Culinary Icons in Changing Societies: A comparative analysis of Puerto Rican and Cuban cookbooks

DRAFT – In Preparation for Food, Culture and Society

Abstract
Puerto Rico and Cuba, linked by a common colonial history, culture and tropical environments, have similar cuisines. The islands’ shared historical trajectory has 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 different insight on local and transnational manifestations of these islands’ sociopolitical transformations during these decades.

Keywords: cookbooks, Cuba, Puerto Rico, culinary knowledge

Cookbooks are usually the work of “culinary experts” seeking to provide prescriptions for specific dishes and, in some cases, directives on what proper meals are. While these books may not be reflective of actual diets or food preferences, they serve as gateways to the societies in which they were published. 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). They also 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 & Forster, 2003).

The expertise of cookery book authors is often taken for granted, 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 mostly focuses on the recipes (ingredients, cooking methods), as vehicles to explore
culinary practices and tastes in times pasts (Bullock, 2012; Driver, 2009), or on the role of cookbooks in women’s lives (Forster, 2003). The present essay, meanwhile, seeks instead to understand national cuisine representations and sociopolitical changes through two iconic cookbooks in the Spanish Caribbean: Puerto Rico’s *Cocina Criolla* by Carmen Aboy Valldejuli and Cuba’s *Cocina al Minuto* by Nitza Villapol. This analysis is motivated by the cultural affinity of these two islands, and their transitioning political, economic and social contexts in the last decades, marked by the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

Cuba and Puerto Rico have similar environments and cuisines, where rice and beans are staples and meat is prominent. Both cuisines arise from a history of Spanish colonialism, resulting in the culinary amalgamation of food traditions of native Taino populations, Spanish conquistadores, and African slaves.¹ Their historical paths began to diverge, however, 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 through other disciplines (Amador, 2008; Montijo, Ruiz, Aponte, & Monllor, 1985; Scarano, 1998), the present comparison aims to bring a different perspective, addressing this topic via the domestic, quotidian lens of food and culinary writing. Valldejuli and Villapol provide the perfect vehicle to achieve this, as their work dates from 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, where marked by the social and political circumstances of the period. Moreover, their books still hold an iconic and central role in these island’s culinary histories and ideals, locally and transnationally. Yet, despite this popularity, there is no formal scholarly work analyzing their lives and work.
The cookbooks presented in this analysis, as any cookbook, are not a representation of the gastronomic reality of times. Cookbook authors tend to write from a perspective of abundance and a desire for innovation (Appadurai, 1988). As the work of “experts”, these books play a role in the provision and standardization of culinary knowledge. As books on national cuisine, Cocina Criolla and Cocina al Minuto also serve to develop and assert place-related identities through the culinary (Appadurai, 1988; Driver, 2009). Symbolically, they carry nostalgic memories, real or imagined, of a distant past, especially for Diaspora communities, while also seeking to cast a national identity, through its recipes and the discourse in which they are embedded (Appadurai, 1988; Ferguson, 2010; Leonardi, 1989).

The following pages present an analysis of these cookbooks, as representations of national cuisine in contexts of sociopolitical transitions. It starts by setting the context in which the books were written through an overview of the authors’ lives and the societies they inhabited. Then, their work is analyzed, comparing early and later editions of their books, assessing the influence of their changing contexts in their 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). It also allows for new 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).

**Valdejuli and Villapol: Their Life in a Historical Context**

“Cuba and Puerto Rico are / of one bird the two wings; receiving flowers or bullets / on the same heart”

Lola Rodríguez de Tió, *Mi libro de Cuba* (1893) [Author’s translation]
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. A few years later, Cuban became an independent country (1902), while Puerto Rico remained a possession of the United States, a relationship that continues to this day. While Cuba was officially an independent country, under the Platt Amendment of 1901, the United States had a strong influence on the island 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). Therefore, despite the change in political status, both islands shared a strong influence from the United States, developing capitalist, market-oriented economy in the first half of the twentieth century.

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 was also marked by instability and transitions 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 in the island and the US, including attacks to the Governor’s house and a shooting incident in the US Congress (Ayala & 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 18th 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 & Reddock, 2004). The increase in women civic, political and economic participation changed the amount of time devoted to traditional household tasks, inevitably affecting their role in the kitchen.

