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Taco Norway

The History of a National Dish

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Foreword

Writing this thesis was no easy feat, and I would not have been able to do it if not for the help and support of so many people. First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor, Patrick Bernhard, who introduced me to the wonderful field of food history. Without his knowledge, patience, and unwavering support through this long and difficult process, this thesis would never have seen the light of day. A big thanks also to Ellen Cathrine Lund who advised on the didactic epilogue. She provided great help, not just with insights and guidance for the epilog, but also with invaluable emotional support at pivotal moments. I also want to thank my mother who proofread, and who's encouragements, trust and love, makes me want to be as great as she believes me to be. Thank you to my brother, Michael, who also proofread the whole thing. I want to thank my dear André, who has sat with me through the ups and downs, every day, of tackling this great challenge. And lastly, I want to thank all my friends and loved ones, who are too many to mention, but whom without I would not have gotten through it all.

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Abstract

Over the last 20 years or so, Taco has become an iconic staple in Norway. My thesis looks at how and why the dish has come to hold such an integral part of Norwegian eating habits and food culture. My main argument is that the popularity of the dish is ultimately tied to the rapid commercialization, mediatization and globalization of our world in which agency, culture and identity become exceedingly complex. I further argue that it is due to its perceived values that the taco has become a national identity marker. To Norwegians the taco holds ideals of community and egalitarianism; the exact values they cherish in themselves as a society. It has evolved from foreign to familiar sustenance into a national tradition in the matter of approximately fifty short years. To understand food mobility in the 20th and 21st century, one needs to look at these intersections between what happened practically and emotionally. What underlying currents and complex realities has shaped the choices made by individuals and by communities? My thesis is thus a contribution that addresses questions of “food mobility” and “food and identity”.

List of contents

Introduction.....	6
THESIS	6
STATE OF THE RESEARCH	7
THEORY AND METHODOLOGY	9
PRIMARY SOURCES	11
ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER.....	11
Chapter 1: How the taco came to Norway – a windy tale	13
UNCERTAIN ORIGINS.....	13
TACO TRUCKS AND FAST FOOD – THE AMERICAN TACO.....	14
NORWEGIAN BEGINNINGS - IMPORTS FOR AMERICANS LOOKING FOR OIL IN THE NORTH SEA	15
“TACO WITH MEAT FILLING” – NORWEGIAN TACO	17
A TACO OF THEIR OWN.....	19
Chapter 2: The Social Taco	21
CONSUMERISM AND POST-WAR NORWAY: HISTORY OF COMMERCIALS AND MARKETING IN NORWAY 1960-2010	21
THE TACO SHELF AND NEWSPAPER ADS.....	22
FROM MEXICAN TO NORWEGIAN – A SHIFT IN MARKETING STRATEGY	24
NEXT MEX – LEVEL UP?.....	27
FAMILY DINNERS AND COMMUNITY	28
Chapter 3: The Egalitarian Taco.....	30
NEW ROUTINES – THE END OF THE HOUSEWIFE ERA	31
DO IT FOR THE KIDS – FREE PARENTING AND THE TACO LOVING CHILD.....	33
THE TACKY TACO.....	34
THE PEOPLE’S TACO – BECOMING HABIT AND TRADITION	37
FOOD FIT FOR A KING – A <i>FOLKELIG</i> IDEAL.....	39
Conclusion	41
THE PARTICULAR.....	41
NEW EXPLANATIONS.....	43
ONWARD.....	44
Epilogue.....	46
THE POTENTIAL FOR FOOD IN TEACHING HISTORY	46
CORE ELEMENTS AND INTERDISCIPLINARY THEMES	47
BIG IDEAS AND AMBITIOUS TEACHING.....	48

TOPIC SUGGESTIONS.....	49
TEACHING PLAN – DIDACTIC AND PEDAGOGIC REFLECTIONS.....	51
FOR THE TEACHER.....	53
FOR THE STUDENT	54
References.....	56

Introduction

THESIS

For most Norwegians, the term “*fredagstaco*”, is deeply familiar as a part of everyday life.¹ To the people of Norway, fond memories spring to mind of shared dinners at home with family, celebrating the weekend and enjoying each other’s company around the buffet-style dinner. Some reminisce of birthday parties, dinners with friends or roommates, and they will no doubt have strong opinions about the “correct” ingredients and the specific order in which to load the perfect taco. For the last 60 years or so, the reach of taco in Norwegian society has spread and seeped into the cultural identity of Norwegians so deeply that it currently holds a seemingly irreplaceable position in household eating habits. Variations of the taco appear at Friday dinners. New restaurants continually pop up, one seemingly more authentic than the other. Chains, claiming to hold true to the Californian style of the Mexican cuisine spread out through the country. The ritual of eating out at a new restaurant is a luxury and a nice break from routine, but nothing compares to the “good old” *fredagstaco* at home. The thesis statement I will be arguing is as follows: “To Norwegians, the taco represents the very same values that they cherish in their own society, which is the reason for its enormous popularity and longevity in the Norwegian diet.” In this thesis I want to relate this idea of food and values to modern food migration. How does food travel in a globalized world, and can the way Norwegians understand and accept the concept of “taco” say something about modern food migration?

To understand how taco came to Norway we need to look at how American culture and capitalism have had a considerable effect on Norwegian culture, and within that, its cuisine and eating habits. The trade connections between Norway and the US were strengthened after World War II and the signing of the Marshall Plan.² In its strife to rebuild Norway, the government invited the Americans in through a promise to buy American merchandise, which in its turn made import from the US customized and simplified. Some may think that the taco came to Norway as a result of Mexican influence, but as will be further explored in this text, it is in fact an example of American influence.

¹ *Fredagstaco* meaning Friday Taco, or Taco Friday.

² Ida Jahr, "Marshallplanen," in *Store norske leksikon* (2020). <https://snl.no/Marshallplanen>.

Food is never only fuel – it is deeply connected to people’s cultural identity.³ The food we eat has implications for our social selves and vice versa.⁴ The way taco is eaten in Norway, it is inherently a social food.⁵ In an increasingly digitalized and social media-engulfed world families report communicating less, and 6 out of 10 Norwegians report missing having time for wholesome conversations with family and friends.⁶ The buffet style presents opportunities for conversation. “Can you pass the sour cream?” leads to “how was your day?” and so the taco becomes social; it brings the family together. The taco’s popularity has varied, but it has had a steady incline nonetheless and the dish has prominently rooted itself in the country’s culture – seemingly more so than any other food trends to date. So, what is it about Norwegian culture that fits so well with “taco culture”? This paper will enter into the debate on how food is transported and how it is adapted, understood and appropriated across nation lines, in a modern, globalized world.

STATE OF THE RESEARCH

Within historical research, the field of food history is still growing. It started to gain foothold around the 1970s and has since emerged from the midst of popular science, non-fiction literature and other fields, into holding its own as a valuable subcategory of historical research. Jeffrey Pilcher wrote the “Oxford Handbook of Food History” in 2012, outlining the historiography of food history, shining light on the works earlier ignored by professional historians. Before the Annales School of the early 20th century, there was scarce interest in food history. The French school however, with their interdisciplinary studies, included some research – mainly on nutrition. Yet it was the anthropologists in the 1970s who really opened up the field for food in history academia. However, as Pilcher points out, the potential for food history is so great, that the field should only grow, as it surely has, into a discipline with its own methodology and research debates.⁷

³ Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, *A History of Food*, trans. Anthea Bell, 2. ed. (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2009, 1987).

⁴ Donna R. Gabaccia, "Food, Mobility, and World History," in *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*, ed. Jeffrey M. Pilcher (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ Norwegians use the singular “taco” when referring to the dish, which is why you will see me mostly using that when referring to the Norwegian version, as opposed to the plural “tacos” which is more common in the English language.

⁶ "Nordmenn spiser og prater mindre sammen," 2017, 2020, <https://www.melk.no/Inspirasjon/Kveldsmat/Nordmenn-spiser-og-prater-mindre-sammen>.

⁷ Jeffrey Pilcher, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Food History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), Introduction.

In the United States, the topic of tacos has been studied to some degree, with prominent works such as “Planet Taco: a global history of Mexican food” (2012) by Jeffrey M. Pilcher, “Taco USA: How Mexican food Conquered America” (2012) by Gustavo Arellano and “La Tacopedia: Enciclopedia del Taco” (2012) by Juan Carlos Mena and Déborah Holtz to name a few. In “Taco Planet” Pilcher makes the argument that tacos are a global food and always have been. “Taco USA” tells the complicated story of how tacos traveled across the border and became a national favorite, looking at immigrants, white cookbook writers, and the rise of fast food as main actors. “La Tacopedia” is a comprehensive encyclopedia, including the history of tacos in Mexico, terms and definitions, recipes, and restaurant recommendations. The University of Kentucky has a course on tacos called *Taco Literacy: Public Advocacy and Mexican Food in the U.S. Nuevo South*.⁸ The forementioned books are among the texts listed on the curriculum. For my thesis, I will be drawing on these works where applicable to the Norwegian case.

In Norway, the field of food history is growing as well, with important contributions. Among the newest, we find “Fattigmenn, tilslørte bondepiker og rike riddere: Mat og spisevaner i Norge fra 1500-tallet til vår tid” (2019) by sociologist Annechen Bahr Bugge. The study is an immersive and impressive account of Norwegian food culture over the last 500 years. The book has sections including the topic of taco, but no part dedicated to Mexican food in particular.⁹ Bugge, as perhaps Norway’s leading professor in food culture and food history, has several interesting works that intersect history, sociology, nutrition and culture studies. Her PhD from 2005 is called “Middag” (“Dinner”) and is a sociological analysis of Norwegian dinner habits.¹⁰ It draws from history, in natural ways, to say something about food in our society.

Aside from the online blogpost *Den norske tacohistorien* (“The Norwegian Taco History”) by Øyvind Holen and the online encyclopedia article on taco, also written by Holen, I have not been able to find any expansive studies on the topic of taco in Norway.¹¹ However there are more informal sources of information to be found. Among these are an article written by a grocery store chain for commercial purposes called “Hvordan ble nordmenn så

⁸ “Taco Literacy Course Description,” 2017, accessed 05.19.2021, <https://tacoliteracy.com/2017/01/03/taco-literacy-course-description/>.

⁹ Annechen Bahr Bugge, *Fattigmenn, tilslørte bondepiker og rike riddere: Mat og spisevaner i Norge fra 1500-tallet til vår tid* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2019).

¹⁰ Annechen Bahr Bugge, “Middag” (PhD NTNU, 2015).

¹¹ Øyvind Holen, “Taco,” in *Store norske leksikon* (2020). <https://snl.no/taco>.

glade i taco?" ("How did Norwegians come to love taco?")¹² and a children's book called "Visste du at...? Taco" ("Did you know that...? Taco") by Anna R. Folkestad, with fun facts about tacos both in Norway and Mexico.

In 2018, I wrote my bachelor's thesis on the topic of tacos in Norway, which this thesis is an extension of. The thesis looked at the terms *tacofredag* and *fredagstaco* (meaning Taco Friday and Friday Taco) to see how they were used by the Norwegian public and the media. Its focus was to shine a light on how Norway has tried to make sense of the dish and how in doing so has attributed it with certain characteristics and values. The paper argued that looking at how Norwegians have given meaning to the dish holds the key to understanding the infatuation between Norwegians and tacos, which I will now add to and further explore.

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

This paper will look at the topic from a social and cultural historian's point a view. In addition, the argument will have a global history approach.¹³ Although the subject matter is focused on Norwegians, the thesis deals with the intersections of cultures as well as globalization. Based on a wide array of secondary literature and primary sources, it will critically look at the available material and aims to find patterns and explanation models in a larger context of food identity and food mobility while also carving out the peculiar.¹⁴ This thesis relies heavily on being interdisciplinary, using theories from sociology as a backdrop for historical analysis.

Prominent works of history outlining ideas of food mobility exist already. They theorize on why and how food travels and is adopted across country boundaries as well as cultural borders. Looking at the quickly growing library shelf of food history, there is an overabundance of books focusing on food moving through wars, empire building, and invasions. This explanatory model fits in many cases but cannot be applied to many modern ones. As Donna R. Gabaccia points out in her illuminating article "Food, Mobility and World History", we need to look beyond "food and empire" when we research more recent occurrences of food mobility.¹⁵

¹² "Hvordan ble nordmenn så glade i taco?," 2020, accessed 21.10.2020, 2020,

https://kiwi.no/tema/taco/hvordan-ble-nordmenn-sa-glade-i-taco/?utm_campaign=nyhetsbrev_uke40&utm_source=Agilic&utm_medium=email&utm_content=1.

¹³ Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

¹⁴ Leidulf Melve, *Historie: Historieskriving frå antikken til i dag* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 2012), 239-40.

¹⁵ Gabaccia, "Food, Mobility, and World History."

Gabaccia's theory is that we can mainly see three trends within previous food migration theorization. The first is that food travels when peoples migrate in search of food. The second is that it travels through wars and empires. The final trend is the mass migration of the 18th and 19th century. She outlines the potential for a fourth explanation model, which uses mediatization and Americanization in its analysis. It calls for a more indirect and complex way of looking at how food migrates. This is where this thesis fits. It is also an explanation model that opens up for the more particular in different cases of how food travels as opposed to the three aforementioned explanation models, which are generalizing. In the complexity of the connectedness of the modern world, one needs to rise above generalized theories and look at the particular.¹⁶ One can argue that the case of the "Norwegian taco" is quite particular.

Globalization refers to the way in which the world becomes more intertwined. Distances and differences are minimizing as the world becomes interconnected. As Gabaccia points out, "new intellectual interests in globalization generated rich new opportunities for linking the study of mobility to histories of food with a focus on cultural dynamics."¹⁷ We turn away from sedentism (the assumption that civilized peoples and cultures stay immobile) and look to other more indirect and complex understandings of mobility.

When speaking of how food travels, historians have traditionally used the term diffusion. I will consciously not use it, because I believe as Gabaccia, that food does not necessarily undergo a natural process of slow travel and consequently become diffused or watered out.¹⁸ Media, transnational trade, and the growing interconnectedness through the internet has resulted in a more indirect and "unnatural" system of trends, culture, and food to migrate. This thesis will discuss how actors, with intention and purpose, are responsible for the way the taco has traveled. Gabaccia makes the point that it is trade, human migration, and media that are the central mechanisms causing food to travel in response to globalization. Important to her theory is the element of human agency. She argues for an explanatory model in which food travels through human choices, and not through a result of abstract or external influences. It is through that eye, that this study has been done.

The time period explored is from 1965, the year of the first import of Mexican foodstuff to Norway, until present time. As for geographical scope, the primary source

¹⁶ Gabaccia, "Food, Mobility, and World History," 319.

¹⁷ Gabaccia, "Food, Mobility, and World History," 309.

