reminds us of a text in the *Elogio a la cocina mexicana* (Praise of Mexican Cuisine) (De Orellana, et al., 2012), in which the process of how Mexican food was accepted on the list of World Heritage cuisines is detailed, a title given by UNESCO on the 16th of November 2010. This declaration considers Mexican cuisine as an essential element of the cultural identity of this country.

In said text, the presence of corn, avocado, and coco stand out. They go hand in hand with instruments such as the grinding stone, wooden wash basins, pestle and mortar, the hotplate, and *atarakuas* (harpoon with four needles and a reed handle), baskets made with *chuspata* (lacustrine vegetable fiber) are represented, demonstrating the richness and variety of the foods of yesterday and today, of the past and the present.

Edgar Morín (2012), affirms that the essential part of every culture resides in its gastronomy. He is right, according to Lopez (2012) and it would be hard to disagree with the brilliant heir of western thought, one of whose concerns, since the splendor of Greek philosophy, has consisted in fathoming and understanding the physical and metaphysical reaches of the act of preparing and tasting food. In the reflection of these thinkers, this topic has been a constant for their multi-dimensional reaches that are also concerned with human creativity as a profound root of art. It is a fact, besides, that the preparation and joy of food has been a fundamental part of all civilizing processes (López, 2012).

These laboratories, called kitchens, are not only spaces of construction and combination of smells, tastes, and textures, but they are also spaces to construct personal and social identities of coexistence between family members, emotional catharsis, conversation, and generally building family and community ties. Without a doubt it exercises multiple functions, food production in this region and the entire country.

By thinking of food or candy made in Salvatierra and considering the techniques of knowledge transfer from generation to generation, permanence in time and other elements to do with identity and culture of the region, such as those pointed out in *Artesanías agroalimentarias. Alternativas posibles en el sur de Guanajuato* (Agro-food crafts, possible alternatives in the south of Guanajuato) (Alejo, Herrera, and Ruiz, 2012), and by reflecting on the *Elogio a la cocina mexicana* (De Orellana et al., 2012), we can say that, in a certain way, these foods mentioned previously form a part of the agro-food crafts of the Salvatierra region.

Where is Salvatierra?

The municipality of Salvatierra (which belongs to the state of Guanajuato) is located in the Valle de Huatzindeo, named 'the place of beautiful vegetation'. It has a surface area of more than 597 km² and a population of 97,054 inhabitants, which corresponds to 2.0% and 2.2% of the surface area and population of the State of Guanajuato¹, respectively.

Salvatierra borders with the municipalities of Cortázar and Jaral de Progreso in the north; to the east with Tarimoro and Acámbaro; to the south with Acámbaro and the state of Michoacán de Ocampo; to the west with Yuriria and Santiago Maravatío. The main access road is highway 51, which connects it to Acámbaro and Celaya, and the state highways that lead to Cortázar, Jaral de Progreso and Santiago Maravatío.

Socio-Demographic and Economic Characteristics of the Region

According to the General Population and Housing Census 2010 (INEGI, 2010), the population in the municipality of Salvatierra is 97,054 inhabitants, which represents 1.8% of the state population, 10.4% of Region IV South and 22.9% of Sub-region 9.

The Municipality has more than 82 localities, of which 6 have a population over 2,500 inhabitants, and are therefore considered urban. Of the localities in the municipality, Salvatierra has the most inhabitants (37,203 people), Urireo (8,679 people), San Nicolás de los Agustinos (7,148 people), San Pedro de los Naranjos (4,494 people), El Sabino (4,095 people), and Maravatío del Encinal (3,398 people).

Of the non-economically active population, 60.2% are dedicated to housework, 26.9% are students, 5.9% participate in other non-economic activities, and 3.4% have some kind of permanent physical or mental limitation which prevents them from working, and 3.6% are retired or pensioners. According to the definitive results of the economic census of 2009, the tertiary sector presents the greatest quantity of economic units registered with 3,496 and a total of 9,209 people occupied, mainly in retail. The secondary sector has 335 units registered and a total of 1,988 workers, and lastly the primary sector has a total of 59 workers.

This characteristic may mean that there is a number of temporary migrants (towards the United States) when there is little work in the field. In the municipality, approximately, less than a tenth of the sources of employment are in the primary sector, the majority of which correspond to agriculture. Another relevant factor is poverty, the municipality has a high percentage of its population in extreme poverty close to 59.7% (10.1% of the population are found in a situation of extreme poverty, and 49.7% in a situation of moderate poverty), a higher percentage than the state (48.6%).

