

Est.  
1841

YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

Lawson Welsh, Sarah ORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2270-057X> (2018) 'Caribbean Cravings: Literature and food in the Anglophone Caribbean'. In: Piatti-Farnell, Lorna and Donna, Brien, (eds.) The Routledge Companion to Food and Literature. Routledge

Downloaded from: <http://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/2090/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

<https://www.routledge.com/The-Routledge-Companion-to-Literature-and-Food/Piatti-Farnell-Brien/p/book/9781138048430>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repository Policy Statement](#)

# RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at [ray@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:ray@yorks.ac.uk)

## ***The Routledge Companion to Literature and Food***

Edited by Lorna Piatti-Farnell and Donna Lee Brien

Name: Dr Sarah Lawson Welsh

Affiliation and job title: York St John University, Associate Professor and Reader in English and Postcolonial Literature

### **Caribbean Cravings: literature and food in the Anglophone Caribbean.**

“Hungry belly an Fullbelly/ dohn walk same pass/ Fullbelly always a-tell Emptybelly/ ‘Keep Heart.’” (James Berry, ‘Caribbean Proverb Poem 1’, 1984, 3).

“My mother and her friends’ conversations were like boil-up, with plantains and cassava and other kinds of ground food and salted meat thrown into a pot of water, in no particular order, and boiled until the pot is a steaming, bubbling, savoury cuisine.” (Ivory Kelly, ‘The Thing We Call Love’ in *Pepperpot: Best New Stories from the Caribbean*, 2014, 80).<sup>i</sup>

“As Trinis we like our picong (piquancy) in both our food and our talk. If there is one thing we are serious about it is our pleasures.” (John Lyons, *Cook-up in a Trini Kitchen*, 2009, 9)

“Let us then speak of the Caribbean that we can see, touch, smell, hear, taste; the Caribbean of the senses” (Antonio Benitez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 1996, 9-10).

The academic study of food has undoubtedly been one of the growth areas of the last twenty-five years. However, Caribbean Studies has been very slow to embrace the study of food, writing and culinary practices in a Caribbean context. The popularity of Food Studies, both as an area of academic enquiry and in terms of a growing audience of more general readers, is evident from the burgeoning number of publications which cross these audiences, such as those which examine single foods in their various historical, cultural and global contexts.<sup>ii</sup> However, very few studies explicitly address the relationship of food and literature.<sup>iii</sup> Strikingly, in her essay, ‘Food and Literature: an overview’ in Ken Albala (Ed.) *The Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies* (2009, 122-134) literary scholar Joan Fitzpatrick fails to mention a single non-European text or study, other than a fleeting mention of Sharmila Sen’s (2008) critical essay on curry in a Victorian text set in India; indeed, in Fitzpatrick’s account ‘Literature’ is read as both thoroughly canonical and as exclusively British. This oversight in an apparently *international handbook*, reveals the doubled blind spots of current food studies: an unquestioning canonicity in many studies on food and literature on the one hand, and a rather unproblematic concept of the connection between food and writing as a symptomatic or corroborative one rather than the more complex or vexed one it actually is, on the other.

The Caribbean has a long and multi-layered history as a region of trade and encounter, colonial settlement, movement and migration, cultural admixture, syncretism and creolization.<sup>iv</sup> Importantly, the Caribbean is not just ‘out there’ but ‘here’ as well; it cannot be easily contained within geo-cultural borders but exceeds its own limits. Thus, for example, many of the Caribbean’s most successful writers (such as Man Booker prize-winning Jamaican novelist Marlon James) are diasporically located in Britain, America or Canada and some of its most important cultural traditions (such as Reggae and Dancehall) are now global commodities. For Caribbean postmodern theorist Antonio Benitez-Rojo, the Caribbean is ‘the Repeating Island’ (1996), a fluid space of plurality, difference and discontinuity which is yet paradoxically united by certain ‘endlessly

repeating' experiences, practices and phenomena. Building upon Benitez-Rojo's idea of the Caribbean as a "cultural meta-archipelago without center and without limits" (1996: 9) this chapter argues that the Caribbean is also a 'moveable feast' where different ethnicities, cultures and cuisines (Amerindian, European, African, Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern among them) have created some unique literary as well as culinary practices. Drawing on a richly diverse tradition of Caribbean writings, this chapter shows how the creation of food and the creation of narrative are intimately linked cultural practices in the Caribbean and its diasporas. Historically, Caribbean writers have explored, defined and re-affirmed their different cultural, ethnic, caste, class and gender identities by writing about what, when and how they eat. Images of feeding, feasting, fasting and other food rituals and practices, as articulated in a range of Caribbean writings, constitute a powerful force of social cohesion and cultural continuity. Moreover, food is often central to the question of what it means to be Caribbean, especially in diasporic and globalized contexts. The region has one of the longest histories of global connectedness and globalizing processes in relation to food. But what happens when food 'travels', and how do diasporic writers negotiate their identities through and with food? How do contemporary Caribbean writers navigate tensions between the local and the global, foodways of the past and of the present and how are concepts of culinary 'tradition' and 'authenticity' articulated in their writing?

This chapter considers not just literary texts but historical accounts, journals, memoirs, testimonies, essays and other writings on food. Moving beyond the geopolitical aspects of food histories, an area amply covered by monumental studies such as Sidney Mintz' *Sweetness and Power* (1986), and studies of micro-level practices of food preparation and consumption, as foregrounded in a number of anthropological and qualitative sociological studies of food, it seeks instead to focus on the interplay between food and writing, what Anu Lakhan has recently termed the "call and response between food and culture" (2008). Lakhan's term is useful for the purposes of this essay as it describes the relationship between food and writing in a way which suggests both a politics of production and consumption and a distinctively Caribbean literary and culinary aesthetic of orality and communality. As Austin Clarke recalls in his 'Barbadian memoir' *Pigtails and Breadfruit*:

As a boy I was surrounded by women – mother, countless aunts, women cousins and all the neighbourhood women, my mother's friends – women who were all continuously involved in some confounding and miraculous feat in the kitchen... I can still see those women performing feats of culinary magic with all the arrogance, intolerance to criticism, and competitiveness that is peculiar to persons whose knowledge is based exclusively on an oral tradition, on myth and on the inheritance of customs." (1999, 4 & 41)

Caribbean cooks do not generally use cookbooks but rely on oral tradition, custom and improvisation, as is the case amongst many African-Americans. <sup>v</sup>Doris Witt's *Black Hunger: Soul Food and America* (2004) and her 2007 chapter, 'From Fiction to Foodways: working at the Intersections of African American Literary and Culinary Studies' suggest as much and provide a useful, potentially transferable methodology for a study of the relationship between food and literature in a Caribbean context. However, this chapter is deliberately promiscuous in utilizing a wider range of approaches and methodologies drawn from historical, literary, cultural and feminist theories, food studies and postcolonial studies.

The Caribbean's first cooks were Amerindians (such as the Arawaks and Caribs) who navigated and settled in the region long before the advent of Europeans or enslaved Africans. The culinary tradition of *Barbacoa* (what the Spanish later named *Barbecue*), the practice of marinating and then roasting meats over open coals is almost certainly Amerindian in origin, as are many culinary practices still found in the Caribbean today. <sup>vi</sup> As Hulme and Iversen (1998), Warnes (2004) and, most recently, Valerie Loichot (2013) have shown, the idea of auto-ingestion or cannibalism had become closely

associated with the indigenous peoples of this region even before Columbus's infamous encounter with Carib Indians, though there is little evidence to suggest that cannibalism was actually practiced by them in any regular or secular context. Loichot argues, not altogether persuasively, that the start of the long association between the Caribbean, eating and consumption was Columbus's mishearing of 'Carib' as 'Canibal':

Metastazing from this linguistic error, Europeans and other western colonizers, tourists, and readers have associated the Antilles with the primal act of eating, whether in the figure of the cannibal, or in that of its tamed counterpart, the Caribbean itself – its land, people, and language – all reduced to delectable objects: “cannibal islands,” “spice islands,” “succulent women,” “luscious beaches,” “peppery language.” (Loichot, 2013, vii)<sup>vii</sup>

Food features centrally in a number of Amerindian creation narratives, such as the story of the tapir and the Tree of Life which is the subject of 'The Tree of Life', a poem by Jamaican, Olive Senior (1995: 91-2).<sup>viii</sup> In other Amerindian narratives, food and eating are used as metaphors for copulation, often with animals acting as the animistic bridges between the human and the spirit world. Although writers such as Wilson Harris, Pauline Melville, Grace Nichols and Olive Senior have variously explored the mythical, cultural and culinary legacies of the Amerindians in their writing, actual Amerindian oral narratives have been much less widely anthologised, translated or studied in comparison to those of other ethnic groups in the Caribbean.<sup>ix</sup>

