**Mexico’s National Drinks: Pulque, Tequila and the Temporalities of Authenticity[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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**Abstract:** This article analyses the changing representation of pulque and tequila as Mexico’s national drinks across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to demonstrate how different temporal concepts and historical narratives organize time in the construction of authenticity. Firstly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, stories about the origins of pulque in the pre-colonial Indigenous past created a framework of genealogical time to celebrate Mexico’s ancient roots as a nation or to lament obstacles to national progress. Secondly, from the 1940s to the 1970s, the depiction of pulque as Mexico’s authentically national drink depended on a through-time continuum in which pulque featured as an element of the national cuisine that remained unchanged since time immemorial. Thirdly, in the late twentieth century, pulque became subject to a nostalgic historical narrative of decline. At the same time, tequila’s representation as the authentically national drink became more established, through a combination of temporalities that conferred both ancient status and futurity. I argue that authenticity is most powerful as a temporal construct when it combines ahistorical, historical and future-oriented temporalities.

**Keywords:** Mexico, Pulque, Tequila, Authenticity, Time, Temporality, Nation, Indigeneity

**Introduction**

The category of authenticity in Mexican culinary and cultural history is inseparable from discourses of nationhood as they have developed and changed across the nineteenth and twentieth century. The language of authenticity itself is relatively new, starting to appear in food writing, cookbooks and culinary tourism promotion in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in response to the spread of industrial, Americanized versions of Mexican food at a global level.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, the manner in which this authenticity has been defined has much in common with a longer history of constructing Mexicanness or *lo mexicano*: the “idea, a sensibility, and the fiction that there exists a collective, unified Mexican national consciousness”, expressed through Mexican culture.[[3]](#footnote-3) Since the mid nineteenth century, politicians, intellectuals, artists and others have tried to mould Mexico’s complex internal history, ethnic and racial diversity, regional difference and relationship with the outside world into a coherent vision of Mexicanness. Different historical narratives about the formation of a national cuisine have been part of this process, as have the categorization of pulque and tequila as Mexico’s national drinks.

As the introduction to this Special Edition explains, food scholarship has concentrated on the importance of place within constructions of and claims to authenticity. By analysing the changing representation of pulque and tequila as Mexico’s national drinks, from the mid nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, this essay aims to demonstrate how different temporal concepts and historical narratives can organize time to construct authenticity. After a brief overview of the historical production and consumption of pulque and tequila, the article explores three major periods in this construction of authenticity. Firstly, in early Mexican food writing from the 1830s until the early twentieth century, there were only sporadic attempts to identify pulque as the national drink, while tequila generally did not feature at all. From the 1880s, however, other media, including literature, newspapers and academic studies, variously celebrated or denigrated pulque as distinctively and uniquely Mexican. In doing so, they often framed stories about the origins of pulque through genealogical time, tracing a lineage that connected the pre-colonial Indigenous past to Mexican popular culture in the present.

Secondly, as part of a broader trend of culinary nationalism, from the 1940s to the 1970s, recipe books and food writing mobilized the same origin stories in a different temporal framework. They depicted pulque as one of a handful of elements of Mexican culinary heritage that formed a through-time continuum, remaining essentially unchanged throughout historical time and even being suspended beyond time through myth. In this period the language of authenticity began to appear in reference to pulque as Mexico’s national drink, and sometimes explicitly denying that status to tequila, which still did not feature prominently in food writing. Finally, in the late twentieth century, pulque was the subject of a nostalgic and declensionist historical narrative that fixed its vitality as part of Mexican culinary heritage in the past, commonly identifying the late nineteenth century as pulque’s golden age. At the same time, food writing increasingly represented tequila as the national drink, constructing its authenticity as such through both genealogical time and a triadic historical narrative of *mestizaje*, the “modern nationalist ideology” that romanticizes the blending of Indigenous and Spanish cultures in the formation of Mexican nationhood.[[4]](#footnote-4) Genealogical time established a lineage between pulque and tequila that conferred a deep, ancient historicity on tequila, while the triadic narrative of mestizaje gave tequila temporal dynamism and futurity, in opposition to either an unchanging or dying pulque. Taken together, these changing representations of pulque and tequila as Mexico’s national drinks demonstrate how authenticity operates as a temporal construct.

**Pulque and Tequila: A Historical Overview**

Pulque is a fermented alcoholic beverage, made from specific varieties of the agave or maguey plant, and its production has been concentrated in the high plains of central and south-central Mexico for at least two thousand years.[[5]](#footnote-5) Sweet sap, known as *aguamiel* or *neutli*, is extracted from the opened trunk of the agave, which is first cut when the plant reaches maturity, after between eight and twelve years of growth, and sap collection takes place over a period of several months.[[6]](#footnote-6) The sap is fermented with natural yeasts and, often, with additional roots, barks and gums; depending on the batch, fermentation time can vary anything from a few hours to several days.[[7]](#footnote-7) The resultant pulque is a foamy, milky white drink of about five per cent alcohol by volume, with a somewhat dense texture, distinctive, slightly bitter aroma and semi-sweet taste (see figures 1 and 2). Fermentation continues quite rapidly, making the pulque thicker and more pungent, and it spoils within a few days. It can be consumed plain, generally known as *pulque blanco* (white pulque), or mixed with fruits and other flavourings to make *pulque curado* (cured pulque).[[8]](#footnote-8)



Figure 1. Agave, open and carved to extract the sap, San Mateo Ozolco, Puebla, Mexico. Photograph by Rocio Carvajal, 2015. Courtesy of Rocio Carvajal.



Figure 2. Pulque in jícara bowl, Puebla, Mexico. Photograph by Rocio Carvajal, 2015. Courtesy of Rocio Carvajal.

In pre-colonial Mexico, the religious and ritual uses of pulque have been well-documented, particularly within the Aztec empire. Pulque was one of several intoxicants believed to bring about a state of instability and unpredictability that facilitated communication and exchange between human, divine and natural states of being. Because of this sacred function, there were strict protocols about who could consume pulque, when, in what quantities and for what purpose, with severe punishments for those who violated these rules. There is considerable debate about whether these rules were enforced in practice, especially considering that aguamiel – the sap from which pulque can ferment naturally – was more freely available. But the fact that such rules existed, even if they could not be enforced widely, shows that pulque had a high symbolic and cultural value.[[9]](#footnote-9)

With the onset of Spanish colonization in the early sixteenth century, the commercialization of pulque developed rapidly. The first commercial licenses for selling pulque were granted by the 1530s and by the 1650s there were more than 200 pulquerías (taverns selling pulque) in Mexico City alone.[[10]](#footnote-10) The production and trade of pulque brought substantial revenue to the colonial government, and the consumption of pulque became embedded in the daily diet, routine and popular culture of Indigenous, mixed race and some Creole (of Hispanic descent, born in the Americas) people. Although economically important to the colonial state and elite landowners, the cultural status of pulque changed dramatically in the colonial period (c. 1521-1810). It went from having high cultural value in the pre-colonial world, to being denigrated as the “Indian” drink and the drink of the poor. Spanish elites and colonial authorities were very regularly concerned about pulque causing immorality and social disorder amongst the Indigenous and mixed race lower classes.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The pulque industry grew still further in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as land reforms enabled agricultural estates to increase cultivation of agave and railroads facilitated major improvements in the transport of pulque from its rural centres of production to its urban centres of consumption, which were themselves rapidly growing. Mexico City’s population, for instance, rose from approximately 230,000 in 1877 to 470,000 in 1910.[[12]](#footnote-12) Pulque estates were valued at 200 million pesos in 1909, up from 10 million in 1870, while Mexico City had around 1,000 pulquerías in the early 1900s and pulquería numbers also expanded in Puebla and Toluca.[[13]](#footnote-13) These developments were in constant tension with increasingly negative views about pulque amongst Mexico’s political and intellectual elite, many of whom considered it an obstacle to progress and a cause of alcoholism, insanity, criminality and racial degeneration.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In the first half of the twentieth century, the pulque industry suffered from three major issues: land reforms breaking down large agricultural estates; major state-sponsored anti-alcohol campaigns; and the increasing affordability of domestically-produced beer, which was promoted by the government and the industry as a more hygienic, urbane alternative to pulque.[[15]](#footnote-15) Gradually, these and other factors led to a major decline in pulque production and consumption. In the early 2000s, about one hundred pulquerías operated in Mexico City: a decline of ninety per cent since 1900, while the city’s population has increased by a factor of twenty (at least). In 2011, the National Institute of Public Health estimated that less than five per cent of Mexico’s total population drank pulque on a regular basis, in contrast to the fifty per cent of men and thirty per cent of women who drank beer.[[16]](#footnote-16) However, the last decade has seen two distinct trends towards reviving pulque’s popularity: the organization of rural festivals dedicated to celebrating maguey cultivation and pulque production; and an increased popularity of urban pulquerías amongst young professionals and trend-setters.[[17]](#footnote-17)

