

**Bachelor project Cultural Anthropology, 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2013**

***Kitchen life in Guatemala***

***An anthropological study on food and gender in San Juan la Laguna***



**By Anne Kesteloo (3696278)**

**Supervisor: Dr. Gerdien Steenbeek**

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## **Contents**

### **Introduction**

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Studying food and gender | 5 |
| Fieldwork                | 7 |
| Overview thesis          | 9 |

### **Chapter 1. Anthropology of food**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Perspectives and approaches               | 11 |
| Food as structure, discourse and practice | 13 |
| Food as a household practice              | 14 |

### **Chapter 2. Anthropology of gender**

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Conceptualizing gender | 16 |
| Doing gender           | 17 |

### **Chapter 3. Food and gender**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Cooking and the sexual division of domestic labor | 19 |
| The kitchen as a woman's domain                   | 20 |

### **Chapter 4. Food and gender in Guatemala**

|                            |    |
|----------------------------|----|
| Political-economic history | 22 |
| Food                       | 23 |
| Gender                     | 24 |

### **Chapter 5. Households and the sexual division of domestic labor in San Juan la Laguna**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| The village of San Juan la Laguna                       | 26 |
| Houses, households and families                         | 27 |
| Sexual division of domestic labor and its socialization | 28 |
| Marriage and its responsibilities                       | 30 |
| A woman's work  | 31 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Chapter 6. Diet and cuisine in San Juan la Laguna</b>                              |    |
| Overview of food products   | 33 |
| Diet and cuisine in San Juan la Laguna  | 35 |
| Structures and discourse of San Juan food   | 38 |
| <br>  |    |
| <b>Chapter 7. The practices of preparing and consuming food in San Juan la Laguna</b> |    |
| Grocery shopping and cooking lunch  | 41 |
| Dynamics during cooking and the beings of a good wife                                 | 42 |
| Serving and eating lunch  | 45 |
| <br>  |    |
| <b>Conclusions: Cooking and eating as gendered practices</b>                          | 48 |
| <br>  |    |
| <b>Bibliography</b>   | 51 |
| <br>  |    |
| <b>Appendix:</b>  |    |
| <br>  |    |
| <b>Reflections during and after fieldwork</b>   | 54 |
| <br>  |    |
| <b>Resumen investigación “La vida de la cocina en Guatemala”</b>                      | 57 |
| <br>  |    |
| <b>Photo's and maps</b>   | 60 |



## Introduction

It was the second week of my fieldwork in San Juan la Laguna, Guatemala, and I had met up with Claudia<sup>1</sup> and her sister-in-law Angela to go grocery shopping before cooking in the morning. While Claudia is buying fish from a lady on the main road of the village, Angela turns to me and asks with a curious, but critical look what I have tasted so far when it comes to local and traditional dishes. After hearing my relatively short summary, she concludes that I have eaten hardly anything, *casi nada*, of the food from San Juan. Immediately, a cup of *atol*, a hot corn drink bought on the street, is pushed in my hands to drink and right after seeing my reaction of the flavor which I am not used to, we head to the market to buy our ingredients for lunch. After grocery shopping, we go back to the house of the family, where Angela jokingly asks her mother Elena if I will be a good wife, when I do not know how to cook. Her mother laughs and replies: “She will learn.”

That was not the first nor the last time that people were enthusiastic to teach and educate me about their culture, their skills and knowledge about food during my fieldwork. Overviews about the types of food of the area was often told to me, after they knew the topic of my research, just like an examination about what dishes I liked and did not like. People were also eager to learn me how to cook, and as it shows above, not only for culinary reasons. The remark Abigail made, point out to the fact that cooking and eating actually has a lot to do with gender. And because of my fieldwork and my subjects of study, I had an opportunity to take a look into the kitchens of people and thus also into their lives.

As Counihan and Van Esterik (1997:1) said: “food is life, and life can be studied and understood through food”. Food is necessary to survive for humans and animals, but that is not all. Food conveys cultural meaning and significance to people; “it defines us as social beings” (Weismantel 1998:7). Food is an inevitably part of everyday practice, because food has above all symbolic meanings about the people and culture where it is eaten. And all this varies through time and space. This is where anthropology comes into place, because anthropology studies cultural variation throughout history and the world itself, in search of meaning given by natives themselves (Moore&Sanders 2006).

### *Studying food and gender*

In this thesis, food is looked at through the lens of gender. The practice of gender through cooking and eating and thus the embodiment of symbolical values about masculinity and femininity, gender

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1 Out of respect for the privacy of my informants, all of their names have been feigned.

relations and the sexual division of domestic labor form the focus of my research. My thesis is aimed at the everyday preparation and consumption of food of which the activities of cooking and eating happen on a household level on a daily basis. The accent in my thesis will be put on how these practices are gendered, including how these processes surrounding food can be related to the sexual division of domestic labor. The context in which this thesis takes place and took place in the form of fieldwork, is a rural village in Guatemala, San Juan la Laguna, where I lived and worked for two months.

Anthropological research on food has made clear that food is a strong ethnic and class marker (f.e. Weismantel 1988:9). It remains unknown whether food is also a marker of gender. Food should not only be considered as fuel for humans, but according to anthropologists, food encompasses way more in everyday life (Mintz&DuBois 2002). Cooking and eating are ways for people to culturally express themselves, and they do so according to cultural rules and social norms, which they interpret and respond to in their own fashion. As such, food can be represented as a form of interactions between structure, discourse and practice (Weismantel 1988). During this process, differences between groups in terms of class, ethnicity or regional background, can be marked and thus a social group defines itself through food (Counihan&Van Esterik 1997).

On a micro-level, the distribution of labor surrounding food are practices related to power differences between social actors within households (Katz 1995). Power relations within family household are communicated through the tasks and activities of the preparation and consumption of food. Feminist anthropology has taught us that in the construction of gender, 'natural' differences between men and women are defined and accentuated, while also creating social hierarchy (Moore 1988:13, Scott 1986:1067). Because of this, the cultural construction of gender has a big impact on the shaping and framing of daily life (Brouns et al. 1995:31-35). The concept of 'doing gender', where gender is studied “as a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction”, is highly useful for my research to observe the practice of gender in daily life, or more specifically, in the kitchen (West&Zimmerman 1987:125). I will use Weismantel's (1988:23) concept of 'kitchen life' to study the daily dynamics in a household with regard to food and gender, and how power and agency is expressed in the kitchen and at the dining table. I would like to demonstrate that food and gender are interrelated practices, in which I emphasize interpretation as a way of understanding the cultural meanings of food and 'doing gender'.

Within the anthropology of food, there is some literature written about the relationships between gender and food (Counihan 1999, Kahn 1986, Weismantel 1988). In this thesis, I want to contribute to the theoretical debate that food conveys meanings about gender and that gender

influences social practices of food in such a way that they can be considered 'gendered'. With the study of 'kitchen life', I aim to acquire a thorough understanding of 'doing gender' in daily life on a household level. However, within the bulk of literature on food, not much has been written about indigenous practices of collecting, preparing, serving and consuming food. The theoretical relevance of my research will largely be based on this missing gap in the anthropology of food, namely showing that the preparation and consumption of food is a gendered practice for indigenous people in the highlands of Guatemala.

This gap in theoretical knowledge leads me to my research question; In which ways are the preparation and consumption of food in indigenous rural households in San Juan la Laguna in Guatemala a gendered practice?

In this respect, my thesis is mainly be exploratory, because not much has been written about the preparation and consumption of food as a gendered practice, especially not in a rural context. As Boeije (2010:32) argues, qualitative methods are especially useful when a subject needs more explanation, or when meaning behind a certain phenomenon is searched. Besides, my research question is aimed to discover tacit knowledge, which requires interpretation of activities in daily life and an understanding of these seemingly natural habits in a way in which ideas are embodied and enacted. Conducting research took place on a micro-level, because of my focus on households. Anthropological research, or to be more specific, fieldwork is quite crucial for this kind of approach.

### *Fieldwork*

Fieldwork has a central place in anthropology; together with participant observation, it forms the distinctive research method of the discipline and a 'rite de passage' from being a student to being a professional (Robben&Sulka 2012:2). With fieldwork, anthropologists try to “understand the inside view of the native peoples” they study by living “in their natural habitat” for an extended period of time (Powdermaker in Robben&Sulka 2012:7). In other words, fieldwork can be defined as; “intimate participation in a community and observation of modes of behavior and the organization of social life” (Keesing&Strathern in Robben&Sulka 2012:8).

Fieldwork offers an up-close image of the people you study and their cultural ways, in which not only speech is included (stories, gossip, conversation etc.), but also body language, 'common' ways of handling businesses and so on. With my first attempt to do good fieldwork in Guatemala, I also tried to acquire an understanding of local ways of life. My study includes the examination of indigenous practices surrounding food on a household level and how these are gendered. Both

cooking, eating, and the social organization of these activities, are 'natural' events which happen daily in every culture. This also applies to ideas people have about what men and women should do for their families, and what masculinity and femininity entails. In order to grasp this, I needed to experience day-to-day life in San Juan and tried to find out what occurs in the kitchens of people. Fieldwork can give me the tools to gain people's trust by establishing rapport (having good relationships with informants), which is hopefully created over time, and thus a way of observing everyday accounts (DeWalt&DeWalt 201:47).

The amount of time was short, however, two months to be exact. During March and April 2013, I resided in the rural village of San Juan la Laguna in Guatemala. In the beginning of my fieldwork, I was occupied with trying to gain access to my research population. How was I able to meet and not only visit families, but also enter their private spheres, like the kitchen, while cooking and eating with them, with their full consent? I struggled with this dilemma for approximately a week, figuring out a way to be able to do this in a tight community where I knew nobody.

But when I became a volunteer at 'Rupalaj Kristalin', an local organization for communitarian tourism, things started to change quickly. When I told the tour guides about my research they immediately invited me to come to their homes to meet their wives and children. On these occasions, I would ask permission if I could visit them regularly to help them with their grocery shopping and cooking. With reactions like "Of course, any time!", to my surprise, I began to develop my contact with five families and was always also invited to eat lunch with them after a morning of cooking. First encounters were crucial in my research in order to succeed in having a follow-up with a family I had met and which 'worked well and felt alright', so I had to make a good impression on these occasions. Building rapport was essential, because my study is all about intimate human relations. As a result, the beginning of my fieldwork was rather a slow, but steady process of getting people to become acquainted with me, and in some cases, even see me as an adopted foreign daughter or a friend.

After a month I had created a schedule, although quite flexible, adjusted to the relaxed way of life in San Juan, where I would visit these families one day in the week. So, my data was collected in the presence of, and thanks to, five hospitable families who welcomed me in their homes, kitchens and dining tables. I could also come along unannounced, which I often did while 'hanging out' with just chatting away while bearing the heat.

The nature of fieldwork is a deeply personal one, since the researcher tries to let go everything that is normal to him/her and tries to understand the unfamiliar in which s/he dwells in. Still, it is

expected that the researcher maintains an 'objective' view on the way of life of the people s/he is studying in order to obtain valid data. This tension is represented by the research method of participant observation itself; the contradiction of being a 'subjective insider and an objective outsider' that is required for this method (Robben&Sulka 2012:2). As Paul stated so clearly; “participation implies emotional involvement; observation requires detachment” (Paul in DeWalt&DeWalt 2011:28).

Peculiar as this research method is, the method itself and both features of participant observation are crucial, which I will demonstrate with my own research. With just 'being there', you are already participating in daily life and can therefore understand more of local non linguistic knowledge. The preparation and consumption of food are very physical social practices (the pressure needed for grinding maize the 'right' way, sensing when stew is boiled enough, the naturalness of eating at certain times and table manners). To understand these practices, I have done a large amount of cooking and eating myself. While participating in daily life, casual conversations could be overheard and interactions between household members could be seen. In this way, observation was also very important to my research. I could obtain a general understanding and was able to analyze social situations and 'self-evident' courses of everyday life during my fieldwork because of participant observation. All in all, only with participant observation, the combination of participating and observing, an outsider (in this case, me) can grasp what 'doing gender' in the kitchen actually means in a specific context.

Another method frequently used during fieldwork are informal interviews, in which the researcher 'follows the lead of of the informant', since anthropologists try to comprehend the native's point of view (DeWalt&DeWalt 2011:137). Still, interviews can be used to get to know more about a certain subject. With my research, I had open interviews to obtain more information about ideas and opinions people have about what they think it means to be a man or a woman and what the responsibilities in the household are for the two sexes. With casual conversation during cooking, I asked questions about the use of particular ingredients, when certain dishes are eaten, the mechanics of serving and so on. Also, with informal interviews, more information can be obtained in the sexual division of domestic labor and the roles men and women play in this. With semi-structured interviews, several families were asked general questions about the characteristics of the households and its members.

### *Overview thesis*

The results of my fieldwork in San Juan la Laguna, Guatemala, are presented in this thesis, which is

structured as follows.

The theoretical framework will firstly be discussed, where in chapter one the anthropology of food will be elaborated and in the second chapter the anthropology of gender is clarified. In the third chapter of my theoretical framework, these two approaches are combined and it is looked at how food and gender are practices which influence each other. The context of the thesis is explained and information is presented about food and gender in Latin-America, and especially Guatemala, in the fourth chapter.

Moving forward after this literature study, the empirical part of my thesis commences, where my own collected data are described and discussed. In chapter five, a description is given about San Juan, and attention is paid to what a household entails in San Juan. This also counts for the sexual division of domestic labor and the analysis of what my informants have to say about this subject. The diet of the habitants of San Juan is discussed in the next chapter, just like how food products are used and what makes up the cuisine of the village. In the last empirical chapter, the practices of preparing and consuming food is described with the families I got to know and spent time with. Lastly, a conclusion and overall discussion is presented of my fieldwork and the data collected during this time, while also connecting this data to the theoretical framework.

After my bibliography, an appendix can be found, included with a reflection about my role as a researcher in the field and the relationship I had with the people I done my research with. This reflection is followed by a summary of my research in Spanish, the language in which I conducted my research. Photo's and maps can also be found in the appendix.