The economic sector that predominates in the municipality is the tertiary sector. Currently, the population is concentrated in the commercial sector in detriment to agricultural activity, which has specialized and focused on production that does not stay in the municipality. Salvatierra produces a large variety of agricultural products such as garlic, celery, forage oats, garbanzos, fava beans, red tomatoes, lettuce, corn, melon, cucumber, watermelon, green tomatoes, wheat, carrots, gladiola, sorghum, alfalfa, asparagus, guava, *nopal* (*opuntia cactus*), grape, among others.

Agro-Food Crafts of the Region

Some communities in Salvatierra use raw materials to make certain products that have become characteristic of the community. Such is the case of Urireo, where the production of corn tortillas is supported by a lot of history with the Spanish conquest. In their passage through time they have built, shared, and transmitted knowledge, material and cultural values for families with indigenous backgrounds.

Despite their valuable contributions to identity and culture, hand-made tortillas in the community in recent years has been threatened by distinct factors, such as: socio-economic and cultural influence from other places, male migration to the United States, disinterest of young people to continue this activity, high costs, lack of institutional support, among others.

This brings with it the loss of knowledge, not only of productive processes, but it also leads to the mutilation of sociocultural values of corn and the tortilla. For women there are few alternatives, there is no school where they can substitute their learned skills. In the process they become entrusted by their mother to assist men around the house, in this duality of serving to learn, and learn to serve. Besides, the years go by caring for brothers and sisters, taking care of the stove, while their father leaves the land and their mother sells tortillas in town. In other cases, they leave town to dedicate themselves to occupations with higher income, or they also go to the neighboring country.

It is important, then, to say that Urireo is a community that you cannot discuss without referring to the tortillas made by girls, young women, or older women in this community in Guanajuato. Regarding the production that they realize, we can point to what is shown in Table 2, which presents aspects of production with a total quantity of 68.83 tons of corn dough (data corresponds to the year 2010, obtained in a study realized by this group of researchers).

During the period 2005 to 2010 some mills were closed, due to high electricity and raw materials costs, or due to families abandoning this productive activity (due to migration to the United States, or dedicating themselves to work in other places in the region). In general, total dough production of mills has reduced by 42.36%, impacting both production for sale and production for consumption.

Regarding total domestic units, it has reduced by 44.78%, which affects the value of the tortilla production obtained. Among the reasons that the owner(s) argue(s), of the fall in sales and consumption of hand-made tortillas produced in domestic units, indicating that it is due to the proliferation of *tortillerias* (stores that sell tortillas made by a machine, normally on the premises) in recent years. Here, in this region, we find many modern companies with small establishments that in the city or the countryside are dedicated to the artisanal-family manufacture of a diverse range of products. These small production units constitute one of the strategies and spaces of income obtainment for families in the countryside.

Handmade food production has an important role within and outside the region, as much for the flow of products and raw materials that are processed, as for the quality and cultural and historical acquis of the region (Alejo *et al.*, 2012).

The work of the authors mentioned also highlight other products that are elaborated in 10 municipalities of the region of Salvatierra, these are: *carnitas* (pork tacos), *chicharrón* (crackling), *requesón* (cottage cheese), bread, *longaniza* (pork sausage), cheese, *elote* (corn on the cob), *churros* (fritters), *mole* (sauce), tacos, chorizo, *moronga* (black pudding) or *rellena* (tripe stuffed with cooked blood and spices), pickles in vinegar, *gordita* (thick corn tortilla filled with meat, cheese, or other ingredients), *corunda* (triangulartamal), *nieves* (ice cream or sorbet), *uchepos* (sweet corn *tamal*), *buñuelos* (doughnuts), *tamales* (corn flour filled with meat, chicken, chili or other ingredients, wrapped in corn or banana leaves), and *pozole* (soup with large grains of corn, chili, and pork or chicken).

Regarding products that are made in 5 to 9 of the municipalities of the region, Alejo, Herrera, and Ruiz (2012), indicate products such as: *birrio* (spicy lamb stew), caramels, fruits in syrup, sweet rolls, fish, *ate* (fruit paste), liquors and crystalized candies. And the list of other products made in 5 out of 10 municipalities in the region of Salvatierra are: *barbacoa* (lamb roasted in an earthen oven), *jocoque* (fermented milk, similar to yogurt), caramel, praline oilseed, handmade tortillas, turnovers, *buche relleno* (stuffed stomach of various kinds of meat), cream, sweet potato, *cocada* (candy made with coconut), *gallina empulcada* (chicken stewed in *pulque*), *rompope* (eggnog), homemade yogurt, peanuts, jams, and *pulque* (a traditional alcoholic drink fermented from an extract from agave or maguey).