The Caribbean's first narratives, then, were oral. Early additions to this oral literature were the Anancy (Anansi)<sup>x</sup> tales of the spider trickster figure (half man, half spider) which West African slaves brought with them to the Caribbean and continued to adapt and develop on the sugar plantations.<sup>xi</sup> Anancy tales are often read simply as folk tales but in fact they originated and functioned as carefully coded survivalist narratives amongst Africans and then slave populations in the Caribbean. They tell of how the wily, cunning, verbally dexterous figure of Anancy repeatedly survives by outwitting bigger, more ferocious or physically stronger foes (e.g. Alligator, Snake, Tiger) with his combination of adaptiveness, wit and guile; symbolically he thereby represents survival in the times of famine or death or slave resistance to an oppressive plantation regime. Unsurprisingly, given the survivalist function of these trickster tales, such stories often feature food or more accurately, food shortage.<sup>xii</sup> Anancy, “the trickster strategist of a series of oral stories dealing with food shortage and acquisition... eats while others starve.” (Jennings 2008, 102). In Beckwith's “Dry-Head and Anansi” for example, Anansi manages to trick his wife into allowing him to eat a whole pig as a “cure” whilst in Walter Jekyll's “Annancy in Crab Country” (1966) Anansi poses as a preacher in order to lure delicious-looking Crab to a ‘baptism’ in boiling water.<sup>xiii</sup> Food in these stories, is then, literally (and literarily) a matter of life and death as story and food come together in a functional but also fully realized and living cultural form.

In “How the Spider got a Bald Head” in R.S Rattray's 1930 collection of *Akan-Ashanti Folk Tales*, “Anansi gets his comeuppance for eating at a funeral while he is pretending to be fasting in honor of the dead. He is about to be caught eating some hot beans, so he quickly hides the beans in his hat but loses all his hair as the beans burn his scalp as a result.” (Marshall 23-4) It is, as Marshall suggests, a tale which “reinforces Asante social structure by showing the problems that can befall those who defy customs.” (24). Marshall notes how “the majority of [Asante Anansi] tales start with the description of famine, with Anansi in desperate search for food...the prime focus of the[se] stories is the growing of crops and the desirability of meat”, especially as an offering to potential mates. (27). “Jamaican Anansi stories also start with a description of lack and suffering”; “Anansi, because he can always find ways to overcome the most seemingly insurmountable challenges, is conjured in life- threatening situations when food and water are in short supply, and death is

imminent.”(27). Indeed, “The Jamaican Anansi, is obsessed with food”...motivated by his stomach and will steal from own children [as well as others] to feed his insatiable appetite.” (77-78)

That Anancy tales – like the food cultures of the Caribbean - are living and creolized rather than fixed, inherited forms is evidenced in the tale of “Anansi and Sorrel” (Bennett 1979). Out of a context of lack (Anancy has nothing to take to the Christmas Eve Morning Grand market), accident (he flings some red plants he finds into a pot of boiling water) and improvisation (he tries adding sugar, ginger and cinnamon) Anancy inadvertently invents the classic Jamaican Christmas drink of sorrel, itself a symbol of Jamaican cultural identity. As Marshall observes, it is an innovative adaptation of African hibiscus drinks given a new form and context. (49) Indeed, gradually Caribbean creole food such as salt fish, scallions and banana replaced African foodstuffs such as fu-fu, palm wine and palm nuts in Anancy tales thereby registering a new creolized Caribbean cultural identity. (Marshall, 49-50)

The other main sources from this early period are white planter and travellers’ accounts of life in the Caribbean<sup>xiv</sup>, many of which reveal interesting attitudes to new, exotic, familiar, imported and creolized foods as well as the ways in which food availability and food choices were linked to race, ethnicity and social hierarchies in the Caribbean colonies. *Caribbeana*, Thomas Krise’s 1999 collection of early Caribbean writings includes a number of texts which note such early foodways and food practices, and which register European responses to food, whether indigenous or naturalized, in the Caribbean. Striking amongst them is English journalist, Edward Ward’s satirical travelogue ‘*A Trip to Jamaica*’ (1696), a European account of the Caribbean which parodies the ‘kind of promotional travel narrative that characterized reports from the settlements in the Americas’ (Krise: 77). In ‘Of Their Provisions’, Ward constructs Caribbean foodstuffs and foodways as utterly bewildering if not repellent and unhealthy to the European, using tropes of exoticism and alienation rather than commensality to describe them:

The chiefest of their provisions is *Sea Turtle*, or *Toad in a shall*, stew’d in its own Gravy; its Lean is as white as a Green-sickness Girl, its fat of a Calves-turd Colour, and is excellently good to put a stranger into a Flux and purge out part of those ill Humours it infallibly creates...they have *Beef* without fat, Lean Mutton without Gravy, and Fowles as dry as the udder of an Old Woman, and as tough as a stake from the haunches of a Super-annuated cart horse...

They make a rare *Soop* they call *Pepper-pot*; it’s an excellent breakfast for a *Salamander*, or a good preventative for a *Mountebanks Agent*, who eats Fire one day that he may get better Victuals the next. Three Spoonfuls so inflamed my Mouth, that I devour’d a peck of *Horse-Radish*, and drank after a Gallon of *Brandy* and *Gunpowder*, (*Dives* like) I could not have been more importunate for a Drop of Water to coole my tongue...

They have *Oranges*, *Lemons*, *limes*, and several other Fruits, as *Sharp* and *Crabbed* a themselves, not given them as a *Blessing*, but a *Curses*, for eating so many Sower things, generates a *Corroding Slime* in the Bowels, and is one great occasion of that fatal And Intolerable Distemper, *The Dry Belly-Ach*; which in a Fortnight, or Three Weeks, takes away the use of their limbs, that they are forc’d to be led about by *Negro*’s. (Krise, 88-90)

Ward’s strategy here is to separate himself from the white planter class whose culinary practices and tastes he satirizes. Without exception, Caribbean foods and dishes are found to be inferior to that of Europe: too at variance with European norms; too tough (as Lewis, 214 also notes), oily, hot or sour for the more moderate and ‘refined’ European palate. However, if we read against this dominant grain, Ward’s account also reveals the emergence of a counter-narrative, the story of a nation or a region being told through its food, an identity being formed based, in part, on what people eat. In this reading, food practices act to mirror wider patterns of social encounter and change in the

Caribbean as both colonizers and, to a lesser extent, slaves, adapted their food patterns to a new environment.<sup>xv</sup> Ward's response of disgust can be read alongside other accounts which register curiosity, adoption, rejection, synthesis, transculturation and creolization as different groups respond to each other and to foodstuffs and food practices both familiar and unknown. Read in this alternative way, Ward's passage inscribes some instances of early markers of white Creole identity as culturally *Caribbean* rather than European: the taste for the indigenous meat of the turtle and for the classically Caribbean African-derived 'one pot' meal of Pepperpot. When Ward notes the turtle served in its shell as a favourite set piece or culinary performance of the most sumptuous plantocracy tables, he strikes upon an early emblem of Jamaicaness (Higson 2008, 6 & 8), a way in which early white Creole identity was defined and practised.

As Sarah Lawson Welsh (2014a) and Lars Eckstein (2001) have shown, Caribbean novels such as Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* (2010) and Caryl Phillips' *Cambridge* (1993) rework some of these earlier sources in the form of neo-slave narratives or historiographic metafiction. They also offer a detailed exploration of the representation of food and social order in the pre-emancipation period. Indeed, these two novels, with their doubled historical narratives, prove especially illuminating of this unfixed and shifting relationship between food and culture or social order. Both novels feature black hunger and white Creole plenitude, different kinds of 'illiteracy' and authorship, and both stage fictional explorations and reworkings of white Creole and slave attitudes to food and foodways in a Caribbean plantation context.<sup>xvi</sup>

The social ritual of the formal dinner party was an important part of the relationship between food and culture for the planter classes, since it was the main, if not the only way, in which this class met socially and exchanged news, views, food and drink. In this context, the range, kinds and quality - as well as quantity - of food and drink offered to others in the same racial and social group became very closely freighted with particular distinctions of taste and associations linked to status, as Levy's novel, in particular, testifies. In *The Long Song*, Andrea Levy wryly comments on the extraordinary range as well as plenitude of foodstuffs grown, imported and eaten by the white Creole and planter class in the Caribbean, as documented in texts such as Long (1776), Lewis (1834), Carmichael (1833) and especially Nugent (1801-5 [1905]), through the fictional character of the English woman, Caroline Mortimer. Caroline has lately arrived in Jamaica, to live with her brother, plantation owner John Howarth, who married into Creole society (much like the Rochester figure in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* [1966]) but has recently been widowed. When she first arrives on the island, Caroline is keen to try and to taste local foodstuffs and West Indian dishes:

Her appetite, which she had feared she would never regain after her ravaging voyage... was now returning. And fresh and adventurous it was too. Why she thought the mango the loveliest of fruit - juicy and sweet. True, it did have the taste of a peach dipped in turpentine...but she was not a timid person, too scared to try these new experiences...She told her brother, 'If turtle is considered fine food in this foreign place then I must taste it, even if only the once.' She wanted to try everything...Bring on the duck, guinea birds and jack fish, for Mrs Caroline Mortimer was eager to nibble upon their bones. Even breadfruit destined for the slaves' table. (22-24)

In this and related passages, Levy foregrounds Caroline's prodigious appetite and social ambitions within Jamaican Planter society - as evidenced by her sumptuously spread dinner tables and, in particular, her elaborate plans for a grand Christmas dinner - in order to stage some extraordinarily evocative, as well as comically subversive passages which explore both black and white attitudes to food and food consumption in a plantation context. Whilst we should note *The Long Song's* status as complex amalgam of contemporary historical materials and non-contemporary fictionalized text<sup>xvii</sup>, this part of Levy's novel usefully highlights not only vast discrepancies in patterns of

consumption between planters and their slaves, the hunger and plenitude existing in close proximity in the plantation environment, but also dramatizes the small but daily acts of resistance, on the part of the slaves, to the authority of their white masters and mistresses, through practices such as deliberate misdirection and pilfering. (Levy 72-3, 96-9<sup>xviii</sup>.) Like the coded survivalist strategies of the Anancy tale, food acts here as a 'volatile practice'<sup>xix</sup> capable of filling a void and performing resistance to white Creole power.

In all cases, the figure of the black cook was key both as a nurturing figure but also as a subversive and potentially dangerous agent of poisoning, as hinted in Grace Nichols' poem, 'The Fat Black Woman Remembers' (1984, 9). Mrs Carmichael explained the clash between old and new foodways and patterns of consumption through the figure of the cook, usually a creole or African man. Ilari Berti (2012) has argued for the importance of the Great House kitchen as a 'site of creolization': 'consuming different foods was a common habit and not only gave rise to new practices of eating but generated dynamic spaces of transculturation'. Caribbean texts which explore the role of the cook in this context include Andrew Lindsay's *Illustrious Exile* (2006), Diana McCauley's *Huracan* (2012) and Marlon James' *The Book of Night Women* (2009). The latter centres around Lilith, a house slave employed in the Estate House kitchen. Employment as a 'house-slave' was often viewed as preferential to the harsh conditions endured by 'field slaves' (and carried the additional inducement of access to a wider quantity and quality of food in the form of leftovers and food pilfering) but it also made female slaves such as the fictional Lilith especially vulnerable to the brutal physical and sexual abuse of white male inhabitants and their guests. In Anthony Kellman's historical novel, *Tracing Jaja* (2006) Becca is employed as a house servant to an elderly African King exiled in Barbados and the two start an unlikely relationship based on companionship and Becca's excellent – and fortifying - Bajan cooking. Here Becca's cooking "gives body" (Mehta 2009, 94) to both the sick Jaja, who is revived by the meals she prepares for him, and to the text as language, corporeality, feeding and consumption are entwined.

Writing about the cultivation, preparation, cooking and eating of food (often in a commensal and/or gendered spaces and settings such as 'the yard' or outside communal cooking space in C.L.R James' classic short story 'Triumph' (1929) or the kitchen table of Paule Marshall's eponymous autobiographical essay<sup>xx</sup> are key ways in which Caribbean writers have historically explored, defined and re-affirmed their different national, cultural, ethnic, caste, class and gender identities. Indeed, the tropes of feeding, feasting, fasting (and other food rituals and practices) are articulated in a range of Caribbean writings and constitute an important source of identity and a powerful force of social cohesion and cultural continuity (e.g. food culture promotes an attachment to an original and territorially-based homeland). In Ivory Kelly's short story, 'This Thing We Call Love' the young female protagonist observes that "My mother and her friends' conversations were like boil-up, with plantains and cassava and other kinds of ground food and salted meat thrown into a pot of water, in no particular order, and boiled until the pot is a steaming, bubbling, savoury cuisine." (*Peppercot*, 2014, 80). Arguably, this close connection between "cooking and storytelling as performative rituals" (Mehta 2009, 98) is especially pronounced in a Caribbean context, where orality is still key to understanding the literary and culinary cultures.

Towards the end of his classic bildungsroman, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), George Lamming describes the preparation, cooking and eating of a final, special meal between G and his mother before the former departs from his home island of Barbados for Trinidad. This scene is characteristic of the ways in which food is used in Caribbean literature to explore and reaffirm particular national, cultural, gender, generational, ethnic and class identities in a Caribbean context. The mother comments to her son:

‘An’ when I think to myself,’ she said, ‘that it is probably the last good meal I’ll give you in this life my heart hurts me to think that that vagabond [a black cat] nearly walk off with my fish. ‘Cause when you’ll get a meal like this again only God knows’...

‘I think they cook in Trinidad,’ I said. I was uncertain of the result, but the strain between us had passed and I took the risk of speaking frankly. ‘They cook all over the world,’ she said, ‘but ‘tis how an’ how they cook. If you think cookin’ is putting a pot on the fire an’ leavin’ it till it tell you to come, you make a sad mistake. There be people who eat all sort o’ jumble up mess and they call it cookin’ too. An’ once they got a hole in their face to stuff, they couldn’t care less what an’ what they stuff it with. But if you think that’s cook’ you make a sad mistake.’

‘I suppose they have their own kind of cooking,’ I said. ‘Those I see look quite healthy, and when they come her to play cricket sometimes they win.’

‘Tis a different thing,’ my mother said, ‘as far as I gather they eat out in restaurant an’ cook shop and God only knows what. But when it comes to cookin’ a good an’ proper meal in their own home they don’t know how to start. An’ on the back of it, they...say they more modern than the others in the other islands.

Most o’ them, an’ particularly the young ones, don’t know what an’ what a home mean...they ask you to go to the Chinese restaurant, or this hotel or that hotel, an’ they eat their guts full. But yu never get one o’ them to say come home, let my mother or wife prepare you a meal...Here the first thing we do to a stranger is give him something to eat home, an no matter how bad the old home look, you want him to eat something you cook your own self. ‘Tis the opposite with them , an all because they got a generation of damn lazy young women who can’t do one God blessed thing but expose themselves in front of a mirror and go out like a cat baiting rat...they don’t know what the inside of a kitchen look like. (260-61)

Here, as in many Caribbean literary texts<sup>xxi</sup>, food symbolizes the nurturing power and guidance of the mother and the mother symbolizes ‘home’- biological, cultural and national. The mother’s suspicion of other islanders’ cuisine (here Trinidadians) and their apparent embrace of modernity (eating out rather than cooking at home) is predicated on her own defence of small island ‘tradition’ and configured through a series of gendered, class, national and cultural signifiers.<sup>xxii</sup> Appropriately enough in a passage in which the mother warns the young G that “everything in a skirt ain’t clean” (263) the mother closely associates female propriety with the ability to make home (“know what the inside of a kitchen look like”) and to cook a ‘proper’ home-cooked meal. These are typically middle class, colonially-informed constructions of femininity and of the kitchen as a female gendered space which, in a moment of spectacular generational and inter-island rivalry, the mother suggests the bacchanal loving young women of Trinidad cannot possibly live up to. The possibility that such women may offer something more alluring than maternal love and the pull of her ‘home food’ is one that the mother tries hard to repress but which G nonetheless detects.

Interestingly, Lamming describes, in great detail, the preparation and serving of this meal of flying fish and cuckoo from G’s perspective, rather than the mother’s and in not altogether positive terms. Rather mischievously (given that it appears on the Barbadian coat of arms as a signifier of national identity), the Mother intimates that flying fish may be something even non-Barbadians can make. However, ‘turning cuckoo’, that is making the accompanying “dryfood” dish of cuckoo (or cou cou/coo coo) is designated a special status as a signifier of Bajan identity. Cou cou is a ‘one pan’ dish of cornmeal, water and butter, to which okra is often added and stirred with a ‘coo coo stick’. It was almost certainly brought to the Caribbean by Africans, regularly eaten by slaves and promoted by Afro-creole cooks and thus has a long and important heritage.<sup>xxiii</sup> That G finds its preparation “a very tedious undertaking” (266) could be read as reflecting his separation from the maternally-dominated

world of childhood and his embarkation on a wider journey beyond the confines of all the island space represents to him.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Ironically, one of the most famous depictions of a meal in Trinidadian literature is a home-cooked meal in the home of Tiger and Urmila, the Indo-Caribbean protagonists<sup>xxv</sup> of Sam Selvon's 1952 novel, *A Brighter Sun*. The novel is set in 1940s Trinidad where the US established military bases during WW2. Early on in the novel we hear of Tiger's arranged marriage and the centrality of food rituals and feasting to his rural Hindu wedding:

The whole village turned up for it, Negro and Indian alike, for when Indian people got married it was a big thing, plenty food and drink, plenty ceremony...He was only 16 years old and was not in the habit of attending Indian ceremonies in the village. But he knew a little about weddings, that Indians were married at an early age, and that after the ceremony friends and relative would bring him gifts until he began to eat; only then would they stop the offerings. (4-5).

