

Is There a Place for Iberian Studies in Catalonia?

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In memory of Basilio Losada

1. A pachyderm in the room: Iberian Studies in Catalonia

It is quite a challenge to report on the current state of Iberian Studies in Catalonia,¹ due in large part to a lack of institutional implementation in Catalan universities. Although regulated courses of study for the various official and co-official languages of the Iberian Peninsula and their literatures exist within the Catalan academy, they are pursued autonomously following independent curricula and implemented very unevenly. Despite the presence of a small number of courses exploring the cultural diversity of the Iberian Peninsula, they do not form a cohesive field.

Catalan research that could be considered Iberian Studies has a significant comparative dimension and is often combined with intellectual history, so it may also be viewed as an intellectual history of Iberisms and of the intra-Peninsular cultural contacts that they foster. Considering this, it seems natural to ponder why Iberian Studies has failed to put down roots in Catalonia, given the long political and cultural tradition of Iberist thought dating back more than a century (Martínez-Gil 1997) and the presence of some of the discipline's foremost specialists, such as Víctor Martínez-Gil and Jordi Cerdà, both professors at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). One possible explanation is the unclear definition of the social and academic function of these studies in Catalonia. The study of Catalan culture itself is already a recognized field of research and teaching. Moreover, the study of the relationships between Catalan culture and other Iberian cultures does not require the application of any new area of study. It is insufficiently clear how a new label such as "Iberian Studies" would benefit Catalan society, what it would renew or replace, and in what way it would challenge previously institutionalized disciplines.

Let us briefly examine a few of the reasons why Iberian Studies has not yet found its place in Catalonia. The first reason is the perceived Hispanist orientation of many Iberian Studies initiatives, regardless of the disciplinary masks they wear. This Hispanism, understood as the academic expression of a "nacionalismo cultural posimperial"² ["postimperial cultural nationalism"] (Resina 2009, 29), imposes a centralism that "seems to be replicated within Iberian Studies" (Gimeno Ugalde and Pérez Isasi 2019, 54) in the form of "una estructura radial de las relaciones literarias ibéricas [que] reaparece, así, fantasmáticamente, incluso cuando se intenta luchar contra ella" ["a radial structure of Iberian literary relations [that] reappears in a ghostly form even when attempts are made to fight it"] (Pérez Isasi 2021a, 38). Broadly speaking, three perspectives have dominated the process of defining Iberian Studies, according to a recent assessment (Pérez Isasi 2021a, 26). The first is an evolved Hispanism that seeks to correct ideological biases and move beyond outdated methodologies. The second is the Area Studies of the English-speaking academy,

¹ This article focuses on the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, a political division within Spain. However, Catalan culture extends beyond these administrative borders to other Spanish territories such as the Valencian Community and the Balearic Islands, where it is also an official language. In addition, Catalan is present in regions like the Franja de Ponent in Aragon and Carxe in Murcia. Outside Spain, it extends beyond the Pyrenees into southern France, where it is spoken, and it is the official language in Andorra. The language is also institutionally recognized in the city of Alghero on the island of Sardinia, Italy. Therefore, the term "Catalan" may be used to encompass all of these territories, while the administrative region is specifically referred to as "Catalonia" or the "Principality of Catalonia".

² All English translations of quotes were carried out by the author of the chapter.

which encompasses a variety of disciplinary approaches to the humanities and social sciences across the geographically delimited area of the Peninsula. The third relates to comparative literature, with a specific focus on the Iberian area. Ultimately, the reality is one of tacit understanding between the three perspectives, as this chapter will show.

Hispanism finds a natural ally in Area Studies. In exchange for methodological renewal, Hispanism was expected to accept the incorporation of other Peninsular cultures, thereby becoming supposedly “Iberian”. Yet this broadening of the archive does not necessarily entail a relational dimension, allowing Hispanism to maintain its national approach, ignore the other Iberian cultures, and publish its outputs in collective volumes with an Iberian perspective alongside studies on other Peninsular cultures. To alleviate the guilty conscience of the Peninsular states by omitting their colonial history and silencing the experience of exile and migration, which are key to the history of minoritized cultures, this alliance has the effect of turning Portugal into another periphery of Spain by isolating it from the Lusophone area (Gabilondo 2014, 29). Similarly, Iberian Comparative Literature also tends to function as a complement to Hispanism. It was the comparative paradigm of French chairs (Van Tieghem 1931) that took hold on the Peninsula (Vega 1998, 50). This form of comparativism is characterized by the reification of national literary units and the study of the relationships between them following a binary model, which seeks to demonstrate the factual existence of contacts between literatures, interpreted in terms of sources, influences, and mediations. The aim of binary comparativism is to complement a national literary history by focusing on the influence it has had elsewhere and demonstrating its excellence in terms of the reception and recreation of foreign models. Like the discipline to which it was subordinated—the history of national literature—, French comparativism had a strong historicist and documentary character based on empirical observations and an accumulation of erudition without theoretical reflection. This is the intuitive, inertial comparativism practiced by Hispanists and Lusitanists in numerous works of a supposedly Iberian nature. The presumption that comparativist perspectives are exempt from nationalistic bias must therefore be rejected, as in this case it is quite the opposite.³ Even the contested World Literature, which has emerged in the United States as the latest paradigm of Comparative Literature, is perfectly complemented by Hispanism. As Àlex Matas has pointed out, both disciplines agree on the difficulty of recognizing the existence of interliterary communities based on conflict and of confirming the official cartography “organizada alrededor de aquellos pocos centros de poder capaces de otorgar la visibilidad y conferir valor de intercambiabilidad” [“organized around those few centers of power capable of granting visibility and conferring interchangeability value”] (2017, 547–550).