¹⁸ Gabaccia, "Food, Mobility, and World History," 313.

material will all come from Norway. The study will be national, but the thesis will of course rely on research and theory from around the world, where relevant, avoiding academic nationalism.

PRIMARY SOURCES

I have made use of a variety of illuminating sources, as opposed to concentrating only on a few. Primarily, I have performed a qualitative analysis of articles with the mention of “taco” and related terms like “fredagstaco” and “tacofredag”, found in the national library’s digital newspaper archives. The purpose was to explore how Norwegians have given meaning to the taco, through when these terms are mentioned, in what context and what is ultimately being conveyed by it. Furthermore, I have looked at commercials both tv and printed, to gain insight into how companies have targeted the population. What values or otherwise characteristics, did they try to appeal to in the Norwegian people?

In 1992 NRK’s monopoly on Norwegian television ceased, and commercial channels such as TV2 became available to the public. Televised commercials made their debut. Through their assumptions about what Norwegians respond to, we can perhaps draw, at least normatively, conclusions about Norwegian ideals and values. Furthermore, commercials are also defining of culture and identity, not only conveying but also *creating* it.¹⁹

A sampling of various cookbooks was mined for insight into how food writers tried to understand and convey the concept of taco when it first became popular.

ORGANIZATION OF THE PAPER

The purpose of this paper is to explore why and how taco has become such an integral part of Norwegian food culture. To accomplish this, it will both look at how the food traveled, as well as how it was adopted and appropriated. It will connect the theories on food mobility with explanations in food’s connection to identity and our social selves. Therefore, the first part will look at Norwegian society from 1960s till now, and at Americans in Norway, who as early as the 1965, had imported the first taco products to the country. Within this chapter I also feel it is necessary to look at different definitions of taco and at how the taco came to be

¹⁹ Jostein Saakvitne, "Norsk reklamehistorie 1945–2020," Fagtekst, (2018).
<https://ndla.no/subject:14/topic:1:185588/topic:1:185591/resource:1:74027?filters=urn:filter:94dfe81f-9e11-45fc-ab5a-fba63784d48e>.

“American”. This brings me closer to the point of the Norwegian taco essentially being an indirect result of American influence on Norway. In the next chapter I will look at the commercialization of Norwegian society, and the idea of the social taco. This chapter, along with the third, will connect to the idea of the identity making qualities of food and the way in which taco has been made into a symbol of “Norwegian-ness”. Through the focus points of my thesis, the argument of the “social taco” and the “egalitarian taco” will emerge.

Chapter 1: How the taco came to Norway – a windy tale

The tale of how the taco found its way to Norway is a windy one and requires an entirely different explanation model. One that includes, or rather centers around, the ever intermingling of our world through commercials, media and trade. This chapter will explore the American taco, as well as Norway's relationship with the United States.²⁰ Mexican food was not popularized in Norway because Mexican immigrants opened restaurants to fulfill their own appetites for the flavors of their home country, or as a means to becoming economically independent in a new country. It was also not a result of Norwegians traveling to Mexico and bringing their foods back with them. It rather has to do with American influence.²¹

The answer to why and how taco became a Norwegian staple is indirect and complicated, and it raises the question of how we define “taco” and whether or not there exists or ever has existed an “authentic taco”. Moving on I will look at how Norwegian society finally came to accept and appropriate the “ethnic” taco into their own culture, making it part of a new national identity and food culture. In doing so, I will begin to, as Gabaccia puts it, “analyze how exactly human beings, human choices, and human strategies resulted in particular customs and beliefs becoming general ones.”²²

UNCERTAIN ORIGINS

The answer to the question of when the taco first appeared, depends on how you define “taco”. If you, like Deborah Holtz and Juan Carlos Mena in “Tacopedia”, define it as a kind of “edible spoon” made of the maize tortilla, it dates back to as early as 1000-500 B.C.²³ This, seeing as the discovery of the process of nixtamalizing corn and then making it into a dough and heating it, can be attributed to the Aztecs. Gustava Arellano also subscribes to this belief, defining the taco as “a tortilla wrapped around a stuffing”, and claims that it therefore has existed ever since the invention of the tortilla, even if the term “taco” did not appear until the

²⁰ Gustavo Arellano, *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America* (New York: Scribner, 2012).

²¹ Maren Möhring, "Food For Thought: Rethinking the History of Migration to West Germany Through the Migrant Restaurant Business.," *Journal of Contemporary History* (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009413505666>.

²² Gabaccia, "Food, Mobility, and World History," 313.

²³ Déborah Holtz & Juan Carlos Mena, *Tacopedia* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2015), 17-19.

late 19th century.²⁴ If taco then is to be defined as a corn tortilla with literally anything in it, then the taco is certainly very old.²⁵

However, if you define the taco as a Mexican invention, as does Jeffrey Pilcher in “Planet Taco”, then per the definition there can be no pre-Hispanic Mexican food – seeing as there technically were no “Mexicans” before the colonization of America.²⁶ Tacos, as much of the food that is eaten in Mexico today, can be seen as the direct result of the Spanish invasion of Mexico. If we are to use Pilcher’s definition, tacos did not become popularized until after Mexican independence in the late 19th century, years after the Mexican independence of 1821.²⁷ However, Pilcher also agrees that it is worth looking back to the invention of the corn tortilla through the process of nixtamalization of maize, to truly understand the cuisine of Mexico today. This paper will not go into depths about this specific history, but one should note the fact that without the invention of nixtamal, a process in which the Aztecs processed the ancient and inedible corn to make it into something more nourishable, edible and pliable, there would be no taco.²⁸

Pilcher further makes the point that tacos are in and of themselves a global food. What is now considered the Mexican national cuisine is contended and constructed. The idea of it “Center around three basic images: an indigenous culture little changed from the ancient Aztecs, a Creole country steeped in Hispanic colonial traditions, and a modern nation following the latest fashion of Europe.”²⁹ He makes the point that modern-day searches for authentic tacos are pointless, because there is no such thing as an authentic taco; it has always been changing. Questions of what is and what is not a taco henceforth become difficult, and perhaps futile to answer.

TACO TRUCKS AND FAST FOOD – THE AMERICAN TACO

The rise of the taco in the United States can be attributed to the post-war Southwest. Mexican Americans living in the areas around the border, through both formal restaurants and street vendors, made the American taco come to life, “combining North American ingredients with

²⁴ Arellano, *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*, 52.

²⁵ Mena, *Tacopedia*, 17-19.

²⁶ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Planet Taco - A Global History of Mexican Food* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21.

²⁷ Pilcher, *Planet Taco - A Global History of Mexican Food*, 44-45.

²⁸ Mena, *Tacopedia*, 17.

²⁹ Pilcher, *Planet Taco - A Global History of Mexican Food*, 104.

Mexican sensibilities”, according to Jeffrey Pilcher.³⁰ These migrants and ethnic cooks created what we now know as California Mexican and Texan Mexican food, more commonly referred to as the hyphenated Cal-Mex and Tex-Mex.

Another important actor in the creation of the “American taco” is of course Glen Bell, founder of the now international franchise Taco Bell. According to himself, he is the father of the fast-food taco, and as Pilcher also points out, both the success of Taco Bell and Mexican American restaurants can be attributed to “the postwar expansion of consumerism, restaurants, and food processing”.³¹ The country saw a general growth in wealth and an expansion the middle class. A symptom of this economic boom was McDonaldization, which refers to a “historical process of rationalization, industrialization, and functionalization of eating”.³² Glen Bell, having previously been a hotdog and hamburger-vendor and a McDonalds employee, applied these fast-food strategies taken from the Henry Ford-assembly-line model onto his fast-growing taco chain.³³ This allowed for the taco’s immense spread nationally, and later internationally. At the same time, it led to a further hybridization and even appropriation of the food.

NORWEGIAN BEGINNINGS - IMPORTS FOR AMERICANS LOOKING FOR OIL IN THE NORTH SEA

Tacos were first brought to Norway as early as 1965.³⁴ During the Cold War there seemed to be a trend of Americans traveling around the world, bringing their eating habits with them. This was the beginning of what Pilcher calls the “contemporary globalization of Mexican food”.³⁵

During the 1960s, Norway came of international interest as the result of the discovery of oil reserves in the North Sea. During this time Americans, mainly Texans, traveled to the coast of Norway in search of the lucrative raw material. The food that met them in the small coastal towns was very different from what they were used to, however, and they soon began to crave the foods of their homeland. Allert Middelthon was a grocer living in Stavanger at

³⁰ Pilcher, *Planet Taco - A Global History of Mexican Food*. 130.

³¹ Pilcher, *Planet Taco - A Global History of Mexican Food*, 130-31.

³² Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, *Food: A Culinary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 533.

³³ Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Food in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³⁴ Holen, "Taco."

³⁵ Pilcher, *Planet Taco - A Global History of Mexican Food*, 11.

the time. Now, his son Allert Middelton Jr. recalls how the American requested the import of goods from the States, remarking how: “The first thing they asked for was taco.”³⁶ Goods such as corn flour, tortilla chips and canned taco products were imported from Texas to Stavanger in the 1960s. As an advertisement from the local newspaper Stavager Aftenblad shows, they catered to Americans directly, the advertisement reading “A Middelthon – The place where Americans meets.” The text is in English, albeit with a typo, and it details different “American products” that could be bought or ordered, such as barbeque sauce, Campbell’s soups and many different Mexican products, among them from the producer Old El Paso.³⁷ Although Middelthon Sr. had great success importing taco products, and a dedicated customer base in the Americans, the food was still to be unknown to most Norwegians for a couple of decades more. It was not until a little later that taco gained major popularity amongst the general Norwegian public. Regardless, one can clearly see a link between the Norwegian taco tradition and American influence on Norway.³⁸ In 1971 more Mexican American food products came to the country when the grocer Oluf Lorentzen also started to import Old El Paso products to Oslo.³⁹ A competing distributor, Haugen Gruppen, started to import taco products in 1985.⁴⁰

Despite the influx of taco imports, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that we can truly see its emergence in the Norwegian general diet. Part of the reason for this can be traced back to Mexico gaining international attention through global sporting events, such as the 1989 soccer World Cup which was held in Mexico. According to the Norwegian grocery store Kiwi, Norwegians are the leading consumers of Mexican food per capita in the world, second only to Mexicans.⁴¹ In 2011, 48% of Norwegians reported that they ate either tacos, burritos, or tortillas at least once every month; a 16% climb from 2003.⁴² “Taco” has gone from being a foreign term to a national dish in a matter of 40 years. In 2011 and again in 2013 it was

³⁶ Rolv Christian Topdahl, Øystein Otterdal, and Ruth Einervoll Nilsen, “– Vi solgte taco og tortillachips før alle andre,” *NRK*, 23.09.2018 2018, 124, https://www.nrk.no/rogaland/_-vi-solgte-taco-og-tortillachips-for-alle-andre-1.14297697.

³⁷ A. Middelthon, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, 08.30.1974 1974, Advertisement column, <https://www.nb.no/items/c3d6b8e2d58d6df2d4fc230e4db8c5e1?page=9&searchText=taco>.

³⁸ Øystein Aldridge, “Den norske nasjonalretten taco,” *Aftenposten*, 11.02.2013 2013, <https://www.aftenposten.no/okonomi/i/3jx9M/den-norske-nasjonalretten-taco>.

³⁹ Holen, “Taco.” Old El Paso was established in 1917 in New Mexico, (the owner was from El Paso, Texas, explaining the name) and sold mostly canned tomatoes and pinto beans. “Old El Paso,” in *Wikipedia* (2020). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_El_Paso.

⁴⁰ Holen, “Taco.”

⁴¹ Kiwi, “Hvordan ble nordmenn så glade i taco?.”

⁴² Aldridge, “Den norske nasjonalretten taco.”

claimed that Norwegians ate over 14 000 000 dinners a year containing either tacos, fajitas or tortillas.⁴³ In 2015, and again in 2019, a study found that among Norwegians under the age of 40, 80% of them ate tacos or Mexican food at least once a month.⁴⁴ How does the “Mexican food” we eat compare to the one that the American work migrants craved when they first requested it, however? What were Norway’s first perception of taco and how has it changed? To answer this, one needs to consider ideas of authenticity and the invention of the Norwegian taco.

“TACO WITH MEAT FILLING” – NORWEGIAN TACO

Food researcher Annechen Bahr Bugge claims that tacos came into Norwegian eating habits for real in the 1990s and the 2000s.⁴⁵ But how we have eaten and understood taco has also changed over time. What can be understood as a “Norwegian taco”? Looking at cookbooks, one can get an idea of social and cultural tendencies of the time in which they were published, as cookbooks are “children of their time”, as Henry Notaker states in his important work “Gastronomi: til bords med historien”.⁴⁶ “Den rutete kokeboken” from 1982, was written by Ingrid Espelid Hovig and has been considered a household staple, selling in more than 360 000 copies.⁴⁷ With eight renditions, the newest one having been done in 2015, the book is an anthology now containing 1800 recipes. Comparing the different editions to see how the taco was made sense of when it was first introduced, and how the concept of “taco” has changed over time, can give valuable insight into how taco has been understood and conveyed in Norway.

The first time the word “taco” appeared was in the third iteration of the cookbook, which came out in 1994. The edition has a single taco recipe: “Taco with meat filling”.⁴⁸ Here, taco is described as a shell filled with ground meat that has been cooked with “taco- or chili mix”, topped with lettuce, tomato, grated cheese, and sour cream. Later in the book the word “taco” is mentioned again but in context of a recipe called “Tortilla” describing that

⁴³ Aldridge, "Den norske nasjonalretten taco."

⁴⁴ Aldridge, "Den norske nasjonalretten taco."

⁴⁵ Ann-Inger Borstad and Erlend Hansen Juvik, "Ny undersøkelse beviser myten: Fredag er tacodagen," *Adressa* 2018, <https://www.adressa.no/nyheter/innenriks/2018/02/02/Ny-unders%C3%B8kelse-beviser-myten-Fredag-er-tacodagen-15971621.ece>.

⁴⁶ Henry Notaker, *Gastronomi: Til bords med historien*, 2. ed. (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1987), 189.

⁴⁷ Ingrid Espelid Hovig, *Den rutete kokeboken*, 8. ed. (Oslo: Gyldendal Forlag, 2015), 7.

⁴⁸ My translation. Original title: “Taco med kjøttfyll”. Original phrase: “taco- eller chilimix”. Ingrid Espelid Hovig, *Den nye rutete kokeboken*, 3. ed. (Oslo: Gyldendal Forlag, 1994), 515.

“tortillas are used a lot in Mexican cooking [...] Usually one puts filling on the cakes and roll it together. That is called Taco.”⁴⁹ At this point taco was probably a somewhat familiar term and people ate it, but not so familiar that it does not need defining. By the fourth edition, published in 1999, there is an added definition of the term “taco” in the appendices, not found in previous editions. It reads: “Thin corncakes that are filled with various cold and warm filling”.⁵⁰ Corncakes referring in this case to the fried taco shells that were first more commonly used in Norway. Later we see that the tendency moved from the fried shell to the wheat tortilla.

