

Cracking The Code: Food, Diaspora, Storytelling, & The Caribbean Journey

A senior honors thesis submitted by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

English

Tufts University

May 2023

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## **FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: A Tribute to My Grandmothers' Kitchens**

“As we break bread together, we offer abiding grace and blessings...honor our ancestral legacy and cultural expression...The centerpiece of our nurturing spirits...gifts from...people who understood and lived by the generosity of shared humble kindness...stories and human engagement...” (Smalls 280).

Caribbean history and literature bear the imprint of a complex, multicultural story that draws from every major continent. Spain and Portugal vied for supremacy in the region in 1492, long before the Transatlantic slave trade, where slaves provided labor, albeit forced, for the sugar, coffee, banana, and cotton industries in the New World. Caribbean food tracks major themes of the story between the “Old World ” and the “New World” such as cultural conflict, dislocation, fusion, and integration. The food of the region tells the stories of resilience, conquest, servitude, global economy, and colonialism – if you read references to food with discernment.

My connection to Caribbean literature and food is deeply personal. My family has immediate ties to Jamaica, Panama, Haiti, Martinique, and Colombia. Our sweet delicacies came in the form of a Christmas decorated tin-pan from my maternal, (Jamaican) grandmother in South Florida. Holiday seasons were filled with gifting her Jamaican puddings to friends and family. Raisins and currants soaked in rum and a hefty, moist cake laid in each container. The recipe varied from the old British “Plum Pudding,” by utilizing rum, instead of wine and by replacing lard with butter. The Jamaican version tends to be more moist and easier to digest than its British ancestor.

We enjoyed Haitian fried fish on Fridays, especially Good Friday, accompanied with rice, beans, patacones, and pikliz—a pickled mixture of shredded cabbage, hot peppers, carrots, and

vinegar. My paternal grandmother, from Mirabelais, Haiti, often made, *dri dri ak djon djon*, Haitian Black mushroom rice from a mushroom only grown in Haiti. Another tradition that Haitians honor is to eat Soup Joumou, a pumpkin based soup filled with ingredients that slaves were not allowed to eat. Haitians eat this every January 1st to commemorate their independence from France. Thus, Soup Joumou embodies resilience and liberation. The recipe and the contents capture an important piece of history integral to Haitian people, national identity, and sense of self. If you know enough about food access, this particular soup can tell the intricate story of who the Haitian people are, what their political struggles have been, and how they have responded, utilizing their food.

One generation further back, my maternal Great Grandmother was born on Carenero Island, in the province of Bocas del Toro, Panama to a creole father and an indigenous mother from Colombia, South America. She was known for her fish stew utilizing snapper, goat or parrot fish, fresh herbs, and simmering them for hours with green bananas in coconut milk. We know that corn played a major role in her meals as did plantains. We also know that she came of age right at the time when the United Fruit Company made huge profits from banana yields in that province.

As you might imagine, my sense of self has been largely wrapped up in understanding and enjoying food traditions and flavors of the islands and South America. This allowed me to identify strongly with my Caribbean identity— as much as an American. Food has been a mainstay of my personal life, within the cultures that I inhabit. It has also provided me with an interesting lens from which to review literature.

Often, food in literature may appear to be an ‘after-thought’ something to supplement the main plot. However, in my review of several texts, I indicate the importance of looking at food to

not only understand the plot of a story, poem, or oral tale, but the larger history of Caribbean cultures, as an expression of the pre and post-colonial events.

## **INTRODUCTION: The Explosion–Fusion Food, Fusion Culture**

As I have studied Caribbean literature and history through respective English and Africana studies, and as one who enjoys and notices food, I have observed how food connects people and cross-cultural spaces powerfully. Within their ingredients, their preparation, and their presentation, many quintessential “Caribbean” dishes hold important diasporic commentary. The food itself encapsulates the historical realities of colonialism, cultural integration or “creolization,” genocide, creativity, and innovation. However, it does more than that as well. Sometimes, food bonds, divide, proclaim a political manifesto or broadcast subtle, social distinctions that might otherwise escape review.

Both the presence and language of food in Caribbean literature reveal the complexity of the diaspora connection to Africa, Europe, and Asia that have converged in the New World. In this thesis, I will explore how selected Caribbean authors/storytellers view and utilize food to convey complicated ideas related to time, place, and identity. Food references can be literal. Yet, frequently they serve as metaphors, calls to action, and a description of how African, South Asian, European, and East Asian cultures relate to the history, politics, challenges, and joys of life in the New World.

I chose these selections of texts: “The Story of Anansi and Sorrel,” *The Farming of Bones*, *Crick Crack, Monkey*, and the poems, “Letter from “Mama Dot” and “Dining at Customs,” because, through food citations and imagery, they show operating realities in Jamaica, Trinidad, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic at the time of their composition as independent nations and before, under the thumb of colonial powers. They present histories within themselves, but also the larger legacy of the Caribbean. Food and references to eating, gatherings, and sharing, serve as a lens for examining Diaspora thinking– in a variety of formats.

A scene of consumption within one of these texts may be a marker of a particular Caribbean nation's creativity and adaptability, their struggle for individuality, creolization, or the challenges of blending multiple cultures within a nation. At the same time, these markers may have broader cross-Caribbean or even global significance. Food can serve as a potent form of communication. Food, by its very presence, can serve as a placeholder for history, memory, and past events. In this role, it serves as a griot, a kind of cultural memorial. "A griot, in African cultures, retells the stories – the high points and low points—of families and clan groupings" (Charles 3). Griots lie at the cross section of a storyteller, librarian, musician, and historian in African cultures. Food creates timelines, revealing how people trade and recombine ingredients and condiments that speak volumes about where they have been and what they have experienced. For example, in *Crick Crack, Monkey, Tee*, the protagonist, lists some of her favorite Trinidadian delicacies. On the surface, this might appear to be a straightforward, factual analysis. However, each food dish incorporates important elements of South Asian cuisine which can be traced back to the presence of indentured servants who came largely from India, but also China and Portugal, to Trinidad in 1833. Indentured Servants "replaced" the African slaves as cheap laborers under agreement. "Over 1.5 million Indians arrived on foreign soil as bonded laborers during the 87-year colonial indentureship system."<sup>1</sup> Tee's food list, then, harkens back to the political events of the post-slavery era in Trinidad. It points to a series of historical realities that involved complicated events which gave enslaved Africans the opportunity to leave the plantations and put, in their place, underpaid workers from Asia and Europe. Food can bind groups together, reinforcing their shared past and vision for the future. In "The Story of Anansi and Sorrel," a trickster spider (Anansi) with origins in West Africa, reminds the listener that Jamaica (and other

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<sup>1</sup> See "History of Trinidad." *Milwaukee Public Museum*, to read more about indentured servitude in Trinidad.

parts of the Caribbean) share a common heritage with West Africa. These spider stories came to the Caribbean via the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. This particular episode tells the story of how Anansi popularized a classic Christmas drink called “Sorrel” in Jamaica. As we will see in the textual analysis, this simple tale manages to communicate a sense of loss and rediscovery of older, food “treasures” as Anansi spins his web of intrigue and mystery.

Food can equally separate and define target groups linguistically, culturally, and socially. *In The Farming of Bones*, I will later explain how the parsley herb becomes a tool for then Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo’s government and Dominican civilians to commit genocide against Haitians. Food can create dividing lines, (re)define identity, and provoke displacement.

Food can serve as a statement of defiance, a form of resistance, and a source of unity. Sometimes, though, it represents a synthesis, a vital fusion of multiple elements that find themselves working together in a new and different social context to the one they originally came from. Food can be as dynamic as the societies that prepare and eat it.

Finally, food can also harken dreams of a better future. When people reference distinctive foods that have ties beyond their present role, they are making a statement about self; through their food, they transcend present circumstances and invoke another (better) reality.

In my own family we have witnessed the complexity of food and food references. Sometimes, these come up in subtle details. For example, in Jamaica, it has been noted that those with meat (read relative wealth) will require less gravy/sauce on their food. Whereas those with less wealth will typically require more gravy/sauce on their food to give it flavor. Thus, by asking someone whether they want gravy or not with their meal, it is possible to decode their social standing and not just their preferences. I learned this from my Jamaican grandmother who pointed out that it might seem “lower class” to inundate one’s rice with gravy. The point is that



food, its usage, and proportions can have enormous significance related to literacy, social standing, and unspoken, yet visible hierarchies.

Some literary analysts have inadvertently discounted food scenes in books and novels. Adrienne LaFrance published an article in “The Atlantic” magazine (March 29, 2022) analyzing food scenes as they appear in written format and noted, “In literature, references to eating tend to be either symbolic or utilitarian. Food can indicate status or milieu (think about all those references to Dorsia in *American Psycho*), or it can move the plot forward (Rabbit Angstrom’s peanut-brittle habit in John Updike’s final *Rabbit* book). Even in the hands of the greats, food scenes can seem less than central to a story, more filler or filigree than substance. There are exceptions, however—moments in which food unlocks a higher story form” (1).

In the works I have selected from Caribbean literature, food seems to have tentacles in many important aspects of Caribbean life. It seems to have transcended nutrition and taken on a narrative life of its own. In the book, *Food and Literature*, scholar Gitanjali G. Shahani wrote, “Beginning with an abstract consideration of food (as language, as metaphor, as form, as sex), with Eagleton’s stipulation that “it is that it is never just food,” it finds its way to a consideration of food as material substance (the stuff of colonial loot, of agricultural cycles, of industrial plants)” (1). From what I have read, heard, and experienced, Caribbean food and references come with the imprint of a complex history and political evolution. By unbundling the food, we encounter hidden strands of history and experience that are worth pondering. Food invites us to examine the underlying stories that have made the Caribbean what it is today.

Food and literature share important elements. Each represents a form of storytelling. The presence of African derived food in an Anglophone culture constitutes a (defiant) form of speech. It states, “I’m here even though you don’t hear me, I am nourishing you, I am present.”

On the other side of this analysis, the presence of non-native Caribbean foods and commodities documents colonialism, how ingrained imported plants, and food ingredients have become in Caribbean/New World cuisine. The path of these items describes the story of settler colonialism and the colonies. South Asian spices and ingredients track the route of indentured servants and their settlement in a place that rejected their personhood. The food tells the stories of both the colonizers and the colonized. In *Food, Text, and Culture in The Anglophone Caribbean*, author Sarah Lawson Welsh states, "...the Caribbean has a long and multilayered history as a region of trade and encounter, colonial settlement, movement and migration, cultural admixture, syncretism and creolization and how, in the region, the cultural practices of cooking, eating and storytelling have always been closely linked" (128). To add on to Welsh's analysis of the Caribbean's "multilayered history," we must acknowledge the native peoples who inhabited the islands before they were colonized.

A hidden or sometimes forgotten aspect of the food involves the Indigenous peoples (such as the Arawaks and Caribs) who pre-dated the mass-African migration from Africa and that of European, and Asians after the Transatlantic Slave Trade took root. Although globalization helps us to understand the Caribbean and its cultural evolution, we must address the native roots, origins, and influences of the Caribbean. The Tainos in the Caribbean made, "barbacoa," the original Arawak name, for marinated meat roasted over open coals. This cooking process was adopted and adapted by the Spanish and other colonial settlers. "Barbacoa" from the Tainos, became "barbecue" as a result of Spanish colonization.<sup>2</sup> It is evident how food plays a pivotal role in the history, culture, and literature of the Caribbean and, of course, its people.

Drawing from Welsh's analysis, I will focus on the linkage between cooking and eating practices

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<sup>2</sup> See Severson to read a New York Times article about Judith Tschann's book about food etymologies entitled, *Romaine Wasn't Built in a Day*.

in the Caribbean and how that has been heavily influenced by its first inhabitants, historical migration patterns, colonialism, and trade.

The Caribbean itself is populated with a melting pot of people who bring various global traditions. As I later discuss, the groups of people that make up the societies of the Caribbean, who originally hail from different continents, have all arrived through different pathways and under distinct circumstances. However, one thing remains true. Caribbean food is a product of its rich history and the “migration,” and “cultural admixture” of peoples. I will place food in conversation with storytelling and history to show the importance of globalization and how integral the Caribbean (even as a microcosm) can be to understanding the history of the world.