At times, methodological descriptions of Iberian Studies lack precision, resulting in a mixture of disciplines held together solely by their geographical scope (Pérez Isasi 2021b, 276). This highlights a second characteristic of Iberian Studies that makes it unfeasible for inclusion in the Catalan academy. The dominance of the Catalan language extends beyond the Pyrenees and into French territory, as well as encompassing the city of Alghero in Sardinia. If the sole criterion is geographical scope, then the northern delimitation typically naturalized in Iberian Studies becomes problematic. From this perspective, Catalan Studies would be required to self-mutilate in order to become part of Iberian Studies. One example is Joan-Lluís Lluís, one of the most award-winning writers in contemporary Catalan literature, who would be excluded from the discipline because he was born in Perpignan and is a French citizen. The conflation of the geographical border of the Iberian Peninsula with the political border of the Spanish State (one of the services provided by Area Studies to Hispanism) has

³ The nationalism implicit in the comparative literature of French origin was vehemently rejected by the European comparativists who emigrated to the United States after World War II. See Welles (1959).

become naturalized and could turn Iberian Studies into a legitimizing tool of historical processes such as the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659) if not critically reviewed.

Thirdly, as a result of the preceding arguments, there is a persistent perception in Catalonia that Iberian Studies, as articulated internationally, serves as a facade to conceal external political agendas that do not appropriately consider Catalan culture (Martí Monterde 2013b; Matas 2017). At best, Iberian Studies draws on Catalan Studies in an instrumental manner to fulfill a legitimizing quota, inviting its specialists to participate as native informants. The fact that Iberian Studies is predominantly expressed in English or Spanish is a telling symptom of this dynamic. It is important to note that the term “Iberian Studies” is a foreign label,⁴ which can easily be perceived as a trend or as a further attempt by the academic industry to perpetuate an enduring cycle of conferences, associations, and papers (Casas 2019, 26; Cerdà 2021, 342). Furthermore, it may arouse suspicions that the emphasis on demonstrating the relevance of Iberian Studies ultimately serves the academic (self)aggrandizement of its pioneers and main proponents through the increasing bibliometric capital generated by this academic machinery.⁵

Considering all of this, the successful integration of the various studies on Iberian cultures conducted in Catalonia into a hypothetical international area of Iberian Studies would require certain adjustments to be made. In my view, these adjustments should not be perceived as a list of particularist demands, but rather as a challenge to the field of Iberian Studies itself. We might agree that self-indulgent isolation within one’s own culture and academic tradition and an uncritical embracing of foreign agendas under the guise of universality are both equally parochial. If Iberian Studies genuinely values the subject it claims as its own, it would be wise for the discipline to heed calls for attention from the periphery.

When it comes to addressing this issue, I concur with numerous researchers (Gabilondo 2014; Resina 2016; Casas 2019; Picornell 2019) in advocating for the future of Iberian Studies to be intertwined with Comparative Literature. From my standpoint, it would be highly beneficial to embrace a comparative approach that incorporates a theoretical perspective, calls upon the sociology of culture to explore diversity in the institutionalization of literature, and draws on feminist, postcolonial, and subaltern theories to challenge the presumed universality of any cultural agent or phenomenon. A comparativism that, in addition, historicizes poetic and intellectual debates from synchronic and diachronic perspectives, prioritizes the issues of translation on literary circulation, and considers controversial interactions between different languages and literatures, particularly when they coexist within the same space.

It has been argued that Comparative Literature lacks a specific methodology, as it borrows from other fields such as Biology or Anthropology, and that it has no distinct object, as literature is already studied by other disciplines. For this reason, the discipline has been constantly threatened by adjacent fields of study and its relevance has often been called into question. It is worth noting that what makes Comparative Literature relevant still today is neither an exclusive object nor its own method, but rather a set of specific issues, such as the relationship between the local and the global, expressions of cultural borderlands, literary circulation, (un)translatability, dialogue or misunderstanding between notions of literature and/or poetics that are not equivalent, and the cultural relativity of aesthetic value, to name just a few.

⁴ The term “Estudis Ibèrics” (“Iberian Studies” in Catalan) has traditionally been used for archaeological studies of the Iberians, the pre-Roman inhabitants of the Peninsula. This can be seen in early studies, such as that of Joaquín Costa (1891–1895), as well as in more recent work. See Sanmartí (2013).

⁵ As David Sibley (1995, 122) points out: “This compartmentalizing of knowledge is a characteristic of academia associated with the growth of more specialisms. It secures monopolies and insulates the purveyors of knowledge from the threat of challenging ideas. Compartmentalized knowledge, kept within secure boundaries, gives power and authority to those who peddle it”.

