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FOOD, CULTURE & SOCIETY

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Writing Cuisine in the Spanish Caribbean: A Comparative Analysis of Iconic Puerto Rican and Cuban cookbooks

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Abstract :

Puerto Rico and Cuba, linked by a common colonial history, culture, and tropical environments, have similar cuisines. The islands' shared historical trajectories have been increasingly divergent in the last century, especially since the 1959 Cuban Revolution. This paper analyzes the concurrent social changes since the 1950s in these two contexts, through the work of two iconic cookbook writers, Carmen Valdejuli (Puerto Rico) and Nitza Villapol (Cuba). Writing and publishing during the second half of the twentieth century, these women's books became an important part of the culinary imagination in their respective islands and diaspora communities. This article analyzes how their work reflects their personal stories and changing social contexts by comparing the earliest and latest editions of their books. Differences between Puerto Rican and Cuban cuisines, as portrayed in the cookbooks, are assessed and contextualized in their respective sociopolitical contexts. This analysis of the production and transmission of culinary traditions offers a novel insight on local and transnational manifestations of these islands' sociopolitical transformations during these decades.

Keywords: cookbooks; Cuba; Puerto Rico; culinary knowledge

Introduction

Cookbooks are the work of "culinary experts." They provide prescriptions for specific dishes and, in some cases, directives on what constitutes a proper meal. Traditionally, cookbooks have been used as manuals on how to cook and eat in a given social context, targeting specific members of society with the means to buy and use the books (Appadurai 1988; Driver 2009). While

not necessarily reflective of actual diets or food preferences, they can serve as gateways into the societies in which they emerged. They play a role in preserving and reproducing tradition, as windows into kitchens of the past and transmitters of food memories and culinary practices of a particular time and place (Floyd and Forster 2003).

The expertise of cookery book authors is often taken for granted and is not usually subject to academic inquiry (Newlyn 2003). Analyses of cookbooks often fall in the realm of literature, cultural studies, history, and, more recently, the interdisciplinary field of food studies. Such analysis has focused, for example, on the recipes (ingredients, cooking methods) as vehicles to explore culinary practices and taste in times pasts (Bullock 2012; Driver 2009), or on the role of cookbooks in women's lives (Forster 2003). Expanding this literature, the present essay seeks to understand national cuisine representations and sociopolitical changes through two iconic cookbooks from the Spanish Caribbean: Puerto Rico's *Cocina Criolla* by Carmen Aboy Valldejuli and Cuba's *Cocina al Minuto* by Nitza Villapol. Both books were first published in the 1950s and are still widely used to this day, giving the authors high prominence in the culinary literature of their respective islands (Bliss 2006; Garth 2014; Santiago 1998). This analysis is motivated by the cultural affinity of these two islands, and their transitioning political, economic, and social contexts in the last decades.

Cuba and Puerto Rico have similar environments and cuisines. Rice and beans are staples and meat is prominent in daily diets. Both cuisines arise from a history of Spanish colonialism, resulting in the culinary amalgamation of food traditions of native Taino populations, Spanish conquistadors, and African slaves.¹ Their historical paths began to diverge at the end of the colonial era, resulting in present-day socialist Cuba and capitalist Puerto Rico. While the diverging histories of Cuba and Puerto Rico have been analyzed in other academic disciplines (Amador 2008; Montijo, Ruiz, Aponte, and Monllor 1985; Scarano 1998), the present comparison aims to bring a new perspective, addressing this topic via the domestic, quotidian lens of food and culinary writing. Valldejuli and Villapol's books provide the perfect vehicle: their work expands across the early 1950s to the late 1990s, decades of profound sociopolitical transformations in their respective islands. Their lives, like the historical trajectories of Puerto Rico and Cuba, were marked by the social and political circumstances of the period. Moreover, their books still hold an iconic and central role in these islands' culinary histories and ideals, locally and transnationally. The work of Villapol has been analyzed in journalistic and scholarly mediums (Fleites-Lear 2012; Garth 2014; Ponte 2012). Conversely, Valldejuli has not received a similar level of attention.

The cookbooks presented in this analysis, as any cookbook, are not a representation of the gastronomic reality of the times. Cookbook authors tend to write from a perspective of abundance and a desire for innovation (Appadurai 1988). These books play a role in the provision and standardization of culinary knowledge, through recipes considered part of everyday life in their context, while also carrying nostalgic memories, real or imagined, of a distant past. With this role in mind, the following pages present an analysis of these cookbooks.

Table 1: Summary of authors' biographies

	Carmen Aboy Valldejuli (1912–2005)	Nitza Villapol (1923–1998)
Place of birth	Puerto Rico	New York, NY
Family life	Married with children	Never married
Education	Unknown	Nutrition/Pedagogy
Learned to cook from:	Home cook	Mother
Main book	<i>Cocina Criolla</i>	<i>Cocina al Minuto</i>
Side projects	Children's literature	Historical and domestic articles

in the context of sociopolitical transitions. It begins by setting the context in which the books were written through an overview of the authors' lives and the societies they inhabited. Then, the authors' work is analyzed, comparing early and later editions of their books, assessing the influence of the social transitions in the different cuisine representations and the overall gastronomic discourse of the texts. While the books are, in essence, a collection of recipes, this essay focuses on the discourse framing or embedding such recipes (Leonardi 1989). This essay differs from and builds on previous comparisons of Villapol's work before and after the revolution (Fleites-Lear 2012), by placing the Cuban transitions alongside those of Puerto Rico. In doing so, it also contributes to scholarly conversations on the role and existence of national cuisines, given the culinary similarities of the contexts at hand, building on the classic work on national cuisine and nation formation from Mintz (1996) and Appadurai (1988), using the structural approach to cuisines found in Rozin (1982)

Valldejuli and Villapol: their lives in a historical context

Cuba and Puerto Rico are / of one bird the two wings;

They receive flowers and bullets /in the same heart

(Lola Rodríguez de Tió, *Mi libro de Cuba* (1893) [author's translation])



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These verses by the Puerto Rican poet Lola Rodríguez de Tió beautifully describe the intimate relationship between the two islands at the turn of the nineteenth century. Five years after these words were written, the Spanish American War of 1898 marked the first historical point of divergence between them. Cuba became an independent country (1902), while Puerto Rico remained a possession of the United States, a relationship that continues to this day. Despite the change in political status, both islands shared a strong influence from the United States, developing capitalist, market-oriented economies in the first half of the twentieth century. While Cuba was officially independent, under the Platt Amendment of 1901, the United States had a strong influence on the

island's affairs (Staten 2005). During this period, Cuba's economy and social life was greatly influenced by the United States, including Hollywood movies, Coca-Cola™, and the use of the English language (Geiling 2007).