Within the Caribbean, food connects people to popular traditions: “Placing literary texts in dialogue with other kinds of writings on food demonstrates their crucial connectedness to a wider oral culture and to important popular traditions in the Anglophone Caribbean, something which is often minimized or overlooked in Western accounts of food and literature” (Welsh 128). Welsh also makes it a point to acknowledge the importance of oral culture to Caribbean tradition and how literary texts also play into “Western accounts of food and literature.” In other words, the Caribbean is often not the first place researched to understand more about literature and food—despite its rich history and culture.

This thesis will place the Caribbean in the center of the conversation connecting literature, food, and history, which may contradict how certain scholars approach this material. Food also connects Caribbean people to their history and to the rest of the world: “Moreover, food is often central to the question of what it means to be Caribbean, especially in diasporic and globalized contexts. As has been shown, the region has one of the longest histories of global connectedness and globalizing process in relation to food” (Welsh 95). Finally, this thesis will

also show the “global connectedness” and “globalizing process” of food while acknowledging how central food has been to the formation and description of the Caribbean as it relates to Jamaica, Haiti, The Dominican Republic, and Trinidad.

## **CHAPTER ONE: Sorrel the Griot Drink –The Story of Sorrel in Jamaica**

Many stories came to the New World out of African oral storytelling traditions. One series of such tales revolves around a mysterious spider man, Anansi, who displays trickery, wit, and humor as he outsmarts others. In certain accounts, Anansi takes on god-like abilities. In others, his human traits shine through. In most accounts, he appears as the ultimate deceiver with a quick mind and the ability to lead others astray. Alongside his humor, Anansi imparts wisdom in his stories; he performs the role of a griot. Part historian, part fantasy storyteller, he brings readers and listeners to a place where they laugh at their vulnerabilities and process deception, mistrust, and loss of faith in others. They also relive, through the exploits, their own life frustrations. They take refuge in his cleverness. His intricate stories often portray confrontations between the West African spider god and a New World opponent. Anansi's victories have cultural overtones because they often empower the underdog or the one who appears weak. As a spider, Anansi can get overlooked and underestimated. Yet, he triumphs over adversity and upstages his opponents. Symbolically, this indirectly gives power to West Africa and things African.

Anansi stories have historically been shared orally due to both traditional, ancient, practice from the Old World in tandem with lack of writing opportunities for enslaved peoples in the New World. Oral storytelling is considered a non-Western format. This thesis honors non-Western forms of storytelling. Specifically, the importance of oral stories to the (re)telling of Caribbean history can be reviewed by taking a closer look at two versions of “The Story of Anancy and Sorrel.” “Sorrel” has developed into one of the most popular celebration beverages in Jamaica. This dark, red drink resembles wine or port and has a rich fruity aroma. Traditionally,

merrymakers consume sorrel as part of the Christmas celebration. This drink has become the subject of many versions of how “Sorrel” got its distinctive name.

Like many oral accounts, these versions rely heavily on the spontaneity, inflection, and gestures of the storyteller to give the plot life and meaning. In the oral story, the emotion gets carried by the narrator(s), who becomes a key participant in the storytelling process. This dynamic influences how we, as the audience, perceive that specific story (written work can also have many interpretations solely based on what has been written on the page, but not always how the writing is delivered or spoken). Incorporating this Anancy story into the analysis also adds another dimension to the format of storytelling. It broadens the scope and challenges the Western narrative of what stories “should be,” or what they “look like,” and the forms that they are able to take.

In Lady Vivien’s “A Slice of Jamaica!” version, Anansi, lacking goods to sell at the market, raided his neighbor’s plots and eventually found a “beautiful, elegant, red plant” (Vivien 2:25). He did not know the plant; he did not name it at that time. He grabbed the unnamed plant and went to the market where he tried to sell it. When confronted in the market with accusations of being a “thief,” he ran away carrying the red leaves with him. On his journey, he dumped the leaves into a pot of boiling water that “the hominy lady had on the fire” (Vivien 5:00). (Hominy is a corn porridge popular in the Caribbean, made from both the kernels and the corn husk). He assured those pursuing him that the drink was satisfying. He told them that if they would “add a little ginger, add a little sugar, add a little pimento, cinnamon, and nutmeg,” it would be nice (Vivien 7:35). He described it as being “nicer than wine” (Vivien 8:32). Once the listed ingredients had been added, he offered it to them and realized that it tasted good. He exclaimed

that it tasted “So Red; it’s So Real” (Vivien 8:35). Those listening made the two words into a new one: SORREL.

In this version of the story and the second version to come, the phrase, “So real” is emphasized and becomes the name of the drink. The sorrel’s distinctive color, red, gets repeated several times. In both versions, Anansi is deemed to be a “thief” but saves himself by creating a concoction that becomes the sorrel drink. In the next version, there is more emphasis on how Anansi was able to get the plant. Both versions also have very animated narrators. The narrators also incorporate singing in the section when Anansi is putting in the spices to the pot. It adds a beat and rhythm, in a call and response format that invites the listener to join in to the song/story. The first version, not spoken in Patois necessarily, seems to get a big part of its energy from the listeners’ input. Anansi’s laziness/failure to work/lack of a job comes up explicitly, “Anansi is not someone who worked regularly” (Vivien 2:13). At one point, Anansi tries to swap his armful of sorrel with someone at the market. This individual asks him, “What is the name [of the plant]?” (Vivien 3:49). Because Anansi made it seem like his sorrel plant was precious, people now wanted to grab it out of his hands. So, he began to run. But, because he was running, the rest of the sellers thought he had stolen something. They joined the pursuit.

In the second version told by Queen Nettyann, while rummaging through his neighbors’ property, he finds a plant that he does not recognize and decides to sell it in the market because he does not have anything better to sell. The inference might be that through laziness he has neglected to cultivate his own crops. In both stories, the plant catches his attention. However, he knows nothing of its qualities. The other market sellers wonder how he got the plant, because they know he has nothing good to offer. Only in desperation (sidestepping police and pursuers accusing him of being a thief and bumping into a woman about to make hominy porridge) does

he drop the plant into boiling water. After this happens, the mysterious plant colors the hot water, making it wine-like. After adding various condiments, such as ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, pimento, and sugar, it tastes delicious. Both versions liken the resulting sorrel to “wine,” (Nettyann 3:28; 3:52, Vivien 8:32) and we also learn that while Anansi exclaims that the drink is “SO REAL” (meaning so good) that listeners christen it “Sorrel.” He succeeded and the resulting drink became “SORREL” homophone for “So Real.” “Everybody shouted “Sorrel, Sorrel ” (Nettyann 4:03). Anansi starts dancing in the end when he says, “so real.” The narrator ends with “Jack Mandora me no chose one,” (Nettyann 4:14) which is a classic ending to many Jamaican Folktales.<sup>3</sup> In line with this phrase, the narrator speaks patois throughout this version. This was probably the original form in which the story was told to people.

Although the details of both accounts slightly vary, they share many overlapping themes. In both plots, Anansi is running away. In the first story, he runs away so that the other market sellers won't grab his sorrel and leave him with nothing. It is only afterwards, when he is running, that the other sellers assume he is a thief. In the second version, he runs when accused of theft. We do know that Anansi does not seem to be settled on one spot. He must keep moving. This sense of being unsettled and unrooted might encode an important diaspora message in itself. The audience/listeners might identify with Anansi on multiple levels as he bounces from one threatening situation to another, outwitting his pursuers and inventing lies/mistruths to survive. His survival, like theirs, depends on wit, precision, and the ability to turn things around quickly.

The next common point is that the sorrel plant appears to be unknown in both versions. A mysterious plant, Anansi first lies about its properties which, ironically prove to be true. In the first version, Anansi grabs a beautiful dark red plant. It does not have a name. By the end of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Dance's "Letter to the Editor," to read an explanation on what "Jack Mandora me no chose one," means (basically the storyteller is saying, 'don't hold me accountable, I am just the messenger').



story, he has given it a name. That name comes as the result of a mistake. His audience thinks when he says, “SO REAL/SO RED” that he is saying, “Sorrel” (Nettyann 3:56). The naming process plays on homophones. The audience/listeners might also identify with the need to rename/find new names for things. As part of the Middle Passage experience, enslaved Africans were mixed with others of different linguistic groups. Often, when they arrived at their New World destinations, they would be forbidden from speaking their African tongues and, therefore, had to find new names for things. Anansi hints at this reality in both stories.

Finally, these oral, non-written story forms require different methods to build suspense and keep the audience engaged. In both versions, the storytellers use repetition to make the story come alive. In the first version, the beauty of the plant gets attention. Over and over, we are reminded that the plant has an attractive deep, red luster. In the second version we hear, more than once, that the drink should taste like wine. This is confirmed when the condiments bring out its flavor. At the end of both versions, the word “sorrel” is repeated as if to fix a new word in our minds. The audience experiences suspense. Although Anansi recurs as a traditional figure in Jamaican folktales, each one of his stories differ. We know he will always be “the trickster.” This fact gets attention in both accounts. The storytellers’ tone, facial, and hand gestures—rather than the actual choice of words—conveys admiration for Anansi’s cunning and general pleasure at the outcome of this adventure. Sorrel tastes good.

Although both accounts sound as if they retell the birth of a completely new beverage, Sorrel harkens back to African history.<sup>4</sup> A member of the Malvaceae family, hibiscus sabdariffa, has ties to West Africa. However, its ties to the ancient world may predate its West African origins. Certain food experts believe that drinking sorrel has been attributed to ancient Egyptians.

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<sup>4</sup> See Chin to read more on the sorrel plant.

To this day, hibiscus tea, taken cold, is a popular Egyptian breakfast drink.<sup>5</sup> How, then, should we interpret this story based on the diaspora experience? What does the sorrel story mean?

One of the first things that comes to mind is the idea that Anansi had to relearn the use and properties of the plant itself. He no longer recognized it but he had to “make do” with what he had and be resourceful. Anansi indirectly “knew” this plant; his ancestors knew it. His history included it. However, due to the disconnection that Anansi has to his original homeland in West Africa, he has “forgotten” that knowledge. He must either relearn it or reinvent it. This speaks to the larger diasporic experience in which familiar elements (whether that is in the form of food, language, culture, etc.) must be repurposed or recreated to adapt to a new environment. This often happens when people try to maintain elements of their homeland and bring it with them as they make a new life in another land. Anansi had to relive the experience of learning about this old plant, one that he was very familiar with in West Africa, home of his ancestors. The old beverages, old plants, and old ways may have been forgotten and may have to be relearned in a new (hostile) context. Anansi stumbles upon the way to prepare the drink by accident and he fumbles his way into perfecting it by adding a series of condiments.

The condiments (used in creating a Jamaican beverage) link the Caribbean (New World) to Asia via India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and China (the Old World). Ginger (versions one and two), grown first in the ancient kingdoms of China, India, the Malukas and West Africa, makes its way into the recipe.<sup>6</sup> Pimento (allspice) on the other hand, is a New World seasoning, a native plant of Central America and the Antilles.<sup>7</sup> Nutmeg originated in the Moluccas in Indonesia and came to be cultivated widely in the Caribbean.<sup>8</sup> Cinnamon, originally cultivated in Sri Lanka and

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<sup>5</sup> See Olson to show the Egyptian Hibiscus Tea recipe and read more.

<sup>6</sup> See Vegetable Facts to read more on ginger origins.

<sup>7</sup> See The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica to read more on allspice origins.

<sup>8</sup> See The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica to read more on nutmeg origins.

along the Malabar coast of India is now widely cultivated in the Americas.<sup>9</sup> The addition of sugar (versions one and two) as the ultimate seasoning links the story directly to the sugar economies of the New World.

One beverage (Sorrel) becomes a metaphor and a literal representation of a fusion culture in the Caribbean/Jamaica. As Anansi adds ingredients to the mix, he literally traces pathways of people and cultures to Jamaica, where they combine to (re)create an ancient drink. The naming of the drink, too, holds clues for what Anansi communicates. He could have named it just about anything. However, he chooses two Standard English words, “So Real” to complete the process. However, these two words somehow get mis-heard, and they become “SORREL.” This creation of a language that starts out mimicking standard English raises yet another theme, that of dialect/patois which has served as a class divider throughout Caribbean history. On one hand, the new word represents a corruption of the original language. On the other hand, it signals the genesis of something original that defines an emerging experience.

