Dark Food: Sugar and Memory in Cristina García's novel *Dreaming in Cuban*

This chapter introduces the original idea of "dark food", exemplified by sugar, as a concept able to provide an insight into the legacies of slavery and its relationship to capitalism. It offers a novel interpretation of the connection between food and cultural memory starting from the concept of Gothic food and its relationship to colonialism. This is carried out through a focus on the references to sugar in Cristina García's 1992 novel *Dreaming in Cuban*.

In the specific context of the 1959 Cuban Revolution and its aftermath, in the novel, food and consumption are carriers of a notion of hunger which harbours the violence of colonialism revived by revolutionary upheaval. I consider García's work to be representative of an idea of hunger that highlights the paradox of its contemporary attitudes to consumption and globalisation in light of colonialism and its consequences. There is an infinite Western hunger for excess portrayed in García's texts in contrast with the hunger for basic commodities in Cuba that provides the opportunity to discuss the conflation between an insatiable appetite and the losses caused by historical upheavals. The idea of dark food is to provide a lens through which it is possible to observe contrasts from a middle ground, a place that encapsulates how consumption can both passively and actively shed light on complex identitarian issues that allow for alternative interpretations of the past.

Introduction

This chapter foregrounds the creation of a new concept which digs into the intersection of literature, consumption and cultural memory, facilitating the excavation of the relationship between memory and literary diasporic narratives. This novel interpretation of the connection between food and cultural memory in diasporic fiction is rooted in the concept of Gothic food and its relationship to colonialism. If food has increasingly become a way to explore the negative, this is true most of all in how it is depicted in the horror and Gothic genres, becoming, as defined by Lorna Piatti-Farnell, "Gothic food" (Piatti-Farnell 2017). Accordingly, I here

introduce the concept of 'dark food' to provide insight into the legacies of slavery and its ties to capitalism—exemplified by sugar. The conceptualisation of dark food, as a literary representation of the re-creation of traumatic memories via the medium of consumption is examined in Cuban-American diasporic writer Cristina García's first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992). The chapter's aim is to re-centre food in relation to the models of memory presented in the novel that shed light on some of the consequences of globalisation and capitalism. This chapter explores the idea that consumption and food, considered together, offer a new angle from which to view memory and literature. Food offers a point of entry into the fused temporalities of experience that sheds light on issues which enter the sphere of cultural memory, indexing the differences between the everyday and shifting and contrasting views of the past.

García's text portrays an infinite Western hunger for excess, which is contrasted with a hunger for basic commodities in Cuba; this dichotomy of surplus and shortage provides an opportunity by which to discuss the conflation between an insatiable appetite and the losses caused by historical upheavals. The exploration of the relationship between memory and literary diasporic narratives in relation to the concept of dark food allows for a renewed perspective which uncovers alternative routes that run parallel to pre-existing interpretations of the past.

Cristina García and Culinary Tradition

There is a strong culinary tradition in Latin American literature, as evidenced in the work of writers such as Laura Esquivel (1998) and Rosario Castellanos (1971). There is also a powerful connection between food and memory in diasporic writers such as Sandra Cisneros (1984) and Julia Alvarez (1991). In these authors' work, food-centred nostalgia is a recurring theme, emphasising how identity can be both deconstructed and constructed by food. Food can become

a way of reconnecting with childhood memories or even the formation of memories of a past that was never experienced. The strong connection between food and memory is explored by the French novelist Marcel Proust. In his work, *In Search of Lost Time* (1913) memories of the past resurface, prompted by the act of eating, contributing to the formation of an individual's identity. In *Deciphering a Meal* (1971), Mary Douglas focuses on the relationship between meals: each one needs to refer to other meals, and each is part of a whole that means what it does because there is a memory of pre-existing foods within this whole. The ingestion of food, according to Douglas, entails the consumption of a system of meanings that can only be understood within a pattern of repetition. Hence, the patterning of food itself is a code that contains within it the possibility of various different messages (Douglas 1972, 249-250). Repetitive patterns of food consumption presuppose a memory of these patterns that allows food analogies to emerge and to be carried from the past into the present. In this way, food mediates memories of itself and creates new memories that are in constant flux, depending on the context in which they occur. The connection is further explored by David Sutton (2001): food and memory both contain concealed meanings that can become externalised. As Sutton points out, memories are "formed as an interaction between the past and the present" (Sutton 2001, 9), in which identity is continuously shifting. Thus, as stated in Michael Lambek's introduction to *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (1996): "Identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding" (Lambek 1996, xxix). Going beyond the idea of food as being purely nutritional, Roland Barthes' use of semiotics allows for a contextualisation of food in its role as a signifier. Barthes states that sugar, for instance, is a "time, a category of the world" as it implies "a set of images, dreams, tastes, choices, and values" (Barthes 1975, 48). In *Writing History, Writing Trauma,* LaCapra refers to the "middle voice" commented on by Barthes in reference to "Benveniste's argument that many languages