By the time beer began to overtake pulque as Mexico’s most commonly consumed drink in the second half of the twentieth century, tequila was gaining an international reputation as Mexico’s national drink, as Mexican cinema of the 1940s helped to make hot-blooded, tequila-drinking *charros* (cowboys)into emblems of *lo mexicano*.[[18]](#footnote-18) Tequila is a distinct regional form of mezcal, a distilled spirit made from the cooked hearts of agave plants. Some archaeological evidence suggests Indigenous societies may have made mezcal in the pre-colonial period, but most accounts point to distillation being introduced after the onset of Spanish colonization.[[19]](#footnote-19) Although the colonial state banned mezcal production in the seventeenth century, to protect revenue from imported wines and liquors, illicit production and consumption became widespread during the colonial period.[[20]](#footnote-20) When the prohibition was lifted in 1795, colonial authorities in Guadalajara collected enough taxes on mezcal to finance half the costs of a new government building, indicating the considerable extent of its production in the region that would later become famous for tequila.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Tequila is the name of a town and district in the state of Jalisco, which became a major centre of mezcal production in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. During the same period, leading producers and exporters, including the Cuervo and Sauza families, strove to distinguish *mezcal from Tequila* as a distinctive product, characterised by modernized production methods and the use of the blue agave, or Agave tequilana Weber.[[22]](#footnote-22) Both the First and Second World War saw enormous increases in the export of tequila to Europe and the US, but disruption caused by the Mexican Revolution in the 1910s-20s and land reform in the 1930s led to major downturns in production. The Mexican government began establishing the legislative framework that formalised tequila’s distinct status in 1949, solidified it in 1974 by applying Mexico’s first Denomination of Origin to tequila, and in 1994 established the Official Mexican Standard for Tequila and the Tequila Regulatory Council, which regulates and monitors production processes. The industry suffered again in the 1980s with a serious agave shortage, but tequila has since become one of the fastest growing spirits in the world: its production tripled to more than 300 million litres annually between 1995 and 2008 and it has acquired an increased reputation as a marker of taste, sophistication and connoisseurship over the same period.[[23]](#footnote-23)

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, then, the fortunes of tequila and pulque as consumer products could hardly have been more different. In the rest of the article, I demonstrate how debates about their authenticity as national drinks have mobilized temporal concepts and historical narratives in distinct, but interlinked, ways over time. Firstly, nation-building discourses in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century sought to categorise pulque as the national drink in a framework of genealogical time that connected the pre-colonial Indigenous past to contemporary Mexican popular culture. Such connections emerged first not in the genre of cookbooks and food writing, but in literature, media discourse and different kinds of academic enquiry that variously presented positive and negative interpretations of the ancient lineage of pulque consumption. In constructing this genealogical timeframe for understanding pulque as uniquely and distinctively Mexican, the story of Xochitl and pulque’s origin was central.

**Xochitl, the Origins of Pulque, and Genealogical Time**

According to the legend recorded by a seventeenth-century Mexican historian, a noble maiden named Xochitl presented the Toltec king Tecpancaltzin with a gift of pulque, which her father Papantzin had learned to produce from the agaves he cultivated. The king was so taken with this gift, and with the beauty of Xochitl, that he seduced her and took her as his queen without her parents’ knowledge. This led to a scandal, which was resolved when the king agreed to name the son that Xochitl had borne heir to the Toltec throne. But the new heir, named Topiltzin, was doomed to preside over an era of moral decay and ruin, which brought about the fall of the Toltec dynasty.[[24]](#footnote-24)

The story of Xochitl and the discovery of pulque featured in canonical *costumbrista* literature, a genre that depicted Mexican “customs and types” and often combined representations of daily life with melodramatic or romantic narratives.[[25]](#footnote-25) Two leading authors in this genre, Manuel Payno and Guillermo Prieto, used the figure of Xochitl to establish a genealogical line of descent from the pre-colonial Indigenous past to contemporary cultural practice. Genealogical time, as defined by William Gallois, traces a family lineage to establish connections across time, while also acknowledging either cyclical or linear patterns of change. In this framework, popular cultural practices, as depicted by the *costumbrista* authors, serve the purpose of “actualizing” a particular account of time (national history) and “of connecting the present moment with the heritage” of the people to whom it relates (the nation).[[26]](#footnote-26)

In Payno’s most famous novel *Los bandidos de Río Frío* (1888-91), a description of a rustic pulquería in an urban neighbourhood figuratively associated Mexico’s ancient past and contemporary culture through the Xochitl legend:

“Painted in the centre of the wall is a strong, young woman, with round, rosy cheeks, a feathered headdress and a light dress peppered with coloured jewels; she presides over the pulquería and seems to encourage the locals to leave on display their bulky chests, their thick calves and their small, sandaled feet. It is America personified and should be recognised as the queen of these singular taverns where the liquor discovered by the beautiful Xochitl is dispensed.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

The mural is of Xochitl herself; her image not only connects the pulquería to a specific figure in the pre-colonial Indigenous past, but is also active in bringing the scene to life, drawing out the local colour of the ordinary Mexicans who drink and relax in her company. This interaction between Xochitl’s image and the pulquería patrons helps to collapse the distance between past and present.

Moreover, Xochitl’s pulquería is central to Payno’s description through time of the neighbourhood in which it is located. In one paragraph, Payno covers how this neighbourhood, Puente de la Leña, was the “busiest and happiest” part of Tenochtitlan (the Aztec capital) during the “the times before the conquest”; how it fared through the “long siege” and destruction that Hernán Cortés wrought on the city; to how it is now “the most commercial, energetic and bustling… of the great modern capital”.[[28]](#footnote-28) The description is thus not one of stasis, since it has gone through substantial change, but it does establish an equivalence between this part of Mexico City in the nineteenth-century present and the pre-colonial past. Payno further describes the neighbourhood’s transformation during the Friday of Sorrows holy day, when the pretty Indigenous girls steering little boats along the canal call to mind the beauties that had graced the courts of Moctezuma, the Aztec emperor, and Isabel, the Spanish queen at the time of the conquest.[[29]](#footnote-29) The passage embeds key legendary and historical figures of Mexico’s past – Xochitl, Moctezuma, Cortés, Isabel - in the description of the present-day city. Two male and female pairs, connected to the Indigenous and Spanish sides of Mexico’s heritage respectively, constitute the genealogical connection between Mexico’s past and present.