Carmen Aboy Valldejuli and Nitza Villapol started their careers as cookbook writers in these changing times. Living about 700 miles apart, they led contemporary lives, cooking and thinking about food around the same time, in the midst of the sociopolitical and historical divergence of these islands. The subsequent discussion of their biographies is based largely on journalistic accounts.

Valldejuli, the Puerto Rican

Carmen Aboy Valldejuli [1912-2005] was born in Puerto Rico to one of the island’s elite families, less than two decades after the United States occupation of 1898. According to her own accounts, she lived in a home with plentiful servants, with a father who loved fine food (Valldejuli, 1975). She was raised in “the Spanish tradition that proper young ladies never performed menial household chores” like cooking (P.x). She learned how to cook in her early twenties, from Francisca Falú, her life-long home cook (Solís Escudero, 2008).

After her initial introduction to the kitchen, and motivated by her marriage in 1936 to the engineer and amateur devotee of the culinary arts, Luis F. Valldejuli, (Valldejuli, 1975), Mrs. Valldejulli started collecting recipes and experimenting in the kitchen. 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” (Service, 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. 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 cocinare 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 (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 (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 (1923-1998) 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, while others situate her at Harvard and MIT in 1955 (Ponte, 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”, as she believed 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 her mother’s cuisine’s nickname (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.

Villapol had other competitors at the time. However, a key factor for her enduring popularity is that, contrary to her competition, she decided to stay in Cuba after the 1959 Revolution (Ponte, 2012), despite the abrupt changes of the period. Her books and show lost private food company funding, but gained a new sponsor: the State (Oppenheimer, 1993). She kept airing her show, even during the times of great scarcity brought on by the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, a key ally and trade partner for Cuba. This event marked the start of a period of drastic economic decline, and lead to acute food scarcity and hunger termed the “Special Period in Times of Peace.” While the loss of petroleum imports from the Soviets promoted the organic agriculture applauded today (Febles-Gonzalez, Tolon-Becerra, Lastra-Bravo, & 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 (Rodriguez-Ojeda, Jimenez, Berdasco, & Esquivel, 2002).

Through her work, Villapol sought to help Cubans cope with the scarcity of the times, teaching 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 this or the other recipe, I started by asking which recipes were possible with the available products. (Diego, 1983) [Author translation].

She introduced recipes with ingredients that were used in other Latin American countries (for example, plantain peel), but were considered inedible in Cuba (Ponte, 2012). These attempts led to criticisms of cheapening the Cuban cuisine (Bianchi Ross, 2002), including crediting her for fictitious, inedible recipes such as bistec de frazada (mop steak) (Ponte, 2012).

Villapol’s interest in cuisine came more from an interest in the health of the population, than 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). This issue is salient in discussions about her decades-long cooking show assistant, Margot Bacallao. It was Ms. Bacallao, who did most of the cooking and recipe planning, while Villapol only gave final touches (Perez Saez, 2009). Despite this seemingly key role, she is rarely featured in the spotlight. While, on her own account, she was “terrified” of being in front of the cameras³, this issue is also discussed in regards to unequal race relations in Cuba, as Ms. Bacallao was an afro-descendent woman (Ponte, 2013).
Despite these criticisms, her books are still popular, even as unauthorized editions from editorial houses in the United States (Cubamerica, in Miami, Fl) and Mexico, subjected of copyright battles. Like Valldejuli, Villapol diversified beyond the culinary. She wrote weekly columns on the Cuban Bohemia Magazine, on recipes and other topics of concern for the Cuban housewife (Carrobello, 2013). She was credited with having influenced the Cuban food rationing system, or la libreta (Miller, 2008) and contributed to a UNESCO publication on the African influences on food in Latin America (Villapol, 1977).

The Books: Overview and content

This section explores how these changes and the authors lives are reflected in the national cuisine portrayal found in Cocina Criolla and Cocina al Minuto. Valldejuli 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, & Scott, 1989). In Puerto Rico, rapid industrialization greatly diminished the role of agriculture in the island, further increasing the 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 starts with an overview of the editions included in this analysis: *Cocina Criolla* (1954 and 2001) and *Cocina al Minuto* (1954 and 1991), followed with a review of the chapters and changes across editions, including a comparison of cuisines as presented by these two authors. The 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. It is guided by the following questions: Given the many sociopolitical and cultural changes, have the books changed and how? Are the changes reflective of the transitioning context in which the books were written?

