

# **MISSION: BURRITO**

A thematic literature review to assess universal characteristics  
of 'authenticity' in gastronomy

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9 December 2023

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A research component submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Gastronomy

## Abstract

The term 'authentic' is widely used in describing and comparing cultural cuisine, and in an increasingly globalised world with increasingly knowledgeable customers, there is a desire to pursue food that is authentic. Yet, as populations cross borders and share food, grasping what makes food authentic is progressively more difficult. Nevertheless 'authenticity' remains a commonly used term for evaluating food, with its exact definition open to interpretation by the individual. This research asks, "What characterises 'authentic cuisine' when the term is used within the hospitality industry in the United States?" It investigates the confusion surrounding authenticity, the modern diner's preoccupation with authenticity, and ways in which authenticity is assessed. Authenticity is a social construct, with its evaluation dependent upon cultural context, thus creating further confusion. Regardless, there are modern individuals who quest for authenticity as an escape from their industrialised, everyday lives. Exploring first the modern anthropologist and then the modern tourist, the research finds parallels to the modern diner. Therefore, ambiguous and oftentimes conflicting notions of authenticity notwithstanding, there is still a desire for the modern diner to experience authentic food.

A study of literature pertaining to authenticity reveals eight characteristics: storytelling, simplicity, terroir, historical tradition, ethnic connection, personal connection, nostalgia, and aficionado identity. The research identifies the integral roles of emergent authenticity, commoditisation, and staged authenticity in assessing these characteristics, as some explicitly connect to authenticity, others merely imply authenticity, and still others are reliant upon social context. Initially, the eight characteristics appear to separately but equally contribute to authenticity; however, further investigation reveals that they are interwoven, and can amplify or diminish one another. Whereas terroir, historical tradition, and ethnic connection focus on the product, personal connection focuses on the producer. A personal connection may be tied to any of these characteristics; however, it is not obligatory for such a connection to exist for

authenticity to be present. The emphasis is on the creator's intention in incorporating their artistic heritage rather than the heritage itself. The personal connection can be strengthened with nostalgia for food memories of the past, however real or imagined. These can imbue food with an aficionado identity for the consumer, who can experience an authentic connection with an object, thus authenticating the object and themselves.

The Mission burrito is chosen as a case study subject because of its unique positioning in the American foodscape. The research finds early iterations of the Mission burrito congruent with characteristics of authentic Mexican cuisine. As the Mission burrito strays from its birthplace, the Mission District of San Francisco, California, USA, it evolves beyond the cycle of emergent authenticity. Commoditisation takes a strong hold on the Mission burrito, and it no longer exhibits characteristics of authenticity. The approach used in this study is a potential way to assess authenticity in other foods with immigrant origins within the American hospitality industry. There is also a possibility of broadening the application of this framework in other areas of gastronomy and anthropology as a whole.

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## **Attestation of Authorship**

*I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.*

Dianne J. Ma

Date: 09/12/2023

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to my parents, Gloria & Sanford Ma, who have always believed in me and supported my foray into the hospitality industry and beyond. You are miles (kilometres) away but always close in my heart.

To my advisors, my dream team, without whom this would not be possible. Robert Richardson, thank you for cutting through the clutter in my mind, whilst understanding how precious every word seems in the moment. Christine Hall, who I knew for years before finally meeting in person, I could not have dreamt of a better first contact and first friend in a new country; your warm support is everything. Thank you both for your steadfast guidance and quick responses to my middle-of-the-night panic emails.

To my instructors, Tracy Berno and Hamish Bremner, thank you for reminding me to always question the intent behind the message and disrupt, well, everything.

To Elberta Chan, my advisor in all things AUT and Aotearoa, thank you for holding my hand through this master programme.

To David Parker, my proofreader, thank you for indulging my myriad grammar questions. I never tire of bantering about syntax and learning new rules.

To my friends, old and new, who sent me positive energy and kept me sane this past year. Josie Inman, Dolby Ng, the Sarah(s) Hwang & Lee, Pauline Marie, Prang Ittikul, and Chloe Eberly – whether through sharing resources, painstakingly determining the perfect colours and graphs, keeping me eternally caffeinated, reminding me to look up from the screen, or just metaphorically holding my hand, thank you for being exactly what I need exactly when I need it.

Last, and certainly the most, thank you to Lennon MacDonald – my in-house editor, sounding board, and partner in crime. Life is punctuated with ups and downs, adventure and quiet, grey days and shining rainbows. I am punctuated by you. Without you, this would be nothing.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The term 'authentic' is widely used in describing and comparing cultural cuisine, and in an increasingly globalised world with increasingly knowledgeable customers, there is a desire to pursue food that is authentic (Fukutomi, 2022; Porciani, 2019). Yet, as populations cross borders and share food, grasping what makes food authentic is progressively more difficult (Saxena, 2019). Nevertheless 'authenticity' remains a commonly used term for evaluating food, with its exact definition open to interpretation by the individual (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). As *The Ethnic Restaurateur* author Krishnendu Ray says, "Cooking in general is not considered conducive to thinking" (Ray, 2016, p. xiv). Regardless, food memories inform our predilections, dictating our individual gastronomic identities, which in turn characterise our individual understandings of what represents authentic cuisine (Ferguson, 2010). Thus, tracing the formation of cuisines and the origins of the social construct of authenticity can allow for the synthesising of the universal characteristics of authentic food (Weiss, 2011).

There has been gastronomic research on how different cultures in different languages interpret taste textures (Nishinari et al., 2008). Ethnographic research has explored how immigrant experiences have influenced cooking in foreign countries (Ray, 2016). Outside of the field of gastronomy, there is also research regarding how having an authentic experience can be independent from having a cultural experience (Wang, 1999). This research focuses on the current state of the conversation surrounding authenticity. It endeavours to parse out universal underlying characteristics of authenticity within gastronomy by unpacking the confusion surrounding authenticity as a social construct (Handler, 2001; Lu & Fine, 1995; Vann, 2006; Weiss, 2011), discerning the motivations behind seeking authenticity (Berger, 1973; Taylor, 1992; Weaver, 2010), and understanding the ways in which authenticity is assessed (Cohen,

1988; MacCannell, 1973; Wang, 1999). These insights formulate a framework upon which purportedly authentic foods within the American hospitality industry can be analysed (Fukutomi, 2022; Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Martin-McAuliffe, 2016).

When an ethnic cuisine is presented in a different country, authenticity can be interpreted one way by the dominant society, another way by the immigrant population of that ethnicity, and yet another way by tourists from the ethnic country of origin (Cronin, 2015). A restaurant might market itself as authentic, but in actuality is adapting its food to cater to the palates of its guests (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). This fusion might undergo continual adaptation which then evolves into its own cuisine (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). Thus, this study will also trace the evolution of a single dish: the Mission burrito.

The framework is validated through an examination of the Mission burrito, a regional variant created in San Francisco, California, USA (Arellano, 2012; Birdsall, 2016; Canavan, 2015; Saldaña, 2023). The research seeks to ascertain whether, according to the established framework, the Mission burrito meets the criteria for authentic Mexican cuisine (Arellano, 2019; Barry-Jester, 2014m; Pilcher, 2001; Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). There is potential for extending the application of this framework to other food with immigrant origins within the American hospitality industry, such as hot dogs from Germany (Selinger, 2020), pizza from Italy (Nadeau, 2023), and orange chicken from China (del Barco, 2017), thereby furthering research in authenticity and gastronomy.

## 1.2 Research Aim

This dissertation seeks to identify key characteristics of 'authentic cuisine' in today's gastronomic landscape by exploring the question:

**What characterises 'authentic cuisine' when the term is used within the hospitality industry in the United States?**

### 1.3 Dissertation Overview

**Chapter 1: Introduction** – An introduction to authenticity in food, utilising the Mission burrito as a case study.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review** – A survey of authenticity as a social construct; methods of evaluating authenticity; correlations in authenticity between anthropology, tourism, and gastronomy; and eight characteristics of authenticity.

**Chapter 3: Research Framework** – A detailing of the research, including an inductive approach with relativist ontology, constructivist epistemology, critical inquiry paradigm, meta-synthesis methodology, and reflexive thematic analysis method; ethical considerations; study limitations and further research recommendations; and the researcher's positioning.

**Chapter 4: Background Information** – Historical background on the formation of Mexico and Mexican cuisine, the invention and dissemination of the burrito, and the construction and changing demographics of the Mission District in San Francisco, California, USA.

**Chapter 5: Data Analysis** – A listing of analysis procedures, summary of resources analysed, and findings correlating the eight characteristics of authenticity from the literature review chapter and the Mexican cultural context from the background information on the Mission burrito.

**Chapter 6: Discussion** – An assessment of the Mission burrito as authentic Mexican cuisine and a reframing of authenticity characteristics.

**Chapter 7: Conclusion** – A summary of this dissertation's research and findings pertaining to authentic cuisine in the American hospitality industry.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

A literature review is a synthesis of current knowledge pertaining to a specific topic, which creates the foundation for answering a research question (Machi & McEvoy, 2022) and contextualises what has previously been studied for the reader (Leary & Walker, 2018). A critical analysis, evaluation, and synthesis can also reveal gaps in the current literature and indicate how to advance the field of study (Efron & Ravid, 2018). The contextualisation is the base of a logically argued case, which establishes a persuasive thesis. There are two parts to the logical argumentation: building the findings and forming the conclusions (Machi & McEvoy, 2022). In this dissertation, the research first analyses the conversation surrounding authenticity and then forms a set of potential characteristics of authenticity in gastronomy.

The term 'authentic' is extensively employed to characterise and compare cultural cuisines in an increasingly interconnected world (Fukutomi, 2022; Porciani, 2019). However, as populations engage in cross-cultural interactions and food-sharing, determining the authenticity of food becomes increasingly challenging (Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Saxena, 2019). Through disentangling the confusion surrounding authenticity, an understanding emerges of the differing and sometimes conflicting social constructs of authenticity (Cohen, 1988). By deciphering how the concept of authenticity appears in modern society, it is possible to understand the underlying motivations that lead the modern individual on a quest for authenticity (Berger, 1973; Handler, 2001). Although there are general characteristics of authenticity, how they are assessed is a deeply individualistic experience based upon one's relationship with oneself (Cohen, 1988).

The assessment of authenticity by the modern individual often occurs from an outsider's perspective, and the way in which food is characterised in relation to other foods is one possible way that the boundary between authentic and inauthentic food is drawn (Johnston & Baumann,

2015). Additionally, in engaging with what they perceive to be authentic cultural objects, the individual contributes their own predilections to the greater cultural understanding of authenticity (Cohen, 1988). Thus, authenticity as a concept is both relational and socially constructed through producer and consumer perceptions (Wang, 1999).

## 2.2 Confusion around Authenticity

The difficulty in characterising authenticity lies in the confusion surrounding how authenticity is understood (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Authenticity can be viewed through objectivist, constructivist, and existentialist epistemologies (Wang, 1999). Additionally, there are differing ethnographic interpretations of what is authentic (Vann, 2006). Cohen (1988) analyses how the concept of authenticity affects the modern tourist and recognises that, because authenticity is a social construct, the social connotation of authenticity is ever-changing. Applying this idea to gastronomy suggests that food that is characterised as authentic does not necessarily equate to an accurate representation of ethnic cuisine, thus creating more confusion about what is truly authentic cuisine. Since a multitude of cultural scenes produces equally as many signifiers of authenticity, this creates confusion and hinders a universal understanding of authenticity, not just across facets of culture, such as anthropology and tourism, but also within a specific genre, such as gastronomy (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

There are different ways to establish cultural identity, but cultures are not closed systems, and cultural identity itself is constantly transforming and evolving, thus resisting a single, static definition (Lu & Fine, 1995; Weiss, 2011). An example of this is language, which can undergo similar transformations to gastronomy. A pidgin language, as a communication method for people without a common language, such as Portuguese Pidgin, can progress to a creole language, such as Brazilian Portuguese, with its own native speakers (Muysken & Smith, 1995). The exact moment in time that this transition occurs, however, is difficult to pinpoint. There are similar difficulties in determining when a food becomes an authentic part of a cuisine. This might

be with a single ingredient, such as with imported hot chilies in Sichuan cuisine (Lin, 2015) or American-invented Spam in South Korean cuisine (E. Kim, 2013). This is also seen with specific dishes, such as French-influenced banh mis in Vietnamese cuisine (Vu, 2016). Even entire categories of fusion foods, such as the hybrid of Texan and Mexican cuisine, can eventually become its own cuisine – in this case, Tex-Mex (Pilcher, 2001; Wheaton & Carroll, 2017).

Authenticity (and culture in general) exists relationally, and “any understanding of a particular person’s or group’s authentic identity will be a function of specific social encounters, and particular evaluations of authenticity are open to negotiation and dispute” (Handler, 2001, p. 966). The metric for assessing authenticity can vary, based upon the individual’s connection with their own identity and their subsequent quest for authenticity (Cohen, 1988). These differing interpretations can lead to conflicting assessments of cultural objects, thus resisting a clear universal definition of authenticity (Handler, 2001).

Furthermore, Vann posits that “the concept of ‘authenticity’ is not always a useful tool for ethnographic exploration, even when it is made sensitive to nuances of sociocultural difference” (Vann, 2006, p. 288). This is seen in the comparison between Vietnamese and Euro-American interpretations of counterfeit commodities. From a Euro-American standpoint, authenticity embodies uniqueness and originality, and can be traced to a point of origin (Cohen, 1988). By contrast, an inauthentic or counterfeit product misrepresents the relationship between the producer or creator and the object. This perspective has become institutionalised as the foundation for brand and product authenticity in international standards of intellectual property rights (Vann, 2006).

A Vietnamese evaluation of commodities is less fixated upon notions of ownership and authenticity, and instead categorises goods as model, mimic, real, or fake. Vann (2006) uses the example of glasses frames. A pair of Ralph Lauren glasses frames retailing for VNĐ2,240,000 (NZ\$149.22) are considered a model good, since Ralph Lauren is a famous luxury brand. Glasses

of a similar shape and style made by Calvin Klein, and sold for VNĐ140,000 (NZ\$9.33), would be counterfeit by Euro-American metrics. In the Vietnamese market, however, Calvin Klein glasses are categorised as a mimic good, which is not meant to deceive customers but, rather, fills a niche. Both Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein glasses are considered real goods, as they are able to be used as intended. This is different from a fake good, such as a shampoo bottle filled with cooking oil, or a makeup compact filled with flour, which does not attempt to mimic or imitate a model good. A fake good only barely resembles a product and is useless. Its outward appearance conveys value, when in fact it is deceiving the consumer. The nuances within the Vietnamese market demonstrate that authenticity is a social construct, which is relational and fluid and highly influenced by cultural variations in interpretation (Vann, 2006).

### 2.3 Authenticity as a Social Construct

In anthropological studies, there are objective and constructive approaches to authenticity. The constructivist approach states that “the authenticity of phenomena is never a matter of objectively determinable fact, but is always socially constructed and, as such, subject to change” (Handler, 2001, p. 964). The concept of authenticity is “illusive, a quality that individuals construct from personal experiences, feelings, and memories, and through everyday practices” (Fukutomi, 2022, p. 35). A constructivist epistemology recognises that there are always interpersonal connections, and humans are socially and historically situated. A question that can arise, then, is how useful it is to homogeneously define the identity of a cultural group and its cultural objects (Handler, 2001).

Even though the constructivist approach has gained popularity, both objectivist and constructivist approaches have endured as opposing epistemologies. In particular, the objectivist epistemology is prevalent in late-capitalist institutions in, for example, artifact authentication in museums (Handler, 2001) and the protection of intellectual property rights in courts of law (Vann, 2006). In these cases, authenticity is considered an objectively verifiably characteristic of an

object. An objective, purist ideal of authenticity for anthropologists, art historians, and curators states that “in order [for an artifact] to be acceptable as authentic, the product should not be manufactured ‘specifically for the market’” (Cohen, 1988, p. 375) and should be crafted for traditional use within the society that it was created. The emphasis in this definition is the “absence of commoditization as a crucial consideration in judgements of authenticity” (Cohen, 1988, p. 375). Nonetheless, there are instances, such as when African artisans produce art for European patrons, that the art is still deemed authentic (Cohen, 1988). There can also be cultural as well as economic value if a cultural object is commoditised successfully.

Taking the objectivist approach does not necessarily mean that one is disbelieving of authenticity as a social construct. Some anthropologists reject the principle of objectivism, but believe that an objectivist epistemology is the most socially progressive way to approach authenticity. Since the 1970s, there has been a growing rejection in Euro-American anthropology of the notion of intrinsic homogeneity in cultural groups. By using an objectivist epistemology, anthropologists hope to strategically disrupt the hegemonic politics of cultural appropriation that has perpetuated exploitation of marginalised communities (Handler, 2001).

Eddie Huang, the Taiwanese-American owner of now-defunct Baohaus restaurant, also recognises the danger of homogeneously referring to entire ethnic groups. In his book, *Fresh Off the Boat: A Memoir*, he states that his “main objective with Baohaus was to become a voice for Asian Americans. Whether you accept it or not, when you’re a visible Asian you have a torch to carry because we simply don’t have any other representation” (Huang, 2013, p. 264). He also adds a footnote: “Important distinction. Note that I say ‘a voice’ not ‘the voice’. I don’t speak for all Asian Americans, I speak for a few rotten bananas like me” (Huang, 2013, p. 270). There is an opinion, however, that hegemony is inherent to authenticity, and therefore the two cannot be separated. Identifying an object as authentic fundamentally delineates a cultural, ethnic, and racial hierarchy (Handler, 2001).

Handler puts these differing viewpoints into perspective, “The fact that anthropological expertise based on any of these positions can influence the social status of objects and people is if nothing else evidence that supports a constructionist account of authenticity” (Handler, 2001, p. 966). Thus, economics, politics, and culture all contribute to society’s constructions of authenticity (Fukutomi, 2022).

## 2.4 Authenticity in Modern Society

There is a consensus that a concept of authenticity has developed in the modern world (Appadurai, 2014; Berger, 1973; Cohen, 1988; Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Modern society emerged from institutional developments such as mercantile capitalism, industrialisation, urbanisation, social mobility, and mass communication through technology (Berger, 1973). There is no single social reality; rather, there is a “pluralization of the worlds of social experience” (Berger, 1973, p. 86). In pre-modern society, a single governing institution of state and religion defines a person’s identity, and an individual “experiences a world that is fully real, knows his [sic] own location in the world, and consequently knows who he [sic] is” (Berger, 1973, p. 85). This fragmentation into multiple modern institutions creates scepticism and uncertainty about the world, a characteristic of postmodernism, which in turn lowers feelings of belonging and creates uncertainty about oneself (Berger, 1973; Duignan, n.d.). The freedom afforded by individualism, or the right to choose for oneself, has arguably deteriorated a sense of higher purpose (Taylor, 1992). One’s identity, rather than being reinforced by a single institutionalised social reality, is now continually confirmed subjectively by other individuals (Berger, 1973). In the emergence of a pluralised world, “the individual relates to a plurality of experiences, none of which he [sic] fully identifies with” (Berger, 1973, p. 87). This “pervasive identity crisis” (Berger, 1973, p. 88) leads one on a quest for authenticity.

## 2.5 Quest for Authenticity

Berger describes how a modern person's quest for authenticity is a way to "give weight to the individual's sense of reality" when their reality is not defined singularly by the institutions around them (Berger, 1973, p. 88). This ever-changing subjectivity leads the individual to question their identity, thus instigating introspection. The "quest for that unity between the self and societal institutions, which endowed pre-modern existence with 'reality'" is the impetus for seeking authenticity in a place and time away from modern society (Cohen, 1988, p. 374). In analysing the quest for authenticity in cultural subjects, such as museum anthropology and modern tourism, analogies can be drawn with modern diners.

### 2.5.1 The Museum Anthropologist

Within the study of anthropology, museum curation depends upon the authentication of cultural objects. Cohen (1988) analyses the modern anthropologist's fixation with authenticity, citing the above explanation of alienation as a factor. He hypothesises a positive correlation between one's feelings of alienation, one's quest for authenticity, and the metric upon which authenticity is evaluated. The greater the alienation, the more exacting the parameters of authenticity. In particular, there is a preoccupation with pre-modern life that generally focuses on "cultural objects produced prior to the penetration of modern Western influences", which can include industrialisation and mass production (Cohen, 1988, p. 375). Therefore, there is often an emphasis on cultural objects that are 'original', 'natural', and 'handmade'. They become symbols of a purity in cultures that existed before the 'contamination' of contact with the Western world; in other words, in a pre-colonialist era. There is a manufactured nostalgia for a time and place that was destroyed by that very coloniser. Thus, colonialist ideals inform the museum anthropologist's evaluation of authenticity in cultural objects (Cohen, 1988).