Within the sixth edition published in 2006 there is no longer a reference to tortillas with meat being called taco in the recipe; she omitted the description altogether. This removal implies that the taco had become so widely known and consumed, it no longer needed an introduction. In 2015 “Den rutete kokeboken” came out with its eighth, and still most recent, rendition, and by now “taco” is so popular that there are five taco recipes including one for homemade tortillas.

As the taco has gone from something foreign to familiar, the openness to variations of the dish has grown. New restaurants pop up all over the country, one seemingly more authentic than the other. For example, a now fast-growing fast-food chain found in many major cities around Norway called Los Tacos, first opened in Bergen in 2015 proclaiming they had “Mexican food so authentic Donald Trump would build a wall around it”.⁵¹ But is there such a thing as an authentic taco? As previously mentioned, historians are not so sure.⁵²



FIGURE 1: A TYPICAL FREDAGSTACO (FOTO: PRIVATE)

⁴⁹ My translation. Original quote: “Tortillas brukes mye i mexicansk matlaging [...] Vanligvis legger man fyll på kakene og ruller dem sammen. Det kalles Taco.” Hovig, *Den nye rutete kokeboken*, 544.

⁵⁰ My translation. Original quote: “Tynne maiskaker som fylles med forskjellig kaldt og varmt fyll.” Ingrid Espelid Hovig, *Den rutete kokeboken*, 4. ed. (Oslo: Gyldendal Forlag, 1999), 724.

⁵¹ lostacosnorge, “Mexican food so authentic Donald Trump would build a wall around it,” Instagram, 04.18.2016, 2016, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BEWMaBmS6M4/>.

⁵² Historian Achim Saupe points out the definition of authenticity: “it signifies in the first instance genuineness in the sense of something that has been validated by someone “as original” and questions the way it has been used in cultural studies as a hallmark of quality. He goes on to point out the politicality and subjectivity of “the

Today, what is popularly eaten in Norway, referred to as *fredagstaco*,⁵³ is much closer to a burrito in construction, than a taco. This is true whether you compare it to Mexican or American tacos. The burrito is defined by its largeness, and that it contains several different ingredients, and of course, everything being wrapped in a large flour tortilla.⁵⁴ Norwegian taco is served as a buffet-style meal where everyone assembles their own taco. It starts with a large wheat flour tortilla, followed by minced meat cooked in taco seasoning, chopped lettuce, diced tomatoes and cucumbers, shredded cheese called *gulost*, sour cream, and store-bought salsa.⁵⁵ Although many still prefer the fried corn tortilla, the large, soft wheat tortilla is now as popular, if not more so.⁵⁶

A TACO OF THEIR OWN

The “original” taco, whether you want to date it back to the Aztecs or to after Mexican independence, nevertheless centers around the maize tortilla, and as Holtz and Mena claims: “Still, the importance of this food lives on, not only in its enormous economic contribution to Mexico, but also in its cultural legacy: maize, tortillas, and tacos are an integral part of Mexican identity.” Interestingly so, seeing as this thesis makes the point that the taco eaten in Norway, the “Norwegian taco”, is in many ways integral to *Norwegian* cultural identity, despite it being so far removed from the historic and culturally important connection to maize.

The Norwegian taco is an example of Mexican food as global food, as is the burrito. As Pilcher points out, the burrito is: “Eaten widely around the world, but virtually unknown in most of Mexico. Wrapped in a wheat flour tortilla, it is a distinctive product of the frontier, unlike the corn-based dishes popular in the rest of the country.”⁵⁷ Wheat was not a native plant in the Aztec empire but was introduced by the conquistadors in what is now northern Mexico.⁵⁸ Presently the wheat tortilla is popular both in this area, in the south of the United

establisher” of said authenticity. Achim Saupe, "Authenticity," *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte* (2016), <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.645.v1>.

⁵³ Meaning Friday taco.

⁵⁴ Arellano, *Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*, 142-43.

⁵⁵ Bugge, *Fattigmenn, tilslørte bondepiker og rike riddere: Mat og spisevaner i Norge fra 1500-tallet til vår tid*, 412.

⁵⁶ *Gulost*, meaning “yellow cheese”, is the most commonly used cheese in Norway. It is a mild, firm cheese that is somewhere between a low-moisture mozzarella and swiss cheese in flavor. Some people call it *hvitost*, meaning “white cheese”.

⁵⁷ Pilcher, *Planet Taco - A Global History of Mexican Food*, 46.

⁵⁸ Mena, *Tacopedia*, 46.

States, and of course in Norway. On the question of authenticity, the burrito or *fredagstaco*, can be said to be less authentic than other forms of tacos.

Los Tacos claimed to serve “authentic Mexican food” on an ad where the literal text claiming it, reads over the photo of a burrito. Furthermore, the restaurateur and chef who founded it, is in fact from San Diego and found the inspiration for the chain in similar Mexican restaurants in his hometown.⁵⁹ It may well be “authentic”, but at this point it seems to be more authentically American, or Californian, than it is Mexican. In this case it appears like a market strategy to distinguish themselves against other brands and restaurants, or even the Norwegian *fredagstaco*, which one can argue has become something, in a sense, Norwegian – authentically Norwegian if you will.

The concept of authenticity and the way Americans first appropriated the taco, is undoubtably connected to the idea of food and identity. Food writer Alejandro Escalante writes in “Tacopedia” that “The real taco – its essential flavor, its exoticism – is found outside, in the streets and in taco restaurants.”⁶⁰ To most Mexicans, a taco is a snack, something you eat on your way to something else. You have a quick bite, usually eating it right there on the street, standing upright or sitting on a crate. The term “vitamin T” is used in Mexico to describe the energy they get from maize-based foods, such as tacos, tamales, tortas and so on, that gets them through the day.⁶¹ Whereas for Norwegians it is something completely different. It has grown from trend into tradition and attached meaning that resonate with our social and cultural identities. As will be discussed in the upcoming chapter, the ritual of eating taco in Norway connects to cherishing family and a celebration of the weekend.

⁵⁹ "Vår historie," 2020, accessed 10.22.2020, <https://lostacos.no/om-los-tacos/>.

⁶⁰ Mena, *Tacopedia*, 17.

⁶¹ Mena, *Tacopedia*, 275.

Chapter 2: The Social Taco

In this chapter, I will look at how the taco has been marketed and understood both by those corporations that offered Norwegian food and the people who consumed it. The main argument here is that the taco was deemed as a social food by Norwegians throughout its history and that this is part of the reason why it is so popular. Taco, I will further argue, was seen as an antidote to the downsides of modern life, namely loneliness caused by individualization.

This part of the thesis will look at how taco has been understood and deemed as a social food by Norwegians throughout its history in Norway by first looking at consumer culture and the commercialization of the post-war period in Norway. Furthermore, it will look at the way taco has been marketed and how it plays a role in how society has attributed the dish meaning. Then I will look at how the practicality and socialness of the taco extends beyond the family, and Norwegian's relationship to the very act of preparing and eating taco in itself.

With the rise of fast food and processed food there has been this shift. From food being prepared slowly, with love, and at the center of the family, to food being something that is fast on your plate, fast in your stomach, perhaps not even eaten at home. This can be seen as a contributing factor, or perhaps a result of, the shift from a society focused on the communal and togetherness and over to individualization. In a society where more and more feel alienated and lonely, the family style *fredagstaco* becomes an antidote. "The social taco" celebrates family and togetherness.

CONSUMERISM AND POST-WAR NORWAY: HISTORY OF COMMERCIALS AND MARKETING IN NORWAY 1960-2010

The reason why taco has become an integral part of Norwegian food culture can in ways be explained by looking at the push and the pull of the market forces. Thus, we have to look at the actors, such as brands and stores, who consciously and with intention introduced and furthermore "pushed" the product into mainstream popularity. On the other hand, you have the consumers. The people and the culture that accept it and make it their own. According to Don Slater for the study of consumer culture to be fruitful it needs to not simply be "the study of texts and textuality, of individual choice and consciousness, of wants and desires, but

rather the study of such things in the context of social relations, structures, institutions, systems.”⁶² Commercials of a time period give us an insight into the ideals of the society in which it was targeted. It functions as mirrors that can, if looked at the right way, portray sides of a national identity. Henceforth, I will outline how commercialism and marketing took shape in Norway after World War II, and then further look at how the taco products of Old El Paso and Santa Maria were marketed.

Commercialism had its breakthrough in Norwegian society after World War II.⁶³ Norway became more internationalized as goods and influences made its way across the borders and onto the markets. Advertisements would subsequently ascribe products with meaning and value beyond just their actual appliance. They were symbols, that in turn would make the buyers associate the product with desired ideals that could be obtained if they were in possession of said product.⁶⁴ During the 1960s international advertising agencies made their way to Norway and would from then on dominate the market in Norway. When we think of commercials some may think of posters and flyers, but mostly one thinks of TV, the internet and perhaps radio. In Norway the government-funded broadcasting company, NRK, had a legal monopoly on both media channels and were non-commercial, naturally. In the 1980s however, with the repeal of the monopoly, new commercial channels arrived both for television and radio.⁶⁵ With them came the televised commercial. In the beginning the new commercials were intriguing and fun; an event in and of themselves, so one can assume they were quite effective.

THE TACO SHELF AND NEWSPAPER ADS

An important factor in the marketing of taco products, alongside TV commercials, posters, and internet content has been the grocery stores and supermarkets as a medium, according to Silje Kristin Skifjell, the consumer contact for Santa Maria Norway.⁶⁶ If you go into any grocery store in Norway, you will soon find the “taco shelf”. Relating to what Skifjell says, I can confirm this from my time as a grocery store clerk, around 2014, the “taco shelf” was

⁶² Don Slater, *Consumer Culture & Modernity* (Cornwall: Polity Press, 1997), 2.

⁶³ Saakvitne, "Norsk reklamehistorie 1945–2020."

⁶⁴ Saakvitne, "Norsk reklamehistorie 1945–2020."

⁶⁵ Jon Annar Fordal, "NRKs historie," *NRK*, 04.30.2009 2009, <https://www.nrk.no/organisasjon/nrks-historie-1.6589747>.

⁶⁶ From email 05.10.2020 from Silje Kristin Skifjell, consumer contact in Santa Maria, after inquiry about Santa Maria's marketing history. Silje Kristin Skifjell, Email from forbrukerkontakt.NO@santamaria.no to miriam.folland@gmail.com, 10.05.2020 2020, In possession of author, Private email.

large and prominent in the store, and when the weekend neared, it had to be manned almost constantly. Skifjell explains how the stores as mediums of marketing have been very important in branding and distribution and exemplifies it by pointing to how Santa Maria has established themselves as the “red taco products”, in contrast to the Old El Paso products as the “yellow” ones. “This is used actively in packaging, store shelves, and with product islands in the stores, also driven by large campaigns that are very visible in the stores.”⁶⁷ Answering both to demand, and also at the same time forcing its relevance with an unwavering presence. Through commercial campaigns, deals and of course “the shelf”, the producers of taco products, mainly Santa Maria and Old El Paso, made sure Norwegians did not forget about *tacofredag*.

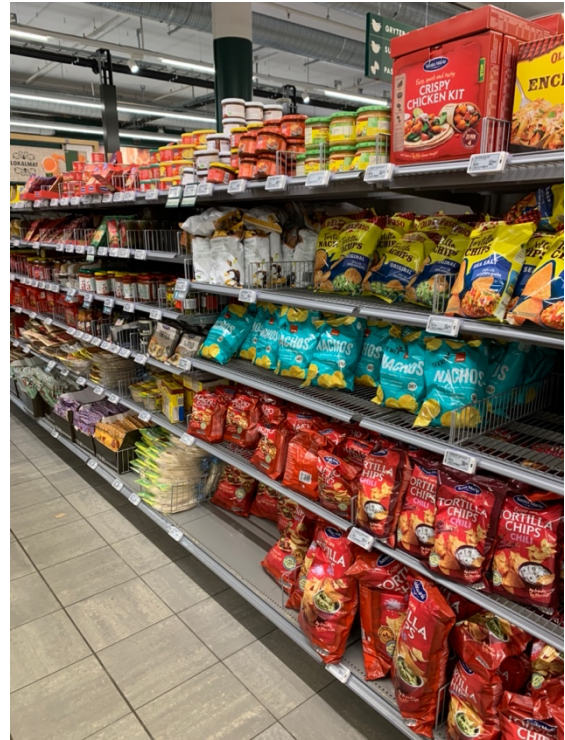


FIGURE 2: A TYPICAL "TACO SHELF" AT MY LOCAL COOP MEGA. (PHOTO: PRIVATE)

In addition, household products for serving the taco have been sold in Norway since at least the 90s. These can take many different shapes. Early examples look like large, round serving plates split into sections to hold the different ingredients. Now, a more common version is as set with small ceramic bowls for the different vegetables, and one large bowl for the taco meat, sometimes with room for a small candle under it to keep it warm, as pictured in Figure 1 in the last chapter. This is all placed on a rotating plate for easy access around the dinner table. The earliest newspaper advertisement including the term “Tacosett” that I can detect from the Norwegian Newspaper database, is from late 1997. Since then, there has been an increasing number of ads for different sets. In total the database registers 504 mentions of “Tacosett”. Some of the early mentions are referring to kits with ingredients to make a taco dinner, but mostly these are advertisements of the kitchen appliance. In 1997 there were two ads, between 2000 and 2004 there were eight, between 2005 and 2009 there were seven, but

⁶⁷ Skifjell, Email from forbrukerkontakt.NO@santamaria.no to miriam.folland@gmail.com. My own translation. Original quote: “Dette brukes aktivt i emballasje, butikkhyllene og med torg på gulv i butikk, også drevet av store kampanjer som er svært synlige i butikk.”

then something happened around 2010. Between 2010 and 2014 there are 289 mentions of “tacosett”, again most of them being from ads.

In the beginning they were marketed as gift ideas for Christmas.⁶⁸ During the 2000s it seems like they mostly just appeared in kitchen appliance store posters. Today, the kitchen appliance store Kitch’n describes the taco serving sets as “an eternal classic for Taco Friday!” and encourage the buyer to gather their family around the table with this helpful appliance.⁶⁹ In its construction, it facilitates the social dinner. Its implication is that it will be used for family dinners, and it will be used often.