**Books Overview**

The first edition of *Cocina Criolla* was published in 1954 and has more than sixty editions, all published by editorial houses in the United States, including one in Braille. The English edition shares a similar successful record. Given the printing of unauthorized versions of *Cocina al Minuto*, the publishing record is harder to establish. Several editions from 1954 (the 3rd edition) to the latest in 2011 appear in the WorldCat database; however, these include the unauthorized (and often nameless) copies.

*Cocina Criolla* has few illustrations, mostly black and white sketches of dishes in the beginning of chapters. The front cover displays tropical fruits in the center, surrounded by cooking tools. The first and later editions remain essentially unchanged in design, content and length (Table 1). The book has five introductory chapters (1-5, Table 1) preceding those dedicated to recipes, to be discussed in the next section.

**Table 1. List of chapters, by edition (Author’s translation)**

<table>
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<th>Puerto Rico – Cocina Criolla</th>
<th>Cuba – Cocina al Minuto</th>
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Unlike *Cocina Criolla*, there are changes in content organization between the first and older version of *Cocina al Minuto* (Table 1), as well as marked differences in the book’s appearance and length. The 1991 edition of *Cocina al Minuto* is longer (315 pages, compared to 210 pages in the 1954 edition). It is also a much simpler book. The 1954 *Cocina al Minuto* includes jocose illustrations at the start of each chapter, which are lost from the 1991 edition. A second, more important change is in the use of *Cocina al Minuto* by food companies and other private enterprise. The 1954 edition contains one-page food advertisement intercalated between recipes. These include not only food products but also for appliances and beauty products. Food placement is also found in the recipes, where ingredients are called by their brand name and product placement is found at the end of some recipes. For example, a rice dish ends with an
exhortation to accompany the meal with a “rica [delicious] and burbujeante [bubbly] Hatuey beer [the national beer]” (Villapol, 1954:8, author’s translation).

The salient role of advertisement is a key differentiating factor between Cocina al Minuto and Cocina Criolla, as Valldejuli’s book did not include any type of advertisement. It also differentiates the 1954 and 1991 editions of Cocina al Minuto. After the Cuban Revolution, private companies left, and the state became the book’s sponsor. With this shift, we also see a change in the actual content of the book (Table 1), indicating the important role of sponsors in the book’s content. An important change was the marked differences in the important of cocktails. The 1954 edition dedicates half of the book to cocktail parties (Chapters 15-23, Table 1), while these are relegated to a chapter in the 1991 edition (Chapter 15, Table 1). Another change is the increase in instructional chapters, from having only one in 1954, to four in 1991, to be discussed in further detail in the next section.

Figure 1. Cookbook page distribution

Figure 1 confirms the lack of change in Cocina Criolla, versus the marked differences in Cocina al Minuto, as seen in Table 1. It is clear that the 1954 version of Cocina al Minuto placed
great importance to entertaining and treats, as seen in more than half of the book being dedicated to alcoholic beverages, cocktail snacks and desserts. 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 desserts. This similarity is interesting given the two different food-contexts of Cuba and Puerto Rico during the 1990s, as previously described. The next sections further explore the actual content of the chapters outlined above.

Introductory Chapters

Cookbooks are more than a collection of recipes. They often contain other, preceding chapters introducing the home cook to the book, and in other occasions, to cooking in general. It is in these chapters that we find how the recipes are framed in these books, and, in the case of the books of interests, where we find the most important and interesting key differences in how Valldejuli and Villapol portrayed these similar cuisines.

Cocina Criolla’s short introduction starts as follows,

This book was written with faith and enthusiasm, guided by 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. (Valldejuli 2001: P.vii) [Author’s translation].

In this introduction, Valldejuli sets the tone for the practical use of the book, while 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 with “moderation, but with gusto (pleasure, taste)” (vii). This introduction remains unchanged from the 1954 edition.
In contrast with Valldejulli, Villapol did not seem to see a need for a book introduction to her 1954 edition. The book simply starts with The Menu, instructing the reader on how to best 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 Valldejuli’s introduction. The nutrition-centered tone is emphasized by Villapol’s presentation of dietary guidelines adapted from the United States “Basic 7” food group wheel. Villapol’s menu planning advice centers on meeting the Basic 7 recommendations, and includes a week’s sample menu to help readers in attaining these goals. There are also references to over- and undernutrition as well as advice to ameliorate both issues.

