

Center and periphery

Twenty-first-century
literature, cinema,
media from Spain

Edited by

Amparo Alpañés

Washington & Jefferson College

Series in Critical Media Studies



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Foreword

Joanne (Jojo) Lucena

Arcadia University

Dr. Amparo Alpañés, an associate professor at Washington and Jefferson College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has artfully edited a novel collection of articles that analyze the peripheries of contemporary Spanish art, literature, and cinema. She at first defines peripheries as distinct regions of Spain that have their own language, dialect and historic and cultural values that differ from central Spain. Later, Alpañés broadens her definition of periphery to include race, gender, and sexuality, concepts that modernize and diversify contemporary academic research. She then further expands on the peripheral concept that is postmodern in scope and inverts societal values by lauding unproductivity and sex work in Spain. The authors in this volume of articles include issues of marginalization while examining the aforementioned themes to create a more inclusive Spanish society. In her introduction, Alpañés provides a brief overview of the text's intent while carefully summarizing each article by each contributor. The contributors are either graduate students or assistant and associate professors at universities throughout the United States. The editor is well versed in contemporary Spanish literature and cinema and has widely published on current themes such as *La España oculta: Una mirada honesta a las penurias actuales en "Ayer no termina nunca" (2013)* y *"Techo y comida" (2015)* and *La bruja, la loca y la madre: mujeres en las series españolas y estereotipos de género* amongst other articles and book chapters.

The articles compiled in this collection are quite comprehensive and compelling. They allow the audience to relate to many movies, series and videos that are readily available on Netflix or YouTube, underlining their accessibility to a varied audience. The book is divided into three parts: I-Independence and National Identities as the Peripheries of Spain, II-Disability, Blackness and Queerness as Periphery and Part III-Symbolic Inversion and Peripheral Identities, Front and Center. Most readers are quite familiar with the contrast of national identities, such as the Basque Region as compared to Andalucía, or at least the stereotypes of each region thanks to the very popular movie, *Ocho apellidos vascos*. This first article, written by Alison Posey, highlights how the very serious subject of Basque terrorism and ETA can be analyzed using two parodic comedies to do so. The second article concerns an allegorical analysis where a group of vegetables creates an independent nation-state in a comical way, employing a highly rhetorical structure. The first article of Part II of the text uses

three contemporary films to examine the representation of disabilities, ableism and hegemonic masculinity. It is of note that these movies, *Mar adentro* and *Campeones*, are often used in Spanish Cinema classes. The next three analyses examine racism against Africans or second-generation Africans as well as the racism between North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans (superbly studied in the Spanish series, *Mar de plástico*). Included in this section is the xenophobia experienced by the Romani people and the homophobia within the conservative and traditional gypsy community as portrayed in the film *Carmen y Lola*. In the third organizational part of the text, "Symbolic Inversion and Peripheral Identities, Front and Center," the authors utilize the famous work, *Rabelais and His World* by Mikhail Bakhtin to examine symbolic inversion. The first article discusses *Destello Bravío*, a film that depicts four women waiting in a pre-apocalyptic region in Spain, which suggests emptiness and where female pleasure (hence the Bakhtinian carnivalesque application) is exaltation and not reproductive in nature, an inversion of traditional Spanish values. The second article analyzes the novels of Cristina Morales where themes such as political dissidence and problematic relationships with institutions are underlined. The third article of this third section and final of the text offers a deep portrait of the iconic transgender activist and actress known as La Veneno.

Although varied in themes regarding the concept of periphery, Alpañés's text deftly connects her proposed definitions that the reader can easily follow and comprehend. The broader definition is what imbues this text with much utility for classroom use either in an undergraduate or graduate setting and adds to the study of contemporary Spanish film and literature.

Introduction

In 2021, I submitted an essay for publication in a monograph edited by Dr. Esther M^a Alarcón-Arana, Associate Professor of Spanish at Salve Regina University. That positive experience led me to follow Dr. Alarcón-Arana's example, and in 2022 and 2023, I contacted scholars to publish a monograph on the topic of "Center and Periphery In Twenty-First-Century Literature, Art, and Film From Spain." This volume is the culmination of that work.