Results

By following the qualitative ethnographic method and recurring to techniques such as open interviews, semi-structured, keeping a field diary, and obtaining audio-visual material, we could obtain (during the period January 2013 – December 2014), some reflections derived from fieldwork realized with people dedicated to the production of agro-food crafts in this region in the south of Guanajuato: Salvatierra.

The sample included 5 women who produce hand-made tortillas, 5 butchers, 5 bakers, 5 producers of guava *ate*, conserves and jams, 5 women that make *mole*, *montalayo*, and other traditional food from the region.

As the production of agro-food crafts is characteristic of the region, so too wind music is characteristic and emblematic in the region, that is why we had the opportunity to interview various musicians integrated in the bands of communities in Salvatierra to understand their reflections regarding the production in the region. Here are a few notes related to this topic.

We are primarily interested in highlighting that where we talk about agro-food crafts we mean a wide and diverse concept. We consider its cultural implications, its means of production, the raw materials used, and consider it as an activity that constitutes a cultural need and also has an instrumental function (obtaining income) for those that realize it.

In this analysis we consider, then, economic aspects that have a close relationship with social and cultural aspects. The important thing to consider is not necessarily the final product (food), but the productive artisanal process that implies forms of organization, traditional practices, applying techniques with ancient roots, transformation of raw materials found in the region, organization and participation of different generations in the construction of food, among others. Nothing, then, more illustrative that the voices of those interviewed, who assert that:

Here, almost the majority (of artisans) dedicate themselves to guavas, peanuts, sweet potatoes, or tortillas. Many people cultivate all this, but here, well they work with guava (S.L., Baker in Salvatierra, 35 years old, dedicated to baking bread, 25th of March, 2014).

We have a big culture of harvesting peanuts and corn, above all agriculture (A. J., worker in a *tortilleria*, *nixtamal* mill, from Salvatierra, 11th of February, 2014).

They are in Urireo (the crafts), for example, tortillas, mole. Here in Salvatierra (we have) conserves, candies, and other things. I don't know a lot about it, but there is a lot of talent. In other aspects there is also a lot (of talent). There is in different areas, I mean, not just music, but also in food (F. R., musician and singer in a versatile group, resident of Salvatierra).

As may be observed, they refer to candies or regional, traditional food, these are the crafts that the inhabitants emphasize. Outside of food production, on a small scale we can find other artisanal branches:

Carpenters still have works of art in churches, doors, and many other things that are there in the Iglesia de la Luz (La Luz Church), are handmade (F. G., 72 years old, resident of Salvatierra, 17th of November, 2013).

Well, there are very few crafts in Salvatierra, food is more important (F.G., 72 years old, resident of Salvatierra, 26th of January, 2014).

Really, there isn't a specific craft of Salvatierra (...), but there is a lot of food (R. C., resident and Trader of Salvatierra, 26th of January 2014).

Additionally, when residents of the Salvatierra region refer to makers and protagonists of agro-food production, they refer to men and women not as artisans, but under the kind of occupation that they realize. Architects are not recognized as 'artisans', they are denominated by the name of their activity, of their work: bakers, milkmen, traders, *tortillera* (a person that makes tortillas), etc. Here is one testimony:

Being a miller has meant a lot to me, because I have been working here for many years and I have never been out of work (A.J., worker in a tortilla factory, nixtamal miller, from Salvatierra, 11th of February, 2014).

The above invites us to question the titles, names, categories, or concepts that we academics use to 'name' what we are studying and analyzing. We thought, then, that maybe these 'labels' are, or are not, the result of the 'whims' of our theoretical methodological lenses or under which we may even go so far as to 'put a strait jacket' on what we analyze, this social reality that we study. That is why, here (in Salvatierra) to the woman of Urireo that makes tortillas by hand, we do not call her an 'artisan' but the tortilla that she produces is denominated under the title (agro-food) craft.

Those interviewed opt for the name of their profession (translated from the Spanish word *oficio*, which the *Real Academia Española* defines as a habitual activity).

Yes, the majority work in the field and many others have professions here in the Salvatierra factory. And others have businesses, they also have music, or whatever, they support themselves (with various activities to obtain income). It is not exclusively music (what generates income). There are some that if they earn enough, then, they just dedicate themselves to music as their sole way of making a living, there is a lot of agro-food production too (R. C., 23 years old, musician, trombone, student of Agro-Industrial Engineering, from Santo Tomás Huatzindeo, Salvatierra, 23rd of January, 2014).

Some refer to their work as an art form.