The late 1950s and early 1960s marked important points of historical divergence between the two islands. While a segment of Cuban society enjoyed great wealth, the island was marked by income inequality and increasing political oppression and instability (Geiling 2007), culminating in the Cuban Revolution of 1959. To a lesser degree, Puerto Rico also experienced instability and transition during this period. The late 1940s saw the implementation of the industrialization project, Operation Bootstrap (Duany 2010), and the establishment of the *Estado Libre Asociado* ("Commonwealth" in English) as Puerto Rico's decolonization model in the 1950s. These transitions led to increased resistance from nationalist (pro-independence) groups on the island and the US, including attacks on the Puerto Rican Governor's house and a shooting incident in the US Congress (Ayala and Bernabe 2007).

The period was also marked by changes in domestic values and customs. There was a gradual transition from the traditional, Spanish society values of the eighteenth century, to more modern gender roles, sparked by the feminist movement that had already started in the beginning of the century, which spread across all strata of society (Colon and Reddock 2004). The increase in women's civic, political, and economic participation changed the amount of time devoted to traditional household tasks, inevitably affecting their role in the kitchen. The lives of Puerto Rico's Carmen Aboy Valldejuli and Cuba's Nitza Villapol are discussed next, based largely on journalistic accounts. Living about 700 miles apart, they cooked and wrote about food contemporaneously, in the midst of the sociopolitical and historical transitions of these islands. Despite their similar level of influence in the culinary imagination of their compatriots, Valldejuli and Villapol differed in their life trajectories (Table 1) and attitudes toward food, marked by the different impact of the sociopolitical shifts in their neighboring islands.

Valldejuli, the Puerto Rican

Carmen Aboy Valldejuli was born in Puerto Rico to one of the island's elite families (maiden name: Ferrer), less than two decades after the United States occupation of 1898. According to her own accounts, she was raised in "the Spanish tradition that proper young ladies never performed menial household chores" like cooking (Valldejuli 1975, x), in a home with plentiful servants, with a father who loved fine food (Valldejuli 1975). As she reached the age for marriage, her life-long home cook, Francisca Falú, a woman of African descent, taught her how to cook (Solís Escudero 2008).

Mrs Valldejuli started collecting recipes and experimenting in the kitchen motivated by her marriage in 1936 to engineer and amateur devotee of the culinary arts, Luis F. Valldejuli (Valldejuli 1975). These recipes, annotated in a notebook dedicated to her daughters, continued to grow, later resulting in the first edition of *Cocina Criolla* (Solís Escudero 2008). The Valldejulis were

a team, once referred to as the “unofficial ambassadors of Puerto Rican cuisine” (“Puerto Rican Expert Compiles Book of Recipes,” 1968), as Mr. Valldejuli played a big part in the book’s development. This partnership later resulted in a co-authored publication, *Juntos en la cocina* (Together in the Kitchen), not included in this analysis.

Valldejuli is recognized as an important cookbook author in Puerto Rico. This important recognition is despite the existence of other cookbook authors in her earlier years, and the proliferation of cookbooks in Puerto Rico since the 1950s (Solís Escudero 2008). Her books are still sold and printed, almost a decade after her death. *Cocina Criolla* has been compared to the *Joy of Cooking* (Hartz 1994). Her work brought her fame in the United States, including invitations to cooking shows, guest articles in magazines, and the award of the “Best Cook Book Around the World” by *Time Life* magazine (Solís Escudero 2008). Valldejuli hosted two cooking shows, “*Cocine con Pueblo*” (Cooking with Pueblo, a local supermarket chain) and “¿*Qué cocinaré hoy?*” (What will I cook today?). She also became a children’s book author, with a series of books on the adventures of the elf Cucuyé, including the title *Cucuyé en la Cocina* (Cucuyé in the Kitchen) (Valldejuli 1980). Despite this fame and prolific career, little has been published about her private life. We only get a glimpse at her home in a 1968 newspaper article, where it was described as spacious, with a big family kitchen, still staffed by her cook, Ms Falú, and a teaching kitchen, in construction at the time (“Puerto Rican expert compiles book of recipes,” 1968). Journalistic accounts and the very short autobiographical notes in her books paint an image of a woman who loved cooking and the pleasures of life. Nothing exemplifies this better than her quote, “*Salud, amor, dinero, y tiempo para gastarlo*” (Health, love, money, and time to spend it).

Villapol, the Cuban

Nitza Villapol was born in New York, to a Cuban family “of means” living in political exile (Ponte 2012). She moved with her family to Cuba in 1934, at age 11 (Colomina Gonzalez 2006), after the collapse of the Machado regimen in Cuba. Some sources say she studied nutrition and dietetics in London in the 1940s; others situate her at Harvard and MIT in 1955 (Ponte 2012), or completing a doctorate degree in Havana in 1948 (Fleites-Lear 2012). Unlike Valldejuli, Villapol never married. Several journalistic sources describe her as a bitter woman (Miller 2008; Oppenheimer 1993), an attitude blamed on having suffered polio as a child (Ponte 2012).

She learned to cook from her mother, a woman described as a feminist, who cooked in a fast-paced style, or “in a minute,” matching her belief that women should not spend more time than needed in the kitchen (Oppenheimer 1993). This cooking style influenced Villapol, and she named her cooking show (and later her books), *Cocina al Minuto*, in honor of the nickname of her mother’s cuisine (Ponte 2013). Her cooking show aired from 1948 to 1997, making her a constant presence in Cuban television for decades (Ponte 2012). The book, *Cocina al Minuto*, was published soon after the start of the cooking show, in 1950.