Moreover, Payno noted that the neighbourhood, its people and their popular customs are an “ancient novelty”, not only for foreigners but also “those *enlightened* and *Parisian* Mexicans who live in the city centre”.[[30]](#footnote-30) By emphasising the words *enlightened* and *Parisian*, Payno mocked those well-to-do Mexicans who preferred to show off their cultural ties to Europe, as being out of touch with popular culture and real Mexicanness. Pulque and pulquerías are presented consistently as emblems of the popular, the authentic and the uniquely Mexican throughout the novel. In addition to the passage describing Xochitl’s pulquería in Puente de la Leña, pulque is depicted as a quintessential part of rural and urban custom numerous times in the novel, and pre-colonial figures such as Xochitl and Nezahualcoyotl are referenced in connection to pulquerías more than once.[[31]](#footnote-31) For those enlightened and Parisian Mexicans to become truly Mexican, they need to discover - for the first time, as a “novelty” - the “ancient” roots of popular culture represented by Xochitl’s pulquería.

Guillermo Prieto likewise used pulque and the figure of Xochitl to connect Mexico’s ancient past to popular culture in the nineteenth century in his celebrated memoirs, written in the 1880s. The opening chapter describes Mexico City in the 1830s, portraying pulquerías as among the most popular places to drink, with their lively atmosphere, music, games and dancing, and imagery of the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ on their walls.[[32]](#footnote-32) In chapter two, pulquería sociability is characterized as the most “typical way of getting to know the common population of Mexico City… intermingling to form a restless throng…, the fervour being fed by tasters, glasses, and pitchers of Xochitl’s intoxicating liquor”.[[33]](#footnote-33) The two passages together establish a genealogical relationship, less linear than Payno’s, between past and present: the walls of the first pulquería are adorned with Christian symbols, and thus a connection to the colonial past; in the second, Xochitl and the pre-colonial Indigenous past prevail; and both passages convey a vivid sense of living vitality and momentum of the people gathered within. Thus the distance between the present and two distinct pasts are collapsed in successive pulquería scenes, implying a close family relationship between the present and both pasts. Additional pasts are added to this genealogical connection that begins with pulque and Xochitl, towards the end of the memoir, where the author remembers walking through Mexico City in the aftermath of the Mexican American War of 1846-48, a particularly vulnerable time in the nation’s developing history.[[34]](#footnote-34) His ambulation begins at a point which was “in times past called the Pulque checkpoint, where great deliveries of the liquor of Xochitl” came into the city.[[35]](#footnote-35) From this starting point, he proceeds through a series of locations which evoke or symbolize, in this order: the independence wars (1810-1821); the foundation of the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan (1325); the colonial Inquisition (1570s-1700s); the Mexican American War (1846-48); and political and literary achievements of the mid to late nineteenth century.[[36]](#footnote-36) The story of Mexican history and culture that figuratively starts with pulque and Xochitl in the pre-colonial past, moves back and forth very quickly through long periods of time as the author moves through the space of the capital city - the ‘present’ of the 1840s – knitting together the present moment and Mexico’s long history.

Manuel Payno and Guillermo Prieto, both very influential literary figures, traced a cultural lineage between the pre-colonial Indigenous past and contemporary popular custom through pulque and the Xochitl legend, illustrating the deep historical roots of *lo mexicano* and celebrating its cultural vitality. However, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century also saw a considerable upswing of anti-pulque discourse in other media, which drew on similar genealogical frameworks to create an opposition between backwards-looking cultural tradition and a progressivist narrative of modernity. As Tim Mitchell has noted, the political and intellectual establishment in Mexico during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century embedded a concept of progressive time in their vision for modernizing Mexico, attributing the lack of national progress to date to the stultifying traditions of Indigenous peoples, peasants and urban workers.[[37]](#footnote-37) This historical narrative about Mexico’s development, or lack thereof, depended on assigning a negative value to “tradition”, as an anti-progressive quality that ought to be “condemned as… monotony, torpor, vegetation, backwardness, inflexibility”.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Within this discourse, politicians and medical, psychiatric, legal and criminological experts frequently associated pulque with all the problems they identified as holding back Mexico’s progress as a nation, including crime, mental illness, poverty, ill health and racial degeneration.[[39]](#footnote-39) *El Diario del Hogar*, for instance, a Mexico City newspaper that focused on daily life and social reform, asserted in 1882 that:

“A terrible plague runs through this city: PULQUE... Don’t ask those who sell or buy it: they will tell you it is the ambrosia of the gods... Do you know to what we owe the ignorance, degradation, laziness, sickness and social death of Mexico’s common folk? The use of pulque.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

This reference to pulque as the “ambrosia of the gods” evokes pulque’s mythical associations to infer the fantastical and deeply rooted popular traditions about pulque to which the unfortunate “common folk” were wedded. The city council campaign of the early 1900s to prohibit pulquerías from newly developing and wealthy neighbourhoods in Mexico City explicitly contrasted the “civilized… elegance” of the neighbourhoods with the “vice-ridden customs” of pulquerías, which were a “serious obstacle to their progress”. [[41]](#footnote-41) This, and much of the anti-pulque rhetoric circulating at the time, created an opposition between pulque, pulquerías and popular tradition, on the one hand, and the modernizing qualities of Mexico City on the other: progress, elegance, civilization and cleanliness.

Moreover, the legend of Xochitl was invoked by several figures seeking to effect a radical change in popular tradition to enable a more progressive future, highlighting the genealogical connections between the pre-colonial past and the present in order to break them. In the 1880s, legal expert Francisco Serralde asserted that pulque consumption had “disastrous consequences in terms of criminality”, supporting this claim with detailed discussion of pulque’s chemical composition, crime statistics, physical diseases caused by alcohol abuse, and laws regulating pulque sales.[[42]](#footnote-42) It is therefore striking that Serralde devoted considerable space to recounting the legend of pulque’s discovery, involving Xochitl, her father Papantzin, the king Tecpancaltzin and the god Ixquitecatl in events said to transpire between 1045 and 1050.[[43]](#footnote-43) Including the specific dates of 1045 to 1050 gives the story, and the wider narrative about the problems caused by pulque in the present day, a specific historical beginning. Immediately after the Xochitl story concludes, Serralde emphasises that today “the majority of the cases of drunkenness in Mexico originate with the abuse of pulque”, implying a historical connection between the origin, or beginning, of pulque and the present day problems of crime, mental illness, poverty and ill health.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Roque Macouzet, a medical doctor and founder of one of Mexico’s first temperance societies in the early 1900s, invoked the Xochitl legend to establish a historical precedent for introducing much stricter controls on pulque in contemporary Mexico. His 1900 paper called on the church, the education system and the press to launch a “crusade” against the abuse of pulque, together with a range of measures to restrict its supply. He argued that pulque consumption was a “plague” responsible for high rates of violent crime, ill health and infant mortality, much more so than other alcoholic drinks because of its unique fermentation process and composition. He described Xochitl’s invention of pulque as “the worst service to her people and her race”, before noting that “historians say” the very king to whom Xochitl had dedicated pulque had to introduce a range of severe punishments, including the death penalty, to deal with the epidemic of drunkenness instigated by “the national drink”.[[45]](#footnote-45) Referring to pulque as the “national” drink at the time of its inception, establishes a lineage through time between Xochitl and the contemporary Mexicans - “her people and her race” – who continued to suffer the consequences of pulque consumption.

Genealogical time, centred on the ancestral lineage connecting figures like Xochitl from the pre-colonial Indigenous past to contemporary popular culture, was therefore mobilized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to both celebrate and denigrate pulque as the national drink. While both types of narrative employed genealogical time, they contained different temporal interpretations of “tradition”, one largely positive that evidenced Mexico’s deep historical roots as a nation and one largely negative that was held responsible for preventing Mexico’s progress as a nation. Cookbooks and food writing from the same period, and until the 1940s, did not frequently employ such temporally complex or nationalistic representations of pulque. As the next section demonstrates, however, pulque did feature significantly and consistently in these works in ways that would later become central to the construction of Mexican culinary tradition and claims for its authenticity.