Iberian Studies has neither an exclusive object of study nor a specific methodology and the geographical argument often used to define the discipline is weak from a theoretical point of view. This weakness affords an ambiguous status to spaces that have often been excluded, viewed as unfinished business, or summoned to discuss the Iberian framework. Such areas include the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands, Madeira, the Azores, Gibraltar, Ceuta and Melilla, French Roussillon, colonial territories, and enclaves of exile and emigration. As a result, there has been a sharp rise in theoretical and methodological essays in recent years, without a similar level of activity in practical studies. When case studies do appear, they tend to abandon the theoretical audacity of earlier methodological essays and end up gravitating inertially towards a Hispanism that has seen little methodological renewal or towards the old binary paradigm of French Comparative Literature.

Following the analogy between Iberian Studies and Comparative Literature, it would be valuable to revisit the allegory used by American comparativist Gerald Gillespie. Gillespie wondered if

Definers of any canon in any particular historical period anywhere envision an ideal creature or “unicorn” in place of the ungainly actuality or “rhinoceros”, that is, the full context. It is the rhino that well-informed observers, internal or external, will see if they more carefully take into account the hoofs, tail, horn, and other appurtenances of a culture as an ensemble. (...) Chimeras result when pundits try to amalgamate all the phenomena to conform to an all-explaining doctrine. (...) Locally peripheral elements that suggest an unacceptable “rhinoceros” and even the most lovely foreign “unicorns” may be suspect as “chimerical” in the view of either radical or conservative critics. (...) Comparative Literature should exploit the critical possibilities that can flow from deliberately converting all manner of seductive “chimera” and winsome “unicornua” into ungainly “rhinoceroi”. (2004, 245–246)

In its current form, Iberian Studies could easily be perceived in Catalonia as an imagined chimera aimed at studying an ideal object, akin to a unicorn that certain Catalan specificities would challenge. Enabling Iberian Studies to take root in Catalonia would require not only more widespread implementation of the study of Peninsular cultures in the Catalan academy, but above all an acceptance of the fact that studying Catalan culture entails grappling with complex and challenging aspects as hard to get to grips with as the tough hide of a pachyderm.

2. The unequal institutional implementation of studies of different Peninsular cultures in Catalonia

As stated earlier, Iberian Studies has not taken hold institutionally in Catalonia but several fields of study that have some overlap with the discipline have developed unevenly and independently. Studies of Catalan and Spanish languages and literatures, whose continuity is guaranteed due to their social presence and official status, have developed autonomously, relying heavily on historiographical models of national literature. Regulated courses of study on Galician, Portuguese, and Basque cultures are almost non-existent in Catalonia, especially since the 2009 Bologna Process⁶ reform, which represented a step backward in their institutional presence. It remains uncertain what will become of these areas of knowledge, as the self-proclaimed “most progressive Spanish government in history” intends to eliminate academic areas such as Basque, Catalan, Galician, and Portuguese Philology, as well as Literary Theory and Comparative Literature. These areas will all have to be dissolved into

⁶ The Bologna Process, triggered by the Bologna Declaration (1999), aimed to standardize European Union academic systems for the European Higher Education Area. Its implementation in Spain in 2009 brought reforms that were not set out in the declaration and expanded the neoliberal university model (Dias 2017, 70–72).

one of two new fields: “Modern Languages and Literatures” or “Hispanic Philology, Classical Philology, and Ancient World Studies”. This chronological dichotomy—*modern* vs. *ancient*—and the positioning of Hispanic Philology on the side of ancient cultures suggest a closing of the ranks within traditional Hispanism, which seems to relegate the use of new “modern” methodologies to foreign cultures. Regarding the study of Catalan, Basque, and Galician, it seems unlikely that the Spanish government will grant them an academic status equivalent to that of cultures with a state, placing them in the “Modern Languages and Literatures” field. As a result, they are likely to be made invisible by the familiar iron fist of Hispanism. The Catalan government, with its autonomy in university affairs, is expected to maintain the poor health of Catalan Studies in Catalonia. However, the evidence points to even greater setbacks for Basque and Galician Studies in the near future.

The university system in Catalonia consists of twelve universities, seven of which are public. While Hispanic and Catalan Studies are taught at most of them, regulated courses of study in Galician, Basque, and Portuguese are only offered by the University of Barcelona (UB) and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). At UB, Galician Studies was founded by Basilio Losada in 1968. In the 1990s, it was expanded into a BA degree program along with Portuguese Studies, which later became a major degree until it was dissolved in 2009 under the Bologna Process. Subsequently, Galician and Portuguese Studies were included in the BA Degree in Modern Languages and Literatures as minors; in 2019, they were added to the BA Degree in Romance Languages. To this day, the Galician teaching staff organize knowledge transfer activities for Galician Literature Day, including exhibitions, lectures, and round tables. Since the pandemic, they have also launched a collection of bilingual anthologies (in Galician and Catalan) published by Chan da Pólvora.

The study of Peninsular languages and literatures at UAB also began with Galician Studies in 1995. A Galician lectureship was subsequently created at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities in 1997. Currently, UAB offers a minor in Galician Studies as a complement to any of the degrees offered by the university. Additionally, the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting offers a minor in Portuguese Studies. Within the faculty, there is an affiliated center, the Camões Institute Portuguese Language Center in Barcelona, which was inaugurated in 2001 and has hosted the José Saramago academic chair since 2007. A recent agreement with the Guimarães Rosa Institute in Barcelona has enabled UAB to set up a lectureship from Brazil. It should be emphasized that many of the cultural activities relating to Galician language and literature in Catalonia are due to the civil society activism taking place at some Galician centers. These institutions boast well-stocked libraries and offer courses in Galician language, culture, and music. Notable among them are the Asociación Cultural Galega Rosalía de Castro, located in Cornellà de Llobregat, and the Ateneu Roig, in the neighborhood of Gràcia, Barcelona. The former has hosted a major poetry prize since 1987 and houses a theater group. The latter also has a theater group and a book club, as well as organizing the alternative Galician Literature Day every year.