## Chapter 1. Anthropology of food

Food covers a whole lot more than just the recharging of humans and animals. What can we learn from food by studying it as a research subject from an anthropological perspective? I want to discuss in this chapter how food is more than just a bulk of carbs.

In the first section, the relevance and usefulness of anthropology in regard to the study of food is discussed and what approaches are suitable for my research. In the second section, it will be covered how food can be seen as a structure, discourse and practice, and how food can be viewed as a way of marking social differences between people. In the third section, an elaboration will be given on how food can structure social relations in households.

### *Perspectives and approaches*

The act of eating is a universal phenomenon for both humans and animals. Cooking however can be regarded as an act of humans in order to differentiate themselves from animals (Kahn 1986:151). Only humans have rules about when or when not to eat, heat up their food in various ways, cut their vegetables into edible pieces and think about presentation when serving their food to others.

Food is not only a means of survival, food can also tell us a lot about multiple dimensions which make up society. How is anthropology crucial in our understanding of food and the roles it plays in society? According to Mintz (Mintz in Sanabria 2007:251), people have a “uniquely human capacity to create a symbolic world, and then both call it reality and to treat it as real”. Human behavior thus partly consists of the meanings people give to their lives. All these different ideas and stories people accumulate into the creation of culture (Robertson in Moore&Sanders 2006). Through the interpretation of these ideas, anthropology tries to figure out the plural meanings which make out culture (Geertz in Moore&Sanders 2006). In this way, anthropologists try to completely understand multiple aspects of culture, “that complex whole” (Kroeber in Moore&Sanders 2006). This idea is derived from Boas, who stated that anthropology, “the study of mankind”, has to apply a holistic approach, in order to study various aspects of culture (Boas in Moore&Sanders 2006). Anthropology serves as a suitable discipline to study the cultural construction of food, since anthropologists try to convey the meanings attached to cooking and eating people give themselves through a holistic and interpretative approach (Counihan&Van Esterik 1997:1).

Ever since anthropology has existed as a discipline, anthropologists have been taking an interest in food. Some have written about food in an innovative and groundbreaking way, such that

they had created three different perspectives within the anthropology of food. There is the material perspective (or economic) can also be used where food habits are studied to explain their “ecological utility”, so how and why food preferences practically work (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997: 9, 67-79). Another way of researching food can be from a semiotic perspective (or structuralist), which signifies that through the study of food, the underlying structures of society could be traced (Counihan&Van Esterik 1997:9). Last but not least, there is also a symbolic perspective (or cultural), which says that food habits contain cultural meaning and information (Counihan&Van Esterik 1997:9).

Claude Lévi-Strauss created a “culinary triangle” which represented three ways of cooking meat, and he argued that the different types of preparation each meant different issues (Lévi-Strauss 1966 in Counihan&Van Esterik 1997:28-35). He was the starter of the semiotic perspective, but scholars moved on from this approach and food could say more about society than solely the structures. Roland Barthes, a key author in developing a symbolic perspective, stated that food is 'a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behavior' (Barthes 1961 in Counihan&Van Esterik 1997:20-26, 21). In line with Barthes, Mary Douglas also thought and wrote about food symbolically, arguing that anthropologists should look at food as a code, with messages about social relations and classifications. She said that a meal is like a poem with a hidden meaning, and if we could crack the meaning, we could find information about culture (Douglas 1975 in Counihan&Van Esterik 1997:36-53).

In my research, I attempted to do just that; trying to understand the meaning of the messages which are communicated and expressed in the execution of seemingly natural food habits. Like Barthes and especially Douglas bodies of thought, these habits contain clues about social relations in a society which are normal for its inhabitants, but seem peculiar for outsiders. Although my research also looks at the structures in which food operates, for example the organization of preparing food in a household, namely by whom it is done, it will mostly try to find out the ways how preparing and consuming food convey social and cultural meanings about gender. The combination and interaction between structure and culture, or the semiotic and symbolic perspective, is used and explained by Weismantel (1988), an approach which is also applied on my research and which is explained below.

### *Food as structure, discourse and practice*

So far the different approaches of the anthropological study with regard to food are discussed and the chosen and applied perspective in my research. This section will elaborate on how food can be



seen as a structure, discourse and a practice in shaping social interaction according to Weismantel (1988). In line with this, it is shown how culturally constructed food habits affects social relations and creates differences between groups.

In Weismantel (1988) her ethnography on food and gender in the context of poor indigenous people in the Ecuadorian Andes, she conducts her research in line with Barthes and Douglas adopting a symbolical approach. She wants to “demonstrate the interaction of structure, discourse and practice” within food and cooking, in stead of just looking at structure alone (ibid:10-13).

With structure, rules that “govern the ways foods are prepared and eaten” and what kind of foods and meals are found important in different cultures are meant (Weismantel 1988:14). Is meat more essential for a proper meal, or starches (or even vegetables)? Should lunch be served warm, or is it just a bigger portion of a breakfast? While addressing Douglas, Weismantel argues that these notions about 'good' and 'bad' food and the way people prepare and consume them, contain symbolical meaning and cultural values. Food and its representations form thus 'a semiotic system' fit for its specific context. Rice has for example different connotations in America, than it has in Zumbagua, Ecuador (Weismantel 1998:14-15).

Moving on from food as a structure and thus a semiotic perspective, Weismantel also argues that food conveys meaning about culture, for example in terms of discourse. As such, she further enhances her overall symbolical approach on food. Because the fact that food is part of the human condition, food symbolism carries an affective and great power (Weismantel 1988:8-10). As a result, economical, political and ideological views can be connected with certain food preferences, in which food becomes a source of discourse (Weismantel 1988:17-18). To return to the rice example, Weismantel argues that cooking rice is seen as pretentious with Zumbaguan people. Since rice can only be bought at the market, it is thus more expensive than home grown starches, because it is imported. These facts underline cultural meaning; namely that rice is seen as western (imported), modern (expensive) and 'white' (not indigenous/local) food (Weismantel 1988:117-19). Neighbors who eat rice are thus wealthy and want to distinguish themselves from the 'real' Zumbaguan people. In this way, social bonds are established and social groups are defined, because the differences between them are accentuated through eating of certain foods. As such, 'food is one of the strongest ethnic and class markers', because food serves as a powerful metaphor in the daily lives of people (Weismantel 1988:9). In this respect, my research serves to prove that food is also a marker of gender.

The activity of cooking, or 'kitchen life' as Weismantel calls it, can be seen as a practice. In line with Barthes, Weismantel argues that food 'represents the relations between the social collective and the individual', cooking can thus be seen as a kind of interaction between the two (1988:23).

Cooking also bridges “the conceptual and material bases of social life”, because structures and ideologies are expressed and embodied with cooking (Weismantel 1988:23). In other words; social totality comes into place in the processes of cooking and eating (Weismantel 1988:24). In my research, I will mostly focus on the act of cooking and eating, and will therefore approach food mainly as a practice where social relations are enacted, especially gender relations.

Weismantel's view on food, illustrates how food can create ideas about social classifications and relations and how these are practiced in everyday life. “Diet (the types, proportions, and nutritional values of foods eaten) and cuisine (the kinds of meals or dishes that are prepared and shared) all reveal important insights into history and the construction of culture” (Sanabria 2007:250). Since we can view ourselves “as a culturally constituted human species”, then maybe food can also say something about us (Mintz in Sanabria 2007:251). Mintz argues that while eating is natural and necessary, eating habits are socially learned and derived from history. Processes around cooking and eating are thus culturally constructed. Kahn (1986:149) argues that food “furnishes a rich and versatile symbolic vehicle”, in other words; meanings are expressed through food. Food stands close to people and identification with the food you eat occurs on several levels. For example if your family always eats a certain dish on Friday (perhaps it's fish-day), or the town where you come from is known for a special drink ('jenever' in my case), or that Italians are called as 'wops' (spaghetti-eaters). As you may notice, these identification processes involve groups on several levels, I will argue that food can create, maintain and naturalize differences between people. In the next section, I wish to show how this process of creating an idea and a feeling of “us and them” can occur on a micro-level, namely that of households.

### *Food as a household practice*

“Next to breathing, eating is perhaps the most essential of all humans activities, and one with which much social interaction is entwined” (Mintz&Du Bois 2002:102). Because we have to eat everyday in order to survive, food plays a huge role in daily life. In this section, it is discussed how food influences social dynamics on a household level and in family life. It will be shown how household relations are also gendered in their food preparing and consuming practices.

My research is played out within the intimacy of people's homes, or in other words, households. Food plays such a central role in my research, this is also reflected in my definition of households. A household is a group of people who eat together and contribute and are interdependent in order to provide a livelihood for its members, in order to bring food on the table. In this definition, attention is payed to the household members and how these people are related to

each other, how household income is generated and the organization of domestic labor. All these assets have to do with food, since people have to buy, cook and eat it. But how do these processes surrounding the preparation and consumption of food operate within households, and how are social relations affected in these processes?

It is important to realize that households are not homogeneous unities; they consist of individuals who have different, and sometimes even contrasting positions towards one another. Intra-household dynamics are based on status and power differences, mainly shaped from age and gender, and inequality in these family relations also prevail (Weismantel 1988:26). The allocation of resources amongst members of households thus occurs through cultural notions people have about rights and needs (Katz 1995:327). A household is however an ambiguous place and the social organization of a family happens via conflict and negotiation (Carter 1996).

The status of household members and their place in the family is figured out with “their relative dominance over and subordination to another can be seen in the labor invested in cooking, serving and cleaning up” (Weismantel 1988:25). Weismantel argues that power relations between household members can be observed through the distribution of domestic labor, and like status, this is also dependent on gender and age. The different types of jobs people do in a household, also reflects and accentuates the differences between them. Scholars have conceptualized the division of domestic as the consequence of marriage structuring kinship organization in a household, which makes its member dependent of each other (Burton et al. 1977:227). In many cultures, men are supposed to make an income and mostly women are responsible for housework, including grocery shopping and cooking. In the kitchen, however, women have “access to a specifically feminine sort of political power” and can exert control over their relatives, depending again on age and their family role (Weismantel 1988:26). In so doing, female cooks do not stand powerless in their domestic environment.

Practices and mechanisms surrounding food which seem natural, actually show us insight on power relations, the marking of social groups and differences between them. These differences in the kind of work in the house, gives us an indication that the distribution of domestic labor is also a gendered process related to status, in other words the sexual division of labor.

## Chapter 2. Anthropology of gender

From studying 'the woman' and her so believed universal oppression to the study of gender in all its diversity, feminist anthropology has come a long way since it started out in the 1970's (Nencel 2007:93-95). But what does gender actually mean in social reality and how does it shape peoples lives? In this chapter, it will be shown how these processes of gender work and how they can be studied. Firstly, gender will be explained as a concept, and secondly it will be discussed how gender influences social life in terms of what a gendered practice is, or how one becomes a gendered person, namely by 'doing gender' (West&Zimmerman 1987).

### *Conceptualizing gender*

The most important lessons that are learned in feminist anthropology, is the realization that gender is a cultural and social construct that emphasizes differences between men and women. This creates ideas about masculinity and femininity, and this shapes gender roles and relations (Nencel 2007:98). In addition to this, it is also crucial to acknowledge that there exist differences between not only men and women, but also between men and women themselves in terms of ethnicity, class, sexuality and age. Men and women in their plurality and particularity, cannot be studied by universally fixed theories; gender is multi-layered, fluid, contextual and historically situated (Nencel 2007:97-98, Moore 1994:17). In this way, a more fuller understanding could be founded in the 'significance of the sexes' in society (Scott 1986:1054). This significance is very important to study, since gender has a huge influence on social life. Joan Scott (1986) show us perfectly in her article how this takes place and besides which gives a very clear description of what gender actually entails. In this section, I will discuss Scott's and other scholars' conceptualization of gender in order to fully explore and comprehend what gender encompasses.

Scott (1986) gives a refinement of the term gender in her article. According to her, the study of gender “implies the study of the other”, so looking at both sexes in relation to one another. Instead of locking men and women up in separate spheres, one should pay attention to the “social relations between the sexes” (ibid:1056). Because gender is a way of constructing an 'us and them', there should not only be looked at the boundaries, but also at the relations between two supposing opposites. She states that “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (ibid:1067). The first proposition implies that there is a cultural construction of symbols which invoke meanings and representations about women and men, and that these should be

interpreted. Culturally distinct ideas of femininity and masculinity, which are opposites of each other, are thus formed. This symbolical system has its influence on all sorts of social relations in society, namely; on an individual level (subjective identity), in social institutions (politics, education, labor market and so on), and in practices (how are gender relationships expressed in daily life) (ibid:1068). The second proposition explains that these social relations between men and women are not equal and that gender is a way of expressing power differences in all three levels (ibid:1069). Gender is can thus be seen as a cultural construct (an “organizing principle”), a way of structuring human interaction and functions to reproduce and legitimize social hierarchy (Brouns et al. 1995:31).

Scott has had a huge influence on the further conceptualization of gender and her propositions can be seen as a hallmark for the theorizing of gender. The idea that 'gender can be seen either as a symbolic construction or as a social relationship' is rejected, and nowadays feminist scholars state that gender constitutes both parts that affect each other (Moore 1988:13). For my research, I shall adopt Scott's propositions about gender, and will mainly look at how gender expresses cultural notions on masculinity and femininity and how it shapes social relations between the sexes which also involves power relations.

### *Doing gender*

My main focus is to study how gender is practiced in everyday life with regard to processes of food. The embedded expression and performance of gender in daily life, or what it means to be a 'gendered' person and how gender is displayed in society, was conceptualized by scholars in the 1980's as “doing gender” (West&Zimmerman 1987:125).