### 2.5.2 The Modern Tourist

Cohen draws a parallel between the modern tourist and the museum anthropologist, as they both “seek authenticity in other times and other places” (Cohen, 1988, p. 375). The museum anthropologist romanticises pre-colonised culture, and in relating this quest for authenticity to the modern tourist, this means pursuing “the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity” (Cohen, 1988, p. 374). This is particularly seen in colonised, or settler societies, such as the U.S., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Handler, 2001). The authentic ‘cultural object’ sought by a museum anthropologist can expand for the modern tourist beyond a physical souvenir to encompass a historical site, an ethnic performance, or other touristic experiences (Weaver, 2010). As with the museum anthropologist, the modern tourist will have varying tolerances for inauthentic touristic experiences based upon the tolerance for their own inauthentic identity. As Cohen explains, “individuals who are less concerned with the authenticity of their touristic experiences...will be more prepared to accept as ‘authentic’ a cultural product or attraction which more concerned tourists, applying stricter criteria, will reject as ‘contrived’” (Cohen, 1988, p. 376).

Wang (1999) investigates how an authentic experience is created in the interplay between the modern tourist and the touristic event, as a means for determining underlying characteristics of authenticity. He explores three approaches to the experience of authentic tourism as they relate to existential philosophy. First, objectivism connects to objective tourism wherein physical cultural objects, such as ancient arrowheads, are original and therefore authentic. This is in contrast to modern day souvenir replicas, which would be considered inauthentic. Wang (1999) notes, however, that there are actually two different experiences of tourism at play. Not only is there the arrowhead that is being viewed, but there is also the experience of the tourist viewing the arrowhead. How the tourist feels is a real experience and yet is not acknowledged in objective tourism. When the tourist views the arrowhead, their

experience is still real and valid, even if the cultural object is a replica and not original. This correlates to the second approach of constructive or symbolic authenticity, which is explained through constructivist philosophy. The experience is linked to what the cultural object symbolises, rather than the physical cultural object itself. However, because objective and constructive authenticity necessarily connect to objects, they are still limited in their explanation of tourist experiences (Wang, 1999).

Therefore, existential authenticity is a more encompassing analysis of a tourist's experience because it includes tourist activities. This links to the postmodernist deconstruction of authenticity, whereby the authenticity of the experience does not depend upon the authenticity of the cultural object, or any object at all (Duignan, n.d.; Wang, 1999). Existential authenticity is further subdivided into interpersonal and intrapersonal authenticity. An example of interpersonal authenticity in tourism is when a person seeks a destination in order to strengthen human-to-human relationships. This might be visiting family or engaging in a getaway with friends. In a gastronomic context, this could be the ritual of weekend brunch, which focuses more on the commensality of the experience than the food (Ternikar, 2014). Intrapersonal experiences focus on the individual tourist. They seek to escape from the monotony of their daily life and engage in tourism, such as relaxing on a beach or going to a retreat, as a way to reconnect with themselves (Wang, 1999). Similarly, attending a cooking class can be a gastronomic experience that transcends the repetitiousness of everyday food preparation (Yoo et al., 2022). Neither of these experiences require cultural tourism. However, the tourist might still engage in cultural tourism and, by extension, culturally "authentic" adventures (Wang, 1999), such as the cook-your-own-food aspect of Korean BBQ or the carved-at-the-table experience of Brazilian churrascaria (Buhalis & Park, 2021; Wang, 1999)

As the concept of authenticity is used increasingly in tourism marketing, it is important to delineate which authentic experiences are derived from cultural tourism and which experiences

originate solely from the tourist (Wang, 1999). The findings can also be applied in the hospitality industry, and can thoughtfully facilitate empowerment and agency in restaurateurs and chefs to have a maximum positive impact on both the customers and the destinations. For example, in the prefecture of Kagawa, Japan, a mutually beneficial experience for restaurateurs and diners occurs, where diners observe the preparation of udon noodles and subsequently use a self-serve station for build-your-own udon bowls (S. Kim & Ellis, 2014). Similarly, agricultural tourism in the state of Michigan, USA, provides niche experiences, such as observing apple cider being pressed or picking one's own pumpkin at a farm – experiences which are economically beneficial to farmers and emotionally satisfying for the modern tourist (Che, 2006).

### 2.5.3 The Modern Diner

In this way, the quest for authenticity connects early colonialism, museum anthropology, and modern tourism. The definition of an authentic cultural object can continue to expand from a museum artifact or touristic experience to other representations of culture, including gastronomy (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999; Weaver, 2010). Thus, a parallel can be drawn between the modern tourist and the modern diner. Both embark on quests for authentic experiences in order to reconcile self and society. Whereas the modern tourist travels to a place to experience authenticity in situ, the modern diner in this research is seeking authentic food in local restaurants within the settler society they inhabit.

The modern diner can be described by many names: gastronome, epicurean, or foodie. For them, food is not merely biological sustenance; it is integral to a modern diner's identity and lifestyle (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). As someone who "devotes considerable time and energy to eating and learning about good food, however 'good food' is defined", the modern diner is a cultural and sociological omnivore, who engages with a variety of genres and curates the food they consume (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. x).

It can be argued that the narcissistic focus on the self in modern times has corrupted the cultural understanding of authenticity (Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Taylor, 1992). Rather than relating authenticity exclusively to the individual self, authenticity ought to be “reconnected to a larger social context, or ‘horizons of significance’” (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 62). As in the aforementioned existential authenticity in tourism, truly authentic decisions and experiences are recognised as such by both the self and society (Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Taylor, 1992; Wang, 1999).

## 2.6 Assessment of Authenticity

Evaluations of authenticity can occur when assessing a cultural space from the outside looking in. The authenticity of a cultural object, whether it be an artifact, destination, or dish, is assessed not through its intrinsic qualities but “through perceptions of how [the] cultural object negotiates a set of standards and values” (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 63). These standards and values are not static; they vary across different points in time and place. Furthermore, the process for evaluating authenticity depends upon the facet of culture under scrutiny. Characteristics of authenticity in architecture, such as preservations in materials and appearance over time (Heynen, 2006), might be different from authenticity in dance, which is characterised by creative choreographies that incorporate new movements into established dance forms (Sagiv et al., 2020).

Genres within a subject can also have their own evaluations, as in Johnston and Baumann’s (2015) example of music. Authenticity in country music is evaluated on a singer’s relationship with tradition, where they incorporate their own uniqueness and genuineness in a way that resonates with the conventions and values of country music. In blues music, authenticity is based in an even more elaborate human experience that incorporates not only the singer’s originality and the tradition of blues music, but also social signs within the blues club (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

Authenticity, then, relies not just upon the cultural object but also the interpretation of the object through individual memory and social context. It is created by the individual to represent an approximation of a prior memory; the last time one visited a place, heard a song, or tasted a dish. It is the memory surrounding a prior gastronomic experience, such as cooking with one's grandparent, that contributes to the modern diner's assessment of authenticity (Fukutomi, 2022). Fukutomi posits that in fact, "Our cultures, senses, and memories play more important roles in authenticating food than the food itself" (Fukutomi, 2022, p. 41).

### 2.6.1 Emergent Authenticity

A calibration occurs for those immersed in a specific cultural object, or scene, which continually detects and assesses signs of authenticity. It is through a reliance upon social evaluations of time, place, and performer that "individuals gain an intuitive sense of authenticity" (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 63). In engaging with the cultural object, the beholder also contributes to the social evaluation. This creates a continual feedback loop whereby the beholder and the social evaluation evolve how authenticity is characterised. Cohen (1988) calls this "emergent authenticity" and relates it to the evolution of tradition. He explains,

Since authenticity is not a primitive given, but negotiable, one has to allow for the possibility of its gradual emergence in the eyes of visitors to the host culture. In other words, a cultural product, or a trait thereof, which is at one point generally judged as contrived or inauthentic may, in the course of time, become generally recognized as authentic, even by experts. (Cohen, 1988, p. 379)

Disneyland, for example, has evolved from a contrived tourist attraction to an authentic representation of contemporary American culture (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999).

The presence of an audience also provides an opportunity for a dialogue with the producer of a cultural object. There is a dimension of the cultural object that extends beyond its use within the "'internal' local or ethnic public" of the producing culture to integrate "novel but 'authentic' messages" when communicating with an external audience (Cohen, 1988, p. 379). This

is seen in Hmong art, which intertwines traditional embroidery with depictions of their religious persecution in the present day as a way of broadcasting their suffering to the rest of the world (Cohen, 1988; Yang, 2003). Cohen explains that “Such messages thus become new cultural expressions, which are recognized as ‘authentic’ even by experts, such as anthropologists or ethnographers interested in cultural change” (Cohen, 1988, p. 379). Ultimately, the assessment of authenticity is about the people, not the cultural objects (Fukutomi, 2022).

### 2.6.2 Commoditisation

Linked to emergent authenticity is the assessment of how the commoditisation of authentic cultural objects is can contribute to their authentication. Contrary to the objectivist epistemological view that authentic cultural objects are created solely for use within the society of their creation (Wang, 1999), cultural objects produced for the outsider questing for authenticity can become “a diacritical mark of their ethnic or cultural identity, a vehicle of self-representation before an external public” (Cohen, 1988, p. 383). The cultural object may retain some traits of authenticity when it is transformed into a commodity, which in turn authenticates the object as a whole. As described earlier, however, an individual’s quest for authenticity is based upon the reconciling of an identity crisis (Berger, 1973; Cohen, 1988; Taylor, 1992). Therefore, not all commoditised cultural objects will be interpreted as authentic by all people.

Regardless, engaging with a commoditised cultural object can be akin to watching a performance that “has profound roots in reality” but is predicated on a mutual understanding between the performers and the audience of “make-believe” as a proxy for real life (Cohen, 1988, p. 383). The interaction, then, can be perceived as authentic even if parts of the cultural object are contrived. As it pertains to authentic food, the modern diner recaptures authenticity each time they consume the cultural object, thus creating an authentic experience for themselves. This is exemplified by Japanese cuisine in Perth, Australia, where a gyoza restaurant has adapted its recipes to include non-traditional ingredients such as chicken and teriyaki sauce. Although

considered inauthentic by Japanese standards, it is a popular dish that customers look forward to eating. Therefore, because the modern diner assesses the experience as authentically joyful, the food also becomes authentic (Fukutomi, 2022).

Cohen (1988) highlights the importance of recognising commoditised cultural objects in the creation of cultural identity. He shifts away from the notion that commoditisation is always destructive; in analysing how permutations of authenticity are perceived by the performers and the audience, new aspects of cultural identity are revealed. There is also a differentiation between the negative and positive impacts of commoditisation, as they pertain to the development and preservation of authentic cultural meaning (Cohen, 1988). Such is the case with the Silk Road, an example of how the concept of trade was integrated into Chinese culture, and was used as a tool for disseminating other Chinese cultural objects, such as food, literature, music, and art (Andrea, 2014). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China has revitalised and modernised the Silk Road with its “One Belt, One Road” initiative focusing on international infrastructure partnerships in transportation, telecommunications, IT, energy, law, and logistics (Dellios, 2017; Winter, 2016). This could potentially be the foundation for policy regarding tourism as a “major cultural manifestation of the real world” as well as a sector of economic development (Cohen, 1988, p. 384).

As previously mentioned, emergent authenticity is an iterative process (Cohen, 1988; Johnston & Baumann, 2015). In commoditisation, the perception of an authentic cultural object can also be influenced by its integration into everyday life (Fukutomi, 2022). The implication that authenticity lies not only within a cultural object but also the actual transfer from producer to consumer can also be applied in the hospitality industry. The modern diner has a constructivist view of authenticity, whereby they seek out characteristics that authenticate restaurants, chefs, and food. They might not have tasted a cuisine in its origin country, in which case they must create their own impression of what is authentic. Furthermore, authentication occurs through

traditional word-of-mouth, social media, or simply through spending money, and the modern diner in turn authenticates their self as a credible source (Fukutomi, 2022).

### 2.6.3 Staged Authenticity

Acknowledging the interplay of the commoditisation and the authenticity of cultural objects allows for an analysis of the different ways that businesses create an authentic environment, or stage. The concept of “staged authenticity” was originally developed in tourism studies by Dean MacCannell (1973). He expands upon the theory presented in Erving Goffman’s 1959 *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* that observes how social establishments are divided into the ‘front’ and ‘back’ regions, oftentimes with architectural arrangements reinforcing the separation. In a restaurant, the ‘front’ is the dining room where guests interact with staff, while the ‘back’ is out of sight of the customer and includes the kitchen, break area, manager’s office, and other spaces meant only for staff. Commonly, in the hospitality industry, front of house (FOH) and back of house (BOH) describe not only the physical spaces but also the positions typically associated with them. Hosts, servers, and general managers are delineated as FOH, whilst dishwashers, cooks, and chefs are considered BOH (Wilson, 2020). In the restaurant space, the physical architecture also reinforces the perspective of the food being served. The lexicons of architecture and gastronomy overlap in the descriptors used, such as ‘bland’, ‘tasteful’, and ‘organic’. The commonalities in food and architecture transform their relationship, becoming metaphors for one another. Consequently, if the architecture of a restaurant is authentic, it can be understood that the food is also authentic (Martin-McAuliffe, 2016).

In the context of the stage (house), performers (staff) move freely throughout FOH and BOH. Audience members (diners) are confined to FOH. There is a mystification that occurs in FOH, which uses props to convey a sense of reality that is not necessarily an accurate portrayal of the world, but is nonetheless presented to the guest as “real” (MacCannell, 1973). For example, Chinese restaurants in America might use a combination of various props to convey authenticity.

They might incorporate words commonly associated with Chinese culture such as 'Jade' or 'Lotus' into the restaurant name (Lu & Fine, 1995). Or the menu item might have an intriguing name, such as Beggar's Chicken, which is connected to a Chinese folk tale about a beggar stealing and hiding a chicken in the mud. The beggar roasted the mud-covered chicken and inadvertently served it to the emperor, who loved it. This inspired the beggar to sell the delicacy, subsequently overcoming poverty (Youn & Kim, 2017). "Staged authenticity", then, occurs when FOH is intentionally arranged in a way to imply that guests "may experience, or at least glimpse, the 'real' or the 'actual'" (MacCannell, 2011, p. 27), but the guests are unaware of the contrived setup, thus accepting it as an authentic representation of reality. They believe that the mystification has been lifted, when in fact the mystification is still occurring; it has just more cleverly masked the truth (MacCannell, 1973).

In general, customers are aware of this mystification and accept it, but the modern diner sometimes seeks to look behind the curtain, searching for the truth (MacCannell, 1973).

MacCannell (2011) has since posited the question: what if the barrier between FOH and BOH was removed? The removal of such a barrier could convey that the establishment is presenting a wholly authentic identity without secrets. This is displayed in Chez Panisse, a restaurant in Berkeley, California, by Alice Waters, a pioneer of Californian cuisine. When a kitchen fire burned the wall dividing the BOH and FOH, Waters opted to keep the restaurant space completely open (H. K. Lee, 2013; Singer, 2016). Although open kitchens are a common contemporary feature today (Tuttle, 2012), at the time the only guests invited to see into a kitchen were family, friends, or VIPs who sat at a dedicated chef's table (Chen, 2018). Opening the Chez Panisse space democratised the dining experience: allowing any patron to see the hustle and bustle involved in food preparation, rather than limiting the experience to a privileged few. Staged authenticity was no longer a factor, and the audience was able to view the actors wholly. With FOH and BOH fully integrated, the space "invited visitors to observe the cooking process; it made transparent how

real, whole, ingredients can be transformed into delicious, nourishing plates of food by people like themselves” (Singer, 2016, p. 111). Many forms of staged authenticity can be present in restaurant dining, and whether contrived or not, it can be influential in how the modern diner assesses the characteristics of authentic food.

## 2.7 Characteristics of Authentic Food

Establishing authenticity as a relational social construct does not preclude an analysis of prevailing characteristics in food. There are still overarching characteristics of authenticity that the modern diner in settler societies pursues, even if the evaluation of the characteristics is based upon individual subjectivity (Handler, 2001). Each of these characteristics exemplifies the quest for authenticity in a different time and place, as well as displaying facets of authenticity as a social construct.

### 2.7.1 Storytelling

The underlying theme of all the characteristics is the importance of storytelling, which conveys authenticity through memory, nostalgia, and history. As Fukutomi explains, “Deeply subjective, stories can easily manipulate claims of the ownership, origins, and values of a food, thus offering a heritage for it, which is constructed and invented” (Fukutomi, 2022, p. 36). A 1960 American article on Indian food, for example, focuses as just as much on Manorama Phillips, an Indian bureaucrat at the United Nations, as on the food itself. It authenticates Phillips by detailing how her homesickness for India led to a penchant for entertaining at home with a distinctly Indian flair as well as presenting a photo of Phillips dressed in a traditional Indian sari (Ray, 2016). Similarly, the documentary *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (Gelb, 2011) chronicles the life of master sushi chef Jiro Ono in Tokyo, Japan. Ono’s mastery of sushi is authenticated in telling the story of how he runs his restaurant, Sukiyabashi Jiro, teaches his two sons the art of sushi, sources the best ingredients from the famous Tsukiji fish market, and is awarded three stars by the internationally

influential *Michelin Guide* (Ferguson, 2008; Gelb, 2011; “History of the Michelin Guide,” n.d.). The American-produced indie documentary itself conveys authenticity through storytelling by filming in Ono’s native Japanese with English subtitles, which displays original, unadulterated dialogue as opposed to Westernised translations (Gelb, 2011).

### 2.7.2 Terroir/Geographic Specificity

In the modern world of mass production, the geographical specificity of a food can be a significant indicator of authenticity (Che, 2006; Johnston & Baumann, 2015). The “taste of place” has become especially prized in modern society as globalisation has induced a homogenisation of food (Harper, 2009). This is exemplified in Japan’s beef production, which traces several details including the farm, breed, lineage, and birthdate in the Cattle Individual Identification Register (National Livestock Breeding Center, n.d.), as compared to the mass production of a McDonalds ground beef patty that has parts from countless cows (Schlosser, 2002). The “taste of time”, such as in the case of an exemplary vintage of wine, can also be a facet of geographic specificity (McGee, 2004). The melding of place and time is expressed in the French word “terroir”, which “encapsulates an amalgamation of people, place, cultural tradition, and landscape ecology in food and drink” (Fukutomi, 2022, p. 36). Terroir has become so important to cultural cuisine that there are now legal geographic designations in several countries, such as France’s Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée (Institut National de l’Origine et de la Qualité, n.d.), India’s Geographical Indications of Goods (Intellectual Property India, n.d.), and Mexico’s Denominación de Origen (Gobierno de México, 2015). There is also a non-governmental organisation, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), which develops and publishes standards for various industries, including feed and food chain traceability (International Organization for Standardization, 2022).

This sets the cultural object apart from a generic version, and the restrictions on production and consumption convey that the product is valuable (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). The terroir of the food also has connotations of being “true to traditions that are perfected and

best known in that place alone” (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 66). This connects to the quest for authenticity that the modern tourist embarks upon when confronted with a dissonance between self and society. When one cannot find authenticity in the relationship between self and society, it is sought in other places and times. The terroir of a product literally grounds it at a specific geographical and historical point, and consuming that product tethers the modern diner to that authentic experience.

As previously mentioned, in settler societies the quest for authenticity often is preoccupied with originality as a valuable attribute (Fukutomi, 2022; Vann, 2006). Terroir, then, is an indicator of originality and purity. Especially in contrast to the technology and industrialisation of the modern world, there is a “wilderness fetishism” for natural, untouched products (Fukutomi, 2022, p. 38). It is possible that the notion of terroir itself is a social construct, and it only exists because we have ascribed value to it; it is simply a marketing ploy. For example, showcasing the terroir in French wines distracts the consumer from the fact that French wineries rely upon foreign workers, rather than local people, to produce their wine (Fukutomi, 2022).

In relating emergent authenticity to food (Cohen, 1988; Johnston & Baumann, 2015), Fukutomi (2022) speculates that consumer engagement contributes to modern-day terroir. A literature review of electronic word of mouth (eWOM) reveals that it is “considered one of the most influential informal media among consumers, business, and the population at large” (Huete-Alcocer, 2017, p. 1). Huang also describes the impact of online restaurant reviews: “About three weeks after opening [Baohaus], we were the number-one hot restaurant in New York on Yelp. I think Yelp is doo-doo but it drove a lot of customers to the shop” (Huang, 2013, p. 264). Factoring eWOM on social media sites into restaurant and food producer business strategies can contribute to the cultivation and refinement of their terroir.

### 2.7.3 Simplicity

Similar to how terroir transports the modern diner to a specific time and place, simplicity in food implies an effortless and honesty that is reminiscent of a simpler way of life, a time when society authentically mirrored the self. Simplicity not only explicitly indicates the food will be tastier and of higher quality, but also implicitly evokes a nostalgia for agrarian ideals. Here, the modern diner's quest for authenticity seeks a departure from the complex industrialised food system that reflects the fragmented relativist realities that the modern diner contends with. Instead, transparent food pathways and sustainable production methods are sought out (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). It is important to clarify that simplicity is perceived by the modern diner; the food does not necessarily need to be simple. It could be argued that food production and preparation is rarely simple, and the illusion of simplicity is another aspect of staged authenticity (Johnston & Baumann, 2015; MacCannell, 1973).