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Villapol had many competitors at the start of her career. However, contrary to these competitors, she decided to stay in Cuba after the 1959 Revolution (Ponte 2012). Before the revolution her books and cooking show were funded by private companies. After the Revolution private companies left, and she became sponsored by the Cuban government (Oppenheimer 1993). The situation worsened after the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s and the onset of the “Special Period in Times of Peace” in Cuba, marked by drastic economic decline and chronic food scarcity. While the loss of petroleum imports from the Soviets promoted the organic agriculture applauded today (Febles-Gonzalez, Tolon-Becerra, Lastra-Bravo, and Acosta-Valdes 2011), foods Cubans were accustomed to, such as meats and dairy products (petroleum-dependent commodities), suddenly became scarce, greatly impacting the quality of the Cuban diet during that decade (Rodríguez-Ojeda, Jiménez, Berdasco, and Esquivel 2002). In this period, Villapol sought to help Cubans cope with the ongoing food scarcity, using her books and show to teach the population to cook with whatever was available in the market. In her own words:

Simply, I inverted the terms. Instead of asking myself which ingredients were missing to make that or another recipe, I started by asking which recipes were possible with the available products. (Diego 1983) [Author’s translation]

During this period, Villapol introduced recipes with uncommon ingredients, such as plantain peel, that, while used in other countries, were considered inedible in Cuba (Ponte 2012). These attempts led to criticisms that she was cheapening Cuban cuisine (Bianchi Ross 2002), and even crediting her with fictitious, inedible recipes such as *bistec de frazada* (mop steak) (Ponte 2012).

Villapol’s interest in cuisine was motivated by a desire to improve the health of the population, and not necessarily a love for cooking. Anecdotal accounts describe her as someone who disliked cooking (Ponte 2012), with a preference for simple meals and even canned soups (Miller 2008). Such accounts note that it was her decades-long cooking show assistant, Margot Bacallao, who did most of the cooking and recipe planning (Perez Saez 2009); some argue without the appropriate credit.² Ms Bacallao, like Valldejuli’s cook Ms Falú, was a woman of African descent. She was a key character in Villapol’s career. Yet, it was only after Villapol’s death that accounts start to appear on Bacallao’s role in the *Cocina al Minuto* cooking show.

Despite the criticisms, Villapol’s *Cocina al Minuto* is still popular, even prompting the production of unauthorized editions in the diaspora community, subjected to copyright battles.³ Like Valldejuli, Villapol diversified beyond the culinary. She wrote weekly columns in the Cuban *Bohemia* Magazine, on recipes and other topics of concern for the Cuban housewife (Carrobelló 2013). Moreover, she was credited with having influenced the Cuban food rationing system, or *la libreta* (Miller 2008) and contributed to a UNESCO publication on African influences on the Latin American diet (Nitza Villapol 1977).

The books: overview and content

Valdejuli and Villapol both enjoyed a higher than average social class and upbringing, with access to education and opportunities to travel. However, the sociopolitical changes of the times inevitably affected their lives, their work, and their relationship with food and cooking. Food availability, production and consumption patterns changed, as well as the underlying economic and class structures in the islands. The Cuban Revolution promoted the goal of self-sufficiency while also addressing inequities in food access through the food rationing system (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 1989). In Puerto Rico, rapid industrialization greatly diminished the role of agriculture, further increasing reliance on food imports (Carro-Figueroa 2002; Guerra 1999). In addition, the Cuban Revolution sparked a migration of Cuban exiles to Puerto Rico, and these exiles influenced Puerto Rican commerce, especially in the food sector, through the establishment of restaurants and food outlets (Duany 1989).

This section explores how these changes and the authors' lives are reflected in their work: *Cocina Criolla* (Valdejuli 1954, 2001) and *Cocina al Minuto* (Villapol 1991; Villapol and Martinez 1954). The selection of these editions was influenced by access and the intent to include editions released while the authors were still alive. This analysis rests on the similarities between Puerto Rican and Cuban cuisines, lifting the focus from the recipes (the ingredients and procedures), to the narrative surrounding them. This exercise shows that the different levels of transitions in these two islands (that is, the drastic, revolutionary transitions in Cuba, compared with the moderate, gradual transitions in Puerto Rico) are indeed reflected in these iconic cookbooks. Furthermore, the comparison also underscores how the lives and contrasting attitudes toward food color how the recipes are framed in these books.

Overview of the books

The first edition of *Cocina Criolla* was published in 1954 and has more than 60 editions, all published by editorial houses in the United States, including one in Braille. The English edition shares a similarly successful record. The publishing record of *Cocina al Minuto* is harder to establish, given the publication of unauthorized editions. It was first published in 1950, with a new edition every two years before 1960. After the Revolution, *Cocina al Minuto* was published in 1980. The 1991 edition used in this analysis is a revised version of the 1980 edition (the one used for this analysis).⁴

Cocina Criolla and *Cocina al Minuto* contrast in how they have evolved throughout the years, both in content (Table 2, Figure 1) and in design. *Cocina Criolla* is a simple book, with few illustrations, mostly black-and-white sketches of dishes at the beginning of chapters. Despite the passing of time, the book remains essentially unchanged in design, content and length. Contrasting *Cocina Criolla*, the two editions of *Cocina al Minuto* are in essence two different books. There are changes in content organization between the two editions (Table 2), as well as marked differences in the book's appearance and length. The 1991 edition of *Cocina al Minuto* is longer (315 pages, compared with 210



Table 2: List of chapters, by edition (author's translation)