In their groundbreaking article West and Zimmerman describe how they want to achieve an “ethnomethodologically informed understanding of gender” in which they want to see how men and women themselves undertake gender as members of society (1987:126). They state that “doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and mircopolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'” (West& Zimmerman 1987:126). They hereby mean that even in the smallest actions people undertake each day with each other, signs of gender can be traced. They derived this idea from Goffman's account of gender display, where he argues that gender display are portrayals of culturally constructed notions of gender, which he calls “the prototypes of essential expression” (West&Zimmerman 1987:129). West and Zimmerman move on from this idea and argue that doing gender is an “ongoing activity embedded in everyday interaction” (1987:130). They describe this process as the accountability

men and women have on their own behavior and how people give criticism on other peoples on their masculine or feminine behavior. Did they behave themselves correctly as the social situation prescribed them to do as proper members of society? When someone behaves out of order, like a woman paying for dinner on the first date, this says something about masculinity and femininity. In this process, people always have the option on how to behave and interact in social situations, for example like deliberately going against certain gender expectations, or negotiating how their behavior does fit in their sex category (West&Zimmerman 1987:130). In other words, people have agency when it comes to their gendered behavior and actions, but are also restrained by social rules and structures. In this way, the creation and formation of gendered persons are shaped (West&Zimmerman 1987:136). In extension to this notion, gendered practices also do exist, in which certain activities are seen as masculine or feminine.

Because gender is such an important way of categorizing people and society is involved in naming 'essential' differences between men and women, “doing gender is unavoidable” (West&Zimmerman 1987:137). These differences seem natural and normal to people, part of the biological part of the sexes, when really it is culturally constructed; the concept of gender (West& Zimmerman 1987:137). This impact of gender on society, makes cultural notions and social organization and activities 'gendered' (Brouns et al. 1995:32-33). Hence, my research will also be aimed at how gender is 'done' in everyday life and how cooking and eating are gendered practices.

### Chapter 3. Food and gender

Research has been conducted to show differences between social groups and how food plays a role in solidifying group membership and setting groups apart, mostly in terms of ethnicity or social stratification (Mintz and Du Bois 2002:109). But not much emphasis has been placed on how food creates and maintains social relations within groups. In this respect, gender can play a huge role in accentuating differences between individuals. That's why in this chapter, I want to discuss the relationship between food and gender and will try to decode the practice of gender behind the preparation and serving of food. What kind of ideas are attached to cooking and how are gender relations reproduced through serving? In kitchen life, gender is performed and enacted through the sexual division of domestic labor with regard to food.

#### *Cooking and the sexual division of domestic labor*

Since cooking is seen as a common responsibility for women, whether as a member of a family or as a spouse, this idea is reflected in the sexual division of domestic labor within households. The sexual division of domestic labor is connected to different duties and responsibilities for the sexes, where usually women take care of housekeeping and men work to generate income for the household (Murcott in Brettell&Sargent 1993:80-81). With housekeeping, especially the amount of time and effort which is put by women in the activity of preparing food for the family is considerable and outweighs the housework done by men (Haukanes 2007:15). This could be a sign of unfairness within the sexual division of labor, but most women accept cooking as a self-evident responsibility towards their families (Haukanes 2007:19-20).

Tensions can come to display with the interaction between gender relations and food distribution. Elizabeth Katz (1995:327), who conducted research on indigenous domestic economy and intra-household interaction in rural Guatemala, states that rules and practices in a household are gender-based and discrimination in the allocation of resources and sexual division of labor takes place within families. In the allocation of resources, you can think of deciding what to purchase or not. In this process, negotiation has to take place between husband and wife, or sometimes the husband has even full authority in deciding what to spend 'his' money on (Carter 2004:640-41). Discrimination is also evident with the sexual division of labor. In the context of poverty and agriculture, women often work alongside their husbands, but their work is not remunerated, because this labor is carried out 'as a member of the household' (Katz 1995:330). Because of women's primary role as a caretaker and giver, women have to manage with everyone's needs, and therefore

are besides their work outside the home providing for their families, also responsible for work that has to be done in the household, which results in double responsibilities for women (ibid:332). These roles have to be mediated within the household, where also other members of the family, usually older kids, give a helping hand in earning money, helping with the crops or doing housework (ibid:335-36).

### *The kitchen as a woman's domain*

“In all kinds of societies, women have always had primary responsibility to prepare food and giving it to others” (Counihan 1988:52). Carole Counihan (1988:51) researched female identity making and domestic power through food provisioning with urban women in Italy. In her article she makes connections about the seeming 'naturalness' of women to feed their loved ones, for example in bodily functions like breastfeeding, or assumed female features of being generous and care giving (1988:53-54). Also Weismantel (1986:28), who did research on food and gender in Ecuador, states that “complex ideological representations” explain and justify productive roles, and that for example a “women's tool” like a broom or a saucepan, “are made to seem an inseparable part of her nature, so that the tasks assigned to her appear to result from biological, not social, law”. Counihan and Weismantel both argue that cooking is a “women's domain”, serving is part of the “ideological role of the woman in marriage” and femininity is formed according to ideas about “family, nurturance and altruism” (Counihan 1988:54, Weismantel 1986:28).

Within marriage, preparing food is seen as a duty for being a good wife, who is responsible for getting a proper meal on the table every day. At least, this is the case with middle-class women from England, according to Anne Murcott on family meals (Murcott in Brettell&Sargent 1993:78). Serving food to their families or visitors is also an important part of this “women's domain” and also contains symbolism about the social hierarchy of the household and marital relations (Weismantel 1986:28). As I said before, the distribution of food is a process related to status, and women with their considerable amount of time and energy taken into domestic labor, seem to be in the lower ranks within a family. An example with food, it does not matter whether it is in Italy or Ecuador; women who cook a meal, are always the ones who are last to eat; everyone else has to have food before they can eat (Counihan 1988:55, Weismantel 1986:28).

In this act of cooking and serving food which women make for their families, women are not subordinate or powerless. On the contrary, “because food is such a gripping need day in day out, it takes an additional social and symbolic significance. It is a powerful channel for communication and a means to establish connection, create obligation, and exert influence” (Counihan 1988:53).



Through food, “messages about social position and relative power” can be communicated within a marriage between husband and wife, or within a household between family members (Weismantel 1988:28-29). With a tasty meal a woman can indirectly oblige her husband to support her and treat her properly, as well as the sharing of a meal marks the existence of a family (Murcott in Brettell&Sargent 1993:80-81). Haldis Haukanes (2007), who conducted research on consumption practices and gender relations in the Czech Republic, states that women who are at the center of food distribution. This can be seen as “main kin-makers” in strengthening family bonds with handing out food, while “at the same time, she is building her identity as a proper woman who does what women are supposed to do” (Haukanes 2007:20). As Counihan (1988:53) says so beautifully and fiercely; “it is the power of women who feed, who satisfy hunger, who are viscerally needed, and who influence others through manipulation of the symbolic language of food”. So women have informal power and even agency in their acts of cooking and serving and therefore being a good cook is a quality that not only husbands and family members appreciate. Also for a woman herself it gives her pride and satisfaction, and with the tasty food she makes, she has the tools to get things done in and around the house (Counihan 1988:55).

People use food to define and “express gender qualities, balance relationships between the sexes” (Kahn 1986:149). Food can thus be used as a framework to analyze gender relations and the way power is expressed and negotiated.

## Chapter 4. Food and gender in Guatemala

As is described now, my research could take place in any part of the world. The cultural context in which an anthropological study takes place is extremely important, and therefore I want to discuss mine, namely Guatemala. Firstly, a brief history of Guatemala will be given in terms of land, cultivation and social developments. Secondly, food ways in Guatemala will be discussed in terms of diet and cuisine. Thirdly, scholarly knowledge of gender in Guatemala, but also Latin-America in general, because of lacking scientific sources, will be described and the missing gap of indigenous gender relations in it.

### *Political-economic history*

Throughout history, the distribution of land, and the crops which can grow on it, has always been an issue in Guatemala. With the coming of the Spaniards in the 16th century and the conquering of the land, and the end of Maya civilization, the indigenous population was exploited and forced to work in fields to produce goods, such as coffee and chocolate, that would be transported to Europe (Fischer&Hendrickson 2003:56-57). The New World was used to enrich western economies and western culture was forced upon the Maya, which resulted in a mix between the two, or 'a more cosmopolitan and hybrid Maya culture' (ibid:61).

In the 19th century independence was gained and Guatemala was founded as a country. Since the colonization, and even before that, Mayan people had been associated with agriculture and also indigenous people themselves say they have a strong connection with their land (in which the presence of their ancestors resides and 'mother nature' in general) (ibid:132). This continues to be the case, even nowadays. Not only is their sentiment great towards their land, but also in a more practical way indigenous people are dependent on their land. A great number of indigenous people are farmers, live with their families in the rural areas and depend greatly on the land on which they grow their crops (mostly maize and bush dry beans) and thus their livelihood. In the highlands "milpa agriculture", corn fields, are a way of life for indigenous people (ibid:124-130). In the 1970's and 1980's however, these usually peaceful countrysides were the places where a tremendous amount of violence took place (ibid:130-136). State repression was at its highest at that time and the army and guerrilla groups fought against each other for political power. In their battle, the state involved thousands of civilians by massacres, kidnapping and torture, to suppress rebellion or detect 'collaborates', this was also known as 'disappearances' (ibid:66-67). These violent actions were mostly aimed at indigenous people and the battle was fought on and for their land.

After the end of the Guatemalan Civil War in 1996, the country adopted a democratic system and the market was opened up to the world, which resulted in an export economy (ibid:30-34). Influences of globalization took (and still are) place in Guatemala and Maya agriculture has been changed according to the demands for certain goods. Because of this, nontraditional crops appear in the fields that are produced for export, for example broccoli, snow peas and berries instead of “corn, wheat, cabbage and potatoes” (ibid:136). Even though indigenous farmers profit from the nontraditional agriculture, which is mostly aimed at the U.S. market, the country remains a developing country. Poverty is widespread and Guatemala is classified as having a low GDP per capita (gross domestic product), which is a way of measuring a nation's annual economic activity and productivity by dividing this total by the population size (United Nations 2012). Although, the national income is unequally distributed throughout the land and its people, Guatemala has for example a high Gini index (0.596) (World Bank 2011). Economic inequality is expressed in areas, since rural areas are poorer than urban ones. Lower and thus poorer social classes are mostly constituted of indigenous people, and the country's political and economical elite mainly consists of 'ladino's' (people with Spanish descent), so social stratification is also formed by not only class differences, but also ethnic lines (Fischer and Hendrickson 2003:27-29).

### *Food*

Pilcher (1996:199) argues, according to this research on Mexican cuisine, that ethnic differences, and thus power differences, are defined and expressed culturally. Food plays “an important part of this categorization scheme”, where certain foods are associated with ethnic groups and can thus serve as a cultural expression and “status marker” (Pilcher 1996:200). Weismantel (1988:87-88) argues in a similar way, stating that in people's diet, so what they eat everyday, you can observe “differences in wealth”, by for example adding expensive ingredients to a meal, or just eating the bare necessities .

According to Wiesmantel (1988:91), “starches predominate in every meal” in the Zumbaguan, Ecuadorian diet, but Fischer and Hendrickson (2003:12) argue that the same can be said for Guatemala. Corn has been the foundation of Maya diet and can thus stand as a symbol for an ethnic and cultural Maya identity (in the contrary of eating bread, which is a Spanish tradition). “Tortillas are always the heart of the meal”, thin flatbread made from finely ground maize, which are usually filled with beans (Fischer&Hendrickson 2003:12). Complements in Ecuador are meat, vegetables and seasonings, like salsas (Weismantel 1988:89-90). It should be noted that poor Guatemalan families mostly cannot afford meat, and the presence of meat in a meal is therefore

rare, and viewed as a special treat for common people when consumed (Fischer&Hendrickson 2003:12).

If tortillas are a basic element in normal, everyday meals, tamales (filled corn based dough which is steamed or boiled in a leaf wrapper) are the foundation of meals on special occasions for indigenous people, such as feasts, festivals or birthdays, as it was and still is for the Mayans in Belize (LeCount 2001:940-943). For example during the Holy Week, families have grand meals in their houses, ceremonial food, which they normally wouldn't eat, but for this special occasion, they do. The meals indigenous people eat during festivities also differ from ladino families, which underlines the correctness in Pilcher's statement about food as a cultural expression.

“Mealtime interactions are very important for Guatemalan families and society”, since there is time for conversation, gossip and discuss problems and solutions (Fischer&Hendrickson 2003:10-11). Whether it's just a regular day/dinner, or a celebration with a feast, food provides means to establish and reaffirm social relations between people. With indigenous people, just like any ethnic group, it is also a way of expressing their ethnic identity with their distinctive cuisine and style of cooking. While most wealthy, ladino families would cook on gas stoves for example, a lot of indigenous households still cook with wood fires, and food is consumed around hearthstones in poor families, which indicates a difference in status (Fischer&Hendrickson 2003:10-11).

Cooking is mostly done by women, who spend a lot of their day in the kitchen grinding maize, baking tortillas, making coffee (Fischer&Hendrickson 2003:12-13). Not only do women have to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner every day, they are also responsible for the preparation of enormous amounts of foods which takes much time and care to prepare during feasts and fiestas, as custom for Mexican immigrants in the U.S. (Wessel&Jones 2006:16-17).

### *Gender*

As I said before, ethnicity and class must be considered in trying to define what gender entails. In regard to indigenous Latin-American gender relations, however, not much has been written. The machismo/marianismo model was for example mostly based on middle-class ladino families, whereas my research about working class indigenous families (Ehlers 1991:1). What then has been written about them? Studies have shown that poor, rural and indigenous families reject the traditional division of labor where 'the man' works outside of the house, and 'the woman' takes care of the household, which can be more applied to ladino families (Chant&Craske 2003). This is illustrated by the fact that a lot of indigenous women also work outside of the house and make an income, for example in the study of Katz (1995). With ladino families, a working woman would be

seen as a threat to the role of the man as the sole breadwinner, but indigenous people see it “as a vital component of household survival” in the face of poverty (Chant&Craske 2003:169). This is also illustrated in Katz article (1995:329-331), which shows the necessity of indigenous women in rural areas to work alongside their husbands in the fields, or go to the market and sell their crops or textiles, in order to provide enough food and income for the family. “Through their activities, these women make a significant contribution to household income, both indirectly in terms of their unpaid agricultural and household labor, and directly through the money they earn in market-trading and petty commodity production” says Moore (1988:43) about indigenous women in Peru. Ehlers (1991) confirms this statement with her study on indigenous Guatemalan women, by arguing that women's behavior toward men, and their way of life in general, is a form of a survival strategy.