'have a double system of time'" (LaCapra 2001, 20). The first form is the time at which communication takes place, and the second is the time at which the event takes place, "deprived of present or future". In this sense, food acts as an in-between, functioning as a material form of middle voice in García's work: it is both active, in as much as it needs to be manually cooked or prepared in some way, and passive, in that it dwells in customs and traditions.

Furthermore, Barthes states that "food has a constant tendency to transform itself into situation" (Barthes 1975, 58), therefore, food can become an expression of a traumatic memory, as the trauma is symbolically and materially reproduced through the use of particular ingredients. Barthes notes, in reference to literature as a childhood memory, that it consists first and foremost of "certain objects which recur, which continually repeat themselves" (Barthes 1989, 22). It is repetition, as also mentioned by Douglas, that is key in the reinterpretation and reconstruction of memory through consumption. In this context, dark food can be understood as representing the role of food in relation to memories which perpetually recreate narratives of violence. I consider the latter notion specifically in relation to the impact of colonialism and its role in the creation of Cuba's plantation economy and sugar production industry. This is visible through Cristina García's work and her narrative, centred around the upheaval of the Revolution, which makes use of food as a way to reconstruct the past and create new experiences through memories.

Cristina García was born in Havana to a Guatemalan father and Cuban mother. In 1961, when she was two years old, her family was among the first wave of people to flee Cuba after Fidel Castro came to power. They moved to New York City, where she was raised in Queens, Brooklyn Heights, and Manhattan. García became a journalist and worked for the New York Times and Time magazine and is the first Cuban-American woman to publish a novel written in English. In García's fiction, rifts between the US and Cuba are mirrored in the divided loyalties of characters from different generations, whose actions alternate between attempts to

bridge divisions between families and acts of revenge. As a source of tension and rupture owing to the ongoing US embargo against Cuba, introduced in 1958, food becomes a crucial tool in conveying these messages.

Cuba offers an appropriate basis for an investigation of transnationalism: as far back as the early nineteenth century, Cuban diasporic communities demonstrated transnationalism via their participation in Cuban politics. Transnationalism was also at the centre of colonialism, slavery, and other exploitative forms of control related to globalisation, as well as the struggles and transformations that occurred in opposition to it. Therefore, it is possible to trace 'the paths not taken in the formation of dominant national narratives' via transnationalism (De Cesari and Rigney 2014, 6); this is precisely what García achieves through her writing. The rising concern with identity within the transnational communities are the focus of García's work. Specifically, her literary output represents a negative process of *transculturación* following transnationalism, and in this way, the metaphors created around sugar in *Dreaming in Cuban* acquire a mixed emotional resonance, representing both nostalgic and traumatic memories. *Dreaming in Cuban* tells the story of Celia del Pino and her family as they cope with the Cuban Revolution and endure the exile and emotional fallout that follows. García's writing is a fictionalised version of the past that emphasises the suffering caused by colonialism and slavery for Cubans and the Cuban diaspora. Her writings can be considered a 'medium of cultural memory', introducing new images of the past into an ongoing process of 'dynamic interplay between text and context' (Erll 2011, 171).

My examination of García's novel focuses on the context of distorted memories and the dynamics between different generations of the same family and how this constitutes as an example of dark food. At the same time, it considers the more capitalistic message behind the writer's narratives. García creates a new storyline focusing on how her characters relive violent experiences through references to sugar, which represents their nation and the contrast between

cultural elements in Cuba and the US. Her protagonists are possessed by an insatiable hunger to re-experience and reformulate past memories, making them part of their present: as a concept, dark food, encapsulates this reinterpretation of consumption.