In Selvon's description Tiger forgets himself and prematurely bites a piece of 'meetai' (flour and sugar mixed with water and then fried), thus ending the offerings. Later in the novel he gains employment at one of the bases and invites two American colleagues home after work "to eat Indian food" (160). Urmila is horrified by Tiger's demands and his request for ethnic and culinary authenticity:

"You have to cook like you never cook in you life before. The best things. Grind the masala yourself, don't buy curry powder from tall boy. The achar, get dhal, and make dhal pourri, make metai'. Fry channa. Buy two fowl from Deen wife....look you don't want me to tell you what to do! And girl, you better don't let anything go wrong, you hear. Them people is my boss, and if I please them good, I might get promotion." (160)

Cooking is clearly demarcated as women's work within the Indo-Caribbean culture of this novel; indeed, "very often the value of a man or a woman is intricately linked to the process of cooking and eating"<sup>xxvi</sup> and Urmila has been socialized into such gendered expectations of the need to be a "good cook" for her husband. Moreover, the kitchen (unlike the rum shop or the store) is very much a female gendered space affording a space away from men, as is the case in many Indo-Caribbean texts.<sup>xxvii</sup> What is interesting about this scene, however, is the appropriation of unfamiliar received standards of culinary etiquette (Urmilla's borrowing of glasses, plates and cutlery from her (Afro-) creole friend Rita in the hope of impressing the American guests) alongside the insistence on familiar markers of cultural and culinary authenticity (Urmila's insistence on using her wood fire rather than Rita's gas stove to cook on as "you can't cook roti and thing on stove" (164).<sup>xxviii</sup> As so often in Selvon's fiction, such expectations are comically upturned as one of the American guests says:

"I'm very interested in your customs... I understand that some Indians eat with their fingers. We want to do that too. We'd like everything to be as it always is. Hope you've not gone and made special arrangements." (167)

The meal is uncomfortable – not just because of traces of exoticism and culinary tourism in the American's request but due to the clash of cultural and gender expectations on both sides and the 'staged' nature of the dinner. Indeed it is essentially a performance of ethnic identity and class aspirations constructed for the consumption of a particular audience through food. Selvon shows how both Tiger and Urmilla are obviously uneasy when Urmilla is asked by his guests firstly if she would like to share the bottle of rum and then join them at the table rather than eating separately "sitting on a box" (171) in the kitchen as is customary (171). When she does finally join them, she

unconsciously begins to eat with her hands and is unsure if she has shamed Tiger in front of his guests. The meal is a 'success' but leaves in its wake a poignant and unresolved sense of difference and unshared experience as two different 'Trinidadian' experiences collide.

In a later Trinidadian text, Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970), the young protagonist, Tee, is torn between two cultural traditions: the rural Afro-Creole world of her grandmother (Ma) and aunt (Tantie) and the colonially-influenced, aspirational, middle class world of her Aunt Beatrice with whom she is sent to stay in Port of Spain. In a scene close towards the end of the novel, the extent of Tee's deracination and cultural alienation from the world of her happy early childhood with Ma and Tantie in the country is revealed through signifiers of clothing and food. Tee is surprised by a visit from Tantie, her brother Toddan, Doolarie and Uncle Sylvester. Through Tee, Hodge satirises Aunt Beatrice's "ingestion of metropolitan values" (Mehta 2009, 98) through middle class, Anglo-centric rituals, such as having "Forther" Sheridan, the local priest make his fortnightly visit to "our drawing room, letting himself be pampered and fussed about with tea and cake and more than a drop of whisky or brandy" (105-6). However, Tee herself is not immune from such damaging pretensions. She is now horrified by the vision of "Uncle Sylvester coarse and repulsive, his over-fed stomach tipping over the top of his pants" (106) and Doolarie with "the fronts [of her white shoes]...cut away to give her toes room" (106). Afterwards Tee reflects:

The worst moment was when they drew forth a series of greasy paper bags, announcing that they contained polarie, anchar, roti from Neignb' Ramlaal wife, and accra and fry-bake and zaboca<sup>xxix</sup> from Tantie, with a few other things I had almost forgotten existed, in short all manner of ordinary nastiness. (106)

When offered food by Tantie:

I declined in alarm: the very thought of sitting in Auntie Beatrice's drawing room eating coolie-food! And Accra! Saltfish! Fancy bringing saltfish into Auntie Beatrice's house! When I refused, Uncle Sylvester, to my disgust, leaned over and said familiarly: "Awright, dou-dou, lemme help you out them," and reaching into a greasy bag drew out a thick spotted roti: he settled back with sounds of satisfaction and opening his jaws wide enough to accommodate Government House (this was dictum of Auntie Beatrice's in the context of table-manners) proceeded to champ away. A strong smell of curry assailed the drawing room. That was another thing I would pay for afterwards, I thought miserably. And I hoped Auntie Beatrice wasn't looking on too, with Uncle Sylvester sitting on the sofa eating roti and curry with as much reverence as if he were sitting on a tapia-floor. (107)

Here, as with the meal in *A Brighter Sun*, what is eaten and how it is eaten are important. Tee disavows her relatives' gifts of Indo-Caribbean foods (such as roti and curry) not in and of themselves but as the markers of a class and ethnic identity which she has been indoctrinated against. She now sees them as 'nasty', 'smell[y]', 'coolie', peasant food ("tapia-floor"), completely out of place, not to say an affront to the Euro-creole manners of the middle class world she has been absorbed into. The use of food as a marker of class superiority is also found in Ismith Khan's short story 'Puran Puran' from *A Day in the Country* (1994), as Pooran, a young Indo-Caribbean country boy is mocked by his Port-Of Spain school friends for his lunchtime food of 'roti and fried spinach' (26). However at the end of the story, Pooran decides, unlike Tee, that his family's food and the rural Indo-Caribbean Hindu community he is part of, are to be embraced rather than rejected:

Morning awakened with smells of eggplant frying in coconut oil and smoked herrings in the embers of the fireplace, and he could see Leela squatting in front of it, blowing gently into the embers...and Ramdath...with a hibiscus stem against his teeth, spitting out its juice and

broken fibres. As he looked at Ramdath and Leela again, he knew how it was in the beginning, that Mr Hopkins [the teacher] was wrong. He knew that the little gods and the big gods had put the world together one morning...with the smell of smoked herrings, and the taste of hibiscus stem, and odours of eggplant frying in coconut oil. (32-33)<sup>xxx</sup>:

In Rooplall Monar's short story "Massala Maraj" (1987) set on a Guyanese sugar estate, the Brahmin Maraj turns his culinary traditions to advantage by seducing the tastebuds of the Estate Boss's wife with his "coolie dal-purri" (309) and "massala fowl-curry wrap up in lotus leaf" (313). Anansi –like he uses his culinary skills to get preferential employment as a carpenter rather than a field labourer but oversteps the mark when he is found stealing bigger and bigger items from the estate. What saves his skin and gains him reinstatement is the sweet taste of his cooking which both the Boss and "Big Manager Missie" cannot do without.

In a short but insightful online essay for Peepal Tree Press: 'Food and Cooking', Jeremy Poynting reflects on the centrality of food in Caribbean literature:

descriptions of food and eating in Anglophone Caribbean writing have so much to say about belonging and unbelonging, about identity, ethnicity, class, gender, migrancy, exile, food as a token and signifier of communicative exchange, food as a passageway to sensuality and sex, eating as an external sign of inner feelings, food as sacrament. (np)

Poynting argues this is especially the case in Indo-Caribbean writing and cites Lakshmi Persaud's first three novels as showing different aspects of the central role of food in Indo-Caribbean culture. *Butterfly in the Wind* (2009) explores the Hindu world of food offerings (124-7) and *katha* or communal food (132) as a signifier of 'traditional Indianness' and, like *A Brighter Sun*, shows the gendered world of female cooks. However, its Hindu characters also try and enjoy creole (African-Caribbean) food and Kamal's mother repeatedly invites her Moslem neighbour, Mrs Hassan, to sample "her style of cooking" (90) in the communal Hindu prayer and traditional storytelling gatherings (*kathas*) she organises at her home.<sup>xxx</sup> *Sastra* (1993) is more concerned with Hindu food preferences and 'correct' food preparation, especially in relation to Milly, the creole, Christian cook employed by an elderly Christian convert called Surinder Pande. Like the mother figure in Ramabai Espinet's 1994 short story 'Indian Cuisine', *Sastra* articulates a suspicion of cultural and culinary change and modernity. This is a feature also found recurrently in V.S Naipaul's writing.<sup>xxxii</sup> *Daughters of Empire* (2012) offers a diasporic view of food as 'a bridge between cultures' (Poynting, np) not just a nostalgic link to 'back home'. In Chinese-Caribbean writing too, texts such as Jan Lowe Shinebourne's *The Last Ship* (2015) or Willi Chen's short story collection *Chutney Power* (1994) show how particular food markers and culinary traditions are used to police the boundaries of ethnic and generational identities or to break through them, as in Chen's 'Mas' is More than a Creole Thing' (1994, 1-9).