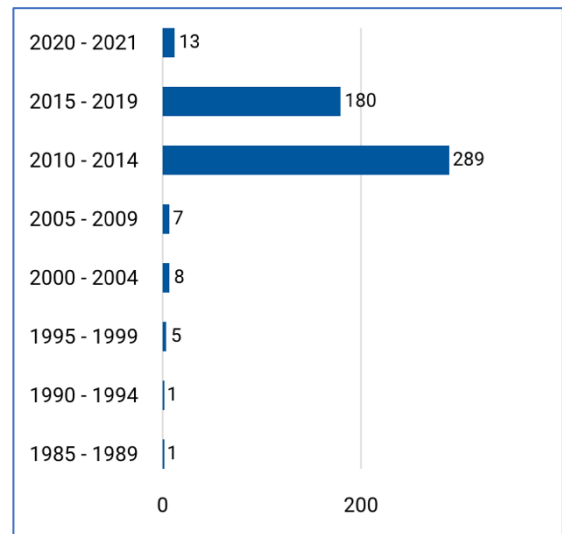


FIGURE 3: TAKEN FROM NORWEGIAN NATIONAL LIBRARY NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE SEARCH ENGINE. SEARCH WORD: "TACOSETT".

FROM MEXICAN TO NORWEGIAN – A SHIFT IN MARKETING STRATEGY

In the beginning, taco was marketed as something Mexican and exotic. Judging by the national library’s newspaper archive, Old El Paso has been marketed in Norwegian News Paper since 1974. The oldest mention of “Old El Paso” that can be found in the database, is the advertisement from Allert Middlethon in Stavanger Aftenblad, mentioned earlier. One other advertisement appeared twice in 1974, in Aftenposten, Norway’s largest printed newspaper. In an advertisement for the food section of the shopping center Glassmagasinet in Oslo centrum, Mexican food items such as tortillas, tamales, and Old El Paso products were defined. Under the title “Original specialties from far away...”, the marketer proclaimed that

⁶⁸ Horten Glassmagasin, "Tilbudstoget i gjengangeren julen 1997 - Tacosett kr. 249," Advertisement, *Gjengangeren* (12.19.1997 1997),

<https://www.nb.no/items/ddc6e28971ef4644f4e0bac588cf8e4e?page=17&searchText=tacosett>.

Karisma - City Nord, "Hos oss finner du julegaver til alle! - Tacosett, før 245, Nå 199," Advertisement, *Nordlands Framtid* (11.25.1997 1997),

<https://www.nb.no/items/af75fa20d39bcb9bd46e5bba5753b649?page=71&searchText=tacosett>.

⁶⁹ My translation. Original quote: “Tacosett er en evig klassiker til tacofredag! Samle familien rundt bordet, og forsyn dere etter ønske ved hjelp av den roterende platen.” "Modern House

Daily use tacosett," accessed 05.22.2021, <https://www.kitchn.no/nettbutikk/servering/boller-skaler/750128/>.

Magneten kjøpesenter, "Gavebutikken fremfor noen - Tacosett 5 deler - Gavetips," Advertisement, *Innherreds Folkeblad Verdalingen* (09.19.2001 2000),

<https://www.nb.no/items/2a3c0ad2d5ebd7f6247074989c4c9e20?page=13&searchText=tacosett>.

it was trendy to experiment with what they call ““weird” foods”, going on to inform that Glassmagasinet's grocery store “Gla’ mat” has such food items. The first foods mentioned are Old El Paso products, explaining that they are “a series of Mexican national dishes and sauces with temperament! Food for people who can handle hot spices!”.⁷⁰ Judging from this advertisement we can assess two things. Taco products, or Mexican food, was not yet widely common, even in the capital. More importantly, we can see that it was still characterized as something foreign. The advertisement implies that experimenting with odd foods is trendy, Mexican food being one of these. It also has to give a disclaimer of sorts, saying that this food, is not for everyone. Knowing the status of the food today, this seems especially ironic. Another advertisement, from 1994, reads “Try some interesting food! Try Mexican food! Try Old El Paso”.⁷¹

Looking at what little can be found of old video commercials for taco items, one can also see a clear development in recent years. The oldest clip of an Old El Paso commercial found on YouTube, is one from 2010.⁷² By that time, *tacofredag* was well established and the dish had had widespread popularity for quite some time. Still, the commercial has a heavy Mexican theme. It depicts a boy in class, being asked to point to where Mexico is on the map. After some consideration, the boy points to Norway. He smiles, and the scene shifts over to the boy at home with his family, presumably, at the dinner table ready to eat a varied spread of Mexican-inspired dishes. On his own plate we can clearly see a taco in a crunchy tortilla. A voice-over by the kid can be heard where he says, “When I can decide, we always serve my favorite food.” The Old El Paso logo appears, with the slogan “Discover the Mexican kitchen.” The music played over is easily recognizable as Mexican Mariachi music.⁷³ Similarly, Santa Maria has a commercial from 2011 where sensual “Mexican music” is played over images of produce, like corn, lime and tomatoes, going through water, juxtaposed to the

⁷⁰ «Gla’ mat» can be translated to «Happy foods”. My translations. Original title: “Originale spesialiteter fra fjerne himmelstrøk...”. Original quote from advertisement: “Det er på mote å eksperimentere med “rar” mat.” Glassmagasinet, “Originale spesialiteter fra fjerne himmelstrøk...,” *Aftenposten*, 10.09.1974 1974, Advertisement column, <https://www.nb.no/items/14218a5219acbd31890f086dd7e39d92?page=3&searchText=%22Old%20el%20paso%22>.

⁷¹ My translation. Original quote: “Prøv litt spennende mat! Prøv meksikansk mat! Prøv Old El Paso!” MINI 1000, “TEMA,” *Harstad Tidene* (Harstad), 04.28.1994 1994, Advertisement, <https://www.nb.no/items/6634aa591bdf57158d492476f9a6c447?page=37&searchText=%22old%20el%20paso%22>.

⁷² GeneralMillsNorge, “Old El Paso Norge 2010,” (Old El Paso, 03.25.2021 2010), Commercial, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XosBlhLxa9I&ab_channel=GeneralMillsNorge.

⁷³ GeneralMillsNorge, “Old El Paso Norge 2010.”

taco products, like salsa, shells and tortilla chips. A voice-over asks, “What’s your reason to do Tex-Mex tonight”.⁷⁴

What we can learn from these commercials is that early on, taco and Tex-Mex was marketed as something Mexican and exotic, trying undoubtedly to appeal to the curiosity of the consumer. Skifjell confirms this explaining how Santa Maria, in the introduction of taco and Tex-Mex, used a lot of marketing based on the origin country, “Thus, this dish [taco] was also something new and exotic that came after the pizza had stood strong for a long time.”⁷⁵

Marketing something as new and exotic has the advantage of peaking interest and curiosity, but we can derive more understanding of how the marketing agencies perceived their target market. During the years between 1960 and 2000, Norway experienced a boom in two important areas: immigration and travel. Due to the growing oil economy, Norwegian society experienced a new general wealth, that would change the way people lived and the way they perceived their shared national identity.⁷⁶ The emergence of a large middle class made long-distance travel and flight tourism common, especially to the south of Europe popularly referred to as “syden”, meaning “the south”.⁷⁷

There was certainly immigration in Norway before the 1960s, but most of the immigrants were from Scandinavia and northern Europe. It was first by the end of the 60s that immigrants started coming from other continents.⁷⁸ With them, they brought foods, traditions and customs. International grocery stores, owned by immigrants, started to sell imported ingredients and commodities.⁷⁹ When the taco spices first came to Norway in the 60s, perhaps the people were not ready. It was too different. Too exotic. But as the decades progressed, with new impulses coming into the country through migration, as well as through travel, Norway rapidly became a globalized country. Their palates had been primed, and by the 90s

⁷⁴ starkfilm, "Santa Maria Tex mex," (Santa Maria, 03.25.2021 2011), Commercial. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D--p1qVMm-U&ab_channel=starkfilm.

⁷⁵ My translation. Original quote: “I tillegg brukte vi i introduksjonen av taco eller texmex, mye markedsføring med tanke på opprinnelsesland, i stor grad Mexico. Dermed var denne retten også noe nytt og eksotisk som kom etter at pizzaen hadde stått sterkt lenge.” Skifjell, Email from forbrukerkontakt.NO@santamaria.no to miriam.folland@gmail.com.

⁷⁶ "1970 – i dag: Oljealder og overflod," in *Norgeshistorie* (Universitetet i Oslo, 2021). <https://www.norgeshistorie.no/oljealder-og-overflod/>.

⁷⁷ Edgeir Benum, "Modernisering og miljøbelastning," in *Norgeshistorie* (Universitetet i Oslo, 2020). <https://www.norgeshistorie.no/oljealder-og-overflod/1939-modernisering-og-miljobelastning.html>.

⁷⁸ Grete Brochmann, "Den nye innvandringen," in *Norgeshistorie* (Universitetet i Oslo, 2020). <https://www.norgeshistorie.no/oljealder-og-overflod/1955-den-nye-innvandringen.html>.

⁷⁹ Bugge, "Middag," 117.

taco was exciting, and interesting, and fitted with the idea of the globalized, modern Norwegian.

In the early advertising of taco, the marketing heavily focused on its Mexican origins, but as Skifjell further points out, this has shifted over time. Now Santa Maria has completely cut out the Mexican elements in their marketing. “For us taco is a “Norwegian” dish[...]”, Skifjell explains, pointing out how their products are not, and never have been, produced in Mexico.⁸⁰ Indeed, newer commercials found on their webpage or on YouTube, feature instructional videos of how to prepare different types of taco dinners, or, and more interestingly for this thesis, of families enjoying the food around a buffet-style dinner. The family element is similar to the way it was portrayed in the previously discussed Old El Paso-commercial, this time though, with no allusions or mentions of Mexico, but rather with the words “Taco fredag”, “Taco Friday”, popping up – the association being, “our taco” or “the Norwegian taco”.⁸¹

NEXT MEX – LEVEL UP?

Furthermore, Santa Maria’s latest campaign is a new line of products that are marketed with the tagline, in English, “IT’S NEW - IT’S NEXT MEX.”⁸², “Next Mex” being an obvious play on the term “Tex-Mex”. The products include ingredients such as tomatillos, ancho and chipotle chilis, peach and cacao – no doubt purposefully echoing the taco’s Mexican ancestry. On Santa Maria’s website, their new products are explained to be new flavors and surprising combinations, urging you to “Take your taco to the next level!”⁸³ These are not new flavors. For anyone who has ever been to Mexico or at a Mexican restaurant, or even someone who is just familiar with Mexican food will know, these are common ingredients used in a variety of traditional Mexican dishes. A more appropriate name for it might be “Old Mex” or “Vintage Mex”. The intended targeted consumer should be considered when apply meaning to the way it is appealing to and understanding its audience. In this case, the audience Santa Maria is directing the commercial towards is all Norwegians and their way of eating *fredagstaco*.

⁸⁰ My translation. Original quote taken from: “– for oss er taco en "norsk" rett og vi produserer heller ingen av våre varer i Syd-Amerika, selv om taco'en selvfølgelig henter sin inspirasjon derfra.” Skifjell, Email from forbrukerkontakt.NO@santamaria.no to miriam.folland@gmail.com.

⁸¹ Santa Maria Norge, "Santa Maria - Taco Fredag (Kjøttdeig)," (Santa Maria, 08.04.2021 2021), Commercial. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gS8lc4YDp4&ab_channel=SantaMariaNorge.

⁸² "IT'S NEW - IT'S NEXT MEX," (Produktinformasjon), 2021, <https://www.santamariaworld.com/no/tema/next-mex/>.

⁸³ My translation. Original quote: “*ta din taco til neste nivå!*” Norge, "IT'S NEW - IT'S NEXT MEX."

Implying both that there is a traditional, old way for Norwegians to eat a taco dinner, and that the time is right for it to be challenged. If the taco most Norwegians eat is the same as they have been eating for many years, introducing for example tomatillo salsa to the “traditional” Norwegian taco dinner, *is* new. Even though salsa made from tomatillos, usually called *salsa verde*, can be dated back to the Aztec empire. Although it has been eaten on tacos long before the first iterations of the dish ever made it to Norway, Norwegians have not widely consumed it before.⁸⁴ Wanting to appeal to the modern Norwegian today, perhaps with the ever-growing focus on authenticity, this “new wave” of taco products may be a way of making sure tacos stay relevant and “cool”, just as Norwegians may want to perceive themselves.

FAMILY DINNERS AND COMMUNITY

The resilience of the tradition of the family dinner can be seen as an expression of Norwegians family values, and *fredagstaco* is an important example of this. “For many, the taco represents a nice and permanent meeting point for Friday Night [...] It is a social meal with different components that can be suitable for everyone, no matter of age”, says Ståle Riddervold, marketing manager for Old El Paso Norway.⁸⁵ He points out that the very nature of the meal itself encourages social interaction in a way that other dishes do not. It is an activity, both in preparation, assembly and throughout the meal.

The whole family sits down and enjoys a meal together, sometimes even the preparation is a social act in itself. This tradition extends to groups of friends and other types of communities. A column from the newspaper *Nordlys* from 2008 depicts a group of students living together. It contains the oldest mention of the term “Tacofredag” in Norwegian newspapers archived by the Norwegian National Library. It explains that in the shared apartment they sometimes eat dinner together. One of the students says, “we have Taco Friday every other Friday. You are sort of supposed to have taco on Fridays. It fits”.⁸⁶ This dialogue implies that the taco is a food for shearing and perhaps to meet up at the end of the week, as friends or as for example a community. Within the newspaper archives there are multiple announcements from different churches and congregations arranging “Taco Friday”

⁸⁴ "Salsa Verde," in *Wikipedia* (2021). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salsa_verde#cite_note-1.

⁸⁵ Kiwi, "Hvordan ble nordmenn så glade i taco?."

⁸⁶ My translation. Original quote: “Vi har tacofredag annen hver fredag. Du skal liksom spise taco på fredag. Det passer.” Christina Yvonne Olsen, "Hjemme hos: Kristoffer, Simen og Rikke," *Nordlys* 2008, <https://www.nb.no/items/74e885061797a445ab03c5053a088d27?page=61&searchText=Tacofredag>.

at the church.⁸⁷ A religious community uses the taco's social and gathering qualities to attract people to come share food and company: "It is important to us that people come together and have community with family" explains one of the leaders of one of these events, thus *fredagstaco* seems to be a widespread way of social gathering both within the family and outside.

Interestingly, this social aspect extends to Norwegians living outside of Norway as well. In a reportage from 2011 in VG about Norwegian exchange students living in so-called "ghettoes" in Toulouse, the students have a positive view on their experience, pointing out their sense of community and togetherness in the foreign city. Here they often share meals: "we usually have Taco-Friday with taco spice from Norway".⁸⁸ In these "Norwegian" housings they meet over food and shared culture, making not only social connections but professional ones as well. Taco is a gatherer of people, identities, and a feeling of home or "Norwegian-ness".

