

Savored Memories and the Cuban Culinary Imaginary

Digital Archive and Analysis

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Introduction

This project investigates the origins of the Cuban cuisine memorialized in the recent nostalgic writing of Cuban exiles. Playwright Eduardo Machado's 2007 memoir, *Tastes Like Cuba: An Exile's Hunger for Home*, for example, includes 30 replicable and relevant family recipes. While my dissertation research argues that these recipes serve as an alternative means of return to a remembered pre-Revolutionary Cuba that is otherwise inaccessible, this project delves much deeper into the culinary archive of that remembered Cuba. *Tastes Like Cuba* takes its name from Machado's grandfather's quest to recreate the flavors of the *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken) that he made often in Cuba, before the family left in the wake of the 1959 Revolution. In the memoir, the dish illustrates the ways in which exile transforms everyday aspects of life. The text includes two arroz con pollo recipes: Grandfather Fernando's exilic version and Machado's adaptation, however, the frequently referenced 'original' is not present.

My interest in Cuban cookbooks begins with the challenge to find a pre-Revolution recipe for arroz con pollo. Therefore, I take Machado and his grandfather's recipes as my anchor for comparison with the recipes included in Eugenio de Coloma y Garcés' 1856 *Manual del cocinero cubano*, which is widely accepted as the first collection of recipes described as culturally Cuban. Then, I put those recipes into dialogue with a selection of other pre-Revolution cookbooks and post-Revolution exilic culinary memoirs.

Research Questions

- Does Coloma y Garcés' 1856 *Manual del cocinero cubano* include a recipe for arroz con pollo or another chicken-rice combination dish?
- If so, how does it compare to:
 - a) the recipes for arroz con pollo in Machado's memoir?
 - b) those in the other pre-Revolution Cuban cookbooks*?
 - c) those in the other post-Revolution exilic culinary memoirs*?

*see corpus

Methods

The method for addressing these questions is comprised of 3 major phases:

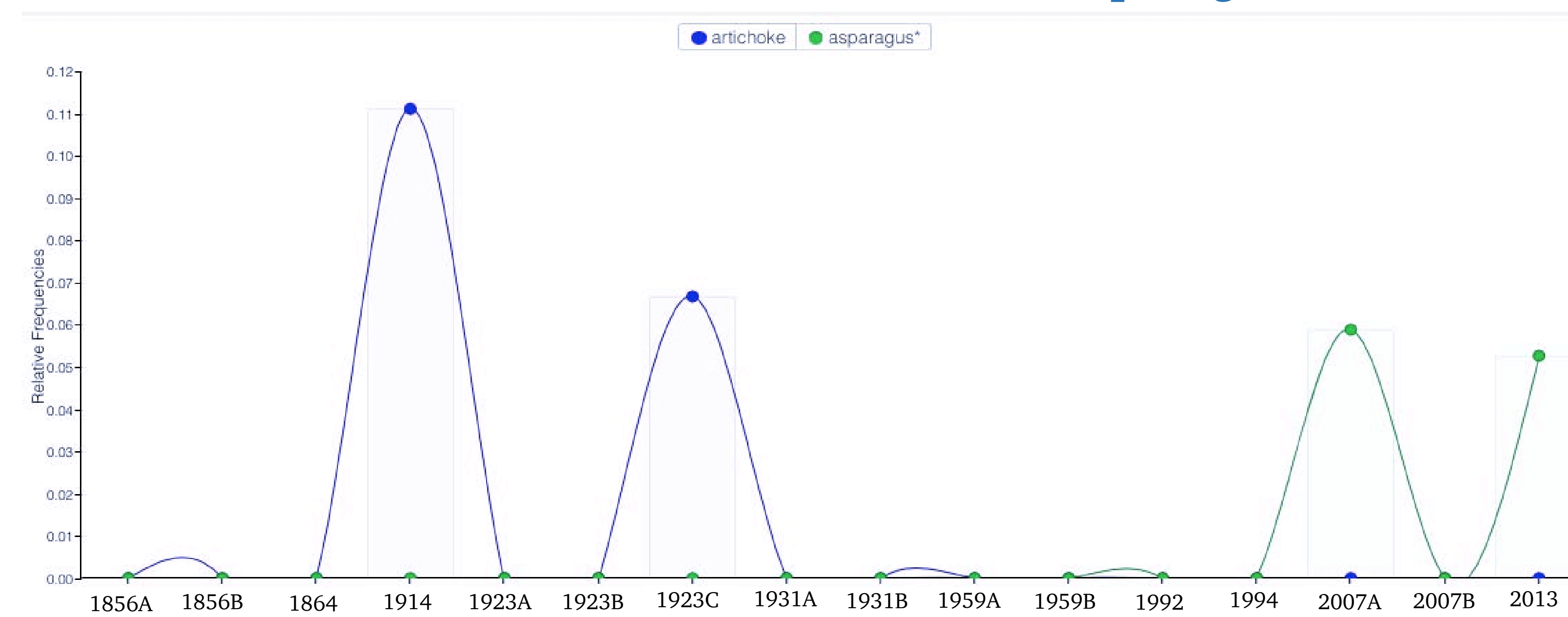
- 1) Because a copy of the 1856 edition of *El manual del cocinero cubano* could not be obtained, the 2017 reproduction by Dr. García Yero was digitized. (Optical character recognition is ongoing.)
- 2) Two relevant recipes were located: *Arroz á la valenciana* (Valencia rice) and *Arroz con gallina ó pollo* (Rice with hen or chicken). It's important to note that this text does not have an index or table of contents. The two recipes selected were located not in the poultry section, but in the section called *Menestras ó potajes*, which translates to vegetable stews.
- 3) Using the text analysis software, Voyant Tools, the ingredients from the two 1856 recipes were compared to those from Machado's memoir and twelve others (nine from pre-Revolution cookbooks and three from post-Revolution exilic culinary memoirs).

