

## FACULTY REFLECTIONS ON 'IBERIA'

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Recently, we conducted a survey among the faculty of several departments of Spanish, asking for their thoughts on the state of 'Iberia' and Iberian Studies. We received a variety of responses to our survey, which contained the following questions:

1. How do you currently interpret "Iberia"?
2. Is the term "Iberian Studies" still relevant in academia?
3. Has the concept of "Iberia" changed for you in your research and in the classroom?

Their responses follow below.

**Professor Jorge Aladro-Font**  
**Professor, Spanish Literature**  
**University of California, Santa Cruz**

... Como una rica y productiva combinación *de* distintas culturas y lenguas que tienen como denominador común el haber compartido, para bien y para mal, un enorme recorrido histórico en conjunto.

... Sí, y más que nunca. La pluralidad y diversidad de la historia de "Iberia" es un perfecto ejemplo para estudios multiculturales, interdisciplinarios, etc.

... Obviamente, hoy en día casi nadie enseña literatura, historia, filosofía, sociología, etc. de la misma manera que hace 20-25 años. No hay una nueva "Iberia" hay una forma distinta de verla y en consecuencia de enseñarla.

**Professor Marta Altisent**  
**Professor of Spanish, Department of Spanish & Portuguese**  
**University of California, Davis**

... I interpret this term in its geographical broad sense of "Península Ibérica" encompassing Spain and Portugal (with all its regions/cultures and common history).

... I think it is. To me, personally, it sounds a little anachronistic but valid. It has nostalgic connotations of turn-of-the century Spain, as in its musical/poetic representations by Falla, Albéniz, Maragall and as in some of the discussions of the "*Generación del 98*". I don't think Spaniards (literary critics, historians, politicians) would use this term much today, as they tend to favor "*Hispanico*" as in "*Estudios de filología hispánica*" which excludes Portuguese. To emphasize "*español*" is somehow taboo nowadays, but this term remains useful as a cohesive denomination of countries/nations/regions that are trying to disengage themselves from a "*Castellano-céntrica*" and imperialist idea of Spain, while feeling still part of a common macronational unit. But this is another story relevant to the unfinished re-configuration of the *Estado Español* post-Constitution of 1978, still unresolved between a federation of mini-states vs. a state of *regiones autónomas* (with some aiming to become independent nations) solution.

The term "Iberian" also reflects a certain British and American perspective of Spain, as a country of exotic, pre-modern contrasts in Europe's periphery. A notion that James Michener popularized in the Sixties with his international best-seller *Iberia* as many British writers had done before.

... No the concept has not changed. I tend to use this term in the context of the "Generation of 98" and when I teach Joan Maragall's poem "Iberia", referring to the Spanish region's loyalties to the "*patria gran*" (great homeland).

**Prof. Joan L. Brown**  
**Elías Ahuja Professor of Spanish**  
**Department of Foreign Languages & Literatures**  
**University of Delaware**

The term "Iberia" is not one I use, either in my research or my teaching. The Iberian Peninsula includes Spain and Portugal and my work is Spain-centered. The term North American Studies would be similarly imprecise if one studied U.S. culture and literature, in my opinion. For me the concept of Iberia is of historical interest rather than current utility.

Spain is now conceptualized as a site of multiple nationalities and languages, and even the concept of "Spain" is held together tenuously, much less "Iberia" which is even more broad. The book title *Spain After Spain* gives a good idea of this notion.

**Prof. Dru Dougherty**  
**Professor, Department of Spanish & Portuguese**  
**University of California, Berkeley**

... For me, "Iberia" designates, historically and currently, a place, namely the Iberian Peninsula that includes Portugal and Spain. It is common to run across the geographic term "*la Península Ibérica*" in Spanish publications, as well as the English equivalent, "the Iberian Peninsula," in texts published in English.

Of course "Iberia," like "Europe" is also a creation of the imagination to which many different values— cultural, political, artistic, etc.— have been attached. As such it often occurs in combination with "America" as in *iberoamericano*, an adjective that suggests a degree of commonality in values like the ones just mentioned. In general such usage implies a shared cultural zone, not surprisingly since "Iberia" itself designates a zone comprising two countries, Spain and Portugal.