This Anansi story further suggests that an older culture/beverage/plant has been forgotten and that, as a result of a winding journey, with accidents and unexpected turns, a delicious drink emerges that utilizes global seasonings to celebrate a Christian holiday. The references to it looking like wine hint at the fact that Sorrel might be a local wine replacement. Thus, one of the Old World’s most celebrated drinks gets replaced by a pungent beverage that draws elements from every continent. At this level, the story links the Old World to the New, utilizing Sorrel. Here, Sorrel serves as a reminder of the (hidden/forgotten) past and suggests that the future holds the possibility of pleasure. Everyone likes the Sorrel. It distracts them from Anansi’s theft; it

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<sup>9</sup> See The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica to read more on cinnamon origins.

gives them a reason to celebrate; it links them—whether they recognize it or not—to the older cultural traditions of West and East Africa.

## CHAPTER TWO: Cafecitos & Sugar Cane

*The Farming of Bones*, by Edwidge Danticat, is a historical fiction novel that tells the story of the Haitian “Parsley Massacre” through the eyes of Amabelle Désir, a young Haitian woman growing up in the Dominican Republic (DR). In the book, parsley, coffee, and sugar carry the weight of Haiti’s long and fraught history of colonialism and tense cultural interactions between Spanish and French inhabitants of the Island of Hispaniola. Three food products, coffee, sugar, and parsley, co-narrate a grisly tale. Alongside this, Danticat explores the complexity of language and the inflection of Haitians, versus Dominicans and how this eventually operates to exterminate thousands of Haitians. Before delving into the Massacre and the story built around it, it is interesting to note that Haiti produced a range of food exports, many of which set Haiti apart as a prosperous hub during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Yet to read *The Farming of Bones*, none of Haiti’s productivity or economic prowess seems evident. Instead, Haiti and Haitians seem relegated to a lesser status and one that begs for pity rather than admiration.

The novel describes the complex, historic interaction between the French and Spanish inhabitants of Hispaniola and their social-color-caste-based interactions. Many aspects of this complicated story infuse Amabelle’s interactions with her boss’s family with historically meaningful references. Significantly, many interactions involve sugar and coffee. From 1600 to 1800, the sugar economy joined Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas in an interrelated grouping of competitive economic relationships (Aronson & Budhos 35).

The plot sets the scene to recount the events of the 1937 Parsley Massacre, a horrific massacre that occurred on the Haitian-Dominican border. The backdrop of this gruesome story includes plentiful acres of sugar and coffee fields. These fields (and their food products) provide

the context for the characters, their responses, and their cultural orientation. With plantation crops as the backdrop, France and Spain play a dangerous cultural game that pits Haitian-Creole Speakers (tending to be dark-skinned) against Spanish speakers (tending to be lighter-skinned) in a society that dismisses Africa and things African, while consuming African-based foods. Arguably, two Dominican staples, Mangu (mashed plantains)<sup>10</sup> and Mofongo (mashed green plantains with pork rind)<sup>11</sup>, have clear links to Africa. Nevertheless, the Dominican society that appears in Danticat's novel seems to operate independently of this African connection. She focuses her attention on Haitians who have been living in the Dominican Republic for some time, newly arrived Haitians, and Spanish Dominicans, knowing that many of these groupings overlap, intermarry, and intermingle.

Particularly on the borders between Haiti and the DR, Haitians (French and Creole speakers) intermingle with Spanish speakers and name their food in the Spanish style. Tragically, French/Creole pronunciation of the Spanish word for "parsley" ultimately costs Haitian-Dominicans their lives. This marks the culmination of a series of violent events that first started with Christopher Columbus' discovery of the New World, his extermination of Indigenous peoples, following by the brutality associated with the establishment of the sugar/coffee plantations, and, finally, the slaying of Haitians (living in the Dominican Republic) who happened to pronounce the word for "parsley" in a distinctive French-Creole way. In this incident, food does not only take on the form of nourishment/seasoning but is simultaneously used as a vehicle to commit genocide on Haitians in the Dominican Republic. "Parsley" becomes an intermediary tool, used to commit ethnic cleansing and genocide. It transcends being simply a

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<sup>10</sup> See "Dominican Cooking," to show Mangu description and recipe.

<sup>11</sup> See "Recetas Gratis," to show Mofongo description and recipe.

herb/condiment/seasoning, and plays a toxic, political role. This aspect of Hispaniola's history began long before the Parsley Massacre.

In 1493, Christopher Columbus brought the first sugar plant from the Spanish Canary Islands to Hispaniola (the island home of Haiti and the Dominican Republic). "The plants that Columbus brought with him to the island he called Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) flourished. Soon there were sugar plantations all over the island, and a kind of "white gold" rush began" (Aronson & Budhos 31). By the 1700s, Saint Domingue, the French side of the island (known as Haiti), became the "world's richest sugar colony" (Aronson & Budhos 135). He had traveled in search of spices from India, made a wrong turn and ended up in the Caribbean, which became known as The West Indies. This voyage set into motion a series of events that set the stage for the establishment of the sugar economy on Hispaniola, "Sugar planting boomed first on Hispaniola...As the common saying went: "Without sugar, no Brazil; without slaves, no sugar; without Angola, no slaves" (Aronson & Budhos 32). Without African slaves, sugar production for the colonies would not have been staffed. The economy (of Europe and the colonies) probably would not exist, but for the labor of African slaves. Like a drug, the world became hooked on this product and African slaves were necessary in the cultivation of sugar for the colonies' sweet tooth. "Haiti, or Saint-Domingue as it was called, was known as the Jewel of the Antilles. One of the world's most prosperous colonies, its lush terrain provided 80% of the world's sugar, and an equally impressive portion of its coffee, rum, indigo, molasses, and timber."<sup>12</sup> As the hub of sugar production, Haiti earned the name "The Jewel of the Antilles." This title came from the incredible wealth and the development of a prosperous economy for the colonizing countries. The value of the country was due to the economic success that was

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<sup>12</sup> See Schrei, especially page 1, to read the background of why Haiti is called "The Jewel of the Antilles."

generated, or to put it more truthfully, the economic success of the colonizing countries was a direct result of the back-breaking enslavement and practices of transported African peoples.

They were producing “white gold” after all.

By the late 1700s, Saint Domingue (now Haiti) became the world center of sugar. At the time of the Haitian Revolution, the incensed revolutionaries decided to destroy everything related to sugar. Sugar was part of the dynamic that made the Africans slaves. Sugar needed to be wiped off the island, which served as a vast sugar factory to the world (Aronson & Budhos 83). Commanders gathered and this triggered the Haitian Revolution. Fighting for freedom, the former slaves defeated the armies of first England, then France: Europe’s two most powerful nations (Aronson & Budhos 88). The French controlled Haiti (in addition to Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guiana) after they witnessed how other European nations had prospered from the sugar economy. This involved securing the labor of “hundreds of thousands more African Slaves” (Aronson & Budhos 35). The irony of sugar cultivation lay in the taste of the product itself. While sugar was sweet, the labor of sugar-cane cutting was one of the most brutal forms of labor. The harvesting of sugar cane was so brutal that the average lifespan of an enslaved person working in the sugar cane fields was between 4 - 7 years.<sup>13</sup> A harsh existence and short-life span for African slaves was the brutal cost of massive economic wealth for European colonizing powers and the colonizing craving for dessert, sweetened tea, and coffee.

The Dominican Republic (Spanish territory) did not form part of the official movement to dismiss France as the ruling colonial power. In a sense, it remained in its own colonial bubble with Spain. Yet geographically it shared space with Haiti and was certain to experience certain consequences of Haiti’s political status. Amabelle relives the ambiguity of being Haitian,

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<sup>13</sup> See “Imperial Slave Economy,” and National Museum of African American History & Culture to read more about the brutal conditions for African slaves.



speaking French/Creole, living in a section of Hispaniola, now controlled by the Spanish, in a society that relegates Haitians to a (much) lower, undesirable social status. The context of her life is the battle between two European superpowers to gain full control of Hispaniola.

In *The Farming of Bones*, many of these socio-political battles get conflated in the symbol of the *cafecitos* (little cups of coffee with sugar or condensed milk), “The Dominicans needed the sugar from the cane for their *cafecitos* and dulce de leche” (Danticat 138). Haitians and Dominican families occasionally gather over *cafecitos* for what appears to be social time. Despite the brutality of the actual harvesting, they share the joy of drinking sweetened coffee together. The elements in the *cafecito* bring back to mind the horrors of the slave economy, the difficulties involved in harvesting sugar cane, and the decline of Haiti as a one-time prosperous island nation. At the same time, the imagery here is complex. Despite the strands of painful history that combine in the actual coffee cup, both groups do sit together for some form of communal enjoyment. At least for a moment, their language, social, and racial differences take a backseat to the coffee.

In one scene, La señora with whom Amabelle works for, asks Amabelle if she could invite the cane workers in for a *cafecito*. It is interesting that Amabelle’s boss, though not named often, appears to have a kind impulse. This is not a situation in which she unfeelingly adopts the attitudes that should apply to one in her social position. Yet, despite her inner (individual feelings) she has assumed the role of being a symbol of her color and caste. As a representative of the ruling class/caste she embodies or is perceived to embody its core values. Who she might be as a person becomes secondary to her social/political symbolism. This situation provides a complicated example of metonymy/synecdoche. In a way, the boss has lost her personal identity; instead, she has taken on attributes that define a whole social order. She becomes both a symbol

and a vector of the ruling color-caste. Parallel to this, the “cane people,” have been obliterated as individuals. They, too, have taken on symbolism as representations of a dark-skinned under-caste. The Spanish Dominican society has reduced both the plantation owners and enslaved peoples into symbols of their respective race-based, social grouping. It has deprived both groups of their individuality. This is evident at the level of language and how they denote each other. Given these many layers of complexity, the invitation to drink coffee takes on deeper social and cultural significance; la señora’s original, apparently well-intentioned motivation, meets (in her husband, Pico) with the harsh lines of class-gender-racial disparity.

The scene also highlights the tensions and growing inequality between resident Haitians and their Dominican counterparts, which might have reflected growing tensions between France and Spain. One of the characteristics of colonial politics has been the tendency of the outlying territories to mimic or to defend the position of their metropolitan colonizers. Plantation economies set up an unequal relationship between the outlying colonies, such as Haiti and Santo Domingo, with the “metropolitan homeland, the center of power” (Mintz xv). The resulting social hierarchies are “not about the dependent colony, the object and target of power.” (Mintz xv). The colony develops to meet the needs of the dominating metropolis. “[T]here is a tendency for one of the other—the “hub” or the “outer rim”—to slip out of focus” (Mintz xv). European nations, such as France and Spain, at the center of the exploitation and powering of food production and world goods took center stage in the conversation between European nations and the Caribbean. This thesis also allows the countries at the center of the exploitation and powering of food production and world goods to be at the center of the conversation as opposed to just within the margins of a story that centers the Western colonizing powers.

In the Dominican Republic, parallel to “hub” politics,” an ongoing internal caste system emerged, that despised Haitians, who tended to be darker complexioned and elevated Dominicans who tended to be of mixed European and African ancestry. These distinctions reflected social roles. Often, Haitians were involved in agriculture. They cultivated sugar and coffee. Their lighter skinned peers owned, ran, and operated the sugar and coffee plantations.<sup>14</sup> Anabelle’s boss would have belonged to this ruling class/caste. In all likelihood, she would have been light skinned (or at least lighter skinned than Amabelle). La Señora’s husband’s (Pico) response, reveals both her naiveté and the ruthlessness of the system they all operate in:

Amabelle, you know some of the cane people? ... Go and ask them—the ones who just walked by—to come and have un cafecito with us... We poured coffee into her best red orchid-patterned tea set and passed the first cups... [when her husband returned] he did not scold her, but once he discovered that she had used their imported orchid-patterned tea set, he took the set out to the yard and, launching them against the cement walls of the house latrines, he shattered the cups and saucers, one by one. (Danticat 111;113; 114)

When her husband Pico, who serves as part of Trujillo’s military cabinet, finds out, he smashes each individual cup that they drank out of. Danticat tells this part of the story with restraint, probably showing that his response is not extraordinary or unexpected, but part of the “acceptable” way of responding to dark-skinned, Haitian, workers. This scene highlights colorism, racism, and ethnicity tensions between the DR and Haiti. In this scene, Haitian Blackness is equated with unacceptability. Cleaning the cups was not enough for Pico. He needed to destroy them entirely. The thought of his wife having interactions with Black Haitian workers seems to have triggered violent rage and the desire to destroy. As a result, he destroys the cups, and does so violently, one at a time. This scene also serves as a foreshadowing for the

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<sup>14</sup> See Conde, to show the Haitian-Dominican tensions and struggles.

ethnic cleansing to come later in the book. Another point of interest revolves around the quality and kind vessels used to contain the coffee. “Poor people” probably did not use fine China: “Imported orchid-patterned” tea sets. They may have used earthen or less refined cups/vessels to hold their coffee. Additionally, orchids have long been a symbol of refinement and elitism. By destroying the cups, Pico broadcasted several negative attitudes directed to Haitians. His actions show his belief that: (1) he is socially superior to the Haitian participants in the gathering; (2) they have no right to fraternize with his wife; (3) that the cups have become contaminated by Haitian use; and (4) that rather than try to retrieve or repair the damage, he would prefer to get rid of the cups; and (5) a violent response is appropriate. This graphic scene serves as a metaphor for the Haitian-Dominican history and its violence. Haitians have struggled for (social) acceptance and have been found wanting.