Puerto Rico: <i>Cocina Criolla</i>	Cuba: <i>Cocina al Minuto</i>	
1954 and 2001	1954	1991
1. Introduction	1. The Menu	1. Introduction
2. Kitchen equipment	2. Rice and pasta	2. Balanced diet and how to prepare a menu
3. Cooking thermometers	3. Fish and seafood	3. The blender, pressure cooker and the refrigerator
4. Useful tips	4. Meats	4. How to measure the ingredients
5. The formal dinner	5. Poultry	5. Cereals
6. Soups	6. Fried foods	6. Cured meats and meat
7. Meats	7. Salads	7. Beans, soups and stews
8. Poultry	8. Varied dishes	8. Eggs
9. Fish and seafood	9. Pastries (<i>pasteles</i>), pies and tarts	9. Fish
10. Eggs and vegetables	10. <i>Cakes, paneletas</i> and cookies	10. Chicken
11. Fried foods	11. Puddings and refrigerator desserts	11. Sauces, dressings and mayonnaise
12. Pasta	12. Sandwiches	12. Vegetables and fruit
13. Salads	13. Winning recipes	13. Ice cream and [non-alcoholic] drinks (<i>refrescos</i>)
14. Sauces	14. Your Osterizer	14. Desserts
15. Cereals	15. Mixology	15. Salty snacks and drinks
16. Grains or legumes	16. The bar	16. And period (The ajiaco)
17. Sweet pastry, flan and creams	17. Drinks	
18. Sweets with coconut	18. Cocktails	
19. Other desserts	19. Rum cocktails	
20. Breads, sandwiches, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks	20. Gin cocktails	
	21. Cognac cocktails	
	22. Whiskey cocktails	
	23. Appetizers	
	24. Cordials	
	25. Long drinks	
	26. Punch	
	27. Salty snacks	

pages in the 1954 edition). It is also a much simpler book. The 1954 *Cocina al Minuto* includes jocosé illustrations at the start of each chapter, which are lost from the 1991 edition.

A key difference between the books is the inclusion of advertisements in the 1954 *Cocina al Minuto*. These are included in the form of inserted, one-page ads not only for food and alcohol, but also selling appliances and beauty products, and promoting specific brand names in recipes. For example, a rice recipe ends with a tempting exhortation to accompany the meal with a “*rica* [delicious] and *burbujeante* [bubbly] Hatuey beer [the national beer]” (Villapol and Martínez 1954, 8, author's translation). The salient role of advertisement

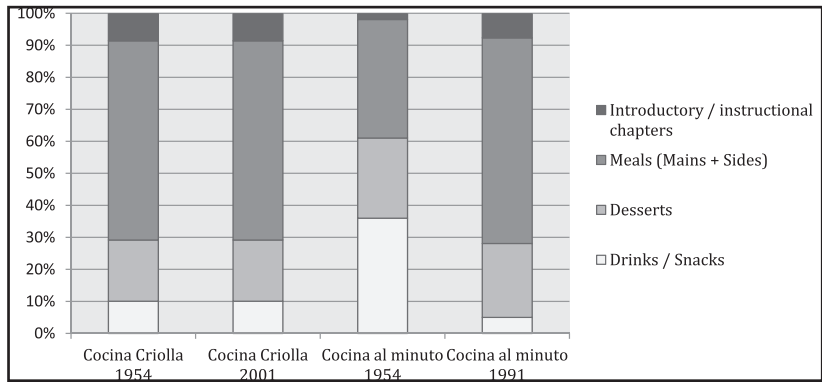


Fig 1: Cookbook page distribution. Note: The graph represents the proportion of pages dedicated to different topics derived from the books' chapters (see Table 2). Chapters were grouped into the main categories included in the graph: Introductory chapters, Meals (including chapters dedicated to protein sources, vegetables, etc.), Desserts, and Drinks/Snacks.

is a key differentiating factor between the 1954 and 1991 editions of *Cocina al Minuto*, and between *Cocina al Minuto* and *Cocina Criolla*, as Valdejuli's book did not include any type of advertisement.

The presence of ads in *Cocina al Minuto* may have affected more than the look of the book. There was a shift in the book's content, especially the focus of the book. The 1954 edition dedicated more space to entertaining and treats (see Figure 1). While half of the chapters are dedicated to cocktails, these are relegated to only one chapter in the 1991 edition (see Table 2). The content distribution of the 1991 edition seems closer to that of *Cocina Criolla*, with a large proportion dedicated to recipes centered on animal proteins, followed by grains/pasta and produce (see Figure 1). In addition, the 1991 *Cocina al Minuto* increases the number of introductory chapters, from only one in 1954 to four in 1991. The proportion of such introductory and instructional chapters (to be discussed in further detail in the next section) is also similar to the distribution in *Cocina Criolla* (see Figure 1). Possibly, free from the pressures of maintaining advertisement revenue, Villapol was able to change her book in concordance to her desire to teach and affect the diets of the Cuban population.

The next two sections continue to compare these books by further exploring the content of the introductory and recipe chapters, respectively.



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More than recipes: introductory and instructional chapters

These cookbooks are more than a collection of recipes. They contain other, preceding chapters introducing the home cook to the book and the cooking experience. In these chapters we discover how the recipes are framed, as well as the most important and interesting key differences in how Valdejuli and Villapol portrayed their national cuisines.

Cocina Criolla starts as follows:

This book was written with faith and enthusiasm, guided by the hope that it will be useful. It is inspired by the certainty that culinary art can be easily acquired if one conforms to recipes written with details and exactitude, which give the equivalence of long years of experience. (Valdejuli 2001, vii [author's translation])

In this introduction, Valdejuli sets the tone for the practical use of the book, as an instruction manual. It continues, with her positioning herself as a culinary expert and the recipes as true and tried. These recipes are further described as typical Puerto Rican recipes to be enjoyed in “moderation, but with *gusto* (pleasure, taste)” (vii). This introduction remains unchanged from the 1954 edition.

In contrast with Valdejuli, Villapol did not seem to find a need for an introduction to the 1954 *Cocina al Minuto* edition. The book simply starts with a chapter dedicated to “The Menu,” instructing the reader on how best to plan meals for the family. Matching her personal interest in nutrition, Villapol positions food according to its nutritional importance, greatly contrasting with the tone of food as enjoyment we find in Valdejuli's introduction. The nutrition-centered tone is emphasized by the inclusion and explanation of dietary guidelines adapted from the United States “Basic 7” food group wheel,⁵ framing menu planning around meeting these guidelines, along with a sample week's menu. In addition, there are also references to over- and under-nutrition as well as advice to ameliorate both issues.