The Menu chapter is preserved in the 1991 Cocina al Minuto, but as a modified version. 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). While detailed menus were included in the 1954 edition, these disappear in 1991, a reflection of the scarcity and lack of consistency in the post-Revolution food market.

The 1991 Menu chapter is preceded by a lengthy and politically charged introduction, which deviates from the typical gastronomic discourse on would expect from a cookbook, meriting a longer, in-depth analysis beyond the scope of the present article. While the 1954 edition center food in its nutritional importance, the 1991 edition 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” (p.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 to 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 wellbeing of the people. This example related to lard (manteca 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 differentiating Cocina al Minuto from Cocina Criolla, and from its pre-Revolution 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 also as a teacher for Cuban people, not only of the culinary, but also of their history, in the hopes to improve their eating habits.
Together with the introduction, the chapters preceding the recipes in the 1991 edition reflect the influence of the state 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 to everyday cooking, including how to use and maintain kitchen equipment and on how to measure ingredients, including measurement conversions. Dedicating a chapter to refrigerators, blenders and pressure cookers potentially indicate a perceived need to teach her audience about their “appropriate” use. Aside from instructions on the use and maintenance of these kitchen tools, the chapter also gives advice on cooking times for the pressure cooker and how to best store foods in the refrigerator, as a way to avoid food waste and preserve leftovers. Such instructions are not found in the 1954 edition, nor 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 equipments for a first kitchen and practical tips for the home cook. For instance, Valldejuli lists 45 unique 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 emphasis on cocktails and cocktail parties, this chapter indicates the aspirational nature of Cocina Criolla, especially given the harsh economic reality of most Puerto Ricans in the 1950s (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007). The marble table and similar equipment is not found in the 2001, 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 advise 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” (p. 20). A second tips appears in the 2001 edition, where she suggest 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 the womanly duties in this regard. This second point is clearly 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: p. 21, author’s translation).

Such “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 the 1950 society in Puerto Rico, this only represented 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. The chapter concludes with a page for the “informal dinner”, recommending serving the food “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 relationships with food in the context of the societies they were writing for. The centeredness of nutrition in Villapol’s work contrasts with Villapol’s love for food and entertaining. Next, these differences are further explored in the recipe chapters.

Recipes Chapters

Cocina Criolla contains many dishes associated with traditional Puerto Rican cuisine, such as white rice, beans, pastelas (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, fish escabeche (pickled fish), and a variety of fried snack foods. The recipes are ordered starting with soups, followed by meats. Eggs and vegetables share a chapter, followed by a chapter dedicated to fried foods (frituras), signaling the relative importance of these 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, containing three different recipes for the cooking base, *sofrito* 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 in the island. There are three chapters dedicated to desserts, ending with a final chapter on miscellaneous foods and beverages (Table 1), 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 rely on 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 (groups in order of use), followed usually by numbered procedures. Unfortunate 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* reveal that the books are virtually the same, as noted above (Table 1 and Figure 1). Some recipes even remain in the same page. 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*. How Cuban cuisine is portrayed changes greatly
between the two books, from how the chapters are organized to the 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 chapter early in the book. Salads are in one of the last chapters, before miscellaneous foods, desserts and alcoholic beverages. The chapters contain some traditional recipes such as rice dishes and tamales, but, interestingly, it lacks important traditional recipes, in particular the *ajiaco* (typical Cuban stew made from meat and root crops) and other typical Cuban recipes like *ropa vieja* (“Old Clothes”, a dish of stewed shredded beef). Despite the presence of beans in the diet, there is no chapter dedicated to legumes, as we find in *Cocina Criolla*. The emblematic Cuban black beans are found in the miscellaneous *Platos Variados* chapter, along with a recipe for chop suey, acknowledging the Asian influence in the Cuban diet. Overall, the recipes portray a strong French influence, with an air of sophistication and fit for entertaining. It includes recipes such as Lobster in a Chocolate sauce, *Ladrillo de carne fria* (“cold meat brick”), and *flan de pescado* (fish flan). Such taste is mirrored in the “Winning recipes” chapter, with selected submissions from Villapol’s TV viewers (all females), which includes a recipe for *Carne con Chocolate* (Meat with Chocolate). Similar to Cocina Criolla, ingredients include canned and other industrial goods, including one featuring hot dogs. Such recipes, along with comments such as “most of the fried foods are much tastier” (p.45) contrast the nutrition centeredness found in The Menu chapter described above.