Context

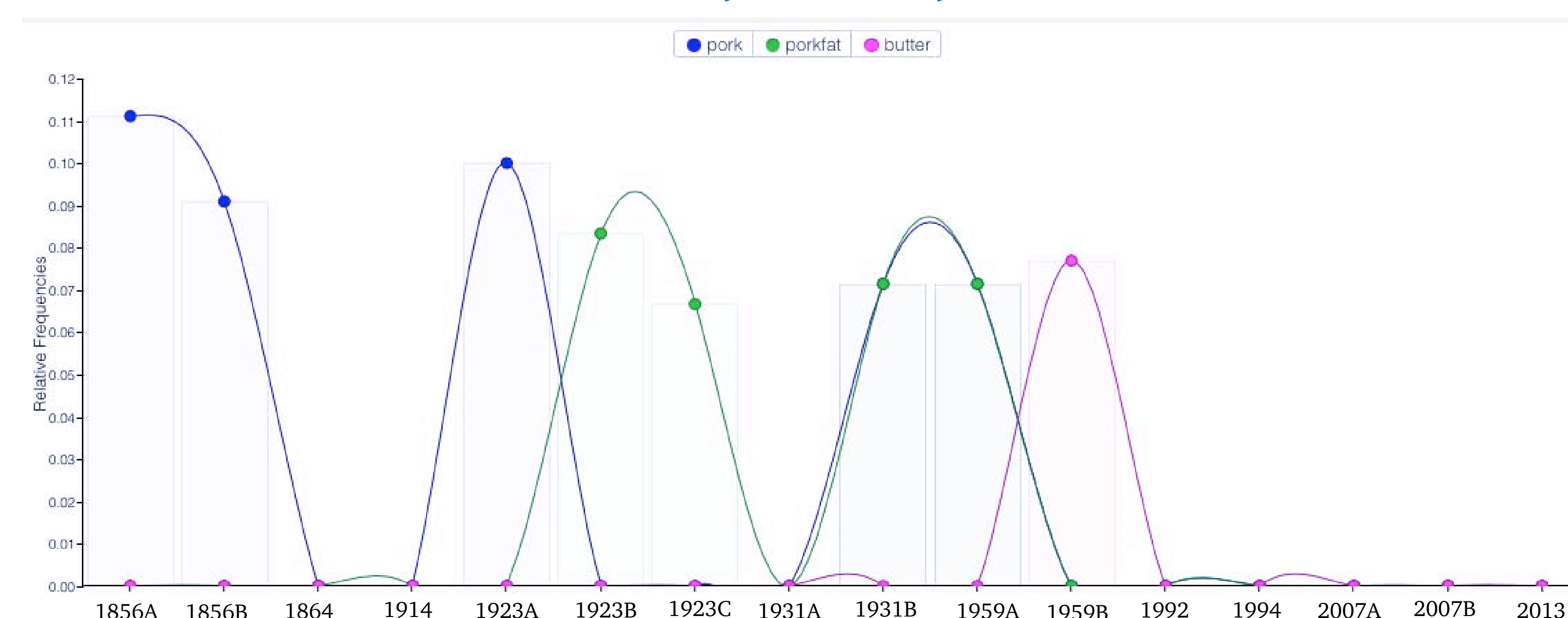
Machado's memoir is framed by the specific socio-political context of the 1959 Cuban Revolution and subsequent exile in the US, as well as Cuba's *Special Period* of the 1990s. While the production of Cuban exiles is not a circumstance unique to the Revolution and the enduring Castro regime, it is the catalyst for this memoir and several like it. Part of the large wave of post-Revolution emigration, Machado arrived in Miami in 1961 at 8 years old. Three decades later, the family is still in exile and the island experiences another significant economic-cultural shift. The collapse of the USSR left Cuba without crucial economic support and spurred the economic crisis of the 1990s known as *El Período especial en tiempos de paz* (Special Period in Times of Peace). This name was coined to describe the "war economy in times of peace, [and] to justify the shortage" of food, energy, and transportation (de Maeseneer 32). The crisis changed the island culture's relationship with food and rendered the nostalgic cuisine inaccessible to Cubans and exiles alike.