The menu chapter is preserved and modified in the 1991 *Cocina al Minuto*. The Basic 7 food wheel is replaced by a wheel with three food groups: Energy foods (starches, sweets, fats), Constructive and Reparative Foods (animal sourced foods), and Regulatory Foods (fruits and vegetables).⁶ However, Villapol no longer provides the detailed week's menu found in the 1954 edition, an expression of the scarcity and lack of consistency in the post-Revolution food markets. This chapter is preceded by a lengthy and politically charged introduction, which deviates from the typical gastronomic discourse one would expect from a cookbook, meriting a longer, in-depth analysis beyond the scope of the present article.

While the 1954 *Cocina al Minuto* underscores the nutritional importance of food, the 1991 edition adds historical and political factors. In the 1991 introduction, Villapol contextualizes the Cuban diet in its history and current political situation, with references to the influence of the United States “imperialism” and the 1961 “criminal Yaqui blockade” (9) on the Cuban diet, as seen in the following excerpt:

[The United States], knowledgeable of the value of pork meat as a source of high quality protein and of vitamin B-1, sold to Cuba, a country almost illiterate and hence ignorant of issues related to nutrition, and its rulers not interested in public health, a big part of the lard they did not consume.

Therefore, without knowing, Cubans contributed so that their exploiters could eat the meat of the pork and its derivatives like hot dogs, ham, etc. (Villapol 1991, 9–10 [author’s translation])

As seen in this quote, Villapol not only blames the United States for Cubans’ hefty lard consumption, but also the Cuban leaders before the revolution, in some ways reminding the reader of the lack of attention they had for the well-being of the people. This example related to lard (*mantecca* in Spanish) is especially significant, as lard was the first food product the Cuban government had to ration in 1961 due to shortages blamed on the US embargo and was key to cooking in Cuba at the time (Best 1961). Arguably, aside from attacking the “Yanqui blockade,” Villapol is also attacking the high reliance on lard, a nutrient-deficient food, and as a habit that needs to be changed in the Cuban population.

The 1991 introduction clearly marks the difference in the social context before and after the revolution, and further differentiates *Cocina al Minuto* from *Cocina Criolla*, and from its pre-Revolution 1954 edition. Introductory remarks, focusing more on the historical contexts of foods, are also found at the start of most of the 1991 recipe chapters. Such remarks are reflections of Villapol’s wish to assert herself as more than a *cocinera* (a cook) or a cookbook writer, but, rather, also as a teacher for Cuban people,⁷ not only of the culinary, but also of their history, in the hopes of improving their eating habits.

Together with the introduction, the chapters preceding the recipes in the 1991 edition continue to reflect the influence of the government in the books, providing Cubans a tool to cope with the scarcities brought about by the Revolution, while also justifying such scarcities through the Yanqui Blockade. The 1991 introduction is followed by instructional chapters on everyday cooking, including how to use and maintain kitchen equipment and how to measure ingredients, including measurement conversions. Dedicating a chapter to refrigerators, blenders, and pressure cookers potentially indicates a perceived need to teach her audience about their “appropriate” use. Such a chapter also gives advice on cooking times for the pressure cooker and how best to store foods in the refrigerator, as a way to avoid food waste and preserve leftovers. Such instructions are not found in the 1954 edition, or in *Cocina Criolla*.

The chapters following the short *Cocina Criolla* introduction are devoid of the political, historical, and nutritional commentary found in the 1991 *Cocina al Minuto*. Following the introduction, Valldejuli formally starts her book with practical information targeting a young bride or a woman starting her life away from home. This is seen in the constant use of female pronouns, and in the specific (and aspirational) listing of equipment for a first kitchen and practical tips for the home cook. For instance, Valldejuli lists 45 distinct items in the 1954 edition, including a marble table for the home preparation of pastries and pastas, and other similar equipment for the home cook preparing these elaborate dishes from scratch. In a similar fashion to the 1954 *Cocina al Minuto*’s emphasis on cocktails and cocktail parties, this chapter indicates the aspirational nature of *Cocina Criolla*, especially given the harsh economic reality



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of most Puerto Ricans in the 1950s (Ayala and Bernabe 2007). The marble table and similar equipment is not found in the 2001 edition, where these are substituted with time saving equipment, such the blender, microwave, and food processor. This indicates the changes in women's domestic expectations in the past decades and the greater access to this equipment.

Cocina Criolla lacks the nutrition discourse found in *Cocina al Minuto*. In the 1954 edition, nutrition-related advice is only found in a single sentence in the "Useful Tips" chapter, encouraging the reader to "eat fresh fruits every day, as they are very nutritious and essential for the organism" (20). A second tip appears in the 2001 edition, where she suggests substituting lard with vegetable oil in most recipes (except for making pie crust).

Instead of using her book to promote healthful eating habits, Valldejuli focuses on entertaining and womanly domestic duties, as seen in the following quote, instructing the reader about what to do with unexpected guests:

A friend has arrived unexpectedly, and he is staying for dinner. What a problem!!! How bewildering!!! And to this I respond: None of that! Let's get to work, and while the husband gifts him a cocktail or highball, we [*nosotras*—female plural] skillfully, without hurry or haste, will prepare a simple and attractive menu. (Valldejuli 1954, 21 [author's translation])

Such an "attractive menu" is constructed out of mostly canned or jarred food such housewives should always have in their kitchen. These instructions are a reflection of the author's life, as a married socialite who loved entertaining, prepared to fulfill her domestic duties. While this situation may have been common in the elite classes of 1950s society in Puerto Rico, this represented only a small segment of society. Furthermore, contextualizing this chapter in the author's life, we might even wonder if Mrs Valldejuli "skillfully, without hurry nor haste" prepared the food herself, or had her lifetime home cook, Francisca Falú, deal with such unexpected guests. This theme is further reflected in the last instructional chapter, "The Formal Dinner," a 13-page chapter listing with great detail the requisites for such meals, described as "inflexible." The list starts with obvious elements such as guests, table, and chairs, and goes on to detail requirements associated with plates, silverware, and glassware, including a finger bowl, and uniformed help. This chapter also specifies the order of the menu's seven courses: aperitif, soup, hors d'oeuvre or fish, meat, salad, dessert, and coffee, these followed by a cordial with cigars for men and cigarettes for women.⁸ The chapter concludes with a page for the "informal dinner," where food can be served "buffet-style."