### **CHAPTER THREE: Parsley the Bitter Herb – The Parsley Massacre**

The Massacre River has taken its violent name from the 1728 massacre when French buccaneers killed Spanish soldiers. Ironically, the history of bloodshed at this site repeated itself in the history of relations between a subsequent generation of French/Creole and Spanish speakers. This same Massacre River marks the spot at which the Haitian Parsley Massacre took place a little over 200 years later. Danticat memorializes this event, quite explicitly, in *The Farming of Bones*. The Parsley Massacre that occurred on the Haitian-Dominican border of La Isla Espaniola (the Island of Hispaniola) marked the culmination of years of friction and antagonism by Spanish-Speaking Dominicans against Haitians who mostly spoke French and Creole. Trujillo, the ruling President of the day, and Dominican civilians legitimized a brutal genocide which amounted to an ethnic cleansing campaign. In the area separating Haiti from the DR, it might have been difficult to distinguish Haitians from Dominicans, solely based upon appearance. Despite the general color-caste distinctions between the groups, many second generation Haitians had intermarried and intermingled with their Dominican hosts. The groups lived side by side. Many spoke both languages. So, to set apart those who had strong ties to Haiti, Dominicans would ask apparent Haitians how to pronounce parsley (the intonation and pronunciation are different in Spanish and French). Because Haitians speak French (or Creole) and Dominicans speak Spanish, their pronunciation of the word is markedly different. Also, certain French/Creole speakers did not know the Spanish word for the herb. They, too, would fail the “test” not even because of their inflection, but because of their lack of knowledge of Spanish. Either way, French/Creole speakers got punished. If they pronounced “perejil” the French/Creole way, or they did not know how to say parsley in Spanish, this would indicate that they were

Haitian or of Haitian descent. The Dominicans interrogating, would simply hack them to death with machetes.

In the book, Danticat reenacts this history, first with rumors, “Many had heard rumors of groups of Haitians being killed in the night because they could not manage to trill their “r” and utter a throaty “j” to ask for parsley, to say perejil” (Danticat 112). To many Haitians, the Dominican Republic (DR) has provided opportunities for jobs, particularly on sugar plantations, which continued to be in high demand. During this period, the United States began to open up American businesses within the DR which created even more jobs. This tempted many Haitians to move to the Dominican Republic. These newly transplanted Haitians had to assimilate and adapt to the prevailing (Spanish) culture of the Dominican Republic. However, they were not the only Haitians in the DR.

Certain Haitian families had been living in the Dominican Republic for generations—long before Trujillo. They lived amongst each other, married, had children, and lived together. Every Haitian in the DR was not always a poor, cane cutter; there was a full hierarchy of Dominicans with Haitian roots, including wealthy Haitian-Dominicans. It was in October 1937, when Rafael Trujillo unleashed a racially and ethnically motivated carnage against Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans. Trujillo invited civilians to join him. “The official policy intent was to kill all Haitians at the Dominican border” (Murdoch 1). The fear-factor of Trujillo’s regime ran deep; civilians would randomly assert authority by cornering a Haitian and asking them to say “perejil.” “If they failed or they spoke with a Creole pronunciation or accent, they were chopped individually by the use of machetes. A brutal and violent way of killing. Although there is no definitive tally of murdered Haitians, it is estimated to be 30,000” (Charles 3).

In this text, parsley serves simultaneously as a word, symbol, and tool used to commit genocide against Haitians. The language differences between Spanish and French, helped to codify a lingering color issue prevalent on the island. Lighter skinned, Spanish-speaking Dominicans held attitudes of superiority, based solely on their complexions, towards darker, French/Creole-speaking Haitians. This underlying racial/ethnic/color issue added energy and fuel to Dominican efforts to identify non-conforming Haitian language users who could not pronounce (or did not know) the Spanish term for the herb.

Interestingly, in terms of its usage, parsley had beginning of life and end-of-life significance for Haitians. It marked the first washing of an infant's hair and combined with boiled orange leaves to conduct ritual burial washings. In between, it seasoned, brewed teas, and added savor to life:

We used pesi, perejil, parsley, the damp summer morning-ness of it, the mingled sprigs, bristly and coarse, gentle and docile all at once, tasteless and bitter when chewed, a sweetened wind inside the mouth, the leaves a different taste than the stalk, all this we savored for our food, our teas, our baths, griefs, to shed a passing year's dust as a new one dawned, to wash a new infant's hair for the first time and—along with boiled orange leaves—a corpse's remains one final time (Danticat 60).

Ironically, this parsley, medicine, spice, food, seasoning, and ritual bath, became a tool for mass genocide when it falls into the hands of those whose ethnocentricity has mushroomed into full-blown racism/colorism/domination that finds expression in exterminating a group of people, based upon their pronunciation and use of French/Creole. As a symbol, parsley, in *The Farming of Bones* captures the dichotomy between healing and death. An ingredient, supposed to bring nourishment, health, and comfort, becomes a channel for destruction and mayhem:

Two brothers were dragged from a cane field and macheted to death by field guards—someone there had supposedly witnessed the event with his own eyes. It was said that the Generalissimo, along with a border commission, had given orders to have all the Haitians killed. Poor Dominican peasants had been asked to catch Haitians and bring them to the soldiers (Danticat 112).

The story of parsley is the story of corruption of a potentially “good” ingredient and its alliance with negative forces. This too, unfortunately, occurs in the twisted story of the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As recounted in the novel, parsley embodies the ultimate yin and yang of life. Death and healing; slaughter and birth; French-Haitian and doomed-to-die and Spanish/Dominican permitted-to-live. These elements get tangled up in the story of parsley as it unfolds in the Dominican Republic. Even today, parsley forms part of the base of many Caribbean and Latin American spice mixtures such as epis (in Haiti): a mix of parsley, onion, celery, cilantro, Green Bell Pepper, scallion, Thyme, garlic, lime juice, olive oil, vinegar, and Sofrito, etc. It is difficult to reconcile parsley’s benefits as a food substance with its association with mayhem, murder, and death.

On another level, though, if we view the Parsley Massacre as a bizarre ritual, perhaps even a somewhat religious event, the use of parsley as an accompaniment to a major sacrifice comes up in Jewish and Christian literature. Passover has been described as the celebration of the sacrifice of the paschal lamb. In memory of this, the lamb is eaten with “bitter herbs” which include aromatic lettuce, cucumber, endives and “parsley.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Exodus 12:8; Numbers 9:11 from the “Topical Bible: Bitter,” which expands on “bitter herbs” during Passover.



## CHAPTER FOUR: From Sweet Cerises to Crisps

Hundreds of miles east of Hispaniola, Trinidad with Indigenous origins, has lived through French, English, and Spanish colonialism, along with heavy infusions of South Asian (notably Indian) populations and culture. The complexity of this fusion culture emerges in the coming-of-age story of a Trinidadian native, who must grapple with an abrupt relocation from her Aunt Tantie's working-class home to her middle-class Aunt Beatrice's (Aunt B) home. *Crick Crack Monkey* by Merle Hodge tracks this painful transition. Although it occurs within Trinidad, it might as well have occurred somewhere in the British Isles. It causes Tee severe culture shock. Her personhood and sense of place, space, and identity get challenged by her Aunt Beatrice's insistence on introducing her to unfamiliar British food and European social mores in a callous way. Aunt B. uses put-downs, a haughty tone, and ridicule to get Tee to understand that her prior life lacks polish and that, to become somebody, she must adhere to the British way.

Unlike *The Farming of Bones*, in *Crick Crack, Monkey*, when multiple cultures intersect they do not trigger physical violence, genocide, or mayhem. Instead, they seem to force choices that may result in permanent displacement, feelings of loss, or isolation. Part of the loss seems literal. If you are no longer in a home or place that honors local Trinidadian foods, you can no longer enjoy fresh fruits and confections on spot. That experience constitutes one kind of loss. You miss what you love. Yet, it still has a place in your heart and mind. You have fond memories. You still find affinity with the place, food, and culture. However, when you lose your taste for that which once sustained, comforted, and gave you a sense of place and belonging, you experience a deeper, perhaps even more painful "loss." The second kind shifts your identity and makes you into someone different. This far-reaching, deep loss lies at the heart of *Crick Crack*.

Tee, a young woman who struggles to find her place in the world, must choose between the Trinidadian life with her Aunt Tantie and the British morals, ideals, and practices of her Aunt Beatrice. She is torn between two cultures. Born and raised in Trinidad by Aunt Tantie, who embraces the South Asian-African fusion culture, Tee must move to another part of Trinidad under the care of Aunt Beatrice, a true lover of England and things British. In a world that salutes Europe and defines Asia and Africa as subpar, Tee must find a way to reconcile her initial love of Trinidad and its peoples, with a growing sense that their culture lacks world recognition and worth. Told in the first-person narrative format, the story appears to unfold from Tee's perspective. However, it is not that simple. As Tee moves from acceptance to rejection of Trinidad her voice changes. The tone of her descriptions of her relatives and their eating habits becomes disparaging. So, although she remains the narrator, it is as though she has channeled another, alien voice – perhaps the strident voice of Aunt Beatrice, the committed lover of England/Britain.

Aunt Beatrice shows Tee how to climb the social ladder by making contacts with English residents of Trinidad and those who worship Britain. Aunt B looks forward to having tea with the vicar, even though he is known to be a drunkard. This social activity, she believes, elevates her status, and makes her life more meaningful. It is significant that, as the story progresses, Tee also comes to value tea and the foods associated with entertaining in the British style. In the backdrop, the original Trinidad-loving Tee has been silenced. Her food has been discredited and she must struggle to be authentic in a subculture (of Aunt Beatrice's home) that undervalues their origins.

Tee's relationship to food reflects the tensions within her as she tries to adapt to life with Aunt Beatrice—without the kitchen staples of Trinidadian culture. At first, Tee yearns for tropical

deserts, fruits, and outings to the market—markers of Trinidad and the fusion of culture evident in its foods. As her identity shifts, Tee begins to reject Trinidad and its food. Slowly, she internalizes the fact that Britain, not Trinidad, heads up the Commonwealth. Her food tastes shift and change accordingly to line up with political realities. In a world where power aligns with Europe, Tee begins to side with the powerful and to adopt their tastes in food, culture, and social behavior. In a sense, Tee travels a kind of reverse Middle Passage journey in the novel. She moves her attention and focus from the New World (Trinidad) and to the world of England (through Aunt Beatrice), its eurocentrism, and its distinctive (bland) palate.

This reverse journey proves to be rough and destabilizing in its own way as Tee experiences a difficult culture shift. When Tee first arrives at Aunt Beatrice's home, she recalls that, "At dinner I had no appetite and Auntie Beatrice piled things onto my plate" (Hodge 77). Tee experiences a common "traveler's," dilemma where she does not adjust to the food and setting of her new surroundings. In this earlier section of the book, she calls Aunt Beatrice's food "things," they don't even have individual names; she lacks interest in whatever Aunt Beatrice offers because it is so different to the authentic, multicultural Trinidadian food she has grown to love.

