Disciplines

Multidisciplinary scientific journal of open access, peer reviewed and with a biannual periodicity

Volume 1, Number 1. August-December 2022

Electronic Journal

Cookbooks and sweepstakes as marketing tools during Mexico's "symbolic participation" in World War II

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Abstract: Four cookbooks published by the newspaper Excélsior between 1943 and 1945 show that World War II was not apparently a main concern for Mexican people, at least not for homemakers. Twice a year the newspaper conducted an advertising campaign to gain subscribers, using lavish homes as grand prizes in sweepstakes as well as carefully edited cookbooks, all focused on women and families.

Keywords: Cookbooks, Mexico, World War II, recipes, sweepstakes, marketing.

Reception date: 12-18-2021 | Date sent for evaluation: 02-23-2022
Acceptance date: 03-13-2022 | Publication date: 04-04-2022

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INTRODUCTION[1]

Mexico's involvement in World War II was low compared to other powerful Allied countries, such as the United States, Canada, France, Australia, or Great Britain, for example. The contribution of Mexican soldiers from the 201 Fighter Squadron that fought overseas in 1945 has passed to just a line in history, which D. Salazar, and E. Flores (2018) call a "symbolic participation," of barely 300 men in a sea of millions of soldiers from other countries (p. 83). Mexico had declared war on Axis powers in 1942, but its combatants – known as the Aztec Eagles- were not sent until 1944, to be trained in Texas. It can be safely said that Mexican citizens in those days were well informed about the war through the radio and newspapers, but there was no notable unrest in the country, unlike other nations that were key players on the front lines of war.

The "symbolic participation" of Mexico is reflected in the pages of the cookbooks published between 1943 and 1945 by the well-known national newspaper *Excélsior* in Mexico City. The 1943 cookbook, *Recetario de Cocina*, was the first of a series, and though it contains more than a hundred recipes and advertisements for liquors, soap, restaurants, ball dresses, cigarettes, and more, it has just a brief mention of the war in one of the ads. On the other hand, American, British, and Canadian cookbooks stated that homemakers played an essential role in the war, saving food, rationing, cultivating victory gardens, or canning produce. In contrast, the *Excélsior* cookbooks brought forth rich, flavorful dishes, with plenty of ingredients like chicken, fish, cheese, eggs, pineapple, pears, avocado, nuts, almonds, olives, sherry, rum, and many more.

These cookbooks were intended as a special gift for subscribers. In every subscription campaign a cookbook was given in the sweepstakes along with the chance to win a fully furnished home. It must be said, too, that the 1943 issue used for this research work seems to be, at least until now, the only one in existence, thus the importance to examine this issue with more detail. There are a second and third cookbooks from 1944, and still another one from 1945 during wartime. Their contents reflect peaceful times at home. The advertising, as it will be seen later in this article, included luxury items -like fur coats-, furniture, cosmetics, home appliances and a variety of foods and beverages, like Sidral Mundet soda, ketchup, cookies, and more. Hundreds of recipes in all the four cookbooks require a variety of ingredients that were not easily available for Europeans in wartime.

Cooking during World War II has been the subject of research in the last few years. J. Flinn (2007), author of the article World War II Cookbooks: Rationing, Nutrition, Patriotism, and the Citizen Consumer in the United States and Great Britain, stresses the fact that cookbooks and recipe pamphlets played a significant role in the US and Britain at improving health and creating the "citizen consumer" who bought and cooked food according to wartime regulations (pp. 84-85), to help Allies win the war.

I. Theien (2009), in her article Food Rationing during World War two: a special case of sustainable consumption? explores the strategies applied by consumers for making do in Norway, like reducing waste, using substitutes, and "exploiting underused natural resources such as wild plants, birds, and alternative marine sources of nutrition […]" (p. 1). Theien also

[1]We would like to thank Dr. Sue K. Pardue for her invaluable support in reviewing this article. We also want to thank Mr. Roberto Rodríguez, who oversees the Excélsior Historical Archives, for his invaluable help to conduct this research. We are grateful, too, to the personnel of the Archivo Histórico de Querétaro, where we consulted the El Nacional newspaper. Last, we want to thank the staff of the Hemeroteca del Archivo Histórico del Estado de Puebla for their service at consulting the Excélsior newspaper.

deals with crisis recipes and the role of homemakers in the kitchen.