**The “Authentic” Pulque: From Through-Time Continuum to a Lost Golden Age**

Like literature and art, recipe book publications were an important medium through which elites sought to imagine the Mexican nation into being in the nineteenth century.[[46]](#footnote-46) However, as Jeffrey Pilcher has observed, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cookbooks generally “reflected the elite preference for Spanish and French cuisine over indigenous dishes”. [[47]](#footnote-47) Given the elite and European biases of these texts and the increasingly negative views of pulque circulating in other forms of public discourse, we might therefore expect that pulque, a drink and ingredient closely associated with Indigenous and non-elite Mexicans, would feature very sparingly, if at all, in these cookbooks. However, it did feature in fairly consistent ways, establishing a culinary tradition involving pulque that, by the middle of the twentieth century, formed the basis of representations of pulque as the authentically national drink. These traditions included pulque’s use as a cooking liquor for meat, as the base of a famous sauce (*salsa borracha*, or drunken sauce), and as the ideal accompaniment for certain regional dishes (especially *barbacoa*, or maguey-roasted meat); the finest pulque hailing from the plains of Apan; and the celebrated curados (pulque flavoured with various fruits, nuts and aromatics) dating to the colonial period.

In one of the first comprehensive publications on Mexican cookery, the *Diccionario de cocina* published in 1845, several recipes include pulque as an ingredient, in making salsas and cooking meat and beans, and as the perfect beverage accompaniment to certain dishes, such as enchiladas and chile-based stews.[[48]](#footnote-48) Pulque’s use as a cooking liquor for meat and beans consistently featured in recipe books across the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.[[49]](#footnote-49) In some cases, this use of pulque was identified as a “Mexican-style” flourish, even in books addressing a very wealthy elite audience, such as *El cocinero mexicano* (1831), probably the first published Mexican cookbook.[[50]](#footnote-50) Its recipe for Mexican-style ham instructs the cook to “follow the same procedure as for recipe 30 [Spanish-style ham], but instead of cooking the ham for the second time in wine and vinegar, use pulque”.[[51]](#footnote-51) What would later become known as salsa borracha appeared in several early recipe books under the title “salsa de pulque”, usually as an accompaniment for rustic meat dishes. This sauce was made by mixing pulque together with toasted and ground ancho and pasilla chiles, pumpkin seeds, more chiles browned in lard, finely chopped garlic, raw onion and crumbled cheese.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The 1845 *Diccionario de cocina* included an extended entry on pulque itself, describing it as “the regional drink of these parts and an excellent wine” with healthful properties.[[53]](#footnote-53) Like many subsequent works, it asserted that the best quality pulque was produced from magueys in the plains of Apan and detailed several recipes for cured pulque.[[54]](#footnote-54) *La cocinera poblana*, in its fourth edition published in 1890, included a section on cured pulque drinks and a recipe for “Pulque of the Three Guarantees”, referencing the name of the army, agreement and flag that established Mexican independence in 1821, alluding to pulque’s national credentials. The recipe calls for pulque coloured red with tuna fruit, sweetened white pulque and pulque coloured green with celery to be added one by one to a glass to create the vibrant colours of the Mexican flag.[[55]](#footnote-55)The same text declared that there “are so many ways of curing pulque and they are so well known” that it was unnecessary to reproduce them all for its readers.[[56]](#footnote-56) These references, albeit brief in books commonly several hundred pages in length, nevertheless suggest that pulque was a familiar drink to their broadly middle to upper class readership, and an important enough element within Mexican cookery to include despite their tendency to marginalize Indigenous contributions to Mexican cuisine.

It was not until the mid-twentieth century, however, that cookbooks routinely celebrated pulque as the national drink. From the 1940s to the 1970s, as part of a broader trend of culinary nationalism seeking to defend traditional and authentic Mexican cuisine against changes brought by modernization and globalization, food writers reimagined the traditional, not as an obstacle to progress and development, but as the source of the cuisine’s cultural value. In this model, tradition was valued for its “longevity, survival, endurance, stability, constancy… in things that have happened ‘time out of mind’ or since ‘time immemorial’” and, while the historical narrative afforded room for changes over time to Mexican cuisine as a whole, its authenticity value was dependent on those elements of the cuisine that formed a “through-time” continuum.[[57]](#footnote-57)

The use of pulque in recipes and as a beverage helped to articulate a positive, culturally valuable vision of tradition around which the idea of “authentic” Mexican food started to coalesce. Alfredo Ramos Espinosa, a key figure in the post-revolutionary educational establishment that promoted mestizo ideology, wrote lyrically in 1948 about the virtues of traditional Mexican home cooking: “Don’t give me roast turkey with chestnuts and apple purée, or the classic pheasant elegantly stuffed with truffles; give me a plate of good *mole* and a glass of cured pulque.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Ramos considered pulque to be cheap and nutritious; drinking it with meals at home should be encouraged, over going out to spend money in bars and restaurants unable to replicate “authentic Mexican food.”[[59]](#footnote-59) His work is notable for its passionate exposition of Mexico’s *mestizo* identity: “not the simple sum of Indian things and Spanish things, but… something different, born of the compound, in the chemical sense of the word.”[[60]](#footnote-60) This is a statement of post-revolutionary mestizo ideology par excellence and yet Ramos warmly embraced pulque’s place in Mexican culinary tradition. His description of salsa borracha, a consistent feature of Mexican cookbooks since the early nineteenth century, almost makes the flavour jump off the page: “And how about some drunken sauce, where the mulato or pasilla chiles, the essential garlic and onion, are mixed with pulque to do honour to the chopped olives and aged cheese! Don’t be scandalized; think of the wine used around the world in all kinds of casseroles.”[[61]](#footnote-61)

Josefina Velázquez de León, a giant of mid-century Mexican food writing, also gave special place to barbacoa and salsa borracha, as the first recipes in a section on “Mexican Specialities” in her 1952 book *Cocina mexicana de abolengo*. While the book traces an overall narrative of change brought by centuries of Spanish, French, Austrian and Italian influence, and regional exchanges within Mexico, the “true Mexican cuisine” - the “tradition” of “our ancestors” - began with a strong base of ingredients, techniques and dishes “known since the times of the Aztec Empire”, barbacoa and pulque included.[[62]](#footnote-62) Maria Elena Sodi de Pallares (1958) described “authentic” Mexican cuisine as the “fusion, born through the centuries, of two great culinary trends: the aboriginal and the western”, but singled out pulque, maize, chocolate and chiles as particularly enduring contributions from the “aboriginal” side of this fusion.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Several cookbooks from the mid twentieth century further incorporated stories about the origins of pulque in the pre-colonial Indigenous past to establish a through-time continuum of Mexican culinary culture. Variants of the Xochitl origin story are discussed twice at considerable length in the early stages of *Good Food from Mexico*, first published in 1950. First, in an introductory essay that combines a broad overview of Mexican culinary history with impressions of the centrality of food to the Mexican character, the Xochitl legend is used to show the enduring nature of Mexican culinary culture against external influences:

“Despite the invasion of bottled soft drinks from the States, the native beverages continue to be popular. Pulque… reigns supreme. It has since 1045 when Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl was so entranced with the “honey water” discovered by sixteen-year-old Xoxhitl [sic] that he married her. To the princess, whose name means Flower, is given credit for bringing to the Mexican good earth what was once considered a ceremonial drink and the special property of the goddess with four hundred sons… No native celebration is complete without it and the Indians, particularly those living in communities without adequate water supply systems, drink astonishing quantities of it.”[[64]](#footnote-64)

Interweaving a description of pulque’s continuing popularity and importance, particularly for the Indigenous population, with an account of its origin in the pre-colonial past, conveys a deep cultural continuity. Combining a precise historical referent – the year 1045 – with more mythical aspects of the story – the goddess with four hundred sons (Mayahuel, the Aztec agave goddess) - invests pulque with both historicity and timelessness simultaneously.