From Gothic Food to Dark Food

If we accept that food has increasingly become a way to explore the negative, this is particularly true in how food is depicted in the horror and Gothic genres, becoming what Lorna Piatti-Farnell (2017) defines as 'Gothic food'. To examine this emergence, there is a need for more flexible frameworks to consider transformations in our awareness; the awareness of our potential destruction in horror and the Gothic presents one example in which food can symbolise the changes taking place in the wider framework of cultural memory. These changes are connected to capitalism and globalisation, which can be viewed as the causes of a parasitic and insatiable condition that metaphorically transforms the flesh of the living into the unliving through its associated labour. This theme emerges repeatedly in all types of media, and the horror genre in particular develops the concepts of vampirism, zombification, and possession in association with a separation between 'worlds'. In the context of consumerism, food becomes imbued with the symbolism of anxiety and detachment. The starting point for this analysis arose from observations about how food is portrayed in film, where it often symbolises a range of anxieties by functioning as a signifier of change, often within a family setting. The use of food and the locations associated with it transmits a sense of unease in a storyline, culminating in transformations that include instances of zombification and monstrosity. In the film *Maggie* (2015), the kitchen sets the scene for events central to the characters' lives, and it is here that Maggie discovers her need to consume human flesh. The kitchen, however, is still the place where the family congregates and where everyday activities uncannily continue to take place, even while a member of the family is, effectively, undergoing a process of

zombification. Meanwhile, in *The Possession* (2012), a young girl buys a cursed box that contains a spirit that enters her body, and the subsequent changes to her behaviour become apparent to her family in settings that involve food and her inability to stop eating.I argue for an association between the idea of communicative breakdowns within the family and community and visual representations of a lack of food preparation or a lack of care for food as a communal experience. In this context, eating becomes a metaphor for the self, drawing on situations that express disgust, hunger, abjection and violence, as well as matters that concern corporeality and the monstrous. The intersection of the boundaries of the human body with the uncanniness of consumer identity is a place dominated by socio-political anxiety. In connection with the monstrous and the supernatural, food can play a dynamic part in driving a narrative's action.

Transformations in the human interactions associated with food acquisition, preparation, and consumption indicate broader societal changes. The widening gap between the foods we eat, which our bodies depend on to live, and their sources in terms of production and cultivation translates into a display of anxious human vulnerability. Changes of this type that occur in films often come about via supernatural or monstrous 'interventions' and have a close temporal relationship to changes in the food that the characters come into contact with. By taking the connection between food and violence a step further, I consider the use of sugar to be an example of 'food horror' that bears the weight of a historical violence linked to colonialism and enslavement on the sugar plantations.

During the late nineteenth century, the rise in imports of goods from the colonies meant that such products as sugar became widely available to purchase in Europe. In the same period, the Gothic literary scene was using the figure of the vampire as a symbol of consumption that reflected these changes. An example is found in the portrayal of the soul-extracting coloniser in John William Polidori's novel *The vampyre*, which was published in 1819. The character of

Ruthven—supposedly a representation of Lord Byron—is attacked by Greeks in an ironic echo of Byron's frequent references to those very people being subject to the destructive power of the Turks. In Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), Laura and her father are living as colonisers in Styria when she becomes a victim of the vampire Mircalla. After being infected, Laura continues her travels, conjuring the idea of movement and furthering the geographical boundaries of the event in Styria. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) also exemplifies the fear of the unknown and the Other, and the novel can be considered in relation to the new products being imported as Britain expanded as a colonial power.[1] It is ironic that the 'monsters' in these stories are approached by outsiders in their lands, 'transforming' their victims who then carry the Otherness to different places in their bodies. As Gothic monsters, they are characterised by the idea of transformation and insatiable hunger. Food and hunger are simultaneously anticipated and feared, and the vampires re-energise themselves through consumption. This process rests on the paradox that such consumption leads to an assimilation of food, causing it to be transformed into something different. There is a darkness in this idea that energy exchange occurs for the 'worse': food and consumption create the shadow the vampire lacks; thus, food becomes the visible trace of the monster's non-existent reflection.

As a Gothic trope mentioned in relation to the figure of the vampire, hunger is applied here to contrast the extreme scenario of starvation with a fullness that goes beyond satiety, which García uses to symbolise the contrast between Cuba and the USA. She tackles the idea of boundaries through body narratives: the bodily horrors and 'controversies of incorporation', where boundaries are lost and geopolitically questioned. Chad Lavin's 2013 book *Eating anxiety* explores the borders between the self and the world, postulating that 'the violations of the borders of the self in the physical act of eating' can be paralleled with the toppling of

[1] "This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless" (Stoker 1897, 45).