... I find the term "Iberian Studies" relevant to the academy in the sense hinted at in my answer to the previous question: the study of a shared geographic zone, of the people who live there and their history, literature, culture, etc., especially as they intermingle or exhibit mutual hostility. Perhaps the most suggestive feature of the designation "Iberian Studies" for current academic work is its supranational premise, i.e., the idea that two countries by virtue of sharing a greater geographic locale have features that transcend nationalist identities. The storms that blow in from the Atlantic and the wine culture along the Duero River are examples of such common features. Like the "European Union," the word "Iberia" challenges national and nationalist assumptions and opens the imagination to ways of thinking about similarities and differences, linguistic relationships and political borders, beyond just "Spain" and just "Portugal." Symptomatic of our being in thrall to nationalist paradigms is the fact that Spanish weather forecasts on television include the (empty) space of Portugal but never show its weather.

... No, "Iberia" hasn't undergone a change in my research or classroom. It hasn't suffered the kind of transformation experienced, for example, by the term "*latino*," which used to designate a common cultural heritage but acquired, in the U.S., an ethnic edge. To my knowledge, nobody claims "Iberia" as their particular place or heritage, the way Basques claim Euskadi. One would have to be a resurrected Roman to seriously advance rights (of conquest) to "Iberia." But anyone living in the Iberian Peninsula may imagine himself or herself as Iberian in infinite ways. "Iberia" in that sense is a threshold to virtual identities grounded in very concrete commonness, such as sharing the powerful Tagus River. El Greco was the quintessential Iberian!

**Prof. Michelle Hamilton**  
**Associate Professor, Spanish & Portuguese**  
**University of California, Irvine**

... "Iberia" for me is the term I most often use to refer to the Iberian Peninsula in the periods I study, including the 8th through the 14th centuries. Other terms are more problematic for me. For example "Spain" excludes not only Portugal, but also Muslim kingdoms, whose inhabitants would not self-identify with "Spain." The concept of "Spain" as developed in the work of medievalists such as Ramón Menéndez Pidal and Claudio Sánchez Albornoz also excludes many of the other regions of Iberia, including many of the territories that had been part of the Crown of Aragón and that later became territories under French nobility. I sometimes use "*al-Andalus*" when referring to Muslim Iberia, but the term is imprecise and I feel people identify it with confessional faith identity (Islam) over other identities, and see it as somehow different from Iberia.

... I'm not sure I completely understand this question about the relevance of Iberian Studies in academia. If you mean why are medieval Iberian Studies "relevant" to other research being done by specialists in other fields I would underscore the ways in which medieval Iberian culture intersects with many of the critical approaches being deployed by scholars working in contemporary fields, particularly translation studies, Diaspora studies and investigation of the postcolonial or transnational subject.

... Regarding how my own conception or use of "Iberia" has changed in my own career, I think the way I've come to conceive of "Iberia" as well as the way I deploy the term in my own work, reflects my own experiences as well as the theoretical approaches of my mentors. Not only have I had the chance to study aspects of Iberian culture outside the Peninsula—in both Israel (the Sephardic *romancero* and other oral traditions) and Morocco (again, studying Moroccan folk traditions similar to what is described in medieval Andalusí texts)—but I have also had the great fortune of studying and working with some of the most important living medievalists (Joseph Duggan, Arthur Askins) and particularly Hispanomedievalists (Sam Armistead, Charles Faulhaber, Dorothy Severin, Louise Vasvari, and I would include James T. Monroe), whose theoretical and research approaches are radically different, but from whom I gained a familiarity with the variety of critical approaches from cultural studies to classical romance philology that predominate in Medieval Studies today in the Academy. I think though that probably the many experts outside or peripheral to the field that I have worked with (Shoshana Weich-Shahak, Haya Bar Itzhak, Ibrahim Muhawi, John Hayes, etc.) as well as my own colleagues in graduate school (Mustafa Kamal, Gil Andijar, David Wacks, Sarah Portnoy, etc.) have shaped my own understanding of how terms used to designate medieval Iberia (terms such as "Sepharad," "Al-Andalus" and "Spain") are cultural constructions deployed by specialists in different fields to address different purposes. I prefer Iberia because I think it is the term that



best can encompass this variety, and which has the fewest negative connotations of religious, ethnic or linguistic privileging.

**Prof. Paola Marín**

**Assistant Professor, Modern Languages & Literatures  
California State University, Los Angeles**

... I agree with Jose Saramago that Spain and Portugal constitute a common historical/cultural space. Political borders do not correspond to the cultural development of the region.