Images of food and sex, bodies and consumption, the eroticism of eating and of stimulating the senses in different ways, have long been connected in a range of cultures and the Caribbean is no exception. Indeed, writers such as Guyanese Grace Nichols ('Sugar Cane' in *I is a long memoried Woman* (1983) and *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* 1984) and John Agard ('English Girl Eats Her First Mango' [1983] in *Alternative Anthem* 2009, 21-3), Jamaicans Opal Palmer Adisa (*Caribbean Passion* 2004) and Anton Nimblett (*Sections of an Orange* 2009) and Trinidadian Lettawatee Manoo-Rahming (e.g. 'Come Into My Garden', 'Come Dine With Me', 'Curry Flavour' in *Curry Flavour* 2000) have all explored sex and eroticism through sustained images of food and eating in their writing. These are all important articulations of Benitez-Rojo's plea for a "Caribbean of the senses" (9-10). However, not all of these writers use images of food without an awareness of the darker side of food cultivation and consumption in the Caribbean, especially sugar's links to slavery, what Grace

Nichols has called “the sweet crop with a bitter history”<sup>xxxiii</sup> and Carl Plasa has recently termed Caribbean writers’ need to revise ‘saccharine colonial vision[s]’ (2009: 9).

Cooking and eating play an equally key role in the negotiation of Caribbean identity (what it means to be Caribbean) and culture in a global context. Diasporic Caribbean subjects (writers and cooks) can be seen to attempt to re-establish a new cultural home by adapting their culture to novel conditions, fusing imported culinary traditions with resources in the new territory, and creating local versions of Caribbean cooking and eating. Indeed, literary texts do not merely reflect but sometimes also mediate process of culinary deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Whilst poems such as Grace Nichols’ ‘Like a Beacon’<sup>xxxiv</sup> and Lorna Goodison’s ‘Hard Food’<sup>xxxv</sup> articulate nostalgia for ‘back home’ through the lack of Caribbean food in a diasporic setting, other texts - such as Jamaican Kei Miller’s autobiographical essay ‘But in Glasgow there are Plantains’ - move towards negotiating new identities which are no longer purely or simply diasporan. Echoing Stuart Hall’s notion of diasporan identities as always in process<sup>xxxvi</sup>, Miller reflects: “What is happening to me in Scotland, as I establish a home, is what is happening to everyone in this world everyday – we are still and always becoming ourselves.” (45) And for Miller, food is central to this process:

In Glasgow, I am learning how to cook the Caribbean...it is not really that some sudden wave of homesickness has come over me, or that I’ve never cooked before. I’ve always loved cooking, but in the Caribbean I had never tried to cook mackerel rundown, or Gungo peas soup, or Escoveitch fish<sup>xxxvii</sup>, partly because so many people could do it better than I could ever attempt. (46)

Miller’s essay moves beyond culinary nostalgia or what Poynting calls ‘home food as cliché’ in Caribbean literature by offering an example of a Caribbean writer’s awareness of the more complex contemporary role of (re)constructed traditions, creolization, deterritorialized and re-territorialised food cultures as well as a new phenomenon of pan-Caribbean food as an effect of the increasing commodification and ‘globalized reach of Caribbean food.’<sup>xxxviii</sup> Crucially, Miller’s cooking is both Caribbean *and* Scottish, creolizing “the Caribbean with Scottish ingredients” (47) in order to produce something new (“you must make it your own, with your own special touch” (47)). When his mother asks: “Are there really plantains in Glasgow?”, he is able to assure her that there are indeed and “more consistently than you find in Jamaica – as if they import them from a place untouched by hurricanes” (47). Hinting at a longer history of Caribbean-Scottish culinary connections, he also notes the easy availability of “Scotch bonnet peppers” something “I’d always thought of as Jamaican peppers, but which has obviously reminded someone, a long time ago, about something he saw in Scotland – a Tam o’ Shanter hat.” (47) As Miller concludes: “these connections go both ways.” (47)

---

<sup>i</sup> Pepperpot is perhaps the best-known version of the ‘one pot’ meal still eaten throughout the Caribbean. It has both an important economic and symbolic function as it developed from the one pot method of cooking in an iron vessel over an open fire, a practice originally necessitated amongst slave populations and favoured by the poorest classes in the Caribbean. It makes use of largely indigenous and naturalized ingredients (cassareep from cassava which was much used by the Caribbean’s original peoples: the Amerindians, hot peppers and available green leafy vegetables) which could be readily grown on the slaves’ ‘provision grounds’. The knowledge required to make Pepperpot was primarily orally transmitted and this factor created a symbolic function for Pepperpot in reconnecting plantation slaves to orally transmitted African culinary traditions and, in the post- emancipation period, in reconnecting West Indians to slave food on the plantations. Pepperpot was primarily marked, then, as ‘slave food’. Quite when and why Pepperpot was first served to the planter class by slave cooks, and appropriated by the planter class as part of its cuisine, is uncertain, but one thing *is* certain: Pepperpot did successfully cross the social divide from slave to master, which is, in this context, also the division between African or African-descended cook and the Euro-creole consumer. Pepperpot, it seems, was one of the first thoroughly creolized dishes in the Caribbean and continues to be prepared and eaten in

---

different forms to this day. In a 1965 cookbook from the Caribbean, the author notes the longevity of the dish and its potentially very old provenance in Caribbean cuisine: “Pepperpot can be kept going for several months and is almost passed on from generation to generation. Every evening it is warmed up and fresh meat or cold remains are added to it. Sir Algernon Aspinall declared in *The Pocket Guide Book to the West Indies* that he had partaken of Pepperpot said to have been one hundred years old) (Grey: 208) Pepperpot also has an important specific function within domestic economy as an efficient means of eking out available food (‘making do’) by adding to and boiling up the one pot meal each day; this social phenomenon and characteristically Caribbean ‘cultural philosophy of food’ (Houston 2005, xxv), born out of historical necessity rather than choice, has been documented by a number of sociologists and critics including Olive Senior (1991,129-147) and Lynn Marie Houston (2005, xxv-xxvii). Its use in the title of this collection of stories is thus freighted with special significance; it is much, much more than a kind of shorthand for cultural diversity.

<sup>ii</sup> See for example, Kurlansky, *Salt: A World History* [2003], Albala, *Beans: A History* [2007], Abbott, *Sugar: A Bittersweet History* [2010], Griffiths, *Tea: A History of the Drink That Changed the World* [2011], Eccott, *Vanilla: Travels in Search of a Luscious Flavour* [2004].

<sup>iii</sup> These include Keller Brown & Mussell 1984, Appardurai 1988, Mintz (1996), Counihan & Van Esterik [1997] 2008, Ashkenzai & Jacob 2000, Belasoc & Scranton 2002, Capatti & Montanari 2003, Watson & Caldwell 2005, Higman 1998 & 2008 and Huggan 2001. One recent exception which does address the relationship between food and literary texts is Valerie Loichot’s *The Tropics Bite Back* (2013) but this focuses on a very small number of texts from the Francophone rather than the Anglophone Caribbean.

<sup>iv</sup> For example, Trinidadian writer and painter John Lyons reflects on his Trinidadian culture and cuisine thus: “as a Trini away from my first home I’ve continued to borrow and absorb...our cooking reflects our past: the Amerindian Caribs who were there before the Spanish arrived, the French who ruled the island until the beginning of the nineteenth century (when the British took over), and the Africans, Indians (Hindus and Muslims), Chinese and Portuguese Madeirans who came enforced or with varying degrees of choice, to labour on the sugar estates, or the Syrians or Lebanese who came to peddle goods and later set up some of our biggest stores). From all of these came elements of our cuisine and no Trini has ever felt shame in borrowing, adapting and calling their own (what we call creolising) whatever may be had in the way of food from their neighbours. That dynamic, rich, cultural intermix is embedded in the very notion of the cook-up” (*Cook-Up in a Trini Kitchen*, 2009, 8-9)

<sup>v</sup> For example, the recipe and cooking methods for ‘run-down’, the classic Grenadian one-pot dish of meat, vegetables, banana, coconut milk and ‘saffron’ (actually turmeric) so-called because of the layer of coconut oil and meat juices that settles to the bottom of the cooking pot, is almost exclusively orally and matrilineally transmitted: passed from mothers to daughters, or by older female family members to younger ones.