Recognized as the first culturally Cuban cookbook (Barradas), Coloma y Garcés' *El manual del cocinero cubano* was published more than four decades before Cuba's independence from Spain in 1898. According to WorldCat, there is only one copy of Coloma y Garcés' text available in a public library—the Biblioteca Nacional de Cuba José Martí in Havana. Another copy is listed among the holdings of the British Library that were destroyed in the Blitz of London (1940-41). The digitalization of Coloma y Garcés' text is vital because it has recently been scavenged and portions have been reproduced by several individuals using self-publishing platforms. While these versions bear Coloma y Garcés' name, they are not faithful reproductions, and at present, an original copy is virtually inaccessible. For this project, I have used the 2017 reproduction edited by Dr. Olga García Yero of the University of Camagüey (Cuba) and published in Santiago de Cuba.

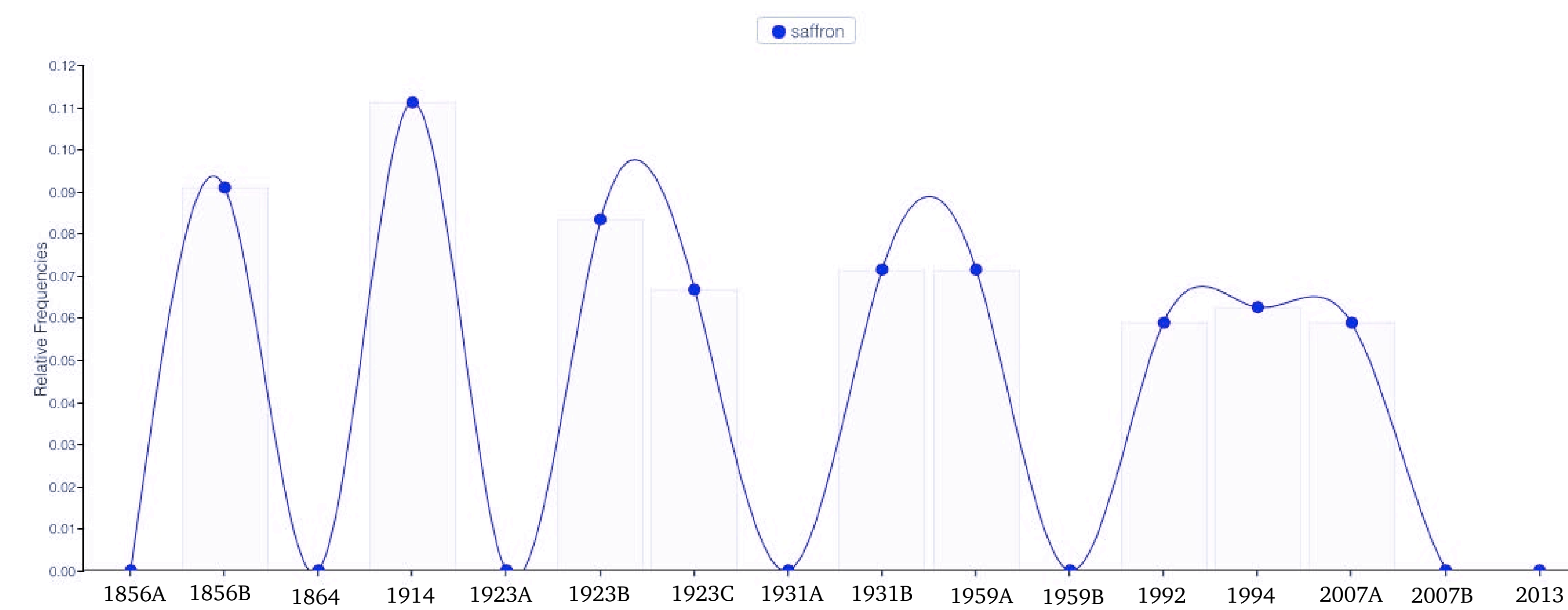
Presence of Artichoke and/or Asparagus



Presence of Pork, Pork Fat, and/or Butter



Presence of Saffron



Recipe Key

- 1856A Coloma y Garcés, "Arroz con gallina ó pollo"
- 1856B Coloma y Garcés, "Arroz á la valenciana"
- 1864 Legrán (1857), "Gallo con arroz"
- 1914 Triay, "Arroz con pollo"
- 1923A Reyes Gavilán y Moenck, "Arroz con gallina"
- 1923B Reyes Gavilán y Moenck, "Arroz con pollo"
- 1923C Reyes Gavilán y Moenck, "Arroz con pollo superior"
- 1931A Sevigne, "Arroz con gallina"
- 1931B Sevigne, "Arroz con pollo"
- 1959A *Romances*, "Arroz con pollo"
- 1959B *Romances*, "Arroz con pollona"
- 1992 Urrutia Randelman*, "Arroz con pollo de Rosalia"
- 1994 Lluriá de O'Higgins*, "Arroz con pollo"
- 2007A Machado*, "Eduardo's arroz con pollo"
- 2007B Machado*, "Fernando's arroz con pollo"
- 2013 Shelton*, "Arroz con pollo en Houston"

*exilic culinary memoir

Glossary

Arroz	Rice
Gallina	Hen
Gallo	Rooster
Pollo/pollona	Chicken
Valenciana	Valencian (from Valencia)

Acknowledgements

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Corpus

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Urrutia Randelman, Mary, and Joan Schwarts. *Memories of a Cuban Kitchen*. New York, Wiley Publishing, 1992.

Results