Basque Studies has been present at UB since 1987, where it is attached to the area of Linguistics because the initiative was originally proposed by linguist Ibon Sarasola. Itziar Aduriz took over in 1999. In 2000, an agreement was reached between the Basque government, UB, and UAB to establish Basque *lectorados* at Catalan universities. From 2007, the Etxepare Basque Institute oversaw these lectureships, which eventually merged into a single position covering both universities. Like Galician and Portuguese Studies, UAB offers a minor in Basque Studies. Outside academia, the Associació Cultural Euskal Etxea in Barcelona, founded in 1979, has been the main organizer of activities to promote Basque culture in Catalonia. It is the most active Basque cultural center outside Euskal Herria worldwide (Galarraga 2015), offering courses on Basque language and culture and hosting three annual festivals: “Literaldia”, which has featured a month-long series of literary events since 2005; “Euskal Herria Sona”, focusing on Basque music; and the film festival

“Zinemaldia”. The coordinators of Galician and Basque Studies at UAB organize the “UAB Conversations” as part of the “Literaldia” festival, consisting of a round-table discussion with participants from the cultural sphere in the Basque Country and Galicia.

The absence of a formal academic structure for Iberian Studies in Catalonia has not deterred numerous researchers from exploring the interactions between Iberian cultures, sometimes sporadically, sometimes continuously. What they share is a belief in the relational dimension of the Iberian perspective and the need to transcend the restrictive framework of Hispanism and the closed, asymmetric binarism of relations between Catalan and Spanish literatures that it promotes. Consequently, this research has often been conducted by Lusitanists or comparativists⁷ and occasionally coordinated as part of collective projects.⁸ However, its Iberian dimension typically consists of a series of individual sectoral studies without any organic links between them. Added to the fact that there is a Catalan-language university and publishing system beyond the Principality, encompassing the Balearic Islands and the Valencian Community, this poses challenges when it comes to categorizing research conducted in Catalan within a single autonomous community. For instance, the symposium *Uns apartats germans*, which took place in June 2009 at the Sorbonne in Paris, was resumed in November 2009 at the Ateneu Barcelonès and finally published in Palma de Mallorca. It is also difficult to situate the research of Catalan scholars who work outside the Principality of Catalonia but regularly engage in scientific conferences there, such as Enric Bou, Esther Gimeno Ugalde, Joan Ramon Resina, and Jesús Revelles, among others.

With regard to academic journals in Catalonia, they typically accept articles in the Romance languages of the Peninsula. Two journals affiliated with UB are of particular note: *452ºF. Journal of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature* (2009–), which, from its inception until 2015, presented all content simultaneously in Catalan, Spanish, and Basque; and *Abriu: estudos de textualidade do Brasil, Galícia e Portugal* (2012–), which publishes articles in Catalan, Spanish, Galician, and Portuguese. *Visat* (2006–), the digital journal of literature and translation by the Catalan PEN, also includes sections on Basque literature and translations from Portuguese. Meanwhile, the independent cultural magazine *Caravansari* (2006–), based in Santa Coloma de Gramenet on the outskirts of Barcelona, focuses on criticism and literary creation with a Peninsular scope. Its Iberian dimension is rooted in the anarchist militancy of its founder, the poet Mateo Rello, as the twentieth-century libertarian movement often professed Iberist convictions (Cerdà 2025). The magazine also extends beyond the Peninsula, featuring works from Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, and El Salvador, as well as Brazilian

⁷ Without aiming to be exhaustive, I would like to highlight the contributions of Lusitanists Jordi Cerdà, Pere Comellas, Elena Losada, Víctor Martínez-Gil, and Isabel Soler; and comparativists Maria Dasca, Antoni Martí Monterde, Àlex Matas, Antonio Monegal, Bernat Padró, and David Viñas. A selection of their research is listed in the bibliography.

⁸ Elena Losada and Xus Lama lead the project *Género, violencia y representación. Los textos de creación en la prensa femenina peninsular (1848–1918)* at UB. Jaume Subirana, at Pompeu Fabra University (UPF), leads the project *Escritores, comunidad y reconocimiento en las literaturas periféricas peninsulares (1972–2022)*. In collaboration with this project, Maria Dasca and Esther Gimeno Ugalde organized the seminar “Catalan literature and Iberian literatures: influences, reception and translation” in 2022. Other researchers in the Catalan academy have participated in Iberian projects directed from outside Catalonia. This is the case of Isabel Soler, member of the project *Saberes de las dos Indias. La materia médica en el mundo colonial ibérico, ss. XVI–XVII*, directed by José Pardo Tomás from CSIC, and Bernat Padró, member of the project *Literatura & Cía: canon, mediación y branding en los sistemas (pos)literarios ibéricos (ss. XX–XXI)*, led by Enrique Santos and Iolanda Ogando from the University of Extremadura. This is also the case of Jordi Cerdà, Elena Llorens, Víctor Martínez-Gil, Bernat Padró, and Gemma Yllà-Català, who were part of the project *A invasão silenciosa. Presença portuguesa nas revistas literárias ibéricas do século XX*, directed by Antonio Sáez Delgado from the Chair of Iberian Studies at the University of Évora. The activities of the Comparative Literature in the European Intellectual Area Research Group, led by Antoni Martí Monterde at UB, deserve a special mention. This group has continuously programmed activities with an Iberian perspective, including the coordination of the MA in Barcelona-Europe: Literature and Comparative History of Intellectuals (2014–2019), which offered a module on Iberism taught by Bernat Padró. As part of this project, Padró also coordinated the seminar “Iberism: a perspective from Barcelona” (2017).