The introductory chapters of *Cocina al Minuto* and *Cocina Criolla* have marked differences in how these two authors framed their recipes, revealing their own personal relationship with food in the context of the societies they were writing for. The importance of nutrition in Villapol's work contrasts with Valldejuli's love for food and entertaining. These differences are further explored in the recipe chapters.

The recipes

Cocina Criolla contains many dishes associated with traditional Puerto Rican cuisine, such as rice, beans, *pasteles* (Puerto Rican version of the *tamal*, made with root crops instead of corn), *mofongo* (fried green plantain mashed with garlic, oil, and pork rind), chicken with rice, and fish *escabeche* (pickled fish), among others. The recipes are ordered starting with soups, followed by meats. Eggs and vegetables share a chapter, followed by a chapter dedicated to *frituras*, signaling the relative importance of fried foods in the Puerto Rican plate constructed by Valldejuli. It is only in the last two chapters—before we reach dessert items—that we find staple foods, namely rice and beans, in the Cereal and Grains and Legume chapters respectively. The Cereal chapter, aside from various rice recipes, also contains a few corn-based recipes (*tamales*, *hayacas*, and corn *funche*, a sweet version of a polenta). The Legume chapter is short, but varied. It contains three different recipes for the cooking base, *sofrito*,⁹ and recipes for six different legumes (pink, red, and white dried beans, garbanzo beans, fresh pigeon peas, and fresh fava beans), demonstrating the variety of legumes consumed on the island. There are three chapters dedicated to desserts, ending with a final chapter on miscellaneous foods and beverages (see Table 2), mostly nonalcoholic.

Valldejuli's recipes rely on industrial foods, including processed meats, canned vegetables, and ready-made condiments (ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, mayonnaise, etc.). Most of the recipes include basic foods, such as rice, and despite the brief recommendation to eat fresh fruits in the "Useful Tips" chapter, not many recipes incorporating these are present. The recipes are formatted listing the ingredients first (grouped in order of use), followed usually by numbered procedures. Unfortunately for the home-cook, most recipes do not have an indication of yield or number of portions. However, yield by pound is specified for meats, in the introduction to the chapter, along with further cooking instructions, before the recipes.

A page-by-page comparison between the 1954 and 2001 editions of *Cocina Criolla* reveals that the books are virtually the same, as noted above (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Some recipes even remain on the same page. These similarities were confirmed when looking at editions in between, informally encountered in Puerto Rican kitchens during the course of this study. The main changes are in the chicken recipes, where the requirement to pluck the chicken is taken out. A second change is the substitution of lard for vegetable oil, reflecting changes in health concerns. This overall immutability of *Cocina Criolla* is an important distinguishing factor differentiating it from *Cocina al Minuto*.

The two editions of *Cocina al Minuto* differ in how they portray Cuban cuisine, from how the chapters are organized (see Table 2) to the recipes and ingredients used. The 1954 *Cocina al Minuto* edition starts with Rice and Pasta, followed by chapters dedicated to animal proteins. As in *Cocina Criolla*, fried foods have their own, dedicated chapter early in the book. Salads are in one of the last chapters, before miscellaneous foods, desserts, and alcoholic beverages. The recipe chapters contain some traditional dishes such as different ones using rice as a base and tamales, as well as international recipes (including



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one for a Puerto Rican *asopao*). Despite the central role of beans in the Cuban diet, there is no chapter dedicated to legumes, as we find in *Cocina Criolla*. The emblematic Cuban black beans are delegated to the miscellaneous *Platos Variados* chapter. Overall, the recipes depict a strong European influence, with an air of sophistication, seen in dishes such as Lobster in a Chocolate Sauce and *flan de pescado* (fish flan). Similar to *Cocina Criolla*, ingredients include canned and other industrial goods, including one recipe featuring hot dogs. Such recipes, along with comments such as “most of the fried foods are much tastier” (45) contrast the nutrition centeredness found in “The Menu” chapter described earlier.

The 1991 *Cocina al Minuto* presents a toned-down, simplified version of Cuban cuisine, compared with the 1954 portrayal. Lobster disappears from the fish chapter, and the number of corn-based recipes expands. Meat recipes include those made with cheap canned meats, such as *Spam con frijoles*, as well as tips to increase the yield of meat portions, using pasta or oatmeal. The book provides different alternatives for basic recipes, such as five different recipes to make white rice, reflecting the unpredictability of the market. There is an entire chapter dedicated to eggs, with different recipes for “fried” eggs, for example, cooking the egg over milk, tomato sauce, and even water. We also find a chapter dedicated to sauces, not present in the early 1954 edition (see Table 2), with five recipes for home-made mayonnaise (including two egg-less versions).

The 1991 *Cocina al Minuto*, on the surface, focuses on healthier foods. It omits the chapter dedicated to fried foods, and includes a chapter on fruits and vegetables (see Table 2). However, a closer look reveals that, despite its title, this chapter contains mostly vegetable recipes, focusing on starchy varieties such as potatoes, plantain, and other root crops. Fruits are mostly included in dessert recipes. This edition also underscores traditional dishes, omitting international ones. Of interest is the central place it gives to *ajiaco*. The recipe is placed in its own chapter, the last one in the book, entitled *Y como punto final* (And Period), introducing the dish as the epitome of Cuban cuisine (Fleites-Lear 2012).

This comparison shows that, despite the similarities between Cuban and Puerto Rican cuisines, there are marked differences in how these cuisines are presented and framed by these two authors, illustrated in the contrasting ways the books were organized and which recipes were included and left out. This contrast is greatly displayed in the pre- and post-Revolution editions of *Cocina al Minuto*. These two editions stand at two different extremes, with *Cocina Criolla* situated, unchanged, in the middle, but in many ways closer to the 1991 edition of *Cocina al Minuto*. The next section compares Cuban and Puerto Rican cuisines to further contextualize the difference in portrayals found in these books.