The thing is that it shouldn't be considered work, but art, because each piece, or each thing that one makes becomes an art, it isn't just a job, we just thank god that people even pay us to do it (S. L., baker in Salvatierra, 35 years of age, dedicated to baking bread, 25th of March, 2014).

In this case, Salvatierra and its communities, the empirical evidence, the literature review, invites us to make the following considerations.

It is observed that agro-food crafts stand out in the region. Additionally, we can find artisanal branches such as basketry or embroidery, but at a small scale, it is not characteristic of the region, it leads in transforming crops and raw materials into jams, conserves, cheeses, candies (from milk, peanuts, and guava), and traditional plates (*montalayo*, *largas*, *carnitas*, see above).

The distinctive stamp of the region is the handmade tortilla made by women in Urireo, an important community for tortillas and corn production, such as Santo Tomás (another community) full of expert and able hands for wind music.

We should also emphasize that the shared social representation regarding crafts are associated to food production, whose raw materials are transformed, and in the process, in the majority, it is realized with traditional techniques and instruments, which is why they are called agro-food crafts. The makers of said products (tortillas, candies, conserves, and others), are not generally recognized under the title 'artisans', even though their products are considered 'crafts'. They prefer to call themselves by the name of their profession or occupation: bakers, traders, salespeople, among others.

Activities such as costume jewelry is recognized by some inhabitants of Salvatierra as 'crafts', which implies the need to reflect on this definition, as they are considered under the heading of manual arts or hybrids, proposed by the institution in charge of crafts in Mexico: the Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías (the National Fund for the Promotion of Crafts).

Another related reflection is that the municipality of Salvatierra organizes expositions and sales of agro-food products in the region. Although we also observe craft expos or fairs whose protagonists are mestizo or indigenous artisans from other states of the republic (internal migration).

It may also be mentioned that Urireo is a community characterized by the production of handmade tortillas. This production is still current, however, it has diminished due to the absence of support, lack of organization between women, high costs of raw material, leaving the community due to international and internal migration, young women leaving the profession due to migration or for choosing schooling as space allows, in the future, to be able to aspire to better-paid jobs with greater social recognition.

In the production of tortillas, as in other artisanal products, the presence of women stands out, however, men are also present when obtaining raw material or selling the product. Here, as in other places, food is a space of social interaction, emotional catharsis, passing time, feeling useful and contributing socially, it possesses multiple psychosocial functions: expressive (cultural, social, and personal) and instrumental (obtaining income). And the kitchen is also an intimate laboratory of generational encounters, it is the space in which the grandmother inherited her family and community secrets with her hands, meanwhile combining flavors of chili, bean, and corn. There, the worldview and community history that can't find a better space than food (or that slice of tortilla), to be inherited, to be shared.

Conclusions

We have addressed emblematic and distinctive elements of the region of Salvatierra (Guanajuato, Mexico) which allows us to think and underline that these (social) realities reclaim a transdisciplinary approach in which, above all, considers the voices of the people that construct their daily lives in agro-food crafts.

These (agro-food crafts), both material and symbolic objects situated in time and space, constitute a multi-dimensional phenomenon that interests academics and experts in the social sciences, health sciences, engineering, and multiple areas of knowledge.

That is why we speak in plural and say crafts, a construct which we have tried to reflect on, and when we use this term (agro-food crafts) we refer precisely to the preservation of techniques, knowledge, and skills that pertain to hands, sometimes certain utensils and such processes of raw material elaboration are spaces of personal, social, and community identity construction, of cultural, historical, and present conservation; a present that is rooted in a rural and agro-food past.

Undoubtedly, there is more to study on the topic of the issues addressed in this text, for example the productivity, competitiveness, and economic growth of these foods, on development and competition with industrial technology, on social questions such as the reduction of rural poverty through the creation of more labor spaces, on the phenomenon of generational rifts around these professions, on the topic of health (the impact that certain jobs have on the health of the producers), on the empowerment of women through work, on means of production, and the search for sustainability, on the effect of climate change on the production of cultivars, on rural financing, how unions and their actors organize, on rural development policy, safety, quality systems, and others.

The study of the ways and strategies of producer organization is also relevant, as is the study of their needs as small and medium sized businesses, the impact of migration and remittances on this kind of production (in the case of Guanajuato, the state with a great migratory tradition), levels of marginalization and multiple battles of the architects against processes of globalization, etc.

Without a doubt, when we talk about food and our traditional food, we are talking about identity, about the economy, worldview, and multiple elements that make us think that we are lacking a more comprehensive study of this issue. This work encourages the efforts of supporters that defend Sennett (2009), when he asserts that: 'We can only achieve a more humane material life if we better understand the production of things' (p. 20), in this case the production of our food.

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