Simplicity can be found in many facets of food (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). It might be exemplified in the small-scale production of Strachitunt cheese in the Val Taleggio region of Italy that uses unpasteurised milk from farms owning a mere 20-150 cows (Grasseni, 2023). Or, preparation method and number of ingredients could be described as simple. Restaurateur Alice Waters is widely regarded as the pioneer of California cuisine, which focuses on simple preparations that highlight local, seasonal products and exemplifies the farm-to-table movement (Banas, 2023; California Museum, n.d.). Waters extolls simple recipes in her books *The Art of Simple Food* (Waters et al., 2007) and *The Art of Simple Food II* (Waters et al., 2013). Simplicity might even be used to describe the presentation of food or the ambiance of the food being served. The name of Huang's restaurant, Baohaus, was directly influenced by the simple designs of the Bauhaus style of art and architecture (Droste, 2002; Huang, 2013). Reflecting the minimalist aesthetic, Baohaus had a small menu of five simple dishes: three bao flavours, boiled peanuts, and fries (Huang, 2013).

If simple food is meant to represent originality and honesty, then by contrast overwrought, complicated food represents a dishonest corruption of the authentic, original version (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). For example, in *Jiro Dreams of Sushi* (Gelb, 2011), Ono's food is described by food writer and long-time customer, Masuhiro Yamamoto, as "simple" and "completely minimalist", and yet has "depth of flavour" which he summarises succinctly: "Ultimate simplicity leads to purity" (Gelb, 2011, 4:04 min.). Ono's lifelong odyssey for simplicity exemplifies the quest for authenticity, which is characterised in this case by his belief that authenticity lies within perfection and purity. Mass-market sushi and sushi fusion dishes, sushi pizzas and sushiritos (a portmanteau of sushi and burritos) were available and popular in the 2000s in the United States (U.S.) and Australia (Friedland, 2015; Fukutomi, 2022; Maklinal, 2022). By contrast, Ono's sushi, with its purity in flavour and technique, was lauded as authentic (Maklinal, 2022).

Simplicity in food, then, is a vehicle for conveying the "authenticity of the lives and values of those carrying out food production" (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 69). Simple food mirrors simplicity in life, which the modern diner is seeking. Unlike terroir, which is a static characteristic that is inherent to the product, simplicity is a dynamic, socially constructed value that depends greatly upon cultural context. The honesty and integrity of the product is exemplified by contrasting it with inferior product, and the simplicity is representative of a "simple" time and place that exists outside of the complexities associated with advanced industrialised societies (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

#### 2.7.4 Nostalgia & Imagined Taste

In the quest for authenticity, the modern diner invariably sentimentally yearns for the past, whether remembered in their own personal history or imagined in a different place and time (Fukutomi, 2022; Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Studies suggest that this nostalgia has a positive psychological effect, and is interlaced with vital interpersonal and intrapersonal functions

(Leunissen et al., 2021; Reid et al., 2023). These functions also embody the goals of the quest for authenticity: social connectedness (sociality), meaning in life (existentialism), and self-esteem (self-orientation) (Sedikides et al., 2015). Food in particular elicits a strong nostalgic response (Mannur, 2007). Huang (2013) references a dan-dan noodle stand in Taiwan that his father talked about for years before finally bringing him there at age 12 as a rite of passage. He describes the dish as “one of those bites that make you think maybe, just maybe, your taste buds can carry a cognitive key that can open something in your mind” (Huang, 2013, p. 62). It was the spirit of both his and his father’s food memories that Huang strove to capture in the atmosphere at Baohaus (Huang, 2013).

Fukutomi (2022) characterises nostalgia as a synaesthesia of memories and feelings that invokes comfort and a sense of mourning for the time when the memories were formed, such as remembering a home-cooked meal. Because the nostalgia is constructed in our minds, however, she contends that the food does not necessarily need to be a replica of the modern diner’s home-cooked meal in order for us to experience nostalgia. In what is described as the “imagined taste” of the Indian diaspora in the U.S., the narrative of the food is sufficient to draw upon food memories even though the dishes themselves are store-bought, rather than homemade. Fukutomi explains, “Imagined taste is not about the taste of food, but about people’s belief that the food tastes as it should, that it fits their memory or satisfies their desire” (Fukutomi, 2022, p. 37).

#### 2.7.5 Personal Connection

The ability to connect a cultural object with its producer is another important characteristic of authenticity, and “as with other forms of cultural consumption, we evaluate authenticity in food by connecting the food to the visionary behind the plate” (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 75). Identifying not only the producer but also the producer’s intent in creating a product is another method for evaluating authentic food. If the modern diner is able to

trace the journey from the producer to their plate, they believe they can also assess if the cultural object was made with honest intentions. Thus the product is imbued with the producer's authentic self (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

One way that personalised food is authenticated is through expressions of individual artistic creativity, as is the case with aforementioned celebrity restaurant chefs Eddie Huang (Mishan, 2010), Jiro Ono (Gelb, 2011), and Alice Waters (Banas, 2023). Similar to a composer or sculptor, the chef is regarded as an artist creating original and authentic culinary art (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Ono prides himself on his innovation within sushi making as he continues to create new techniques to improve upon traditional knowledge. "The masters said the history of sushi is so long that nothing new can be invented," Ono says, "They may have mastered their craft, but there's always room for improvement. I created sushi dishes that never existed back then. I would make sushi in my dreams. I would jump out of bed at night with ideas" (Gelb, 2011, 26:19 min.). It is the continual process of perfecting his creativity that allows him to be authentic to himself and, by extension, to his craft (Maklinal, 2022). By contrast, chain restaurants and industrially processed food are akin to drum machines and mass-produced posters that lack a producer's unique identity (Anastasiadou & Vettese, 2018; Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Zagorski-Thomas, 2010).

Another way that producers personally connect with their food is through culinary artistry, as derived from family tradition (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). In Sicily and Sardinia, it is common for olive oil mills to bear family names because food is regarded as a reflection of oneself and one's family, and therefore "selling a high-quality product becomes a matter of respect, even honor" (Hilton, 2023, p. 42). Such is the case of the only ISO-certified Sardinian company, San Giuliano Alghero. Its oil mill, Domenico Manca, is named after the Manca family that has produced olive oil since 1912 (Best Olive Oils, n.d.; San Giuliano, n.d.). This year, 2023, they won five awards in the New York International Olive Oil Competition the largest

international olive oil competition attracting 1,244 brands from 28 countries (Granitto, 2023; New York International Olive Oil Competition, n.d.). This type of reference establishes a traceable artistic lineage back to the original creator, as compared to the faceless anonymity of the industrialised food system (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

#### 2.7.6 Aficionado Identity

Johnston and Baumann (2015) identify the personal connection between a producer and their product. Fukutomi (2022) analyses connection from a different perspective that she calls aficionado identity: the connection between the modern diner and the food they are consuming. With a personal connection the modern diner consumes authentic food, and therefore consumes the authentic identity of the producer (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). With aficionado identity, the modern diner has an authentic connection with the cultural object, and therefore does not necessarily need to rely upon the producer as a proxy, or surrogate, to authenticate the food or their own identity (Fukutomi, 2022). This correlates with Wang's (1999) interpretation of constructive authenticity, in which the experience of the modern diner is authentic and therefore the authenticity of the cultural object is still valid, even if it is not original.

Such is the case with Japanese food in Australia (Fukutomi, 2022) and Chinese food in America (Lu & Fine, 1995). Some modern diners feel they have authority to assess the authenticity of the food because they 'know' the ethnic cuisine. To use a research analogy, this knowledge could have been acquired through primary research, by eating Japanese or Chinese food whilst visiting or living in these countries. It could also have been attained from secondary sources such as online review sites or restaurant marketing. Whether acquired directly or indirectly, this knowledge calibrates the individual's understanding of authenticity and engages them in a form of emergent authenticity (Fukutomi, 2022; Lu & Fine, 1995).

### 2.7.7 Historical Tradition

The history and tradition of a food is another common marker of authenticity (Grasseni, 2023; Johnston & Baumann, 2015; Porciani, 2019). With historical tradition as an anchor, a set of conventions and standards is established (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). This historical continuity demonstrates not only that the original integrity of the food has persisted through globalisation, but also that, as compared to a temporary food fad or gimmick, it is timelessly appropriate (Maklinal, 2022). Furthermore, historical tradition can be interpreted as authoritative and irrefutable. Oftentimes it connotes that the production or preparation of the food in today's time and place matches the process of the original milieu in which it was created (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

Johnston and Baumann (2015) discuss how historically authentic food is sometimes delineated as food that has not been modified for an external palate. When they interviewed self-described foodies, one participant explained

Authentic food to me is food that is true to the culture from which it came. ... So by authentic I mean, if I went to the Philippines that's how it would traditionally be prepared. ... Not modified for American tastes. (Johnston & Baumann, 2015, p. 78)

This is akin to the authentication process in other areas of anthropology and culture (Cohen, 1988; Johnston & Baumann, 2015). For example, the preserving technique for Icelandic fermented shark, hákarl, has been moderately modernised (Rögvaldardóttir & Leaman, 2012). The major producer today, however, is the Hildibrandsson family, which has been making hákarl since 1608 (Bjarnarhöfn, n.d.). It is still small-batched produced and the pungent flavour has not been adapted to suit a non-Icelandic palate, therefore remaining authentic to the original dish (Skåra et al., 2015; Steingrímisdóttir et al., 2018).

For others, the historical tradition is not limited to just a static representation of food over time. It can be the foundation for innovation, and is a way to express creativity across multiple cultures or within conventions of an immigrant culture (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

This is displayed in the American dish goulash – an interpretation of the Hungarian soup, gulyásleves, which features cubed beef and paprika. By contrast, the American version has a thicker, stew-like consistency and substitutes ground beef and ketchup (Metro-Roland, 2013). Possibly this is due to the popularity of ketchup as a condiment and the convenience of readily available ground beef in the American market (Bentley, 2019; Geib, 2022; Schlosser, 2002). Similarly, corned beef and cabbage is an Irish American adaptation of boiled bacon and cabbage, a customary St. Patrick’s Day dish in Ireland (McGarry, 2022). In the U.S., however, pork was more expensive than beef, so corned beef gained popularity as a substitute for bacon (Cronin, 2015).

### 2.7.8 Ethnic Connection

Historical tradition and ethnic connection, although distinct from one another, are often closely intertwined (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Staged authenticity is also present in ethnic connection, as there are indications of authentically ethnic cuisines that exist beyond just the food. Huang’s Taiwanese heritage authenticates him as an authority on the Taiwanese gua bao that he serves at Baohaus (Ray, 2016). Ono’s fast-paced service and restaurant décor at Sukiwabashi Jiro hearkens back to the pre-globalised, pre-Americanised origins of sushi in the Edo era, when it was a casual food that chefs served directly to customers at food stalls (A. Lee, 2019; Maklinal, 2022; Sukiwabashi Jiro [すきやばし次郎], n.d.).

Furthermore, there is a perception that authentically ethnic food presented in another locale must be both produced and consumed by the corresponding ethnic group. The modern diner expects to see Mexican cooks in Mexican restaurants (Gaytán, 2008). There is an even stronger connotation of authenticity when the patrons are Mexican and can order food and converse with the staff in Spanish (Gaytán, 2008). This emphasis implies that one’s ethnicity contributes to an authentic preparation through a mixture of their palate, their use of proper techniques, and their interaction with guests (Johnston & Baumann, 2015).

## 2.8 Literature Review Summary

In this literature review chapter, eight characteristics of authenticity emerged: storytelling, terroir and geographic specificity, nostalgia and imagined taste, simplicity, personal connection, aficionado identity, historical tradition, and ethnic connection. The data analysis presented in Chapter 5 uses these characteristics as a framework for assessing the authenticity of the Mission burrito. Because authenticity is a social construct and each individual assesses authenticity differently based upon their unique perspectives, there can be confusion surrounding how to evaluate each characteristic of authenticity. Therefore, this research contextualises each of these characteristics in different and relational ways through emergent authenticity, commoditisation, and staged authenticity. In the next chapter, the research framework is explained, along with ethics considerations, study limitations, areas for further exploration, and how the researcher's interests have informed the research.

## Chapter 3: Research Framework

### 3.1 Introduction

The research framework maps out the path towards answering the research question in an unambiguous way, and is the strategy and structure of the investigation. Strategically selecting each step in planning a research design is critical for drawing valid findings and conclusions, as all of the parts are interconnected and inform one another. By determining the components before beginning the research, the research framework can be referred to throughout the research process, ensuring that the reasonings are sound (Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

This research employs inductive reasoning, a method of drawing conclusions that begins with specific observations, then develops a pattern of events from which general principles are derived (Babbie, 2013). First, contemporary literature regarding authenticity and food are synthesised and distilled in the literature review. In the data analysis, the emerging characteristics are then tested against studies on the history and evolution of the Mission burrito. The framework of the research utilises a relativist ontology, constructivist epistemology, critical inquiry paradigm, qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, and reflexive thematic analysis method.

This study analyses prevalent characteristics of authenticity in the present day, and therefore recognises that a finite answer to the research question does not exist. This is not to say that one should abandon the pursuit of an answer (Handler, 2001). Even though authenticity is a social construct, and therefore is in a constant formation process, it acts as a point of reference in society (Bryman, 2004). Characteristics of authenticity are contextualised by the individual, who in turn is shaped by the society they live in (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Therefore, analysing how authenticity is interpreted allows for the examination of society in a specific time and place (Cohen, 1988).

### 3.2 Research Question

In an attempt to determine prevalent attributes of 'authentic cuisine' in a modern gastronomic context, this research aims to answer the following question:

**What characterises 'authentic cuisine' when the term is used within the hospitality industry in the United States?**

### 3.3 Ontology

The ontology component of a research framework establishes how reality is interpreted (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Also considered the study of existence, ontology seeks to understand the nature of our reality. This research takes a relativist approach. A relativist ontology establishes that there are multiple subjective realities, which change within and between society and time (Gray, 2018). This correlates with postmodernism, which is a movement that arose in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to challenge the values and intellectual assumptions of modern Western philosophy developed in the 17<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Duignan, n.d.). One of these viewpoints is that there is an objective, singular reality that is external and independent of our social world (Handler, 2001; Wang, 1999). Postmodernism rejects this notion, instead asserting that reality is a conceptual construct and that it is not possible for statements about reality to be objectively true or false (Duignan, n.d.).

Authenticity is a social construct which has developed in modern society, and the modern individual's quest for authenticity arises from a dissonance between identity and the modern world (Berger, 1973). There is no singular social reality, but rather a plurality of realities that imperfectly defines an individual. Feeling alienated from these realities, one attempts to articulate the opposition between society and self. Out of a need to reinforce individual identity, one turns to introspection and seeks to be true to oneself; in other words, to be authentic (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Therefore, it must be recognised that authenticity is open to

individual interpretation. Consequently, this research utilises a relativist ontology, which acknowledges that there is no absolute standard in social and cultural research (Seale, 2018).

### 3.4 Epistemology

If ontology is concerned with what exists, epistemology is the underlying theory determining how we know it exists (Seale, 2018). It clarifies how knowledge is created, acquired, and communicated within the research framework (Scotland, 2012). Specifically, a constructivist epistemology creates meaning through interaction between the research and the subject. It supports a relativist ontology that asserts that cultural themes, such as authenticity, are not objective external realities that affect society (Gray, 2018). Rather, people and culture undergo a continual state of reconstruction and redefinition (Bryman, 2004). It is through the relativity of social interaction that the concept of authenticity develops (Seale, 2018).

The research explores how markers of authenticity are subjective and how authenticity is used relationally in different contexts (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999). Thus, the “way of knowing” (Frisen, 2017, 1:13 min.) how authenticity is characterised is a constructivist approach. Because authenticity is a social construct, a constructivist approach recognises that there are multiple and sometimes contradictory viewpoints on what comprises authentic food (Fukutomi, 2022). Additionally, within a cuisine, there can be divergences in terms of what authentic cuisine is (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Therefore, the research must acknowledge that the concept of authenticity is inherently constructed by its subjects (Gray, 2018).

### 3.5 Paradigm

The paradigm is determined by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of reality and knowledge (Scotland, 2012). It guides the choice of topic and dictates both how research is conducted and how results are interpreted (Bryman, 2004). The constructivist epistemology highlights the importance of the relationship between the researcher and the research, which

reinforces the relativist perspective that there are multiple realities (Gray, 2018). Different researchers will have different relationships with the same research because they experience different realities (Denzin, 2017). A critical inquiry paradigm recognises that the researcher is locally and historically situated within the very research that is occurring. It posits that, since all inquiry subjectively reflects the viewpoint of the inquirer, it is important to critically analyse one's own cultural conventions. The influences of politics, economics, culture, and society are all contextualised within the research (Pham, 2018).

A critical inquiry paradigm for acquiring knowledge allows for the challenging of established assumptions about authenticity (Gray, 2018). Notions of authenticity have been heavily influenced by colonialist, Euro-American values of originality and purity (Cohen, 1988; Handler, 2001; Vann, 2006). In order to deconstruct these underlying social and cultural influences on authenticity, it is imperative to first identify the characteristics of authenticity (Denzin, 2017; Johnston & Baumann, 2015). This axiological perspective distinguishes between the different value judgements about authenticity in modern society (Chesebro, 1973). Multiple interpretations of authenticity create confusion, so it is also crucial to critically inquire why and how these interpretations emerge. Only then, through understanding how ideology and power shape society, can beneficial social change occur. Then, perhaps, it will be possible to disrupt the current cultural hegemony of authenticity (Denzin, 2017).

### 3.6 Methodology

The methodology is the underlying theory of the methods used in research (Seale, 2018). It is the strategy for answering all the questions of how, when, where, why, and what data is collected and analysed within the research framework (Scotland, 2012). Through a critical inquiry paradigm, the researcher recognises the influence of their own preconceived notions upon the research (Pham, 2018). This links to the constructivist epistemology in that the researcher's influence subsequently impacts the research. Additionally, the relativist ontology indicates that

there are also other realities, which should be considered during the research process (Gray, 2018). Thus, this study employs a qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, which acknowledges the researcher's role in choosing the group of studies to analyse. Generalised results are formed from focusing on a similar phenomenon or topic (Finfgeld-Connett, 2014). This is an inductive approach, which builds a theory and identifies knowledge gaps (Leary & Walker, 2018).

As used across a myriad of research areas, a meta-synthesis methodology examines qualitative research to interpret patterns, which inform the refinement of new knowledge and contribute to theory building and practical application (Walsh & Downe, 2005). The methodology aims to consolidate the patterns and concepts in multiple studies, whose cumulative knowledge is more substantive than an individual study – an instance where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Finlayson & Dixon, 2008). The process of meta-synthesis applies generalisable ideas in new settings and situations. It also identifies literature gaps for potential future research. The search criteria are determined through relevant inputs and data is coded according to the chosen analysis method (Leary & Walker, 2018). This research applies findings presented in the literature review, which synthesised patterns found in different sources regarding authentic food. It also incorporates the characteristics of authenticity found in anthropology and tourism studies. These are all combined in the data analysis, using the Mission burrito as a case study to assess the viability of the characteristics that emerged in the literature review chapter.

### 3.7 Method

Methods are the practical techniques used in research (Silverman, 2018). This research utilises a reflexive thematic analysis method, which analyses literature pertaining to authenticity and creates basic codes, grouped categories, and overarching themes based upon the research data (Leary & Walker, 2018). In this context, a theme represents a pattern in how authenticity is characterised, which conveys meaningful information relating to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The reflexive approach incorporates the critical reflection of the researcher during

the data analysis process into a qualitative meta-synthesis methodology. This is achieved by routinely considering the effect of pre-existing assumptions and expectations upon the choices and actions made during the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2021), which bolsters the perspective of the critical inquiry paradigm that the research is situated by the researcher and shaped by society in general (Pham, 2018). Stemming from a constructivist epistemology and relativist ontology, there are multiple realities that are constantly shaping one another (Gray, 2018). This research also employs inductive reasoning, as it is only through the research that a theory of 'authentic cuisine' emerges. The research starts with a research question and then collects data to generate answers (Bryman, 2004). In this way, meanings, consistencies, and patterns emerge from the data, which characterise the traits of 'authentic cuisine' (Gray, 2018).

Inductive thematic analysis codes data without adhering to any preconceptions, thus employing a data-driven approach to create new theory. At the same time, it acknowledges how the researcher's own theoretical values and positions inform the research. Consequently, the theoretical framework is designed to align with the knowledge the research seeks, whilst also recognising the decisions contributing to the research plan (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The impetus for conducting this research was a realisation that although 'authenticity' is a universal and commonly used term for evaluating food, its exact definition is open to interpretation by the individual (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). By reflexively engaging with the data on authenticity, the researcher's subjective orientation to the research becomes a tool for harnessing the value of authenticity and interrogating its influence on the research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

A thematic analysis is akin to a map of the worldview of qualitative research. This includes the particular point in time of the research, the perspective of the researcher, and the specific positioning developed between the research and the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It contextualises the research through the "interpreting and reporting [of] *relevant* patterns of meaning across a dataset" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 258) without requiring complex and deep

theoretical engagement. This study did not begin with a hypothesis, thereby eliminating deductive thematic analysis as a method of research. Rather than testing predetermined qualities of authenticity against literary sources, the literature review determines the prevalent characteristics of 'authentic cuisine' through inductive thematic analysis (Bryman, 2004). Although this necessitates the restructuring of the data multiple times, it broadens the range of potential answers to the research question and allows for a deeper understanding of the findings.