and African poetry written in Portuguese. Transcending co-official languages, it has also published poetry in Asturian. Since 2013, *Caravansari* has organized a biennial poetry event in the Peninsular languages, which has been attended by writers such as Manuel Rivas, Kirmen Uribe, Joan Margarit, Chus Pato, Bernardo Atxaga, and Eva Veiga.

3. Towards Iberian Studies from a Catalan perspective: a proposal for the future

As we have seen so far, Catalonia has a small but sufficient base upon which Iberian Studies can build. The discipline's viability will depend on its response to certain legitimate expectations, such as adopting a multicultural, plurilinguistic perspective like that proposed by Bou (2012, 51) and establishing a non-hierarchical relationship between its components, as advocated by Resina (1996, 114). In short, it will be a matter of overcoming the temptation to sublimate the problematic Iberian rhino into an ideal unicorn. Given the reluctance shown towards conventional Iberian Studies conceived outside Catalonia, as discussed above, I would like to suggest some possibilities for modification to make the discipline fully relevant to Catalan society. This task would, of course, require various specialists and institutions to work together.

3.1. Relational and multilateral Iberian Studies

First and foremost, Catalan Iberian Studies should be inherently relational and multilateral. Since the main Iberian cultures already have disciplines devoted to their study in Catalonia, an Area Studies approach would be unsuitable. Our focus should therefore be on examining the interactions between Iberian cultures, which would be sufficient in itself to justify this branch of studies according to Martínez-Gil (2015). Nonetheless, the specific interactions between Catalan and Castilian cultures would not suffice to be considered Iberian unless situated within a broader comparative framework. Limiting our focus to their interactions would be perceived in Catalonia as something not Iberian but specific to the Catalan culture, either from an interliterary perspective (Martí Monterde 2013a) or based on the binary comparison typically advocated by the deep-rooted Hispanism in Catalonia (Sotelo Vázquez 2014), which in no case considers its endeavors to be part of Iberian Studies. Yet, the exploration of Iberian connections must not overlook relations shaped by conflict, as numerous scholars have highlighted (Martí Monterde 2013a, 71; Gabilondo 2014, 29; Pérez Isasi 2017, 356; Casas 2019, 30; Picornell 2019, 83; Martínez Tejero and Perez Isasi 2019, 10; Cerdà 2021, 352–53). Indeed, the Catalan perspective of the Peninsula will always be more or less explicitly marked by the specter of the War of Secession (1640–1652),⁹ a pivotal historical event that gave rise to the asymmetry between the political and cultural trajectories of Catalonia and Portugal.

Secondly, I concur with Mercè Picornell that we should avoid focusing solely on factual contacts between different literatures (2019, 63), as this would limit the object of study either to the three historical periods in Iberian relations identified by Pérez Isasi (2017) from an interstate perspective or to the four historical periods described by Òscar Costa (2015, 501–03) if viewed from the Luso-Catalan perspective. As far back as 1961, Henry H. Remak advocated for a comparativism capable of making intelligible phenomena not reliant on factual contact. Consider, for example, Losada (2016) and Viñas Piquer (2016), who compare Iberian responses to international phenomena such as adultery novels or

⁹ The Reapers' War (1640) and the proclamation of the Catalan Republic (1641), repressed by the Castilian monarchy, were instrumental in consolidating Portuguese independence. The Portuguese coup exploited Castile's divided attentions as it was forced to prioritize one of the two fronts. The Reapers' War represents the eastern counterpart of the Restoration War (1640), which led to the Treaty of Lisbon of 1668 and the official recognition of Portuguese sovereignty.

bestsellers. It should be equally legitimate to study the relationships that Peninsular cultures have established with foreign cultures, such as France and England (Gabilondo 2019, 92), as well as the colonial dimension of Iberian cultures, without which the history of the Iberian Peninsula or the decolonized territories in America, Africa, and Asia cannot be understood. Despite its late intervention in colonial affairs, the Catalan case offers examples of cultural dialogue, such as with Cuba, but also embodies a disastrous history with active participation in the slave trade (Sust Fatjó 2022). The notion of trans-Iberism, postulated by José Saramago and understood as an Iberism of delocalization (Martínez-Gil 2023, 14), would enable a deterritorialized approach to the Iberian (2025) and, according to Saramago himself, would stem from a decolonized literary theory with a broader comparative perspective than the Peninsular one.