Over time, though, Aunt B wears Tee down. The English/British foods which, at first, seem uninviting to Tee, becomes increasingly acceptable; she finds that her Trinidadian roots equate her with a subculture. To rise in stature and to survive a hostile and disorienting environment, she decides to take on the English/British eating habits and change herself. In terms of food, she must transition from South Asian spices, Indigenous fruits, and African food preparation techniques and embrace the cuisine of Great Britain, its tea rituals, and its liquor. Making this transition proves to be disorienting. Tee initially longs for the taste of Trinidadian

foods and hot pepper, “I thought of dalpouri and good hot pepper. The height of festivity to Toddan and me was eating off a piece of banana-leaf, in the happy event of the supply plates being insufficient. Auntie Beatrice had an aversion to hot pepper; she said it was nastiness...we poured it over everything—rice, fish-soup...” (Hodge 87). However, now that she is in Aunt Beatrice’s home where things like hot pepper is looked down upon, as we later learn, Tee internalizes Beatrice’s British palate as her own. By adopting Aunt B’s food, she has taken on her personality/preferences/point of view.

Early in the story, Tee reminisces how her grandmother, lovingly known as “Ma,” would go to the market on Sunday mornings to sell sweet treats that she made during the week, “Ma had a spot in the market on Sunday mornings, and she spent a great part of the week stewing cashews, Pommescythères, cerises, making guava-cheese and guava jelly, sugar-cake, nut-cake, bennay-balls, toolum, shaddock-peel candy, chilibibi...” (Hodge 16). Incidentally, “Ma ” might have been a Caribbean “higgler,” or market woman who would make her livelihood from selling in the market and reinvesting the profits in her business. Ma certainly shared her love of candy with Tee. This, in turn, anchored Tee to Trinidad. Each sweet element and treat serves as a reminder of the many multicultural strains within Trinidad’s culture. Each desert serves as a microcosm of the Indigenous (Brazil/South America), European, and African ingredients that combined to create a unique new cuisine.

If we were to treat each food citation as an example of synecdoche or even metonymy, then each fruit or desert could be seen to represent the culture of its origin. Ma’s goodies become a check list of cultures, religions, and ethnicities that have contributed to Trinidadian society. Cashews originated in Brazil.<sup>16</sup> Pommescythères, of French origin, translates to “*apple of*

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<sup>16</sup> See ScienceDirect to read more about the trade of cashews to “other parts of the Caribbean, India, and East Africa.”

*Cytherea*.”<sup>17</sup> The stewed apple makes chutneys, which is a practice that originated in India to preserve spices and food. Cerises, French for cherry, makes it to Ma’s list. Although bing, maraschino, and garden cherries have traveled the globe, Ma refers to them collectively, utilizing their French name. France conquered Trinidad and many fruits have retained their French names. French colonization (1783) has imprinted its language on the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. That phase of Trinidad’s colonial experience shows up in the naming of certain fruits. Guava cheese comes from a recipe developed in Goa, India.<sup>18</sup> Bennay Balls, sweet balls of brown sugar and sesame seeds, harken back to Africa.<sup>19</sup> This tracks the direct pattern of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade or at the very least the trade between Africa and the Caribbean. Shaddock-peel candy ties Trinidad to Asia.<sup>20</sup> Toolum, a treat of molasses and coconut, combines products of the sugar production industry with coconut.<sup>21</sup>

This passage, set within the first 16 pages, sets up Tee’s early, multicultural orientation to the world. It is rich with ties to Asia and Africa. Tee’s conceptualization of the multicultural Caribbean world involves admiration, the same admiration she holds for these culinary delicacies. Each deserves to be named separately and acknowledged. These sweets are not only something that she holds dear, but they bind her to her own grandmother. In this sense the sweets come with an ancestral link. Quite literally, Tee might have strands of her DNA that tie her racially and culturally to both Africa and Asia, the home of most of these sweets. The purchasing of the ingredients and the preparation time provide opportunities for her to bond with her grandmother and to learn, through food, the complex world connections she experiences daily. It

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<sup>17</sup> See blog Wildgirl to read more about the origins of Pommes-cythères and when it is consumed.

<sup>18</sup> See Times of India Recipes to show more about guava cheese and its Goan roots.

<sup>19</sup> See TasteAtlas to read more about the origins of the word, “Benne.”

<sup>20</sup> See “Shaddock,” in Oxford Reference to read how the fruit came to the Caribbean and to learn about the words’ etymology.

<sup>21</sup> See WiWords to read more about the origins of Chilibibi, also known as Asham.

is only when she faces English (the colonizer) culture through her interactions with Aunt Beatrice that her thoughts, opinions, and viewpoints of Trinidad change irreversibly. Later in the book around the time of Carnival, Tee reflects on how she now feels about the classic Trinidadian event:

...I discovered that I didn't even want to go home for Carnival...We sang all the way and drummed on our chocolate and pitch-oil tins that contained the pelau and roti and dalpouri and chicken. It had always been an event we looked forward to even more than Christmas...All this I was seeing again through a kind of haze of shame; and I reflected that even now Tantie and Toddan must be packed into that ridiculous truck with all those common raucous niggery people and all those coolies (Hodge 94-95).

The process of downgrading Trinidad's culture started after Tee arrived to live with Aunt Beatrice. In this excerpt, Tee shows her growing shame and repudiation for a quintessential part of Trinidadian culture (Carnival). The assimilation process with Aunt Beatrice, moves Tee from acceptance to loathing. She begins to disdain Trinidadian food and uses pejorative and negative terms to describe Trinidadian food and eating practices. When her Aunt Tantie and Uncle Sylvester come to visit, Tee rejects their version of Trinidad as symbolized by the food they bring:

The worst moment of all was when they drew forth a series of greasy paper bags, announcing that they contained polorie, anchar, roti from Neighb' Ramlaal-Wife, and accra and fry bake and zaboca from Tantie, with a few other things I had almost forgotten existed, in short, all manner of ordinary nastiness...As I sat with the bags poised gingerly on my knee Tantie suggested: 'Well yu don' want to eat a polorie or something? What yu waitin' for?' I declined in alarm: the very thought of sitting in Auntie Beatrice's drawing room eating coolie-food! And *accra!* *Saltfish!* Fancy even 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 yu out them,' and reaching into the 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 a 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 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 (Hodge 118).

In this new version of Tee, where the British customs and culture have infiltrated her mind, her native food equates to "nastiness." "Coolie Food" does not equate with upward mobility. To begin, "coolie" is a derogatory term used to address indentured servants or laborers. This food nourishes migrant farm workers who have come to Trinidad to make a life in agriculture or the trades. Now, curry, polorie, roti, anchar, accra, saltfish, and zaboca hold little appeal.<sup>22</sup> They might even seem repulsive. It is interesting to note that each of these foods has a tie to Africa, Asia, or Indigenous America. Through her rejection of the Trinidadian food, Tee also rejects her earliest conditioning and the intimate relationships she established as a child in Trinidad. Thus, she "loses" her grandmother, Tantie, Sylvester and the entire community they represent. She battles to establish her identity. In balancing Trinidad with England, England wins out. In this passage, Tee looks down upon Trinidadian food with disgust. Her attitude seems to suggest that it should not be considered food; she now deems Trinidadian culture and food etiquette to be primitive. The pungent flavor of the curry turns her off. However, it is not just curry that loses favor. Tee weans herself off the food-related nicknames that she shares with Ma. Early in the story, she revels in being Ma's pet, "sugar cake," and "dumplin:"

Sometimes when the others were not about she would accost me suddenly: 'An who is Ma sugar-cake?'  
'Tee!'  
'An who is Ma dumplin?''  
'Tee!' (Hodge 21)

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<sup>22</sup> See Bon Appetit, Sukhis, Simplyrecipes, Spruceeats, Savorythoughts, Caribbeannational weekly, Wiwords, and Jamaica gleaner to read about curry, polorie, roti, anchar, accra, saltfish, and zaboca respectively.

In this scene, Tee gleefully accepts Ma's pet names which also happen to be food elements in Trinidadian cuisine. She connects to her roots and origins through her grandmother's naming and names for her. By the time Tantie and Uncle Sylvester visit her at Aunt Beatrice's home, Tee has taken on a different perspective. She finds their food and their banter repulsive. The very fact that her uncle sits down to eat in front of her appears undignified in her eyes. Equating Uncle Sylvester eating roti on the sofa as if he were eating it on the "floor" quite literally shows how much her perceptions have changed. The floor sits below the sofa; he might as well be eating "lower-class" food on the floor. The food itself defines him as one of a lower caste/category. Tee defines herself to be higher up on the social pole --but at the expense of her Trinidadian identity. The farther away she is from her Trinidadian roots, the more "civilized" she thinks she becomes. Tantie, Uncle Sylvester, and their eating habits link them to an under-caste; Tee wants to separate herself from them.

In a telling scene, Tee becomes tuned into protocols related to using silverware. She had been accustomed to eating with a bowl and dessert spoon. An encounter with Aunt Beatrice makes her feel "ordinary" or common. First, Aunt Beatrice addresses her by her full name, Cynthia which is a far cry from the endearing "Tee" she prefers. Second, Aunt B. makes it clear that eating with a spoon identifies Tee as lower-class.

At midday when we came home from school we helped ourselves to lunch out of the pots and pans. One day I absentmindedly put my food into a bowl and took a dessert-spoon with which to eat it...

'What's the matter, Cynthia, weren't there any more plates and knives and forks?'

'Yes,' I replied lamely, aware now of the nature of my transgression but deeply puzzled nevertheless; I merely found it very comfortable to eat rice out of a bowl and with a spoon instead of chasing it all over a plate with a fork...'Don't bring your ordinaryness here! *We* don't eat with bowl and spoon here, you're not living at your precious *Tantie* now!' (Hodge 105)



In this scene, Tee inadvertently takes up old habits, ones that she is most comfortable with, such as eating with a bowl and spoon instead of a plate, knife, and fork. Aunt Beatrice chastises and ridicules her. Aunt B explicitly informs Tee that the Trinidadian ways that she learned from Tantie are unacceptable. In this way, Aunt B issues an ultimatum forcing Tee to choose either the high road (Britain, England, The UK, and Europe) or the low one (Trinidad's multicultural diet and lifestyle).

It is also significant that, in describing Tantie and Uncle Sylvester, the author uses dialect. In a world that gives respect to England and things British, the use of dialect often indicates less education, less social standing, and less credibility. We see many of these factors at work in this passage describing their visit. Tantie and Sylvester use familiar language.

They communicate comfortably in short phrases; their speech includes colloquialism and references to everyday Trinidadian names of things. As a term of affection, they refer to Tee as "Dou-dou," (I picked up on this because my own Haitian grandmother used to call me this. Perhaps the French influence in Trinidad made this term of affection popular there). What is clear is that this would not be a way that the British/English would refer to someone – even in an affectionate way. The use of the term marks Tantie; it makes her part of a subculture (from the British perspective) or at least a culture with non-British influences. Extrapolating from Aunt Beatrice's attitudes, anything non-British automatically lacks credibility. On the other side of things, it may equally be true that, knowing Aunt Beatrice's position, Tantie is deliberately using Tee's pet name openly, to antagonize Aunt Beatrice. Incidentally, the act of giving these specific foods a human counterpart, would be the equivalent of a kind of reverse-personification. Instead of giving an (in)animate object human traits, as happens with personification, this is giving a human a food proxy. If we treat this pet name process as a literary device, what it suggests is

that the cultural foods serve not only as figurative representatives of the people who eat them, but quite literally as their alter egos. Thus, rejecting curry becomes not only rejection of the culture that favors the curry, but also a rejection of each and every curry-eater. This idea reinforces the concept that “you are what you eat.” A number of commentators have pointed to this fact, notably Sarah Lawson Welsh.<sup>23</sup> However, within *Crick Crack, Monkey*, the nicknaming process makes a similar point. Quite literally, Ma and Tee name each other and refer to each other, based upon their favorite foods.

Before Tantie and Uncle Sylvester visit Tee at Aunt Beatrice’s home, Tee seems to observe her aunt and her daily habits. Tee’s “conversion” and indoctrination is certainly in motion. We see this through her observation of Aunt Beatrice who critiques Trinidadian shops in

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<sup>23</sup> See Welsh in *Food, Text, and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean*, reflect on another scholar, Jeremy Poynting who says, ‘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 token...’ (Welsh 118).