'territorial borders by the forces of globalisation' (xii). In this sense, food becomes a lens that magnifies the threats posed to the 'sustainability of borders', and consumption emerges as a way to analyse anxiety and disruption. Susan Ardill (1989) also argues that 'food is about boundaries, maps of the body, the outlines of social give and take' (84), whereas Piatti-Farnell's (2017) observations on how 'the act of eating aids the actualisation of memory into the present' creates the idea of a materiality of existence that, distanced from itself, becomes solely 'a reminder of the past' (215). The separation and the void between sites of production and the products consumed also create a void within the consumer. The idea of dark food uncovers the concealed flows of power that direct how societies develop while containing the fractured aspects of food and consumption.

Dark Food

In the field of tourism, the term 'dark' is used in relation to memory and consumption. The phrase 'dark tourism', coined by Malcolm Foley and John Lennon in 1996, focuses on the relationship between tourist attractions and death. Since the coining of this term, Tony Seaton (2018) has proposed a revised model of dark tourism as "engineered and orchestrated remembrance'; this model shifts the focus of dark tourism from contact with death to 'encounters with remembrance of fatality and mortality" (Seaton 2018, 2). Such a shift has had a significant influence on historical perspectives. For instance, Alan Rice refers to Pierre Nora's (1986) concept of *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory. He discusses the case of opening plantations to tourists and outlines how these sites become *lieux d'oublier* (Rice 2009, p. 230), or sites of forgetting through their misrepresentation of the brutal effects of enslavement or their elision of the slave presence.[2] Like other forms of tourism, dark tourism is considered a form of consumption, although it is not necessarily death that motivates visitors

[2] The example referred to here is the Wye Plantation in Maryland.

(Biran and Hyde 2013, 192); rather, this type of tourism can be part of a journey that includes learning about commemoration and how identities are forged (Slade 2003; Cheal and Griffin 2013).

The use of the term 'dark' in relation to food is not novel: 'dark cuisine' refers to a category of foods combined in ways that can be considered dubious. It comprises unorthodox culinary pairings that have come to signify a cultural shift, particularly in the context of Chinese cooking, from more traditional and rigid approaches to less conventional ones. Recently, the concept of the 'dark kitchen' or 'ghost kitchen' has emerged to refer to a new business model in which food service providers cater to the increasing demand for takeaway food in the context of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Essentially, dark kitchens are production units that are not connected to physical restaurants but produce restaurant-type food and deliver it to consumers. The disconnect between the idea of food a customer holds and the reality of its sites of production in this context raises the question of food as a symbol and its cultural meaning, as well as its imbrication with capitalist structures of production and consumption. Here, I propose a novel meaning of 'dark' in relation to food. I argue that, ultimately, dark food is a means by which experiences linked to a traumatic event are relived and expressed through food and as a result of the process of consumption. This process of reconstruction has its roots in a historical, literary and filmic "food anxiety", which can be related to a Gothic idea of food and consumption. In García's work, this concept is associated with cultural memory and modalities of remembering that are portrayed via references to consumption. In the context of memory, I consider how García uses food and consumption in *Dreaming in Cuban,* framing her as a narrator who constructs and deconstructs an idea of Cuba via her use of sugar-themed food references.

Cuba and Sugar Plantations

Cuba's sugar plantations were significant sites for the process of cultural mixing among native born Cubans, Africans, Asians and Europeans. From a transnational point of view, such mixing could be witnessed in the Cuban-American community after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. In this chapter I investigate how evidence of the sugar plantation's enduring influence emerges in García's work. The introduction of the plantation system of cultivating sugarcane was one of the most historically significant events for Caribbean societies (Benítez-Rojo 1992, 38) and the juxtaposition of the commercial power of sugar with the poverty of the people producing it is central to Garcia's work.

Sugarcane was brought to the Caribbean from the Canary Islands with Christopher Columbus's second voyage, which began in 1493. It eventually became the dominant crop in the Caribbean regional economy, and was the primary crop in Cuba by the 1800s. I focus on Cuba precisely because of its colonial legacy, which is central in the production of sugar. From a geographical perspective, Cuba's position was advantageous owing to the access it offered to the Floridian and Mexican coastlines; these routes were already used to exchange goods by the Indigenous Taínos (Granberry 2005, 153). Although Cuba proved disappointing to the arriving Europeans as a source of the precious metals being sought, it became a base from which to travel to other places in search of gold. It also served as a stopover location for the Spanish, French, British, and Dutch because its harbours and inlets made it an ideal place for ships to moor.