The perception that there is a center and a periphery in Spain has always interested me. Since the creation of Spain as a nation, there has been tension between Castile and Aragon—the kingdoms united in 1479—and the other territories that were added to the Crown of Castile after that date, such as Granada, Seville and Navarre, to name a few. As a nation composed of many distinct kingdoms and territories that have their own cultures and languages—Castille, which gave its name to Castilian, the Spanish language, is the geographic center of the country—and the periphery. Galicia, the Basque Country, Cataluña, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, which are territories with different cultural values and where other languages have been spoken since the time when Spanish/Castilian became a language. The expression "center vs periphery" is commonly used in Spain to describe how the many cultures of the Spanish territory have interacted in more or less violent ways towards each other throughout history.

This volume wishes to offer an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on scholarship from fields such as gender studies, media analysis, and postcolonial theory. The authors thus provide a rich and multifaceted understanding of the cultural dynamics at play. The aspiration is that this breadth of perspective helps to situate the literary texts and cinematic works within broader sociopolitical contexts, revealing the complex interplay between artistic expression and national/regional identities.

The authors and I also wanted to offer a new use for the concept of "center vs periphery" in Spanish. To achieve this, the volume addresses not only historical and political peripheries but also new peripheries defined by race, gender, and sexuality, broadening the traditional understanding of the term and adding depth and diversity to the discourse.

We aspire to present a multifaceted volume that provides valuable academic insights for scholars and students across various fields, including gender studies, media studies, and post-colonial studies. We believe that discussions on nationalism, separatism, and cultural identity are particularly relevant in the

context of ongoing debates about regional autonomy and cultural preservation in Spain. Moreover, by highlighting the voices and experiences of marginalized groups, we endeavor to foster a more inclusive understanding of Spanish identity. The author's essays encourage readers to critically engage with the media they consume and consider the broader social implications of representation. This volume not only wants to contribute to scholarly debates but also to potentially influence public perception and policy regarding cultural diversity and inclusivity in Spain.

This volume is intended for undergraduate and graduate students in the humanities, especially in gender and women's studies, queer studies, media studies, Spanish literature, Spanish language, nationalism/separatism, race and Blackness, and postcolonialism. Professionals and scholars in the above-mentioned disciplines will also enjoy this monograph and find it useful. The authors of the essays here included, and I, expect the general population interested in those areas to enjoy and benefit from this publication as well.

In this book, we explore three types of peripheries: the historical and political periphery of the Basque Country and Catalonia, the new periphery inhabited by non-white, differently abled, and queer people, and another new periphery that puts society upside down by celebrating unproductivity, dissidence, and the sanctification of sex work.

The first part of this volume—Independence and national identities as the peripheries of Spain—examines how Spanish twenty-first-century literature and film address, or avoid addressing, the conflict between a unified idea of Spain and the distinct cultural and linguistic areas of the periphery. In the first essay, “The *Ocho Apellidos Vascos* effect: disavowing difference in *Fe de Etnarras*,” Alison Posey discusses how the box office success *Ocho apellidos vascos/The Spanish Affair* (2014), directed by Emilio Martínez-Lázaro, has opened the door for filmmakers to produce movies that show formerly controversial and taboo topics such as Basque terrorism on screen. While Spanish terrorism had been the central theme of Spanish movies before *Ocho apellidos vascos*, Posey examines how said theme is treated from a comedic angle, specifically in the 2017 film *Fe de etarras*, directed by Borja Cobeaga.

The second essay, “Vegetable allegorism in contemporary Spain: a reading of Javier Tomeo's *La rebelión de los rábanos* (1999)”, written by Arturo Ruiz-Mautino, analyzes how the use of the allegory in the novel *La rebelión de los rábanos* (*The Radishes' Rebellion*)—in which the main characters are vegetables and not humans—shapes the literary conversations about independence movements in Spain. The study of allegory in this essay allows us to examine Tomeo's original literary approach and his voluntary disconnect from contemporary Spanish politics.

In the second part—Disability, Blackness and Queerness as periphery—four authors explore racism, ableism, xenophobia and queerness in Spanish film, literature, and television. Mary Hartson examines three recent Spanish films in which the protagonists are disabled male characters in “Interrogating hegemony: disability and masculinity in contemporary Spanish film.” Her essay demonstrates that contrary to what we could expect, these white males are portrayed as extraordinary, even capable of overcoming their disabilities by sheer will, which does not grant centerstage to differently-abled characters but rather keeps them in the periphery while Spanish audiences follow the story of exceptional men.

In “Black Spain: growing up as a Black woman in twentieth and twenty-first century Spain in the works of Lucía Asué Mbomío Rubio and Desirée Bela-Lobedde,” Olatz Sanchez-Txabarri analyzes the essay *Ser mujer negra en España/Being a Black Woman in Spain* (2018), by Desirée Bela-Lobedde, and the novel *Hija del Camino/Daughter of the Road* (2019), by Lucía Asué Mbomío Rubio. These works, written by two Afro-descendant women in Spain, show how they use communication and activism to denounce the institutional and social racism their bodies suffer.