The purpose of this work[2] is to show that the differences in the war front were reflected in the kitchen, from what can be seen through these cookbooks, although in this article the first copy (1943) will be examined in more detail, due to the fact that it is the only specimen known so far, at least publicly, since in the case of the other cookbooks -June 1944, December 1994 and *circa* June 1945- there are more specimens. Apparently, there were no concerns about food rationing or availability for middle-class Mexican housewives, and there are no signs of widespread tension over war issues in any of the four cookbooks: It was just the enjoyment of cooking. On the other hand, despite the rise in prices in Mexico, the commercial aspect of the cookbooks shows that the businesses that advertised in them directed their advertising to homes with a multiplicity of services and products. The war brought prosperity to the country, a high demand for products that favored exports, mainly to the United States. In addition, foreign investments strengthened the economy. However, the disadvantage of these benefits was the uncontrolled increase in the prices of goods and services, which President Manuel Avila Camacho (1943) tried to restrict through a Decree to Freeze Prices (pp. 4-5). Thus, coffee, rice, pork, lard, beef, oil, cocoa, beans, and many other goods fell under the government's price control measures.

This article contains five sections. The first section examines global and national circumstances in the light of the war that was taking place, since providing a historical context is essential. The second section presents both recipes and advertisements and is discussed. In a third section, the Mexican cookbooks are analyzed in comparison with a few other American, Canadian, and British cookbooks. The fourth section describes the ads in the 1943 cookbook. A fifth section examines some of the various cookbooks from this period, printed in Canada and the United States. An analysis of them allows us to establish frank differences between their contents, oriented to a domestic war economy, and the contents of the Mexican cookbooks examined here. Obviously, the *Excélsior* cookbooks were not the only Mexican cookbooks by then, but they may very well serve the purpose of showing the differences between both parts.

I. The world in 1943

As the end of 1943 approached, a confrontation had been going on for four long years since Britain and France had declared war on Germany on September 3rd, 1939. In 1943 the Allies had increased their control over some of the areas previously taken by Germany and the intended leadership of Germany gradually faded as the Nazis were stepping out of strategic positions as the war evolved; Churchill and Roosevelt demanded the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany at the beginning of the year. In May the German army surrendered to the British and Americans in North Africa, and by the end of 1943, Germans had been either forced out or defeated in several fronts of the war. On King Victor Emmanuel's orders, the national gendarmerie arrested Mussolini in July. In November, the relentless Japanese army faced a couple of defeats in the Southern Pacific.

Then, Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill, also known as "The Big Three," joined for a critical meeting at Tehran between November 28 and De-

[2]This article is part of a larger research project at the Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, registered with the number FFI 2020-01, in which the main object of study is this collection of Excélsior cookbooks.

cember 1. The world could perceive the end was near, but still, the war was not over yet. The purpose of that meeting was, mainly, to coordinate the military strategy to regain control of France and to discuss the postwar arrangements. On December 3, a deadly attack on Berlin by the Royal Air Force further weakened the German front: (Associated Press, p. 1).

While battlefields were active in much of the world, the Americas was a relatively peaceful region. Although some countries were, naturally, key players to the Allied forces -like the United States and Canada-, Latin America was involved to a much lesser degree. Even so, some countries were formal allies in the war and supported the efforts of the United States and Britain. Among these nations were Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, and many others. Chile and Argentina were an exception, but they were expected to join the Allies at any time (United Press, 1942, p. 1).