The origin story is reiterated again, in the first full chapter - on beverages – to position pulque as “Mexico’s national drink today, as it was when the Spaniards arrived”. Again, specific historical dates (“the eleventh century”) and more mythical elements (“the legendary god-ruler” Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl) of the origin story are combined, alongside phrases indicating the unchanging, timeless nature of pulque’s embeddedness in popular custom: “Since then [the eleventh century] the people of Mexico have consumed pulque as naturally as water… are still serving it endlessly… Women still go with their jugs in age-old fashion…”.[[65]](#footnote-65) *Good Food from Mexico* does celebrate culinary mestizaje, but the narrative structure framing the book emphasizes continuities from Mexico’s pre-colonial past. Most chapters of the book begin with historical vignettes of how a particular aspect of Mexican cuisine has developed from its beginnings in the pre-colonial past. Within this structure, pulque is depicted as one of the two most enduring, timeless food traditions, the other being corn tortillas.[[66]](#footnote-66) Salsa borracha is one of a handful of recipes described as being “part of the Mexican cooking tradition since time out of mind”.[[67]](#footnote-67) Barbacoa is another.[[68]](#footnote-68) In depicting pulque as the national drink and an ingredient in timeless food traditions, *Good Food from Mexico* places it and a select number of other foods on a through-time continuum, emphasizing continuity from time immemorial to articulate the authenticity of Mexico’s cuisine.

Pulque is similarly represented in a 1974 book on *Pre-Hispanic Cooking*, which sought to convey to English-speaking audiences the enduring and complex nature of Mexican cuisine. Its main aim, while acknowledging that Mexican food was, “as we ourselves are, the product of the joining of two peoples and two cultures”, was to counter the impression that pre-colonial Indigenous cuisine, as the base for this fusion, had been limited and poor. In this framework, pulque is the first foodstuff to be discussed in depth, being introduced in reference to the Aztec agave goddess Mayahuel and the “most important” of her four hundred children “Ome Tochtli, the god of pulque”.[[69]](#footnote-69) While the origin story involving Xochitl is not included, the fall of the Toltec god-ruler Quetzalcoatl is attributed to pulque in a mythical-historical account of the origins of chocolate, with both being repeatedly described as the food of the gods.[[70]](#footnote-70) The unchanging, timeless nature of pulque within Mexican food culture is strongly emphasized, stating that the methods used to produce pulque in contemporary Mexico “are the same as those used by the ancient people of Mexico”.[[71]](#footnote-71) Betty Blue’s *Authentic Mexican Cooking* (1977) similarly stresses pulque’s enduring presence within a mestizo cuisine, mobilizing a familiar combination of pre-colonial mythic history, the meeting of Spanish and Indigenous cultures in specific historical moments, and contemporary popular culture. “Pulque is the same now as it was when Cortés and his men arrived in Tenochtitlán. History tells us that this drink was the downfall of the Toltec empire. Whether or not this is true, pulque can be purchased today in every village or city.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Mexican cuisine is thereby located in a specific historical moment – the meeting of Spaniard and Indian. At the same time, pulque is one of several Indigenous elements (also maize, chiles, beans and tomatoes) brought to this specific historical moment of fusion that are depicted as transcending time, through references to their origin point in the mythic past, their unchanging means of production and consumption and their longevity.

From the 1990s, food writing specialising in Mexico’s drinks became more common and, like the earlier generation of cookbooks, these connected pulque’s origins in the pre-colonial Indigenous past to its cultural value and authenticity. Rather than placing pulque in a through-time continuum, however, these works typically made pulque the subject of a nostalgic and declensionist historical narrative that fixed its vitality as part of Mexican culinary heritage in the past, identifying the late nineteenth century as pulque’s golden age. As William Cronon has suggested, declensionist narratives tell a story of decline over time and are often rooted in “romantic and antimodernist reactions” against change.[[73]](#footnote-73) In declensionist narratives about pulque, the story begins in a timeless, mythical past associated with pre-colonial Indigenous culture; its middle is the late nineteenth-century golden age; and the end is either now or nearing, in the late twentieth century, as a result of modernization and globalization. This narrative structure and use of time create an image of an authentic national heritage in decline and evoke a poignant sense of loss that tries to emotionally engage the audience in pulque’s protection or revival.

Laura B. Caraza Campos begins her 1994 account of pulque as one of Mexico’s “national drinks” in, essentially, the beginning of time itself. The maguey from which pulque is derived is attributed the same kind of ever-present status as humanity, the cosmos and maize: “Just as there are myths about the origins of the sun, the earth, men and maize, the maguey also has its own: it is the encarnation of the goddess Mayahuel, who went into the heart of the agave so that from this hollow its blood would flow.” This timeless beginning is blended together with the pre-colonial Indigenous past in the opening section of the book, which recounts the story of Xochitl and Tecpancaltzin, and other origin stories, including the downfall of the Toltec empire following god-ruler Quetzalcoatl’s pulque-induced drunken shame, and another attributing the discovery of pulque to a tricksterish possum. The same passage emphasizes the sacredness of the agave for “our ancestors” in “ancient Mexico” and declares “Pulque is still produced today as it was for centuries – although its golden age has certainly passed.”[[74]](#footnote-74) Caraza’s narrative middle charts the expansion of pulque production and consumption during the colonial period, culminating during the Porfiriato (1876-1910), and highlights how the plains of Apan became renowned for producing the finest quality pulque and the immortalization of curados in late nineteenth-century fiction like *Los bandidos de Río Frío*.[[75]](#footnote-75) Particular attention is devoted to pulquerías as hubs of popular urban culture, with vividly decorated interiors and lively atmospheres, via extended quotations from the work of Porfirian-era historian Antonio Garcia Cubas. Caraza’s narrative end brings us up to the late twentieth-century present, in which pulquerías “are almost museum exhibits. Photographs, poetry, signs and decorative murals have been lost. Today, people drink beer, not pulque... But no-one ceases to long for a good curado with barbacoa and memory preserves the pleasant smell of salsa borracha or pulque bread.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

The book as a whole is clearly concerned with promoting and preserving pulque as culturally valuable heritage. Caraza acknowledges that tequila is globally recognized as the “typical of drink of Mexico… as Mexican as mariachi, the charro, toasting and ranchera songs”, and that beer has comprehensively displaced pulque especially amongst urban consumers. However, this book on Mexico’s “national drinks” devotes more than twenty pages to pulque and pulquerías, just four to tequila, six to mezcal and less than two to beer.[[77]](#footnote-77) Moreover, the declensionist narrative about pulque, ostensibly moving in a linear direction from beginning, through middle, to end, is complicated by a temporally complex passage discussing the names of remaining pulquerías: “*The Daughter of the Apaches* was the name given to *The Apaches* when it was relaunched. And *The Future*, on reopening, was called *Memories of the Future*….”[[78]](#footnote-78) The two selected examples of surviving pulquerías are striking because they create a form of genealogical time, tracing a familial line of descent between the historical *The Apaches* and its “daughter” in the present, and a form of cyclical time in which *The Future* is of the past, and its present-day successor both remembers and revives that past. The declensionist narrative is thereby combined with genealogical time and cyclical time to depict pulque as the most important of Mexico’s “national” drinks and as such, a culturally vital aspect of heritage that should be preserved for the future.