Also in decision-making, the man in the house does not have sole authority in indigenous households, according to Carter (2004) with his study on indigenous Guatemalan households. In deciding what to purchase, men and women often discuss together what is best to buy, or different kinds of household purchases are divided by men and women (Carter 2004:647-48). Social capital is also greater with indigenous women than presumed, because indigenous women can often be seen outside of their homes, they have strong connection to community and kin and have access to a wide network. Moreover, 'Latin-American' women use this network as a survival strategy for themselves and their families (Molyneux 2002:177). In all of these cases, indigenous women tend to have a 'double burden', or tend to multitask as you may call it, since they work outside of the house (paid or unpaid) and are still responsible for work within the house (such as cooking) (Fischer&Hendrickson 2003:9).

Now that the general context of my research is clear, I want to continue with sketching the scene of my fieldwork in the next chapter, where the village of San Juan la Laguna will be described and overall my collected data in the upcoming chapters.

## Chapter 5. Households and the sexual division of labor in San Juan la Laguna

### *The village of San Juan la Laguna*

San Juan la Laguna is a widespread, but still small, village near Lago Atitlan, in a valley surrounded by mountains and the volcano San Pedro<sup>2</sup>. In total there are approximately 11.000 people living in San Juan, of which 6.000 live in *las aldeas*, little villages in the mountains which are still a part of the municipality, and 5.000 in the city center. This city center is a stretched living area with houses. Family properties stretch from the lake side, all the way back from the countryside, *el campo*, to the foot of the mountains. In the lake, men fish in their boats or catch crabs on the beaches, selling them later in the market or to provide fish for their families. In the fields in the valley grow coffee plants, which is also the main income and export product of the area and almost every man works *en el monte* (in the mountains). In the past, maize plants would grow in these fields, but since the 1970's people have started to cultivate coffee here, as it made more money. Nevertheless, San Juan faces difficult times nowadays, because the coffee plants suffer from a disease, which makes the leaves dry and the coffee beans of poor quality. Further up in the mountain though, the coffee plants are in better condition. Local honey is also an export product of San Juan. In the hills artificial beehives can be found, where honey is produced.

The city center is located closest to the lake and only has one main street, where the bank, stores, internet cafes and the library are located. Several churches can be found in the village, catholic as well as evangelical. The majority of the inhabitants are catholic, which can be seen in the construction of a bigger catholic church with a square in front of it, which is located in the center of the village. The predominance of Catholicism in the village is reflected in the fact that the inhabitants raise and collect their own money for the construction of the new church. When this church is finished in about a year, it will be the biggest church in San Juan. The library with colorfully painted walls has a little park in front of it, with the village patron Saint John in a basin of water with flowers and plants next to it, is also new. The paved roads are recently built, in the years before that there weren't roads, but just rammed earth. At the corner of the street leading to the lake, a covered market can be found each morning, where meat is sold, just like vegetables, fruit, clothes, bras, shoes and other products.

All these building projects and innovations in the village points to a period of economic prosperity, which is in contrast with the failing coffee crops. Although there is economic progress visible in San Juan, it is still a relatively poor area. However, San Juan is not totally self supporting,

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<sup>2</sup> Maps of Guatemala, Lago Atitlan and San Juan la Laguna can be found in the appendix.

and the village has received financial support from national and international non-profit organizations, who have helped renewing the village. Since five years or so, tourism also begun to flourish in San Juan, which has brought visitors spending their filled wallets on locally made handicrafts, like paintings and textiles. Several weaving associations were founded and they started to make their own products, selling these in stores for tourists. As a result, a large majority of the women in San Juan commercialized their weaving skills, bringing their self-made textiles to the associations and making some money when their items are sold.

This well kept and clean village demonstrates a strong indigenous character. You can see this on the murals depicting indigenous themes and ceremonies, for example sowing and reaping of crops. Almost all of the women wear *trajes*, traditional indigenous clothing. Most men wear western clothing, although sometimes a hat, and only senior men would wear their typical *trajes* of the village. Local people only speak Tz'utujil with each other, a Mayan language, and only Spanish to outsiders. This also reflects that San Juan is a tight community, with everyone greeting each other in the streets as they pass by and with many extended families living close to one another.

### *Houses, households and families*

When walking through the streets of San Juan, you will see painted walls of concrete or *adobe* (clay-brick) that adjoin the road. Metal doors with a bell or just a piece of plain corrugated iron that serves as a door, which can be pushed open. Behind that door, you will find a family property, which is enclosed by walls, with several separate little houses made of the same material as the walls. You usually will find a courtyard of rammed earth on the property with chickens and roosters walking around in it, and a few dogs barking at you. Next to these animals, some coffee plants, fruit trees and a *huerto* (kitchen garden) with herbs can be found. A covered *pila* (wash basin) stands outside with dirty dishes or clothes waiting to be cleaned or washed. Strings with wet clothes hanging to dry and that dripping water on the plants are suspended around in the garden.

In the little houses that are spread around the property and that surround the courtyard, bedrooms can be found, just like a bathroom and a kitchen. On an ordinary summer's day, people mostly sit outside in the shade, because inside it is too warm, due to the corrugated tin roof. Especially in the kitchen, temperatures can rise to that of a heated oven. A *plancha* (cooking plate or hearthstone) is located what is often a small room, which blows out heavy smoke when it is fed with deadwood, while pots and pans and their content are being cooked above it. Further, the room is often frugally decorated, just like the other rooms in the houses. Only the necessary is available in the kitchen; a stool, *leña* (fire wood), a broom, kitchenware, pots and pans, tableware, a water

dispenser (because tap water is not clean), bags of dry foot and seasonings.

Living in these properties and houses in San Juan are often large extended families, with multiple generations living together. Marriage is a way of (re)shaping a household, because when a couple marries, the woman usually moves to the family property of her husband. With an addition of a new family member and possibly more over time, and overall a change in kinship relations in the household occurs. For example, a senior couple or widow live alongside their children. These brothers and sister vary in age and can be married and have children themselves too. In this way, a cluster of grandfathers, uncles and aunts, cousins and nieces live with each other. With marriage a new family member is added to the household, and this is also reflected in the mapping of residences in the property. Usually newly weds are given a separate room or even house on the property, but their children will have to live with them in that space, just like some older married couples did before them. Older brothers can sleep together in a room, just like girls, or in some cases somewhat older children will have a room for themselves.

Kin relations can be seen in the lay-out of the distribution of houses and rooms on the family property and thus how household members relate to one another. Little unities are in this way created which are dependent on each other in order to make a living.

### *Sexual division of domestic labor and its socialization*

When I arrived on a Saturday at Isabella's house, two of her daughters aging thirteen and sixteen were busy with scrubbing soaked clothes on the *pila* in the courtyard and hanging them up to dry in the sun. Her youngest sons of nine and ten years old were watching television in the room next to the kitchen with some of their cousins. Her husband was out, probably working in the coffee fields or doing a tour for tourists, as he is a tour guide and a farmhand.

Isabella is a hard working woman in her early forties, who occupies herself with taking care of six children, weaving for an association, sometimes cooking lunch for tourists when her husband had given a tour and organizing ceremonies, as the family is very active in the catholic church. But for now, Isabella sits on a stool, stares at the lake and enjoys the cool breeze coming from it. After talking about food for a while, she suddenly becomes quiet and a deep frown appears on her normally friendly looking face. Then she looks at me with her little pitch black eyes and says; “Do you know that in San Juan two different cultures exist?” Puzzled, I start asking what she means. “I mean that of a man and that of a woman”, she says to me like a teacher to its somewhat slow student and further explains her statement:



Women stay at home and men work in the mountains. Women have to work in order to support their family with weaving, knitting, making woolen bales etc. It's for the children, so they can go to school and we can buy the things they need, like books, notebooks and pens. A woman also has to work for the food expenses. If a woman doesn't work, then there is nothing to eat. It's a lot of work. Just like washing clothes, that's also a lot of work. (23<sup>th</sup> of March 2013)

Isabella, and other women which will be mentioned later, made me realize how different tasks and kinds of work of the household are ordered according to gender. Or in other words, how the sexual division of domestic labor functions in San Juan. The remark “if a woman doesn't work, then there is nothing to eat”, reflects the necessity of having to work hard in order to provide the basics for your family and how important women are in this process, namely with the work they do in the house and in the kitchen every day.

The history and every day activities of Ana illustrate how these statements express themselves in reality. Ana, a kind, humble woman in her late thirties, lives on a property in the city center with her husband and their two children, an older son and a younger daughter, both in their teens and who go to school. Her husband has a decent job in an organization which provides housing for people with insufficient resources to do this themselves. While sitting at an old wooden table in her kitchen whilst our *tamalitos* were being cooked, we talked about her life and family life in general. Like most women in San Juan, Ana did not go to school and therefore couldn't read nor write. According to her mother, that was something only men should do, and from the age of eight, she had to give a helping hand in the household chores alongside her mother. She had to learn how to make tortillas, how to cook and how to weave. Her daughter of eleven years old can now also do all of these things. According to Ana this is necessary for her daughter to be independent, for when she is not at home, but at a reunion for example. Her son though, did not had to learn these things when he was a young boy. “No, men have to do other things”, Ana told me. Like getting deadwood in the forest, to harvest and clean *milpa* crops, milk cows and pick herbs. Boys go with their fathers to the mountains to learn how to do these things, *a fuera* (outside) and girls stay with their mothers at home to learn other things.

So already at an early age, different types of labor are distributed between men and women, which leads to a the socialization of the sexual division of labor and making these types of activities, and even places, gendered. Picking coffee becomes a man's job and the mountains his territory, while on the other hand making tortillas is a woman's job and the house, or more specifically the kitchen, her area.

However, things are changing nowadays, with young boys and girls going to school and the increased possibilities for women to also work outside of the house. The disability of being unable to read and write did not stop Ana from making an income. Ana is a member of a weaving association, which means that she sews bags at home during weekdays and sometimes cooks in a store for tourists who want to taste a 'typical' Guatemalan meal. In this way, both Ana and her husband worked in order to sustain their family in their daily needs, by making sure their children can go to school, a proper lunch can be eaten every day and medicines could be provided when necessary.

### *Marriage and its responsibilities*

After some time during my fieldwork in San Juan, I came to realize that marriage has a great impact on households and of course family, but as a result, also in the meaning of the work men and women do.

Especially Isabella made the relationships between marriage and the sexual division of domestic labor clear to me. After our interesting talk about the existence of two different worlds in the village, I came back to her to get to know more about this topic. She continued talking about how the work of a woman is different from that of a man.

A woman needs to do the housework, take care of the kitchen, prepare food, look after the children and arrange a lot of stuff. A man gets up, eats his food and goes off to the mountains to work. But he only has one kind of job, for example taking care of the fields. He spends his time in the mountains. He works from eight o'clock in the morning to four o'clock in the afternoon. But a woman's work never ends. She has to prepare all the meals, do the dirty dishes, and also work in the evening to weave. She has to make money in order to support her family. (11<sup>th</sup> of April)

I then asked what men had to do in order to be a good husband. "The same, work hard for their families. The responsibilities of men and women are the same, just the kind of work they do differs," said Isabella.

With my next visit, Isabella started talking more explicitly about marriage. She said it was smart for a woman to marry, but that you have to know your job when you do; you have to know your responsibilities towards your family. That's why she teaches her daughters to weave and cook, so that they know how to do these things independently and can take care of themselves. I asked what would happen if a woman does not know how to cook. "Then she is not a good candidate for

marriage”, Isabella said to me. “Her mother-in-law will get tired and be mad at her, because this woman doesn't do any work in the house.” Then Isabella told me the latest gossip of the village, where a fifteen-year old girl got married with a young boy. Isabella said she talked to the mother-in-law of this girl, and said she wasn't pleased with the behavior of her new daughter-in-law, because she only played with her cousins, and didn't do anything in the house, only eating. Isabella repeated; “When you marry, you have to work and know your job”.

This shows that doing housework is part of the duties of being a good wife and if you do not execute these tasks, your credibility as one quickly fades away and most likely, problems in the family will arise.

### *A woman's work*

Most people think of work as an equivalent to earning a salary. In San Juan though, this was not the case. When I told Veronica, my host 'mom', about my research and it having to do with cooking, but also with the persons making the food, she looked at me with narrowed, slightly naughty looking eyes and she said to me; “your research is about *trabajo de la mujer*” (a woman's work). I realized Veronica was absolutely right. Not only is generating an income by working with a weaving association part of women's daily jobs in San Juan, but also the housework they had to do every day.

Veronica is a woman from a large poor family when she married her husband, but as years passed and her four children were born and raised, the family started to climb up on the social ladder. Especially since her husband has a good job at the municipality and the children are able to go to university in Quetzaltenango, because of the financial help of an American godfather. The family lives on a medium-sized, but well kept property, where Veronica has access to both a *plancha* as well as a gas stove and could keep her products in a big modern looking fridge. While preparing lunch one day, Veronica told me with her slow and sometimes melodramatic way of speaking and captivating voice, a day in a life of a woman in San Juan.

Women have to get up early to get the fire started in the *plancha*, have to prepare the maize dough by washing the seeds and going to a *molino* (mill) to grind it into dough, make breakfast and fresh tortillas for their husbands and children. Then the husband goes off to work, early if he works in the coffee fields, or a little bit later if he works in the office. According to Veronica, a woman's work was a more difficult job than a man's work, because men just leave the house after a meal, but that women need to take care of the house. Women have to do the dishes, clean up the house, give water to the plants in their *huerta* (kitchen garden), wash clothes, sweep the floor, feed the chickens,

go grocery shopping, cook lunch, cook dinner, keep an eye on the kids etc. Veronica let out a deep sigh after she told me this while she cut some meat. “The responsibilities of a woman never ends,” she said to me, “because a woman always needs to think what to do next or plan what to eat the next day.” She told me that women therefore are often tired, because of their multiple preoccupations with the children, cooking, cleaning and weaving.

Because weaving in San Juan is a way for women to make an income, you can view this phenomenon as a 'double burden' for women, for having to take care of both housework and a job. But for Veronica, weaving was also a way of expressing herself and a way of being independent. With the money she made from weaving, she could pay herself for the grocery shopping and buy a new apron once in a while or kitchenware when needed, without bothering her husband. According to Veronica, problems could arise between wife and husband when the woman is totally dependent on her husband for cash. Therefore it was better to share workload, and thus work together to make ends meet.