Comparing the cuisines through the books

Rozin (1982) provides a useful schema to compare these cuisines, deconstructing them in three main components: basic foods, manipulation techniques, and seasoning (Rozin 1982). Villapol and Valldejuli use the same basic ingredients

Table 3: Chicken casserole ingredient list (in order presented)

<i>Cocina Criolla</i>		<i>Cocina al Minuto</i>	
Pollo al Caldero (1954 and 2001)		Pollo en Caserola (1954)	Pollo en Caserola (1991)
1. Chicken		1. Chicken	1. Chicken
2. Garlic		2. Lemon	2. Garlic
3. Pepper		3. Butter	3. Sour orange or lemon
4. Dry oregano		4. Salt	4. Butter
5. Salt		5. Pepper	5. Salt
6. Olive oil		6. Onions	6. Pepper
7. Vinegar		7. Potatoes	7. Stock
8. Butter		8. Carrots	8. Potatoes
9. Canned tomatoes		9. Green beans	9. Green beans
10. Onions		10. Dry wine	10. Onions
11. Potatoes		11. Water or chicken stock	
12. <i>Petit Pois</i> (peas)		12. <i>Petit Pois</i> (peas)	
13. Dry sherry		13. Champignons (mushrooms)	

to construct national cuisines in Cuba and Puerto Rico, respectively, as the islands share common staples and basic foods (rice and beans), given the commonalities in environments and historical trajectories. These similarities yield analog dishes, for example, the Puerto Rican meat and root-crop stew *sancocho* and the Cuban *ajiaco*. These dishes present some variation in ingredients and preparation, but, at the core, are virtually the same, as they share similar manipulation techniques and differ only slightly in seasoning. There are also overlapping dishes, such as fried chicken, white rice, rice with chicken, chicken casserole and *escabeche* (fried, marinated fish, served cold), among others.

The presence of overlapping dishes allows for a more in-depth comparison between the cuisines presented in the books. Differences in an everyday recipe, for example chicken casserole (Table 3), can illustrate subtle points of contrast, and how they relate to underlying differences between Puerto Rico and Cuba. The chicken casserole ingredient list (Table 3) reveals the subtle differences in seasoning among these two cuisines. The Puerto Rican version in *Cocina Criolla* uses tomatoes and oregano, whereas the Cuban version in *Cocina al Minuto* adds more citric flavor through the use of lemon or sour orange.

Upon a closer look at these ingredients, other differences start to emerge. The 1954 *Cocina al Minuto* recipe has more vegetables and includes champignons, missing from the 1991 recipe and not present at all in *Cocina Criolla*. Mushrooms are not a “typical” ingredient in either cuisine. Their inclusion adds a sophisticated flair to this otherwise commonplace, basic recipe. These differences allow for commentary on underlying social differences between the islands at the time the books were written (1954), where ingredients such as champignons and chocolate were part of the Cuban culinary imagination and



missing from the Puerto Rican recipe repertoire, even when written by a member of the elite class. It also highlights differences in ingredients between the Cuba of the 1950s and that of the 1990s, as seen in the simplification of the recipe from 13 to 10 ingredients and the omission of ingredients that may have been scarce at the time, such as champignons, peas, and dry wine.

Beyond this specific example, the books reveal that both cuisines have a marked use of fried foods and a lack of emphasis on fruits and vegetables, except starchy varieties, like plantain and yucca. Seasoning is somewhat similar, in particular the use of lemon, vinegar, bay leaf, parsley, oregano, *culantro* (*Eryngium foetidum*, long coriander, *recao* in Puerto Rico), and black pepper. However, in Cuban cuisine, bitter orange and cumin are more prominent than in Puerto Rican cuisine.

The similarities in basic foods, manipulation techniques, and seasoning already noted further Mintz's arguments in favor of a regional (in this case, Spanish Caribbean) cuisine, as opposed to individual national cuisines (Mintz 1996). However, understanding cuisines as "cultural systems" (Rozin 1982), these seemingly small differences are significant in these two contexts. As noted by Dowdy, local cuisine (called "cocina criolla," creole food, as in the case of Puerto Rico), has been an important part of the Cuban national identity (Dawdy 2002). A similar sentiment is also found in Puerto Rico (Ortiz Cuadra 2013). The nationalistic tone of cuisines in these two contexts started even prior the 1898 emancipation from Spain. The first Cuban Cookbook, *Nuevo manual del cocinero cubano y español* (short title), was published in Havana in 1857, followed by the first Puerto Rican cookbook, *El Cocinero Puerto-Riqueño*, two years later (Díaz de Villegas 2004). Valldejuli and Villapol have contributed to the documentation and standardization of these cuisines that started since the early years of these two islands.

Cookbooks and their cuisines as reflections of the authors and their societies

This analysis has revealed a distinct contrast between the national cuisines presented in *Cocina Criolla* and *Cocina al Minuto*. The chicken casserole example accentuates the subtle differences in cuisines, and how these may be a reflection of the different contexts in which they were written. This comparison also reveals different audiences and purposes. The 1954 *Cocina al Minuto* echoed the cosmopolitan image of Cuba at the time, written for the urban, middle- and upper class housewife. The early edition of *Cocina Criolla* has a similar audience, yet it focuses on formal dinners, in contrast with Villapol's focus on the cocktail party. This draws attention to the contrast between Villapol's upbringing by a feminist mother in the United States and Valldejuli's upbringing in a more traditional, family-focused household. There is also a contrast in the authors' relationships with food, where Valldejuli stresses the enjoyment of food and good company, while Villapol sees food as serving mostly health and nutrition functions.

Valldejuli and Villapol are both insiders writing about national cuisines. This desire is present in Valldejuli's introduction to the book, where recipes

are described as “typical Puerto Rican recipes” (Valdejuli 2001, vii). A similar tone is found also in Villapol’s 1991 introduction, which places the recipes of the book in the Cuban historical context and current political situation. At the same time, following Appadurai (1988), their books represent a compromise “between the urge to be authentic and ... the urge to disseminate and popularize the most easily understood and appreciated items” (17). The comparison presented here reveals how such a selection process was impacted by historical circumstances in these two contexts. The stark changes in *Cocina al Minuto* contrast sharply with the constancy of *Cocina Criolla*, mirroring how the political and social changes of the last five decades of the past century affected Cuba and Puerto Rico differently. Valdejuli enjoyed the life of elites, most likely never experiencing food scarcity or social conflict, contrasting with the diminished food choices and turbulent political environment Villapol endured. *Cocina Criolla* reflects the comfort and stability enjoyed by Valdejuli, and the constancy in the Puerto Rican food supply and society not experienced in Cuba. Such differences still stand to this day.