... I think [the term "Iberian Studies" is relevant] as long as Portugal and all minority regions/languages in Spain are included. Also, the changing demographics in Spain, particularly the influx of Latin American and African immigrants, must be considered when talking about Iberia nowadays.

... Yes, of course. I will point out to two main interrelated facts: the European Community and globalization of the world economy. Spain cannot be understood at the present as an isolated nation without taking into account her interactions (both positive and negative) with other countries in terms of economy, cultural influences, and politics.

**Prof. Ana Maria Martinho**

**Assistant Professor, Department of Spanish & Portuguese  
University of California, Berkeley.**

... Iberia is a complex conglomerate of cultures and languages with multiple historical forms of self and hetero representation.

It also is, as I see it, a space that shows dynamic strategies of resistance against the Center, easily read as Imperial once more, and that struggles for a redefinition of the matters of State, Nation and periphery(ies).

The different regions and nations in Spain confront and reshape today the political center; Portugal and Spain read each other as discontinued "brothers"; Portugal and its former colonies are struggling with the reading of postcoloniality and reciprocal positionality.

Saramago's *A Jangada de Pedra* is a very good example of this type of problem.

... I would definitely say yes.

In historical and epistemological terms there are many facts and concepts that can be addressed from a productive comparative perspective.

Such perspective can improve the knowledge of trans-cultural phenomena and generate research interests that go beyond a strict geographical localization.

In fact, Portugal and Spain have shared events and conflicted on many seminal occasions. All these circumstances have led to significant changes in the shaping and definition of their respective symbolic capital at home and beyond borders.

I would consider this to be one of the major assets to consider under a comparative reading and writing of such "loci".

... Yes, very significantly. Though my focus of interest is Portugal and the Lusophone countries, I have a deep interest in three particular moments in the history of Iberian countries and cultures: the colonial history in the Atlantic; immigration and Diaspora; Iberia and Europe today. Portuguese history cannot be read accurately unless it addresses such a broad perspective.

**Prof. Gonzalo Navajas**  
**Professor, Spanish & Portuguese**  
**University of California, Irvine**

... To me, Iberia means the conglomerate of nationalities, languages, and cultures that compose the Iberian Peninsula. That means the four languages and cultures within Spain in addition to Portuguese in Portugal.

... Yes, if it is reconfigured to insert the current political and cultural situation of the Iberian Peninsula within Europe. It is becoming less and less relevant to study Iberian national literatures and cultures isolated from the wider context of European Studies. At the same time, the literature written in Spanish should be connected to the literatures of the other languages in the Peninsula. It is a challenging task because it demands the readjustment of long-standing intellectual habits, but it is becoming more and more imperative in order to avoid the conventional centralist and unilateral view of Iberian culture.

... Yes, I find myself including in my work and courses texts not only in Spanish but in Catalan, Galician and Basque (in translation). As I said, it is a demanding goal. However, I think it is what the present situation requires unless [one wants] to parcel out and divide further the cultures of Iberia, and thus make them increasingly irrelevant in the post-national paradigm of the digital and global age.

**Prof. Ignacio Navarrete**  
**Associate Professor, Department of Spanish & Portuguese**  
**University of California, Berkeley**

I find the concept of "Iberian Studies" useful for a number of reasons. To begin with, as someone who works in the Medieval/Early Modern field, I would have to say that if people at that time did not think in terms of "Iberia" per se, there was a commonality of culture and historical experience between Spain and Portugal that certainly set those areas off from "France" and "Italy," which were more clearly something else. "Spain" itself as a unified monarchy was only coming to be at the time; were it not for dynastic accident and civil war, Castile might have joined Portugal instead of Aragon at the end of the 15th century. Further dynastic accidents led to a union of Spain and Portugal in the 16th-17th centuries. In the cultural area there were many writers who wrote in both Castilian and Portuguese, or for that matter Castilian and Catalan or even all three, and important cultural contacts were maintained that were far closer than those with France and Italy. Just as "Italy" had a cultural unity in spite of its political divisions, I believe the same was true of Iberia, and the experience of Arabic/Muslim domination was no small part of that commonality.