In the literature review chapter, an inductive research approach revealed the prevailing characteristics of authenticity. These characteristics are then used as a template for analysing sources pertaining to the Mission burrito. The data chosen for analysis is narrowed down to books and grey literature from 2012 onward which discuss the invention of the Mission burrito in the Mission District of San Francisco. Focusing on restaurant production, the data analysis chapter traces the global popularity of the Mission burrito and the path towards its categorisation as authentic Mexican food. Subsequent readings analyse the worldview and differing perspectives of each source. This culminates in determining if there are enough characteristics in the Mission burrito that categorise it as authentic Mexican food.

### 3.8 Ethics

This study relied upon secondary data collection. This study did not collect primary data, and therefore did not require ethical approval. Regardless, in conducting research, it adhered to Te Tiriti o Waitangi's core principles of partnership, protection, and participation while also incorporating the values of Auckland University of Technology (AUT): pono (respect), tika (integrity), and aroha (compassion) (Auckland University of Technology, 2019).

Although this study does not focus on Māori cuisine, the ideologies of respecting cultural values are relevant in the study of other ethnic cuisines. Especially because the research framework paradigm is critical inquiry, it is important that the analyses are not based upon assumptions with racist underpinnings. Some, if not all, of the immigrant cuisines that are

analysed are part of marginalised communities. Therefore, the research employs cultural sensitivity and intelligence when studying different ethnicities and, in this way, it can ensure pono of the cuisines analysed.

### 3.9 Study Limitations & Further Recommendations

Within the parameters of this research, secondary data collection in the form of a reflexive thematic analysis (Fan et al., 2022) is the most appropriate method for testing the prevalent characteristics of authentic cuisine in the formation of the Mission burrito as authentic Mexican food. Primary data collection was time-prohibitive. A systematic review of all literature would also have required more time to analyse such a large amount of data. Additionally, the confusion surrounding authenticity precludes finding a direct answer to the research question. Rather, the research is focused on exploring the concept of authenticity and applying general characteristics to an analysis of the Mission burrito.

Authenticity is a prevalent theme in modern society. As such, it is not feasible to cover every subject pertaining to authenticity. This research focuses on the confusion surrounding authenticity, authenticity as a social construct in modern society, the quest for and assessment of authenticity, and the prevalent characteristics of authenticity. This provides a foundation for further exploration. Throughout history there has been a strong link between one's food preferences and socio-economic status. The modern diner identifies the characteristics of authentic food through seemingly empirical data. These markers, however, can be problematic because of the ways in which they reinforce cultural hegemony. Those with a higher social status have greater means to seek authenticity, and this can inadvertently perpetuate cultural elitism and hierarchy (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Further study could include how and why the quest for authenticity is problematic, as well as detailing what is problematic about each characteristic.

Furthermore, there is a pattern of Euro-American producers and chefs culturally appropriating ethnic cuisine and profiting from selling purportedly authentic food. Such is the

case of Steve Ells, the founder of popular chain restaurant, Chipotle. Although the research discovers themes of gentrification and cultural appropriation, the analysis does not delve into how and why it is problematic that Ells is a Caucasian, classically trained chef who turned to opening an ethnic Mexican restaurant when he could not fund opening an upscale restaurant. Further study could examine the societal implications of colonialism enduring through cultural appropriation.

The research could also be expanded geographically. The focus has been on ethnic cuisine served in settler societies, such as the U.S. Exploration could include immigrant ethnic cuisine in other countries, such as Chinese food in the Philippines (Fernandez, 2004), or the impact that trade has upon cuisine, such as the importation of Russian food to South Africa (Goncharov & Rau, 2018). The incorporation of new ingredients into cuisine, such as in the Columbian Exchange in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, could also be studied (Lin, 2015). Staged authenticity in food could also be explored in the same way that Disneyland has been analysed as a postmodernist expression of authentic contemporary culture (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999). This could include restaurants that exemplify rude service, such as Dick's Last Resort (n.d.), or uncommon tableaux, such as The Lock Up, a now-defunct prison-themed restaurant (Nagase, 2022). With the foundation of this research, there are numerous ways to explore authenticity in food.

### 3.10 Researcher's Positioning: Woman on a Mission

Ray's (2016) turn to cooking during graduate school resonates with my own experience of wanting to explore the physical labour of cooking after dedicating myself to a rigorous study of liberal arts, namely classical studies and psychology, as an undergraduate. Whereas Ray continued his career in academia while cooking on the side, I dove headfirst into the hospitality industry, first in the kitchen and then in culinary consulting. It is now, 10 years later, that I have returned to academia with the intention of "bringing together here the two habits of thinking and doing" (Ray, 2016, p. xv).

The Mission burrito is a specific touchpoint in my gastronomic memory. Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, I have consumed countless Mission burritos from myriad restaurants. As a child, my mother would make her own versions for my school lunches. What I simply called a burrito (no “Mission”) is a food that has fed me through adulthood. As with the research framework, the Mission burrito’s whole is greater than the sum of its individual, enticing parts. It is the striking balance of seasoned rice, flavourful meat, velvety beans, fresh guacamole, piquant salsas, melted queso, and rich crema, all wrapped in a supple tortilla and smooth foil casing that transcends any single ingredient.

In relocating to Aotearoa for AUT’s Master of Gastronomy programme, I have come to realise that the Mission burrito, ubiquitous to California, and increasingly to America, cannot be found everywhere. My own quest in Aotearoa for a Mission burrito that meets my cravings has led me on an existential quest to identify how authentic food is characterised. My ignorance of the origins of the burrito first became apparent in college when my roommate, Diana Rodriguez, came back to campus after a semester abroad in Mexico. Born to Mexican immigrants in Wichita Falls, Texas, she had grown up eating burritos. She expressed her shock when she arrived in Guanajato, central Mexico, and her favourite dish was nowhere to be found. Gastronomic ‘a-ha!’ moments like this throughout my life have led me on a journey to this Master of Gastronomy programme.

Finally, there is a growing recognition in North America of the First Nations that occupied modern-day Canada and the U.S. before European contact. Land acknowledgments are ever more common in communications, and they are firm reminders that Americans are not the first peoples to settle on this land. My curiosity surrounding the Mission burrito also stems from the understanding that I grew up just across the bay in Oakland, California, on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Muwekma Ohlone (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, n.d.), and I have an increasing interest in how occupation by many different cultures has shaped the gastronomy of the Bay

Area. Further, my ethnic background as a Chinese American has fostered an interest in the cultural hegemony of authentic food. Through this exploration, I hope to contribute to a decolonisation of gastronomy studies.

## Chapter 4: Background Information

*Note.* In aligning with the usage of gender-neutral pronouns, in this dissertation the term ‘Latine’ is used to describe people of Latin American heritage. ‘Latinx’ was present first in American English as a gender-inclusive term (Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). However, there is growing evidence that using -e as a suffix has eclipsed the -x in both written and spoken gender-inclusive language (Slemp, 2020). Additionally, it is argued that the usage of -x reflects a form of linguistic imperialism that American English has inflicted on Spanish and the broader hegemony that the U.S. has over Latin America, as it is rarely used in Spanish-speaking countries (Guerra & Orbea, 2015). As is common when surveying a large demographic, different Latin Americans self-identify with differing terms (LATV Media, 2021), but ‘Latine’ is an increasingly popular self-described term (Garcia, 2022), and therefore is employed in this dissertation.

### 4.1 Introduction

There is debate about whether regional variations in Mexican food in the U.S. are considered part of Mexican cuisine, rather than Mexican-American or American cuisine. Such is the case with Tex-Mex and Cal-Mex cuisines, which comprise ingredients and dishes that have been invented or popularised in the states of Texas and California, respectively. Questions are also asked as to whether the burrito, which is popular throughout American states, is inauthentic Mexican food (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). Studying the formation of Mexico and its culture can bring clarity to the confusion surrounding what comprises Mexican cuisine and how the burrito fits into its narrative.

### 4.2 Mexican Cuisine

The culture of modern-day Mexico and, by extension, Mexican cuisine, is varied and complex. It is comprised of numerous indigenous cultures, which have different histories, customs, languages, and identities. Having originally crossed the Bering Strait 10,000 to 20,000

years ago, humans settled throughout the Americas (Poole, 1951). For almost 3,000 years prior to Spanish contact, complex civilisations rose and fell. The densest populations were in Mesoamerica, which encompassed central and southern Mexico, Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Hassig, 2006). Historically, cultures were largely delineated by various geographical divisions, such as tropical rainforests, plateaux, deserts, mountain ranges, and oceans. This influenced the varieties of indigenous flora and fauna, which gave rise to distinct regional cuisines. Even the preparation and usage of more ubiquitous staple ingredients, such as tomatoes, beans, chillies, and corn, varied widely throughout Mesoamerica (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). These culinary variations evolved for centuries before the Spanish conquest of the Americas that began in 1492, and persisted during Spanish rule for the next few centuries whilst also integrating with Spanish cuisine (Hassig, 2006).

Christopher Columbus, an Italian navigator sponsored by Spain, was the first European explorer to reach Mesoamerica, and he found that the biodiversity was different from that of Europe and Asia, also known as the Old World (Poole, 1951). On subsequent voyages he brought seeds and animal back and forth between the Old and New World, in what is known as the Columbian Exchange. The effects of the Columbian Exchange were devastating to indigenous populations in the New World. Diseases from the Old World weakened the population, and Europeans brought over 12 million Africans that they had enslaved in order to colonise the New World with plantations (Nunn & Qian, 2010). Largely overseen by the Spanish conquistador, Hernando Cortés, by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there was a comprehensive integration of Old World plants and animals into the New World (Poole, 1951).

Through the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries this region became New Spain and the capital, Mexico City, became the wealthiest city in the Spanish empire (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). Mexico City was originally the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, and under Aztec rule it already had a diverse population of indigenous cultures. The Aztecs had conquered various parts of Mesoamerica

before Spanish colonisation, and more than 60,000 people interacted in Tenochtitlán markets, integrating a wide range of food from indigenous cuisines (Arellano, 2012). Under Spanish rule, Mexico City became an even more global city, an epicentre of Mesoamerica where myriad cuisines converged (Mann, 2011). In addition to Spanish influence, other cultures spanning from East Asia to Africa in the Spanish colonial empire also forcibly integrated with indigenous societies (Adams, 2004).

This mixing of cultures, also known as *mestizaje* culture, gave rise to a fusion cuisine of Spanish and indigenous foods (Pilcher, 2016). Wheat, rice, and European domesticated animals such as cattle, pigs, sheep, and goats were the foundational foreign foods brought to the New World (Arellano, 2012). With the introduction of these livestock also came cheese and dairy products (Poole, 1951). Other foods included bananas, cilantro, cloves, coffee, garlic, limes, nutmeg, onions, parsley, and sugar (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). The pre-Hispanic populations, however, were not homogeneously referred to as “Mexicans”; rather, this was a categorisation that occurred much later, after Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821 (Pilcher, 2017). In this way, the *mestizaje* culture of indigenous and Spanish, along with *mestizaje* cuisine, was a foundation of Mexican identity from its inception as a country (Adams, 2004; Poole, 1951; Wheaton & Carroll, 2017).

Cultures in northern Mexico were exposed to more Spanish and *mestizaje* influence both because the area was less densely populated than central and southern Mexico and also because the land was more suitable for Old World agriculture, such as wheat and livestock production (Poole, 1951). This territory included modern-day Mexico and most of the modern-day American southwest: California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. It was only when the Mexican–American War ended in 1848 with the purchase of these states by the U.S. that this territory was no longer considered Mexican (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023). What had come to be known as the *norteño*, or northern, region of Mexico was now divided into the

borderlands (Pilcher, 2001). Today, the states of Baja California, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Sonora, and Tamaulipas comprise the Mexican side of the border, while California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas line the U.S. side of the border (Pick et al., 2001). With the new establishment of the U.S.-Mexico border came a formation of national cuisines with “new boundaries and ideals of authenticity” (Pilcher, 2017, p. 132). Generally, only food from states south of the border was accepted as authentically Mexican, whereas cultural provinces in the U.S. were distinguished as having Mexican-American food. The relatively recent U.S.-Mexican border, however, does not negate centuries of mestizaje cuisine, and dishes in different regions of the borderlands continue to resemble one another more closely than the dishes of the northern Mexico states resemble those of central and southern Mexico (Pilcher, 2001).

### 4.3 The Burrito

As Mexican and Mexican-American cuisines continued to form, different regional dishes became associated with one country or another. The evolution of national cuisines led to the disappearance of burritos in Mexico, while in the U.S. they became exclusively linked to wheat flour tortillas. The burrito is a peculiarity because, although arguably it is comprised of Mexican ingredients and prepared with Mexican techniques, it is a dish that is more familiar internationally than within Mexico (Pilcher, 2017). Additionally, much of the information surrounding its origins and consumption within Mexican culture is conflicting. One origin story is that of gold miners in Sonora, who travelled into the mines with burros, or donkeys, and nicknaming their portable lunch after them – burritos, or little donkeys (Arellano, 2012; Florestall, 2008). This is consistent with a common motif in Spanish colonial culture of donkeys carrying food (Pilcher, 2017).

Examining the word itself, there is no etymological origin to ‘burrito’. The first known culinary reference is found in *Diccionario de Mejicanismos* [*Dictionary of Mexicanisms*] (1895) by Feliz Ramos – a collection of words and definitions found in Mexican Spanish, as distinct from

other Spanish-speaking countries. Arellano (2012) cites Ramos as stating the burrito comes from the southwestern state of Guerrero. Pilcher (2017), however, claims Ramos traced the term to central Mexican state Guanajuato, and translates the description of a burrito to English as being a “rolled tortilla with meat or other thing inside, which in Yucatán is called cosito, and in Cuernavaca and Mexico [City], taco” (Pilcher, 2017, p. 47).

Furthermore, there is debate about what ingredients comprise a burrito. Pilcher (2017) concludes that the absence of a description of whether the tortilla is corn or flour in Ramos’s dictionary implies that it is made of corn. Yet another source, a book written by Ana Bégúe de Packman about historical California cookery, mentions both corn and flour tortillas which can be filled with beans and cheese or leftover stew (Pilcher, 2001). Although it is generally agreed that flour tortillas are popular in the borderlands, it is also debated whether they originated as a flour version of corn tortillas or if they are a variant of Old World flatbreads, such as pita or matzo, that were reinterpreted in the New World (Arellano, 2012; Pilcher, 2017).

What can be tracked, however, is that until recently the burrito was primarily eaten by the working class. Perhaps contributing to the ubiquity of flour tortillas today is the portability and affordability of a flour-wrapped burrito (Arellano, 2012). From the 1940s-1960s, Mexican farmhands legally entered the U.S. through an agreement made with Mexico. Called *braceros*, these migrant workers were completely dependent upon the government and the farmers not only for their wages but also for housing, food, and clothing. Burritos were an easy and cheap lunch that could be made ahead of time and distributed in the morning (Pilcher, 2017). The *braceros* took them into the fields where the burritos would bake in their foil wraps, resulting in a hot lunch. There are conflicting reports of whether or not the *braceros* actually enjoyed these burritos. Unsurprisingly, farmers assumed the *braceros* were grateful for the generous housing and food they provided, whilst many *braceros* found the flour tortilla unfamiliar at best, the meagre portions objects of scorn, and the burritos wholly disgusting (Arellano, 2012).

Meanwhile, the post-World War II growth in consumerism and advancements in food processing led to expansion in the food industry. Additionally, Mexican-Americans emerged as an empowered group with increased civil rights and, by extension, a growing disposable income for culinary tourism. This contributed to the development of Mexican and Mexican-American food in formal restaurants, or by street vendors and taco trucks (Pilcher, 2017). In particular, burritos were a staple of food trucks in Los Angeles, California. Their popularity caught the attention of Glen Bell, who included burritos in the original 1962 menu of his fast-food restaurant, Taco Bell. Recipes were published in the *Los Angeles Times* by 1964, and burritos spread throughout restaurants in Southern California (Arellano, 2012).

In Mexican restaurants and taco trucks, the burrito consisted of beans, rice, and a meat with optional queso (cheese), crema (sour cream), or guacamole (avocado sauce). Restaurants of other cuisines created fusion burritos with fillings ranging from pastrami and cheddar cheese to hot dogs and chili. Burrito innovation, however, was not limited to Los Angeles. Up north in the Mission District of San Francisco, California, another variant emerged which would become known as the Mission burrito (Arellano, 2012).

#### 4.4 The Mission District

The original inhabitants of the area now known as San Francisco were the indigenous Yelamu tribe of the Ohlone people (Gomez, 2023). With the arrival of Spanish Catholic missionaries in California, indigenous tribes were converted to Christianity and forcibly relocated to 21 mission settlements spreading from San Diego, California, in the south, to Sonoma, California, in the north (Blakley & Barnette, 1985). The mission established in the Yelamu region was the Misión San Francisco de Asís, from which the city receives its modern-day name (Gomez, 2023). Also nicknamed “Mission Dolores” after the nearby creek Arroyo de Nuestra Señora de los Dolores (Our Lady of Sorrows), the settlement was founded in June 1776.

In the decade that followed, the Spanish missionaries worked to convert over 1,000 Ohlone 'neophytes' working and living in Mission Dolores to allow them to become Spanish citizens. In 1790, the Franciscan friars used the neophytes as slave labour to build a permanent mission building, which is still standing today as San Francisco's oldest building (Nolte, 2004). Subsequently, the surrounding neighbourhood became known as the Mission District, or The Mission (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007). Land around Mission Dolores was granted to the Franciscan missionaries for agriculture which, similar to the rest of the borderlands, included grain and cattle production (Smythe, 1908).

Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821 and subsequently took control of California and its missions (Hackel, 1997). Under Mexican jurisdiction the missions were secularised and the neophytes freed – the land grants, called ranchos, were taken from the Franciscans and given to Mexican settlers and Spanish soldiers. These Hispanic Californians became known as the Californios. Initially, the freed neophytes were also given ranchos, but they were exploited and manipulated by the Californios, and ultimately did not retain much land (Janin & Carlson, 2017). The area around Mission Dolores became primarily occupied by a close-knit society of Californios: Mexican gentry, older Spanish soldiers, and ranching families with First Peoples and African ancestry (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007).

At the beginning of the Mexican–American War in 1846, the Californios peacefully surrendered to the U.S., and the area was renamed San Francisco. Soon after the war ended in 1848, the Gold Rush transformed San Francisco into a booming mercantile city. To accommodate the rapid expansion, the zoning of land consisted of narrow plots 25-30 feet (7.62-9.14 metres) wide and 122.5 feet (37.34 metres) long, which would become the basis for future architecture in The Mission (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007). People from all across the world converged in California to capitalise on the Gold Rush: from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, Mexico, Chile, Peru, and most of Europe; Polynesians and Filipinos from Hawaii;

and Americans from Oregon and the East Coast (Churchill, 2001). Irish working-class immigrants, in particular, settled in the Mission District and revitalised the Catholic communities by establishing new parishes to join the old Mission Dolores (Garofoli & Said, 2014). This demographic shifted to German immigrants in the late 1800s, though the population was still predominately working-class (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007).

The large family-oriented demographic of the Mission District also attracted civic, social, and religious institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and convents. These intermingled with commercial operations, such as tanneries, candle and soap factories, a dairy, a brewery, and a waterworks company (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007). The 1906 San Francisco earthquake resulted in massive fires throughout the city; municipal fire hydrants were damaged due to the severe quake and ceased to dispense water. The Mission District, however, was miraculously saved by a single fire hydrant that still pumped water, owned by the waterworks company (French, 2023). Refugee sites around The Mission were set up for San Francisco residents who had lost their homes, and public relief efforts were largely spearheaded by the working-class immigrant population of The Mission (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007).

The parts of the Mission District that did burn down were rebuilt to be largely the same, and The Mission became the most influential and largest working-class neighbourhood within San Francisco. European immigrants continued to settle there until the end of World War II, when post-war economic prosperity gave them the financial means to move into the suburbs (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007). However, redlining, or racial discrimination in the housing industry, prevented minorities from relocating (Jackson, 2021). The vacancies in The Mission ushered in a new demographic of Hispanic immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s (Miño-Bucheli, 2022). In addition to Mexicans, Chileans, and Peruvians who had immigrated earlier, Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, Cubans, Bolivians, and Guatemalans came to The Mission, which

became known as a barrio, or a neighbourhood predominantly populated by Latin American, Spanish-speaking peoples. Collectively regarded as Latines or Hispanics, they banded together to prevent urban redevelopment from displacing their homes and businesses in the 1970s, and Latin culture continued to thrive (“The Mission: A Barrio of Many Colors,” 1994).