## Chapter 6. Diet and cuisine of San Juan la Laguna

Between eight o'clock and half past eight in the morning on every weekday, the covered market in San Juan la Laguna, located on the street between the lake and the catholic church, comes to life. Traders go to their regular spot, those with a steady supply in the stalls and those with new acquisitions go sit at the entrance. Then they start to install their products; a man ties his caught crabs to a reed stem, the woman sitting next to him has a big sack of fish, which she sorts out by throwing the different kinds in different buckets. An old woman kneeling on the floor sells *hierba mora* and little bananas, while on her side a woman with a baby in her arms sells cases filled with tomatoes. Walking to the back of the covered building, stalls with snack food can be found and some plastic chairs in front of them or you can just take a slice of papaya 'to go'. Stalls with baskets of vegetables like unions, potatoes, carrots, *guisquils*, these sold per piece or per pound. Sometimes the same stall will also sell whole gutted chickens which the sellers cut up into pieces with a cleaver. There are stalls with rice, beans and other dry food, butchers with carcasses of cows hanging on hooks from the ceiling and traders who only sell fruit. One can thus find a collection of colors, smells and noises in the market<sup>3</sup>.

Before discussing the diet and cuisine in San Juan and the trichotomy of Weismantel (1988), of which structure and discourse will be elaborated on in this chapter and practice in the next, first I would like to make clear what kind of ingredients the habitants of San Juan use with the upcoming overview. An indication of what can be bought on the market and what people eat regularly, can be found in this overview, from which inspiration is found from Weismantel's ethnography (1998:89-91).

### *Overview of food products*

#### I. Starches

##### A. Locally grown starches (that can be cultivated on the fields or bought from street traders)

|                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
| <i>Maíz</i>      | Corn         |
| <i>Frijol</i>    | Kidney beans |
| <i>Calabacín</i> | Squash       |

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3 Pictures of the market in San Juan la Laguna can be found in the appendix.

B. Purchased starches (bought in the market)

|                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| <i>Papas</i>    | Potatoes    |
| <i>Arroz</i>    | Rice        |
| <i>Fideo</i>    | Noodles     |
| <i>Harina</i>   | Wheat flour |
| <i>Garbanzo</i> | Chickpeas   |

II. Complements

A. Vegetables (bought in the market)

|                  |                               |
|------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>Tomate</i>    | Tomato                        |
| <i>Cebolla</i>   | Onion                         |
| <i>Zanahoria</i> | Carrot                        |
| <i>Guisquil</i>  | Chayote                       |
| <i>Papas</i>     | Potatoes                      |
| <i>Aguacate</i>  | Avocado                       |
| <i>Chile</i>     | Chili                         |
| <i>Ejote</i>     | Green bean                    |
| <i>Pepino</i>    | Cucumber                      |
| <i>Coliflor</i>  | Cauliflower                   |
| <i>Brócoli</i>   | Broccoli                      |
| <i>Elote</i>     | Corn cob                      |
| <i>Pacaya</i>    | Pacaya (blossom of date palm) |
| <i>Apio</i>      | Stems of celery               |

B. Herbs (bought in the market or from traders on the street)

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>Hierba mora</i>        | Black nightshade ( <i>solanum nigrum</i> )             |
| <i>Chipilin</i>           | Longbeak rattlebox ( <i>crotalaria longirostrata</i> ) |
| <i>Hierba cana/blanca</i> | Common groundsel ( <i>senecio vulgaris</i> )           |

C. Meat

1. Locally raised meats (which people can catch or raise themselves)

|                 |         |
|-----------------|---------|
| <i>Pescado</i>  | Fish    |
| <i>Pollo</i>    | Chicken |
| <i>Gallo</i>    | Rooster |
| <i>Cangrejo</i> | Crab    |

2. Products of local animals

|              |      |
|--------------|------|
| <i>Huevo</i> | Eggs |
|--------------|------|

3. Purchased meats and meat products (bought in the market)

|                       |          |
|-----------------------|----------|
| <i>Carne de res</i>   | Beef     |
| <i>Carne de cerdo</i> | Pork     |
| <i>Sardinas</i>       | Sardines |

D. Other seasonings (bought in the market or grown in the kitchen garden)

|                       |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Sal</i>            | Salt                |
| <i>Pimiento</i>       | Pepper              |
| <i>Cilandro</i>       | Coriander           |
| <i>Menta</i>          | Mint                |
| <i>Jugo del limon</i> | Lemon juice         |
| <i>Apio</i>           | Leafs of celery     |
| <i>Pepitoria</i>      | Ground squash seeds |
| <i>Sésamo</i>         | Ground sesame seeds |
| <i>Canela</i>         | Cinnamon            |
| <i>Ajo</i>            | Garlic              |

|                |          |
|----------------|----------|
| <i>Tomillo</i> | Thyme    |
| <i>Clavo</i>   | Clove    |
| <i>Laurel</i>  | Bay leaf |

### III. Snacks

#### A. Fruits (bought in the market)

|                |                         |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Plátano</i> | Banana                  |
| <i>Mango</i>   | Mango                   |
| <i>Papaya</i>  | Papaya                  |
| <i>Melón</i>   | Melon, green and yellow |
| <i>Sandía</i>  | Watermelon              |
| <i>Zapote</i>  | Sapote                  |
| <i>Piña</i>    | Pineapple               |
| <i>Limon</i>   | Lemon                   |

#### B. Bread (bought in a store or bakery)

*Pan dulce/'pan de manteca'* Sweet bread, accompanied with coffee

#### C. Sweets (bought on the street or in the market)

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <i>Helado</i>       | Ice cream made from papaya or mango juice                     |
| <i>Choco frutas</i> | Pieces of fruit like banana or pineapple covered in chocolate |
| <i>Gelatina</i>     | Glasses of flavored gelatin drink                             |
| <i>Chocolate</i>    | Hot chocolate drink (with water or milk)                      |

#### D. Cooked foods from the market of from street sellers (some examples)

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Nachos</i>                       | Corn chips with salsa, guacamole, frijol, cheese or chicken   |
| <i>Tacos</i>                        | Wheat or corn tortillas with filling (tomatoes, union, coriander and a sort of meat)                        |
| <i>Hotdog</i>                       | Bread with union, guacamole and a sort of minced meat, like chorizo   |
| <i>Pollo frito con papas fritas</i> | Deep fried breaded chicken and fries; streetversion of Latin-Americans KFC, namely Pollo Campero            |
| <i>Ceviche</i>                      | Pieces of fresh seafood with lemon juice, unions, coriander, tomatoes and 'English sauce' (Worcester sauce) |
| <i>Churros</i>                      | Fried dough pastry with sugar, cinnamon or chocolate optional   |
| <i>Atol</i>                         | Cornstarch based hot drink, or rice starch with hot chocolate <sup>4</sup>                                  |

### *Diet and cuisine of San Juan la Laguna*

Without doubt corn is the most important part of the diet and cuisine of San Juan and perhaps the whole of Guatemala. When I asked people to tell me about *la comida de aqui* (the food from here), they often did not mention *tortillas* or *tamalitos*, because *comida* and these things are seen as separate and tortillas as self-evident. When I asked about tortillas, people laughed and said things

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<sup>4</sup>Although this overview gives a general understanding of the range of San Juan ingredients, some critical remarks have to be made. For starters, some foods cannot be so easily assigned into one category, like potatoes. This starchy food crop is often viewed as a vegetable in San Juan by serving it with the other vegetables, like carrot and *guisquil*, while rice and soup are served next to it as different components of the meal. But at the same time, potatoes can be eaten independently from other starches, so I also placed potatoes in the starches as well.

like; “yes, enough tortillas here”, or “we always eat tortillas”. This is indeed true, since at all *tres tiempos*, that is *desayuno* (breakfast, served at 06.00/07.00 hours), *almuerzo* (lunch, served at 12.00/13.00 hours) and *cena* (dinner, served at 19.00/20.00 hours), tortillas or tamalitos can be eaten, and in fact is a must for the last two times. Most families prefer to eat fresh tortillas per each *tiempo*, which they themselves had produced from scratch; if they are better off, by cultivating and harvesting corn on their *terrenos* (plots), since rent has to be paid for the piece of land, and if they do not have the money for a plot, they have to buy their corn from street traders. Afterwards they make *nish tamal* (boiled corn seeds), go to the *molino* (machine which makes dough of corn) and make and bake tortillas. *Tamales*, a more luxurious version of tamalitos (steamed corn dough in leaves), can also be made from corn, but also from rice and potatoes. Still, corn is essential in Mayan cuisine with lot's of variations, like a corn drink, *atol*, as well as snacks like *tacos* and *nachos*.

Lunch is the biggest meal of the day, with Sunday lunch the most important meal of the week. Breakfast and dinner are smaller, but are also served warm. Breakfast can consist, for example, of an American style of pancakes, cornflakes with warm milk, *mosh* (porridge with cinnamon, banana and raisins), or *salada* (fried banana, beans, fried eggs and cheese) with a cup of coffee. Lunch is the moment to eat fish (fried, roasted, *patin*, roasted with lemon), chicken or rooster (in a soup, cooked, fried) or *carne de res*, aka beef (cooked, roasted with lemon, *patin*). Fish is the cheapest option (at the moment 3Q for a pound), then chicken (15Q per pound) and *carne de res* is the most expensive (25Q per pound). Meat or fish are however not necessary to make a proper meal, since families often can't afford these pricey supplements; just rice and vegetables are eaten more often. Vegetables like potato, carrot and *guisquil* are often eaten together, whether it's in a soup with rice in it (chicken and avocado are optional) or next to the rice and the soup. Salsa of tomatoes, made from baked or boiled tomatoes, pureed on a *piedra* or in a mixer, is served separately, like a salsa, or included in a sauce. *Guisquil*, *pacaya* and cauliflower are also often consumed deep fried in egg batter. Dinner is often a *salada*, or just two ingredients of this dish, with beans as one of them. *Frijol* (beans with its skin or in a puree form) form an important part of all three meals. Tortillas with avocado and salt can also form part of a dinner. *Hierbas* (herbs), especially *hierba morra* and *chipilin*, form a traditional part of San Juan cuisine, or the region of Solola. These herbs can be eaten in a soup, in tortillas or tamalitos, or can be fried with some onions and chiles. Seeds from pumpkins are also an important ingredient of local cuisine, people bake them on the *plancha* with some lemon juice and salt to eat them in tamalitos with tomato salsa, or they can be used to make a tasty sauce like in the dish *pepian*. Or the seeds are ground and the powder, called *pepitoria*, used as a nice topping on mango or green beans.



Because tortillas and comida are seen as two separate things, this further confirms the importance of starches in the San Juan diet. As previously mentioned, with lunch rice (starch) can be eaten with vegetables like potatoes (starch) while tortillas made from corn (starch) are served as a side dish. Also with breakfasts and dinners, starches predominate in the form of beans and tortillas. The complements are important as well; they add more flavor and vitamins to the meal. Vegetables, herbs and eggs are often used, because of their cheap prices in the market. Fish is also frequently eaten, but meats are less common to eat.

The instruments and implements used in making these dishes are also an important part of the formation of San Juan diet, the way food is prepared and how it will eventually taste. Traditional kitchen equipment consists of the *plancha*<sup>5</sup> (hearthstone), the *pedra*<sup>6</sup> (large stone grinder) and pans of *barro* (clay/earthenware) as the most important items. The *plancha* is used for baking tortillas, roasting tomatoes on a little iron plate, or simply heating things up. The *pedra* can be used for grinding corn to make dough, tomatoes to make salsa, or squash seeds to make pepitoria. The pans of *barro* are used to cook frijoles or corn in.

The food described in the overview is not all locally produced. Although coffee, fish and herbs can come from nearby areas which have been resold by traders, a lot of products come from far away fields in Guatemala, mostly near the coast. But locality is a recurring theme in the conversations I had with people about food. People would often tell me that they don't like to eat food from the supermarket for example, because "you don't know what it is made of or where it comes from" and also because of the lack of flavor. With pride they acclaimed that they only eat food "from here", which they produce themselves on their plots or gardens, or buy at the daily market in the town. Sometimes people spend a large amount of time in growing chickens, feeding them with maize dough or left overs, using their eggs until they are ready to be slaughtered. Fish is caught in the lake, it is very cheap and in large quantity during April. Of course, things are changing, people said to me. Different fish now live in the lake then before, there are poultry farms where hundreds of chickens are produced and you can buy tortillas in stores where women make these all day if you don't have time to make them yourself. More international food influences local cuisine, which you can see in the existence of Guatemalan versions of hotdogs (with chorizo and guacamole), *Chow Mein* (noodles with potatoes, carrot, guisquil and green beans) and french bread (which looks nothing like a baguette). But people from San Juan mostly proudly announced that they eat local, traditional food for most of the time.

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5 A picture of a *plancha* can be found in the appendix.

6 A picture of a *pedra* can be found in the appendix.

### *Structures and discourse of San Juan food*

Now that the eating habits of the people of San Juan are clear, it's now time to turn to the underlying meaning of it all, or at least some further explanation of local cuisine and the application of Weismantel's (1988) vision on food as a structure, discourse and practice on the San Juan diet and cuisine.

Structure entails the rules and regulations surrounding food, or in other words how food is organized. We must ask the question: what is actually a proper meal in terms of ordinary, daily cuisine for the people in San Juan? Without tortillas, a meal is not complete and they also play a central role in the making of a meal. This can be illustrated with several examples. Firstly, it is simply reflected in the fact that a tortilla with some salt alone, or some tomato salsa, can make up a meal. A poor man's meal, but still a meal. Secondly, I noticed that the absence of tortillas during a meal, can make the local people very uneasy. I have two examples which illustrates this phenomenon. The first one is, how Veronica always rushes back to the kitchen after she served a meal to her husband, only to make sure he has his tortillas on time, and thus does not eat lunch without them. Another example, where the absence of tortillas was more prominent, was a lunch with a family where the daughter-in-law made the food, but because the mother of the house had to go to a funeral, and she was the person who normally made the tortillas, so there were no tortillas present at the beginning of the meal. With just eating soup, the daughter-in-law apologized various times to me and her sister-in-law for the lack of tortillas. Luckily, when the mother of the house came in halfway through lunch, immediately started to make tortillas and put a basket of steaming tortillas on the table when she finished several. The eaters looked relieved and took a tortilla right away, grabbing their soaked herbs with it, in stead of using a spoon, which point out to the importance of utility of a tortilla as cutlery.