Mexico's contribution was very much appreciated: it provided a significant part of the essential supply of oil that the US needed to move its forces during the war. Mexico's involvement in the war had much to do with the sinking of its steam tanker *Potrero del Llano*, owned by the state oil company, *Petróleos Mexicanos* -PEMEX-. Unescorted and neutral, it was sunk on May 1942 by the German U-boat named U-564, while on route from the Mexican port of Tampico to New York as it carried more than six thousand tons of petroleum. The national emergency, according to L. Medina (2004), implied the declaration of a state of war (p. 172).

President Manuel Ávila Camacho led Mexico through the conflict. Perhaps the best-known military contribution from Mexico to the Allies was the 201st Squadron (named "The Eagle Squadron"), an elite group that was formed with volunteer pilots and other military specialists who fought alongside their allied colleagues in combat missions, some of them as important as the liberation of the Philippines in 1945, then occupied by Japan. Furthermore, although there were very few Mexicans on the war front, their outstanding role did not go unnoticed.

It was during this hard period that the first *Excélsior* cookbook was published, intended as a subscription gift for the readers of the newspaper during Christmastime, along with the sweepstakes with a luxury home, entirely furnished as a grand prize. Twice a year the newspaper held these sweepstakes, each time with lavish homes, located in upper class neighborhoods. Extensive journalistic reports covered every time the details of the homes, along with the special appearance of some popular film stars who were there to be interviewed by the Excélsior newsmen and comment on the unique features of the homes. They were building a dream in their readers, in a time when families in European countries were struggling to make ends meet, to say the least, and even some others had nothing to eat. The illusion of winning such a home while people overseas were suffering poverty seems to confirm the "symbolic participation" of Mexico in the warfront.

Besides that, the reading audience for whom these cookbooks were published were middle and upper-class women since most people in Mexico could not afford to subscribe to the newspaper -or read, for that matter-, and thus, received the book as a gift. From this point of view, chances are the books -if used- were mainly read by people who enjoyed cooking and/or their servants. Marketing inside the cookbooks was strongly aimed at the middle and upper classes women. For instance, the fourth cookbook -corresponding to the 12th edition of the sweepstakes, called *Enciclopedia del Hogar* (1945) -included advertisements for Ritz fine stockings (p. 4), tailor made suits (p. 57) and a Dixie gas stove, with a cost of $299.50 Mexican pesos -1 peso could buy half a liter of cooking oil or half kilo of coffee, for example- (p. 9).

The cookbooks clearly show the trends in Mexican cookery in the first half of the twentieth century, because they present simple dishes as well

as very elaborate ones. Some of the recipes are accessible and inexpensive foods like *enchiladas*, a fried and rolled corn tortilla, previously dipped into a savory chile pepper sauce, stuffed with cheese or shredded chicken breast, although there are many variations to this description. So, *enchiladas, sopes, tamales, tacos,* and others, are the kind of food the lowest classes could afford, although everyone, rich or poor, enjoys these spicy, corn dough meals named *antojos* or *antojitos*.

As the world watched the turmoil, many kitchen-loving readers in Mexico could still enjoy cooking. The news about the rest of the world reported on the war and survival efforts, but in the Excelsior newspaper cookbooks it seemed that Mexico lived in a different world. For example, there is but one small mention to wartime in the 1943 edition, as opposed to many contemporary cookbooks in the US, Canada, and Great Britain, that naturally took the subject of the war as a central matter. Productos Rusan advertised the soap "Prodigio" -Prodigy- with this message: "The wonderful war invention for the daily washing of ten million soldiers, now at the service of your home!" (*Recetario de Cocina Excélsior*, 1943, p. 97). That is the only allusion to war in all the 157 pages that comprise the cookbook. Rusan also advertised other products in the 1943 *Recetario de cocina*, such as "Arroz Tres Villas" (rice), "Ricomoka" (coffee), and "Fulmigal" (seemingly some insecticide). It may have been a large grocery store, in downtown Mexico City, at the corner of Revillagigedo and Ayuntamiento (p. 97), about ten blocks from the Zócalo, Mexico City's main square, where the Metropolitan Cathedral and National Palace are.