A second moment of contact was in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. My awareness of this has been shaped by the conference I organized in the spring of 2008 on the end of the old regime in the Iberian world. The conference focused on the ramifications of the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and Portugal in 1808, which included directly and indirectly the independence of what were then the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas. It crossed a number of boundaries, not the least between literary and historical disciplines, but also the Atlantic (Spain/Spanish America; Portugal/Brazil), and between language areas (Spain/Portugal, Spanish America/Brazil). From these crossings it became clear that there were again significant commonalities (as well as differences) of history and political and literary culture that set the Iberian world apart. A notable example was the Constitution of Cádiz; adopted by Spanish and Spanish-American liberals in the face of the French occupation, it was the



touchstone for political developments on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the 19th century.

A third area of contact is the contemporary era of globalization. As fellow-members of the European Union, Spain and Portugal share many interests, economic, political, and cultural. There is increasing evidence of rapprochement between the two in, for example, the study of Portuguese in Spain and of Castilian Spanish in Portugal. Both countries also hold important, although decidedly minority, positions in global language communities. This was the focus of a conference I organized a few years ago. In the film industry, for example, financing, production, and distribution of the finished product takes place in a trans-Atlantic marketplace; the same is true (although perhaps less so) in the publishing industry. I don't have a crystal ball but I can only see these trends growing stronger. Thus for both historical reasons and as a reflection of the global cultural marketplace, I believe that Iberian Studies (understood as the totality of the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking world) is a very useful concept.

**Prof. Michael Predmore**  
**Professor, Department of Spanish & Portuguese**  
**Stanford University**

I think one's view of Iberian Studies reflects one's experience in the various academic institutions and, therefore, I will first review my university background. I did my graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where there was strong interest in both Spanish and Portuguese. For twenty years I taught in the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Washington, Seattle, where there was strong interest in Spanish and Latin American literatures and very little in Portuguese. For twenty years, I taught in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Stanford, where there was very little interest in either Spain or Portugal, the primary interest and strength being Latin American literature and culture. At all of these institutions, there was no interest expressed at all in Iberian Studies. It was always Spanish and Portuguese and the emphasis in Spanish was on the Castilian language and on the protagonism of Castilla in the origins and development of Spanish history and culture.

In 2006, our Department at Stanford, under new leadership, introduced a new vision of what we ought to be doing in a Spanish and Portuguese Department. It involves a paradigmatic shift away from the traditional emphasis on Castilian Spanish and history and a full recognition of and respect for the linguistic, cultural, and political diversity of the Iberian Peninsula, particularly as represented by the "historic nationalisms" of Galicia, the Basque Country, and Cataluña. We are making a serious effort now to require our students to learn two and preferably three major languages of the Iberian Peninsula, specifically, Portuguese and Catalan as well as Castilian, in order to take seriously the study of the various historic nationalisms and to have access in the original to each's primary literary works.

I have accepted this challenge most willingly, I have been working in this direction for some years on my own, and I have been enjoying the process of rethinking and reformulating the conventional wisdom in the field. For example, my reading over the years in Galician history and culture has led to a deeper appreciation of the works of both Rosalía de Castro and Ramón del Valle-Inclán. Recent reading in Basque history has given me new insight into the work of Miguel de Unamuno and into the current political situation of the Basque Country. I have never been given any encouragement either in graduate school or by my colleagues at three major universities to learn anything about Catalan history and culture until now and this has been a tremendous enrichment.

I have learned about the pivotal role of Cataluña, and particularly Barcelona, in shaping the modern history of Spain. It is fascinating and instructive to reflect on the fact that many of the leading political ideas that have played a role in modern Spanish history—republicanism, federalism, anarchism, syndicalism, and communism—entered Spain by way of Cataluña. And the leading fashions, whether in clothing, in philosophy, or in art—have taken hold in Barcelona several years before being accepted in Madrid. I look forward to becoming acquainted with and to teaching such major authors as Jacint Verdaguer, Narcés Oller, Joan Maragall, Eugeni d'Ors, Carles Riba, and Salvador Espriu, and I intend to begin the study of Catalan this fall.

I am confident that this conception of Iberian Studies will correct a serious imbalance in the selection of materials that has been traditionally the case in many Departments and programs of Spanish and Portuguese, and will represent a major contribution to the education of our students in both our undergraduate and graduate programs.

**Prof. Harvey L. Sharrer**  
**Professor, Department of Spanish & Portuguese**  
**University of California, Santa Barbara**

As a medievalist whose research and teaching interests encompass the entire Iberian Peninsula and its languages and literatures, for me the term "Iberian Studies" or "Pan-Peninsular Studies" is very much relevant.