The distinction between normal, everyday food and festivity food and the rules surrounding the last category, proves the fact that there is also a structure to be found on this level, namely of extraordinary, ceremonial cuisine. Festivity food during birthdays, weddings and holidays are usually more difficult to make, take longer time to prepare and contain a larger number of ingredients, which are mostly expensive too. During religious holidays, even more demands are made with regard to food. Holy Week took place whilst I was in San Juan, which meant a lot of preparation for the villagers in general with making carpets of pine needles, fruit and painted sawdust on the street for the processions, but it also meant a lot of cooking for the families I knew. On every day of this week, special meals had to be cooked and for these meals special ingredients were needed. Easter bread and dried fish for example, which had to be bought in the market of

Santa Clara, a nearby village in the mountains. For most of my female informants, Holy Week meant spending a whole week in the kitchen.

To illustrate the discourse behind food and to follow Pilcher's (1996) argument about food as a marker, the example of special food during Holy Week can be viewed as a cultural expression, with the people of San Juan showing how much this religious week means to them. Cooking extraordinary meals can be a way of showing their dedication to their faith, and can thus be a cultural expression. Pilcher also stated that food can serve as making ethnic and regional differences clear and this is also the case with eating festivity food. When I talked with my host family about traditional foods people of San Juan eat during holidays, I asked if they also eat *fiambre*, a meat salad, during Todos Santos, which I read as being a popular meal. "No!", shouted everyone at the table, "only *ladinos* eat that. Not us, not people from the villages.", they said to me. The differences made between groups because of the obvious distinctions of certain foods and how people speak about these differences according through justifications in regard to food, is a form of evidence that food is also part of a discourse.

Just like Pilcher states that food serves as a status marker, Weismantel (1988) argues that food also accentuates class differences between people. And indeed, she and Pilcher are right. In San Juan there exists poor and wealthy versions of the same meals. *Chow Mein* for example, can include noodles, pieces of carrot, guisquil, and chili, but chicken and peas can also be added to the dish, which makes it more abundant. Just like if a family can afford to eat beef on a frequent basis, it means that they do not have to worry about their financial situation. But if a household only eats beans, eggs and herbs, you know they are probably trying to make ends meet.

Not only does food shape differences between people, it also creates and strengthens a bond between them; it is a way for people to identify themselves and the group they are a part of. The pride people take in eating 'their' food, like the habitants of San Juan, is a sign that they are different than others and shows that they are special. The importance the people of San Juan give to their local and traditional food, and the acclamation that they do not eat international, western, or urban, food that much, gives us an indication about the tightness of the San Juan community, and thus a sense of belonging. Modernization of course changes things, like replacing the *piedra* for a blender in some cases, but a lot of people stick to their traditional way of doing things. The *plancha*, and not a stove, is an inseparable part of a kitchen in San Juan. In Veronica's kitchen for example, the oven in her gas stove was unused, while she kept her *plancha* nice and tidy and often cleaned it with a wicker brush dipped in *cal* (lime).

This brings me to the last part of Weismantel's trichotomy, namely food as a practice, on which I will elaborate on in the next chapter. This field of food is a bit of an ambiguous area though. When is one really a good cook and how does one decide if a dish tastes the way it should taste? How does one simply cook?

But for now, it is clear that food reveals meaning about identity; subjective or group, society; in class and ethnic boundaries, and culture. Food possesses information on these elements, but messages about social relations are also transmitted. Food thus stands for something else, food serves as a symbol where something tangible becomes something intangible (Weismantel 1988:140-141).

## **Chapter 7. The practices of preparing and consuming food in San Juan la Laguna**

It is the seemingly mystery of cooking, which becomes reality when you watch a woman, like Veronica, focused on her task of peeling and cutting vegetables. Or looking at how she tastes the soup or salsa she has just made (by putting some of it from the spoon on her hand and lick the substance of it) and after some seconds of thought, adding some more salt. Or seeing her sitting next to the plancha while effortlessly but efficiently making tortillas. I wish to unravel these mysteries and give you a description in greater detail about the practices of the preparation and consumption of food in this chapter.

### *Grocery shopping and cooking lunch*

Cooking lunch involves the most time and effort consuming activity in preparing food on a daily basis in San Juan. Every day in the morning, around nine o'clock, women go to the market to buy the essential ingredients for their meal, like meat, vegetables and fruit. What to cook and thus what to buy, is decided before shopping by the women themselves. Women with older children go alone, but when they have a baby, it is carried in a large piece of cloth on their backs, and small children walk next to them and have to carry some thing too, like a papaya. In the market the women shop in a efficient but still relaxed way. Greeting other women in Tz'utujil, having a chat with the lady selling tomatoes while giving her baby boy breast milk, discussing the prices of avocados and lemons with the trader, checking if the chipilin they are about to buy is in good state or not, going to different stalls for various products while walking slowly and carrying their filled bags.

When everything is bought, women return to their houses to start cooking lunch. If they bought meat or fish, they will start with cleaning this in water with salt, cut it and set it on the stove or plancha, or leave it in the fridge to fry or toast later. Vegetables are washed, peeled and cut into pieces and are usually also cooked. Rice is baked first with oil, then water is added and a chile is optional. Beans also have to cook for a long time in a large pan, preferably made of earthenware. If she decides to make tamalitos, like Anaa did one day, she will also start with making these, putting the dough in the leaves, putting these packages in a large pan with one or two cups of water, closing them off with other leaves or a plastic bag and leaving the tamalitos to steam for a hour or a hour and a half. Then salsas of tomatoes, onions and chiles are made, or salads of cucumber or guacamole. Or in the mean time Ana would multitask, like washing some dishes are washed, or some weaving is done.

When these are done, she will cover them with a knitted napkin and will start making

tortillas, if she is not serving tamalitos, like Isabella often did. Usually Isabella would stand next to the plancha, fixes the fire a little by putting new wood into the stone hole, cleaning the cooking plate with a wicker brush and *cal* (lime). Then she makes the corn dough workable by adding some water and kneading. She washes her hands in a bucket with water to make sure the dough doesn't stick to her hands when she goes making tortillas. Then she takes some dough, rolls it between her hands, turns it around while pressing it between her fingers to make the tortilla bigger and then claps the tortilla till it is thin enough and places it on the cooking plate. When the tortilla is heated up enough, Isabella will turn it over by placing her fingers on top of the tortilla and in this way lifting it and putting it on its other side. The tortillas are kept in a basket with a napkin on it to keep the flies away.

Given the fact that both grocery shopping and cooking should also be included in the process of preparing food, it can be stated that most women spend their whole morning with it. Cooking lunch itself usually takes two hours, but this of course varies. Sometimes it takes longer if a special meal is made with several dishes, and sometimes it takes shorter if a simple lunch is served. To make breakfast and dinner doesn't take that much time, about half an hour. Dinner is especially easy, since the beans have been on the fire for most of the afternoon and baking bananas or eggs doesn't take much time. But new tortillas have to be made too, and this can take a half hour too.

#### *Dynamics during cooking and the beings of a good wife*

Dynamics between household members can be observed during cooking, but not with women like Ana, Isabella and Veronica. They can indeed act independently when it comes to cooking, since no one else in the household can help them, apart from their children once in a while. Ana's daughter would at times help her mother with making tortillas. Isabella for example commanded her children sometimes to go to the market to get some eggs while pushing some coins in their hands, and Veronica's daughter would now and then make tortillas to give her mother a break. They are able to behave like the boss in the kitchen, in determining what to cook and how. But what if that situation is different?

In large extended families who live together, compositions of households often change and their members are more dependent on each other than when families live separately. An example of this phenomenon, is the family of Gabriella. Gabriella lives on a family property with her mother, her husband and their eight children. One of her oldest sons recently got married with a girl from a close by village, Clara. The newlyweds were given a separate house on the edge of the property, but

Clara has to help Gabriella with household tasks. This also becomes evident with the practice of cooking. Clara helps her mother-in-law with little jobs during cooking, like cutting vegetables, making tamalitos and making salads. Gabriella is in charge of more difficult tasks, like making salsas, composing soups and cooking them on the plancha, just like the tamalitos, and last but definitely not least, making tortillas. Clara told me that Gabriella also teaches her how to cook difficult dishes, because she can cook herself, but not as well as Gabriella. When Clara said this, a smile became visible on Gabriella's face, which normally has a neutral to an almost earnest expression. The two had fun together while they were peeling potatoes or cleaning up the table, with cracking jokes with each other, or just simply talking.

How the dynamics between a mother of the house and her daughter-in-law works while cooking, becomes even clearer with another family, which Angela introduced me to. Elena, a senior woman with long dark gray hair and some missing teeth, lives with her aged husband on a family property. They have six children, from which two live in the capital, one in San Juan and the other three live with their parents. Two new family members were added a few years ago; the older son got married a few years ago with a woman he had a relationship with for years in Guatemala-City, namely Claudia, and when they finally got married and decided to move to his parents house in San Juan. He and Claudia, a kind looking woman with a gentle face and big round eyes, now have a toddler running around the garden that loves to chase chickens.

Just like Gabriella and Clara, Claudia helps Elena with cooking. When I came to one of my regular visits to this family, I met up with Claudia to buy fish, vegetables, lemon and coriander at the market. Because Claudia is not from around San Juan, and does not speak Tz'utujil, she stood out while doing grocery shopping, and whilst trying to negotiate in Spanish with the traders, did not really succeeded in it. When we came back to the house, Elena made sure if Claudia bought everything at the right place. "Did you buy the fish at that lady I told you to about?" she asked while strictly looking at the plastic bag filled with speckled fish. "Yes", said Claudia obediently. Then the two take place behind the pila to remove the fish scales and its guts. During this process, Claudia works in a precise manner, while Elena quickly goes to one fish to the other. Afterwards Claudia starts to wash the fish, "in water with salt", she says to me, "according to Elena the fish get more clean that way. Elena also taught me how to gut fish". "Yes, I am way faster than you with cleaning fish" says Elena while she laughs. When the two women have finished with this activity, Claudia asks Elena what to do next; the fish should be soaked in new water with lemon juice in order to make patín.

But Claudia does not only listen meekly to her mother-in-law during cooking; she would often try new things, like adding unconventional ingredients to traditional dishes or simply cook

dishes that are not 'San Juan like'. Elena would look at this with raised eyebrows, but tolerated and accepted Claudia's experimentalism in the kitchen. I think it is because Elena and Claudia could get along well and enjoy each others company in the house. And since Claudia could not do nothing much than staying indoors, because of her baby boy which needs constant attention, she pours out her diligence and curiosity in her love for food, in stead of her education in Guatemala-City like she did before. This phenomenon can be seen as a kind of negotiation between different social actors in the household and their power positions in it.

The kind of interaction between a mother and her daughter-in-law can tell us a considerable amount of information about the relations between these women and the household in general. Both Gabriella and Elena have authority while cooking, because of their acquired position in the household as *doña* (lady of the house). Because of their age, they have more experience in the kitchen and are therefore given the right to be teachers and commanders simultaneously to people with a lower status. I also have the feeling that these women get a sense of pride and self-worth by cooking well and having a lot of knowledge about cooking. This can be traced back in the smile Clara gave Gabriella after her compliment, and the comparison Elena made about her fast speed of gutting fish. At the same time, Clara and Claudia are apprentices being just married women learning from their mother-in-law. This shows how food, marriage and family are interlinked; the fact that newlywed women have to learn how to cook properly, and that this transfer of tacit knowledge goes via family lines.

During my talks with Elena while making tortillas, "I make big ones, otherwise my dough never finishes!", she told me a lot about what it means to be a good wife and what they have to be able to do. It started with our conversations about marriage; how a man has to ask a girl's parents for her hand, how the parents of the girl arrange the wedding and how the girl has to move to the family property of her husband to live there. There, she has to get to know the whole family, find her place and do her job. When I asked what a good wife is supposed to do, Elena said this;

She has to take care of/serve her husband (*atender*), she has to cook well, she has to give good food to her family, she has to have love. Yes, you have to give good food to your husband and children, so that they eat well, otherwise there is no love in a marriage. (1rst of April)

With this statement, she explicitly makes clear how necessary it is for a spouse to cook; it is her responsibility to cook, and also an integral part of marriage itself.

An important part of being a married woman is thus to provide food for the family. This was also illustrated when Gabriella's mother walked in the kitchen when we were making tortillas. The



old woman asked Gabriella something in Tz'utujil, probably what that girl was doing in her house, because Gabriella replied with “a study about a woman's work”. Her mother laughed, pointed at the plancha where the tortillas were being grilled and afterwards made the gesture of clapping corn dough into tortillas. While she was doing this, she said “that's a woman's work” to me.

Moving on from the tortilla example, which Elena also referred to as “my job”, Elena thought that this kind of work was as valuable as the work men do, “because men cannot do it and therefore women should help them”, she said. The “it” here, is cooking, and both Isabella and Veronica said to me that men cannot and thus do not cook. Gabriella even made a joke, saying that her husband would die if she did not cook for him. But when talking with Claudia about gender and food, she argued that indeed the woman stands all day in the kitchen with traditional families, but that things are now changing. Men, for example her brother-in-law, can cook now for themselves, like breakfast. When I asked Claudia if her brother-in-law, who lived in his own house in the village, could cook lunch, she shrugged, laughed and said; “No, of course not”. What separates men from women, amongst many matters, is that women are able to make a proper meal, which is considered lunch, and men are not. In household terms, cooking mothers and wives are at an advantage in the kitchen, because the family relies on her for preparing food. Preparing food is thus indeed a way of doing gender.