On Cuba's sugarcane plantations in the eighteenth century, slavery—and the forms of labour that replaced it after the abolition of slavery in 1886—was the driving force of the capitalist system it represented. The process of deculturation that occurred on the plantations was designed to hinder enslaved people's communication with one another, ultimately preventing social cohesion. This violent deculturation process aimed to maximise profitability

through the exploitation of manual labour and the slavery system continued to exert its effects long after it was officially abolished.[3]

In the second half of the nineteenth century, capital from multiple countries, including the US, as well as France, Canada and Germany, was invested in Cuba's sugar industry. During this period, the US owners of the sugar plantations were themselves new citizens; nearly all were either Cuban or Spanish natives who had recently acquired US citizenship (Fraginals 1999, 81). Cuba was financially annexed to North America with the passing of the 1871 Sugar Act, which ruled that the island could trade only with the US, with prices controlled by the New York Produce Exchange. Several Spanish colonies were handed over to the US following the US intervention in the Cuban War of Independence from Spain in 1898, and Cuba became a US protectorate. Although the island was officially independent, a change to its constitution gave the US the right to intervene in its internal affairs and to establish a military base at Guantánamo Bay. From the end of the nineteenth century, Cuba became the centre of world sugarcane production; by the 1950s, almost all the sugar grown in Cuba was exported to the US (Suchlicki 1990, 135).

In 1956, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara began a revolutionary war against Fulgencio Batista's US-backed military dictatorship (1952–59). At the culmination of this war, Batista fled the island and Castro's new government was formed; this government sought to free the island from US influence through a process of nationalisation and land reform. Sugar labourers'

[3] From 1790 the first Africans who were brought to Cuba as enslaved people were aged between 15 and 20 years (Fraginals 1999, p. 29) and mostly male. Their young age ensured that they could spend their most active years working on the plantations; at the same time, the process of deculturation would be more effective in this group than it would be for older people. The plantation was a business, adapting to the changes that occurred as industrialisation developed over the second half of the nineteenth century. Sugar production methods began to change, becoming mechanised, and it was no longer possible to justify the country's adherence to a capitalist system while continuing to employ slave labour. In this way, slave labour became incompatible with the technological revolution of the time, and the slavery system evolved into a coercive economy that capitalist exploitation relied on to succeed. This led to a search for other forms of exploitation, and indentured Chinese labourers were brought to work on sugar plantations from 1847 onwards. These workers received wages, but they were essentially transplants into the slavery system. Thus, the end of slavery in Cuba was an end in name only, and the socio-economic structure that had supported this system persisted.

wages were pegged to the annual market price of sugar, which meant that these workers' livelihoods were affected by fluctuations in production (Suchlicki 1990, 136). Thus, sugar became a symbol of Cuba's dependence on the US. Although Castro made it part of his manifesto to oppose class hierarchy and difference, the fact that Cuba's subsistence continued to depend on the same capitalist system meant that it was still tied to the colonialist blueprint, which continued to uphold the legacies of slavery.

Convinced that Castro's regime would not last long, many people left Cuba for the US in search of temporary political asylum following the Cuban Revolution and Castro's rise to power in 1959. These migrants became known as Cuban-Americans, and they formed a community in which their status as exiles distinguished them from other North Americans of Hispanic origin. It was assumed that their residence in the US would be temporary, and that they would soon return home. Cristina García belongs to a distinct 'second generation' minority group of Cuban-Americans, which includes both those who travelled to the US from Cuba as children and those born to Cuban parents in the US (Pérez Firmat 1995, 3). It is to a study of García and her work that I now turn.

Dark Food and Dreaming in Cuban

Dreaming in Cuban (1992) is García's debut novel. Set in Cuba and the US, it focuses on three generations of the del Pino family. The story is narrated in a non-linear fashion; moving between different places and times, it explores themes that include family relationships, exile and diaspora, immigration and assimilation, and the ways in which political upheaval can divide a family. The novel centres on the women of the family; I analyse the characters of Celia Almeida (b.1909), and Lourdes Puente (b.1936) to explain how the intergenerational family dynamics operate in the text between the family members in Cuba and the exiles in the US; specifically, I focus on how García uses food to explore cultural memory.