Since the 1980s, The Mission has fought gentrification, a socio-economic shift in demographics in which affluent businesses and residents displace minority and working-class communities through rapid development (Garofoli & Said, 2014; The National Geographic Society, 2023). A wave of young, predominantly Caucasian professionals began moving into the Mission District, attracted to the vibrant community and cheap rent. This has included workers in San Francisco’s booming tech industry as well as affluent members of the queer community, who have shifted from the nearby Castro District (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007). The intermingling of all these demographics has shaped the Mission District’s unique culture within which the Mission-style burrito was invented and disseminated across the world.

# Chapter 5. Data Analysis

## 5.1 Introduction

In the literature review chapter, eight characteristics of authentic food emerged. The data analysis chapter uses the Mission burrito as a case study to test these characteristics and analyses whether the Mission burrito has markers of authentic Mexican food. There is dispute about where and when the burrito was invented, but there is a general consensus that the Mission burrito, which is known for its large size and foil wrapping, was invented in the Mission District of San Francisco. Therefore, there are more touchpoints for analysis than if the research were to analyse the burrito in general.

Some of the examples discovered in the literature review chapter concern food that was invented in its home country, such as Jiro Ono's sushi restaurant in Japan. Other examples explore how immigrants bring dishes invented in the home country where they were born to a host country where they now reside, such as Eddie Huang's Taiwanese bao restaurant in the U.S. It is by analysing these models that the eight characteristics of authentic food emerged. There were no examples of food invented by immigrants in a new host country. The Mission burrito was chosen as a case study because it fits into this last category. It was invented in the U.S., specifically the Mission District of San Francisco, California, by Mexican immigrants. By applying the eight characteristics of authenticity to the invention and dissemination of the Mission burrito, the research is testing the validity of the inductive reasoning used in the literature review chapter.

### 5.1.1 Analysis Procedures

The process for analysing the data is adapted from Braun and Clarke’s (2021) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. This is presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1. Thematic Analysis Procedures**

| PROCEDURE STEP                           | PROCESS  |
|--|--|
| Familiarised oneself with data           | Imported all literature into NVivo software. Read through and kept any literature with the key word “Mission”, as it pertains to the Mission burrito.  |
| Generated initial themes                 | Looked at the eight characteristics of authenticity that emerged in the literature review chapter. These became the main themes. Created a preliminary set of categories based upon the literature review.                             |
| Searched for additional themes and codes | Read through all of the literature, coding to existing themes and creating new themes where necessary. This also included negative examples of each theme and an ‘unsure’ category for further review.                                 |
| Reviewed themes                          | Contemplated how well or not the literature fitted into the eight original themes and the research question. Considered how the literature review chapter section “2.6 Assessment of Authenticity” might interact with themes.         |
| Defined and named themes                 | Continued to iterate and restructure codes, categories, and themes until the patterns of thematic analysis were coherent. Reorganised the order of characteristics for clarity.  |
| Produced report                          | Detailed the findings with visuals, such as tables and images to enhance the report. Organised the report according to the eight characteristics of authenticity, with their respective categories and themes, citing relevant quotes. |

### 5.1.2 Literary Sources

In taking an inductive approach, the sources were not sought out specifically based upon the term 'authenticity'. Rather, the search query term was 'Mission burrito'. These sources were chosen because they describe in-depth the Mission burrito or its components:

#### **"What took the burrito so long to become popular?" (2012)**

A book chapter in *Taco USA: How Mexican food conquered America* by Gustavo Arellano (2012).

Arellano's (2012) book traces the history of Mexican food in the U.S., contextualising it with the formation of Mexican cuisine and Mexico as a country. The chapter on burritos discusses different regional varieties as well as how it has become a dish beloved by Americans (Arellano, 2012).

#### **"America's best burrito" aka the "Burrito Bracket" (2014m)**

A multi-part article from American statistical analysis publication *FiveThirtyEight* by Anna Maria Barry-Jester with contributions from Nate Silver, Gustavo Arellano, Jeffrey Pilcher, David Chang, and Bill Addison.

In 2014, *FiveThirtyEight* embarked upon a search for America's best burrito (Barry-Jester, 2014m). This was decided through a sports-style elimination bracket of 64 burrito-selling establishments, which were found on Yelp, an American business review site. Rather than attempt to define what a burrito is, *FiveThirtyEight* crowdsourced what reviewers and food establishments considered to be burritos. The writers looked at 67,391 businesses that contained at least one review with the word "burrito" or "burritos" and narrowed it down based upon a complex weighted calculation of the review ratings (Silver, 2014).

In their archives, *FiveThirtyEight* tagged 41 articles under "Burrito Bracket", 15 of which the research coded. The research sorted these into 'summary', 'review', and 'random' articles. The summary articles delved into the statistical and ranking process, historical background of the burrito, and debates about whether it is a Mexican dish. The review articles were groups of up to four restaurant reviews, sometimes with restaurant owner interviews, including the finalists and

ultimate winner of the bracket. The random articles indirectly pertained to the Burrito Bracket, but with a different subject matter as the focus. All of the summary articles were coded, but not all restaurant reviews. Only restaurant reviews for restaurants in the Mission District of San Francisco or burritos described explicitly as “Mission-style” located outside of The Mission were coded. None of the random articles were coded.

**“The story of La Taqueria’s remastered Mission-style burrito” (2015)**

An article from American gastronomic digital media publication, *Eater* by Hillary Dixler Canavan (2015).

As part of *Eater’s* collection “The United States of Mexican food” (Krupnick, 2019), Canavan (2015) interviews Miguel Jara, owner of La Taqueria restaurant in the Mission District of San Francisco. La Taqueria incidentally was the winner of *FiveThirtyEight’s* burrito bracket, and this article delves into the history of the restaurant. It also details each component of La Taqueria’s renown burrito, which is further illustrated by several photos (Canavan, 2015).

**“The story of the Mission burrito, piled high and rolled tight” (2016)**

An article from American food and entertaining magazine *Bon Appétit* by John Birdsall (2016).

Birdsall (2016) chronicles the history of the Mission District and the creation of the Mission burrito. He discusses the shifting demographics of this neighbourhood and how gentrification has affected burrito restaurants both within The Mission and across America. Gustavo Arellano, author of many of the other sources that this research has analysed, is also interviewed (Birdsall, 2016).

**“There is only one burrito in America now, and that burrito, unfortunately, is Chipotle” (2019)**

An article from *Eater* by Gustavo Arellano (2019).

Also part of *Eater’s* collection “The United States of Mexican food” (Krupnick, 2019), Arellano’s (2019) article focuses on America’s second most popular burrito fast-food chain, Chipotle Mexican Grill (Taco Bell reigns supreme). It recounts the history of Chipotle and the

backstory of its founder, Steve Eells, and discusses the impact that Chipotle has had on Mexican food in the U.S. There is also an interview with a representative of Chipotle, which delves into its potential appropriation of Mexican culture (Arellano, 2019).

**“What is a Mission-style burrito? Maybe...a myth” (2023)**

An article from San Francisco-based public media company *KQED* by Cesar Saldaña (2023).

*KQED* hosts a podcast called *Bay Curious*, in which the subject matter is determined by listener questions (“Bay Curious,” 2023). Saldaña summarises an episode dedicated to the Mission burrito, answering the questions “Were burritos invented in San Francisco?” and “What exactly is a ‘Mission-style’ burrito?” (Saldaña, 2023, para. 3). The article summarises interviews from restaurateurs and residents of the Mission District. In addition to the history of the Mission burrito, it also discusses the socio-political implications of calling it a Mission burrito, especially since within the Mission District it is simply referred to as a burrito. The article also includes a full transcript of the podcast, which is included in the research’s coding (Saldaña, 2023).

5.1.3 Themes & Coding

The six literary sources were analysed and coded according to the eight characteristics of authenticity from the literature review chapter, as summarised in Table 2, below. A further breakdown of the codes can be found in Appendix A.

**Table 2. Eight Characteristics of Authenticity**

| THEME               | DESCRIPTION  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Storytelling</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Storytelling is the underlying theme of all subsequent characteristics, as it conveys authenticity through history, nostalgia, and memory.</li> <li>• Origin stories convey culinary heritage and establish gastronomic traditions.</li> <li>• Visual aids, as forms of staged authenticity, can strengthen the credibility of storytelling.</li> </ul> |

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <p><b>Simplicity</b></p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplicity implies an honesty and effortlessness that is equated with higher quality and tastier food, and is often characterised as perfect and pure.</li> <li>• Through staged authenticity, simplicity is an illusion for the diner in which authentic food is a departure from the complex industrialised food system: a representation of a simpler time and place.</li> <li>• Simplicity can be conveyed through small-scale production, the aesthetics of plating and design, uncomplicated recipes, or the use of few ingredients.</li> <li>• The presence of simplicity can amplify other characteristics of authenticity, such as terroir, historical tradition, or ethnic connection.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Terroir</b></p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The terroir, or taste of place and time, is an amalgamation of cultural tradition, geographical factors, place, and people as expressed through food and drink.</li> <li>• Terroir is often used as an indicator of originality and purity.</li> <li>• Modern interpretations of terroir recognise the calibration occurring in emergent authenticity, and acknowledge the impact of consumer engagement.</li> <li>• Through social media and restaurant reviews, consumers can have an influential role in cultivating terroir.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Historical Tradition</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through historical tradition, a set of standards and conventions is established that creates continuity from a food's inception through to the present.</li> <li>• In contrast to a temporary food fad, historical tradition anchors a food as timelessly appropriate.</li> <li>• Sometimes, historically authentic food is demarcated as static and unmodified for an external palate, but commoditisation can be an integral component of authentic food.</li> <li>• Historical tradition can be the foundation for innovation, particularly for immigrant cultures in a host country.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Ethnic Connection</b></p>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to historical tradition and geographic specificity, ethnic connection is a way of establishing authentic food through cultural practices.</li> <li>• An ethnic connection can imply a simpler time, before the homogenisation of a modern globalised world.</li> <li>• Staged authenticity is often present in the portrayal of ethnic connection.</li> <li>• Consumers may seek out cues with regard to ethnic cuisine that do not directly pertain to the food, such as the heritage of the proprietors and diners, or the décor and ambiance of the restaurant.</li> </ul>   |

**Table 2 (continued)**

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <p><b>Personal Connection</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal connection establishes an artistic lineage traceable to the original production, in contrast to the opaque modern industrialised food system, and identifies not only the producer but also the producer’s intent.</li> <li>• Personal connection can be expressed through individual artistic creativity, using ethnic or historical tradition as a foundation for innovation.</li> <li>• Personal connection also can be established through culinary artistry as a continuation of family tradition.</li> <li>• Emergent authenticity is present in personal connection, as the producer is evolving culinary tradition and calibrating what is considered authentic.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Nostalgia</b></p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes the quest for authentic food is a result of sentimental yearning for the past, a synaesthesia of emotions and memories that invokes comfort and social connectedness.</li> <li>• Nostalgia describes when the past is remembered within one’s own personal history, such as the memory of a home-cooked meal.</li> <li>• Imagined taste occurs when the storytelling of the food is a sufficient proxy for a personal memory, thereby freeing it from the constraints of a perfect replication while still satisfying a yearning for the past.</li> <li>• Nostalgia and imagined taste contribute to the calibration process that occurs in emergent authenticity, as they involve a person’s belief about how a food should taste based their memories and desires instead of the taste of the actual food.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Aficionado Identity</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whereas personal connection concerns the relationship between producer and product, aficionado identity identifies the relationship between consumer and product.</li> <li>• In consuming the food, the diner experiences an authentic connection, thereby authenticating the food, even if it is not considered authentic by the previous metrics.</li> <li>• The diner also authenticates themselves as an authority on the food through their authentic experience.</li> <li>• Aficionado identity can interplay with nostalgia and imagined taste in shaping how a food is authenticated, thereby contributing to the process of emergent authenticity.</li> </ul>  |

## 5.2 Thematic Analysis

*Note.* In order to remain neutral on the analysis of the Mission burrito, this dissertation employs the term ‘Restaurant Serving Mission Burritos’ (RSMB) instead of the Mexican-based term ‘taqueria’ to describe burrito shops.

### 5.2.1 Storytelling

It is through storytelling that other characteristics of authenticity become credible. This can be conveyed through the explicit telling of a story audibly or in writing. It can also be expressed visually through staged authenticity. Analysing stories surrounding the Mission burrito not only establishes a time and place for the creation of the food, but also contextualises the moment with cultural influences.

#### Stories

Within the Mission District, there are detailed (and conflicting) accounts of how the Mission burrito was invented. According to Arellano (2012) the Mission burrito’s story began on September 26, 1961 on the second day of operation for grocery store, El Faro. At lunchtime, firefighters stationed around the corner came seeking sandwiches. Although owner Febronio Ontiveros did not have any sandwiches, hoping to retain customers in his first week of business, he asked them to return the following day. Finding that a single flour tortilla would not create a satisfying enough burrito, he doubled the tortillas for a heartier meal. Upon their arrival, he presented them with a burrito which became immediately popular (Arellano, 2012).

Other sources attribute Micaela Duran, co-founder of Taqueria La Cumbre with husband Raul Duran, as the inventor eight years later, on September 28, 1969 (Birdsall, 2016). In particular, two different taqueria owners in the Mission District, Miguel Jara of La Taqueria and Francisco Hernandez of El Metate, grew up around Duran, who they affectionately called Miki.

Duran's story is similar to Ontiveros's in that she also combined two flour tortillas to create a bigger burrito for the "extra hungry" firefighters (Saldaña, 2023, para. 94).

In addition to the Mission burrito's origin story, the origin stories of a few RSMBs are told. Hailing from the Mission District are La Taqueria, which was founded in 1973 by Jara (Canavan, 2015) and Taqueria Cancún founded in 1993 by Gerardo Rico and Pedro Grande (Barry-Jester, 2014). Before opening Taqueria Cancún, Rico and Grande worked just a few blocks away at El Farolito (no relation to El Faro), whereas Jara attributes his knowledge of Mexican cuisine to his family and his trips to Mexico (Barry-Jester, 2014; Canavan, 2015).

Other RSMB origin stories frequently associated with the Mission burrito include the tales of Denver, Colorado-based chain restaurants Chipotle Mexican Grill and Qdoba Mexican Grill founded by Steve Ells in 1993 and Tony Miller in 1995, respectively (Arellano, 2012, 2019; Saldaña, 2023). Ells, originally from Denver, had moved to San Francisco to train under acclaimed chef Jeremiah Towers after graduating from the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Observing the long lines and lucrative sales at RSMBs, and eating many Mission burritos himself, he abandoned his original dream of opening an upscale restaurant and instead moved back home to open Chipotle. Miller, an investment banker, first tasted a Mission burrito at Chipotle in Denver and was also compelled by a potentially profitable business opportunity. Since Ells rejected his proposal for a partnership, Miller launched Qdoba (Arellano, 2012).

Stories are not limited to just origin or creation legends. Public recognition and accolades can also strengthen the perceived authenticity of a food. Taqueria Cancún is described as an RSMB with "a large, loyal following [that] has received its share of accolades over the years" (Barry-Jester, 2014i, para. 13) and El Farolito is described as "the legendary San Francisco taqueria" (Munguia, 2014, para. 20). Sometimes the story is negative, as in the case of Chipotle, whose burrito is described as "never my favorite burrito. It's flavors are pleasant, but ... I hear 'Chipotle' and I think, 'cultural-appropriating pendejo'" (Arellano, 2019, para. 65).

## Visual Aids

Visual aids can enhance storytelling in literature as well as contribute to staged authenticity at an RSMB. Almost all of the literature uses visual aids to supplement their stories. Though this is mostly in the form of photography, there are also some illustrations and graphs. These visual aids enhance the writing by offering clarity and vivid depictions that might be hard to describe with words. For example, Canavan (2015) explains the step-by-step process of cooking and assembling the Mission burrito at La Taqueria, but it is the mouth-watering photography that takes centre stage.

RSMBs also use visual aids for storytelling. At El Faro, “photos of celebrities ring the wall” which helps distinguish it from the hundreds of other taquerias in The Mission, but “the most distinctive part of the restaurant is a tiled mural. ... It’s a city-wide party. A city celebrates” (Arellano, 2012, p. 140). The many forms of staged authenticity present in the subsequent analysis reinforce the impact of visual aids. Whether it is the RSMBs attracting customers or the authors attracting readers, the use of imagery can profoundly influence how other characteristics of authenticity are perceived.



**Figure 1. El Faro’s Colourful City Mural**

*Note.* The restaurant décor of El Faro tells a story. From *Flickr* by W. Gobetz, 2012 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/6796434102/>). CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0.

## Discussion

Storytelling is the backdrop upon which all other characteristics of authenticity are placed. It is in how the other characteristics interact with one another that the storytelling is enriched, therefore establishing credibility. Storytelling can laud simplicity, implying that it represents authentic food. Ethnic connection, historical tradition, and terroir can all converge in a story. This can then coalesce into an individual's personal connection, which might further be influenced by nostalgia or aficionado identity.

By virtue of stories existing at all, it could be argued that the Mission burrito is authenticated as an original dish through storytelling. Without these stories, there would be nothing to research. Additionally, this research was aided by the images in articles that did not explicitly write descriptions of the plating style, restaurant décor, ethnicity of staff and diners, or other aspects of staged authenticity, but included photos full of these clues. Subsequently, images are incorporated throughout this data analysis chapter to enhance the storytelling of this research.

### 5.2.2 Simplicity

The notion of simplicity implies an effortlessness and honesty in food production that is associated with higher quality, tastier food. Often equated with perfection and purity, simplicity relies upon staged authenticity to invoke a simpler place and time. Isolating aspects of the Mission burrito that are perceived as simple lays the foundation for subsequent characteristics of terroir, historical tradition, and ethnic connection to be further contextualised. This allows for a deeper analysis of how multiple characteristics can bolster one another.

## Presentation & Ambiance

The Mission burrito is often associated with simplicity in its preparation and presentation. An exemplary Mission burrito has a “depth of personality and flavor, and a knowing simplicity” (Barry-Jester, 2014j, para. 6). Jara's recipes for La Taqueria, which are “borrowed from his mother

and from several educational trips to Mexico” are also described as “exceedingly simple. The devil is in the execution” (Canavan, 2015, para. 4). Likewise, representations of the Mission burrito are exalted as having “technical perfection” (Barry-Jester, 2014h, para. 22) and demonstrate how “a few basic ingredients can become perfected–unpolished, but perfected” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 15).

Similarly, simplicity can be implied in restaurant ambiance or plating. Described in a favourable or matter-of-fact way, seating at the more highly rated RSMBs consists of “uncomfortable, yellow-and-orange benches” (Arellano, 2012, p. 140) and picnic tables (Barry-Jester, 2014i). Additionally, the most common style of plating in plastic baskets or plates “with chips on the side and salsa in a ramekin” (Arellano, 2012, p. 140) is inferred to be simple. The service is also described as unfussy:

Our order came out balanced five baskets high on the forearms of one of the workers. None of the burritos was labeled, so we all ate a few bites, then swapped our plates around until we had our requested dish. (Barry-Jester, 2014i, para. 19)

These cues contribute to the staged authenticity of RSMBs, expanding the ways in which diners can assess the authenticity of the Mission burrito.



**Figure 2. Food at La Taqueria**

*Note.* Many RSMBs serve their Mission burritos in plastic basics, exemplifying simplicity. From *Flickr* by jm3, 2007 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jm3/359036546/>). CC-BY-SA 2.0.

## Resistance to Trends vs Mass-Production

As compared to the virtues associated with simplicity, food that is characterised as trendy or mass-produced generally implies a lack of authenticity (Johnston & Baumann, 2015). Arellano criticises Chipotle for taking “a known commodity among Mexicans that suddenly turned trendy in the hands of white Americans, for white Americans” (Arellano, 2019, para. 30). It is even speculated that these versions of Mission burritos are popular *because* they are untrendy, which reinforces the impact of simplicity:

Maybe [the Mission burrito at El Castillito] survived, with original Mission soul intact, by building enough of a wall to obscure it from the tourists, the techies, and the condo buyers. That’s some irony: The most authentic Mission burrito is also the most obscure. Long may it roll. (Birdsall, 2016, para. 31)

This commentary on cultural appropriation is in contrast to RSMBs, such as La Taqueria, which have “enduring popularity” (Canavan, 2015, para. 3) despite the high concentration of RSMBs in the Mission District.

Similar to trendy Mission burritos, descriptions of mass-produced Mission burritos appear to lack connections to other characteristics of authenticity. Chipotle, which as of 2019 had 2,500 restaurant locations, advertised themselves with a custom-built float in a New Year’s Day parade that is typically booked with corporations spending upwards of US\$300,000 (NZ\$509,251) (Arellano, 2012; Pasadena Tournament of Roses, n.d.). As the second-largest Mexican restaurant group in the U.S., they are described as “just any other [New York Stock Exchange]-listed behemoth” (Arellano, 2019, para. 7), implying that they have lost their association with Mexican cuisine. Qdoba is described as “expanding almost as rapidly” (Arellano, 2012, p. 151) as Chipotle in its earlier years. When combining this swift growth with the lack of Mexican culture, as detailed in the origin stories, there appears to be a perception that mass-produced Mission burritos are not authentic Mexican cuisine.