From the "tacosett" to "Next Mex", taco is about shearing and celebrating the communal, just as Slater puts it: "The most private act of consumption animates public and social systems of signs, not necessarily in the sense of public display [...] but more fundamentally through the process of cultural reproduction: in consuming we do not – ever – simply reproduce our physical existence but also reproduce (sustain, evolve, defend, contest, imagine, reject) culturally specific, meaningful ways of life."⁸⁹ In the act of consuming taco Norwegians reproduce how they see themselves, i.e. they reproduce their social selves, as exactly that – social. Selves that are oriented around the family, loyalty, friendships and community. In preferring the conversive nature of the buffet style dinner, they symbolize and reproduce the idea of togetherness, and also, ideas of respect and equality.

⁸⁷ Charlotte Nagell, "Straks kimer det til jul," *Porsgrunn Dagblad* (24.12.2014 2014), <https://www.nb.no/items/1ff61a8b8b0a4c0d1c3ddbc142188cf2?page=4&searchText=%22Tacofredag%22>. Emma Emilie Højlyng Fløde, "Taco-fredag på Tingsalen," *Lillesands-posten*, 02.10.2015 2015, <https://www.nb.no/items/1889de7d95549007c59b9386171cb542?page=24&searchText=%22Taco-fredag%22>.

⁸⁸ My translation. Original quote: "Vi har som regel tacofredag med tacokrydder fra Norge[...]" Ida Giske, "Norske studenter lever nær sagt i gettoer," *VG*, 01.21.2011 2011, <https://www.nb.no/items/a137d13637bcd496b4223b56e9d559c3?page=91&searchText=%22Tacofredag%22>.

⁸⁹ Slater, *Consumer Culture & Modernity*, 4.

Chapter 3: The Egalitarian Taco

Identifying perceived ideals of the taco within Norwegian society help make the argument that part of the reason that taco is so popular is that it enforces and symbolizes important values, namely the idea of egalitarianism. A quality of taco is that it can be seen as modern yet traditional, just like Norwegians. It is modern in that it is can be a symbol of the globalized world. It contains flavors adapted from a country which we only relatively recently gained real connection to. Norwegians pride themselves on being modern, multicultural and international, but we are at the same time inclined to stick to traditions.

The link between ideals, identity and food is explored in many sources, such as the paper “Food, Self, and Identity” (1988) by Claude Fischler, and the edited book “Edible Identities: Food as cultural heritage” (2014) by Ronda L. Brulotte and Michael A. Di Giovine.⁹⁰ The overwhelming conclusions seems to be that the truism “you are what you eat” needs nuance, and that “you eat what you are” can be similarly true. Historian Frank Trentmann makes this connection between consumption and identity in his monumental book “Empire of Things: How we became a world of consumers, from the fifteenth century to the twenty-first”. He explains this in the introduction of his book: “In the rich world – and in the developing world increasingly, too – identities, politics, the economy and the environment are crucially shaped by what and how we consume. Taste, appearance and lifestyle define who we are (or want to be) and how others see us.”⁹¹ Following in that vein and continuing on from the idea of “the social taco”, I want to look at how Norwegians further have ascribed meaning to their food. How is the taco understood in relation to society and identity?

To make my argument, this part will first look at the end of the Housewife Era in Norway and how it correlates to the emerging popularity of the taco. The organization of the family plays an important role in its frequent consumption. Extending on that argument, this chapter will go on to look at the children’s part in making the dish popular, and that the burden of preparing it is an expression of egalitarianism. Further it will explore how the taco marks the difference of the weekdays and the weekend, work and leisure furthering the idea

⁹⁰ Claude Fischler, "Food, Self and Identity," *Social Science Information/Sur les sciences sociales* (1988). Ronda L. Brulotte and Michael A Di Giovinne, eds., *Edible identities: Food as Cultural Heritage* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014).

⁹¹ Frank Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How we became a world of consumers, from the fifteenth century to the twenty-first* (UK: HarperCollins, 2016), 22.

of idealism connected to work and equality. Lastly, the argument that unlike many other food trends that have emerged over the years, the taco has been understood as *folkelig* or “of the people”, will emerge. It transcended a mere trend and had, because of the aforementioned qualities, turned into a tradition and national identity marker.⁹²

NEW ROUTINES – THE END OF THE HOUSEWIFE ERA

The decades following World War II is what historians have called “The Housewife Era” in Norwegian society.⁹³ It lasted approximately until the 1970s and is defined as the period in which a majority of adult women held the home as their most important place of work. A housewife being defined simply as “a married woman” during this period and included women who worked on farms or were otherwise employed. The unofficial labor of the home was in large part the responsibility of the housewife. They were in charge of both homely chores like cooking and cleaning, as well as the care of children. More so, did that responsibility fall on women alone, than previous generations.⁹⁴

Annechen Bahr Bugge called the 1940s’ kitchen the heart of the home.⁹⁵ This feeling was not soon forgotten even as the structure and organization of the home changed. I would argue that this idea of the heart of the home, the heart of the family, actually is placed in the family dinner. As Bugge explains, the kitchen was where the family would meet, spend quality time, and where ninety percent of families ate all their meals in the kitchen in the late 40s.⁹⁶ When the meals eventually were eaten at dining room tables, this idea of the heart of the home was still there but not connected to the physical place but to the place of mind.

However, during the 1970s and 1980s women were increasingly seen as expected to join men in the field of full-time employment, outside of the home. This did not necessarily lead to any radical changes when it came to the organization and division of the informal labors of the home, i.e., childcare, cooking, and cleaning. In fact, a study from 2000 showed that even 20-30 years after the “end of the Housewife Era”, women still carried the main

⁹² Directly translated to “Plebian” or “Popular”, defining it as something for those of lower ranks or “the common” as one definition says: “Who is not of noble rank; pertaining to the great masses.” In the context of Norwegian society, as we will see, my argument is that the term *folkelig* does, somehow contrary, allude to egalitarianism.

⁹³ Elisabeth Lønnå, “Kvinneres rettigheter i Norge fra 1945 til 1990-årene,” in *Store Norske Leksikon* (snl.no, 2020). https://snl.no/Kvinneres_rettigheter_i_Norge_fra_1945_til_1990-%C3%A5rene.

⁹⁴ “«Husmorparadiset»,” *Velferdsstat og vestvending*, norgeshistorie.no, updated 11.05.2020, 2015, accessed 04.22.2021, 2021, <https://www.norgeshistorie.no/velferdsstat-og-vestvending/1804-husmorparadiset.html>.

⁹⁵ Bugge, “Middag,” 99.

⁹⁶ Bugge, “Middag,” 99.

weight of the responsibility of meals, giving women a double burden of both work at home and away from it.⁹⁷ This was also the time when the taco first had its major popularity burst. I want to suggest a correlation here. After the long work week, perhaps mothers wanted to make something special for the family but also labor intensive and time consuming. The taco's appeal can be understood through the combination of being simple and tasty. Yet as food researcher Bugge has argued, "the taco is about marking the difference between weekday and weekend".⁹⁸ Trine Sandberg, one of Norway's biggest food bloggers, has also alluded to this in a blogpost accompanying one of her early Tex-Mex-dishes.⁹⁹ Sandberg writes: "There is something special about Friday dinners, I think. Finally, the shoulders can come down after a hectic week, and one can look forward to two days off with the family."¹⁰⁰ She further explain how Tex-Mex dinners (which in this case happened to be nachos) are perfect because of the low effort, high reward ratio: "I do not always have the energy for a lot of cooking on Friday night, so it can be nice to resort to a quick Tex-Mex dish, such as this simple but good dish [...]".¹⁰¹

The ritual of dinner is symbolic as well as practical and as Bugge puts it: "This results in specific ways to talk about dinner and specific ways of practicing dinner. Navigating this discursive space requires women to adopt a complex set of structured and cultural concepts regarding right and wrong foods and right and wrong ways of eating dinner."¹⁰² How can the so-called modern women, of the 1970s and 1980s, make all ends meet, navigating this almost moralistic field of symbolic and practical necessities? The taco seemingly fits nicely into this. Put somewhat exaggerated, finally there was a food that "does it all", while not making women spend the whole day preparing food for the family. Women can work, and they have agency and power. For Norwegians, the taco dinner symbolizes a form of equality and egalitarianism in the home. Even if it was only slightly true in actuality, since the reality of

⁹⁷ Bugge, "Middag," 111.

⁹⁸ Øyvind Woie, "Tacofeberen er ikke over," *Vårt Land* (2011).

<https://www.vl.no/kultur/2011/03/05/tacofeberen-er-ikke-over/>. My translation. Original quote: "Taco handler om å markere forskjellen mellom hverdag og helg, sier forsker."

⁹⁹ Trine Sandberg, "Kjappe nachos med salsa og guacamole," *Trines matblogg*, 11.23.2012, 2012, <https://trinesmatblogg.no/recipe/kjappe-nachos-med-salsa-og-guacamole/>.

¹⁰⁰ Sandberg Kjappe nachos med salsa og guacamole. My translation. Original quote: "Det er noe helt spesielt med fredagsettermiddager, synes jeg. Endelig kan skuldrene senkes etter en hektisk uke, og en kan se frem mot to fridager sammen med familien."

¹⁰¹ My translation. Original quote: "Det er imidlertid ikke alltid jeg har ork til så mye matlaging på fredagskvelden, og da kan det være greit å ty til kjapp tex-mex-mat, slik som denne enkle, men gode retten". Sandberg Kjappe nachos med salsa og guacamole.

¹⁰² Bugge, "Middag," 346.

the 70s was far from equality of the sexes. Considering also the practice of shared preparation, this point seems even more true. In this new organization of family life that happened during the 70s, the appeal of the taco was that it was easy to prepare (perhaps even a shared burden), just exotic and exciting enough, and that it could be customized to the specific family's preferences and dietary needs as well as individual preferences within the family. This also made it perfect for picky eaters, read: children. A health-conscious matriarch may find taco appealing considering the inclusion of fresh vegetables. This can be seen as an example of what Jeffrey Pilcher makes a point of in the book "Food in World History", that "The most fundamental aggregates of world population results in part from dietary choices made at the domestic level. Methods of food preparation can also shape gender roles and social hierarchies."¹⁰³

DO IT FOR THE KIDS – FREE PARENTING AND THE TACO LOVING CHILD

In a survey from 2017, 31% of the participants said that they reason they ate taco for dinner was "because of the kids".¹⁰⁴ In 2001, Rogaland Avis published a causerie called "In the grocery store" which described the type of situations that might occur at grocery stores that the reader might recognize and find amusing. In it the journalist describes that "In addition, you may be exposed to kids begging to get Friday tacos, [...]" when going to a grocery store.¹⁰⁵ The connection between tacos and dinner with children is so solid that when a couple in 2015 shared that they ate a taco dinner every week, but only *after* the children were put to bed on Saturdays, it got negative reactions from the public. The information was shared in a blogpost, and the comments were quick to point out that they found it selfish to not include their children in the dinner. To this the blogger responded that she did not think anyone would have reacted to it, if they were eating something like steak or mussels. People were outraged because to Norwegians tacos is associated with children and togetherness in the family.¹⁰⁶ This also links to the idea of the egalitarian taco. Other foods, you can eat without the kids,

¹⁰³ Pilcher, *Food in World History*, 144.

¹⁰⁴ Borstad and Juvik, "Ny undersøkelse beviser myten: Fredag er tacodagen."

¹⁰⁵ Tore Bruland, "I butikken, del 1," *Rogaland avis*, 08.24.2001 2001, <https://www.nb.no/items/38c06a3f8c1848fef66d0dc6e883c3dc?page=23&searchText=fredagstaco>. My translation. Original title: "I butikken». Original quote: "I tillegg kan du bli utsatt for unger som trygler om å få fredagstaco."

¹⁰⁶ "I denne familien får ikke barna være med på taco-kos i helgen," VG Familieliv, VG, updated 10.24.2015, 2015, accessed 05.04.2021, 2021, <http://familieliv.herokuapp.com/annonsorinnhold/familieliv/rema1000/105-i-denne-familien-far-ikke-barna-vaere-med-pa-taco-kos-i-helgen>.

but taco is for everyone. It seems that for most families however, it is the fact that children prefer it that is a major factor in their decision to eat it regularly.

The children may have even influenced to the rise of its popularity back in the 70s. The decade before what I am defining the rise of the taco, the 60s, was a period in child rearing that has been described as authoritarian. Children were meant to be seen, not heard. Parents were strict and disciplining the children with physical punishments was not unusual.¹⁰⁷ In the 70s there was, however, a change in the tide. What in Norway was called “Fri barneoppdragelse” which can be translated to “free parenting”, had its emergence. Now the philosophy was to give children both space to be themselves and have a say in family matters. Parents were generally more engaged and compliant to the desires and demands of their young ones.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps, working mothers, balancing a new standard of being a shared breadwinner, whilst also wanting to be a successful homemaker and parent, made taco a recurring dinner practice because it pleased the children while also being easy to make. The children on their part, liking the dynamic, new and fun way of eating dinner – assembling it yourself and even eating it with your hands, which was not, at the time, a common way to eat dinner. After the end of the Housewife Era there seemed to be a shift in focus around food as being oriented around the husband, to it catering more to the needs and wants of children.¹⁰⁹

THE TACKY TACO

Food trends, as other trends, connect strongly to perceptions of class within a society. How the taco has eventually come to exceed clear class distinctions and become a “national dish” is the egalitarian ideal being reflected through eating habits. Trends are interlocked with class and distinguishing between them, setting oneself and one’s social class apart from others, as Pierre Bourdieu so famously theorized in “Distinction”.¹¹⁰ Food trends come and go. Tacos was not the first “ethnic” food trend to reach Norwegian soil, and it certainly was not the last. It has not always enjoyed the high regard it holds today. In Norwegian culture, over the last fifty years or so, taco has gone from trendy, to tacky to tradition, roughly speaking. This can be interpreted to be closely connected to class and the natural life of trends. It is generally

¹⁰⁷ Stein Erik Ulvelund, "Barneoppdragelse," in *Store norske leksikon* (2020). <https://snl.no/barneoppdragelse>.

¹⁰⁸ Ulvelund, "Barneoppdragelse."

¹⁰⁹ Bugge, "Middag," 177.

¹¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* [Distinksjonen. En sosiologisk kritikk av dømmekraften], trans. Annick Prieur (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1979; repr., 1995).

thought that after World War II Norway could be understood more as a society that highlights equality as a value than a class society. Although the difference between the different social strata in terms of income is smaller in compared to the United States, it does not mean they do not exist. An expression of this difference is the cultural need of groups of people to distinguish themselves from other groups, usually having to do with income levels and ways of living.