II. Between recipes and advertising

The contents of the cookbooks feature a variety of products and services aimed at women. Along with varied recipes for soups, cocktails, meats, and so forth, the advertisements in the books varied, as it has been stated. Some of them were, for instance, ads for Bacardi rum, elegant party dresses from "Raúl" (p. 1), advice on how to take care of fur coats from "Katia" (p. 37), a workshop specializing in repairing and maintenance of furs, or suggestions for fancy gifts from "Orell" (back cover), a store for the middle and high class of Mexico City (*Recetario de Cocina Excélsior*, 1943). The third cookbook -that then went by the name of *Enciclopedia del Hogar* (1944), featured advertisements for La Sevillana, specialized in groceries and gourmet foods (p. 161); Detectives Quintana -private investigators- (p. 83), and Ideal electric stoves -a luxury not everyone could afford in those days- (p. 67).

The first cookbook was made up of dozens of recipes sent by women all over the country, as they participated in the newspaper's cooking contest, "The Best Dish," which began in July 1943. Although most of the women were from Mexico City, then known as *Distrito Federal*, there were contestants from all over the country, as distant as Ensenada, the port city in the northern state of Baja California, about 50 miles from the US border; or Villahermosa, in the state of Tabasco, less than 400 miles from the closest Guatemalan border crossing.

Figure 1: The front cover of the *Recetario de Cocina Excélsior*, the first of the series. It shows a well-groomed, middle-class housewife, joyfully cooking in a modern kitchen. Serrano Family Private Collection. Photo: Rosa Martínez.

III. The recipes

These cookbooks are simple newsprint, printed with inexpensive materials, with a cardboard cover. It has no contents page, so the reader must figure out where to find anything needed. Sections are not numbered either, although they have title pages, and besides the recipes and advertisements, there is nothing else; in contrast, the subsequent cookbooks from *Excélsior* would have other topics such as how to set a proper table, nutrition, home decorating ideas, and more. For example, the second cookbook, Segundo *Recetario de Cocina* (1944), has no content index either, but it features a wider variety of contents. In its "First part" it shows how to set properly a table, information on vitamin content in foods and their role in health, and weight loss dieting advice (pp. 8-26).

However, both the first and second cookbooks are orderly arranged. The *Recetario de Cocina* (1943) features cocktails, then soups, eggs, fish, poultry, meat, salads, vegetables and cereals, puddings and fried food, Mexican *antojos* (the so-called *antojitos*, the equivalent to Spanish tapas, but, as it was said above, made of corn dough, with salsa and a whole variety of ingredients like cream, cheese, pork or chicken meat, *chicharrón* -fried, crisp pork skin-, and others), desserts, ice cream, sandwiches, and at last, *tamales* and *atole*. Atole is a sweet hot drink made with cornflour, or corn dough, or corn starch, with varied flavors, like chocolate, strawberry, or pecan, to mention a few. It goes with tamales and all kinds of Mexican sweet bread. That is many flours, for sure, but nowadays many people will have a *torta de tamal*, which is some bread roll stuffed with a hot tamale while drinking a cup of steaming *atole*.

In all, the 1943 cookbook has 171 recipes. Some of them are simple, easy to make comfort food. There is, for instance, the Eggs in a Potato Nest, for which all it takes are five main ingredients (besides salt and white pepper): yellow potatoes, egg yolks, eggs, butter, and cheese. Mashed potatoes mixed with butter, yolks, salt, and pepper. Then, the mix is stuffed into a pastry tip to form the nests, and each one is filled with a raw egg, then baked in the oven for ten minutes (Recetario de Cocina, 1943, p. 136). Sandwiches, although indeed not a Mexican creation, are present in the cookbook with a national twist, like the Mexican Sandwiches, that includes refried beans and *Ancho* chile pepper (*Recetario de Cocina*, 1943, pp. 151-152). *Ancho* chile pepper is a dry variety of the famous poblano pepper. It is a common ingredient both in Mexican cuisine as it is in Southwestern cooking, like New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas.