After an initial analysis, I isolated three categories of data which illustrate meaningful trends: the presence of asparagus, saffron, and (non-poultry) animal fat. These are represented in the Voyant visuals. The significance of these trends is rooted in Machado's memoir. His grandfather's exilic recipe contains "a can of Campbell's Condensed Cream of Asparagus Soup" (Machado & Domitrovich 198), which he claims makes his arroz con pollo "taste just like Cuba" (172). Machado, instead, opts for fresh asparagus. The data shows that neither condensed asparagus soup nor fresh asparagus is present in the corpus before 1994. Interestingly, artichokes make a brief appearance in two recipes: 1914 (arroz con pollo) and 1923 (arroz con pollo superior). Neither asparagus nor artichoke grow well on the island (Roig).

Machado's grandfather says that the soup adds an otherwise lacking element of terroir, which "makes these bland American chickens taste like they grew up roaming the fields eating Cuban grass" (Machado & Domitrovich 198). The data shows, however, that the memoir's two recipes for arroz con pollo lacked the (non-poultry) animal fat included in both of Coloma y Garcés' variations. In fact, pork and/or pork fat, or butter is present in eight of the eleven pre-Revolution recipes.

Finally, Machado often critiques the use of saffron in arroz con pollo. He describes the *bijol*, that often replaces it as "a sinister mixture of annatto seed extract" (83). This substitution is made several times in the memoir by his mother and even his grandfather. The data shows saffron is included in six of the eleven pre-Revolution recipes and in three of the five post-Revolution recipes. *Bijol* is only listed in the grandfather's recipe.

Conclusions

This research sheds light on the impact of exile on heritage Cuban culinary culture in the last 60 years. It also highlights the need for further research regarding changes in culinary terminology and translation across language and time. This includes the terms for poultry as well as the types of peppers. Moreover, potential trends emerged with respect to the use of dry or white wine as well as pimientos. Looking forward, a comparison with similar dishes from other Caribbean cultures would be impactful as arroz con pollo is a nostalgic dish shared with Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic (Fuster).

Bibliography

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