## Discussion

Simplicity can be found in the preparation and presentation of the Mission burrito. The restaurant ambiance can also convey simplicity. By contrast, Mission burritos perceived as trendy or mass-produced suggest weak connections to other characteristics, such as ethnic connection, historical tradition, or terroir. These examples display the wide range in the interpretation of simplicity, and show how simplicity can amplify or diminish other characteristics of authenticity.

### 5.2.3 Terroir

The terroir, or taste of place and time, is an amalgamation of geographical factors, cultural tradition, people, and place as expressed through cuisine. Analysing characteristics of the Mission burrito through a geographical perspective can determine if the features are original and unique to the Mission District or if they are inherent to all burritos. Through the process of emergent authenticity, diners and social media reviewers can also influence how the terroir of the Mission burrito is authenticated.

## Geography of the Mission District

Since the U.S. side of the borderlands, including San Francisco, California, was previously part of Mexico, there is still a strong geographical connection to Mexican cuisine (Pilcher, 2001). And, even though the Mission burrito was not invented until the U.S. took control of San Francisco, because it was previously part of Mexico, it could be reasoned that food created by Mexicans in San Francisco is included in Mexican cuisine (Pilcher, 2016). Yet, even though it is described as “a thing so fused to California’s relationship with Mexico its evolution is nearly impossible to chart”, the Mission burrito has deviated enough from the burritos eaten by Sonoran gold miners that it is “specific to San Francisco, and a thousand miles of mutation separate these from the ones in Sonora” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 10). This indicates that even if it has a direct connection to Mexican cuisine, the Mission burrito has its own unique terroir formed by the Mission District of San Francisco.

Notably, although flour tortillas are prevalent throughout other parts of California and the borderlands, the extra-large flour tortilla was invented in the Mission District, and is ubiquitous to Mission burritos (Arellano, 2012). Ontiveros, one of the purported inventors of the Mission burrito, is described as evolving beyond doubling up two tortillas and sourcing a custom-made one that was “much larger than what was generally available at supermarkets at the time” (Arellano, 2012, p. 145). Jara of La Taqueria has carried on the tradition of custom-made tortillas by working with a local tortilleria, La Colonial, in San Jose, just a few cities over from San Francisco. As particular as Goldilocks, Jara found that a 14-inch (35.56 cm) tortilla was too big, but a 12-inch (30.48 cm) was too small. La Colonial produces the perfectly-sized 13-inch (33.02 cm), especially for La Taqueria’s famous burritos (Canavan, 2015).

The Mission District also has architecture that is unique to its region. San Francisco underwent rapid expansion during the gold rush of the 1840s, and narrow buildings were quickly built to accommodate the increased population (City and County of San Francisco Planning Department, 2007). Although most of San Francisco was lost to a fire in 1906, parts of the Mission District remained standing (French, 2023). The original operations of RSMBs were influenced by this geographically specific architecture of the Mission District’s “compact nature, which forced kitchens to stretch out in their narrow spaces from front to back” (Arellano, 2012, p. 146).

In order to optimise the space, the Durans of La Cumbre are said to have invented an assembly-line style of burrito production, with each component of the Mission burrito separately prepared and stored in trays on a counter that stretched across the narrow restaurant. The customer walks down the line, choosing their ingredients and customising their burrito as it is being assembled, with the rest of the kitchen in plain view behind the assembly-lines (Arellano, 2012). Arellano (2019) chronicles how “this style remained a regional phenomenon until Eells swooped into San Francisco in the 1980s” and brought it to his first Chipotle store in Denver.

Illegal Pete's in Boulder, Colorado, also boasts this assembly-line preparation of their Mission burritos, which corroborates that this unique feature is integral to the Mission burrito's identity.

### Competition

Characteristics of the Mission burrito have also been shaped by the intense competition amongst RSMBs in the Mission District. El Faro is said to have "spawned imitators across town" in the 1960s, with the Mission burrito becoming a "Mission mainstay" in the 1980s, and eventually spreading to over a hundred Latine restaurants "serving burritos in the same fashion" in the 1990s (Arellano, 2012, p. 146). Numbers have steadily increased to hundreds of RSMBs squeezed into a mere 1.5 square miles (3.9 square kilometres) of the Mission District (Birdsall, 2016). Such fierce competition has shaped how proprietors produce and sell the Mission burrito.

The aforementioned assembly-line layout not only optimised the small spaces in the Mission District, but also maximised operational throughput. Quick service, coupled with low prices, was a selling strategy to offer "cheap, fast meals lest impatient customers just walk over to a taqueria next door" (Arellano, 2012, p. 146). Following the burrito down the assembly-line all the way to the cashier allowed customers to customise their order without wasting any extra time, but speed of service was not the only factor for diners. RSMBs also had to distinguish themselves with consistent quality and flavour. At risk of losing customers, the food had to be reliably tasty (Birdsall, 2016).

This emphasis on flavour has endured through the decades, making it a distinguishing characteristic of Mission burritos. In one of *FiveThirtyEight's* Burrito Bracket articles titled "San Francisco Burritos really are better", correspondent Anna Maria Barry-Jester describes La Taqueria's Mission burrito as having an "explosive burst of flavors, beckoning [her] back with each bite" (Barry-Jester, 2014h, para. 22). The burrito at El Castillito in the Mission is similarly described as having "depth of personality and flavor" (Barry-Jester, 2014j, para. 6). Even as RSMBs have diversified their burrito offerings in The Mission to attract the eclectic demographics

of “drywall men and tech bros, skate punks and tourists ... luxury condo dwellers and drunks”, the underlying connection between them is their deliciousness (Birdsall, 2016, para. 4).



**Figure 3. Long Lines at El Farolito**

*Note.* The long assembly-line kitchen that is characteristic of RSMBs in the Mission District helps streamline operations to accommodate large crowds of customers. From *Flickr* by gorekun, 2017 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/gorekun/35424313310/>). CC-BY-NC 2.0.

By contrast, Illegal Pete’s Mission burrito in Boulder had “texture but left the flavor somewhere other than [the] meal” (Barry-Jester, 2014e, para. 14). A Mission burrito at Chipotle’s Newport Beach, southern California location is described thus: “the steak was salty, the rice too tart, [and] the tortilla [was] bland” (Arellano, 2019, para. 74). It is possible that the lower density of competing RSMBs elsewhere in the U.S. has contributed to a decrease in flavour and quality.

### Consumer Engagement

Modern interpretations of terroir recognise the calibration occurring in emergent authenticity, and acknowledge the impact of consumer engagement (Fukutomi, 2022). As the relationship between the diners and proprietors of the RSMBs has evolved over time, it has subsequently affected the terroir of the Mission burrito through emergent authenticity and commoditisation. This is displayed both in the real-time customisation when ordering a Mission burrito and in the way in which customers can engage with RSMBs via social media. Not only was diner customisation a foundational aspect of the Mission burrito in the 1960s, but in recent

decades social media and restaurant reviews have contributed to evolving evaluations of what makes a Mission burrito authentic (Barry-Jester, 2014f; Saldaña, 2023).

Beyond operational efficiency, another benefit of the assembly-line style of Mission burrito preparation is the ability for a customer to pick and choose ingredients in real time, according to “[their] own taste” (Saldaña, 2023, para. 11). There is a positive correlation between a successful RSMB and its ability to cater to a guest. Within the competitive Mission District, La Taqueria will handle the “intricacies of every order – for the most part, Jara will ‘do anything they want’ when it comes to guests’ special requests” (Canavan, 2015, para. 14). Similarly, outside of the Mission District, Chipotle’s “dexterity outshines that of its peers and inspires fans to create endlessly customizable meals” (Arellano, 2019, para. 5). It is clear that diners can influence the offerings of an RSMB.

The ongoing dialogue between RSMBs and diners continues outside of the restaurant in the form of social media and restaurant reviews. San Francisco is also the birthplace of American restaurant review site Yelp, and a desire to analyse its data was a contributing factor to the formation of *FiveThirtyEight*’s Burrito Bracket. Although the requirements for a restaurant joining the Burrito Bracket excluded restaurants that launched after 1 February 2014, an exception was made for Mission Cantina in New York City because reviewers raved about the “deliciousness of the burritos” (Barry-Jester, 2014f, para. 18).

The publication of the Burrito Bracket itself has influenced the volume of diners at various RSMBs. Jara of La Taqueria, whose carnitas Mission burrito won the Burrito Bracket, noticed the shift in sales post-bracket, noting that “Beef [carne asada] has always been the most popular... [but] carnitas are now neck-and-neck with beef” (Canavan, 2015, para. 9). Rico of Taqueria Cancún in the Mission discussed the strain put on his business at the time of the Burrito Bracket’s publication, with one devoted fan even posting an open letter to *FiveThirtyEight* “[pleading] that

it not win the bracket, fearing national acclaim would ruin the place” (Barry-Jester, 2014, para. 9).

### Originality & Labelling

A counterargument to the notion that the Mission burrito has its own terroir is the perspective that some Latine residents and proprietors in the Mission District have on labelling the Mission burrito. For them, the codification of burritos in The Mission as ‘Mission burritos’ is “a term from outsiders, rather than for the people who make or grew up eating the food” (Saldaña, 2023, para. 24). Hernandez of El Metate and Jara of La Taqueria acknowledge that the term is used by “many customers and media outlets” (Saldaña, 2023, para. 20); however, they do not self-identify their burritos as such. They attribute their success to their Mexican heritage and commitment to serving quality food, rather than to the terroir of the Mission District.

Local singer and chief burrito reviewer for *SFGate*, Cecilia Peña-Govea, is wary of the name and remarks, “Does the Mission-style burrito exist? I mean, maybe. ... As somebody who grew up enduring a lot of the violences of displacement and gentrification, I see the way in which cultural assets are packaged and commoditized” (Saldaña, 2023, para. 23). This echoes the Euro-American predilection for imposing authenticity upon other cultures through terroir and originality, as discovered in the literature review chapter (Vann, 2006). This research acknowledges the harmful consequences of external labels in contrast to self-classifying systems, such as Mexico’s Denominación de Origen that was discussed in the literature review chapter (Gobierno de México, 2015).

### Discussion

The terroir, or geographical specificity, of the Mission District has influenced the creation and dissemination of the Mission burrito. Ownership of the land itself can be traced back to Mexican settlers when Mexico controlled California (Pilcher, 2001, p. 20). The narrow buildings, relics of the 1840s gold rush, significantly impacted the operations of RSMBs. The architecture

constrained kitchens, developing them into assembly-line operations where diners could customise their burritos and quickly complete transactions (Birdsall, 2016). This also optimised operations for RSMBs, who had to compete with hundreds of other establishments spread throughout the tiny Mission District. This style of service has persisted even as the Mission burrito has become popular in other parts of the U.S. (Arellano, 2012).

Consumer engagement has been an integral part of the Mission burrito's terroir, as it continues to calibrate what characteristics are considered authentic through the process of emergent authenticity. Because the market is so competitive in the Mission District, the proprietors are incentivised to cater to diner customisation, lest they lose a valuable customer (Barry-Jester, 2014; Saldaña, 2023). With the popularisation of social media and digital restaurant reviews, consumers can have an even greater impact on an RSMB's business (Fukutomi, 2022).

Not everyone, however, acknowledges the Mission burrito as a regional dish specific to the Mission District of San Francisco. Many Latine residents and proprietors resist the labelling of 'Mission burrito' because it has been imposed upon their community in conjunction with gentrification. Therefore, it is important to recognise how external Euro-American classifications of terroir can negatively impact ethnic and marginalised communities (Saldaña, 2023).

#### 5.2.4 Historical Tradition

Historical tradition is closely related to terroir; however historical tradition aims to parse out the characteristics of the Mission burrito to see if they can be traced to earlier iterations of the burrito. By forming a timeline, a set of conventions and standards can be established upon which iterations of the Mission burrito are assessed.

#### Working-Class Consumers

Several aspects of the Mission burrito connect back to the historical tradition of feeding the working class that is present in earlier iterations of the burrito. As previously established in its origin story, the Mission burrito was initially invented to feed firefighters stationed in the Mission

District (Arellano, 2012; Saldaña, 2023). In particular, Ontiveros of El Faro is described as having “eaten burritos in his youth, and knew that it was a staple of Mexican workers in the fields of California’s abundant Central Valley to the south” (Arellano, 2012, p. 145). The ethnicity of the firefighters has been lost to history, but what *is* substantiated is that working-class firefighters were the first customers of the Mission burrito. Therefore, a historical tradition at the inception of the Mission burrito as a working-class food can be traced back to working-class consumption of the burrito in general by Sonoran gold miners and braceros (Arellano, 2012).

A prominent modification to the burrito was also a result of serving working-class customers. Whether served first by Ontiveros of El Faro on September 26, 1961, or by Duran of La Cumbre on September 28, 1969, flour tortillas were doubled up to “create an extra large burrito” (Saldaña, 2023, para. 15) for hungry firefighters who “needed more than a single order” (Arellano, 2012, p. 145). The famous two-tortilla construction of the 1960s prototype Mission burrito set a precedent for subsequent Mission burritos to have a “formidable girth” (Barry-Jester, 2014g, para. 6). The “heavy bundle” (Barry-Jester, 2014l, para. 10) should be “large enough that you could feed like a ball python; after finishing your body could forgo a few meals” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 15).

The Mission burrito’s “swaddle in foil” (Arellano, 2019, para. 27) is an iconic attribute that can be traced at least as far back as the 1940s when the braceros ate them in the fields. The foil of these field burritos was meant to facilitate baking the burrito in the sun, so that there would be a hot meal for lunch (Arellano, 2012). Meanwhile, the main purpose of a Mission burrito’s foil wrap is to “act as an exoskeleton” and lend structural integrity to the “hefty and fat” (Arellano, 2012, p. 140) size. Regardless of the function, the historical tradition of foil-wrapped burritos has continued in the Mission burrito.

Other aspects of the “unique, specific means of production” (Arellano, 2012, p. 146) that originated in the Mission District have largely remained unchanged across all descriptions of

Mission burritos. This includes either placing a “giant flour tortilla on a press, just enough so it heats and the glutens inside the flour tortilla loosen, allowing the disc to stretch without ripping apart” (Arellano, 2012, p. 141) or crisping the burrito on a griddle after wrapping, sometimes both. A proper rolling technique is also essential, an “edible origami” (Arellano, 2012, p. 141) that “folds in the tortilla’s ends and compresses the fillings into a fat, even cylinder” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 9) before the burrito is tightly wrapped in foil.

All of these unique details of the Mission burrito were designed with the working-class customer in mind. The combination of long lines and short lunch hours constrained eating time, so portability was essential for any RSMB that wanted to stay competitive (Arellano, 2012). The preparation methods of the Mission burrito, as influenced by the target consumer, are prime examples of how commoditisation and emergent authenticity can be integral to a historical tradition.

### Longevity & Resistance to Change

Although arguably the formation of the Mission burrito involves its modification and commodification for outsiders, importance is still placed upon RSMBs that are adhering to historical tradition. One way to assess historical tradition is by analysing its longevity. This can include connecting the present as far back into the past as possible or speculating on how far into the future the tradition will be upheld. The use of dates or years of operation within the literature establishes a historical timeline upon which RSMBs are assessed. Having established that the first Mission burrito was created in the 1960s (although the exact year is disputed – 1961 by El Faro or 1969 by La Cumbre), the literature more favourably describes older RSMBs that began operating closer to the 1960s. By contrast, Chipotle is described as “a company that goes back to only 1993, but [relies] on an older culinary tradition: the Mission burrito of San Francisco” (Arellano, 2019, para. 25).

With a founding date of 1973, La Taqueria is lauded as celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the time of this writing. Its legacy as “one of the oldest taquerias in the Mission” is visually reinforced through staged authenticity with a façade that is “is modelled to look kind of like an old [Spanish Catholic] Mission: white stucco with two large archways and brickwork instead of sidewalk” (Saldaña, 2023, paras 58–60).



**Figure 4. Entrance to La Taqueria**

*Note.* La Taqueria’s façade reflects its long history of operating in the Mission District. From *Flickr* by W. Gobetz, 2012 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/6939515413/>). CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0.

El Faro, one of the purported inventors of the Mission burrito, still has their original store sign: “orange backdrop, black-and-white lighthouse, with ‘El Faro’ in the searchlight pointing downward, toward the entrance” (Arellano, 2012, p. 140). Both RSMBs are using staged authenticity to convey that they have longstanding historical connections to the Mission District.

El Castillito, an RSMB in the Mission District, was not included in the *FiveThirtyEight* Burrito Bracket – a choice that was later lamented by correspondent Barry-Jester when she dined there on her own (Barry-Jester, 2014j). In speculating on why “a place that makes such good burritos has kept such a low profile” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 28), El Castillito is further described by Arellano in Birdsall’s article as staying “resolutely working class. ... There’s [RSMBs] that become

Instagram and Yelp sensations, and then ones that are better” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 28). This reinforces how the initial commoditisation of the Mission burrito for the working-class is an integral part of its identity as an authentic food, while at the same time positing that modifications since then have decreased its authenticity. It should be acknowledged, however, that this might stem from the tendency of Euro-American culture to value originality and timelessness.

### Gentrification

Gentrification of the Mission District during the 1980s serves as a turning point in the history of the Mission burrito. As “young, mostly white professionals” began frequenting the RSMBs (Arellano, 2012, p. 146), the diner demographic began shifting away from the working-class. When one of them, Ells, launched Chipotle in Denver in 1993, it was near the University of Denver (Arellano, 2019). Ells was also enamoured with the Mission burrito’s “self-containedness” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 2), and carried this tradition into Chipotle. Chipotle continues to serve this “perfect college late night food” (Saldaña, 2023, para. 51) at locations near universities, thus changing the demographic of nationwide Mission burrito consumption from the original working-class diners (Arellano, 2012). Within San Francisco, the diner demographic continues to change as well. Famously, in 1996, it was “while peeling back the foil” of a Mission burrito that Jack Dorsey, founder of Twitter (now known as X), shared his social network idea with friends (Birdsall, 2016, para. 20).

Further modifications of the Mission burrito in the 1990s separate it from its historical tradition. Although the Mission burrito is known for its hefty size, there seems to be a limit to how large the Mission burrito should be. While specific dimensions or weight are not detailed, Chipotle’s Mission burrito is described unfavourably as a “juggernaut ... larger than anything you can find in the Mission” (Arellano, 2012, p. 142). Competitors, such as Qdoba, subsequently enlarged the size of their burritos to emulate this “edible brick” (Arellano, 2019, para. 1).

## Discussion

As discussed in the introduction to the burrito earlier in Chapter 4: Background Information, the burrito's origins are murky, but references begin in the late 1800s. Whether it was carried into Sonoran gold mines or distributed to the braceros in the U.S., what can be corroborated is that it was primarily consumed by the working class until it was popularised by Los Angeles food trucks in the 1950s (Arellano, 2012). This directly correlates with the invention of the Mission burrito to serve the working-class community that was prevalent in the Mission District in the 1960s.

However, while "San Francisco is shedding blue-collar workers" (Birdsall, 2016, para. 4) and The Mission undergoes gentrification, the burrito offerings in The Mission have become less targeted towards the working class and instead are diversifying to please a wider range of palates. Therefore, although the research is able to connect the first Mission burritos to the historical tradition of serving the working-class, from the 1980s onward there is a stark shift in diner demographics that coincides with gentrification. It could be reasoned that the historical tradition of Chipotle's Mission burrito builds upon El Faro's, because Ells originally ate burritos in the Mission District. He also replicated the portable burrito format that was originally derived from the braceros burritos associated with El Faro's origins (Arellano, 2019). Accordingly, it could be argued that the commoditisation of the Mission burrito for diners outside of the working-class culture represents a form of emergent authenticity in its historical tradition.

### 5.2.5 Ethnic Connection

Ethnic connection is closely tied to terroir and historical tradition. In previous sections, the Mission burrito has been analysed from a geographical and historical perspective. Now, data is assessed through the lens of Mexican culture, heritage, and cuisine. In general, the history of the burrito is described as being closely entwined with Mexico:

At almost every point in the burrito's evolution, there's been a Mexican behind it. The California burrito was created by Mexican immigrants, the Mission burrito was created at El Faro by a Mexican from Durango. ... Mexicans have always been a part of burrito culture. More than anything, it's borderland food. Borderland food is Mexican food. (Barry-Jester, 2014a, para. 6)

This section explores if all iterations of, specifically, the Mission burrito can be considered Mexican cuisine.

### Shifting Demographics & Staged Authenticity

Overall the Mission burrito is heavily associated with Mexican cuisine, and for Mission burritos served in the Mission District, one can “see the embryo of it in the burrito de carne, the rolled taco of Sonora in northern Mexico” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 10). This is established through staged authenticity, where various representations of Mexican culture, such as restaurant décor or the heritage of the staff and diners are cues for authentic representations of Mexican cuisine. In the Mission District, there are many proprietors of RSMBs who draw upon their Mexican heritage. Jara of La Taqueria was inspired to open his restaurant because he “wanted San Francisco to experience his beloved Tijuana food” (Canavan, 2015, para. 26). Hernandez of El Metate similarly “makes burritos in the way that he traditionally would in Guanajuato, Mexico” (Saldaña, 2023, para. 19). The exception is Grande of Taqueria Cancún. He emigrated from El Salvador in Central America, but trained at El Farolito before opening Taqueria Cancún with Rico, therefore immersing himself in Mexican cuisine and establishing a strong connection to Mexican culture in a different way (Barry-Jester, 2014).