The beginning of *Dreaming in Cuban* sees Celia as a young woman living in Havana. She meets and falls in love with a married Spaniard named Gustavo, but he leaves Cuba to return to Spain. Celia is devastated by this abandonment and ends up marrying Jorge, with whom she has Lourdes, who turns out to be a cruel husband. In addition to disputes over parenting, Celia and Jorge clash over politics, with Celia supporting the Cuban Revolutionaries and Jorge siding with the pro-American government. As a young adult, Lourdes attends university and falls in love with Rufino Puente, the son of a wealthy ranch family. She gives birth to a daughter, Pilar, as the Cuban Revolution is taking place. The family flees to New York, where Lourdes supports the family as a baker. Her business becomes successful, and she opens a second bakery. At the same time, her relationship with Celia back in Cuba is confrontational, and she sends her mother pictures of food that is unavailable in Cuba. Although Lourdes visits Cuba, the family is irreparably fractured. When Lourdes leaves Cuba again, Celia walks into the ocean, never to return.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, García's characters represent a continuation of societal and cultural elements from Cuba in a new transnational environment in the US. As a product destined for export, sugarcane is carried beyond the borders of Cuba and 'reinterpreted' away from its roots, processed from the raw product into the form of cakes sold by Lourdes in her bakery.

Throughout the novel, García explores the topic of the transmission of memory in the context of transnationalism. Food and consumption enable the expression of memory's fluidity. Like memories, food and the culinary are in constant flux, and they do not exist in a fixed form; rather, their form is constituted by constantly changing symbols and meanings to be interpreted in relation to specific contexts. This is suggestive of the 'unbounded character' (Bond et al. 2017) and open-ended nature of memories as they travel beyond official national borders in often uneven ways (Bond and Rapson 2014). In García's novel, the modality of how food and

consumption circulate decentres and displaces common notions and biases to reveal alternative historical perspectives through the characters' eyes.

Psychologist Lev Vygotsky's (1978, 38–39) argues that collective memory is a tool for constructing new forms of behaviour that are mediated through external instruments and communication. Events such as the Cuban Revolution contribute to the contestation of collective memories by focusing on the different viewpoints found in intergenerational discourses. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, this is expressed through the medium of food, which acts as an external instrument and is comparable to Andrew Hoskins' concept of mediation. Hoskins states that collective memory is created through a process of transformation: "collective memory in itself is actually comprised of all that memory is comprised of, and significantly, this includes the process of forgetting" (Hoskins 2010, 334).[4]

According to Vygotsky (1978), memories are mediated by external instruments: 'The use of notched sticks and knots, the beginnings of writing and simple memory aids all demonstrate that [people] proceeded to a new culturally-elaborated organization of their behaviour' (39). Food can also be characterised as an external instrument that prompts Celia's memories of a Cuba she had never experienced: she thinks about Cuba "alone in the Caribbean Sea with its faulted and folded mountains, its conquests, its memories" (García 1992, 48) and conjures visions of an imaginary past, perhaps corresponding to a mythological one. Parallel to this is the incorporation of the Afro-Cuban section of society that Fidel Castro—El Líder—proposes as part of his campaign; this rests on a decolonised and idealised history of the island, and simultaneously, it represents the Revolutionary government as the pinnacle of Cuban history. Thus, Celia's support of the Revolutionary Cuban regime, demonstrated through her

[4] Rather than considering relationships with the past in terms of remembering and forgetting, Hoskins believes they should be viewed as forms of mediation and remediation. In this context, migration and exile find a site for variations of differences that are perpetuated outside Cuba via food and its remediation of memories. The sugarcane plantations, as well as the products derived from the sugar that they produce, can communicate a process of memory that is remediated through food, and this is also applicable to a transnational setting.

work on the sugar plantations, parallels how the Revolution devours its history, endlessly reprocessing it to make way for a more appetising future.

El Líder's aim is to create new Cuban citizens who are devoted to their homeland. The description of Celia in the text conveys this idea:

> Celia […] feels part of a great unfolding […] When El Líder needed volunteers to build nurseries in Villa Clara province, Celia joined a microbrigade […] When he launched a crusade against the outbreak of malaria, Celia inoculated schoolchildren. And every harvest, Celia cut the sugarcane that El Líder promised would bring prosperity (García 1992, 111–112).

Celia's memories of Cuba align with Castro's efforts to incorporate the island's Creole population into the workforce to cut sugarcane. In writing the character of El Líder, García may have been inspired by Castro's real efforts to adopt an anti-US stance by incorporating Afro-Cuban and Indigenous people into his socialist campaigns while distancing himself from Cubans of European heritage, a group with closer connections to the US.