As well as comparing different Iberian components, it is important to advocate for an intranational comparativism that questions the exclusion criteria of the national literary histories and asserts the inherent heterogeneity of each Iberian culture. Following Monegal, “it is necessary to begin by not thinking of Spain as the place of an identity but of a difference” (2005, 246). For consistency’s sake, we should also avoid replicating the unitary model in the respective minoritized Iberian literatures. Catalan culture must be understood as a space of differences that can be studied comparatively, as exemplified by Picornell (2019) and Matas (2017, 2021). Both authors also address the hypotactical relationships (Casas 2014) between the local, national, and global dimensions of literary fact. This perspective does not view each stage as a link in a chain leading to the next, but instead highlights the simultaneous, dialogic involvement of all these dimensions (Casas 2006, 44). In short, these proposals affirm intraliterary difference and link the local to the global, contributing to challenging Iberian administrative units and their naturalization.

In light of the above, two additional problems should be noted. The first concerns the need to question the perimeter delimitation of what can be considered Iberian, while the second relates to revising the status and number of its differential components.

3.2. The *unborder* of Iberianness

From a Catalan perspective, the primary concern regarding the cartographic design guiding Iberian Studies is the need to problematize the borders of its object. In order for Iberian Studies to develop a critical dimension, it should regard the border as an object of study itself and explore new forms of territorial intelligibility beyond “national narratives” (Bou 2012, 68). Concerning the Pyrenean delimitation of the Iberian space, while rarely explicitly addressed, there is a tendency to favor the political border between the Kingdom of Spain and the French Republic over the geographical one. As Arturo Casas explains (2019, 50), the latter would be located one hundred kilometers north of the current border, encompassing a significant part of the Catalan and Basque linguistic regions under French sovereignty. Meanwhile, when considering Spanish borders with Morocco and Great Britain, the criterion typically used is not political. In the case of the former, geographical criteria take precedence as Ceuta and Melilla are not part of the Peninsula. In the latter, Iberian Studies tends to disregard British sovereignty over the Rock of Gibraltar. Consideration must also be given to whether the Principality of Andorra falls within the scope of Iberianness. To include it within the Peninsula would be to include a territory that belongs to the International Organization of La Francophonie, making French one of the main Iberian languages. To exclude it would be to overlook the only sovereign state in the world where Catalan has official status. It would not be too far-fetched to suspect that the choice of the border criterion of Iberianness—whether political or geographical—in practice serves a single objective: the linguistic exclusion of French, English, and Arabic from the field of Iberian Studies. Indeed, this is the same principle of exclusion that characterizes nineteenth-

century national literary histories. Here, Iberian Studies once again replicates the flaws of old Hispanism in its practice. The geographical criterion also excludes archipelagos linked politically and culturally to Spain, as Picornell (2019) has observed. This exclusion renders the status of a hypothetical Catalan Iberian Studies problematic, as it cannot be conceived of without the Balearic Islands for social and cultural reasons.

It is clear, then, that borders should be a central subject for Iberian Studies. Like Òscar Jané, we may insist that borders are shaped by capital cities as they become more evident the more one moves away from them and towards the administrative center, where they are observed on the map rather than on the ground. Inhabitants of the border, however, experience it as a space of interaction and contact.¹⁰ This is why Jané proposed the notion of *unborder* to refer to the resilient articulation of this space in the practices of its inhabitants, who suffer the consequences of sustained military and/or administrative intervention: “La identitat de la frontera es forja sobre una pell on els relleus i les reinvençions locals són, per instint de supervivència, una mostra resilient de l’adaptació o la capacitat de superar la frontera existent” [“The border identity is forged on a skin where local reliefs and reinventions stand, out of pure survival instinct, as an enduring sign of adaptation or the ability to overcome the existing border”] (2011, 28). The rough hide of the rhino again challenges the ideal unicorn of ordinary Iberian Studies and calls for reconsideration.¹¹ As Farinelli notes, “l’histoire de la géographie, c’est l’histoire de la confusion entre le modèle et la réalité” [“the history of geography is the history of confusion between the model and the reality”] (1989, 10). If Iberian Studies naturalizes the Peninsular map as a delimitation of the object of study, it will be acting like the chimeras critiqued by Gillespie. Reviewing the geographical boundary of Iberianness and advocating for the study of “unborder” dynamics would better align Iberian Studies with the issues identified from a Catalan perspective. Such a review would also bring Jané’s work into the discipline and make room for less common Iberian perspectives, such as those presented from Toulouse. Examples include the work of Michel Martínez, a specialist in Peninsular nationalisms, especially Aragonese nationalism, and Fabrice Corrons, who specializes in the study of Basque, Catalan, and Galician theater. Both areas of work are decentered with respect to the dominant interests coming out of the Spanish and Portuguese capitals (e.g. Corrons 2009; Martínez Pérez 2020). This twofold review of the boundaries of Iberianness would uncover new issues of great interest that have been overlooked by Iberian Studies so far, such as the relationship between Catalan, French, and Occitan cultures on both sides of the border.

3.3. The necessary visibility of minority cultures

One of the main goals of Iberian Studies has been to enhance the visibility of historically minoritized languages and literatures (Resina 2013, vii). In practice, however, state cultures have been given precedence for demographic and political reasons (Gimeno Ugalde and Pérez Isasi 2019, 58). The incorporation of Basque, Catalan, and Galician cultures as an object of study, although necessary and still incipient, continues to replicate the administrative structure of the Spanish State, which recognizes their co-official status in some territories. Some authors, like Gabilondo (2014, 50; 2019, 99), advocate for the inclusion of other languages with minimal recognition or institutionalization, such as Aragonese, Asturian, and Romani. It could be said that there are three linguistic levels within the Iberian

¹⁰ Antonio Sáez Delgado has frequently drawn attention to this situation on the border between Spain and Portugal, commonly referred to as “la Raya” (*apud*. Leal 2021, 135–36).