Additionally, the transformation of the Mission District into a diverse Latine barrio neighbourhood has contributed to the perceived authenticity of Latine characteristics (“The Mission: A Barrio of Many Colors,” 1994). The demographics of The Mission shifted in the 1950s from Italian and Irish to Mexican, barely a decade before the Mission burrito was invented (Birdsall, 2016). Described as “San Francisco's slice of America's demographic jalapeño” (Arellano, 2012, p. 142), The Mission barrio became the epicentre for an “abundance of taquerias” that

served Latin American fare, not strictly Mexican cuisine (Barry-Jester, 2014h, para. 18). This leads diners to equate other Latin American countries, such as El Salvador, with Mexican culture.

Latine (from Latin America) or Hispanic (Spanish-speaking) diners are also primarily associated with RSMBs in the Mission District. Even so, not all of the diners in these establishments are Latine; this is consistent with a decreased Latine population due to gentrification (Arellano, 2012). Before the 1990s, burritos were predominantly found in Latine neighbourhoods, but gentrification has rapidly and steadily decreased the working-class Latine population from 60% in 2000 to 48% in 2016 with projections as low as 31% by 2025 (Birdsall, 2016). This “cultural compression” is how people such as Ells of Chipotle have been exposed to the Mission burrito (Birdsall, 2016, para. 24).

One way that descriptions of the demographics of dining at RSMBs are delineated in the literature is by residents and non-residents. Sources corroborate that La Taqueria is not only “insanely popular with old and new residents” (Barry-Jester, 2014k, para. 26), but also a destination for tourists and out-of-towner former residents (Birdsall, 2016). It is no surprise then that with the ebb and flow of residents, such as Ells, who frequent RSMBs, the Mission burrito has gained popularity amongst a diverse crowd. Undoubtedly, the literature that this research is analysing, especially the Burrito Bracket competition that *FiveThirtyEight* held, has contributed to the renown of the Mission burrito (Arellano, 2012, 2019; Barry-Jester, 2014b; Birdsall, 2016; Canavan, 2015; Saldaña, 2023).

Mexican restaurant décor is also more prevalent in the Mission District. This is displayed through shop signs bearing “heavy black Mexican Gothic font” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 17), “colorful paper cutout banners hanging from the ceiling” (Barry-Jester, 2014l, para. 10), or TVs playing telenovelas for the diners (Birdsall, 2016). Mexican beverages, such as Jarritos soda and Tecate beer, are also found on menus (Birdsall, 2016).



**Figure 5. La Cumbre Taqueria Shop Sign**

*Note.* La Cumbre’s shop sign in Mexican Gothic font displays its ethnic connection through staged authenticity. From *Flickr* by J. Brooks, 2010 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jeremybrooks/5266094933/>). CC-BY-NC 2.0.

As the Mission burrito geographically moves away from the Mission District, its connection to Mexican heritage weakens, and diner ethnicity is ambiguous. Instead, diners are characterised as “young bearded guys wearing chambray shirts” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 22) or collegiate fraternity “brothers of Tau Kappa Epsilon” (Arellano, 2012, p. 142). The authors of the literature also represent a mix of ethnicities; Cesar Saldaña and Gustavo Arellano are the only Latines, with Saldaña as the sole writer hailing from The Mission.

Danny Bowien of Mission Cantina lacks Mexican heritage, as he was born in Korea and adopted by a family in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. At age 19 he moved to San Francisco and opened acclaimed restaurant, Mission Chinese, in the Mission District (Martin, 2012). He eventually moved to New York City, where he opened another Mission Chinese, as well as Mission Cantina (Barry-Jester, 2014c).

Originally from Denver, Colorado, Eells of Chipotle also does not have Mexican heritage, and his locations are described as “spreading Eells’ generic version of this local specialty throughout the country” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 4). Furthermore, when Eells launched Chipotle, it was not out of a desire to share Mexican food with America but because the “Fordian assembly line methodically prepping the burritos without any loss of quality, hundreds throughout the day”

seems like a lucrative opportunity (Arellano, 2012, p. 47). The lack of Mexican heritage can be tasted in the Mission burritos at Chipotle locations, where menus are all in English, and “carne asada is now called ‘steak’” (Arellano, 2012, p. 143). A notable exception is the iconography of Mayans eating burritos that are found in every store (Jones, 2014). Arellano describes the phenomenon with scorn:

Mayans never ate burritos. Mayans never set up shop in Springfield, Missouri, as far as archaeologists have determined. But a metallic sculpture of one of the ancients, resplendent in flowing headdress, hand stuffing a burrito into his big-lipped mouth, now adorns more than a thousand restaurants across the world. (Arellano, 2012, p. 142)

Also from Denver, Colorado, Miller of Qdoba lacks ties to Mexican cuisine, and he is even further removed from the Mission District than Ells. His first Mission burrito was not in San Francisco, but at a Chipotle in Denver, where he knew “a great business idea when he tasted one” (Arellano, 2012, p. 150). When Qdoba “enlarged their burritos”, it was not to cater to the working-class Latine population but to “mimic Chipotle” (Arellano, 2019, para. 30). A positive correlation thus emerges between Mexican heritage and Mission burritos that are produced in the Mission District, while RSMBs outside of The Mission are not strongly associated with Mexican culture.

## Ingredients

Both the quality and type of ingredients have specific associations with Mexican cuisine, but there are different opinions on whether Mexican cuisine is associated with high-quality ingredients. In interviews, Hernandez of El Metate and Jara of La Taqueria both discuss the importance of using high-quality ingredients (Barry-Jester, 2014k; Saldaña, 2023). Chipotle, however, has marketed the narrative that “Mexican food was cheap in terms of quality, nutrition, price, and philosophy until Chipotle came along” (Arellano, 2019, para. 7). Their burritos come in bags that are meant to represent a departure from other Mexican food:

[Diners] receive their burrito in brown bags with second-grade doodles. A floating, smiling pig face shouts via cartoon bubble, “¡Viva la Revolución!”

Long live the revolution, the classic rallying cry of Latin America. But this coup call is different, the porcine Che calling for the humane treatment of his brothers. (Arellano, 2012, p. 143)

Here, Chipotle is appropriating Latin American revolutions and applying them to a food revolution of sorts. Chipotle seeks to differentiate itself as a healthier-for-you-and-the-planet brand of Mexican food, which it reinforces through the staged authenticity of takeaway packaging. The irony is that in recent years, Chipotle has had outbreaks of foodborne illnesses that infected over 1,100 people, resulting in Eells stepping down as the CEO with the company incurring a US\$25 million (NZ\$40.54 million) fine from the United States Food and Drug Administration (Arellano, 2019; Department of Justice, 2020).

Meanwhile, the same ingredients are predominantly discussed in association with the Mission burrito at all RSMBs: beans, rice, meat, salsa, cheese, crema, and guacamole are wrapped in a flour tortilla. Each of these ingredients individually connects back to Mexican cuisine, as discussed below.

### Flour Tortilla

All Mission burritos are wrapped with flour tortillas and foil. The use of flour instead of corn in a tortilla represent a direct connection to the Mexican borderland states Sonora and Baja California, where wheat was easier to grow (Arellano, 2012). Although wheat was brought over from the Old World, it became a part of the borderlands' regional agriculture before the country of Mexico was formed, thus carrying the culinary traditions of the region through to Mexican cuisine (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017).

### Rice

Most Mission burritos contain rice except, famously, La Taqueria. *FiveThirtyEight* makes a point of stating that “not all Mission-style burritos incorporate rice, nor do La Taqueria’s” (Barry-Jester, 2014b, p. 55). Mission Cantina in New York City also appears to emulate La Taqueria with their “riceless, griddled masterpieces” (Barry-Jester, 2014c, para. 19). When rice is present, it is

generally plain white or “orangey Mexican rice” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 28). Rice was also brought to the New World by the Spanish, and was already incorporated into the local cuisine when Mexico was formed (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017).

### Beans

The most popular type of beans in Mission burritos are pinto beans, which are “creamy and bursting through their skins” (Barry-Jester, 2014h, para. 22). Black beans and refritos beans are also common. The use of beans, which are indigenous to Mexico, also connects back to Mexican cuisine (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017).

### Salsa

Various types of salsa and hot sauce can be found in a Mission burrito. La Taqueria’s hot sauce is described in depth as a “recipe from his late mother” that includes “serrano peppers, tomatillos, garlic, onion, and salt” that has been served since day one (Canavan, 2015, para. 12). Most common, however, is pico de gallo, a chunky mild salsa with tomato, onion, and cilantro. Although mild salsas are noted in other Mission burritos, the salsa in Chipotle’s mission burrito is specifically called out in contrast to Mission burritos found in the Mission District, “Other changes have happened, too: the salsa is milder” (Arellano, 2012, p. 142). The salsa ingredients are a mixture of Old World and New World plants (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017), and the ubiquity of salsa in Mexican cuisine is analogous to the popularity of ketchup in American cuisine (Arellano, 2012).

### Meat

Pork is the most common meat filling in Mission burritos. Carnitas, in particular, is on most menus, and is described as “frizzled a deep brown from braising in fat” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 1) and accented with orange peel and garlic. An exemplary preparation of al pastor, a spicy sweet slow-roasted pork, at Taqueria Cancún in the Mission District, is described as “fiery red with bright chile flavor and a kiss of sweetness” that comes from pineapple (Barry-Jester, 2014i, para. 15). Another article also lauds Taqueria Cancún’s al pastor as a “holy experience” (Birdsall, 2016,

para. 12). The preparation of al pastor, or shepherd-style pork, on a vertical rotisserie links back to Mexico City in the 1950s, where second-generation Lebanese began cooking pork instead of the lamb shawarma commonly found in the Middle East where they originated from (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017).

Beef, specifically the carne asada style of quick grilling lean cuts, is also popular, with El Farolito's carne asada in the Mission District described as "expertly charred" (Barry-Jester, 2014i, para. 19). Less common is shredded beef, although it hearkens back to the braceros field burritos (Birdsall, 2016). Other meat fillings include chicken, lamb, and various types of offal (Barry-Jester, 2014f, 2014l; Birdsall, 2016). This resonates with the introduction of European livestock to the New World during the Columbian Exchange. Specifically, the same borderlands that grew wheat were also good land for cattle grazing, thus integrating beef and dairy into the regional cuisine (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). Vegetarian options are also available, although specific vegetables are not mentioned in the filling (Barry-Jester, 2014i).



**Figure 6. Cross-Section of a Taqueria Cancún Mission Burrito**

*Note.* Many of the same ingredients are used across different RSMBs, and can be traced back to Mexican cuisine. From *Flickr* by The Kozy Shack, 2007 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/peebot/540878102/>). CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0.

## Super Burrito

Additionally, it is “universally known that ‘a super [burrito],’ which costs a buck or two more at each place, gets you a handful of cheese, sour cream or crema, either guacamole or sliced avocado, sometimes shredded iceberg” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 7). Cheese and crema are also a part of regional borderlands cuisine because of the aforementioned cattle ranching in the area, while avocados are indigenous to the New World (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017).

## Discussion

As discovered in the literature review chapter, ethnically authentic food is generally assessed in conjunction with the environment in which it is presented, also known as staged authenticity. The heritage of staff, diner heritage, and restaurant aesthetic can all indicate if the RSMB is serving Mexican cuisine. These markers, or lack thereof, can contribute to the perception of authentic ethnic cuisine. Analysis revealed that Mission burritos served in the Mission District have stronger ties to Mexican culture than Mission burritos served elsewhere in the U.S.

The ingredients themselves were generally consistent amongst the RSMBs, and could all be connected to Mexican cuisine. There is disagreement, however, on the perceived association between quality ingredients and Mexican food. RSMBs in the Mission District have a strong association with Mexican heritage, and they also pride themselves on using high-quality ingredients. Part of Chipotle’s staged authenticity, however, is the narrative that traditional Mexican cuisine is low quality, and Chipotle is providing a premium product by comparison.

### 5.2.6 Personal Connection

Personal connection analyses whether or not there is a traceable artistic lineage in the terroir, historical tradition, or ethnic connection of a Mission burrito. Although personal connection can be closely associated with any of these characteristics, it is not required to be linked in order for it to be a characteristic of authenticity. The focus is on the producer’s intent in

using their artistic lineage, not the lineage itself. Emergent authenticity also is present in personal connection, as artistic innovation recalibrates characteristics of authenticity.

As noted in earlier sections, many proprietors in the Mission District are of Mexican heritage. They also have personal connections in the form of close family ties. Both Jara of La Taqueria and Ontiveros of El Faro have included future generations of their family in their “mom-and-pop” businesses (Arellano, 2012, p. 145). Jara also still uses the hot sauce that his mother made on opening day and, “carrying on his father’s tradition” of pinto bean cooking, boils and fries his beans without smashing them (Canavan, 2015, para. 7).

All of the RSMBs exhibit individual artistic creativity to varying degrees. Rico’s recipes at Taqueria Cancún are a “blend of El Farolito and food he knew growing up, with the exception of Cancún’s famous vegetarian and chicken burritos”, which receive different tortilla preparations to preserve the texture of the fillings (Barry-Jester, 2014l, para. 6). Outside of the Mission District, Illegal Pete’s’ signature move is mixing the standard Mission burrito fillings with a spoon for even distribution before rolling up the tortilla (Barry-Jester, 2014e). Arguably, the original innovation of doubling up tortillas for the hungry firefighters is a display of artistic creativity (Saldaña, 2023). Through emergent authenticity, this became the prototype for subsequent Mission burritos.



**Figure 7. Mission Burrito from La Taqueria**

*Note.* Extra-large flour tortillas have replaced the two smaller tortillas that comprised the very first Mission burritos. From *Flickr* by W. Gobetz, 2012 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/wallyg/6939514929/>). CC-BY-NC 2.0.

Some occurrences of individual artistic creativity stray much further from historical, ethnic, or familial traditions. Bowien of Mission Cantina and Miller of Qdoba are not discussed in the context of family, indicating that their operations are not founded upon familial culinary customs. The only family involvement mentioned with Eells of Chipotle is that of his father who “required his son to draw up a business plan” before loaning him US\$85,000 (NZ\$145,379) (Arellano, 2012, p. 148).

Furthermore, when Eells decided to launch Chipotle, he “returned to Colorado and experimented in the kitchen” (Arellano, 2012, p. 147). In an interview, Eells describes his strategy, “I knew I could improve on the quality and taste of the food. ... Although it’s Mexican food, [my version] had a fresher taste and broader appeal” (Arellano, 2019, para. 30). Amidst Chipotle’s blazing success, *Nation’s Restaurant News* is quoted as lauding Eells in 2004, “If ever an Anglo man was born to make burritos, it is Steve Eells”, (as cited in Arellano, 2019, para. 29). Since then, Eells and Chipotle have been criticised for cultural appropriation of Mexican cuisine:

Chipotle took a known commodity among Mexicans that suddenly turned trendy in the hands of white Americans, for white Americans. But Chipotle proved no gateway to pique Americans into learning about other types of burritos. Instead, the Mission variety came to dominate burrito culture in the U.S. — and endangered other styles in the process. (Arellano, 2019, para. 31)

## Discussion

Personal connection through family tradition or a traceable artistic lineage can strengthen other characteristics of authenticity, such as terroir, historical tradition, or ethnic connection. It is also most effective in storytelling when it can be presented with at least one of these characteristics.

Proprietors of RSMBs who exhibit personal connection through family traditions also demonstrate strong associations to Mexican culture, and the exertion of personal connection upon an authentic dish can calibrate its characteristics through emergent authenticity. Proprietors who rely solely upon individual artistic creativity, however, are at risk of diverging

from the authentic object to the point of cultural appropriation. It appears that when individual artistic creativity deviates too far from an authentic dish, there is no longer an ongoing social evaluation of an authentic dish. Therefore, it loses its historical, geographical, and ethnic connections.

### 5.2.7 Nostalgia

Nostalgia and imagined taste explore how a person’s food memories can authenticate a dish. This includes sentimentality from the perspective of the consumers, proprietors, and the authors of the texts being analysed. Nostalgia, specifically, is strongly associated with ethnic and family connections. Ontiveros of El Faro, Rico of Taqueria Cancún, and Jara of La Taqueria all reference the food of their childhoods in their renditions of the Mission burrito (Arellano, 2012; Barry-Jester, 2014; Canavan, 2015).



**Figure 8. Child Ordering at La Taqueria**

*Note.* Experiencing Mission burritos at a young age can foster nostalgia for them later in life. From *Flickr* by R. Corder, 2017 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/rocor/51120113818/>). CC-BY-NC 2.0.

Arellano, one of *FiveThirtyEight’s* Burrito Bracket Selection Committee members and author of two of the sources used in this data analysis, acknowledges how nostalgia could distract him from objectively evaluating burritos. In reference to El Castillito in The Mission, “it had sentimental

value, and [Arellano] wasn't sure where the line between great memories and sheer deliciousness fell" (Barry-Jester, 2014j, para. 2).

Food writing appears to inspire imagined taste in readers who have not yet enjoyed eating a Mission burrito. When chronicling gentrification of The Mission in the 1980s, it is noted that "Travel guides mentioned [Mission burritos] as a regional marvel, drawing more first-timers to the Mission" (Arellano, 2012, p. 146). In between tantalising descriptions of the Mission burrito, Birdsall writes fondly of his "burrito initiation" in the 1980s (interestingly in the same decade that gentrification was beginning) when he "moved to San Francisco from Berkeley with a few crates of English-lit paperbacks and some Hefty bags of clothes" (Birdsall, 2016).

*FiveThirtyEight's* Burrito Bracket in particular is said to have attracted customers to many of the RSMBs in the Mission District (Barry-Jester, 2014j; Birdsall, 2016). Through imagined taste, the yearning for a food memory instigates new diners to try the Mission burrito, which contributes to the ongoing emergent authenticity of the Mission burrito.

## Discussion

Nostalgia and imagined taste contribute to the calibration process that occurs in emergent authenticity, as they involve the diner's belief about how the Mission burrito should taste based their memories and desires instead of the taste of the actual dish. The proprietors incorporate their nostalgia into individual artistic creativity when creating their exemplary Mission burritos. Arellano, an authority on Mexican food, also influences the narrative of the Mission burrito through his writings. Additionally, it is possible that diners are converging on specific RSMBs because of the nostalgic way in which the Mission burrito is described in publications. Literature exalting establishments such as El Castillito are rife with nostalgic imagery, and the diners can imagine the taste of the Mission burritos, even if they have not personally tasted them before. In a cycle of emergent authenticity, the diners gravitate towards these RSMBs, thus validating the articles as authorities on authentic Mission burritos. This

demonstrates that nostalgia and imagined taste are so powerful, they can recalibrate what is considered authentic.

### 5.2.8 Aficionado Identity

Diners oftentimes experience an authentic connection with the Mission burrito that creates an aficionado identity, in which they feel they can determine authentic preparations of Mission burritos.



**Figure 9. La Cumbre’s Dining Room**

*Note.* Diners connecting with their food at Taqueria Cancún. From *Flickr* by J. Zeschky, 2009 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/worldofjan/4202941168/>). CC-BY-NC 2.0.

This is displayed in the origin stories of some RSMB proprietors. Ellis of Chipotle’s first encounter with the Mission burrito was something “completely different” from other burritos he had eaten and, finding them delicious, he “started to eat them often” (Arellano, 2012, p. 147). Ultimately, he coupled his culinary training with his love for burritos and launched Chipotle. Chipotle in turn “set off an American love affair for Mission-style burritos”, which inspired Qdoba founder Miller to open his own business (Arellano, 2012, p. 150).

In all of the literature, the authors and contributors are enthusiastic about the Mission burrito. Often, they reference their own encounters with burritos as a way of legitimising themselves as authorities on the Mission burrito. Bill Addison on the Burrito Bracket Committee is

described as having eating “100 burritos in 10 weeks” (Silver, 2014, para. 54) to find the best taqueria in the Bay Area and traveling all across the country to eat more (Barry-Jester, 2014d). Additionally, all of the Burrito Bracket contributors have impressive experience relating to gastronomy, such as David Chang, who won the James Beard Foundation Outstanding Chef Award in 2013, and Jeffrey Pilcher, a professor of history at the University of Minnesota and author of *Planet Taco* (2017), a book that this research cites. Birdsall not only expresses nostalgia for his first taco experience, but also authenticates himself as an expert because he “has been eating burritos in San Francisco for more than 30 years” (Birdsall, 2016, para. 4)

## Discussion

Aficionado identities emerge as a result of diners experiencing an authentic connection with the Mission burrito. Consequently, they authenticate themselves as authoritative figures. For Ells of Chipotle and Miller of Qdoba, this manifested in opening their own RSMBs. This research has discovered that neither Ells nor Miller have strong geographical, historical, or ethnic ties to Mexican food and the Mission burrito. Therefore, it is possible that the mutation of their aficionado identities into Mission burrito restaurateurs is a form of cultural appropriation, as identified by Arellano (2019).