In Sarah Lawson Welsh’s, *Food, Text, and Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean*, she meditates on Caribbean food and identity, drawing on *Crick, Crack, Monkey*. Welsh explains how the author, Hodge, “satirizes Aunt Beatrice’s ‘ingestion of metropolitan values’ through middle-class, Anglocentric 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.’ However, Tee herself is not immune to such damaging pretensions.” (Welsh 110).

“... [W]hat 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” (Welsh 111).

Sarah Welsh writes, “You are what you eat.” In this case Tee no longer wants to be associated with her Afro-Indian-Caribbean roots. She uses food to distinguish herself and her separation from the culture and her roots and the shift to her new “indoctrination” (the description used by Welsh). “It has argued that images of feeding, feasting, fasting and other food rituals and practices, as articulated in the writings can constitute a powerful force of social cohesion and cultural continuity or, alternatively, can signal social divisiveness and separatism...and, finally, the complex afterlives of Caribbean food in globalized diasporic contexts where questions of identity, culinary ‘tradition’ and ‘authenticity’ are to the fore” (Welsh 129).

“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 reestablish 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 a process of culinary deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation” (Welsh 126-7).

the “bush” or the country, at every step of the way. Nothing good comes from her regarding the people or their food, “...Aunt Beatrice went from shop to shop complaining that there was no proper food to be got down here in this bush, barely a bottle of olives and a bag of potato crisps and as for things like Worcester sauce and French dressing well it was a good thing we’d brought our own supply of food that was all she could say.” (Hodge 101) Not surprisingly, the foods that Aunt Beatrice considers “proper” or “real food” seem to be European items. From the olives to the potato chips, Worcester sauce, and French dressing—which names France, Aunt Beatrice revels in what Europeans find palatable. These ingredients do not include the Caribbean—let alone Trinidad.

The ‘Britishness’ gets doubly emphasized as Aunt Beatrice calls the chips, “crisps.” This might be a way to stress the non-American (chips) name for fried potatoes. This passage emphasizes the cultural tensions between Britain and Trinidad as voiced through Aunt Beatrice’s many complaints. The overpowering influence of British and colonizing actors, play themselves out in Aunt Beatrice’s acid comments. She has been properly indoctrinated and has nothing positive to say about Trinidad. In many ways, Aunt Beatrice personifies the British perspective. It is as though she has lost her individuality and now reflects wholly and totally the colonial way of thinking. Except that, a piece of Trinidad ironically lingers in her interactions.

After all, Aunt Beatrice continues to live in Trinidad, even though she has carefully isolated herself from the presence and influence of anything or anyone non-British. Much as she would like to, Aunt Beatrice cannot eliminate Tee’s nickname. Even Aunt Beatrice refers to Tantie as Tantie. She must still suffer through visits from her ordinary Trinidadian relatives. Like it or not, she is caught too in an in-between space, balancing Britain with Trinidad, even though

she would dearly love to eliminate Trinidad completely. This must be a difficult space to navigate. Britain affects how she socializes; it affects how she selects her language; and it dictates her food preferences. In an interesting tea scene, Tee and Aunt Beatrice entertain a guest. The menu includes sandwiches, olives, and fancy biscuits. None of these items harkens back to Trinidad. They call to mind Northern Europe, known for its flour-based sweets, and the Mediterranean (olives). Hodge writes, “The three of us ate dinner with the sumptuous array spread obscenely around us. After we’d eaten Auntie Beatrice laid dishcloth over everything, the sandwiches, the nuts, olives, and fancy biscuits” (Hodge 102). Even the word sumptuous was not one Tee ever used before. She has “superseded” in class and language through the way in which she talks about the British foods she has become accustomed to. Also, “fancy biscuits,” insinuates this step in prestige or level.

Food preferences are not random. They reveal deep attitudes about health, nourishment, and social status, to name a few. Sydney Mintz, author of *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, even argues that “...Food preferences are close to the center of their self-definition: people who eat strikingly different foods or similar foods in different ways are thought to be strikingly different, sometimes even less human” (Mintz 3). So, when Tee and Aunt B much on nuts, olives, and fancy biscuits they communicate affinity for the cultures that prepare, sell, and export these foods. When this affinity gets paired with their rejection of anything related to Trinidadian/multicultural treats, you can see that the process of assimilation has run its course. Both Tee and Aunt B have assimilated enough to operate effectively in the sector of Trinidadian society that yearns to be British. They have “crossed over.”

Aunt Beatrice has become a living symbol of the colonial mindset and her true self has been obliterated. You could say that Aunt Beatrice personifies the colonial mindset. This begs

many questions, including questions involving hierarchy and entitlement. Who dictates which cultures/foods should be well regarded? Why do certain foods and cultures receive adulation, while others get relegated to a subservient status? By what authority? Although the colonial experience supplies some answers, it cannot wholly explain the complete transformation of people, like Tee, who voluntarily abandon their home culture in favor of a mostly alien way of eating, thinking, and living, as represented by a different menu.

Where are the multicultural influences that we saw in the market when Ma bought the treats? Has she abandoned or suppressed those rich connections? If so, how does that impact her psyche and relationships? Who is she now? Where are the remnants of her “original self?” The novel does not provide answers to these kinds of questions. It simply describes the painful transition, through Tee, in detail.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Saltfish, Sardines, and Goat

The “in-between” phases of history make a mark on Caribbean literature. By “in-between,” I mean periods of time when there has been no active conflict, war, or open social unrest. Yet, people on the ground, as reflected in their literature, continue to process the realities of slavery, indentured servitude, colonialism, the plantation economies, and their aftermath. These issues percolate, just beneath the surface. As we have seen, particularly in *The Farming of Bones*, Caribbean history has been punctuated by violence that rises to a peak in episodes such as the Parsley Massacre or the Haitian Revolution. However, it also passes through less volatile periods of social uncertainty which disrupt and change the pre-existing order of things. Emancipation seems to have been one such period.

During Emancipation, the formerly enslaved Africans took on roles outside of the plantation economy if they could. Others, notably from Asia, were imported into the Caribbean to provide low-cost, indentured labor. This dynamic shaped post-Emancipation societies across the Caribbean, including Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago. In *Sugar Changed The World: A Story of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom, and Science*, Aronson and Budhos discuss this history post-emancipation of chattel slavery:

Slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1833, thirty years before the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States. But even after they freed their slaves, the sugar plantation owners were desperate to find cheap labor to cut cane and process sugar. So, the British owners looked to another part of the empire—India—and recruited thousands of men and women, who were given five-year contracts and a passage back (Aronson & Budhos 4).

Growing capital through human labor was at the forefront of the British minds when emancipation occurred. In Lisa Lowe’s book, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, she notes that

with the passage of the Slave Trade Act, Chinese laborers were imported to shore up Caribbean labor markets:

In 1807, as Britain passed the Slave Trade Act to abolish the transatlantic African slave trade in the empire, Secretary of State Lord Hobart secretly dispatched Kenneth MacQueen to captain a ship named *Fortitude* from Bengal bound for Trinidad, carrying a cargo of Chinese workers and East India Company goods (Lowe 43).

By the time Emancipation and various independence movements had come and gone, many Caribbean nations initiated a new phase of relationships with their former European colonizers. Students from the former colonies traveled to the United States and other parts of the former British Empire for higher education. Caribbean nationals in search of careers and economic improvement also took a similar journey. This commute involved tasting, trying, and learning unfamiliar foods and new ways of interacting. The poems, “Letter from Mama Dot” by Fred D’Aguiar and “Dining at Customs” by Tanya Shirley, reflect this movement and the complicated ways in which former colonists developed ties with their colonial “motherlands.” This movement and interaction between the colonial mainland and the post-colonial Caribbean provide the backdrop for the two works. In these poems, we see the intersection of the legacy of slavery, indentured servitude, and the creolization of cultures in the Caribbean operating across a larger geographic landscape.

Both poems describe variations on cross-cultural interactions which involve the metropolis. In “Mama Dot,” Boston, Massachusetts becomes the hub. In “Dining at Customs,” an undesignated part of Britain, represents the metropolis. Both works use smells, tastes, and references to the cuisines of their Caribbean homelands to express the cultural, political, and economic distance separating the Caribbean from Boston and Britain. In both poems, home foods seem to become eclipsed by the food associated with foreign, colonizing powers. Also, an

undercurrent of rebellion makes each work a form of literary “protest”—although the violence tends to be understated.

“Mama Dot” tells the story of a relative stuck in the Caribbean, suffering through a failing economy. Despite the promises of freedom and social progress, the actual food that people must consume speaks of deprivation and resourcefulness in the face of lack. Sunday dinner, the pride and joy of many Caribbean families has become a matter of cheap tinned sardines. Saltfish, another cheap protein source, has become the meat replacement and creative cooks have taken to “currying” it. Even to get food, buyers must stand in long lines before they can make their selections. Food scarcity has become a metaphor for the economically precarious existence on the island after independence. Promises have evaporated and life on the ground has taken on a difficult tone. The reader does not know the exact nature of the relationship between Mama Dot, the writer, and the recipient. However, we do know that they come from the same island; given the intimate tone of the poem, they probably lived together (or had very frequent contact like a grandparent and grandchild or an aunt and nephew/niece) prior to the relative’s departure for some part of Europe/North America.

In many ways, Fred D’Aguiar, a Guyanese-British poet born in London to Guyanese parents, makes “Mama Dot,” partly autobiographical. The poem functions as a trans-continental and trans-cultural form of communication. He traveled back and forth between Guyana and London and eventually returned to London in 1972. In “Mama Dot,” D’Aguiar uses an intimate one-on-one letter between a grandmother and her assumed grandson who lives in England (similar to D’Aguiar’s own background) to describe the economic stagnation and food shortages occurring in the Caribbean, once fledgling nations sought to assert their independence. As the poem states, the dominant perspective represented is that of the relative (grandmother) who



complains about life in the Caribbean to a displaced “West Indian working in England;” (Line 30).

“Mama Dot” describes the economic and social changes of Guyana from the perspective of Mama Dot, a Guyanese local/woman and grandmother figure, writing in the form of a letter to a loved one living outside of Guyana, in England. This poem makes important links between the economic instability and food insecurity in the Caribbean with the painful relationship with the metropolis of England. The poem begs the question, without actually asking it, ‘Is there some connection between the wealth of the metropolis, and the poverty of the outlying Caribbean territory? Could there be a direct, causal relationship linking them both? In other words, has the metropolis benefitted at the expense of territories like Guyana?’ These unvoiced questions all come wrapped up in the idea of nationalism, which is mentioned explicitly in the poem.

The specific foods mentioned in the poem are indicative of Guyanese cuisine and cultural exchange resulting from diasporic patterns and migration. Organized in two long, free-form stanzas written in dialect, colloquial Caribbean English and textbook English, the letter lists all kinds of political and social issues, using food scarcity as an extended metaphor for general deterioration and loss of hope. Social conditions continue to deteriorate; this shows up in the (lack of) food and poor quality of provisions available.

Food trade reflects the existing state of flux in the Caribbean country. The country now imports staples that it used to grow internally. This country no longer grows its own rice, “that used [t]o grow wild”; it must now import it (D’Aguiar Stanza I, Lines 8 & 9). Salt-fish has replaced other forms of protein and they have even started to curry it. People hunger for basics, like “Flour, for some roti” and “powdered milk” (D’Aguiar Stanza I, Line 10 & 18). The Sunday Meal (the best meal of the week) has become a showcase for lowly “sardines” (D’Aguiar Stanza

I, Line 28). People stand in line to buy most things, including “Flour, milk, sugar, barley, and fruits” (D’Aguiar Stanza I, Line 10). Overall, it operates like a “South American dictatorship” (D’Aguiar Stanza I, Line 6). People “are stabbing one another” for a place in the food line (D’Aguiar Line 13). The country is “fed up” (D’Aguiar Line 23). Since independence, the country has kept “stepping back” (D’Aguiar Lines 23 & 24). As far as Mama Dot is concerned, since Independence, food has worsened in quality and quantity. Life has become incredibly difficult; people spout words about “nationality” but are “still hungry” (D’Aguiar Line 26). Their aspirations do not make a huge difference to their reality. Food is scarce and so is hope – or at least this is the implication. Historians, such as George Beckford and Walter Rodney have studied the dynamics linking the underdevelopment of the Caribbean/Developing Economies, to the prosperity of corresponding metropolitan societies.<sup>24</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, West Indians working in England are a group of foreigners known and referred to as “Tonto, Friday or Punkawallah” back home (D’Aguiar Stanza II, Line 3).<sup>25</sup> There they suffer identity loss and must conform to an unknown way of life. At the time of death, they develop “roots” there (D’Aguiar Stanza II, Line 28) although they will never be truly at home.

