Estudios Irlandeses, Issue 21.2, 2026, pp. 81-85.
https://doi.org/10.24162/EI2026-15185
AEDEI

Book Review
Marzena Keating: *Continuity and Change in the Irish Culinary History and Culture, 1922–1973*

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Abstract. By drawing on cookbooks, culinary pamphlets, women's magazines, as well as semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in the County Donegal and County Meath *Gaeltachts*, Marzena Keating explores the formulation of Irish culinary culture in the first five decades of Irish independence. Her book, entitled *Continuity and Change in the Irish Culinary History and Culture, 1922–1973*, incorporates both individual and collective experiences and highlights the links connecting food with images of Irish identity, memory, and gender. Thus, the monograph addresses the complexity of twentieth-century Irish culinary experiences in an interdisciplinary framework, by utilising the sources and methods of historical archival research, food anthropology and the sociology of food.

Key Words. Irish food history, food anthropology, sociology of food, culinary culture, *Gaeltacht*, Irish women.

Resumen. A partir de libros de cocina, folletos culinarios, revistas femeninas, así como de entrevistas en profundidad semiestructuradas realizadas en las Gaeltacht de los condados de Donegal y Meath, Marzena Keating explora la configuración de la cultura culinaria irlandesa durante las cinco primeras décadas de la independencia de Irlanda. Su libro, titulado *Continuity and Change in the Irish Culinary History and Culture, 1922–1973*, incorpora tanto experiencias individuales como colectivas y pone de relieve los vínculos que conectan la alimentación con las imágenes de la identidad irlandesa, la memoria y el género. De este modo, la monografía aborda la complejidad de las experiencias culinarias irlandesas del siglo XX desde un enfoque interdisciplinar, mediante el uso de fuentes y métodos procedentes de la investigación histórica de archivo, la antropología de la alimentación y la sociología de la alimentación.

Palabras clave. Historia culinaria irlandesa, antropología culinaria, sociología culinaria, cultura culinaria, Gaeltacht, mujeres irlandesas.

ISSN 1699-311X

One of the latest additions to Irish food studies, *Continuity and Change in the Irish Culinary History and Culture, 1922–1973*, stands out both in terms of its scope and its approach. While the most notable more scholarly attention has been devoted to the Great Famine and the preceding periods, Marzena Keating's book explores the 50 years between the establishment of the Irish Free State (1922) and Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community (1973). It focuses on the importance of continuity and change when assessing how Irish culinary culture actually "mirrored the social, cultural, economic, and religions characteristics of this particular period", stressing that culinary issues also reflected the formation of Irish national identity during the first five decades of independence (11).

Thanks to its well-justified interdisciplinary approach, the book efficiently incorporates both individual and collective experiences, by drawing on cookbooks, culinary pamphlets, women's magazines, as well as semi-structured in-depth interviews. In other words, besides relying on historical archival research, Keating also utilised the sources and methods of other disciplines such as food anthropology or the sociology of food, the combination of which proved to be an effective tool in identifying the ties that link food with identity, memory, and gender (12). After Appendix 1 presents a chronological list of cookbooks, culinary guidebooks, pamphlets, and textbooks published between 1922 and 1973 (a valuable resource for any scholar venturing deeper into the field), Appendix 2 sheds further light on Keating's sources and methods. The interviews, in particular, offer unique insights into the personal experiences of two *Gaeltacht* regions, as "Irish traditions seem to have a strong presence" both in County Meath (the villages of Ráth Cairn and Baile Ghib) and Gaoth Dobhair in County Donegal (the island of Inis Meáin, Gabhla Island, and the village of An Clochán) (235). Ultimately, as the author explains, it was the data gathered from the interviews, cookbooks, and women's magazines that dictated the main themes of the book (13).