There have been times when taco consumption was somewhat frowned upon. As the trend spread far and wide, professional chefs eventually distanced themselves from what they considered to be low culture. An example of this is the chef Fredrik Nordahl, who in 2008 column mocked anyone who loved *fredagstaco*.¹¹¹ Hobby cook Ina Shelby called taco Norway's national dish number one, but was also in 2012 critical of the store-bought ingredients and the standardized *fredagstaco*, and suggested making your own ingredients from scratch.¹¹² In Moss newspaper's printed photos of supposedly random tweets, Martin Ludvigsen tweeted that the grocery store Meny "introduces Taco Friday. Is the marketing manager born 15 years too late?"¹¹³ It is implied that Martin, who can be seen as representing the people, thinks taco is passé and outdated. On the other hand, he can simply mean that the grocery store is naïve in thinking anyone needs an introduction to something as axiomatic. In a reportage from the newspaper Dagens Næringsliv (DN) from 2014 about cars and what the cars say about the owner, Reidar Mide Solberg satirically points out that people who drive Fiat 500 think *fredagstaco* is tacky.¹¹⁴ This could be read as a critique of either being prideful or too "good" for *fredagstaco*, which both emphasize that this is a somewhat common feeling, and that the journalist is critical of it.

In 2012, in the DN magazine D2 had a long segment called "En harry historie" which translates possibly best to "a history of tacky" or "a tacky story" and is a reportage about what is considered tacky and what is not.¹¹⁵ When something is "too" *popular or common*, certain

¹¹¹ Fredrik Nordahl, "Sterk mexikaner," *Varden*, 11.21.2008 2008, <https://www.nb.no/items/be7a87e1e7650795b421ac9eb194a5ac?page=65&searchText=%22taco-fredag%22>.

¹¹² Ina Shelby, "Tacofredag," *Dalane Tidene*, 11.11.2011 2011, <https://www.nb.no/items/298b5f828948fa80c4e30e8bbe26a572?page=21&searchText=%22tacofredag%22>.

¹¹³ My translation. Original quote: "Meny introduserer tacofredag. Er markedsansvarlig født 15 år for sent eller?" Martin Ludvigsen, "Kra kra fra Twitter," *Moss Avis*, 02.26.2021 2014, <https://www.nb.no/items/51b1b3e5b0d94dc8d1fedc20b1a2d4e9?page=11&searchText=%22tacofredag%22>.

¹¹⁴ Reidar Mide Solberg, "Bil etter bil etter bil," *Dagens Næringsliv DN Magasinet*, 08.02.2014 2014, <https://www.nb.no/items/172fc50145944f6cc18d9930a55d8cf0?page=51&searchText=%22tacofredag%22>.

¹¹⁵ Nils Anker and Anders Kemp, "En harry historien," *Dagens Næringsliv*, 12.21.2012 2012, <https://www.nb.no/items/9b0f7702510de09791210b5ad13ba3fe?page=107&searchText=%22tacofredag%22>.

people will distance themselves from it by proclaiming it tacky and below them. Taco has been through this label, but with time that too has shifted. The journalists Nils Anker and Anders Kemp are trying to make a guide to what is and what is not tacky, claiming that it is more difficult than ever to distinguish. They perceived that when it came to food, the lines between lowbrow and highbrow were increasingly blurred. That the quality of being omnivores was much more valued at the time: “modern people choose from a wide repertoire, high and low, and put it together in their own individual style” that was why so many “pride themselves on buying cheap food on the border [svenskehandel], Taco Friday, canned beer and pizza with béarnaise. By avoiding established categories within taste and consume [...] one can at least display oneself as free, individual and authentic people.”¹¹⁶ Lowbrow was highbrow because the new highbrow was to not let oneself be defined by what was high or low. Authenticity and humility, in an ever more commercialized and digital world, was and is something Norwegians value in themselves.¹¹⁷

Separating oneself from the tacky is also often connected to geography. The city is perceived as trendy while rural areas are behind, or willfully tacky. While people may no longer consider themselves “working class” or “middle class”, they still distinguish themselves from each others using food and taste to do it.¹¹⁸ Women who categorized themselves as “folk flest” or common people, also described their food as traditional and ordinary, Bugge found in her studies. She points out how there seems to be a sort of “taste hierarchy” where the urban middleclass is on top. They define the trends and separate themselves by a form of food snobbery. Bugge even uses the example of Mexican food being widely available as the time when it is no longer deemed worthy of the groups at the top of the taste hierarchy.¹¹⁹ This seemed to be true for taco, for a while, but the status of taco has changed over even the last ten to twenty years. Even though it has been declared passé since the 2000s, statistics show that this simply does not hold true. In 2011, 47.8% of people in Norway had some kind of Mexican food at least once a month.¹²⁰ This number has steadily

¹¹⁶Anker and Kemp, "En harry historien."

¹¹⁷ For more on authenticity in food culture see Jeff Pratt's article for the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sussex called "Food Values: the local and the authentic" (2007)

¹¹⁸ Bugge, *Fattigmenn, tilslørte bondepiker og rike riddere: Mat og spisevaner i Norge fra 1500-tallet til vår tid*, 438.

¹¹⁹ Bugge, *Fattigmenn, tilslørte bondepiker og rike riddere: Mat og spisevaner i Norge fra 1500-tallet til vår tid*, 439.

¹²⁰ Charlotte Nymoen Kumbara, *Taco fra Spisefakta og Middagsdagboken*, 2021, Information given to author by senior consultant in Ipsos. Presentation in possession of author., Ipsos Norge.

been growing since then. Despite the dish being declared tacky or passé, it prevailed. People kept eating it for so long that it now can be said to have developed into a new tradition.

THE PEOPLE'S TACO – BECOMING HABIT AND TRADITION

Taco is not like other food trends in Norway, in that it has had a much wider range. Annechen Bugge said in the *Aftenposten* article “The Norwegian national dish taco” that another food trend, sushi, remained a city trend.¹²¹ In many ways, sushi seems to be the taco’s opposite, in terms of symbolized value. Eating sushi can still be perceived as quite posh and urban, whilst taco is what she describes as *folkelig*. This term, *folkelig*, can be translated to folksy, something that is “the people’s” or “of the people”, meaning that it is popular and down to earth. It alludes to taco being for everyone, to its being somewhat humble, downplayed and common: for the common folks. In fact, according to “Middagsdagboken” from 2019, 33% of the participants from Oslo ate Taco during the week that the survey covered, while the rest of the country groups ranged from 38-44%. This shows that the taco has reached broader segments of society, and its position has persisted over time.

Humility is an important value inhabited by Norwegians, especially in rural Norway, sometimes to the point of it effecting individuals and communities negatively. To find evidence of this, read Aksel Sandemose’s *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*, where in the fictional town of Jante, Denmark they have a set of laws basically telling you to be humble, and to not express any kind pride.¹²² The law of Jante is widely known in Norwegian culture, and although Aksel Sandemose’s book was a critique of the small-mindedness of small-town people, and although no one openly agrees with the Law of Jante, there is still a strong sense of humility and a disregard of pridefulness in today’s Norway.¹²³

As Bugge does in her book “Fattigmenn, tilslørte bondepiker og rike riddere», I will here point to study from 1999, performed by researcher Rønnaug Fagerli. Looking at food habits in Norway in the 80s and 90s, Fagerli found that on the whole, Norwegians were still very traditional when it came to their food and dinner habits. Norwegians eat what they are

¹²¹ Aldridge, "Den norske nasjonalretten taco."

¹²² Aksel Sandemose, *En flytning krysser sitt spor*, 1991 edition ed. (Oslo: Den norske bokklubben AS, 1955), 9-11.

¹²³ Gregg Bromgard, David Trafimow, and Christopher Linn, "Janteloven and the expression of pride in Norway and the United States," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 154, no. 5 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2014.914884>.

used to and are creatures of habit.¹²⁴ Throughout the years it has become clear that *fredagstaco* has become a tradition in of itself. Going through the cycle of trendy to passé or tacky, to gaining a new life and interest, and to finally becoming a tradition, is something that has taken time several generations. Studies, such as “Middagsdagboken” by Ipsos, a market research company, has found that the main reason people made taco was that “because it is a dish I usually make”. Actually, 75% of the respondents answered this option. Followed by 43% saying they made taco to “enjoy themselves a little extra”, and 31% saying they do it because the children like it.¹²⁵ The fact that the overwhelming majority say they make it out of habit, combined with the fact that 12.6% of the respondents say they eat tacos or Mexican food every Friday, point to a new tradition. Additionally, “Middagsdagboken” from 2019 shows that 50% of the families with teenagers and 48% of the families with children from the age 0-12, ate taco throughout the week they participated in the study. The research also shows that in the age group “55+” only 22% ate taco, whilst between 20–54-year-olds between 43–46% ate tacos the week they participated in the study.¹²⁶ People who are eating taco often are seemingly people who either are or have children, young adults who grew up eating it, or older adults who had children at home when taco became popularized. With this connection to children and the memories of childhood, either one’s own childhood or the memory and habits of having taco time with children. As creatures of tradition, the custom of eating taco seems to be sticking.

On the matter of habit and tradition one can find many articles referencing this “new” tradition. In 2012, Kristin Løwe wrote a column in Porsgrunn Blad saying she does not enjoy straying from habit.¹²⁷ She writes about how Taco Friday is like a sacred celebration, and she outlines several of her other weekend habits. She is claiming that classic Norwegian habits are drinking Pepsi Max and eating taco on Fridays, almost ritualistically. In a column from Østlendingen in 2015 a celebrity talks about his tradition of having Taco Friday: “True to tradition, there will be Taco Friday[...]”.¹²⁸ Over the years it appears to have become a term

¹²⁴ Bugge, *Fattigmenn, tilslørte bondepiker og rike ridderer: Mat og spisevaner i Norge fra 1500-tallet til vår tid*, 436-37.

¹²⁵ Borstad and Juvik, "Ny undersøkelse beviser myten: Fredag er tacodagen." Kumbera, Taco fra Spisefakta og Middagsdagboken.

¹²⁶ Kumbera, Taco fra Spisefakta og Middagsdagboken.

¹²⁷ Kristin Løwe, "Forandring fryder ikke," *Porsgrunn Blad*, 08.15.2013 2013, <https://www.nb.no/items/14de94233d14770df7ece9214b0dafb9?page=4&searchText=forandring>.

¹²⁸ My translation. Original quote: "Tradisjonen tro blir det tacofredag hjemme, med litt TV, taco og et glass vin." Ragnhild Ekornrud, "Leker videre mot finalen," *Østlendingen*, 10.24.2015 2015, <https://www.nb.no/items/0f0bb1d5633a3c971220a90659fd8ef3?page=3&searchText=tacofredag>.

that is mentioned as a symbol of the everyday life of a Norwegian. In an article about a fitness blogger who was getting married, she writes about everyday family life, where “taco and oatmeal go hand in hand”.¹²⁹ This implies that although Taco Friday is a celebration of the weekend, it has also become so much of a habit and tradition that it is also a normal part of an ordinary week for Norwegians.

FOOD FIT FOR A KING – A *FOLKELIG* IDEAL

Fredagstaco is perceived as humble and is valued as such. One can see this in for example Ellen Sofie Lauritzens critical review of the vegan cookbooks *Deliciously Ella* and *Naturally Sassy* in *Morgenbladet* from 2015.¹³⁰ Here she claims that the authors of the books are condescending towards the common people, here identifying the *folklige* as the ones eating “fish casserole, cheese spread and canned fish, we who have Friday Tacos, eat breads”, and these vegan chefs are implying that they are naïve to do so. Sarcastically, the reviewer thanks the authors for putting down the work to educate the unknowing public on how they too can get the “Energy! Glow! Perfect skin! The shiny hair!”¹³¹ The tone of the review can be interpreted to imply that authors are pretentious and arrogant, and by mentioning Taco Friday the reviewer is indirectly comparing it to how not liking taco is also pretentious. Taco is equated with being down to earth, wholesome and Norwegian.

Tacofredag and *fredagstaco* is repeatedly name-dropped as a symbol of what is inherently Norwegian. In an article about the opening ceremony of a new gym, Menstadhallen in Skien, the arranger of the ceremony jokes that the king and queen of Norway are not present for the celebration because they are busy shopping for “their traditional Taco-Friday”.¹³² This is of course not proof that the king and queen eat tacos, but it can say something about how Norwegians view their regents as well as taco. It can be interpreted to

¹²⁹ My translation. Original quote: “På bloggen sin skriver hun om familiens hverdagsliv, der tacofredag og havregryn går hånd i hånd.” Charlotte Karlsen, “Et løft for kjærligheten,” *Bergens Tidene*, 02.14.2014 2014, <https://www.nb.no/items/493871cde72b8cfe0b182861b29e610d?page=25&searchText=tacofredag>.

¹³⁰ Ellen Sofie Lauritzen, “Veganmisjonærene,” *Morgenbladet* (10.30.2015 2015). <https://www.morgenbladet.no/pafyll/2015/10/30/veganmisjonaerene/?R=UwHhnCxWpg&subscriberState=valid&action=loggedin>.

¹³¹ My translation. Original quotes: “[...] fiskegrateng, baconost og makrell i tomat, vi som har tacofredag, spiser gjærbakst[...].” And “Energien! Gløden! Den plettfriske huden! Det skinnende håret!” Lauritzen, “Veganmisjonærene.”

¹³² My translation. Original quote: “[...] han og dronningen like angivelig var opptatt med innkjøp til sin tradisjonelle taco-fredag[...].” Bjørn Borge, “Helt konge med ny hall,” *Varden*, 11.05.2011 2011, <https://www.nb.no/items/76a7b7d3e5c400530471164c767a081a?page=40&searchText=%22taco-fredag%22>.

mean both that taco is connected to being Norwegian, and that the king and queen are considered to be down to earth, and just like the common folks in their eating habits. Furthermore, when Sogn Avis did an article on two Israeli people who came to Norway and wanted to experience everything Norwegian, the reporter asked if they had taken part of a *fredagstaco* yet. Their response was that they had never heard of it but would add it to the list.¹³³ The interviewer's opinion being that one cannot have the Norwegian experience without *fredagstaco*.

Another example of Taco Friday being described as a main characteristic of being Norwegian was when a Norwegian children's books author was interviewed by VG for the release of her book "The Worlds Coolest Gang". In the interview she mentions that the reason she wanted to write it was because she noticed her son loving books such as *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney and similar humor books for children and realized there were few Norwegian equivalents. She wanted to write these books so that Norwegian children could read about an everyday that they can relate to. Instead of "high school, lockers and prom night" she wanted there to be typical Norwegian things such as "Taco Friday, National Tests [nasjonale prøver] and Sunday walks in the woods."¹³⁴ Similarly, in a play made by high schoolers, the student sing, joke and picks apart everything Norwegian. The play was called WergelandLand referring to Henrik Wergeland a famous Norwegian romance poet and is about everything Norwegian. In the Aftenposten review of the show the journalist points out that the students "make fun of everything Norwegian, like Taco Friday".¹³⁵

The taco has thus become a nation identity marker, surpassing other food trends. It has been eaten throughout the country of Norway for a relatively long time. It has withstood the shifting tides of other intersecting food trends such as the wave of vegetarianism and the search of authenticity by being so extremely adaptable. Taco is what Norwegians want to eat when they are spending their precious time with their loved ones, and it is what is eaten in the city as well as the countryside. Due to the fact that Norwegians ascribe the taco with the very ideals they would like to live by, among them, being an egalitarian society, with equality of the sexes, generations and even between common people and the king.