Back in the Caribbean, life seems to be regressing; progress has become elusive. In Stanza I of the poem, Mama Dot explains her worry that Guyana has taken many steps backward. Nothing would be more insulting to a country that regarded itself as part of the British empire, to be compared to a lawless, Latin American dictatorship:

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<sup>24</sup> See Beckford to read more on Developing/Caribbean Economies in his book, *Persistent, Poverty and Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the Third World*.

<sup>25</sup> See Merriam Webster for Tonto definition which is “fool” in Spanish & Encyclopedia for Punkawallah definition which is someone who would manually operate a fan in India pre-automatic and electric fans.

We are more and more  
Like another South American dictatorship,  
And less and less a part of the Caribbean. (D'Aguiar Lines 5-7)

Mama Dot lists multiple reasons for her frustration. Post-independence (“since independence/ This country hasn’t stopped stepping back;” (D’Aguiar Lines 23-24). Mama Dot uses the shortage of food and the grocery queues, to highlight the post-colonial reality for Guyana. The picture describes privation.

Historically, Guyana had produced more than enough food for its inhabitants. The first rice came to the country from Dutch colonial settlers in the 18th century to feed slaves who worked on the sugar plantations. In the damp, moist climate, rice thrived and continued to grow wild. It has become a staple in Guyanese food culture. Mama Dot emphasizes the deteriorating economic state of the country by pointing to the lack of local produce available to Guyanese people.

Profit, greed, and the desire to prosper, fueled the Trans-Atlantic-slave trade, and enslavement practices. The compulsion to import labor, to exploit both the trans-placed peoples and the native land to make money for the colonizing countries, grew out of the motivation to make profits. In “Letter from Mama Dot,” the poet lists a string of items that are not all completely native to Guyana. However, they have a history of growing well on the land or thriving in the Caribbean climate. Due to the economic situation in the country, the local produce harvested by local people has become considerably more expensive than foreign produce, through no fault of their own.

In the poem, Mama Dot tells her grandchild,

Every meal is salt-fish these days; we even  
curry it.” (D’Aguiar Lines 16-17).

The reference to saltfish brings up a defining set of Caribbean eating habits. The Caribbean has a long history of preservation practices—especially of seafood. The Caribbean’s geographic location and specifically Guyana, in this case, make it susceptible to acquiring the goods of the ocean either through importation, most often from Canada or by processing it locally.<sup>26</sup> Europeans colonized the Caribbean; they used salt to preserve the fish they caught on the shores and for their travels. In the act of salting fish, the reduction of the water simultaneously decreased the ability for living organisms to thrive in the moist, wet environments which would have caused the fish to rot faster.

During chattel slavery in Guyana and in surrounding Caribbean islands, salt fish became a cheap way to feed slaves. Today, salt fish is incorporated in many Caribbean dishes such as saltfish fritters, saltfish callaloo, ackee and saltfish (Jamaica). Salt fish is often cod, but historically includes other kinds of white fish, including pollock. As a parallel, sometimes salted cod was imported from Canada to supplement the slave diet.<sup>27</sup>

As previously mentioned, like Trinidad and Tobago, indentured servitude was introduced to Guyana in 1838, as a replacement for chattel slavery post-emancipation. Growing capital was a continued priority for British colonizers. More labor was needed for the system of sugar production as it was an important crop to the colonial economy. The British tapped into indentured servants to “fill the gap.” Indentured servants largely came from India to Guyana and with their migration came a creolization of both African and Indian cuisines. Spices such as curry remained in the Guyanese/ Caribbean culinary lexicon and explains why curry appears in this text which is set in Guyana. The multiculturalism, intricacies, and politics of different groups

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<sup>26</sup> See Bridging Histories to learn more about saltfish.

<sup>27</sup> See Geoff Brooks to read more about saltfish origins.

of people occurred within the country through enslavement, migration, and indentured servitude, and as a result, Guyanese diet began to incorporate staples from India and China, such as roti.

In the next line, Mama Dot instructs the recipient of the letter to:

Pack the basics:  
Flour, for some roti; powdered milk;  
And any news of what's going on here. (D'Aguiar Lines 17-19)

In a similar vein, roti is a bread that originated in South Asia. The term, "roti" originates from Sanskrit and means "bread." Roti was brought to the Caribbean in places like Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, through indentured servants. Indentured servants were people from Asia (largely India and China) who were put into contracts with colonizing countries to work on the land in these Caribbean countries post-chattel slavery. Roti often accompanies meat, vegetables, or lentil/bean curry. This food serves as an example of the creolization that took place full force in Guyana.

It is interesting that the Second Stanza omits references to food. We move from teeming food lines where people are willing to stab each other for produce, to a place that seems devoid of food, eating, and community activity of the kind described on the West Indian island featured in the first Stanza.

The portrait of England reveals the author/Mama Dot's distaste for the place. In fact, quite literally, the references to food stop quite abruptly. Flowers replace food as the focus in the second Stanza. References to temperate begonias (D'Aguiar Stanza II, Line 18) and sunflowers (D'Aguiar Stanza II, Line 16) define a place that seems at best indifferent to the West Indies. From what we can tell, the British enjoy seeing West Indian children "cow-eyed, pot-bellied" (Stanza II, Line 7) presumably suffering from malnutrition. This is a backhanded reference to

their lack of compassion (because they are not really moved by the situation) and also to the lack of food. Even when you live in the middle of the motherland you remain a stranger, “a traveler to them” (D’Aguiar Stanza II, Line 1). Although the inhabitants are willing to write “the cheque” (D’Aguiar Stanza II, Line 10) and show charity to tamp down guilt, they really do not want you living “next door, your house propping-up theirs” (D’Aguiar Stanza II, Lines 16 & 17). Deception seems to be a defining quality, “So when they skin lips to bare teeth at you, remember it could be a grimace.” (D’Aguiar Stanza II, Lines 21 & 22).

A few lines later Mama Dot writes, “Everybody fed-up in truth” (D’Aguiar Line 23). The act of eating used as a verb becomes an adjective. It has been used to describe national despair. At the same time, it plays on words. According to the dictionary, “Fed is the past tense and past participle of feed.”<sup>28</sup> The only difference that changes the meanings of the words is the inclusion of “up.” “To feed up” can mean to satisfy someone fully with a meal or other food.<sup>29</sup> The phrase “fed up,” can also mean being exasperated or sick and tired.<sup>30</sup> The connection of food and anger are apparent with “truth” as the food that they do not want to eat is part of their current reality. They are “fed-up” with it. This act of eating and this colloquialism to mean angry, are being used as a double entendre to explain how Guyanese people are feeling about and within the current state of Guyana. Additionally, “Fed-up” is a phrase that means mad or upset but they are not being fed, literally, that is the irony.

The food in the poem becomes the lifeblood of the country. If they suffer from not having enough food and having to import much of their food (due to economic and political realities), then this indicates the magnitude of the impact of food not just on Caribbean cultures, but all

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<sup>28</sup> See Collins Dictionary for “fed” definition.

<sup>29</sup> See Collins Dictionary for “feed up” definition.

<sup>30</sup> See Collins Dictionary for “fed up” definition.

societies. Everyone needs to eat to survive. This battle between maintaining culture (the rice that Caribbeans eat with most meals), local resources, and survival, involves complicated factors related to economics, politics, and environment.

In Line 26 of the poem-letter, Mama Dot emphasizes that, “With all the talk of nationality we still hungry” (D’Aguiar 26). Mama Dot shows her exasperation with Guyana; the country needs to focus on: nourishing and feeding its people literally and metaphorically. Yet, it is caught up in a political game which leaves its people hungry, frustrated, and unfed on many different levels. The closing line, “Write! We feast on your letters.” (D’Aguiar 34) makes the connection between politics, food, and love. This line makes it plain that language, letters, correspondence, connection, all constitute as forms of vital nourishment. In place of real food, the connection, maintaining a link to people and places of the Caribbean is what keeps them alive. Bad politics has created a faulty economy that leaves people hungry and displaced. She yearns for “food” to fill her belly; she also yearns for the companionship of her relatives who have left Guyana in search of a better life. The exclamation of “Write!” is also a demand to her close recipient to document their life for their friends, family, and audience back home, but also for the sake of history. Mama Dot demands that they use their voice and ability to write letters to keep their narrative and story alive, even as an immigrant from a small island in a foreign country.

On the same note of language, this poem ends on a stark/pointed note in patois, she says, “Neva see come fo see.” (D’Aguiar Stanza II, Line 30) By placing her voice in Patois, Mama Dot declares her culture and perspective as one independent of the colonial standards. She revolts against standard English and as an extension, the colonizers. She de-colonializes her message and form of delivery. She declares her stance as a Caribbean and specifically, as a

Guyanese person. She will ultimately end on that note—literally on the page, but also metaphorically in her life. She will always be Guyanese; patois will always remain with her. In this sense, her message is political and revolutionary. She pushes back against the colonizing country by criticizing the colonizer’s hypocrisy (“charity’s all they give:” (D’Aguiar Stanza II Line 10)), and by replacing colonial language with her own.

In “Dining at Customs” Tanya Shirley pits an islander, Miss Gloria, against oppressive representatives of an oppressive colonial culture. She eventually rebels in unexpected ways, taking back her power and crudely flaunting her preference for island food. As the story runs, Miss Gloria’s son goes to the United States to attend Harvard University, finds herself baby-sitting his children and dealing with his wife. Frustrated by her life-as-nanny, the mother decides to take time off, return to her island and refresh her spirits. After she decides to return, she kills, seasons, and cooks a goat that had been growing in her neighborhood. She anticipates sharing the goat with her son and his family. However, at the border, the customs agent informs her that she will not be allowed into the US with the unfrozen goat dinner. She cooked it over a coal fire in her cousin Doris’ background, between coconut trees that have weathered many storms (Shirley Lines 2 and 3). She returns to the US and looks forward to enjoying the meal when she arrives at her son’s home. Instead, a custom’s officer, “face pale like alabaster” detains her (Shirley Line 28). He tells her she cannot carry “Unfrozen curry goat through customs” (Shirley Line 29). At this point, Miss Gloria loses it. Although she is sorry her cousin Doris is not there to share in the feast, she takes off her sweater, spreads it on the airport carpet, lifts up her floral skirt and proceeds to eat the curry goat (Shirley Lines 30 to 36).



“Dining at Customs,” raises issues that could be described as “universal” in nature. It touches on relations between an increasingly distant son and his mother. It mentions uncooperative grandchildren, her son William’s “zombie children ”(Shirley Line 16) and a daughter in law “his wife” (Shirley Line 17) who strikes her as being “secretly a man” (Shirley Line 18). It also recounts how, despite the friction when from Miss Gloria eventually decides to take a break and return home where she relaxes on her “verandah” (Shirley Line 22) and “regales” the neighbors with stories of the US, how smart her grandchildren are, the beauty of her daughter in law, with “soft-spoken” diction “like any English lady (Shirley Lines 25 to 27). This simile captures Miss Gloria's love for English speech, or at least her willingness to cite it as a positive point, in her conversations in the district. It also shows that Miss Gloria’s family pride will gloss over interfamily difficulties to present a unified, positive front to those outside of the family. Beyond these matters of universal appeal, “Dining,” also outlines the contradictions and tensions built into the world of empire and colonial domination. This poem tracks the brain drain of students leaving their home country to study at prestigious colleges, like Harvard, their reliance on their relatives, like Miss Gloria, to pick up the loose ends of their lives in America and the cultural imperialism that they all must suffer in this land away from home.