¹¹ The roughness of the border skin is apparent everywhere, including the border between Catalonia and Aragon, and has been thematized by a series of Catalan-speaking writers born in Aragon, such as Jesús Moncada and Francesc Serés, one of whose most acclaimed books is entitled *La pell de la frontera* [The border’s hide] (2014). On this topic, see Matas (2017; 2021, 27–64).

space: “first-class languages” supported by a state apparatus that guarantees their promotion; “second-class languages” that are minoritized but possess enough administrative structure to withstand extinction; and “third-class languages” that are preserved through effort and voluntarism, but barely receive any attention from the academy. This asymmetry owes to the national historiographic model, which naturalizes the correlation between territory, national community, language, and state. José Lambert proposed an alternative based on the study of linguistic maps. Although there are known minorities that would easily be recognized on the linguistic map, as is the case of the three co-official languages on the periphery of the Spanish State, there is a danger that the factual existence of a language may be confused with its institutionalization (1991, 68). The Belgian comparativist pointed out the difficulties inherent in using cartography to represent the phenomena of linguistic overlap, interactions, multilingualism, languages of migration, or languages with a limited written tradition.

From a Catalan perspective, there are several noteworthy cases of linguistic minorities. One is Aranese, which, despite having barely 5,000 speakers, has been one of the three official languages throughout the territory of Catalonia since 2006 (Carrera 2017, 176). Aranese consists of local variants of the Gascon dialect of the Occitan language spoken in France by about four million citizens, with a significant literary tradition dating back to the twelfth century. Recognized by Dante in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* in the early fourteenth century, Occitan literature drew more widespread attention when the Nobel Prize was awarded to Frédéric Mistral in 1904, marking one of only two instances in Nobel history of a literature without a state. Since 2002, the Aranese language has had the support of an Aranese Academy of the Occitan Language. The historical relations between Catalan and Occitan cultures were pivotal in the early stages of Catalan literature and have undergone periods of intensity, such as in the earlier part of the twentieth century. From the perspective of the interliterary communities described by Đurišin (1993) and often advocated by Iberian Studies, relations between Catalan and Occitan and French cultures have historically been more intense than with Spanish, Portuguese, Galician, and Basque cultures. This has an effect on historiography, as Martínez-Gil explains: “la historiografia catalana, no cal dir-ho, ha tingut una predilecció especial per l’occitanisme. S’ha pogut escriure una monumental *La il·lusió occitana* (Rafanell 2006), però la il·lusió ibèrica ha estat rebuda amb certa fredor” [“Catalan historiography, needless to say, has had a special predilection for Occitanism. Despite the appearance of the monumental work *The Occitan Illusion* (Rafanell 2006), the Iberian illusion has received a cold welcome”] (2016, 185). For these reasons, Occitan has aroused institutional interest in Catalonia. The University of Lleida, the only higher education institution in Spain to offer a Degree in Catalan and Occitan Studies, has had a Chair of Occitan Studies since 2005. UAB hosts the Occitan Archive, which regularly organizes the Occitan Conference. In Barcelona, the association Cercle d’Agermanament Occitano-Català, founded in 1977, holds Occitan language courses, book clubs, and lectures to promote Occitan culture. In 2023, the Language Services at UB began to offer Aranese courses. Against this backdrop, there is no valid argument for excluding Aranese from Iberian Studies and the work of many Catalan medievalists and researchers like August Rafanell should be considered integral to the field.

Drawing on Lambert’s perspective based on linguistic maps, another relevant case should be considered: the presence of the Portuguese language in Andorra, where there is a significant community of Portuguese emigrants. According to an official study, Portuguese ranks as the third mother tongue in Andorra behind Catalan and Spanish and ahead of French. As for everyday use, Portuguese is also the third most spoken language but accounts for a smaller proportion than Catalan or Spanish. This suggests the existence of a Catalan-Portuguese bilingualism that may be common among a large part of the population (Government of Andorra 2022). The relevance of the Portuguese community has led to diplomatic relations between Andorra and Portugal, particularly since 1994. The University

of Andorra has had a Camões Chair since 2017. By some irony of fate, an insignificant, almost unknown country like Andorra, which inspired the famous declaration by Eça de Queirós to Ramalho Ortigão: “Eu não tenho história, sou como a República do Vale de Andorra” [“I have no history, I am like the Republic of the Andorra Valley”] (1983, 162), is now a Portuguese linguistic enclave.