The 1991 *Cocina al Minuto* presents a toned-down, simplified version of Cuban cuisine, compared to the 1954 portrayal. The cold meat dishes remain, but lobster disappears from the seafood chapter. It contains a wider variety of corn-based recipes, and recipes including 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 without fat (using instead milk, tomato sauce, and even water). There is a chapter dedicated to sauces, not present in the early edition, with recipes for home-made mayonnaise (including two egg-less versions).

The 1991 *Cocina al Minuto* no longer features a chapter on fried foods, but includes a chapter dedicated to fruits and vegetables. However, despite its title, it contains mostly vegetable recipes, focusing on starchy varieties such as potatoes, plantain, and other root crops. Fruits are mostly included in dessert recipes. The book also presents the previously missing traditional recipes. Of special note, is the inclusion of the *ajiaco*. While left out in the 1954 edition, the post-revolution 1991 edition seems to place greater emphasis in the traditional roots, by introducing the dish as the epitome of Cuban national cuisine. The recipe is placed in its own chapter, the last one on the book, further underscoring its importance. This chapter entitled, *Y como punto final* (And as the last point), presents an introduction to the dish followed by two versions of *ajiaco*, the “traditional” and the “fishermen” versions, the latter containing seafood instead of the traditional beef and pork.

Despite the similarities between Cuban and Puerto Rican cuisines, the authors differed in how the cuisines were presented, in the introductory chapters and the foods and recipes of importance, illustrated in the different ways the books were organized and which recipes were included and left out. Such 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 Criolla*. 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

Villapol and Valdejuli use the same basic ingredients to construct national cuisines. This comparison among such similar cuisines allows for analyzing the existence of such unique, national cuisines, and how they reflect (or not) the local realities of the times. Rozin (1982) provides a useful schema to compare these cuisines, including the following three main main components: basic foods, manipulation techniques, and seasoning (Rozin, 1982).

Cuba and Puerto Rico share common staples, 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 meatloaf-like dish, butifarrón are equivalent to the Cuban ajiaco and paneleta, respectively. These dishes present some variation in ingredient and preparation, but their essence are virtually the same. There are also overlapping dishes, such as fried chicken, white rice, rice with chicken, chicken casseroles and escabeche (pickled fish), among others. The presence of overlapping dishes allows for a more in-depth comparison between the cuisines, as presented in the books. Differences in an everyday recipe, for example chicken casserole (Table 2), can illustrate subtle points of contrast, and how they relate to underlying differences between Puerto Rico and Cuba.

Table 2. Chicken casserole ingredient list (in order presented)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cocina Criolla</th>
<th>Cocina al Minuto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>Chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garlic</td>
<td>Lemon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepper</td>
<td>Butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry oregano</td>
<td>Salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>Pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive oil</td>
<td>Onions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinegar</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>Carrots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned tomatoes</td>
<td>Habichuelas (green beans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Pollo en Caserola</strong> (1991)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sour orange or lemon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pepper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carrots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Habichuelas (green beans)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In looking at the ingredients (Table 2), *Cocina Criolla* uses tomatoes and oregano, whereas the Cuban version adds more citric flavor through the use of lemon or sour orange. Moreover, the 1954 *Cocina al Minuto* recipe has more vegetables and the addition of champignons, missing from the 1991 recipe and not present at all in *Cocina Criolla*. These differences in such a commonplace recipe can tell us much about the 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, as was the case of Valldejuli. It also signifies 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 certain, most uncommon ingredients, such as champignons, peas and dry wine.

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. Interestingly, while Valldejuli includes several *sofrito* recipes (the cooking base for most dishes), *sofrito* is missing from Villapol’s *Cocina al Minuto*\(^\text{10}\). The similarities in basic foods, manipulation techniques and seasoning noted above further Mintz arguments in favor of a regional (in this case, Spanish Caribbean) cuisine, as opposed to individual national cuisines (Mintz, 1996). If cuisines are
understood as “cultural systems” (Rozin, 1982), given the cultural closeness of Cuba and Puerto Rico, these similarities are to be expected. Whether these national cuisines can be best understood as regional is beyond the scope of this analysis. What is important is the existence of these cuisines in the imaginary of these contexts, and the use of these similarities to further understand how the changing sociopolitical contexts changes portrayals of these similar cuisines.