When the poem opens, we learn about some of the differences between Cambridge, MA, and an unnamed West Indian Island where Miss Gloria lived until she went to babysit. William had earned a scholarship to Harvard (Shirley Lines 10, 11). He sponsored her to go and live in the United States where she was stunned by the “suddenness of cold, the imperialism” (Shirley Line 14). During her time in the US, Miss Gloria takes orders from William’s wife and deals with a culture that seems alien to her (although she presents it positively to her neighbors when

she returns). At the border, though, something shifts. Miss Gloria, the deferential woman who has kept mostly silent when in William's home, who has suffered indignities at the hands of "imperialism" decides to take the law into her own hands. In a moment of clarity, she decides to deprive the custom's officer of the power to make her sad. Instead, she seizes the moment, gorges herself on the goat in front of him and proves a critical point: you do not have the power to determine my happiness.

This moment of rebellion marks the point of the poem. She has been waiting for a "long, long time" to put the US (as personified in the custom's officer) in its place (Shirley Line 37). At last, she can act out her deep feelings and affirm the validity of her culture, her food by relishing the curry in public. The resentment of the long thankless hours of work with an ungrateful daughter-in-law, spoiled children, and harsh winters culminate in this moment of defiance.

It is interesting that "Dining at Customs," does not report other food episodes. This outburst with the custom's officer stands alone. Further, it is significant that Miss Gloria herself killed the goat in question and now confronts the officer with the (cooked) goat. The goat dinner seems to pull together Miss Gloria's response to frustration, her ability to be cruel, and kill the custom's officer's vulnerability in the face of Miss Gloria's rage. It becomes a complicated symbol of Miss Gloria's strength, will, and sharp mind. It also becomes a "sacrificial lamb." Instead of lashing out at the system which keeps her trapped in a cycle of subservience, Miss Gloria "kills" and feasts on the goat. The goat, in this sense, becomes the sacrifice. It gives up its life to appease Miss Gloria and give her hope. There is an almost religious overtone to Miss Gloria's careful planning and the outcome of the goat dinner.

Curry goat carries many links to Caribbean culture and the many influences that have crept into food preparation. We get the curry from Asia and the love of goat meat may come from Middle Eastern and African inhabitants of the region. We note that it is prepared in a “Dutch Pot” (Shirley Line 3), the kind of pot that Dutch traders in the Caribbean used to sell on the Caribbean islands. Typically, this pot had a sturdy, big belly and its cast iron sides would withstand the smoke and heat of open coals. The Dutch pot has been a staple in Caribbean food preparation. Any number of one-pot meals and stews have simmered in Dutch pots. It might be regarded as a quintessentially “Caribbean” cooking implement. The pot defines the very Caribbean nature of the pungent goat meal. However, Miss Gloria’s rage and rebellion go well beyond the nature of the meal and its preparation tools. By eating the goat dinner in open view, Miss Gloria protests. She rejects the Custom Officer’s warning and complies in a way that lets him know that she does not fear his orders.

She had planned on eating it in a private setting:

She would eat it when she got in from the airport,  
The yellow, spicy meat, fragments of sunlight  
Settling in her stomach, warming her bones (Shirley Lines 6-8)

unfrozen curried goat through customs. (Shirley Lines 28 - 29)

The curry goat, the spiciness of the meat, these elements embody the Caribbean—the sun, the warm weather, and the multicultural nature of the people itself. This contrasts with the coldness of the people in the North. Their whiteness (alabaster pale—which serves as a synonym for a kind of whiteness), and emotional coldness of the people and the climate (snow) does not sit well with Miss. Gloria. The emphasis on “imperialism of snow” serves as a euphemism for the U.S as a state: a dominating, heartless, cold, power, especially as it relates to Caribbean-U.S relations and

history. Miss Gloria takes the law into her own hands. She wants to set the record straight. No matter how the cold North views her, she has decided to seize power and assert her humanity and intelligence:

Miss Gloria takes off her maroon sweater, spreads it  
on the industrial carpet, laps her long, floral skirt  
Between her thighs, eases her body to the floor.  
She sorry she don't have fork or glass full of lemonade,  
Sorry Doris not here so they can chat and eat, sorry this man  
don't come from anywhere, sorry he going to try to stop her  
As she put the first piece of meat to her mouth (Shirley Lines 30 - 36)

Although this scene demonstrates Miss Gloria's "power," it also creates some vulnerability. Miss. Gloria disrobes her sweater and eats in such a public, exposed, yet intimate area of the airport where they search passengers. By digging her heels in and showing this resistance, Miss Gloria shows defiance and deep pride. She respects her culture and its food. By eating the curry goat, even if she is eating outside, in the car, or even at airport security or customs, she finds strength. There is nothing she finds embarrassing about it; there is nothing she has to hide. Though she does feel her differences and shift in culture in the U.S versus back home in the Caribbean, her powerful sense of self and cultural heritage push her through and keep her going. Her food consumption is a representation of that. She is filled with the "fragments of sunlight," (Shirley Line 7) internally once again (connecting her to her Motherland) even if physically she is in a cold, hostile, place. She will not dim her light. Eating becomes a practice of socialization. Miss. Gloria reflects that she is "Sorry Doris not here so they can chat and eat," (Shirley 34). In the U.S not only does she not have that community that is common in the Caribbean, but she eats alone at customs in the U.S. It can be a lonely, solitary existence living within the "independent

culture” cultivated in the U.S. and which deeply contrasts to the neighborly and communal life she enjoys back home.

By bringing the curry goat with her, Miss Gloria intended to be an ambassador of sorts. She would serve as the bridge person and the goat dinner would unify her US family with her family back home. However, in a world drawn by colonial maps, this kind of transcultural exchange can prove to be complex. It is no coincidence that the US border becomes the barrier to exchange. It sets up hard lines, enforcing cultural isolation, and the separation of the cultures that celebrate intense, spicy cuisine, and those that foster separation, distance and food characterized by the absence, rather than the presence, of seasoning. In a very direct way, Miss Gloria detects the inequity in his pronouncement and the implicit judgment of her food as unsafe, unhealthy, and impermissible. She refutes these negative inferences by openly defying the Customs Officer and consuming the goat right in front of his very eyes.

## **CONCLUSION: Food—A Novel Cultural Lens**

Food creates, expresses, and communicates cultural values, needs, uncertainties, and priorities. In certain instances, it codifies historic events that may have long disappeared from active memory. In the “Anansi stories,” for example, sorrel harkens back to practices common in Egypt, long before slavery, and the Trans-Atlantic trade where transplanted West Africans were forced to work the sugar, coffee, banana, and cotton plantations in the New World. In “Dining at Customs,” curry goat provokes aggressive push-back by an older woman of an entire imperial system she views as oppressive. *The Farming of Bones*, uses sugar and coffee to set the stage for genocide, while revealing multiple layers of discrimination and separation within the DR. A bitter herb, parsley, triggers serial murder, right along the borders separating Haiti from the DR. *Crick Crack, Monkey* explores food as a colonial tool of indoctrination. As a young girl grows up, she rejects the food of her childhood which contained the richness of a multicultural, fusion society, in favor of British/English/Colonial food, such as olives, nuts and fancy biscuits. In “Letter from Mama Dot,” the lack of food raises questions about the political situation in the country and the abilities of those ruling to meet the population’s most basic needs for nourishment. Food tells the story of the nation’s decline, precarious status, and yearning for real nourishment.

These food stories carry with them the bitter and sweet histories of the Caribbean and its emerging world presence; they communicate events, emotions, and aspirations. They reveal complexity. Underlying the sweetness of sugar, an oppressive social system created various tiers of labor and assigned them importance based on their pigmentation. The DR highlights this aspect of the sugar economy. Alongside the bitterness of the parsley, communities bordering the DR had begun to assimilate, integrate, and share their French and Spanish cultures. The Parsley Massacre interrupted a gentler fusion process

that halted violently when the massacre occurred. This is not just true of the Caribbean. Across the globe, people's food tells important stories about their journey, their wealth, and access (or lack of it) and the people with whom the group interacts. For example, Jennifer Burcham Whitt reflecting on Indian food in novels notes:

The writers use food and eating to symbolize culture issues of acceptance, resistance, and preservation of culture, as well as symbols of memory, emotions, narrative history, relationships, power, and consumption.<sup>31</sup>

When we think about literature, we tend to focus on skillful wordplay, ingenious plots, and riveting figures of speech. Often, food gets relegated to the backburner. We see and treat it as not-so-relevant background information that may not lead us to grapple with Big Ideas. My exploration of "The Story of Anansi and Sorrel," *The Farming of Bones*, *Crick Crack, Monkey*, and the poems, "Letter from Mama Dot" and "Dining at Customs," discredits the dismissive approach. This journey through these oral accounts, novels, and poems has persuaded me that we need to pay more, not less, attention to the food citations in what we read. Food creates a context for the plot, characters, and the conflicts that must be resolved. To ignore it is to miss half of the story. When you pay attention to it, the reward includes deeper understanding and appreciation for issues that percolate, just beneath the surface.

Food helps us to "read" literature at a deeper level and this helps us to unpack the history of the nation, which may not be fully represented by that nation's archival documents and "official" version of events. Food takes on a life of its own; it narrates the story within the story. It writes its own (his) story. We need to take a closer look at foods, their history, and use them to unbundle complicated ideas related to time, place, and identity. These works have shown how food is integral to the plots of these texts. Understanding the food becomes necessary to appreciate the imbalances and the strengths of pre and

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<sup>31</sup> See Whitt, to read her book, *An Appetite for Metaphor: For Imagery and Cultural Identity in Indian Fiction*.

post-colonial realities. The food references become both highly specific and yet remain symbols of universal ideas and themes.

In the two versions of “The Story of Anansi and Sorrel,” a tasty, distinctively red beverage becomes a sign of innovation and creolization of a New World reincarnation (Jamaican sorrel) from an Old-World element (hibiscus). By reviewing colonial history, reading works from food anthropologists and scholars, and analyzing the origins of colonial economies, we were able to see how coffee production, sugar production, and the back-breaking work of enslaved peoples, built a world economy (E.g. Haiti helped to build the Eiffel Tower when it repaid the double debt to France, based upon that country’s rebellion, which the country of France still benefits from today). Simultaneously, next door in the Dominican Republic and also in Europe, people drank cafecitos, often using ingredients grown and tended in the Caribbean. Coffee and sugar, in this instance, created trade and social relationships that give color and context to lives on both sides of the Atlantic. To gloss over the references to coffee, sugar, and condensed milk, would be to miss a whole chapter of history.

In *The Farming of Bones*, we dissected how food and language related to food, have functioned as nourishment, a basis for communal/social exchanges, and ironically as a weapon to commit genocide against Haitians on the Haitian-Dominican border. In this instance, a bitter herb serves both as a sustainer and as a destroyer. If we were representing “parsley” using Hindu mythology, we might say that the novel explores aspects of it as both a Shiva (destroyer) and a Vishnu (preserver). The food references capture the duality of life and the potential for good and evil in the very food that provides the basis for life.

Through the text, *Crick Crack, Monkey*, this thesis has shown the legacy and effects of post-colonial realities through a young person’s experience and perception of their own sense of self and culture through food and food habits. We were also able to see and understand the explicit migration patterns and pathways of African, Asian, and European groups by analyzing these same Trinidadian



culinary staples. The food bears the imprint of history and tells us where people have been and how they have survived.

“Letter from Mama Dot,” explores food scarcity as a metaphor for post-independence malaise. The specific items mentioned have political, economic, and social significance for the letter writer. She misses her relative who now lives in England, far away.

“Dining at Customs,” is a witty poem that shows us ultimately what resistance and resilience looks like through the form of a head-strong, bold, Caribbean woman and her method of not forgetting where she comes from and who she is. Defiantly, in full view of incoming passengers and other officials, she brazenly defies a customs officer who informed her, in a matter-of-fact way, that she could not bring her curry goat with her. Her gender, race, nationality, and sense of self, all play a role in her defiant act. We need to put food, just like the societies that consume them, at the center of the global conversation. We need to put food, survival, viability, and political stability at the forefront of the dialogue with the developed world, not just at the periphery.

We can start that process by paying closer attention to food, its consumption and its meaning in the writings that emerge from developing economies like the Caribbean. This will teach us new chapters of history and will bring us to the place where, recognizing the unity of all peoples, we can address with deeper understanding, the wreckage, dislocation, and regenerative fusion that have come about as a direct result of the Trans-Atlantic Trade, the colonial experience, and post Emancipation events in the Caribbean.

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