In her efforts to support the Revolution, Celia becomes involved in the cultivation of sugarcane. As described above, sugarcane, slavery, and plantations shaped the Caribbean landscape for centuries, violently amassing many people of different origins; these people then interacted socially and culturally. The Caribbean cannot be considered a single 'cultural area' because the mix of different colonial powers makes it too heterogeneous to be defined as such: "It would probably be more accurate to refer to the Caribbean as a "societal area" based on the plantation system" (Mintz 1966, 914–915). This term captures the fragmentary nature of different cultures that have been stitched together by a language of colonial dominance until they fuse to create something new. This societal area is driven by capital and slavery and the

first production location for what Mintz calls "proletarian hunger-killers" (Mintz 1966, 919), such as sugar.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Celia represents a link to colonisation and the plantation society it produced insofar as she contributes to the cultivation and production of sugarcane for the Revolutionary cause. The food-related language that surrounds Celia's labour is unromantic and stark: 'There are rats everywhere, hollowing the sweetest stalks, and insects too numerous to swat' (García 1992, 44). She contends with insects, rats, and other hardships and her experience causes her to consider the end products to which she will be contributing—namely, birthday cakes in countries far from Cuba (García 1992, 45). She muses:

> People in Mexico and Russia and Poland will spoon out their sugar for coffee, or to bake in their birthday cakes. And Cuba will grow prosperous […] Next season the cane will regenerate, a vegetal mystery, and she will return to cut it again. In another seven years the fields will be burned and replanted. (García 1992, 45)

Such thoughts present the reader with a picture of complete separation between Cuba as a place of production and the countries it trades with. This labour carries a sense of both hardship and pride; in Celia's eyes, it is a source of prosperity for the island.

Celia's daughter Lourdes represents a different version of the sugarcane imagery used to describe the Cuban society in which Celia lives following the Cuban Revolution. Lourdes is an exile and an active anti-Revolutionary; at the same time, she is associated with processed and refined sugar-based products. The social changes brought about by the Revolution include a redistribution of wealth, which Celia supports and Lourdes detests.[5] If Celia is the

[5] The agrarian reforms in Cuba aimed to break up large landholdings and redistribute land to those workers who farmed it, to cooperatives, and the state. Legislation relating to land reform were implemented in a series of laws passed between 1959 and 1963 after the Cuban Revolution.

unprocessed raw sugar, unromantic and surrounded by vermin, her daughter is the processed end product. Lourdes believes in the capitalist system that has allowed her to become rich, viewing communism as "lies, poisonous […] lies" (García 1992, 132); in contrast, in Celia's complete support of her Líder and the Revolution, she "consigns her body to the sugarcane" (García 1992, 44).

Lourdes' rebellion against a post-revolutionary Cuba is manifested in her 'Yankee Doodle' chain of bakeries, a name chosen to highlight her ideological affiliation with the US. 'Yankee Doodle' is the name of a song first sung in the eighteenth-century by British soldiers fighting in the French and Indian Wars to mock American troops. Ironically, the American colonial troops claimed the song as their own, singing it to deride the British in turn during the American Revolutionary War. Lourdes' appropriation of this name suggests not only an awareness of her migrant status but also an element of pride in connection to it and a rejection of her links to Cuba. Lourdes' bakeries become places where extremists congregate, and her daughter Pilar calls this 'mom's brand of anarchy' (García 1992, 176). In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Lourdes embraces a society in the US that is in opposition to her mother's Cuban society, and she does so through food. Between Celia and Lourdes, there is a transformation in how sugar is depicted—from production to post-production—that is summoned via memories related to the Revolution. The anxiety that arises in response is rendered by the repetition in the continuous remediation of memories through food. When Celia cuts "the sugarcane that El Líder promised would bring prosperity" (García 1992, 111), her lack of prosperity is contrasted with the abundance of food in Lourdes' experience of the US.

The process of remediation reflects the repetitive dynamic of the expansion of the plantation system in the Caribbean. Celia and Lourdes are trapped at opposite points in a historical process involving all the "societies of the Caribbean" (Mintz 1966, 914). Mintz uses this term to refer to the social structures and organisation of many Caribbean nations,