One of the least expensive and hugely popular dishes is the one called *chilaquiles*: fried corn tortilla

chips, either simmered in hot chile salsa or added on top of it, then topped with shredded chicken breast -or eggs, or steak-, shredded cheese, cream, and raw chopped onion. The one recipe of *chilaquiles* in the *Recetario de Cocina* asks for fried tortilla chips, *pasilla* chile pepper, onions, garlic, cream, and *añejo* cheese (*Recetario de Cocina*, 1943, p. 134). Pasilla chile pepper is a long, dark black pepper, very often used in Mexican cuisine. When fresh, it is known as *chilaca*. As for the *añejo* cheese, it is a firm, aged cheese, that may be either shredded, crumbled or grated over many foods, like, refried beans, *enchiladas*, *sopes*, and of course, *chilaquiles*.

However, other dishes in the 1943 book try more to be versions of haute cuisine or international cuisine, with an approach directed at the tables of those families with greater economic resources. One of them is the recipe for Prune Stuffed Chicken. It was a prized recipe in the contest that needed a regular-sized chicken, prunes, cooked ham, cream, olives, chopped flat-leaf parsley, butter, cooked eggs, raw eggs, sherry -*Jerez* wine-, curly leaf parsley, lime, salt, and pepper (*Recetario de Cocina*, 1943, p. 72). Then there is the *Fabada Asturiana*, a widely famous dish in northern Spain. It is a stew, and the cookbook's recipe uses *alubias* -a small, white bean used mainly in European dishes-, *morcilla* -a dark, pork blood sausage-, bacon, lean ham, pork spine and *chorizos* -a spicy pork sausage- (*Recetario de Cocina*, 1943, p. 117).

In this context, the richness and variety of ingredients in the content of Excelsior's cookbooks reflects the fact that, even when Mexico was going through a period of prices that had skyrocketed, there was more food in the country than in Great Britain, France, or Germany. Produce in Mexico was more abundant than produce in the United States or Canada, where a large chunk of it went overseas, to support their armies and the Allied countries. By December 1942 canned goods were scarce in the United States. Plans were made by the American government to ration canned food because people were hoarding products, grocery stores were being emptied, especially in small towns. In other cases, stores were monopolizing products, creating a false effect of scarcity (Griggs, 1942, p. 1). Mexico sent seedless oranges to Canada. Some of these oranges weighed almost a pound, and the shipment sold in less than an hour upon its arrival at Montreal (Éxito de la Naranja Mexicana,1943). Above that, Mexico's privileged climate and lesser involvement in the war allowed a better provision of food for its people, and on January 4, 1943, the National Institute of Nutrition was created to improve scientific research and promote a healthier diet, especially in the rural areas of Mexico (El país cuenta con un nuevo Instituto, 1943).

In addition to what has already been stated, the Second World War had some positive economic effects on Mexico. As J. Meyer (2010) explains, Americans assigned their vast resources to the war, so they needed the natural products that Mexico could sell to them: minerals, oil, fruits, vegetables, meat, and cereals (p. 252). On the other hand, foreign relations with the US improved, the governments signed several commercial agreements on subjects such as Mexican braceros, debt, oil, technical assistance, waters, and of course, the cease of legal strain between the two countries due to the oil expropriation of 1938 (Aboites, 2006, p. 271). The 1943 *Recetario de Cocina* shows some of this prosperity through its recipes and the diversity of advertisements.

IV. The advertisements in the first cookbook (1943)

As the holidays approached, businesses took advantage of the season, like "Raúl", an *haute couture* boutique that offered formal ball gowns for the New Year's Eve (Raúl, 1943, inner cover); or like "Vinos Agustín Blázquez," that presented fine grandies (p. 8) imported from Jerez, Spain. Other products included quality furniture for the home, home appliances, high- quality shoes,

fine china, perfumes, imported clothing from the United States, and more.