Meanwhile, other aficionados express their expertise in the form of restaurant reviews and historical examination, which this research has analysed. All of this experience and exuberance coalesce in them, positioning them as authority figures on the Mission burrito through diner aficionado identity, and it is clear that their perspectives have shaped perceptions of the Mission burrito through emergent authenticity.

## 5.3 Data Analysis Summary

The data analysis conducted in this chapter has taken the exploration of Mexican cuisine set out in Chapter 4: Background Information in conjunction with the eight characteristics of authenticity previously identified in Chapter 2: Literature Review and tested them on the Mission

burrito, a dish that is frequently acknowledged as authentic within the American hospitality industry. Each of the eight characteristics could be related to the Mission burrito to varying degrees, but some iterations of the Mission burrito strayed away from markers of authenticity. The next chapter, Chapter 6: Discussion, illuminates ways in which the Mission burrito exemplifies these characteristics and proposes new theory on how the individual characteristics interact with one another.

## Chapter 6: Discussion

### 6.1 The Authentic Mission Burrito

The Mission burrito arguably embodies all of the authentic traits that were mapped out in the literature review chapter, and also connects closely to the history of burritos in Mexican cuisine. The lore surrounding both of their origins illustrates the impact of **storytelling**. The origin stories describe a burrito as “a meal of the working class, the simplest of lunches: a tortilla, the morning’s leftovers, and nothing else” (Arellano, 2012, p. 143). Similarly, the Mission burrito was created as a hearty, portable lunch for working-class firefighters (Saldaña, 2023). These humble beginnings exemplify **simplicity**.

Although it is ambiguous exactly where in Mexico the burrito originates, possibly northern or central Mexico, it is clear from its inclusion in a Mexican-Spanish dictionary that it was present specifically in Mexican culture, as distinct from other Spanish colonies or Mesoamerican societies (Arellano, 2012). Mexican culture and cuisine continue to be present in the Mission burrito. This is particularly evident in the Mission District, where Latine staff and diners interact in restaurants replete with Mexican culture (Barry-Jester, 2014j; Canavan, 2015). In this way, a **historical tradition** and **ethnic connection** is established.

Ingredients in early iterations of the Mission burrito, including flour tortillas, beans, rice, beef or pork, salsas, guacamole, crema, and cheese, also correspond with burritos from Mexico. Wheat and livestock brought from the Old World, which flourished in the borderlands, became distinctive features of regional borderlands cuisines. And, in contrast to the vegetarian corn tortillas of Mesoamerica, flour tortillas combined with animal fat are characteristic of the borderlands frontier (Arellano, 2012). Beans are indigenous to the New World, and rice was also brought to the New World through the Columbian Exchange (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). The

geographical specificity of combining wheat, rice, beans, and meat, as well as the regional cultural tradition of using animal fat instead of vegetable oil exemplifies **terroir**.



**Figure 10. Taqueria Cancún's Dining Room**

*Note.* Taqueria Cancún's festive dining room has many aspects of staged authenticity, including the Latine staff, Mexican papel picado paper cut out decorations, assembly-line kitchen, and simple picnic bench tables. From *Flickr* by M. Altman, 2021 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/maltman23/51579280509/>). CC-BY-SA 2.0.

A key argument against the burrito as an authentic Mexican dish is that some of its ingredients are not indigenous to Mexico or the Americas in general (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). Analysing the impact of the Columbian Exchange on the Old World, however, reveals that there are several New World ingredients that have become integral to Old World cuisines. This includes the use of potatoes in Ireland (Mac Con Iomaire & Óg Gallagher, 2009), tomatoes in Italy (Gentilcore, 2010), chili peppers in India (Mangalassary, 2016), and chocolate in Belgium (Foster & Cordell, 1992). Therefore, if directly comparing the influence of Old World ingredients upon Mexican cuisine, it could be concluded that these ingredients are also authentic representations (Nunn & Qian, 2010). Additionally, Mexico as a country was formed after Spanish colonisation (Pilcher, 2017). Therefore, if indigenous ingredients that predate modern-day Mexico are included in Mexican cuisine, Spanish ingredients should also be recognised.

With the migration of Mennonites from Canada to Chihuahua in the 1920s, a heritage developed of making queso de chihuahua, a soft cheese (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). With the abundance of dairy available in northern Mexican ranches, queso and crema were also included in burritos (Arellano, 2012). Immigrants in Mexico City also continued to influence the cuisine of northern Mexico. The Middle-Eastern-style of cooking meats on vertical rotisseries was popularised by second-generation Lebanese immigrants in the 1950s. Pork and pineapple replaced the traditional lamb meat, giving rise to al pastor, a popular burrito and taco filling (Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). Each demographic replicated and added to the burrito, thusly displaying **personal connection** through family tradition and artistic innovation.



**Figure 11. Al Pastor in Mexico City**

*Note.* The Mexican preparation of al pastor, a popular Mission burrito filling, has a historical connection to Lebanese immigrants, who cooked lamb shawarma in the same style in the Middle East. From *Flickr* by K. K., 2021 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mmm-yoso/51752317299/>). CC-BY-NC-ND 2.0.

This continues in the Mission District with proprietors preserving family recipes, whilst expressions of artistic creativity lead to new iterations (Canavan, 2015). Incorporating parts of their own heritage showcases a **nostalgia** for the gastronomy of their respective ethnicities. Furthermore, the convergence of so many culinary influences in the burrito could be interpreted as a metaphor for the mestizaje or mixing culture inherent to Mexican culture.

Whether it is American farmers feeding braceros or Mexican immigrants feeding the diverse population of the Mission District, there still continues to be Mexican representation in

the commoditisation of burritos (Arellano, 2012; Birdsall, 2016). Additionally, the burritos are being consumed on land that was previously part of Mexico. Burritos are also common subject matter in literature about Mexican cuisine (Arellano, 2012; Pilcher, 2017; Wheaton & Carroll, 2017). Producers and writers are therefore displaying **aficionado identity** as they connect with and disseminate the Mission burrito. Combined with storytelling, historical tradition, ethnic connection, terroir, artistic innovation, and nostalgia, it is clear that there are many ways in which the Mission burrito up to this point exemplifies authentic Mexican cuisine.

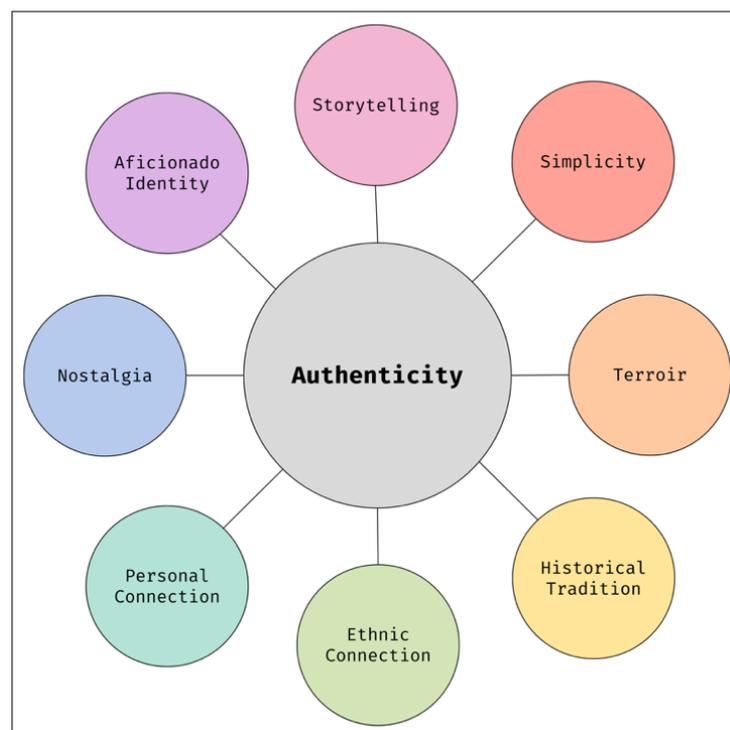
The expansion of Mission burritos geographically away from the Mission District and towards restaurant chains, such as Chipotle and Qdoba, also signifies a departure from Mexican cuisine. This parallels the estrangement from Mexican cuisine seen in the U.S.'s largest fast-food seller of Mexican food, Taco Bell. Fusion flavours found in other establishments that do not self-identify as Mexican restaurants also weaken the burrito's connection to Mexican culture (Arellano, 2012). Although these restaurants are operating on what formerly was Mexican land, these burrito variants are neither produced nor consumed by Mexicans. The ingredients have not coalesced within Mexican culture, and the flavours are so new that the sense of nostalgia has not yet developed. Additionally, there is a lack of historical, personal, or ethnic connection. Furthermore, the aforementioned fast-food chains are relying upon the industrialised food system which is the antithesis of simplicity and authenticity.

Exploring the development and evolution of the burrito through the lens of the aforementioned characteristics resulted in two theories. First, that for the majority of its existence, the burrito, including the Mission burrito, has authentically represented Mexican cuisine. Second, that Americanised variants of the Mission burrito have diverged so greatly from their predecessors that they no longer exhibit characteristics of authentic Mexican cuisine. Yet, it is restaurants such as Chipotle which have disseminated Mission burritos domestically and internationally (Chipotle Mexican Grill, Inc., 2023). Therefore, it is likely that although a Mission

burrito produced within the Mission District is an authentic Mexican dish, the Mission burrito that is exported worldwide and consumed outside of The Mission is not an authentic representation of Mexican culture and cuisine.

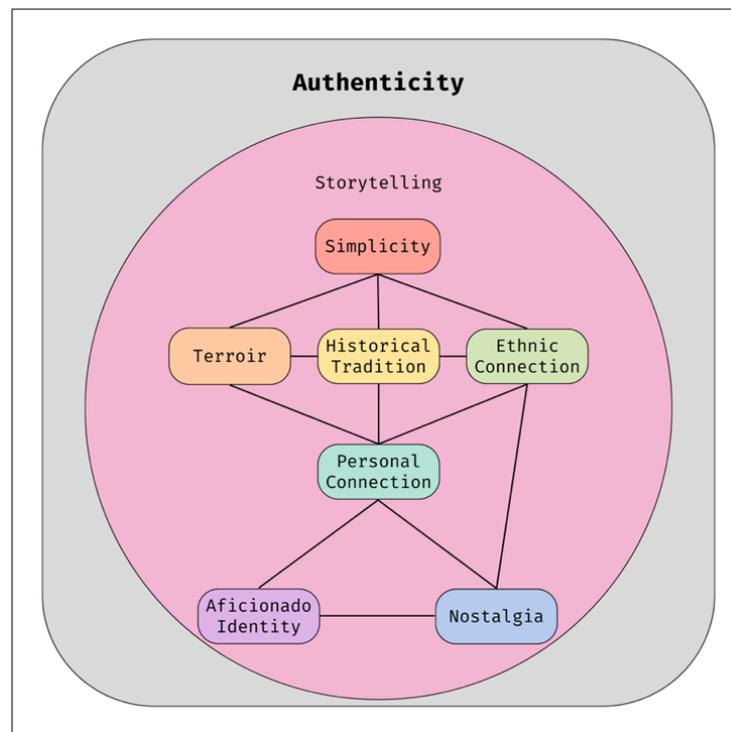
## 6.2 Reframing Characteristics of Authenticity

The analysis of the Mission burrito revealed that characteristics of authenticity intermingle with and enhance each other more than previously thought. In the literature review chapter, each characteristic was discovered individually, and therefore was given equal emphasis in contributing to authenticity. For example, simplicity was considered to be equally as important as historical tradition. Figure 12 shows how the research assessed the eight characteristics of authenticity individually after the literature review:



**Figure 12. Original Assessment of Authenticity Characteristics**

Figure 13 shows how the research rearranged the characteristics according to how they interact with each other after the data analysis:



**Figure 13. Reframing of Authenticity Characteristics**

Storytelling emerged as an overarching characteristic within which the other characteristics are presented. It is through stories and imagery that information is conveyed, and the way that a story is told can be influential in how that information is interpreted. The presence of simplicity within storytelling is a form of staged authenticity, as it implies honesty and integrity in a product – a departure from modern life towards an ideal of simpler times. When used in conjunction with terroir, historical tradition, or ethnic connection, simplicity can also be used as a cue for other characteristics and augment one’s perception of them.

Terroir, historical tradition, and ethnic connection are characteristics that are especially strongly interconnected. An established set of conventions and standards creates continuity through historical tradition. Cultural practices also shape the development of food, forming an ethnic connection. When these congregate in a geographically specific area, a terroir emerges. Thus, a convergence of place, time, and culture can strengthen the storytelling about a food.

A personal connection, whether rooted in family tradition or a traceable artistic lineage, has the potential to enhance other facets of authenticity, such as terroir, historical tradition, or ethnic connection. Storytelling is also more impactful when personal connection is coupled with at least one of these characteristics, but the emphasis lies on the producer's intention in incorporating their artistic heritage rather than the heritage itself. Additionally, emergent authenticity is evident in the context of personal connection, as artistic innovation adjusts the features of authenticity. Nostalgia and imagined taste delve into the idea that a person's recollections of food can lend authenticity to a dish. This encompasses the sentimentality experienced by proprietors and consumers alike. Nostalgia, in particular, is closely linked with ethnic and family connections. Diners without cultural heritage can also have an authentic connection with the food through the cultivation of an aficionado identity. In this case, their authentic experience imbues them with authority through emergent authenticity.

### 6.3 Discussion Summary

Overarching themes emerged in Chapter 5: Data Analysis, which have been explored in the discussion in the present chapter. It appears that some characteristics are more closely interconnected than others. Terroir, historical tradition, and ethnic connection concern the product itself, whilst personal connection, nostalgia, and aficionado identity focus on the people producing and consuming the product. Simplicity is utilised by a producer to make apparent the cultural associations of the product, and all of these characteristics can enhance and lend credibility to storytelling. These characteristics have all converged within the Mission burrito, imbuing early iterations with authenticity. Recent commercialised versions of the Mission burrito lack ethnic connection, historical tradition, and terroir, straying away from authentic Mexican cuisine. The framework of authenticity characteristics tested well against the Mission burrito and offered greater insight into the authentication process.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

## 7.1 Conclusion

Oft touted but rarely understood, the term 'authenticity' is frequently used within gastronomy, juxtaposed with cultural cuisine. This research utilised an inductive approach with a relativist ontology, constructivist epistemology, critical inquiry paradigm, meta-synthesis methodology, and reflexive thematic analysis method in an attempt to answer the following research question:

**What characterises 'authentic cuisine' when the term is used within the hospitality industry in the United States?**

First, the literature review in Chapter 2 contextualised authenticity in the modern world. Because authenticity is in the eye of the beholder, there is no single definitive understanding of authenticity. Authenticity is a social construct, with its evaluation dependent upon cultural context, thus creating further confusion. Regardless, there are modern individuals who quest for authenticity as an escape from their industrialised, everyday lives. Exploring first the modern anthropologists and then the modern tourist, the research found parallels with the modern diner. Ambiguous and oftentimes conflicting notions of authenticity notwithstanding, there is still a desire from the modern diner to experience authentic food.

Through an inductive approach to synthesising the literature regarding authenticity in food, eight characteristics emerged: storytelling, simplicity, terroir, historical tradition, ethnic connection, personal connection, nostalgia, and aficionado identity. The research found that emergent authenticity, commoditisation, and staged authenticity were integral to assessing these characteristics, as some explicitly connected to authenticity, others merely implied authenticity, and still others were reliant upon social context.

Initially, the research delineated the eight characteristics as separate but equal attributes. The data analysis in Chapter 5 revealed, however, that they are interwoven, and can amplify or

diminish one another. Whereas terroir, historical tradition, and ethnic connection focus on the product, personal connection focuses on the producer. A personal connection may be tied to any of these characteristics; however, it is not obligatory for such a connection to exist for authenticity to be present. The focus is on the artist's purpose in integrating their artistic heritage, rather than solely on the heritage itself. The personal connection can be strengthened with nostalgia for food memories of the past, however real or imagined. These can imbue an aficionado identity for the consumer, who can experience an authentic connection with an object, thus authenticating the object and themselves.

The Mission burrito was chosen as a case study subject because of its unique positioning in the American foodscape. The research found that early iterations of the Mission burrito are congruent with characteristics of authentic Mexican cuisine. As the Mission burrito strays from its birthplace, the Mission District of San Francisco, it evolves beyond the cycle of emergent authenticity. Commoditisation takes a strong hold on the Mission burrito, and it no longer exhibits characteristics of authenticity.

This study is presented as a potential way to assess the authenticity of other foods with immigrant origins within the American hospitality industry. There is also a possibility of broadening the application of this framework in other areas of gastronomy and anthropology as a whole.

## 7.2 Closing Thoughts

The impetus for this research was born from a deep homesickness for the Mission burritos that I have subsisted upon for the better part of my life. More often than not, our fridge in Oakland had half a super al pastor burrito wrapped in foil sitting within it. We had a circuit of taquerias and taco trucks to grab dinner from on the way home, and more than a few nights per week saw brown takeaway bags full of fresh fried tortilla chips with small containers of vibrant salsas. It was standard operating procedure for me to slice the burrito in half, still encased in foil.

The burrito ends are the best parts: chewy, cheesy, and delightfully doughy with traces of burrito juices seeping into their cracks. Cutting the burrito in half saves the best for last, twice.

Sometimes I would press foil against the other half, sealing its exposed end carefully to eat later cold – another delight of mine.

Our refrigerator in Auckland has been depressingly devoid of Mission burritos but, when I could not literally devour a Mission burrito, I devoured literature about the Mission burrito and satisfied my curiosity about a food that I had previously taken deeply for granted. The perfecting of my own al pastor recipe has been on pause whilst writing this dissertation, but previous semesters have been peppered with weekend experiments. I continue to test the increasing variety of Mexican products that are available in Auckland (thank you Martha's Backyard and Costco!) and tinker with my recipes. Each time I get closer to an authentic al pastor, or at least the al pastor of my memories. The difference doesn't matter anymore; the flavour is conjured in my soul.

**MISSION: ACCOMPLISHED**

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## Appendix A

**Table 3. Themes, Categories, and Codes used in Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

| THEMES              | CATEGORIES   | CODES  |
|---------------------|--|--|
| <b>Storytelling</b> | Origin story<br>Renown<br>Visual aids  | Accolades, best/not the best, celebrity diners, universally loved<br>Photography, graphics, restaurant décor   |
| <b>Simplicity</b>   | Preparation<br>Presentation or ambiance<br>Resistance to trends<br>Mass-produced   | Perfection, simplicity<br>Restaurant aesthetic, simple plating<br>Trendy   |
| <b>Terroir</b>      | Connection to terroir of burrito<br>Geography<br>Restaurant layout<br>Demographics<br>Competition<br>Originality<br>Consumer engagement<br>Extra-large tortillas | Mission District/not Mission District, San Francisco<br>Assembly-line, narrow/not narrow, open kitchen, upright coolers<br>Diner from SF/not SF, staff Midwestern shirt, Latine population, gentrification, local residents<br>Busy or long lines, consistent/inconsistent quality, construction of burrito, unbalanced ratio, liquid ratio, flavour/not flavourful, low price point, quick dining<br>Externally classified, commoditised<br>Critics and social media, diner customisation |

**Table 3** (continued)

|                                    |   |  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| <p><b>Historical Tradition</b></p> | <p>Connection to history of burrito<br/>         Longevity<br/>         Burrito preparation matches original<br/>         Restaurant aesthetics<br/>         Unmodified for outsiders</p> | <p>Working-class diner/not working-class, no historical connection<br/>         Date founded, employee retention, loyal customers, future of restaurant/not long-lasting<br/>         Foil-wrapped/no foil, eating technique, large size/too large, pressed/griddled, rolling technique/improper technique, self-contained, super burrito, female burrito maker<br/>         Cash only, original décor, traditional plating/not traditional<br/>         Modified for outsiders</p>  |
| <p><b>Ethnic Connection</b></p>    | <p>Connection to Mexico<br/>         Ingredients<br/>         Heritage of staff<br/>         Diner heritage<br/>         Restaurant aesthetics<br/>         Restaurant name</p>           | <p>No ethnic connection, Modern Nouveau Mex<br/>         Components of Mission burrito, types of ingredients, quality of ingredients, organic or free-range, integrity<br/>         Mexican heritage, Latin American heritage, Spanish-speaking, proprietor heritage Latine/not Latine proprietor, employee heritage Latine, employee heritage ambiguous<br/>         Latine diners/not Latine, diner heritage ambiguous<br/>         Mexican décor/historically inaccurate, menu, English-named dishes, Mexican music/not ranchera music<br/>         Conventional Spanish name/unconventional Spanish name</p> |
| <p><b>Personal Connection</b></p>  | <p>Family tradition<br/>         Individual artistic creativity</p>   | <p>Not family tradition<br/>         Inspired by Mission burrito, appropriation, California-style</p>  |
| <p><b>Nostalgia</b></p>            | <p>Nostalgia<br/>         Imagined taste</p>  |  |
| <p><b>Aficionado Identity</b></p>  | <p>Diner aficionado<br/>         Restaurateur aficionado</p>  |  |