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

While the recipes presented in *Cocina Criolla* have many things in common with those from *Cocina al Minuto*, the chicken casserole example underscores the subtle differences in cuisines, and how these may be a reflection of the different contexts in which they were written. They also reflect different audiences and purposes. The 1954 Cocina al Minuto sought to mirror the cosmopolitan Cuba of 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. Arguably, this highlights Villapol’s underlying upbringing by a feminist mother in the United States and Valldejuli’s upbringing in a more traditional household. There is also a contrast in the author’s relationships with food, where Valldejuli stresses the enjoyment of food and good company, while Villapol sees food in its role in health and nutrition.

Valldejuli and Villapol are both insiders writing national cuisines. Following Appadurai (1988), their books, then, represent a compromise “between the urge to be authentic and thus to include difficult […] items and the urge to disseminate and popularize the most easily understood and appreciated items” (17). In comparing their work across almost five decades, we see how the selection and editing process yielded different results. This is seen in how the stark
changes in *Cocina al Minuto* contrasts 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. Valldejuli enjoyed the life of elites, perhaps never experiencing food scarcity, or the lack of food choices that Villapol endured after the revolution. Her books reflect the comfort in her status, and the constancy in the Puerto Rican food supply and society, not enjoyed in Cuba.

**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. A comparison of the cuisines portrayed in the books presents very similar cuisines, stemming from the similar roots and cultural contexts in which they originally develop. The difference arises in the context in which these recipes are embedded, that is, the language or discourse in which they are presented. Such differences are interesting and important. They reflect how the macro, sociopolitical context can affect discourses related to food. The food language in *Cocina Criolla* and *Cocina al Minuto* are indeed a reflection of the period in which they were written, providing a different lens with which to assess the contrasting political and economic situations in these two contexts.

The analysis of these books present sharp changes in cuisine representation in Cuba, in line with the pointed social transitions of the times, and in contrast with the lack of drastic change in Puerto Rico and in *Cocina Criolla*. Arguably, we have three different countries represented in these books: A cosmopolitan, pre-revolution Cuba, a scarcity-stricken, post-Revolution Cuba, and an industrialized Puerto Rico. The books target these different audiences.

The influence of cookbooks is dependent on their use. Cookbooks require a literate audience with the resources to spend in the books, limiting the audience of their work especially
in the early years. Nowadays, half a century after the first editions of these books were published, they are more readily accessible to a wide variety of audiences, and they are still regarded highly by both Puerto Ricans and Cubans. It is the iconic status of these books that provide for an interesting comparison, and a future line of inquiry of the 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. Like Villapol, there were other cookbook writers 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. While such book is still in circulation, along with many other books on Puerto Rican cuisine, it is Cocina Criolla that still captures the spotlight. While a comparison among those books is beyond the scope of this article, it can potentially shed more light not only on the popularity of Valldejuli, but also on the different national cuisine representations in a context that still struggles with issues of national identity and questions of political sovereignty.

Another area that deserves further attention is the racial issues uncovered in the present analysis. Both, Villapol and Valldejuli, had afro-descendant women who may have been key to their establishment as culinary icons, yet, not much is known about them. Such inquiry can involve and contribute to the uncomfortable conversation of racism in these islands, where given the racial mixing, especially in Puerto Rico, these conversations are often left untouched.

The use of cookbooks as units of analysis has been done, mostly, from the fields of history and literature. This analysis builds takes an interdisciplinary look at these books, under the umbrella of food studies, to further understand discourses around food in these two
contrasting contexts, while opening up questions for future analysis and a different understanding of the history and food issues in Cuba and Puerto Rico.

References [to be formatted]


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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 in 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 Based on her own account, recounted to the author during a phone conversation (March 19, 2014).
3 Personal communication with Sisi Colomina González (October 20, 2013), compiler of Nizta Villapol’s work.
4 While more recent editions of the books have been published, this analysis uses those that came out while the authors were still alive.
5 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) were taken out from newer editions of the book.
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.
10 More than a difference in cuisines, it might be a difference between Villapol and other Cuban cooks or chefs (Santiago, 1998).