¹³³ Yngve Bråten, "Good vibes, good people and great views," *Sogn Avis*, 07.05.2014 2014, <https://www.nb.no/items/2db5be7c13fde8298874257f5f062dd8?page=17&searchText=%22tacofredag%22>.

¹³⁴ Camilla Norli, "Utfordrer pingler og duster," *VG*, 01.31.2015 2015, <https://www.nb.no/items/bf8e738a9bcdd8a9cd8edd8a86a07124?page=49&searchText=%22tacofredag%22>.

¹³⁵ My translation. Original quote: "Med bøvtevis av energi og livsglad selvironi, harselerer elevene over alt som er norsk – som tacofredag, russetid og fjøsniiser". Maren Ørstavik, "En hel dag i WergelandLand," *Aftenposten* (01.07.2014 2014). <https://www.aftenposten.no/osloby/byliv/i/Xwpl7/en-hel-dag-i-wergelandland>.

Conclusion

The starting point of my study was asking why taco specifically has come to hold such a cherished and seemingly untouchable status in Norwegian food culture and national identity. In this thesis I have explored this question from different angles. With Gabaccia's ideas on food mobility, and a fourth explanation model in mind I have looked at how the different aspects of the globalized and modern world has impacted the way in which taco has traveled. I have also looked at it from a sociological perspective, taking into account how food relates to identity and culture. It is in the intersection of the actors, markets, events, and the ideals, values and identities, that I have found my answers to the questions posed. Looking both at what actually happened in Norway, the trends, changes and forces that were at play, to make Norway "ready" for the taco, and also looking at the more intimate way in which taco is an expression of Norwegian values, giving an insight into how they perceive and understand themselves.

THE PARTICULAR

The case of the Norwegian taco is, as I stated initially, an example of a peculiar case of food mobility. In this thesis I have looked at the particulars in this case, outlining specific events and some theories of why exactly the Norwegian "climate" and the timing was perfect for the breeding of a new kind of national dish, and why the taco was "chosen" as such.

Firstly, I have to point out that in the very beginning it felt natural to seek out some definition of "taco". This search for some kind of origin to the dish, made abundant the very idea that this thesis would later come to prove. Precisely because of its ambiguous origin, and the windy path it took to reach the Norwegian dinner table, searches for a finite and static definition proved futile. What then became interesting is to understand the relative meaning of the dish. To Mexicans, the taco is an essential part of their eating habits, but as I have discovered, to them it holds an entirely different meaning than it does in Norway, or even their neighbors in the US. When trying to understand foods and dishes it is tempting to search for authenticity, but what I have found is that when it comes to the taco, its authenticity has to be seen as relative. The reason for this is its very nature of being constantly changing and interpreted, prone to global influence.

The taco coming to Norway, is in large part the result of globalization, Americanization and McDonaldization. Had the taco not first traveled to the United States, it probably never would have found its way to Norway. In large part, the way in which it was adapted in the USA rings true to traditional theories of food mobility. Mexican immigrants were in large part responsible for the beginnings of the spread of taco in the United States, close to the boarder and later further up the state of California. It is of course more complicated than this. As I have pointed out, it is in large part due to the industrialization, or rather the McDonaldization of the taco through the rise of Taco Bell that led to its nationwide spread. Subsequently this further led to the possibility of international exporting, and the hard-shell taco is the perfect example of just this. To Norwegians the fried tortilla shell seems more authentic, because it was the first to reach Norway, but it was in fact a product of import practicality. Furthermore, I looked at how the wheat tortilla, and the fact that the way Norwegians eat *fredagstaco* more resembles burritos, what both Mexicans and North Americans understand as tacos. This is interesting because this connection to corn, and the ancient practice of nixtamalization is so far removed. This led me to the conclusion that tacos are a global food, like Pilcher argues, and the Norwegian taco is an almost perfect expression of this.

As I have argued, taco reaching Norway was not a result of Mexican immigrants moving to Norway, but this case of food mobility is not completely removed from the aspect of immigrant influence. Even though it was North American immigrants who brought the first taco products to Norway, what I have understood through this study is that they had seemingly little to do with its eventual popularity. What was it, then? I found it interesting to look at the realities of Norwegian society at the time of its emergence. How were they living their lives and what were their interests and values? Firstly, I researched the idea of the social taco. Today, the taco dinner is very much understood to be about family, gathering and celebration. I wanted to look back and see how this started and shifted over time. Here, marketing, companies and the stores in themselves became important point of contention. They are the conscious actors, who made decisions and had agendas. When I looked at commercial through time, I discovered a shift happening. The taco was first marketed as something exotic and Mexican, but as time went on commercials started to appeal more to perceived family values in Norwegians. The socialness and gathering nature of the buffet-style dinner, was heavily focused on.

What I found was that advertising strategies were in large part answering to shifts in society, rather than the other way around. Marketing can have the potential to create values, but in this case, from what I was able to gather, it seemed like they were catering more to the already established values and demands of the people. Using commercials then became about understanding how the marketer understood its audience and how it used that understanding, more than seeing them as the driving forces of ideas around taco. Not to understate their role, though. Their physical presence was and is extremely important, especially in the never relenting way it has pushed visibility. I however found that this understanding of taco stemmed from the people themselves. The creation of the taco as a Norwegian ideal, came from everyday life practicalities as well as cultural identity idealism.

When it comes to specific occurrences or changes in Norwegian society between 1970 and 2000, there are four things that I have explored that are important in relation to the taco. Those are a growth in immigration (not from Mexico), more accessible air travel, the end of the Housewife Era, and a shift in ideas around child rearing and parenting. These specific and particular aspects of society make for a practical but also a sociologically based explanation model. These external shifts are driven and effect the way in which Norwegians understand and define themselves. The taco is modern, exotic, while at the same time traditional and has been put into a system of tradition, i.e., *fredagstaco*. The taco is centered around community, family, and togetherness, while still allowing for individuality within the group. It is immensely adaptable, making it resilient to shifting perceptions of eating and food systems. Finally, the taco represents the egalitarian Norwegian, seen through its humbleness and Norway's idealizing of being down to earth and *folkelig*. Children and grown-ups enjoy it alike. Urban "taste-elites" eat it, and so do rural families. The taco is perfect for the humble, modern, globalized, traditional, family-oriented, egalitarian Norwegian.

NEW EXPLANATIONS

Initially I asked the question of how the particular case of the Norwegian tacos fit into wider understandings of food mobility. Gabaccia called for a fourth explanation model within food mobility to be more widely research. One that took into account the way in which our world is connected in ways it previously has not been. This thesis has done just that, looking at the particulars of the Norwegian case (searching for the particular is something she highlights as an aspect of the fourth explanation model), but also taking into account modern and complex ways in which societies have been susceptible to influence and change. It has looked at the

active actors who through their desires, motives and understanding of themselves and the society around them, took this dish and elevated it to the status it holds today. It was a complicated and collective process and not something natural or accidental. Within this, the importance of seeing food and consumption in relation to culture and identity has been highlighted. It is this intersection of purposeful effort and the aspect of collective understanding and acceptance, that is my most valuable contribution to this subject. The modern, globalized world as an input overflow and an excessive amount of freedom of choice. To understand how our foodways are shaped, historians who study contemporary history need to take into account the many intricate ways in which those choices are contended. I believe that fruitful discussions of contemporary understanding of food in Norway needs to interconnect Norwegian society's understanding of themselves, their cultural identity, and more broadly their hopes and desires. That is what I have begun to do with the taco here, and what I believe future studies on the topic should continue to do.

ONWARD

It is always towards the end of something one realizes all one should have and could have done. In taking on this topic of the Norwegian taco, I was largely treading uncharted territories and the story is in no way complete. I urge future historians to continue researching this topic (and do it better). For those who would like to do so, I have some suggestions for further study.

While studying this topic I discussed the idea of taco with a wide range of diverse people. Peers, historians, parents of friends, kids, and many other adults from different age groups who all had something to say about tacos. A type of qualitative, interview-based study would be massively interesting and valuable to the question of how Norwegians understand and remember the evolving idea of tacos. Similarly, a larger quantitative study, where a large number of people answer a survey about their history with the dish and how they remember their eating habits throughout the years, could prove very valuable.

Delving deeper into newer technologies and source materials, such as I touched on here, is something I would highly recommend. Doing a more quantitative study in newspapers and books in the National Library's digital archives for example. A further study on how the taco is understood and portrayed through cookbooks and cooking programs could be a very interesting place of focus, seeing as those are booming mediums. Lastly, I will suggest further study into blogs and social media. The internet is such an important way in which we perceive

and adapt trends. Personal blogs, cooking blogs, social media posts and trending topics are all invaluable sources of information, and because of its vastness in quantity we need to first perhaps find better ways of sorting and decoding the insights available.

Epilogue

In my thesis, I have looked at explanations as to why an originally foreign dish, has become so integral to Norwegian eating habits and food culture. I have analyzed at a variety of primary and secondary sources and worked interdisciplinary in the intersection of history, culture studies and sociology. Now I will explain how this has made me a better teacher, as well as how the study of food can be valuable both for students and teachers in the pursuit of understanding and relating to the past. I believe that food history can pose as one of the most promising ways in which to motivate students and have them see the link between the theoretical past and the very real and concrete substances of their everyday lives.

THE POTENTIAL FOR FOOD IN TEACHING HISTORY

Despite food being an essential part of our history and culture, and that it connects to themes within social studies and identity, there has been little focus on it in history teaching neither in lower- or upper secondary school – before now. With the new standard curriculum, *Fagfornyelsen*, that takes effect in August of 2021, there is for the first time a competence aim/objective focusing on food in history to a significant degree. It is found in the VG2 competence aims, and reads that after VG2, students should be able to: “give an account of important changes in how people have acquired food and used natural resources, and assess the significance of this for people and a sustainable society.”¹³⁶ Since this is a new competence aim, it will require teaching materials and new angles of approach as to how we can accomplish this in the classroom. Through my work with my master thesis, I have gained many ideas as to how this can be executed in an interesting and motivating way for learners.

There are many ways in which my study of tacos in Norwegian society specifically can be used in teaching. One of the greatest challenges a teacher faces is the question of how to get teenagers motivated to learn. It is only when students are motivated that they can exceedingly take advantage of their potential for learning.¹³⁷ We are fighting for their

¹³⁶ My translation. Original quote: “gjøre rede for viktige endringer i hvordan mennesker har skaffet seg mat og brukt naturressurser, og vurdere betydningen av dette for mennesker og et bærekraftig samfunn.” Utdanningsdirektoratet, “Kompetansemål og vurdering: Historie (HIS01-03),” (udir.no: Utdanningsdirektoratet, 05.18.2021 2020), Standard curriculum.

¹³⁷ Gerd Grimsæth and Oddrun Hellås, *Undervisningspraksis: Profesjonalitet i skolen* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2019), 128.

attention, not only from their phones, their computers and their friends, but from other subjects and interests. Understanding history and how it shapes our understanding of reality is so vital. Because of limited teaching time and an impossible amount of important history to be covered, teachers stand the risk of feeling discouraged. My goal with championing food history as an entry point for many different angles of approach to aspects of history is that it will motivate the students due to its closeness and relatability. No matter who they are or what their interests are, they will have an inherent relationship with food. Building from that, I want to guide them to realize that history is not exclusively about people long since perished but is in fact about all of us.¹³⁸ I hope to engage my students and make them curious about how everything is connected. I want to give them a concrete example of the long lines of history, as well as tools and skills to teach them not just the specific “*whats*” of history, but the more important “*how*” of history.¹³⁹ *How* do we approach knowledge of the past, *how* has history been created, and *how* are we shaped by that history?

CORE ELEMENTS AND INTERDISCIPLINARY THEMES

In my work with this thesis, I have learned about a myriad of different topics and aspects of world history, as well as national and local history. This has made me aware of how interconnected topics of history actually are. In Fagfornyelsen, there is a new focus on what is called core elements (kjerneelementer) and interdisciplinary themes (tverrfaglige temaer), among other concepts. These are overarching goals for education, that are about skills, ways of thinking and the long lines of history. The core elements are “historical consciousness”, “exploratory history and source-critical awareness”, “historical empathy, contexts and perspectives” and “people and societies in the past, present and future”, all of which I believe I can teach, in some way, through the different aspects of my thesis.¹⁴⁰ The interdisciplinary themes that food history could also touch upon are mainly “democracy and citizenship” and “sustainable development”.¹⁴¹ Through the specific and peculiar history of tacos, I firmly believe we can more effectively analyze overarching themes, develop crucial academic skills, as well as demonstrate a mastery of specific historical knowledge as required through the

¹³⁸ Erik Lund, *Historiedidaktikk: En håndbok for studenter og lærere* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2017), 25.

¹³⁹ Lund, *Historiedidaktikk: En håndbok for studenter og lærere*, 18.

¹⁴⁰ Utdanningsdirektoratet, "Kjerneelementer," (udir.no, 05.20.2021 2020), Standard curriculum. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/his01-03/om-faget/kjerneelementer?curriculum-resources=true>.

¹⁴¹ Utdanningsdirektoratet, "Tverrfaglige temaer," (udir.no, 05.20.2021 2020), Standard curriculum. <https://www.udir.no/lk20/his01-03/om-faget/tverrfaglige-temaer>.

competence aims. To do this I want to draw from my favorite theory I learned in history didactics, which is to teach history through the concept of “big ideas”, as depicted in S. G. Grant and Jill M. Gradwell in their book “Teaching history with big ideas: cases of ambitious teachers”.¹⁴²

BIG IDEAS AND AMBITIOUS TEACHING

A “Big idea” is defined as “a question or generalization that helps teachers decide what to teach and how by centering their teaching units in meaty, complex issues that are open to multiple perspectives and interpretations. For example, a question like: “Was the American Revolution revolutionary?” gives both teacher and students an engaging place to begin their inquiry into this complex era.”¹⁴³ Posing a complicated, and perhaps surprising question, can entice students’ curiosity, and encourage them to start thinking about history in uniquely creative ways. This is the goal I set for myself as a teacher. I want to develop strategies for motivating passionate and self-motivated learners. Student-centric lesson planning forces active participation and learning from students. A key factor to achieve this is making it feel relevant to them. If there is one thing I learned through working on this thesis, is that almost everyone has an opinion about taco. So why not use that as a way to have students relate to the subject matter.