Finally, it is worth noting the presence of the Romani people in the Catalan-speaking region. On the few occasions that this community has been mentioned in Iberian Studies, it has been as a subaltern group represented through a legitimate culture, either from an imagological perspective (Cañadas Ortega 2016) or a Cultural Studies approach (López Castellano 2019). Despite its limited impact on literature and the declining status of its traditional language Romani, an Indo-European language originating from Sanskrit, Gypsy culture deserves attention within Catalan Iberian Studies. I would like to highlight the efforts of Ignasi-Xavier Adiego (2004), who has conducted a comparative study of Iberian dialects of Romani, and Eugeni Casanovas (2016), who has extensively researched the presence of Catalan gypsies in France, whose mother tongue is Catalan. The linguistic interferences between Romani and Catalan, Spanish, and French constitute a complex case that merits the attention of Iberian Studies scholars.¹²

4. Final scruples: disagreement over the meaning of “Iberian”

El que no sepa leer catalán, debe aprenderlo para conocer con Maragall a otros excelsos poetas y escritores. Como creo que es una obligación de todo español culto la de habituarse a leer portugués. Y cuenta que no soy de los que creen que el catalán y el portugués mismo tengan que persistir como lenguas vivas y de conversación y uso doméstico cotidiano en la Península. No oculto que mi deseo –y el deseo lleva aparejada la esperanza–, es que llegue un día en que no se hable en la Península española o ibérica –es decir, en España–, otra lengua que la española o castellana, con los matices que cada región le dé.

[Those who are unable to read Catalan must learn it in order to discover other excellent poets and writers with Maragall. Similarly, I view it as an obligation of every educated Spaniard to become accustomed to reading Portuguese. For the record, I am not among those who believe that Catalan and Portuguese themselves should persist as living languages of conversation and everyday domestic use on the Peninsula. I do not hide the fact that my desire—and desire brings hope to the fore—is that there will come a day when no other language besides Spanish or Castilian, with all its regional nuances, will be spoken on the Spanish or Iberian Peninsula, that is, in Spain.]

Miguel de Unamuno (1914) “A sad fact”

It is impossible to validate a univocal conception of Iberian Studies, as there exists no neutral external standpoint from which to comprehensively observe the subject of study. In a polycentric space characterized by multilateral relations like the Peninsula, the proposition of a unified field of study would reflect the hegemony of one perspective over others, justified by its supposed universality. Therefore, it is imperative to critically engage with a reflection on our own discourse from both a disciplinary and geocultural perspective. The exercise of situating one’s own perspective within the whole in which it operates is key to grasping the ideological implications of the position of enunciation. This was the vocation

¹² Sooner or later, cultural diversity from America, Asia, Africa, and other European countries will have to be included among the minority/minoritized cultures within the Catalan area, as Antoni Martí Monterde (2022, 210–13) has acknowledged.

of Saramago's trans-Iberian perspective, conceived as an awareness "of our place in the world" (*apud*. Sáez Delgado 2020, 58). This cognitive cartography (Jameson 1991) can help us resist the temptation to universalize the concepts that founded Iberian Studies, as if they had a delocalized global validity that enables their univocal circulation without changing their meaning. Just as the term "global" does not mean the same thing in New York as in Quito, Belgrade, Hanoi, or Mogadishu, the same is true for terms like "Iberia" or "Iberian", which are understood in different ways in Lisbon, Santiago de Compostela, Bilbao, Madrid, Palma, Toulouse, and Barcelona, and mean different things according to the discipline, background, and ideology of the researchers in question. In the words of Cerdà, "an Iberian space (...) requires a multipolar approach among all Peninsular and transcontinental Iberian cultures" (Cerdà 2021, 357).

Put differently, it is crucial that we challenge preconceived ideas of a static identity associated with the concept of *Iberian*, opting instead to acknowledge its inherent difference and integrate the multiple perspectives of Iberianness into every comparative analysis. This difference is deeply political because, as Jacques Rancière explains, politics arises from disagreement over the meaning of the words that form the basis of the rationality of a communicative situation, such as *universal* suffrage or *democracy*. This leads to a situation where interlocutors understand, and at the same time do not understand, the same thing when using the same words (1998, xi). From this point of view, within the term *Iberian* there lies a disagreement that results in a different understanding when the words "Iberian Studies" are spoken in Catalonia compared to when they are uttered in other geographical locations. As Rancière shows (1998, 26–9), the disagreement ultimately lies in the demand to be considered by those who are not counted; it is based on an exercise of distortion of the tacit and prior agreement as to the sensitive configuration of the whole and its parts, such as the Iberian whole and its constituent elements. This distortion brings forth the part that was not considered, the part that could be seen and understood—or worse, objectified as a matter of study—but did not become an interlocutor in the debate surrounding the definition of the whole. Catalan Iberian Studies could contribute to this political perspective as it situates the conflict in the very constitution of the new field of study and the sensitive distribution of its constituent elements: minoritized Peninsular cultures, but also other differential instances, as we have argued previously.

In my opinion, this should be the comparative spirit presiding over the discipline. As long as Iberian Studies tolerates peripheral cultures but mostly delegates their study to native informants, and as long as the inertia of academic institutions prompts research to be published in Spanish or English, the new discipline will be complicit in an imperialist dynamic not unlike the one that led Miguel de Unamuno to say that every Spaniard should learn to read Catalan and Portuguese as dead languages, as we saw in the epigraph to this conclusion. Ultimately, only a multipolar comparativism will withstand the homogenizing inertia of states and globalization, make it possible to yield the floor to those parts not previously taken into account, and generate spaces and occasions "to correct one another", as Goethe inscribed in the spirit of *Weltliteratur* (1850, 432). From this perspective, Iberian Studies could take up Armando Gnisci's (2000, 44) call to Comparative Literature as a discipline that obliges us to decolonize ourselves.

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