<sup>vi</sup> These include the use of starchy cassavas (sweet or bitter) to make bammie (GLOSS), bread or farina and the use of cassareep, the cassava’s poisonous juice once boiled, to preserve meat and as a key ingredient in the characteristically Caribbean one pot dish of Pepperpot.

<sup>vii</sup> In this, Loichot draws on the key research of Mimi Sheller whose socioeconomic study, *Consuming the Caribbean* (2003) shows how “Caribbean subjects have been “ingested” by the global machine of the conquest and the genocide of Amerindians, the spread of disease, plantation slavery, colonial capitalism, tourism, and sexual exploitation” (Loichot n.187)

<sup>viii</sup> Christine Mackie, for example, notes how Amerindians “believed that when they first arrived on earth from the ‘sky land’, all the vegetables and fruit they needed grew on one tress, from which the tapir fed himself. The land they had arrived in had very poor soil and yielded little but they noticed that the tapir was living very well, so they set the woodpecker to follow him to discover the source of his food. However, the woodpecker gave himself away by the noise he made gorging on the insects on the tree. Then they sent a rat who bargained with the tapir and they agreed to share, but the rat was so greedy that the Indians found him sleeping with his mouth still full of corn, and so they force him to take them to the tree. After many months, they felled the tree and each man took away a piece to plant for his own.” (*Life and Food in the Caribbean*, 1991, 25.) In Olive Senior’s version of this story in her poem ‘The Tree of Life’ (1995, 91-2), the tapir is named as ‘Mapuri the wild pig’ and it is the Creation God or ‘Mighty One’ who demands the Amerindians cut down the tree and take ‘slips and cuttings and plant them everywhere’ (92) thus initiating the cultivation of crops and systems of agriculture we know today.

<sup>ix</sup> Desrey Fox, is just one among a growing number of Caribbean scholars who are redressing the relative neglect of Amerindian culture. See David Dabydeen, ‘Teaching West Indian Writing in Britain’ in Susan Bassnett (ed.) *Teaching British Culture* (1997) for more on this. Explorations of Amerindian myth and culture are to be

---

found in the fictional and critical writing of Guyanese writers, Wilson Harris and Pauline Melville, though their Caribbean-based writings rarely focus centrally on food. Melville's short story, 'Eat Labba [a kind of small deer] and Drink Creek-Water' from her 1991 collection, *Shape-Shifter*, refers to the Guyanese saying that if you do as the title suggests you will always return to Guyana. Jamaican Olive Senior's poems in *Gardening in the Tropics* (1995) focus more centrally on the Amerindians as the Caribbean's original, eco-sensitive 'cultivators' as well as their important legacies to the Caribbean (see in particular 'Meditation on Yellow', 'Annatto and Guinep', 'The Tree of Life' and all the poems in the 'Gardening in the Tropics' section).

<sup>x</sup> Anansi is the Twi word for spider and this oral narrative are thought to be mainly Asante (Ashanti) in origin.

<sup>xi</sup> This is why influential anthropologists such as E. Franklin Frazier (1957) and Sidney Mintz and R. Price (1976) reject the idea Herskovits (1941) idea of "Africanisms" or African retention in the New World and emphasize instead the influence of what Frazier calls "acculturation" and Mintz and Price "creolization", this in turn has become seen as a mutual, two way process, as between African derived and European cultural traditions in a Caribbean context, something which Fernandez Ortiz terms "transculturation" ([1940], 1963.)

<sup>xii</sup> Jennings (2010) mentions that the following stories from Wona's *A selection of Anancy Stories* (1899): "Do-Mek-A -see", "Put You Down a Me Wife pot", "Tocooma A me Fadder Ole ridin' Harse", "Anancy and Bredda firefly", "Anancy and the sheep", "Anancy and Bredda tiger", "dry Head", "Tumbletud", "Anancy's Deserts", "Groun' Hab Yie", "Anancy and Bredda Dog" and "Anancy meets Bredda Death" "all contain trickster deceptions involving food". (Jennings, 205, n72). Marshall mentions food in relation to the following tales (collected by different anthologists such as Beckwith 1924, Rattray 1930, Jekyll 1966, Bennett 1979 and Tanna 2000): "How the Spider Got a Bald Head (Rattray), "Tomby" (Jekyll), "Anansi and Sorrel" (Bennett), "Annancy and Brother Tiger" (Rattray, Jekyll), "Cunnie-More- Than-Father" (Beckwith), "Annancy in Crab Country" (Jekyll), "Dry Head and Anansi" (Beckwith), "Nansi Steals Backra Sheep" (Tanna 2000), "Wheeler" (Jekyll) 'Fling-a-Mile" (Beckwith), "Shut Up in the Pot" (Beckwith), "Anansi and the Magic bowly" (Ramsawack 1973), "Brother Anancy and Brother Death". All of the stories in Philip Sherlock's *Anansi the Spider Man* (1956) feature food and eating. James Berry's stories for children, *Anansi Spiderman* (1986) extends Anansi's exploits into a Caribbean context and includes food-based tales such as 'Mrs Anancy, Chicken Soup and Anancy', 'Mrs Puss, Dog and Thieves' and 'Anancy and Bad News to Cow-Mother'.

<sup>xiii</sup> In Philip Sherlock's version of this tale in *Anansi the Spider Man* (1956, 73-9) Anansi recruits his friends Rat, Crow and Bullfrog to help him get the crabs interested in his 'preaching'. When the crabs see Anancy 'baptising' his friends they want to join in and are bundled away in a sack.

<sup>xiv</sup> Such as M.G. Lewis (1834), Edward Long (1776), Maria Nugent (1839), Mrs Carmichael (1934).

<sup>xv</sup> Although, as Anu Lakhani notes, "the peculiar thing about the history of Jamaican food is that it doesn't seem to be very Jamaican. Almost none of the island's indigenous meats are found on menus today...contemporary Jamaican signature food came from elsewhere and with no pretensions to nation building. [For example] the ackee, -as Jamaican as you can get, but African in origin - was just another thing Capt. Bligh [of the Bounty fame] managed to transplant." "Consider the Camel..." 2008, np. St Lucian poet, Derek Walcott, also writes of Bligh's voyages and his culinary contribution to the Caribbean in *The Bounty* (Faber & Faber: 1997)

<sup>xvi</sup> As *The Long Song* reflects, the establishment of 'provision grounds' or smallholdings beyond the estate on which slaves could grow 'ground provisions' (starchy root vegetables), plantains, bananas and leafy greens to supplement their diet and the Sunday markets at which they could sell or trade their goods, are both African slave derived traditions which still exist in many parts of the Caribbean to this day.

<sup>xvii</sup> In this it resembles Andrew Lindsay's *Illustrious Exile* which is based in part of the poet Robert Burns' real-life employment as a book-keeper on a Jamaican plantation in 1786.

<sup>xviii</sup> See also Lewis (1834, 347-8) and Mrs Carmichael (1934) on this.

<sup>xix</sup> Andrew Warnes, *Hunger Overcome: Food and Resistance in Twentieth-Century African American Literature* (2004).

<sup>xx</sup> Paule Marshall, "The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen." 1985, 3-12.

<sup>xxi</sup> Examples of texts in which mothers and their cooking signify home include memoirs by Lorna Goodison (*From Harvey River*, 2007) and Austin Clarke (*Pigtails and Breadfruit*, 1999) and poems such as Lorna Goodison's 'I am Becoming My Mother' from *I Am Becoming My Mother* (1986) and Grace Nichols' 'Praise Song for my Mother' from *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984).

<sup>xxii</sup> Many Caribbean nations have their own established 'national' dish or dishes. In Jamaica, for example, it is saltfish and ackee, in Grenada 'run down' and in Barbados flying fish and 'cou cou'.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Candice Goucher argues that "Africans generally preferred plantain to corn" but through global exchange and trade with West Africa, they started to substitute corn (maize) for the starchy pounded yam and plantain

---

of their native cuisines even before slaves were exported to the Caribbean. There “the West African- inspired cook” – a crucial figure of culinary transmission and creolization – “learned to lovingly prepare the new world vegetable as *kenke* or *dokono*, *funghi* or *coo coo* by boiling or steaming in banana leaves.” (Congotay! Congotay!, 2013, 73)

<sup>xxiv</sup> Fellow Barbadian writer, Austin Clarke also discusses the significance to Bajans of flying fish and Cou cou in his culinary memoir *Pigtails and Breadfruit* (1999, 32). In Ramabai Espinet’s (1994) short story ‘Indian Cuisine’, Cou cou is marked as ‘creole food’ and is thus rejected by the Indo-Caribbean mother. Food and sex are linked as ‘eating cou cou’ comes to represent the father’s sexual transgressions with a creole woman who cooks him this dish. That the daughter ‘transgresses’ by adopting cou cou in her own culinary explorations thus marks her increasing distance from her mother’s culinary narratives and the Indo-Caribbean traditions it represents, and a growing sense instead of an independent and creolized identity.