Marina Cuzovic-Severn, in “To be free: the female *other* in Arantxa Echevarría’s *Carmen y Lola*,” studies the 2018 movie *Carmen y Lola*, directed by Arantxa Echevarría which follows two Romani young women who live in the suburbs of Madrid, Spain. Cuzovic-Severn reveals the difficulty of presenting Romani characters who are also queer as protagonists in a culture, the one from Spain, that has treated Romani people as an exotic and unruly minority.

Marilén Loyola examines the reality of the Almerian greenhouses—a Spanish area of economic growth and intense immigration—and its fictionalization in the television series *Mar de plástico/Sea of Plastic*. In “Cultivating empathy: performing the agency of sub-Saharan immigrants in the television series *Mar de plástico*, season 1 (2015),” Loyola establishes that the series works as a mirror image of the reality of racism and discrimination in Spain by portraying how the sub-Saharan characters are mistreated and regularly suspected of criminal actions.

In the third and final part—Symbolic inversion and Peripheral Identities Front and Center—three authors examine the Bakhtinian theme of symbolic inversion in twenty-first-century Spanish film, literature, and media.

Renée Congdon, in “Imagining the end of the world from the edge of the world: radical non-(re)productivity and unproductive expenditure in *Destello bravío* (2021)” analyzes the movie *Destello bravío/Mighty Flash* in which older women from the region of Extremadura, the southwestern edge of Spain, seem to wait for the end of the world. In the desolate landscape of the movie,

Congdon urges the reader to see how the protagonists avoid doing any productive activity and instead dedicate their time to pleasure. It is an inverted reality where unproductivity is celebrated.

In *The Multiple Dissidences of Cristina Morales*, Marc Gràcia Garcia focuses on the two novels of the author whose plot occurs in the present: *Los combatientes* (*The Fighters*, 2013) and *Lectura fácil* (*Easy Reading*, 2018). As Gràcia Garcia demonstrates, all of Morales' novels, and particularly the two studied here, give prominence to powerless, marginalized, peripheral characters who, in the upside-down narrative world of Morales, become empowered characters of dissent.

Finally, Jose Dominicci-Buzó closes the volume with “Hagiographic prints: the symbolic sanctification of La Veneno.” In this essay, Dominicci-Buzó studies how La Veneno—the 1990s transgender television personality, model, singer, sex worker and actress from Spain—has achieved the status of a venerated icon in twenty-first-century Spain. Dominicci-Buzó indicates that in part thanks to shows such as *Drag Race España*, but also to her memoir, and a television miniseries, La Veneno, who passed away in 1996, is very much alive and venerated today in Spain.

This monograph has given its authors the opportunity to publish their research with their own voice; in doing so, the volume explores the several ways in which the peripheries of Spain are changing. The editor thanks all authors for their contributions and their enthusiasm, which has permitted this publication to come to fruition. I hope that the analyses here included will inspire readers to know more, or even to start their own research, about the meaning of the periphery in twenty-first century Spain.

Amparo Alpañés

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About the authors

Editor

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Her research interests include Spanish literature and culture, Spanish Cinema, Gender Studies, the twentieth-century history of Spain—particularly the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)—and the contemporary period.

She presents in the US and at international conferences yearly and is the co-organizer of the international biannual Bridges Across Cultures Conference on the Humanities. Her most recent publication is “La bruja, la loca y la madre: mujeres en las series españolas y estereotipos de género.” *El reflejo de Medusa*, Advoock, Seville, 2023, pp. 89–105.

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Renee Congdon is a PhD candidate in the Spanish & Portuguese department at Princeton University, where she focuses on Spanish culture, literature, and film from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Broadly, her research interests include popular culture, gender, and rural imaginaries and discourses. Her recent publications include a co-authored article on female identity in two contemporary Spanish novels (*ALEC*, 2020) and a book chapter on sensory detail as a narrative technique in Carmen Laforet’s *Nada* (Albatros Ediciones, 2022). Currently, she is working on a thesis that analyzes the figure of the washerwoman and her afterlives in the Spanish cultural and popular imagination from the late nineteenth century through the present.