### *Serving and eating lunch*

Eating lunch is a form a family gathering, I often thought during my visits to families. Persons of the household who live in different rooms and houses on the big family property, and who are busy doing other tasks and jobs, would sit down together, more or less, and eat. Although they would not always begin eating at the same time, and would leave when they finished their meal, at a certain moment, everyone would be sitting at the table, sharing stories, cracking jokes, asking questions and so on. It is a bonding event between family members, but at the same time, it also denounces differences between household members and the performance of gender roles, or the 'doing' of gender.

After an ordinary morning of cooking, Elena and Claudia both decided it was time to eat, when the tortillas were just made and ready. Claudia called her husband and his brother (the one that does not live in the house, but does in the village), who were repairing the sewage of a house on their property; “*A comer!*” (tuck in/to eat). The two men came and played with the little boy for a while outside, in the meantime Elena did the final touches to their dishes in the kitchen and Claudia

scooped up the plates with food. Then the brothers sat at the table, while Elena put the pans, salsa and tortillas on the table and Claudia served up the filled plates in front of the men and me, but afterwards for her sister-in-law Angela, her mother-in-law Elena and herself. This is also the order in which those present sat down, but Claudia sat with her baby on her lap. The single brother began with saying a prayer, everyone joined in and after this, people began eating and talking. When the men finished their meal first, they thanked the ones sitting, as should be done according to good table manners, and left the table to continue their work. Then Angela left after them, Elena collected the dirty pans and plates, and Claudia did the dishes when she finished eating lastly.

This example of serving and eating lunch is an orderly one, mostly this event is a lot more chaotic, with family members running in and out the house, grabbing some food without waiting for the others and continuing with their afternoon when the meal is finished. On another weekday with the same family, the same two brothers sat down first, got a filled plate from Claudia and started eating immediately. The women present in the household, mother, daughter and the daughter-in-law, brought their own filled plate to the table and started eating later than the men, who were also the first ones to leave the table. Again, Claudia did the scooping up and sat down, ate and thus was the last to finish. In this case, the ones who were responsible for cooking, were also responsible for collecting the dirty plates and cleaning these, along with the table and the floor.

In both cases, serving and beginning to eat lunch happens according to a gendered order, which also reflects the sexual division of household labor, namely with men waiting for their food and eating first, women serving, eating last and cleaning when every plate is scraped empty. Still, this indicates how much a family, is dependent on their wives and mothers in filling their appetite. At the mean time, roles of good wife and husband are being played out during lunch, with the wife who cooked nice dishes and giving these to her family, while her spouse spends time with his family by attending lunch and afterwards going back to work, like a good husband is supposed to do. In this way, lunch can be seen as a metaphor for masculinity and femininity.

With Gabriella and her large family, things also went a little different than with Elena and Claudia. In stead of a clear beginning and end, it was busier, while still having some structure. Gabriella shouts over the property that it is time to eat when she can leave her soup alone for a few seconds, and slowly children gather at the table, while loudly talking and teasing their brothers and sisters. Gabriella's husband is already seated at the table with a content smile and cleans the table up a bit to make space for the upcoming plates. Clara stopped with cooking a while before, and sits down at the table next to her husband, with whom she whispers things in his ear and the two both laugh. Gabriella is in the meanwhile busy with serving up the bowls with chicken soup and tortillas

and telling one of her young sons to get some glasses and soda for everyone, he follows her order immediately. A few impatient children already start eating and some grown ups could not help themselves either. When the boy comes back with plastic cups and a big bottle of seven-up and Gabriella also sits down, then everyone starts eating officially. Private chats are being held, the latest gossip exchanged and curiosity expressed towards me sitting at the table as well. Finally, some kids leave the table when they have finished eating, the husband quietly leaves the scene and in the end everyone but Gabriella and Clara are off doing other business. They start to bring the plates to the pila, Clara cleans them along with the pans, while Gabriella cleans the table and feeds the chickens with left-overs. Halfway through the washing up, Clara gets interrupted by a little girl, jumping around and yelling, asking if she can please do the dishes. Clara smiles and hands her task over to her young sister-in-law who enthusiastic starts scrubbing the dirty plates with a soapy sponge.

## **Conclusion: Cooking and eating as gendered practices**

Food is an expression of social life and an illustration of gender relations. Diet and cuisine serve as symbols in terms of structures, discourse and practices. It defines group formation in terms of ethnicity, class and regional differences, just like Pilcher (1996) and Weismantel (1988) claimed. However, my research also shows that gender is essential in defining differences between household members, especially with the practices of cooking and eating food. Kitchen life means the expression of ideas people have about gender, society and culture in general, which are reflected in households in daily life (Weismantel 1988). The kitchen is a place where social roles are established and performed; more specifically, it is where gender is 'done' (West&Zimmerman 1987).

My research shows that 'doing gender' is indeed embedded and embodied in small issues and actions surrounding the preparation and consumption of food with indigenous people in Guatemala (Cf. West&Zimmerman 1987). But at the same time, gender also involves the organization of social life, which is visible in my study with regard to the sexual division of domestic labor. The sexual division of labor in San Juan can be viewed from several perspectives. Regarding the collection of food on a village level for example, which is clearly distributed according to gender, like Burton et al. (1997) argue to be the case. Men usually go into the mountains to work in the coffee and corn fields, collect deadwood or go fishing in the lake. Women tend to stay home most of the day, while weaving, nursing and doing housework.

These activities are taught at a young age to children, in other words socialized into this performativity, and become more prominent in the daily lives of people after matrimony. Marriage forms the basis of these differences in kinds of labor, because it organizes kinship relations and assigns certain tasks to members of a newly formed household (Cf. Burton et al. 1977:227). Households jobs are distributed among its members according to gender and age, and status is involved in this micro-level process of allocation (Cf. Katz 1995). The sexual division can thus be seen as a way to structure family life, but it also contains information about ideas people have about gender and the power relations that come to play with this. I thus do agree with Katz, who stated that the division of labor is indeed a gendered phenomenon, because a distinction is made between the roles men and women should play in households. The families I had contact with, thought of the allocation of household tasks as self-evident. Although women have to take care of a lot of jobs, they do it with dedication and sometimes it even gives them a sense of empowerment. Within this construction and partition of tasks, household members rely on each other to make ends meet and to simply make a living on a daily basis. Indigenous women in San Juan also contribute to the household income with their work in weaving and with the housework they do, a woman's work, in

which multitasking is involved, because they make sure that their household functions properly. This perspective corresponds more closely to Ehler's (1991) statement about survival strategy and the fact that indigenous women tend to work just like men for their families.

One essential aspect of these household tasks revolves around preparing food for consumption, which is grocery shopping and cooking. These activities, just like housework in general, which is seen as part of a woman's work, are responsibilities a married woman has to carry out in order to be a good wife and mother, for example cooking a 'proper meal' (Murcott in Brettell&Sargent 1993). Part of the daily routine and the work women from San Juan have to do is grocery shopping; this is an everyday activity in which they have control in what to purchase for their family and themselves. Cooking is a way of expressing informal power in the household and family between different household members, like daughter-in-laws and children. It is also a way for women to express themselves, because they can decide what to buy, and how to cook. Thus, part of their pride and self-esteem and even identity can be derived from cooking good food, which Counihan (1988) also argues about Italian women.

These dynamics between cooking, marriage, power relations and self-expression are also seen in Counihan's study, where women claimed cooking food is an evident and necessary part of taking care of your family, which my informants also told me. Just like Weismantel (1988), Counihan also claims that through the preparation of food women are able to acquire a certain power position in the household, since cooking is seen as their responsibility and job. As a result, the kitchen can be seen as a woman's domain, where she is in charge. Whether she is cooking alone, or lets her daughter help her while she teaches her how to make tortillas, or whether she cooks together with her daughter-in-law as an expert cook, because of her advantage in knowledge and experience. For women in San Juan as well, it is a place where they are in charge, if they have at least acquired the status of lady of the house. Observing the interactions in the kitchen between household members with different statuses, power relations become clear, defined and can even be negotiated (Cf. Carter 1996, Counihan 1988, Weismantel 1988).

When the cooking is done, and it is time to serve up a meal, this activity is also done in a gendered and status related order. Women scoop up plates and bring these to the table, while men and children wait at the table for their meal to arrive; mostly husbands first, then older brothers, then sisters and children. When they receive their filled plate, they mostly start eating immediately, and it is allowed and normal to leave the table when done eating, although other people are still busy eating. Men eat and leave first to continue their work outdoors, while women eat and clean last as

they continue their indoor work as well.

During this private and familiar activity of eating lunch, boundaries between households members are accentuated, but at the same time lunch is a bonding event, with everyone coming together in the house in the middle of the day. Roles of femininity and masculinity are being played out on a micro-level; of the good wife having cooked lunch and serving this to her family, putting herself in the background by eating last, but also making sure she is the center of food distribution and the one responsible for preparing the meal. This pattern is also described in Haukanes's article (2007:20), where she states that with cooking and serving, “women do what they are supposed to do” as good spouses and that they can be seen as “kin-makers” because of their central role in providing food for their family. Men also enact roles during the consumption of lunch, namely that of the good husband who spends time with his family, enjoys a meal his wife made and afterwards goes back to work to make an income for his family, which is just like the women, one of his responsibilities. As a married couple in a household, they work together to sustain and take care of their family. Eating lunch, can therefore be viewed as a metaphor for shaping and performing masculinity and femininity, and thus differences between household members, while at the same time it also enacts and makes a family unity.

Food can thus be quite relevant for examine gender relations, while gender can also be a useful framework for studying food practices. The interrelation between gender and food, makes customs surrounding food – grocery shopping, cooking, serving and eating – gendered practices (Brouns et al. 1995).

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## **Appendix:**

### **Reflections during and after fieldwork**

I have to say, fieldwork is definitely completely different the way I imagined it, than actually doing it in real life. During my first week, and with frequent repetitions in the other weeks, I had serious doubts about my way of working in the field. This especially counts for my research activities; I was constantly wondering of they were the right ones to do, if I did them right, if they were relevant for my study etc. How could I as an outsider, who knew nobody in this tight community, meet people who would welcome me to their private spheres, namely in their homes? Due to the fact that I struggled with the issue of how to get in contact with my research population, which are families, you could say I was in the 'crisis phase' of that period in my fieldwork (DeWalt&DeWalt 2010:68-69). Looking back now, I think most of my activities were relevant, because I got to meet new people and families who were willing to cook with and talk to me and created a informant relationship with some of these people.

Being your own research tool was very interesting to both experience and employ. During fieldwork, you are dependent on many levels on other people's help and access giving. But on the other hand, it is totally up to you what you decide to do with your time and the people you meet; assertiveness is needed. I have come to find out that characteristics like politeness, patience and flexibility benefits fieldwork and building rapport with informants. With this attitude of approaching people, it shows that you are open and interested in what they have to say. Besides, flexibility is needed in the relaxed way of living in San Juan, since people often forget appointments or show up late (according to Dutch standards). To be able to deal with this, I figured "when in Rome, do as the Romans do", while I tried to also act in a flexible manner and inventive with time-planning and my research activities.

Participant observation was my most useful and used research method during fieldwork. Although the method does imply a contradiction in behavior and mindset – subjective, emotional and empathetic versus objective, rational and detached – I find that the two were actually compatible with each other. Like I argue in my method section in my introduction, both participation and observation is needed to conduct fieldwork of good quality. You could for example totally be merged into a conversation with an informant, or completely carried away by a story one of them told. But after that, while walking home, one could stand still with what just happened and reflect on these events. And when you arrived at home and sitting behind your computer, you had the chance to “objectively” look at the happenings of that morning during cooking, eating and

talking and try to write down as such as possible, while attempting to relive those activities again.

What I did notice during fieldwork, and has become even more clear to me now, is that my role as researcher did develop and change during my stay in San Juan. As time went by, I felt more and more comfortable with my informants, and vice versa, I got the courage to ask things to my informants in a more direct manner and in the last weeks also conducted open interviews. As a result, I got more clearer answers from them, because it was more obvious what I wanted to know. Because I “hung out” more with my informants on a regular basis and just chat with them about random issues in the last weeks, I created a more informal relationship with them. In this way, me and my informants got to talk about various interesting topics and even we got to some forms of life-histories. I also got to know more people in the village during my stay. This enabled me to have a lot of little informal conversations during the day and not only made my research role more active (which the former activities did), but also my role as temporary inhabitant of San Juan. To actively participate in my research, by working along with these women, was crucial in order to understand how their own daily lives are like. I do not only have to use my eyes and my brain, but also my hands and most of all, my heart.

Building a trusting relationship with my informants, rapport, was also necessary to be able to talk freely about gender. I came to discover that gender actually was quite a sensitive subject, and that sometimes people reacted in a defensive manner when I tried to talk about it. People often wanted to present themselves in a modern way, while talking in generalities, in stead of speaking from own experiences. With some of my informants it worked out to talk extensively about gender in a relaxed and informal manner, while sometimes even making jokes about the subject.

The most important lesson I have learned during fieldwork, is that the relationship between the researcher and the informant is really a teacher-student relationship (DeWalt&DeWalt 2010:65). Namely that the anthropologist wants to learn and is eager to listen to the information that his informant tells him, while educating him/her about the local ways of life. I was amazed of how much knowledge my informants had about issues I did not know anything about and how much they can teach to you. Although we differed in a lot of respects, like age, educational level, religious and regional background and opportunities to travel the world, experienced hardships, they welcomed me in their homes and were willing to teach me how to cook and share their stories with me. I came to realized that there is so much to learn. Although these women could not read nor write, they could walk up the mountain to Santa Clara in an hour with cargo carried on their heads, or work for hours in the sun while reaping unions, or concentrate on their weaving while sometimes shouting to their children to behave. They know how to fight, work, survive and love. I got an enormous amount of respect for my informants for these reasons and I am incredibly grateful for the

moments we shared and I got to experience with them. Without them, my research would not have been possible.

Leaving the field was therefore difficult, but I quickly got used to Dutch ways of living. Starting to analyze the collected pile of data, was a tough job, but my research questions and coding helped me in creating structure in the jungle of field notes and in the end with writing this thesis. I hope I managed to write a “good enough” thesis (Scheper-Hughes in Moore&Sanders 2006), which shows the agency of my informants as a way of truly thanking my informants for their help and assistance. All in all, I definitely think I learned incredibly much from doing fieldwork in San Juan on an emotional, personal, social, practical and academical level. I almost can't wait to give it another try.