<sup>xxv</sup> Indo-Caribbeans are descended from Indian indentured labourers who were encouraged by the British colonial authorities to come to work on Caribbean sugar plantations as a replacement labour force in the post-emancipation period. It is estimated that approx. **XXX,000** arrived between 1838 and 1917 when indentureship was ended. Notable Indo-Caribbean writers include Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul, Ismith Khan, David Dabydeen, Rooplall Monar and Lakshmi Persaud.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Richards-Greaves in Garth Ed. 2013, 88.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Brinda Mehta has shown how the kitchen as a gendered space is turned to positive use to negotiate female agency in much Indo-Caribbean women’s fiction, including Trinidadian writers Lakshmi Persaud’s *Sastra* and *Butterfly in the Wind* and Ramabai Espinet’s short story, ‘Indian Cuisine’. (*Diasporic Dislocations*, 2004, 106-131). Anne-Marie Houston notes that “cooking together affords women the opportunity to talk about their lives and discuss the problems they are having. The privacy for these conversations is provided because in traditional Caribbean architecture, the kitchen is located in a separate building in [the] back of the main house in order to reduce the heat transferred to the main house, and also the risk of fire.” (2005, 81)

<sup>xxviii</sup> Brinda Mehta terms this “the familiarity of habit” (2009, 99) and stresses its important function in strengthening “communal ties” (99).

<sup>xxix</sup> ‘Polarie’ (or phulouri) are balls of deep-fried split-pea or dahl flour, garlic and onion (and sometimes masala); ‘anchar’ is spicy kohlrabi pickle; ‘roti’ is an East Indian flat bread from the Hindi word for bread; ‘accra’ are deep-fried fritters of flour, salt, yeast, black-eyed peas or saltfish from the Yoruba name *akkra*; the accompanying ‘fry-bake’ (or floats) are shorter deep fried dough balls; ‘zaboca’ is another name for the avocado.

<sup>xxx</sup> Jeremy Poynting also discusses this short story in his online essay ‘Food and Cooking’ <http://peepaltreepress.com/discover/cultural-forms/food-and-cooking>. Accessed 13.9.16.

<sup>xxxi</sup> The slightly wary, mutual suspicion of Muslim and Hindu neighbour in Persaud’s *Butterfly in the Wind* reflects wider, real-life tensions between different ethnicities and generations in the Caribbean. However, it is important to recognise that even back in India “no community... has a monolithic culinary culture just as not all [upper caste] Hindu Brahmins are vegetarians or Muslims and Christians meat eaters...Diets are changing and culinary borders are being crossed by all communities in a rapidly changing country... this is making a lot of people queasy.” (Soutik Biswas, ‘Why India’s Food Police are Kicking up a Storm’, BBC News website [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-37335891](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-37335891)) accessed 13/9/16.

<sup>xxxii</sup> V. S. Naipaul has also commented on this in both his fictional and non-fictional writing. In *India: a Wounded Civilization* (1976), he recalls how his Brahmin, high caste “ancestors migrated [to Trinidad] from the Gangetic plain 100 years ago” (10) and reflects upon the lasting effects of childhood memories of food as ritual: “I know the beauty of sacrifice, so important to the Aryans. Sacrifice turned the cooking of food into a ritual: the first cooked thing, usually a small, round unleavened bread, as miniature, especially made, was always for the fire, the God.”(10) In his semi-autobiographical novel, *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987) Naipaul recalls arriving in a New York hotel room with his paper bag of bananas: “Some remnant of peasant travel, with food for the journey; some genuine Hindu distrust of the food that might be offered by the aeroplane and then by the hotel in New York.” (1987, 102). Covering similar ground but from a gendered perspective Britta Mehta’s *Notions of Identity, Diaspora and Gender in Caribbean Women’s Writing* (2009) explores the ‘associations between the secular habit of eating food and its spiritual connection,’ (90) what she terms the ‘cultural sanctity of food’ (90) in relation to Indo-Caribbean literary texts.

---

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Grace Nichols, 'The Poetry of Grace Nichols', Programme 3 in the *Poetry Backpack* series for schools. BBC Television 1997.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Grace Nichols, *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*. 1984, 27.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Lorna Goodison, 'Hard Food', *Controlling the Silver* (2010). 'Hard food' refers to the practice of bringing bags full of Caribbean – and especially Jamaican - food for friends and family living outside of the Caribbean.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." 1994, 392-401.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> 'Run down' is eaten across the Caribbean but is an especially Grenadian delicacy. It is a one-pot meal of meat or fish, vegetables, coconut milk and spices which takes its name from the separation of oil and meat juices which form at the bottom of the pot; Gungo peas are also known as pigeon peas and are often eaten as part of Christmas celebrations as they are freely available at this time of the year; Escoveitch (or Escabeche from the Spanish meaning pickled) is a form of cooking (either raw or lightly fried) fish in a sauce made from vinegar, oil and spices, with water, onion, salt sugar, carrots, chayote (christophene), hot peppers and allspice.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> For example, Lawson Welsh 2014 examines UK entrepreneur, Levi Root's first cookbook, *Reggae Reggae* cookbook as an example of commodification of diasporic Caribbean food culture which shows how complex local and the global forces are at play in the marketing of food products and cookery writing as 'authentically' Caribbean. The Reggae Reggae story is fascinating, as despite the presence of a Caribbean diasporic population in Britain since the 1950s, Caribbean food and cooking has, as yet, not really permeated the culinary mainstream in Britain. Lawson Welsh asks whether the Reggae Reggae phenomenon reflects a welcome trend in deterritorializing ethnic foods in Britain as part of a new culinary cosmopolitanism or whether it should be seen instead as a less positive reification of 'ethnic' food, a form of culinary tourism? She concludes that Reggae Reggae constructs a version of Caribbean cuisine which travels well in the global marketplace but which- crucially- overwrites the geographical variables and historical complexities of Caribbean foodways with a new homogeneity and new constructions of 'authenticity'.

#### Works cited

Adisa, Opal Palmer. 2004. *Caribbean Passion*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.

Agard, John. 2009. *Alternative Anthem: Selected Poems*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe.

Ken Albala, Ed. 2009. *The Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*. London & New York: Routledge.

Appardurai, A. 1988. "How to make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30.1: 3-24. .

Ashkenzai, Michael and Jeanne Jacob. 2000. *The Essence of Japanese Cuisine: An Essay on Food and Culture*. Richmond & Surrey: Curzon.

Beckwith, Martha. 1924. *Jamaica Anansi Stories*. New York, American Folklore Society.

Belasoc, Phillip and Warren Scranton. 2002. *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumer Societies*. London & New York: Routledge.

Antonio Benitez-Rojo [1992] (1996). *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Second edition. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Bennett, Louise. 1979. *Anancy and Miss Lou*. Kingston, Jamaica: Sangster's Bookstores.

Berry, James. 1984. *Chain of Days*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Berry, James. 1988. *Anancy-Spiderman*. London: Walker Books.

Berti, Ilari. 2012. "Curiosity, Appreciation and Disgust: Creolization of Colonizers' Food Pattern Consumption in Three English Travelogues". Unpublished Paper presented at the *Caribbean Food Cultures* Conference, University of Heidelberg, Sept. 28-29.

Biswas, Soutik. "Why India's Food Police are Kicking up a Storm", BBC News website [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-37335891](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-37335891) accessed 13/9/16.

Booker, Malika. 2013. *Pepper Seed*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.

Capatti, Alberto & Massimo Montanari. 2003. *Italian Cuisine: a Cultural History*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mrs Carmichael. 1934. *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured, and Negro population of the West Indies*. London: Whittaker, Treacher & Co.