Martha Chapa’s 1999 book on Mexican drinks employs a similar declensionist narrative in its representation of pulque, although structurally it starts with pulque’s “middle” – its golden age – moving backwards, then forwards in time from this point. Chapa begins by inviting readers to imagine themselves in Mexico City at the turn of the twentieth century, depicting a vibrant urban scene where the traditional and modern move side by side: traditionally dressed peasants intermingling with cosmopolitan urbanites. Here, “in the centre of our vision, appears – in lively colour – a pulquería, dominating everything”.[[79]](#footnote-79) This pulquería is declared to be “living through its golden age” and a mischievous expression of the “new national identity”.[[80]](#footnote-80) This recreated moment in time is “more than 380 years” since the Spanish conquest, which, it is implied, started the process of dissociating pulque from its mythical pre-colonial connotations since “Rituals honouring Mayahuel and the 400 “rabbit lords” are no longer freely celebrated in the process of making pulque”.[[81]](#footnote-81) The following passage interweaves accounts of the expansion of pulque production in the colonial period and nineteenth century, various mythical origin stories involving Mayahuel, Patécatl (Mayahuel’s husband), Papantzin, Xochitl, Ce Acatl Topiltzin-Quetzalcoatl, and descriptions of the sociability and material culture of pulquerías in the nineteenth century. And then, “returning to our times” at the turn of the twenty-first century, pulque has almost disappeared: “Only a handful of devotees, forgotten peasants, nostalgic city-dwellers and some youths try to remain faithful to a near-lost tradition and keep alive the memory of *teoctli*, the wine of the gods.” [[82]](#footnote-82) The rich layering of pulque’s cultural significance over time, although concluding with its story of ultimate decline, communicates the importance of preserving pulque as part of Mexico’s cultural heritage. This is explicitly contrasted to beer, whose popularity is identified as the biggest reason for pulque’s decline, in a terse reference to beer’s “ease of bottling and its false image of progress”.[[83]](#footnote-83) The declensionist historical narrative therefore opposes the progressive narrative represented by beer, romanticizing the place of pulque within Mexico’s national culture and suggesting the cultural impoverishment that has resulted from its decline.

**The “Authentic” Tequila: Genealogical Time, Mestizaje and Futurity**

At the same time as declensionist historical narratives represented pulque as an authentically Mexican drink imperilled by and in opposition to modernizing and globalizing influences in the late twentieth century, tequila was increasingly celebrated as Mexico’s national drink in food writing. Several scholars have shown that the construction of tequila as a national icon, imbued with a layered symbolism of modernity, cultural sophistication, tradition, romanticism and Mexicanness, gathered apace in the 1940s, especially through the medium of film.[[84]](#footnote-84) However, tequila remained largely absent from cookbooks and food writing until the last quarter of the twentieth century. From then, the construction of tequila as authentically Mexican combined two distinct temporal frameworks, which, in different ways, contested pulque’s ability to be representative of the nation into the future. First, tequila was commonly represented as the descendant of pulque through genealogical time, giving tequila roots in the pre-colonial Indigenous past. Second, tequila became emblematic of a triadic, evolutionary historical narrative of *mestizaje*, the modern nationalist ideology that romanticizes the blending of Indigenous and Spanish in the creation of Mexico itself.

The entangling of claims to authenticity for tequila and pulque as the national drink had roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As the tequila industry started to expand, producers used labels and adverts that “positioned tequila as the antithesis of pulque”, emphasising their technologically advanced, factory-based production to depict tequila as “the liquid embodiment of a modern, clean, and non-Indian nation”.[[85]](#footnote-85) Tequila’s home in western Mexico, including the city of Guadalajara and the state of Jalisco was depicted as a less Indigenous and more forward-looking part of the country than pulque-producing regions in central Mexico. Tequila became further associated with the 1910 revolution and revolutionary heroes such as Pancho Villa (despite the fact he was a self-professed teetotaller), through Mexican films, songs and literature of the mid-twentieth century. In this way, tequila’s symbolic association with modernity and Mexico’s future became melded to romantic and idealized notions of Mexico’s history and created an oppositional relationship to pulque.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Unlike pulque, however, tequila made few appearances in Mexican recipe books until the later twentieth century and was not important to the development of culinary nationalism in food writing from the 1940s to 1970s. In the foundational *Diccionario de cocina* (1845), and a later edition published in Mexico and France in 1897, there is no entry for tequila, mezcal or beer, but pulque, cider, wine, liqueurs and mixed drinks of various sorts all have their own detailed entries.[[87]](#footnote-87) The drinks sections of other nineteenth-century books made frequent use of rum, aguardiente, chinguirito and various liqueurs in their recipes, but only very infrequently mentioned mezcal and never tequila as a distinct form of mezcal.[[88]](#footnote-88) The *Moderno recetario de cocina* (1929) contains a striking collection of “Cocktails,” using a wide variety of alcoholic ingredients, including gin, vermouth, whisky, bacardi, cognac, absinthe, port, sherry, champagne, madeira, cider, wine, Pernod and rum. None use tequila or mezcal.[[89]](#footnote-89) More striking still is the absence of tequila-based drinks in a 1950 cookbook, which is both about and published in Jalisco (the tequila-producing heartland). In neither the cocktails section, nor a broader beverages section, is tequila (or mezcal) mentioned, but pulque appears in one recipe, blended with rice, vanilla and aguardiente. Tequila and mezcal each feature once in dessert recipes, so their absence from the beverages section is still more noticeable.[[90]](#footnote-90) Josefina Velázquez de León likewise ignored tequila and mezcal in her 1952 publication. Of the 29 recipes in her drinks section, none contain tequila or mezcal.[[91]](#footnote-91)

In translating her work for American audiences in the late 1960s, Velázquez de León did incorporate one tequila-based cocktail: the Mexican Flag Cocktail, containing tequila, sugar, lime juice, and a green grape, white piece of jícama and a red cherry to illustrate the colours of the Mexican flag. However, the same book devotes much more space to discussing pulque as a “popular drink in the central region of the Republic” and providing recipes for cured pulque, despite acknowledging that American readers would not be able to make them.[[92]](#footnote-92) Other English-language books directed at American audiences in the 1960s, gave a greater, though not particularly dominant, place to tequila.[[93]](#footnote-93) By the 1970s, however, the idea that tequila was Mexico’s national drink had become widespread enough outside Mexico for Betty Blue, Professor of Spanish at Southern Arkansas University, to seek to correct this: “One of the most popular misconceptions about Mexican cuisine is that tequila is the national drink; actually the national drink is pulque.”[[94]](#footnote-94)

Tequila was more commonly identified as the national drink in the late twentieth century, especially – as one might expect – in the newly emerged genre of promotional literature and tasting guides for tequila. In one example from 1996, tequila is declared to have “very special nationalistic significance for all Mexicans”, distinguishing tequila from other drinks native to the country, claiming that it is only “tequila, originally and exclusively from Jalisco” that “has become a national symbol”.[[95]](#footnote-95) Works in this genre often depict pulque as tequila’s predecessor, tracing a genealogical lineage through time, beginning with the mythical origins of pulque in the pre-colonial Indigenous past. Lennart Blomberg, for instance, states that tequila, “without doubt Mexico’s most famous foreign ambassador… has its roots and much of its history in common with mezcal and pulque”, before outlining in considerable detail the manymyths and legends about “the origin of pulque and, therefore, of tequila and mezcal”. The legends include Mayahuel, the Aztec agave goddess, piercing her heart to release her “blood”; lightening striking the heart of an agave plant in an age-old storm to boil the sap inside; an opossum teaching humanity how to ferment the agave’s sap; and the discovery of pulque by Papantzin and Xochitl in the Toltec era.[[96]](#footnote-96) A 2010 *Time* magazine piece on “forgotten drinks” casts pulque as the “original tequila”, the “ancient Aztec drink” with a “few great origin myths”. Tequila is thereby invested with an ancient genealogy and at the same time is depicted as pulque’s natural successor: “the beginning of the end for pulque had arrived with the Spanish a few hundred years earlier”.[[97]](#footnote-97) Quite contrary to the actual history of pulque, which became exponentially *more* popular after the beginning of Spanish colonialism and more so still after the end of Spanish colonial rule, the genealogical connection that establishes tequila as the authentically national drink requires pulque to have starting passing into history from the moment the Spanish arrived.