In teaching a big idea unit with taco as a focal point, I could first hook the students by asking “Is there such a thing as an authentic taco?” I think this will immediately engage the students, because in the context of a history class it is an unexpected question and topic. I would start with a discussion, to see how they will resonate without having done any research. We could make a thought map on the smartboard, or even use a digital, interactive tool such as Menti.¹⁴⁴ I would save it, and at the end of the unit I would again ask the question and compare their work to see proof of learning.

¹⁴² S. G. Grant and M. Gradwell Jill, eds., *Teaching History with Big Ideas: Cases of ambitious teachers*» (UK: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2010).

¹⁴³ Grant and Jill, *Teaching History with Big Ideas: Cases of ambitious teachers*», 3.

¹⁴⁴ Mentimeter.com lets you “Create interactive presentations & meetings” with live graphs and polls, “wordclouds”, etc.

TOPIC SUGGESTIONS

After the initial big idea, I would early on guide them into discussions of “what is a taco?”, “authentic to whom?” and eventually “why do Norwegians love tacos?” I suggest spending as long as 10-12 weeks on this big idea unit. Following, I have outlined some topics that I could teach based on my experience working with this thesis, and that have backing in the national course curriculum.¹⁴⁵

When trying to find a definition of a taco, we could look at the ancient civilizations in Middle- and South America. Specifically, the Aztecs. How do we know that they invented nixtamalization of corn or ate corn tortillas? We would search for primary sources on the internet and in textbooks, as of what remnants we have of the ancient civilizations and explore how historians have worked to find out what we now believe about the past.

Another idea is to look at the colonization of America and the lasting effects of colonialism on Mexico. The ingredients used in tacos can be seen as an expression of this, many of which originate in countries far away from Mexico. Picking different Mexican variations of tacos apart, can we learn something from what we find? Why are corn tortillas used in Mexico? Where does the flour tortilla come in? How about pineapples? Was there pork in Mexico before the Spanish invasion of Mexico?

We could do, as the University of Kentucky does in their class “Taco Literacy: Public Advocacy and Mexican Food in the US South”, use the history of taco in the US as an entry point into “qualitative research studying foodways, the social, cultural, economic, and symbolic practices of producing and consuming food, as a prism for understanding demographic change and social issues facing Mexican immigrants in their new home of Lexington, Kentucky.”¹⁴⁶ Further extending this to talk about the complex political climate and the social realities of Mexican people in the US today, would cross over to the field of social studies and can very well fit under the interdisciplinary theme of democracy and citizenship.¹⁴⁷

Furthermore, a possibility is to look at marketing history, like I have in this thesis. Analyzing commercials and learning about how they can be seen to interpret the identities and values of their targeted culture, as well as be the creators of identities and values within a

¹⁴⁵ Utdanningsdirektoratet, "Kompetansemål og vurdering: Historie (HIS01-03)."

¹⁴⁶ Alvarez, "Taco Literacy Course Description."

¹⁴⁷ Utdanningsdirektoratet, "Tverrfaglige temaer."

society. There are many interesting old Norwegian commercials worth analyzing to see what can be interpreted about the past through them. We can research, as I have, older TV-commercials from Santa Maria, and compare them to newer ways of marketing. What has changed? What can that tell us about the shifting position of tacos in Norwegian opinions?

We can look at a wide range of topics about Norwegian society after World War II. The Norwegian taco is in part a result of American influence on Norway. In what other ways, culturally, economically and socially has and is Norway changed due to different degrees of Americanization? Has Norway been as Americanized as some claim? Other important aspects of society during the second half of the 20th century that I touch on in my thesis, are for example, the end of the Housewife Era, the increase in wealth and a growing middle class, accessible travel, influx in immigration, changes in child rearing trends, etc. These topics and numerous others can be read about on norgeshistorie.no, and we can work on building that ground knowledge of societal shifts and trends, and from there look at what it was about this time that coincided with “the rise of the taco”. How do needs and values align, and can we propose correlations?

And finally, building on this we could use the National Library’s newspaper archives, to look through the mentions of “taco”, “tacofredag”, “fredagstaco”, “Old El Paso”, “tacosett”, and other taco related words and phrases, to do a quantitative study of the context in which they are found. What can this tell us about Norwegians and tacos. This will be a practice in evaluating the sources critically. What can we learn from the text, photos, phrasings? What can we say about the circumstance of its existence? Or the time in which it was published? Who is the author, who is it targeted towards and what is the purpose and agenda of the author and or newspaper? Here we can learn about the functional source understanding (*funksjonelt kildebegrep*), reflecting on how the source has meaning in the way we apply it, not inherently in itself. Sources can be used in many different ways.¹⁴⁸ In addition to what we can learn, we should ask ourselves, what limits there are in this way of research. Are there perspectives that are not published, and why? What voices are usually heard in the media, and which are not? Teaching these tools are important not only for study in the fields of history, but also in everyday life. As Sam Wineburg highlights in his book “Why Teach History (When it’s Already on Your Phone)”, misinformation is everywhere, and students today, more so than ever before, stand before the hard task of sorting it all out, but with a lack

¹⁴⁸ Lund, *Historiedidaktikk: En håndbok for studenter og lærere*, 96-97.

of the necessary tools to deal with it.¹⁴⁹ His book was published in 2018, and now, only three years later, this book and this argument has become increasingly more relevant than when it was published.

The way I approached my thesis is very much telling of what type of history learner I am, and subsequently what type of history teacher I want to be. I love big ideas, the long lines, the intersections, the peculiarities as well as the real, close, human aspects of history. With this, I would like to be what Grant termed an “ambitious teacher”. He defines this as someone who “deeply understands their subject matter and actively seeks ways to connect that subject matter with the lived experiences of their students.”¹⁵⁰ For me, it is important to work on making history interesting for the students, and in that having an understanding for the fact that not everyone loves to learn about history. Some students will come to the class with preconceived ideas and notions of what History is. I want to break down those notions, and show them that history can be relatable, creative, fun and eventually I hope they will come to realize how incredibly valuable learning history is to us as humans.

TEACHING PLAN – DIDACTIC AND PEDAGOGIC REFLECTIONS

10-12 weeks is quite a lot of time out of our already limited teaching schedule, but I justify taking this time because of the enormous variety within the unit. It will allow us to go deep into the topic of food history and culture. At the same time, we will work on deeper understandings of history as a whole, not just a “school subject”. I think this will give us the chance for deep learning, while at the same time touching on a lot of important topics along the way.¹⁵¹ The unit would end with an oral assessment.

I also believe it will be beneficial in *relasjonsbygging*, or relationship building, between me and the students.¹⁵² This is an important part of effective teaching. Making myself relatable to them, having them get to know me, gives me a better position to make the study of history relevant and approachable. “Teachers who have good and personal relationships with their students, create a desire to learn and motivation in students” according

¹⁴⁹ Sam Wineburg, *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone?)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), Introduction.

¹⁵⁰ Grant and Jill, *Teaching History with Big Ideas: Cases of ambitious teachers*, 2.

¹⁵¹ Lund, *Historiedidaktikk: En håndbok for studenter og lærere*, 34.

¹⁵² Grimsæth and Hellås, *Undervisningspraksis: Profesjonalitet i skolen*, 130-32.

to Grimsæth and Hellås in “Undervisningspraksis”.¹⁵³ According to Klette, an effective classroom leader is someone who is able to motivate their students for learning, and the way to do this is through balancing different types of teaching methods, and offering different types of support, i.e., emotional support, organizational support and instructional support. Emotional support highlights “relationships, atmosphere and “the tone” in the classroom as important for the students’ learning.”¹⁵⁴ With this teaching plan I hope to strengthen trust and relationships, as well as create an open and lighthearted climate for learning.

Dybdelæring, or deep learning, has been shown to benefit motivation. As Lund points out, “The concentration on one limited part of historical reality through a primary source material will make it possible for the students to notice that they eventually understand more, and that they are developing an ownership to the material and the problem they are working with.”¹⁵⁵ This is very much the same idea as big idea teaching, although big ideas are not necessarily limited to a specific period of time. As I have understood it, they can stretch out over longer periods of history. As long as they center around one specific idea it will have the same type of effect on the students’ motivation and ownership to the developing of knowledge.¹⁵⁶

Through working with primary sources in a big idea unit, the student will practice awakening their *historiebevissthet*, or historical consciousness, which is increasingly acknowledged as an important goal for the study of history in lower- and upper secondary school.¹⁵⁷ Through working with trying to find answers to why we know what we know, and coming up with our own answers to why something may have been, the students will gain insight into the fact that history is “discovered”, that it has to be “worked out” and finally that what we can know of history is ultimately only reconstructions and never absolute truths.¹⁵⁸ It is important however, that in this, we as teachers also highlight that there are degrees to this.

¹⁵³ My translation. Original quote: “Lærere som har gode og personlige relasjoner til elevene, skaper lærelyst og motivasjon hos elevene.” Grimsæth and Hellås, *Undervisningspraksis: Profesjonalitet i skolen*, 131.

¹⁵⁴ My translation. Original quote: “Slik sett er relasjoner, klima og “tonen” i klasserommet viktig for elevens læring.” Kristi Klette, “Hva vet vi om god undervisning? Rapport fra klasseromsforskningen,” in *Praktisk-pedagogisk utdanning: En antologi*, ed. Rune Johan Krumsvik og Roger Säljö (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2017), 186-87.

¹⁵⁵ My translation. Original quote: “Konsentrasjonen om et avgrenset stykke historisk virkelighet gjennom et primærmateriale gjør det mulig for elevene å merke at de etter hvert skjønner mer, og at de utvikler et eiendomsforhold til materialet og problemet de arbeider med.” Lund, *Historiedidaktikk: En håndbok for studenter og lærere*, 65.

¹⁵⁶ Grant and Jill, *Teaching History with Big Ideas: Cases of ambitious teachers*.

¹⁵⁷ Utdanningsdirektoratet, “Kjerneelementer.”

¹⁵⁸ Lund, *Historiedidaktikk: En håndbok for studenter og lærere*, 34.

Some things we can say with a lot of certainty, because of an overwhelming amount of proof, and some things we can assume, with slightly less probability. It is important that we do not confuse becoming historically conscious and seeing nuances in the way history is written, with complete factual denial and historical relativism. Especially in this time of disinformation, conspirations and “alternative facts”, we as history teachers have great responsibility.

Through all of the lessons in this big idea unit, I would use a variety of different types of tasks, work methods and organizations to ensure that the students stay engaged and motivated so that productive teaching can take place.¹⁵⁹ A focus, however, is still always on sociocultural learning. Especially in the lesson plan detailed bellow, I have been influenced by Vygotskij’s theory that learning happens in participation and interaction between people.¹⁶⁰ By having the students first talk with relatives, then with their peers, and then with me, there are many different “competent others” and many variations of potential for learning through the shifting “zone of proximal development”.¹⁶¹

Now I am going to outline a proposal to a lesson plan for one of the lessons in the ten-week unit. The plan is intended for VG2 and takes 60-90 minutes. It could be used early in the unit, or later, depending on what you want the goal to be. To be able to complete this lesson plan the students have had to have done homework, that is outline in the next section.

FOR THE TEACHER

Before class:

The students get a homework assignment one week ahead:

Inquire a grandparent or parent about their relationship to tacos. You can have the conversation in person or over phone or video call. Record it on your phone or take notes.

Here are some suggestions of what you can ask, but feel free to make up your own questions (remember to ask follow-up questions if they say something interesting!):

- Do you remember the first time you had tacos? What, when, where, why?
- Did you like it? Why/why not?
- Have you eaten it often? On what occasions?

¹⁵⁹ Klette, "Hva vet vi om god undervisning? Rapport fra klasseromsforskningen."

¹⁶⁰ Eli Ottesen, "Det viktigste er læring," in *Lektor - adjunkt - lærer: Artikler for studiet i praktisk-pedagogisk utdanning*, ed. Rolf Middelsen and Henrik Fladmoe (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2013), 114-15.

¹⁶¹ Ottesen, "Det viktigste er læring," 114-15.

- Why do you eat it/do you not eat it?
- Has the way you eat tacos changed over the years? (Ingredients? Time of the week? Etc.)
- Why do you think it became so popular?
- Anything else particular you remember about tacos?
- Who do you think are the main consumers of taco?

Your goal: Get the students interested in history through a relatable topic, and about the sources that are all around them. Get them to reflect on the limits and potentials of oral sources. Introduce them to the idea of a functional source understanding by having them reflect upon how the information they gained from their relatives can be used in different ways.

And finally, remember that an important part of this is also relationship building between you and the students, as well as the students between themselves. By sharing information about their parents or grandparents, they can start to understand more of each other's backgrounds and how they all relate to history in different ways.

FOR THE STUDENT

Relevant curriculum goals from Fagfornyelsen:

- explore the past by asking questions and obtaining, interpreting and using different historical material to find answers
- explore and reflect on how the past is remembered locally and nationally
- give an account of important changes in how people have acquired food and used natural resources, and assess the significance of this for people and a sustainable society¹⁶²
- explore how communication and cultural encounters have had an impact on people in Norway and the world

¹⁶² My translation. Original quotes: "Utforske fortiden ved å stille spørsmål og innhente, tolke og bruke ulikt historisk materiale for å finne svar", "utforske og reflektere over hvordan fortiden minnes lokalt og nasjonalt", "gjøre rede for viktige endringer i hvordan mennesker har skaffet seg mat og brukt naturressurser, og vurdere betydningen av dette for mennesker og et bærekraftig samfunn" and "utforske hvordan kommunikasjon og kultur møter har hatt betydning for mennesker i Norge og verden". Utdanningsdirektoratet, "Kompetansemål og vurdering: Historie (HIS01-03)."

Goal for the day:

Reflect upon our own position as history-made and makers of history. (*historiebevissthet*)

Think critically about the way we can use oral sources for knowledge about the past.

(*kildekritisk analyse*)

In groups of four: (10 minutes)

One by one, share what you have learned from your relatives. Take note of similarities and differences in who your relatives are, what age and background, and in their relations to tacos.

Individually: (30 minutes)

Read the text “Muntlige kilder og livsfortellinger” from Norgeshistorie.

<https://www.norgeshistorie.no/studere-fortid/historie/2050-muntlige-kilder-og-livsfortellinger.html> Mark down sections you think are relevant and important.

Questions for reflection: (write down your thoughts)

- Why do you think there were differences in your findings, and that of you peers?
- What challenges or limits do we face when using memories and oral sources?
- Can the interviews tell us something valuable about the topic, even if they are inconsistent with other facts?

In groups again: (10 minutes)

Share and discuss your reflections.

Plenum: (10 minutes)

What have you found out about taco from talking to your relatives?

Where there any big differences in accounts?

What did we think of the text? Did you encounter any challenges?

Can we, and should we use oral sources and life stories when studying history?

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