## Resumen investigación “La vida de la cocina en Guatemala”

Me gustaría dar las gracias a las familias que me han acogido en sus hogares y cocinas durante mi trabajo de campo. Sus nombres se han simulado con el fin de respetar su privacidad, pero al leer esto, saber a quién le estoy hablando. Siempre estaré agradecido por su hospitalidad, la cooperación y la bondad hacia mí. Sin ustedes, mi investigación no hubiera sido posible, así que muchas gracias.

En esta tesis la comida es estudiada a través del género en el contexto de los pueblos indígenas en Guatemala. Con género se indican las construcción cultural y social de masculinidad y feminidad, y como el papel de los géneros y las relaciones se forman en este contexto (Nencel 2007: 98). La comida puede expresar estas nociones sociales sobre lo que significa ser un hombre o una mujer en una sociedad y en esta tesis exploraré como esto ocurre en la cotidianidad. La práctica de género a través de la comida y el acto de comer, y entonces la encarnación de valores simbólicos de masculinidad y feminidad y el poder de las relaciones de poder entre los sexos, forman el centro de mi estudio.

Los conceptos estudiados de la comida y del género necesitan mas explicación teórica. Mi tesis se centra en la preparación y el consumo cotidiano de comidas, específicamente las actividades de cocinar y comer que ocurren a un nivel doméstico y cotidiano. Mi tesis acentua como el género influye en estas prácticas, también como los procesos conectados a la comida se relacionan a la división sexual de los trabajos domésticos. El contexto y el trabajo de campo de esta tesis es un pueblo rural en Guatemala, San Juan la Laguna, donde viví y trabajé durante dos meses.

Estudios antropológicos sobre la comida han aclarado que la comida es un fuerte indicador de etnia y clase (f.e. Weismantel 1988:9). No se sabe si la comida es también un indicador de género.

En esta tesis, quiero contribuir al debate teórico de como la comida transmite significados sobre el género y como el género influye en practicas sociales de la comida. Con el estudio de “la vida en cocina” quiero comprender exhaustivamente como “se hace y se actua” el género en la vida cotidiana y domestica. Sin embargo, en la literatura sobre la comida, no hay mucha literatura dedicada a las practicas indígenas de colección, preparación, servicio y consumo de comida.

La falta de datos y estudios teóricos conduce a mi pregunta de investigación; De que manera es la preparación y el consumo de comidas en casas rurales e indígenas en San Juan la

Laguna en Guatemala una práctica influenciada y condicionada por el género?

En este contexto, mi tesis tiene un carácter exploratorio, en cuanto no hay mucha literatura y estudios sobre la preparación y el consumo de comidas como una práctica influenciada por el género, sobretodo en un contexto rural. Los metodos de investigación cualitativos son los más adecuados por este tipo de estudio, porque esto necesita mucho tiempo en un area de investigación para obtener una comprensión exhaustiva de un tipo de conocimiento tácito y comprender el significado de las prácticas locales. El trabajo de campo, en ese contextos, es muy útil.

A través del trabajo de campo, antropólogos tratan de comprender los punto de vista internos de los nativos que estudian, viviendo “en su habitat natural durante un largo periodo de tiempo” (Powerdermaker in Robber&Sulka 2012: 7). El trabajo de campo permite de obtener una imagen muy cerca de las personas que se estudian y de sus prácticas culturales, en las cuales se incluye no solo el habla (historias, cotilleo, conversaciones, etc) pero también el lenguaje del cuerpo, maneras “comunes” de manejar varias cuestiones y cosas así. Durante mi trabajo de campo, quería vivir la vida cotidiana en San Juan y traté de descubrir lo que ocurre en las cocinas de las personas, y para obtener esta imagen muy cerca, necesitaba una manera para hacer esto. El trabajo de campo puede darte los instrumentos para ganar la confianza de la gente construyendo buenas relaciones con informantes, que se espera se crean con el tiempo (DeWalt&DeWalt 201:47).

Todavía había poco tiempo. Dos meses para ser precisos, durante Marzo y Abril 2013, viví en el pueblo rural de San Juan la Laguna en Guatemala. En el comienzo de mi trabajo de campo, traté de obtener el acceso a mi población de investigación. Después de dos semanas, empecé a construir mis contactos con la familias, que conocí a través de las organizaciones “Rupalaj “ o “Ixoq Ajkeem”, con las cuales cociné y almorcé. Después de un mes creé un programa y visitaba a mis informantes una vez por semana. Entonces mis datos fueron recogidos en presencia de, y gracias a, cinco familias hospitalarias que me recibieron en sus casas.

Los metodos de investigación que utilicé durante estas visitas, fueron por la mayoría observación participante, conversaciones informales y entrevistas informales. Estos metodos y la definición y práctica del trabajo de campo son casi lo mismo, y solo con estos metodos fue capaz de obtener la información sobre los procesos de cocinar, comer, vida de familia, ambientes domésticos y las relaciones sociales en estas casas. Durante estas visitas yo preguntaba sobre el tema de mi investigación, escuchaba lo que las personas decían y observaba como se preparaba y consumaba el almuerzo.

Mis conclusiones sobre mis datos son estas. La división entre los sexos del trabajo doméstico está dividida según el género en el ambiente doméstico. Los hombres principalmente trabajan fuera de casa en los campos de café en las montañas, y las mujeres principalmente trabajan dentro la casa mientras tejan, cuidan y hacen las tareas de casa. Preparar la comida está incluido en las tareas de casa y es un trabajo importante para las mujeres de San Juan. No solo porque necesita tiempo y esfuerzo, pero también porque es un elemento esencial de una buena esposa. Muchas mujeres hablan de cocina, y tareas de casa en general, como un “trabajo para las mujeres”, y cocinar una buena comida es una responsabilidad que las mujeres casadas tienen que cumplir para sus familias. La cocina en ese sentido, es el dominio de la mujer, un lugar donde tiene el control.

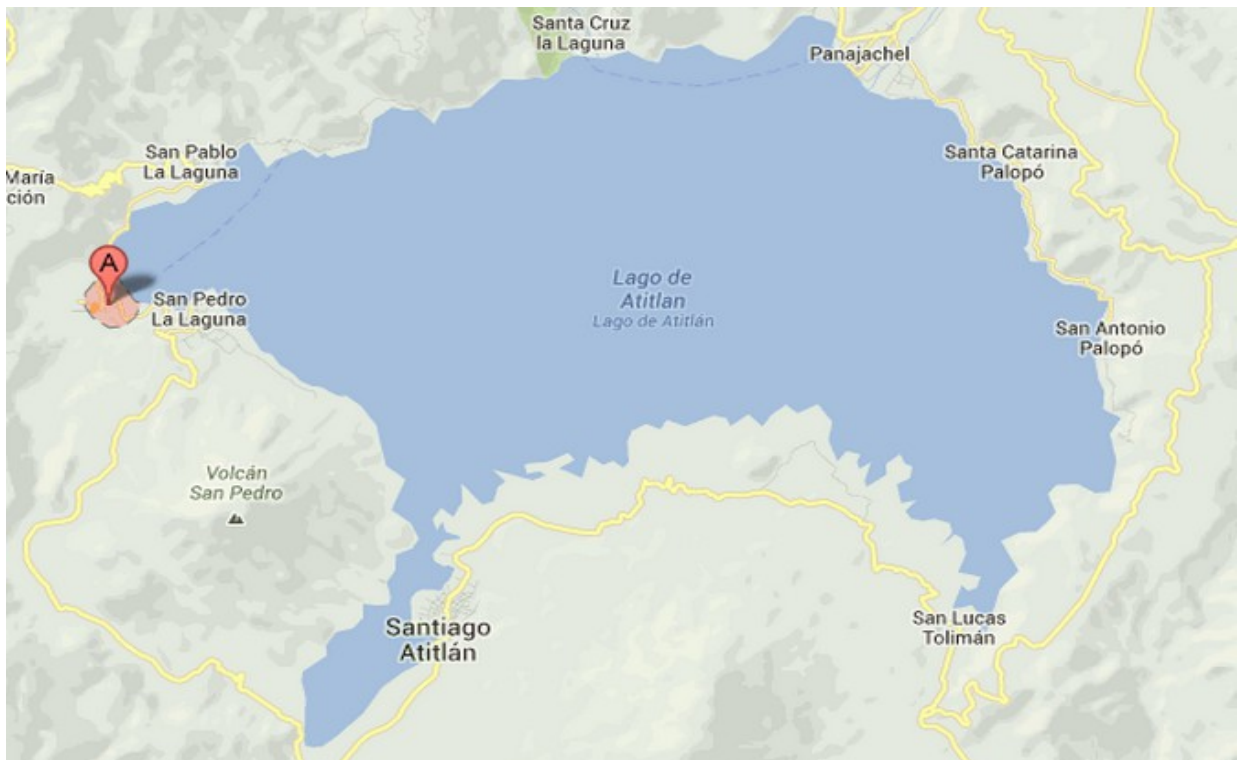
A través de su conocimiento y experiencia en cocina, ella tiene un poder informal sobre otros miembros de la casa, por ejemplo la nuera que vive en la misma casa o sus hijos. Cuando se sirve el almuerzo, la madre de la casa tiene un papel central, distribuyendo los platos llenos de comida, mientras la familia espera en la mesa por su comida. Aunque se sienta, come y termina el almuerzo última, ella controla la distribución de la comida. Es evidente que la familia depende de ella para aliviar el hambre. El almuerzo puede ser visto como una metáfora de feminidad y masculinidad, en la que los papeles de género son realizados y jugados. Es decir el papel de la buena mujer que cocina la comida, y el papel del buen marido que pasa tiempo con su familia, sin olvidar los papeles de otros miembros de la casa. Después de esta reunión de la familia, todos siguen con su día y se van, mientras que la mayoría de las mujeres de la casa tienen que limpiar y continuar con las tareas de casa. Todo eso indica cómo la preparación y el consumo de la comida son prácticas influenciadas por el género.

## Photo's and maps

Map of Guatemala:

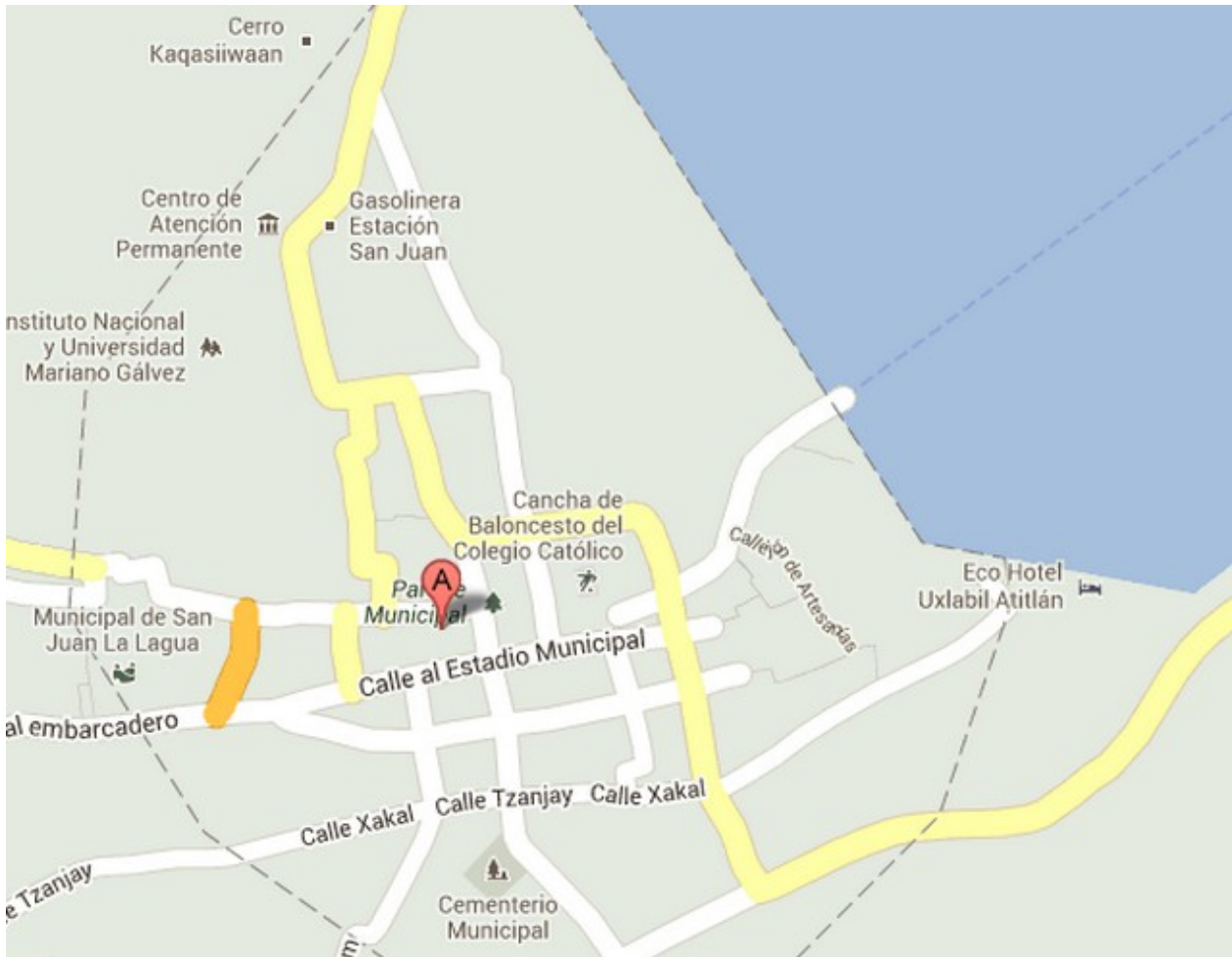


Map of Lago Atitlan:





Map of San Juan la Laguna:



Outside of the San Juan market:



Inside in the San Juan market:





Photo of a plancha with tortillas and rice on top:



Photo of me grinding tomatoes on a piedra:

