

## Repensar los estudios ibéricos desde la periferia

editado por José Colmeiro y Alfredo Martínez-Expósito

# Writing from and for the Periphery Carving Out a Place for Spanish Food Studies

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**Abstract** This article explores the notion of the periphery as it concerns Hispanic food studies. It argues that the periphery has a multiplicity of meanings in this context, and also that it is useful for various methodological and substantive reasons. These include the initial academic marginalisation of food studies itself, the slow acceptance of culinary texts as an object of academic study, as well as the ongoing drive to move food studies from the margins of Hispanic cultural studies. By reference to the Author's own research on Spanish culinary nationalism, this article also shows how the tension between centre and periphery is key to understanding Spanish food discourses of the past few centuries. This discussion hopes to show that the academy is increasingly paying attention to peripheral cultures and objects of study.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Food Studies: Transcending the Periphery. – 3 Spanish Food Culture and the Peripheral.

**Keywords** Hispanic food studies. Spanish food studies. Culinary nationalism. Spanish cuisine. Spanish regionalisms.

## 1 Introduction

Hispanic food studies is a most apt topic for any discussion of the periphery. Food studies, broadly speaking, has slowly moved from a peripheral position in the academy to one of prestige and popularity. If, however, food studies scholars have been alive to the food cultures and discourses of countries such as France, England and Italy, the Spanish-speaking world has only recently begun to receive this type of scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> Although academic inquiry into the food cultures of the Spanish world is relatively new, journalistic discussions about the nature of Spanish cuisine date back to the late nineteenth century. Of particular significance is Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's ongoing

**1** In the case of French cuisine, see Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson (2000; 2004), who has since 2000 been publishing monographs and articles on French cuisine. An important scholar regarding Italian cuisine is Carol Helstosky (2003; 2004; 2006), who has been writing extensively on Italian food culture and its links primarily to politics and nation building.

argument since the 1970s and 1980s for a model of Spanish cuisine that, in contrast to French cuisine, recognized the strength of Spain's regional cuisines or its peripheral food cultures. The writing of intellectuals such as Vázquez Montalbán has been important to the development of Spanish food studies as a number of us food scholars write not just about the discursive codification of Spanish culinary nationalism (see Anderson, Ingram, forthcoming) but also about the cuisines of Spain's peripheries (see Mercer, Song, forthcoming). An important development in Spanish food studies can be seen also in a monographic issue on Food Cultural Studies and the Transhispanic World that I have co-edited with Rebecca Ingram (Anderson, Ingram, forthcoming). In this volume we bring together a body of work that critically interrogates food, its discourses, and its practices in order to delineate the emerging field of food studies in the transhispanic world. For us Hispanists who research and teach about food it is important to assure more visibility for Hispanic food studies within food studies generally. Important, too, is that with our increased research and teaching in this area, we give food studies a more central place within Hispanic cultural studies itself. The absence of food from this discipline is all the more noteworthy given that the cultural significance of food can be found not just in food's materiality, but also in its myriad discursive and visual representations in Hispanic culture.<sup>2</sup>

In arguing in this essay for a more central place for food studies in Hispanic cultural studies, I provide examples of my own scholarship on Spanish culinary nationalism and authoritarian nationalism. Significantly, this discussion of my own research evinces, too, the centrality of the notion of the periphery to Spanish food studies. For Spain's late-nineteenth-century pioneering gastronomes, writing from their purportedly peripheral position in the broader European projects of modernity and nation building, culinary nationalism required them to deal with the hegemony of the French, centralist model.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, in articulating a national cuisine for a more centrifugal country, these figures had to account for the strength of Spain's regional cultures. If the paradigm established at in the nineteenth century gave visibility to Spain's peripheral foodscapes, subsequent Spanish food writers and intellectuals would continue to grapple with the tension between their nation's peripheral and centralist foodscapes.

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2 Food, as Ingram and I demonstrate in the introduction to our forthcoming special issue entitled "Transhispanic Food Cultural Studies" of the *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, "meets the criteria for cultural texts that Jo Labanyi and Helen Graham specify in their now classic introduction to *Spanish Cultural Studies*" (Anderson, Ingram forthcoming).

3 See Labanyi (2000) and Martí-López (2002) for their excellent discussions of the way nineteenth-century Spanish authors dealt with Spain's peripherality and the often vexatious fact of France's literary and cultural hegemony. It is my contention that food writers and gastronomes dealt with a similar problematic as they attempted to codify a cuisine that was at once recognisably modern and autochthonous to Spain.

The present volume edited by Colmeiro and Martínez-Expósito considers also the notion of what it means to contribute to Hispanic cultural studies from a geographical position peripheral to the North American and European centres of academic enquiry. In thinking about my own position, so far removed from these scholarly centres, I can say that editing a special issue on food in the transhispanic world has helped to a small degree to bring Australasia into the centre of this innovative new subset of Hispanic cultural studies. Our work in this region in other areas such as film and historical memory assures us visibility and relevance too. If we continue to bring North American and European scholars together for conferences, edited books and special issues, then it may begin to feel that we constitute a different kind of centre. The tyranny of distance is, however, harder for me to overcome when it comes to access to primary sources. My geographical distance has impacted on my choice of sources and has seen me focus much more on digitised or published food texts, when I would like also to have the time to search through Spain's archives and libraries.

## **2 Food Studies: Transcending the Periphery**

Over the last few decades, more and more scholars have turned their attention to the topic of food, marginal for so long in the academy on account of its association with such phenomena as the everyday, domesticity, femininity and material culture. Moving beyond false binaries, like high and low culture and the public and private split, scholars now value food as a topic of research that connects to issues of broader cultural, social, economic and political importance. Food history and foodways (the term that captures the nexus between food and culture) are valued not just in their own right, but also for what they tell us about broader phenomena such as imperial expansion, nation building, courtly culture, migration, globalisation, bellic conflict and authoritarian rule, among others. Previously ignored and peripheral, food texts, such as cookery books, menus, food television shows, food film and fictional narratives, food guides and visual art depicting food or foodways are increasingly valued as rich and important cultural texts.

As mentioned earlier, food studies scholars have been comparatively slow to turn their attention to the Hispanic world. Traditionally, this scholarship has paid more attention to culturally and gastronomically hegemonic parts of the world, such as France and Italy, whilst it has also extensively investigated these issues in the English-speaking world. As Ingram and I show in our forthcoming special issue on "Transhispanic Food Cultural Studies", the relatively little attention that has been paid to matters of taste in the Hispanic world is particularly remarkable given "the centrality, for instance, of the Iberian Peninsula to the transatlantic exchanges

that introduced iconic foodstuffs vital to the later development of many of Europe's national cuisines" (call for papers). A further factor that would arguably have encouraged interest in Spanish food cultures and discourses, at the least, is the pivotal role played by renowned Spanish chefs in other European courts from the time of the Colombian exchange onwards. This has largely been ignored by food studies scholars. The Hispanic world's relatively peripheral position in the field is surprising, too, given the development of taste communities in Latin America and Spain that ask us to consider the nexus between nation building and global forces of nation branding and gastro-tourism.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding these significant features of Hispanic food cultures and foodways, food studies scholars have written first and foremost about other more hegemonic foodscapes.

Instead, interest in the food discourses and foodways of the Hispanic world has come primarily from within Hispanic studies. The move towards a less 'canonical' and more cultural studies or cultural history style of research has facilitated our greater focus on texts and/or cultural products traditionally considered lowbrow or domestic. Nevertheless, although scholarship on the foodways and food cultures of the Spanish-speaking world is emerging as a dynamic and important area of research, this field of academic inquiry remains peripheral to Hispanic cultural studies. Carving out a more central place for food studies requires bringing together the myriad studies on food cultures, which is what Ingram and I have aimed for in our forthcoming issue. From studies looking at the links between food and nation building to academic inquiry into the impacts of globalization and global food trends on the ways different Hispanic countries commodify food culture for the purposes of gastro-tourism, our special monograph evinces the exponential growth of research linking food culture and/or food discourse to broader social, political and cultural processes.

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4 The time seems particularly ripe for overcoming the peripheral condition of Spanish food studies given the current international appeal of Spanish cuisine, *tapas* and *pinchos*, the large number of Spanish gastronomy films (A. Martínez-Expósito 2015), the newly gained media celebrity of Spanish chefs (José Andrés, etc), and the prestige of star restaurateurs such as the Roca Brothers and Ferran Adrià, and the *New York Times* naming Spain "the new France" on its cover (Arthur Lubow, "A Laboratory of Taste". *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, August 10, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/10/magazine/a-laboratory-of-taste.html>).

### 3 Spanish Food Culture and the Peripheral

My own research on culinary nationalism in late-nineteenth-century-Spain has dealt with the notion of the peripheral as it applies to Spanish food culture and food discourses at that time. The first example of the peripheral can be found in Spain's relationship with neighbouring France in all matters gastronomic. In addition to a marked preference for French cuisine amongst the Spanish aristocracy, from the middle of the nineteenth century, the market for culinary texts and cookery books in Spain was also very much under the influence of the French. This was due, according to Elisa Martí-López (2002, 57), to an international centralisation of cultural processes that meant that Paris became the cultural referent for "peripheral" European countries like Spain. Indeed, Spanish writers of popular cultural forms, such as the serial novel, strove to meet consumer expectations by imitating the French literature that proliferated in their national market. Spanish cookery book authors and gastronomes, I contend, also emulated French culinary texts, which had been responsible for shaping their readers' views about culinary modernity and modern cookery books. In these texts, a very centralist paradigm for culinary nation building predominated. This is because French cuisine had itself subsumed regional cuisines into the centre. Spanish readers of these food texts came therefore to associate culinary nationalism with centralization.

Ultimately, scholars have come to understand that the relentless centralization of French nation building was not suited to a country like Spain where regional identification is so strongly felt.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, at the time of nation building in Spain a number of intellectuals, journalists and food writers of note lamented the lack, compared to France, of national unity. As part of this broader debate about nation building, some of these intellectuals turned their pens to gastronomy, convinced that national unity depended on culinary unity. A challenge for Spain's pioneering gastronomes - the most notable of whom were Dr Thebussem (Mariano Pardo de Figueroa) and the King's Chef - was to codify a national cuisine that spoke to national unity, while also recognising the strength of regional identification in Spain. After much deliberation, they made the suggestion that *la olla podrida* be served at official State banquets "en señal de respeto y deferencia al plato nacional del dicho país" (Pardo de Figueroa, Castro y Serrano 1888, 23), because of its unique connection to all of Spain's dif-

5 See for instance Borja de Riquer and Enric Ucelay-Da Cal (1994), who have observed that the centralization of late-nineteenth-century-Spain did not achieve the same homogenization as that of France or Italy. Nevertheless, these scholars move away from normative assumptions about the paths that nations are meant to follow simply because others have done so. They advocate instead "an integrated approach to Spanish culture that would de-emphasize capitivity and attend to the play of particulars" (1994, 27).

ferent regional cuisines. As they explained, *la olla podrida* was enjoyed by over fifteen million Spaniards, containing foodstuffs from all over the Iberian Peninsula, such as Castilian chickpeas, vegetables from Aranjuez, Valencian lamb and beef from Navarra (24). The dish's symphony of ingredients from across the nation meant that in *la olla podrida* "la alegoría y recuerdos de varios pueblos o territorios de España" (24) became visible. The importance of this 'national' dish to Spanish culinary nationalism was the way it privileged the notion of unity in diversity, rather than relentless centralisation or the subsuming of peripheral regional cuisines into a nation's administrative and/or gastronomic centre.<sup>6</sup>

*La olla podrida* was an excellent suggestion for a national dish because it represented an important break with the hegemony of French gastronomy and food culture in Spain. For the first time in over a century, the Spanish court showcased a dish that was not just indigenous to Spain, but that also symbolised a model for culinary nationalism suited to a country where regional identification was much stronger than national identification. This innovative paradigm for Spanish culinary nationalism has certainly stood the test of time in Spain, seen in the way subsequent codifications of Spanish cuisine look for ways of articulating what it is that unifies a cuisine which is inherently diverse. Spanish cuisine's divergence from the French centralist model has perhaps contributed to Spain's peripheral position in food studies scholarship. If food studies scholars (e.g. Parkhurst Ferguson 2000; 2004) have directed a lot of attention to the monolithic models of culinary nationalism, it has not been as clear, I would suggest, how to write about other less centralising paradigms of culinary nationalism. This is primarily because the common assumption up until recently has been that monolithic nationalism - and by extension monolithic culinary nationalism - is the benchmark for all nationalist projects. The strength of Spain's peripheries (that is, regional cuisines) has contributed therefore to Spain's peripheral position in food studies scholarship and could hopefully result in a paradigmatic shift in perspectives in food studies.

This meant, too, that the issue of a national cuisine or of a monolithic taste community remained somehow unresolved in Spain. Indeed, because a centrifugal national cuisine was never codified in nineteenth-century Spain as it had been done in nineteenth-century France, subsequent Spanish leaders would continue to look to the question of a national cuisine. The political or nation-building potential of food, for instance, did not go unnoticed by Spain's two twentieth-century dictators. For Miguel Primo de Rivera's government, as I have shown elsewhere (Anderson 2018), state-commissioned food texts showcasing Spain's regional cuisines under the

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6 Please see my article for a more in-depth discussion of the suggestion of *la olla podrida* as national dish (Anderson 2013).

umbrella term “cocina nacional” or “cocina española” (Pérez 1929, 9) functioned not just to regenerate images of Spanish cuisine both at home and abroad, but also as a way of unifying a divided population. When Francisco Franco took power in 1939, the top-down imposition of a monolithic Spanish identity took on unprecedented dimensions, with food or food discourses being utilized to produce subject positions or readers who were ultra-aware of the importance of national identity and the category of the nation.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars of Francoist Spain tend to agree that the unity of Spain was one of the most substantive political objective of the dictatorship and that the regime relentlessly used discourse to “forcefully [unify] Spain” (Epps 2010, 551). For many scholars, discourse provides fascism with a necessary form of symbolic violence (see Santianez 2013, *Topographies of Fascism*). Significantly, food studies scholars have been equally alive to how food discourses often function as a site of control. Indeed, discourse about food is for the most part prescriptive, and cooking, as scholars tell us, is one of “the most instructed activity for the general populace in our society” (Tomlinson 1986, 203). Significantly, the talk of food transcends cuisine, as representations of food or advice in food texts also tell readers how to perform aspects of their identity such as nationality, gender, sexuality and class. Both the potency of food discourse as a control mechanism, as well as the Franco regime’s renowned use of authoritarian discourse to impose its rigid notion of truth, make, I argue, the study of Francoist food discourse an important scholarly endeavour.

The term *a la española* – used on one of Franco’s earliest menus from the *año de la victoria* – provides an early example of the official use of food discourse in the imposition of a monolithic Spanish identity. If at this early totalitarian stage of the dictatorship officials were acutely aware of the strength of separatist sentiment, then this official menu, which would have been reported on in the press or referred to in official food texts, creates subject positions or readers who, like their nation’s leader, identify first and foremost with national rather than regional identity. Just as members of a nation feel unified through ‘imagining’ shared history, customs and traditions, the notion of a shared national cuisine heightens nationalist sentiment.

Whilst the term *a la española* was used to describe particular dishes or to refer to standardized style of cooking, there were a number of cookery books published during these years that were purportedly concerned

7 In Hispanic studies or Spanish studies, the type of analysis of food discourse that I am carrying out is, as mentioned earlier, a peripheral area of study. This is most likely because food texts – many of which are cookery books – are gendered female. Food texts are often written with female readers in mind and as such have traditionally been seen as inferior to more ‘high-brow’ cultural texts. In the case of the food texts I look at, it is important to bring them to the center of our analysis for the visibility they give to women’s histories, traditionally excluded from hegemonic discourse and scholarship. Moreover, from their peripheral or purportedly apolitical position these texts often disrupt official discourse in rather remarkable ways.

with the promotion of regional cuisines and many contain some form of the word region in their titles, such as La Sección Femenina's *La cocina regional* (1953) or Ignacio Domènech's *Mi plato: cocina regional española* (1942). The prolific use of the denomination *regional* in cookery books from these years has led some scholars and historians of Spanish gastronomy to write of a revival of culinary regionalism, or "el interés del español por conocer los platos tradicionales de las cocinas regionales" (Martínez Llopis 1995, 300). Yet, on close inspection, these food texts often diminish the importance of regional cuisines and can be seen, as I see it, to produce readers with an acute sense of the secondary role played by regional culture and regional cuisines during the Franco dictatorship. Whilst these texts 'promote' regional cuisines, this culinary regionalism occurs in such a way that the category of the nation or the national gains in importance. This was a similar strategy to the one employed in other forms of popular culture under Francoism, including folklore, cinema, music and dance. As José Colmeiro has argued, this was part of a deliberate political strategy to co-opt difference. In his book *Peripheral Visions*, Colmeiro deals with this question, as it relates to cinema and popular and folk culture under Franco, and theorizes it as a disavowal and co-option of vernacular cultures. Thus he refers to the "Francoist co-option of Galician folk imagery and traditions as a way of demobilizing political Nationalism" (Colmeiro 2017, 269), and the cinematic suture of peripheral cultural identities, by which "cultural and political difference is disavowed and integrated into the fabric of the nation" (108).

As the mediator between the Spanish State and Spanish women, La Sección Femenina was responsible for training women in their domestic and national responsibilities.<sup>8</sup> One of the most important texts published or commissioned by La Sección Femenina was *La cocina regional*, which did not just impose the notion of Spanish women's ultimate devotion to domesticity, but also their responsibility in relation to the promotion of "regional food culture". La Sección Femenina also promoted regional culture through the work of its folkloric group, Coros y Danzas. Although political regionalism was repressed at least until the mid-1960s, cultural regionalism - which involved the promotion of regional folklore and, in some rare instances, even languages and dialects - was supported. The work of organisations such as Coros y Danzas constitutes an important example of the centralist promotion of regional culture and folklore by Francoist officials. Although regional cultures are promoted they are done so as incomparably smaller

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8 As a function of the rigid gender divide in place for much of the dictatorship, women were expected to spend several hours a day shopping and cooking for their families. If women were taught cooking skills as part of La Sección Femenina's compulsory social service program, food discourses also functioned to create female readers who were acutely aware of gender difference and their confinement to the private sphere.



parts of the greater national whole and therefore it is ultimately the category of the nation or the national that gains in importance.

La Sección Femenina's *La cocina regional* can be seen in the light of this type of promotion of regional folkloric culture. Some 500 pages long, *La cocina regional* opens with a discussion of the country's national dish, reminding readers of the function of regional cuisines to contribute to the greater whole that was Spanish cuisine. Following on from this introductory chapter about Spain's national cuisine, *La cocina regional* contains 17 chapters on the country's regional cuisines, each of which consists of an introduction to the culinary style of the region, followed by several pages of regional recipes. If official discourse presented aspects of regional culture as small parts of the incomparably greater national whole, then *La cocina regional* is reflective of this ultra-nationalist paradigm. The apparent focus of this cookery book, according to its title, is Spain's regional cuisines yet it opens talking about the country's "cocina nacional" (*La cocina regional* 1953, 5).

Moreover, the treatment of Catalan cuisine in this cookery book provides an example of the tendency in official discourse to keep cultural regionalism very separate from political regionalism. Whilst *La cocina regional* provides recipes for some traditional Catalan dishes, it downplays the question of Catalonia's distinct and unique history of autochthonous culinary texts. For instance, *La cocina regional* explicitly mentions the fifteenth-century Catalan cookery book *Libre del Coch*, but fails to mention the Catalan origins of this book, instead describing its importance to "la historia de la cocina española" (1953, 6). Moreover, according to *La cocina regional*, which "testimonia [...] la originalidad y personalidad de nuestra cocina", its recipes are "todas típicamente españolas" (1953, 6). By appropriating *Libre de Coch* as Spanish and ignoring its Catalan genealogy, *La cocina regional* empties Catalan food culture of any potential political content. A recipe for Catalan *cocido*, which varies just slightly from other *cocidos* made across the Peninsula, does not pose a threat to national unity and thus can be included in this cookery book, as can myriad references to traditional fiestas and dishes from the region. However, Catalonia's substantive cultural, culinary and linguistic difference is erased, evincing the tendency in official discourse to reduce cultural regionalisms to traditional, folkloric culture.

Another cookery book to deal after the war with the problematic relationship between Spain's culinary centre and peripheries is *Mi plato: cocina regional española* (1942) by Ignacio Domènech, one of the most renowned food writers and culinary professionals of the time. Domènech's cookery books often challenged official discourse. Indeed, this gastronome was frequently disruptive of official discourse, most notably in relation to the tendency to downplay or ignore the devastating hunger of post-war Spain. The last food text that he would pen, *Mi plato*, has received relatively scant scholarly attention compared to many of his earlier gastronomic

texts. Yet the importance of this cookery book should not go overlooked. Contemporaneous food texts on regional cuisines are almost uniform in their adherence to the trend in official discourse of diminishing regional culture and conflating it with folklore or tradition. By way of contrast, Domènech alludes to the fact that he sees Spain's peripheral regional cuisines as entities in their own right.

In the opening pages of this post-war cookery book, Domènech makes it clear that he knows the times have changed and that this was not a time for culinary abundance: "En las presentes circunstancias [...] no es propicio, al ofrecer al público, un libro de cocina de gran envergadura, de platos caros, muy bonitos, que ahora no tienen ninguna aplicación práctica. Por cuyas razones, es lógico, que mi Nuevo manual de cocina Mi plato [...] tenga que presentarse a ustedes más modestamente" (1942, 6). According to this description, Domènech had to come up with a more modest book on regional cuisines than the one he had originally planned, likely either prior to the outbreak of war or before it became apparent that there was no easy or quick fix to the post-war devastation. It is probable, therefore, that Domènech's 127-page cookery book on regional cuisines represents just a small section of what he would have published on this topic if circumstances had been different. Pointing also to the fact that Domènech did not see his paltry cookery book as doing justice to Spain's regional cuisines is his own exclamation that a cookery book for each regional cuisine: "bien pudiera componerse, para cada región, un libro de 500 páginas" (1942, 7).

If other food writers diminished the importance of regional cuisines by subsuming them into ad-hoc administrative or gastronomic zones, Domènech's comment about each regional cuisine being worthy of its own tome reveals that he did not subscribe to such a view. Indeed, his comment about the need for such detailed and voluminous accounts of Spain's regional cuisines provides his readers with an alternative way of imagining Spanish cuisine. If official discourse produces readers who see regional cuisines as very small parts of a monolithic Spanish cuisine, Domènech tries to create subject positions that acknowledge regions or regional cuisines as entities in their own right. The fact that Domènech was Catalan and had written a very important cookery book in Catalan about Catalan cuisine (*La Teca*, 1924) further corroborates that he did not subscribe to the official subsuming of regional cuisines into the national whole. If the food shortages of post-war Spain required Domènech to come up with a much more modest version of his original idea for a cookery book on regional cuisines, it's likely that also precluding Domènech from codifying regional cuisines as unique entities in their own right (as he had done previously with Catalan cuisine) is the oppressive censoring of all cultural texts at this time.

The notion of the periphery, as I hope to have shown in this article, is particularly relevant to Hispanic food studies. From moving Hispanic food

studies towards the centre of Hispanic cultural studies, to the relationship between, more specifically, Spain's central and peripheral food cultures, the periphery as it relates to Hispanic food culture has a multiplicity of meanings, only some of which I have been able to explore here. What I hope is clear after this discussion of some of the recent work in Hispanic food studies, including my own, is that academics are increasingly alert to the importance of peripheral cultures.

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