There were also products for everyone's needs, like soap, cooking oil, canned preserves, baby talcum powder, cigarettes, rat poison, floor wax, yeast, chocolate tablets, gelatin powder, or beauty products, to name a few. Some of these advertisers also appeared in the daily issue of *Excélsior*. One of these was a Mexican company that still exists, Delher. Back then, it sold gas stoves and steel furniture for the kitchen. In the cookbook it showed a state-of-the-art gas stove and kitchen: "No modern home can be whole without the conveniences of our steel furniture for the kitchen and the famous gas stove Delher" (*Recetario de cocina Excélsior*, 1943, p. 7). Then another Delher stove was also shown in the newspaper -this one used tractolina, a kind of petroleum fuel-. These stoves were either sold by the same company, or by El Monte de Piedad -a centuries-old pawn shop in Mexico City- that also sold them brand new: "Three burners with a cabinet and enameled surface" (El Monte de Piedad, 1943, p. 9).

As readers turn the pages of the cookbook, it seems that nothing could disturb the peace in the homes of Mexico, with the kitchens of the middle and upper classes stocked with food in abundance. That is the impression left by the vast diversity of ingredients that the recipes ask for. Although the national newspapers devoted much of their covers to the war, this book tells a different story. Of course, prices were high and there was a shortage of some products, but both in the national newspapers and in the *Excelsior* cookbooks, there seems to have been no anxiety or despair over the lack of food. For instance, children in Nazi France were suffering from malnourishment (La lenta agonía de los niños en la Francia Nazi, p. 4); in India, things were much worse, hunger was rampant, as the United Press journalist W. Briggs (1943) called it, "A Dantesque spectacle in Calcutta", where sometimes women disputed over fruit rinds on the ground (p. 1). However, differences between Mexico and other countries are better understood comparing the *Excélsior* cookbooks to other cookbooks in the Allied countries.

V. The Second World War cookbooks and leaflets from the Allied Countries: Some remarkable examples

In comparison to the cookbooks published by *Excélsior*, cookbooks, cooking booklets, and leaflets in Canada, Britain and the United States reminded their readers that there was a war taking place and that everyone needed to be a responsible citizen and make ends meet, especially with rationed foods, because food would win the war. That was true for other countries, too, like Norway, according to I. Theien (2009),

> […] housewives played a central part in making the rationing system work. They used the scarce food resources as carefully as possible, preventing anything from going to waste, using it for human nutrition. Their thrift was not only guided by the concern for their own families, but also for the societies to which they belonged (p. 9).

Not all the cookbooks in these countries made mention of the war, but, generally, most presented contents in which the situation of the war was evident in one way or another. *40 Wartime Cheese Dishes*, a leaflet by Shefford from Wisconsin, 1943, recommended its fine cheeses to add richness to meals:

> Of course, you want to keep your wartime meals delicious -and nourishing […] as for all the delicious Shefford Cream Spreads -you'll find them a never-ending source of tempting snacks, appetizers and good nourishing sandwiches to go into war worker or school lunch boxes or into your own luncheon menus. We think you'll like the recipes. They're new and interesting-planned to make use of the more abundant foods, to stretch the scarce ones, to go easy on points, and to keep nutrition high (pp. 1-3).

7 Meals Men Like! is a *circa* 1943 leaflet written by Mary Lee Taylor, host to *The Mary Lee Taylor Program*, a radio show that offered advice on cooking and household chores between 1933 and 1954 (Young & Young, 2010, p. 557). Pet Milk Company published this leaflet, and it features "low-point, low-cost recipes." As it became an essential need for Americans to take care of resources, food was supervised and managed under a points system devised by the government of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Thus, at the beginning of 1942, the "Emergency Price Control Act enabled the Office of Price Administration (OPA) to lay the ground for food rationing […]", under which the government issued citizens a ration book, foods classified with red points -meat, fish, and dairy, up to 64 points per month-, or blue points -canned and bottled foods, up to 48 per month- (National Women's History Museum, 2017).

Taylor's menus were simple but designed to be both appetizing and practical. One of them was composed of Creole Meat Balls, "in which ½ pound of meat makes 4 big servings", set over a nest of Boiled Rice or Noodles, along with Buttered Greens or Broccoli, Coleslaw and Maple Chiffon Pie (Taylor, 1943, p. 2). Even with rationing measures, Americans were better fed than most Europeans. In European countries, restrictions on food were harsher than in America.

Canada observed special measures on food cooking at home. *Economy Recipes for Canada's 'Housoldiers'* is a small, 21-page booklet, showing a well-dressed young housewife wearing an apron: a military salute with her right hand and a wooden spoon on the other hand. Its recipes were meant "to suit the Housoldier's budget": "The housewives of Canada are the 'Housoldiers,' serving the Nation truly and well by providing appetizing and nourishing meals that protect and preserve the health of their families." (The Canada Starch Company, 1943, cover and inner cover).

Economy Recipes for Canada's 'Housoldiers' (1943) is quite useful for its small size. Its contents feature knowledge and recipes on cakes, fillings and icings, cookies, pastries and pies, salads and dressings, host supper dishes, variety in vegetables, canning and preserving, lunch boxes, left-overs, food and kitchen hints, food substitutions, equivalents in weights and measurements, and some other subjects. The recipe for Brownies asked for almost a dozen ingredients: butter, sugar, Crown Brand Corn Syrup, 1 large or 2 small eggs, 2 (1-oz.) squares unsweetened chocolate, pastry flour, 1 spoon Benson's or Canada Corn Starch, salt, baking powder, ½ cup broken nutmeats (if available), and vanilla (p. 5). The mixture goes to the oven at 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 35 minutes. Apparently, the situation of households in Canada was not as pressing as in the European war front, however, housewives had to be careful with the use of ingredients and the preparation of recipes, to avoid the waste. Food rationing had gone into effect since 1942, so cooks had to be creative.

British homemakers had tougher times, though, with less food and variety to work within their kitchens. However, they had *The Kitchen Front*, a daily 5-minute radio program that advised people on how to stretch meager rations and feed the family with sensible but varied meals. Cooks could also rely on a variety of books designed for wartime. J. Flinn (2007) states that "even with stricter regulations than the United States, the citizens of Great Britain experienced improved health during the war." (p. 81).

The British housewives had much advice on cooking, saving time, fuel, and money, from books like *War-time Cookery to Save Fuel and Food Value* (1940), issued in the National Food Campaign Exhibition, published in Manchester. *Good Fare. A Book of Wartime Recipes* (1941), and Good Eating. Suggestions for War-time Dishes (1944) were two cookbooks published by the *Daily Telegraph* with reader's tested recipes. There were also plenty of leaflets and booklets that advised to eat more potatoes, use up left-overs, and many hints and ideas on how to spend resources wisely

to make ends meet, and, at the same time, helping the Allies win the war.

A final word

Although further research is needed to compare a more significant number of cookbooks and leaflets, this work gives an inkling of what it was like to live in Mexico in contrast to life in the United States, Canada, or Great Britain in terms of food acquisition and preparing, rationing and war-time cooking. The leading countries among the Allies had strict rules around consumer purchases and rationing programs. They highlighted everything related to the production and commercialization of food. In general, European countries, whether Axis or Allied, had access to much smaller amounts of food than Canada or the United States. At the same time, Mexico, a weak economy, by comparison, enjoyed many more food resources due to a diverse and more benevolent climate, and a low-profile on military actions during the war, thus, it was a "symbolic participation." Overall, the *Excélsior* cookbooks from wartime show that Mexican homes had an advantage on food matters.

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