Conclusions and future directions

The analysis presented here concentrated on the “frame” in which recipes were presented, contextualizing the cookbooks in the times they were written and the authors’ life experiences. While minimal differences were found in the recipes presented, stark contrasts were found in the discourses embedding such recipes. Such differences are interesting and important. They reflect how the macro, sociopolitical context influenced expert discourses on food, as the books’ different portrayals of such similar cuisines reflect the periods in which they were written. This conclusion and the comparisons outlined throughout this essay provide a new way to assess the contrasting political and economic situations in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

The analysis of these important and iconic cookbooks presents drastic changes in the representation of cuisine in Cuba, in line with the pointed social transitions of the times, and in contrast with the lack of radical change in Puerto Rico, illustrated in the equal lack of alteration in *Cocina Criolla* through these past decades. Essentially, it can be argued that there are three different nations or contexts represented in these books: two Cubas (a cosmopolitan, pre-revolution Cuba and a scarcity-stricken, post-Revolution Cuba), and a gradually industrialized Puerto Rico. The books target the different audiences found in these three different contexts.

The influence of cookbooks is dependent on their use. This is an important consideration, especially for the early editions of these books, as cookbooks require a literate audience with the resources to spend on the books, which may have limited their scope and use in the 1950s. Today, half a century after the first editions of these books were published, they are more readily available and accessible to a wide variety of audiences, and they are still highly regarded by both Puerto Ricans and Cubans. It is the iconic status of these books that provides for an interesting comparison, and a future line of inquiry as to the



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role of cookbooks in the memory of transnational communities and those in the home country.

This essay presents the first scholarly look at these authors, based mostly on journalistic and anecdotal accounts of their lives. More historical and biographical inquiries are needed, especially on Valldejuli. As in the case of Villapol, there were other cookbook writers in Puerto Rico at the time *Cocina Criolla* came out, including the often mentioned *Cocine a Gusto*, published in 1950 by two home economics professors of the University of Puerto Rico. Unlike the case of Villapol, Valldejuli's competition did not leave the island. On the contrary, the competition grew and continues to grow. *Cocine a Gusto* is still in circulation, along with many other books on Puerto Rican cuisine. While a comparison among those books is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to acknowledge their existence and draw attention to such a comparative analysis as a potential line of further inquiry, as a way to understand how national cuisines are portrayed in contexts that still struggle with issues of national identity and questions of political sovereignty, as in the case of Puerto Rico.

The present essay has focused on two of the three countries encompassing the Spanish Caribbean, leaving out the discussion of iconic cookbooks from the Dominican Republic. While the three countries share a similar food culture and culinary influences, the Dominican Republic was emancipated from Spain at an earlier period (1922), becoming part of Haiti until its independence in 1844. This difference in political trajectory made the inclusion of the Dominican Republic an issue outside the scope of the current article, and a line for further study.

Another area that deserves further attention is the role of the afro-descendant women behind these culinary icons, and their virtual omission from the culinary literature relations in these islands. While Valldejuli's home cook, Francisca Falú, and Villapol's cooking show assistant, Margot Bacallao, played an important role in the culinary formation of these authors, not much is known about these women. Such inquiry could contribute to a (often uncomfortable) conversation on race relations and the establishment of culinary expertise in these two islands.

The use of cookbooks as units of analysis has been mostly in the realm of food history and literary examinations. This analysis builds on this past research, taking an interdisciplinary approach to these books to further new understandings of the influence of social and economic circumstances on discourses around food, while opening up questions for future analysis and a fresh insight on the history of Cuba and Puerto Rico. This knowledge is relevant and applicable beyond this comparative exercise, given the continuously evolving food environments in these two sister islands in the Spanish Caribbean.

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Notes

1. Cuban cuisine has the added influence of Asian flavors, from Chinese laborers who migrated to the island from China in the mid-1800s mostly to work on sugar plantations, during the time of gradual abolition of African slavery (Hu-Dehart 1994). Laborers settled in Cuba and established the still existing Barrio Chino in Havana.
2. Despite this seemingly important role, Margot Bacallao was rarely featured in the spotlight. While, based on her own account (recounted to the author during a phone conversation, March 19, 2014), she was “terrified” of being in front of the cameras, this issue is also discussed in regards to unequal race relations in Cuba, as Ms Bacallao was an afro-descendent woman (Ponte 2013).
3. There are various unauthorized versions of Villapol’s work, such as those published by Cubamerica (Miami, FL) and the title, “Cocina Criolla” published by Zocalo (Mexico) (personal communication with Sisi Colomina González (October 20, 2013), compiler of Nitza Villapol’s work).
4. Personal communication with Sisi Colomina González (October 20, 2013).
5. The USDA *Basic 7 Food Guide* was used between 1943 and 1955 (USDA 2011).
6. During this time, the USDA had changed the Basic 7 food groups to the Basic four, used between 1956 and the 1970s. These groups were: Vegetables and fruits, Milk, Meat, and Cereals and Breads (USDA 2011).
7. In the 1983 documentary, “Con Pura Magia Satisfechos,” Villapol was asked how she would like to be remembered, to which she answered: “As a teacher—that is what I am” (Diego 1983).
8. These last accompaniments (cigars and cigarettes) are not present in the 2001 edition.
9. The *sofrito* is the combination of ingredients, usually pre-mixed, added to most traditional recipes at the start of the cooking process. The basic Puerto Rican *sofrito* includes green pepper, tomato, sweet pepper (aji dulce), onion, garlic, and cilantro. Other recipes might add oil or lard, bacon, ham, oregano, olives, and capers. While some make their own *sofrito*, basic *sofrito* is also available in stores.



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