- 
- Chen, Willi. 1994. *Chutney Power*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.
- Clarke, Austin. [1999] 2000. *Pigtails and Breadfruit: Rituals of Slave Food, A Barbadian Memoir*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers.
- Counihan, C. and P. Van Esterik eds [1997], *Food and Culture: A Reader*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Dabydeen, David. 1997. "Teaching West Indian Writing in Britain." In *Teaching British Cultures: an introduction*, edited by Susan Bassnett, 135-151. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ecott, Tim. 2004. *Vanilla: Travels in Search of the Luscious Substance*. London: Michael Joseph.
- Eckstein, Lars. 2001. "Dialogism in Caryl Philips's *Cambridge*, or the Democratisation of Cultural Memory", *World Literature Written in English*, 39.1, 54-74.
- Espinete, Ramabai. 1994. "Indian Cuisine", *Massachusetts Review* Autumn-Winter: 563-73.
- Fitzpatrick, Joan. 2012. "Food and literature; An Overview". In *The Routledge International Handbook of Food Studies*, edited by Ken Albala, 122-34. Routledge International Handbooks. London & New York: Routledge.
- Frazier, E. F. 1957. *Race and Culture Contacts in the Modern World*. New York: Knopf.
- Garth, Hanna, Ed. 2013. *Food and Identity in the Caribbean*. London & New York: Bloomsbury.
- Goodison, Lorna. 1986. *I Am Becoming My Mother*. London: New Beacon
- Goodison, Lorna. 2007. *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- Goodison, Lorna. 2010. *Controlling the Silver*. University of Illinois: 2010.
- Goucher, Candice. 2014. *Congotay! Congotay!: A Global History of Caribbean Food*. New York & London: M.E. Sharpe.
- Grey, Winifred. 1965. *Caribbean Cookery*. London & Glasgow: Collins.
- Hall, Stuart. 1994. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: a Reader*, edited by Patrick. Williams and Laura Chrisman, 392-401. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Herskovits, M.J. 1941. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Higman, B.W. 1998. *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica 1807-1834*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Higman, B.W. 2008. *Jamaican Food: History, Biology, Culture*. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.
- Hodge, Merle, *Crick Crack Monkey* [1970] (London & Kingston, Macmillan Caribbean: 1985)
- Houston, Lynn Marie. 2005. *Food Culture in the Caribbean*. Westport, Connecticut & London: Greenwood Press.
- Huggan, Graham. 2001. *The Post-colonial Exotic*. London & New York: Routledge.
- James, C.L.R. [1929] 1996. 'Triumph'. In *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, edited by Alison Donnell & Sarah Lawson Welsh, 84-90. London & New York: Routledge.
- James, Marlon. 2009. *The Book of Night Women*. London: Oneworld.
- Jekyll, Walter. [1907] 1966. *Jamaica Song and Story: Anancy Stories, Digging Songs, Ring Tunes and Dancing Tunes*. New York: Dover Publications.
- Jennings, La Vinia Delois. 2010. *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kellman, Anthony. 2016. *Tracing Jaja*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Khan, Ismith. 1994. *A Day in the Country*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Krise, Thomas, Ed. 1999. *Caribbeana: An Anthology of English Literature of the West Indies 1657-1777*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Lakhan, Anu. 2008. "Consider the Camel, a review of B.W. Higman's *Jamaican Food: History, Biology, Culture* (UWI Press; 2008)", in *Caribbean Review of Books*, 18 Nov.
- Lamming, George. [1953] 1983. *In the Castle of My Skin*. Burnt Mill, Harlow: Macmillan.
- Lawson Welsh, Sarah. 2014a. "'A Table of Plenty'. Representations of Food and Social Order in Caribbean Writing: Some Early Accounts, Caryl Phillip's *Cambridge* (1991) and Andrea Levy's *The Long Song* (2010)", *EnterText* 10: 73-89.

- 
- Lawson Welsh, Sarah. 2014b. "Performing Cross-cultural culinary discourse: the Case of Levi Roots." In *Caribbean Food Cultures: Performances of Eating, Drinking and Consumption in the Caribbean and its Diasporas*, edited by Wiebke Beushausen et al, 153-174. Germany: Transcript Verlag.
- Lewis, M.G. [1834] (2005). *Journal of a West India Proprietor*. Elibron Classics.
- Lyon, John. 2009. *Cook up in a Trini Kitchen*. (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Loichot, Valerie. 2013. *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean literature*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Long, Edward. 1774. *The History of Jamaica, or a General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of the Island*, 3 vols. London: T. Lowndes.
- Keller Brown, Linda & Kay Mussell. 1984. *Ethnic and Regional Foodways in the United States*. University of Tennessee Press.
- Levy, Andrea. 2010. *The Long Song*. London: Headline Review.
- Lindsay, Andrew. *Illustrious Exile*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press)
- Loichot, Valerie. 2013. *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.
- McCauley, Diana. 2012. *Huracan*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Mackie, Christine. 1991. *Life and Food in the Caribbean*. London: Weidenfield & Nicolson.
- Manoo-Rahming, Lettawatee. 2000. *Curry Flavour*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Marshall, Paule. 1985. "The Making of a Writer: From the Poets in the Kitchen" [ ] In *Merle, a Novella and Other Stories*, 3-12. London: Virago. .
- Marshall, Emily, Zobel. 2014. *Anansi's Journey: a Story of Jamaican Cultural Resistance*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press.
- Mehta, Brinda. 2004. *Diasporic (dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani*. Jamaica: University of West Indies Press.
- Mehta, Brinda. 2009. *Notions of Identity, Diaspora and Gender in Caribbean Women's Writing*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Melville, Pauline. 1991. *Shape-Shifter*. London: Picador.
- Miller, Kei. 2013. "But in Glasgow there are Plantains." In *Writing Down the Vision: Essays & Prophecies*, 42-8. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Mintz, Sidney and R. Price, eds. 1976. *Caribbean Contours*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University.
- Mintz, Sidney *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (London, Viking: 1985)
- Mintz, Sidney. 1996. *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Monar, Rooplall. 1987. "Massala Maraj." In *India in the Caribbean*, edited by David Dabydeen an& Brinsley Samaroo, 309-14. London: Hansib & University of Warwick.
- Naipaul, V.S. 1976. *India: a Wounded Civilization*.
- Naipaul, V.S. 1987. *The Enigma of Arrival*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Nichols, Grace. 1984. *The Fat Black Woman's Poem*. London: Virago.
- Nichols, Grace. 1983. *I is a long memoried woman*. London: Karnak.
- Nichols, Grace. 1997. *Sunris*. London: Virago.
- Nimblett, Anton. 2009. *Sections of an Orange*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Nugent, Lady Maria. [1839, 1966] 2002. *Journal of her Residence in Jamaica from 1801-5*. Edited by Philip Wright. Kingston, Jamaica: University of West Indies Press.
- Ortiz, Fernandez [1940] (1963) "Los factores humanos de la cubanidad" *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 21: 161-86.
- Pepperpot: Best New Stories from the Caribbean*. 2014. Leeds & New York: Preekash.
- Persaud, Lakshmi. 1993. *Sastra*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Persaud, Lakshmi. 2009. *Butterfly in the Wind*. Leeds, Peepal Tree Press.
- Persaud, Lakshmi. 2012. *Daughters of Empire*. Leeds, Peepal Tree Press.
- Phillips, Caryl. 1991. *Cambridge*. London: Picador.
- Plasa, Carl. 2009. *Slaves to Sweetness: British and Caribbean Literatures of Sugar*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Jeremy Poynting "Food and Cooking", <http://peepaltreepress.com/discover/cultural-forms/food-and-cooking>. Accessed 13.9.16.
- Rattray, R.S. 1930. *Akan-Ashanti Folk-Tales*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- 
- Richards-Greaves, Gillian. 2013. "The Intersections of 'Guyanese Food' and Constructions of Gender, Race, and Nationhood." In *Food and Identity in the Caribbean* edited by Hannah Garth, 75-94. London: Bloomsbury.
- Rhys, Jean. 1966. *Wide Sargasso Sea*. London: André Deutsch.
- Selvon, Sam. [1952] 1985. *A Brighter Sun*. Harlow: Longman Caribbean.
- Sen, Sharmila. 2008. "The Saracen's Head". *Victorian Literature and Culture*. 36. 407-31.
- Sheller, Mimi. 2003. *Consuming the Caribbean*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Taylor Sen, Colleen. 2009. *Curry: A Global History*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Senior, Olive. 1991. *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean*. Bloomington, University of Indiana & London: James Currey.
- Senior, Olive. 1995. *Gardening in the Tropics: Poems*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe.
- Sherlock, Philip. 1956. *Anansi the Spider Man*. London: Macmillan.
- Shinebourne, Jan Lowe. 2015. *The Last Ship*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press.
- Tanna, L. 2000. *Jamaican Folktales and Oral Histories*. Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica.
- Warnes, Andrew. 2004. *Hunger Overcome: Food and Resistance in Twentieth-Century African American Literature*. Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press.
- Watson & Caldwell. 2005.
- Witt, Doris. 2004. *Black Hunger: Soul Food and America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Witt, Doris. 2007. "From Fiction to Foodways: Working at the Intersections of African American Literary and Culinary Studies." In *African American Foodways*, edited by Anne Bower, 101-25. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Wona. 1899. *A Selection of Anancy Stories*. Kingston, Jamaica: Aston W. Gardner.

Caribbean Theater, Anglophone To understand the nature of the development of Caribbean theater over the centuries, as well as the form of theater that is now evolving in the region, it is important to know something of the history of the Caribbean. The experience of colonization and the type of slavery that existed there have left an indelible mark on the creative impulses of the people. Theater in the Caribbean, therefore, must be seen as having various stages of development. A winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, Walcott sometimes writes plays in verse, and his work, though firmly aligned to the ancient classical drama of Europe, is unmistakably Caribbean in content. He founded The Little Carib Theatre in Trinidad.