Instead of providing a chronological overview, Keating utilised Alan Warde's (1997) meaning-focused approach and concentrated on four major themes, which formed the basis of the chapters and thus the structure of the book as well. Chapter 1 is dedicated to the categories of tradition and novelty, while the main focus of Chapter 2 is on feasting and fasting, highlighting the relationship between food and religion, hence echoing Warde's categories of tradition, novelty, indulgence, and extravagance (24). Chapter 3 discusses the impact of economy on food production and consumption, considering different solutions to dealing with scarcity and rising prices. Notably, this assessment is not limited to the years of the Emergency (1939-45); instead, the chapter traces the changes and continuities in Irish approaches to dealing with economic hardship throughout the entire examined period. Finally, Chapter 4 addresses the influence of scientific and technological transformations on the culinary culture of Ireland, again, with three of Warde's categories (convenience, care, and health) in mind (25). Crucially, all four chapters draw attention to the role of women in relation to each theme: in the first, by examining the gendered division of domestic labour; in the second, by explaining the increased expectations of women at times of celebrations; in the third, by assessing women's role in efficient household management; and in the fourth, by exploring the expectations of women in relation to convenience, care, and health (24-25).

The title of Chapter 1, besides referencing the ambivalent attitude of humans to novel foods, ranging from attraction to reluctance, also points to the emotional connections people may form with traditional foods. The first part of the chapter refines our understanding of what may constitute "traditional foods" in the Irish culinary context, going back to the dawn of agriculture and Neolithic farmers. The readers can gain further insights into scholarly debates on the applicability of a postcolonial framework of analysis when exploring Irish culinary history (28), before considering the significance of national and regional potato dishes (such as colcannon, boxty, pandy, stampy, and potato cakes) as well as familiarising themselves with a

variety of cooking methods and utensils used in the examined period. Respondents' memories demonstrate how important it is to investigate certain foodstuffs (and especially potatoes) in their proper the historical context, creating connections between collective and individual experiences (31-33). Besides sharing meals, Keating reminds us, the slaughtering of pigs also "fostered interconnectedness and solidarity among community members" – a key aspect in the Irish culinary tradition. Culinary texts from the period demonstrate an interest in offal (drisheen, tripe, crubeens) in addition to pork, ham, and bacon, despite the former's strong association with the poor (42-47). Similarly, references to game and seafood also add to our understanding of what constituted traditional Irish dishes, highlighting that, interestingly, rabbit and hare dishes had been particularly popular before (*myxomatosis* was introduced in) 1954 (50). The link between social class and the consumption of certain types of seafood has already been noted by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (2006); respondents' accounts nuance this picture, emphasising the importance of simplicity when consuming shellfish (55-57). Furthermore, the chapter also documents the role of bread baking traditions in strengthening familial bonds and serving as a symbol of hospitality (65). This did not mean a total disregard of novelties as demonstrated by the creative uses of porridge, sugar, raisins, or spices in bread throughout the researched period (70-73). Additionally, the chapter addresses the centrality of butter in Irish culinary history through the ages besides pointing to the fact that even cheeses of foreign origin such as cheddar are often treated as typical Irish products (73-77). It is the final segment of Chapter 1, dedicated to ethnic cuisines and eating out, which best illustrates the perceived contrast between traditions and novelties through magazines like *Good Cooking* (which published plenty of curry recipes), cookery programmes such as "Monica Sheridan's Kitchen and "Home for Tea", or ethnic (Indian or Chinese) restaurants (78-83).

Although the impact of the Roman Catholic Church may be the most obvious factor when considering the religious significance of food in Ireland, Chapter 2 also draws attention to the persistence of ancient, pagan Irish feasts and celebrations (85). Substituting meat to adhere to traditional religious fasting rules was a reoccurring theme in post-independence cookbooks and women's magazines, as well as in the narratives of *Gaeltacht* inhabitants. Nevertheless, abstaining from meat was not necessarily out of the ordinary; rather, it was an everyday experience for the poorer classes. Still, even stricter rules applied to fasting days with herring and kippers as the most popular choices but mashed potatoes, pasta, cheese and eggs also made frequent appearances (88-94). Furthermore, the chapter explores how nostalgia for the tastes and smells associated with the homeland (in the case of emigrants) or with childhood memories appear to be strong in connection with religious feasts such as Hallowe'en (barm brack), Easter (simnel cake) and Christmas (97-106). Keating highlights that the latter was particularly notable not only due to its association with abundance and indulgence (often featuring alcohol) but also as a result of the heightened importance of the commensality (107-10). It is worth pointing out, Keating argues, that even though Christmas cake is not listed among the traditional Irish foods, it is still frequently mentioned in cookbooks, culinary magazines and respondents' narratives, similarly to the Christmas pudding, which only became an integral part of Irish Christmas celebrations in the late nineteenth century (110-12). The chapter concludes by emphasising that a crucial dimension of major celebrations was the intensified expectations women faced not only in terms of food preparation but also as far as hospitality was concerned, explaining, however, that despite the demanding nature of these tasks, food could also serve as a tool for empowerment for women (116-21).