*A Drink Named Tequila* (1997) similarly depicts tequila as the genealogical descendant of pulque, with the originary parent of both being the agave plant. The account begins by outlining “popular myths and legends” about the agave, focusing on Mayahuel’s divine beneficence and her husband Petácatl’s development of fermentation, giving rise to pulque. The “most important” development in the use of the agave family tree, however, “awaited the arrival” of the Spanish and their technology: “the distillation of the must extracted from the heart of the maguey or agave”, thus producing the first mezcal.[[98]](#footnote-98) Thereafter, tequila becomes increasingly intertwined with the emergence of the modern Mexican nation: thriving clandestinely despite colonial-era restrictions; funding the federalist resistance to centralism in the early post-independence period; enabling the liberal victory against conservative forces in the 1860s; and pioneering industrial development in the late nineteenth century.[[99]](#footnote-99) The ancestral line of tequila therefore begins in the pre-colonial and mythic past, in common with pulque, but the national drink, tequila, is born as the national story unfolds through time.

This genealogical framework, in which pulque becomes tequila’s pre-colonial ancestor, is often combined with a triadic, evolutionary historical narrative in the construction of tequila as Mexico’s authentically national drink. As Penelope Corfield notes, triadic historical narratives are marked by “temporal dynamism”, since they are predicated on “the addition of a child” to two parent figures or processes and this “makes a trio which progresses into the next generation”.[[100]](#footnote-100) The modern nationalist ideology of *mestizaje* is a triadic interpretation of the historical development of Mexican culture and identity, formed through the meeting and fusion of Indigenous and Spanish cultures in the sixteenth century, and reaching maturity in the post-revolutionary era of the twentieth century and beyond. Recent depictions of tequila as the authentically national drink use this triadic, evolutionary narrative to characterize tequila as an exemplar of mestizaje. Luna Zamora’s academic study, for instance, describes tequila as “the mestizo product par excellence; like many of the customs, foods and drinks with indigenous roots, it has persisted, but under the influence of new technologies, markets and consumption habits”.[[101]](#footnote-101) A 1998 tequila guide combines genealogical and triadic temporalities to explain how tequila became a “national emblem”.[[102]](#footnote-102) Its “pre-Hispanic ancestor was the American agave, used to produce fermented beverages” and it “came into being as a mestizo creation” in the early colonial period from the “cultural blending in three aspects”. Tequila’s triadic nature is emphasised in two separate ways: it is produced from an Indigenous plant with Spanish distillation technology that came originally from the Arab world; and it represents three stages in Mexico’s evolution, from the colonial era in which the cultural fusion began, to the “rancho grande” of the nineteenth century, to the modern business of the tequila industry “simultaneously bold and conservative, modern and rooted in tradition”.[[103]](#footnote-103)

In some accounts, the very process of *mestizaje* is the defining feature of Mexican historical time, within which tequila comes to exemplify the nation, while pulque is suspended beyond time as simply Indigenous. Agave expert, Ana Guadalupe Valenzuela Zapata, for instance, stresses that “Unlike pulque, which can claim a prehistoric Mesoamerican origin, tequila’s evolution is not purely autochthonous… tequila is a mix of indigenous and Hispanic elements that slowly fermented during the protohistoric period, only to rise to its fully leavened state well after the Conquest. Like the offspring of Cortés and Malinche, of Mayahuel and Dionysus, tequila is *puro mestizo*, a hybrid with a vigor all its own.”[[104]](#footnote-104) The temporal framework implicitly locates historicity in Mexico’s independence period, or at least in the late colonial period, while equating the pre-colonial period to prehistory and the early to mid colonial period to protohistory. Within this periodization, pulque has only an origin, in pre-history, while tequila has a dynamic evolution over time, reaching maturity in the fully historical period of an independent Mexico. Tequila is still afforded a rich genealogy, its forebears including a female pre-colonial Indigenous deity (Mayahuel), a male ancient Greek deity (Dionysus), and two key protagonists in the beginning of Spanish colonialism in Mexico (Cortés and Malinche). Historical time begins – slowly – with the meeting of Spanish and Indigenous cultures and the creation of tequila, and dynamically moves forward as the nation of Mexico emerges and its national symbol, tequila, evolves. The construction of tequila as Mexico’s authentic national drink towards the end of the twentieth century therefore combined a genealogical framework that connected it to the pre-colonial past with a dynamic story of historical change in which tequila was an active agent, evolving in synchrony with the Mexican nation.

**Conclusion**

The changing construction of pulque and tequila as authentically Mexican across time has depended on complex manipulations of the relationship between various pasts, presents and futures. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, genealogical time traced a lineage between pulque’s pre-colonial Indigenous past and contemporary popular practices, which, in different media, showcased the ancient roots of Mexican national culture and positioned popular custom as an obstacle to national progress. By the mid-twentieth century, culinary nationalism had embraced the ideology of mestizaje, but located the authenticity of Mexico’s mestizo cuisine in a through-time continuum, in which pulque’s timelessness, originating in the mytho-historical Indigenous past and remaining unchanged in the present, was particularly valued. Towards the end of the twentieth century, pulque’s connection to both the pre-colonial Indigenous past and a golden age in the late nineteenth century became key to its representation as an authentically national drink within a declensionist historical narrative of lost or vanishing heritage. At the same time, the representation of tequila as authentically Mexican combined a genealogical relationship with pulque, thereby adopting its origins in the pre-colonial Indigenous past, with an active role in the triadic historical narrative of Mexican mestizaje.

Essential to all these constructions of authenticity is a relationship to the pre-colonial Indigenous past, although this is positioned within different temporal frameworks and historical narratives in each case. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the conflicting use of genealogical time to celebrate and denigrate pulque’s role in contemporary popular culture reflected a central tension within elite nationalism in Mexico, and indeed throughout Spanish America, of commemorating pre-colonial Indigenous societies as part of the national past, while viewing contemporary Indigenous peoples as problems of the national present.[[105]](#footnote-105) Different historical narratives about culinary mestizaje across the twentieth century, in which pulque acted first as a symbol of the enduring presence of national tradition and then as its loss, while tequila acted as an active agent of national identity formation through mestizaje, contributed to imagining the pre-colonial Indigenous past as immune to, outside of or before historical time.

The changing representations of pulque and tequila as Mexico’s national drinks therefore show that temporalities outside of historical time are among the most important in constructing authenticity. They are also among the most powerful, in terms of how they can reinforce, and perhaps even shape, nationalist ideologies and the racial politics embedded therein. However, genealogical, progressivist, declensionist and triadic historical narratives about pulque and tequila also show that authenticity as a temporal construct can be fully compatible with historical change. Of these, the triadic historical narrative that made tequila an active agent in Mexican mestizaje is perhaps the most thorough in its incorporation of historical change into the idea of authenticity. Given that tequila’s reputation as the national drink was being explicitly rejected in food writing up to the 1970s, but has since become firmly established, we can perhaps conclude that the manner in which its authenticity has been constructed temporally is particularly persuasive. The temporal dynamism of tequila’s triadic historical narrative and its genealogical connection to pulque suggests that authenticity as a temporal construct is most powerful when it can combine an ahistorical origin to a historical past with a clear future.