Marina Cuzovic-Severn is an Associate Professor of Spanish at California State University Los Angeles, holding a PhD from Michigan State University. Her research interests encompass nineteenth and twentieth-century Peninsular literature, Cultural Studies, Transatlantic studies, and Women’s/Gender Studies. She delves into questions of geopolitics, crises of national identity, and the evolution of feminist thought. Her current book project, *Afrancesamiento: Fashion, Culture, and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Spain*, scrutinizes the cultural and political phenomenon of *afrancesamiento* in Spain during the nineteenth century. By analyzing its manifestations in Spanish literature and the press, as well as its portrayal in society, the book aims to provide an extensive analysis of the impact of French influence on Spanish culture and

national identity. She has published several articles and book chapters in various US and international journals and edited volumes.

José R. Dominicci-Buzó (he/him) is an assistant professor of Spanish in the Department of Romance Languages at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, VA.

His research interests include Spanish brothel literature and culture, Queer and Gender Studies, and the Early Modern Mediterranean—particularly the Spanish-Italian relationships during the twentieth century.

His most recent publications are “Con tinta y pluma en el burdel: cortesanas en *Le sei giornate* de Pietro Aretino.” *Acta Philologica* vol. 60 (2023): 107–117, and “Sobre caballeros trastocados, reinas derrocadas y otras degradaciones carnalescas en la *Carajicomedia*.” *eHumanista* 54 (2023): 35-55.

Marc Gràcia Garcia (he/him) is a graduate student in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Princeton University. He holds a degree in Humanities from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain. His fields of study are Spanish history and literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He has also studied contemporary Spanish philosophy. His latest publication is “Sade, mon amour: sadismo y transgresión en el ensayo neoneietzscheano (1969-1982)”. *Artes del ensayo. Revista internacional sobre el ensayo hispánico*, 2022, Núm. 4, p. 81-98.

Mary T. Hartson is an associate professor of Spanish in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Oakland University, Rochester, MI.

Her research interests include Spanish literature and culture, Spanish Cinema, Disability Studies, and Gender. She has presented and published articles on Spanish and United States cinema. Her current research focuses on issues related to gender and subjectivity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially regarding masculine identity and consumerism as represented in Spanish cinema—a subject that serves as the focus of her book *Casting Masculinity in Spanish Film: Negotiating Identity in a Consumer Age*.

Marilén Loyola, Ph.D., is K. and H. Montgomery Assistant Professor of Spanish at Lake Forest College in Lake Forest, Illinois, where she teaches courses in language, Spanish for the professions, literature, and culture. She specializes in contemporary Spanish theatre, with a focus on memory studies, migration studies, and their transatlantic connections. Her most recent publication is titled “Memory and the Ethical Imagination: The Holocaust and Deportation to Mauthausen in Twenty-first Century Spanish Theater” in *Spain, the Second World War, and the Holocaust: History and Representation* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), edited by Sara Brenneis and Gina Herrmann. Her current

project looks at the relationship between theatre, video, and justice in transatlantic/transnational theatre. Her next project further examines the cultural dynamics and productions emerging in relation to the agriculture industry and the immigrant labor force in the greenhouse region of Almería, Spain.

Alison Posey is a Postdoctoral Associate at Duke University, where she researches and teaches contemporary Peninsular narrative, film, and graphic novels. Her research specializations include ethnic and racial minority literature in twenty-first century Spain, the autobiography as activism, and Hispanophone literature of the African continent. Her most recent publications include the article “¿Tengo que comer gato?” Racial Stereotype in Quan Zhou Wu's *Gente de aquí. Gente de allí. Ensayo gráfico sobre españoles y migrantes*,” in *Romance Notes*, vol. 63, no. 2, 2023, pp. 489-500.

Arturo Ruiz-Mautino is a PhD Candidate in Spanish at Cornell University. His current project studies the emergence of posthumanist ways of thinking about the works of memory in contemporary Latin American fiction. Drawing from memory studies, fiction theory, animal studies, and critical posthumanities, he is working on a transregional genealogy delving into contemporary literary production written in Spanish. His research interests include contemporary Iberian and Latin American literature, Animal Studies, Memory Studies, and Philosophy of Technology. He received his BA from Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and his MA from Cornell University.

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She has presented her research at US and international conferences like NeMLA and LASA. Her most recent publication is “El poder de la amistad entre mujeres en *Mujeres que compran flores* de Vanesa Montfort.” *La herencia de Caliope: La feminidad señalada*, edited by Fernando Candón Ríos et al., Dykinson, 2023, pp. 425-439. She has also researched and published an article on the benefits of Experiential Learning for undergraduate students in Nebraska.

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