Chapter 3 reflects on how Warde's category of economy applies to the Irish context in the researched period (especially during, but not limited to, the Emergency, 1939-45). It pays particular attention to frugality as a virtue of the good housewife (123-32), seasonality, food storage, and preservation methods before and after the rapid modernisation of the 1960s (132-49), and coping with food scarcity by minimising waste and performing food substitutions (149-

62). The "practical, economical, and gustatory properties of seasonal produce" and how these manifested in women's magazines and cookbooks throughout the period is a particularly interesting addition to the chapter (149).

Chapter 4 offers answers to how modernisation impacted Irish culinary culture not merely after the 1960s but since the declaration of independence. What is more, it is revealed that the promotion of culinary knowledge and skills among girls actually had started even earlier than the establishment of the Irish Free State (163-65). Still, educating housewives was not limited to the school system (164-74); some women also found magazine recipes and food-related articles beneficial, depending on their economic situation (172). Respondents' accounts reveal, however, that women learned the most through observation and participation in cooking, making food "a vehicle for exchanging family traditions and as a passage through which culinary customs and habits travelled from one generation to another" (174). Knowledge of healthy eating and the role of food hygiene and proper nutrition were closely related to this issue as child malnourishment was a serious concern throughout the examined period (175-90). The final segment of the chapter investigates the importance of convenience in Irish culinary culture, detailing how housewives could save time and labour with convenience foods (prepared meals, stock cubes, cake mixes) and modern kitchen equipment (190-210). This is where the reader can encounter one of the most memorable quotes from the book, when learning that in contrast to the majority of cookery books, Maura Laverty's *Kind Cooking* (1946) openly praised the benefits of canned food: "Tinned soup is like whisky. It can blow your budget to bits if you take it straight. Mixed with other and less costly things, it won't ruin you" (*Kind Cooking*, 1946: 110). Notably, Laverty used instant food as an ingredient and not as a replacement for home-cooking; women's magazines went further since they openly promoted industrially produced foods (208-09). Chapter 4 concludes by demonstrating that the spread of convenience food and modern kitchen appliances did not challenge the established gender roles after all: the preparation of convenience foods – however convenient – was still the housewife's responsibility and whatever time (and labour) women had saved, that was to be spent caring mainly for their families (210).

While historiography has traditionally characterised the first half a century of Irish independence as inward-looking, it is worth keeping in mind that Irish food history did not exist in a vacuum as both foodstuffs and people kept crossing the borders of the state, resulting in the complexity of culinary experiences. *Continuity and Change in the Irish Culinary History and Culture, 1922–1973* offers a thorough analysis of this time period, drawing on evidence from cookbooks, women's magazines and interviews, which also remind us that migration from and to Ireland remained notable throughout the 20th century. It bears noting that influences associated with other countries' culinary traditions also contributed to the popularity of several foodstuffs and dishes (from spiced beef to plum pudding), which, albeit not native to Ireland, still came to be "recognised by many as native dishes" (27). Unearthing the complexity of 20th-century Irish culinary culture is at the very heart of Marzena Keating's book. Similarly to *Irish Food History: A Companion*, edited by Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire and Dorothy Cashman and published the previous year, *Continuity and Change in the Irish Culinary History and Culture, 1922–1973* is a long-awaited addition to the field of Irish food history, as both compel us to listen to – often unheard – "food voices" unique to Ireland in this period (Keating 2025: 4, 121, 211, 234).

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Received: 01/10/2025 Final version accepted: 15/02/2026

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