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1. This research was funded as part of an AHRC Care for the Future grant entitled *Consuming Authenticities* (AH/M006018/1). I owe a debt of thanks to Rocio Carvajal, Edson Díaz Fuentes, Rebecca Earle, Francisco Eissa Barroso and Natasha Bailey for our many informal and formal conversations about pulque, and all in the Drinking Studies Network who have offered comments on early versions of this paper. I am also grateful for my co-investigators Emma-Jayne Abbots, Anna Charalambidou and Ana Martins, who have made the last few years so stimulating and enjoyable. Finally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their deeply constructive, helpful and encouraging comments. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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48. Mariano GALVÁN RIVERA, *Diccionario de cocina: o el nuevo cocinero mexicano en forma de diccionario* (Mexico City, 1845), pp. 148, 297, 347, 390, 440, 702, 770. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Antonia CARILLO, *Nuevo y sencillo arte de cocina, reposteria y refrescos*, vol. 1 (2 vols, Mexico City, 1836), p. 147; [No author], *La cocinera poblana, y el libro de las familias* (4th ed., 2 vols, Mexico City, 1890), vol. 1, pp. 127, 163-164, vol. 2, p. 58; Maria ISLA, *Manuel de cocina: Recetas recopiladas por la Srita. Maria Isla quien las cedió á la Casa de “La Misericordia Cristiana”* (Puebla, 1905), pp. 184-185; Soledad VALDES, *Cuaderno de recetas* Toluca, 1912, fols. 61-62. Unpublished manuscript, University of Texas at San Antonio Libraries Special Collections, Mexican Cookbook Collection, TX716.M4 V3492 1912; María IBARROLA DE SALCEDA, *Moderno recetario de cocina mexicana* (Mexico City, 1929), p. 53; Ana María HERNÁNDEZ, *Como mejorar la alimentación del obrero y campesino* (2nd edn, Mexico City, 1934), pp. 12-14; Mercedes de la PARRA, *Recetas prácticas de cocina jaliciense* (Guadalajara, 1950), pp. 93, 133, 141; Josefina VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN, *Cocina mexicana de abolengo* (Mexico City, 1952), pp. 191-192; Ana M. de BENÍTEZ, *Pre-Hispanic Cooking* (Mexico City, 1974), pp. 14-17; Sharon CADWALLADER, *Savoring Mexico: A Travel Cookbook* (New York, 1980), p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Its elite audience is confirmed by its opening description of a typical dinner service, with a lavish array of rich dishes, fine wines and liqueurs. [No Author], *El cocinero mexicano o colección de las mejores recetas para guisar al estilo americano y de las mas selectas segun el metodo de las cocinas Española, italiana, francesa e inglesa*, vol. 1(3 vols., Mexico City, 1831), pp. i-x. For other “Mexican-style” dishes defined by the use of pulque, see Mariano GALVÁN RIVERA, *Diccionario de cocina*…, pp. 148, 440; María IBARROLA DE SALCEDA, *Moderno recetario*…, p. 53; Ana María HERNÁNDEZ, *Como mejorar la alimentación*…, pp. 12-14; Josefina VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN, *Cocina mexicana de abolengo*…, pp. 65-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. [No Author], *El cocinero mexicano*…, vol. 2, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Mariano GALVÁN RIVERA, *Diccionario de cocina*…, p. 148; [no author], *Manual del cocinero, dedicado a las señoritas mexicanas, compuestos de recetas de exquisitas viandas, al estilo del país y extramjero, escogidas y arregladas por personas de buen gusto é inteligencia* (Mexico City, 1906), p. 117. For salsa borracha recipes in later works, see Alfredo RAMOS ESPINOSA*, Semblanza mexicana* (Mexico City, 1948), pp. 205-207; Mercedes DE LA PARRA, *Recetas prácticas de cocina jaliciense*…, pp. 126-127; Josefina VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN, *Cocina mexicana de abolengo*…, p. 172; Josefina VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN, *Mexican Cook Book Devoted to American Homes: Authentic Recipes from Every Region of the Mexican Republic. Adapted for Use in the United States, Central and South America* (7th edn, Mexico City, 1969), pp. 110, 250-252; Betty A. BLUE, *Authentic Mexican Cooking – Auténtica cocina de Méjico* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1977), p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Mariano GALVÁN RIVERA, *Diccionario de cocina*…, p. 702. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Mariano GALVÁN RIVERA, *Diccionario de cocina*…, pp. 703-704. For later examples praising pulque produced in the plains of Apan, see Manuel PAYNO, *Los bandidos*…, p. 652; Ana M. DE BENÍTEZ, *Pre-Hispanic Cooking*…, p. 14; Laura B. de CARAZA CAMPOS, *Bebidas nacionales* (Mexico City, 1994), p. 18; Lennart BLOMBERG, *Tequila, mezcal y pulque: lo auténtico mexicano* (Mexico City, 2000), p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. [No author] *La cocinera poblana*…, pp. 68-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. [No author], *La cocinera poblana*…, vol. 2, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Penelope CORFIELD, *Time and the Shape of History*…, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Alfredo RAMOS ESPINOSA, *Semblanza mexicana*…, p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid., pp. 217-221, 307-308. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid., p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid., p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Josefina VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN, *Cocina mexicana de abolengo*…, pp. 8-10. See also, Josefina VELÁZQUEZ DE LEÓN, *Mexican Cook Book Devoted to American Homes*…, pp. 27, 9; Manuel ALVARADO, *Mexican Food and Drink* (New York, 1988), pp. 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. María Elena SODI DE PALLARES, *Ensayo sobre las excelencias de la cocina mexicana* (Mexico City, 1958), pp. 9-16, 32-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Ruth WATT MULVEY and Luisa María ALVAREZ, *Good Food from Mexico* (rev. edn, New York, 1962), p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid., p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid., pp. 84, 106-107, 133, 147, 158, 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Ibid., p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid., p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Ana M. de BENÍTEZ, *Pre-Hispanic Cooking*…, pp. 7, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
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73. William CRONON, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative,” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 78, no. 4 (1992), p. 1352. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Laura B. CARAZA CAMPOS, *Bebidas nacionales*…, pp. 11-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Ibid., pp. 16-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
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77. Ibid., pp. 41, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ibid., p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Martha CHAPA, *Bebidas mexicanas: la ruta del espíritu* (León, 1999), p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Ibid., pp. 8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid., p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Martha CHAPA, *Bebidas mexicanas*…, p. 8-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Ibid., p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Marie Sarita GAYTÁN, *¡Tequila!*..., pp. 43-89; Rogelio LUNA ZAMORA, *La historia del tequila*…, pp. 13-26; José OROZCO, “Tequila Sauza…”, pp. 195-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. José OROZCO, “Tequila Sauza…”, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Marie Sarita GAYTÁN, *¡Tequila!*..., pp. 29-51, 64-76. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Mariano GALVÁN RIVERA, *Diccionario de cocina*…; Ch. BOURET (ed.), *Nuevo cocinero mejicano, en forma de diccionario* (Mexico City and Paris, 1897). [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
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93. George BOOTH, *Food and Drink of Mexico: A Collection of Authentic Recipes Collected from the Many Regions of Mexico* (n.p.: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1964), pp. 163-178; Ruth WATT MULVEY and Luisa María ALVAREZ, *Good Food from Mexico*…, pp. 23-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
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97. Krista MAHR, “Pulque, the Original Tequila,” *Time*, 2 August 2010. <http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2007003_2006752_2006676,00.html> (accessed 13 June 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
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99. José María MURIÀ and Ricardo SÁNCHEZ, *A Drink Named Tequila*…, pp. 22-24, 31-3, 48-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Penelope CORFIELD, *Time and the Shape of History*…, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Rogelio LUNA ZAMORA, *La historia del tequila*…, p. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Alberto RUY SÁNCHEZ et al., *Guía del tequila* (Mexico City, 1998), p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid., pp. 5-7, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ana Guadalupe VALENZUELA ZAPATA and Gary Paul NABHAN, *¡Tequila!*..., p. 13. Malinche was an Indigenous woman who became an extremely important interpreter for the Spanish conquistadors during the early sixteenth century invasion of Mexico, and bore Hernán Cortés a child, often, though incorrectly, referred to as Mexico’s first mestizo. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
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     (Durham, 2007), pp. 5-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)