themselves modelled on the structure of the plantations. Therefore, in García's novel, the narrative food and memory framework Celia and Lourdes find themselves in is necessarily rooted in a plantation-style society. Food products carry within them the "process" of their production, reflecting the process of construction and deconstruction of memories. It is the in-between, the transit, the "initial" part of the process, as described by Barthes (1975, 50-51) when he refers to the stages of production, that are incorporated into the overall meaning of the recipe.[6] Celia is associated with the raw unprocessed cane, whereas Lourdes—a believer in the American Dream—envisions a chain of Yankee Doodle bakeries across the US that will sell the finished processed product (García 1992, 171). Since the plantation was a model of society that involved exporting produce to foreign markets based on a colonial blueprint, it emerged as a capitalist organisational model (Mintz 1966, 26). This model can be observed in how Lourdes runs her bakery and manages her employees, in her vision of the manufacturing process, and in her dream of a chain of outlets stretching across the country (García 1992, 176). Celia talks to Pilar about what Cuba was like before the Revolution, describing it as a pathetic place that relied solely on sugar, with all profits going to a few Cubans and Americans (García 1992, 233); in contrast, Lourdes slaps down coins like pieces of dough (García 1992, 229). Through her bakeries, Lourdes replicates the lack of community life and community spirit that Mintz (1966, 39) characterises as symptomatic of the plantation system. The motive for Lourdes' rejection of the Cuban community in Miami in favour of New York is that in New York, she feels she can act as an individual rather than as part of a machine. However, it is precisely there that she builds a sugar-producing machine of her own.

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[6] "For what is food? [...] It transmits a situation; it signifies [...] all food serves as a sign among the members of a given society […] Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification" (Barthes, 1975, 50-51).

Antonio Benítez-Rojo also contends that the defining characteristic of the Caribbean is not cultural. In his description, most Caribbean nations "present parallel socioeconomic structures, which were determined by the same concurrent phenomenon: the plantation" (Benítez-Rojo 1992, 39). The plantation's ability to survive for centuries, even after the abolition of slavery, political change, and different modes of production, is proof that its characteristic features can morph and adapt to different contexts.

It is significant that Lourdes' rebellion against a post-Revolutionary Cuba is manifested in her establishment of the Yankee Doodle bakeries, thus demonstrating her ideological affiliation with the US. García describes nauseating abundance, which contrasts starkly with the unprocessed sugar cut by Celia:

> The refrigerated cakes come in flimsy cardboard boxes steaming with dry ice. There are Grand Marnier cakes and napoleons with striped icing and Chantilly cream. Lourdes unpacks three Sacher tortes and a Saint Honoré studded with profiteroles, Linzer bars with raspberry jam, eclairs, and marzipan cookies in neon pink. In the summer there'll be fresh peach strudel and blueberry tarts. In the fall, pumpkin pies and frosted cupcakes with toothpick turkeys (García 1992, 19).

This description recalls the Eurocentric and colonial aspects of capitalism. When Lourdes sends her mother pictures of her cakes, they are not meant as gestures of affection but rather as attacks on Celia's political beliefs and reminders of Lourdes' success and the abundance of food in the US, which contrasts starkly with the shortages in Cuba. In this way, García offers a distinct viewpoint on the manifestation of a political protest, which emerges in the correlation of memory and food. The denunciation of social structures through a food language related to memory in *Dreaming in Cuban* finds an outlet in the ways in which memory and food operate

to hold together a fractured past. Indeed, the past that resurfaces can translate an 'identitarian' anxiety within a diasporic, postcolonial, multicultural, and post-Revolutionary scene. For instance, Lourdes thinks back to when she was a 'skinny child' in Cuba (García 1992, 20); strangers, believing she was malnourished and motherless, would buy her treats on the beach or on the main street of town. This memory comes shortly after the reader is told that Lourdes has gained 118 pounds, with flesh amassing so quickly on her body that her thighs are fused above the knees. From feeling malnourished and 'motherless' (García 1992, 20), abandoned by her own country through a Revolution that has taken away her home, her land, and her family, Lourdes has come to fill herself with sugary foods in an attempt to embrace a society of excess; this manifests in the physical transformation of her weight gain.

The negative feelings start to affect how Lourdes views food. In fact, she begins to feel repelled by the smell of food: croissants start to resemble worms, and 'fat pecans [are] trapped like roaches in the cinnamon crevices' (García 1992, 169). This interplay between disgust and pride in the product she has sought to produce is here interpreted as a sign of the contrast between different cultural approaches that are intertwined even as they oppose each other. The metaphors used to describe the food indicate Lourdes' strong distaste for the food she sees. She begins to eat frantically, but then behaves in a completely opposite way soon afterwards by abstaining from food "It's been a month since she [Lourdes] stopped eating, and already she's lost thirty-four pounds" (García 1992, 167), her mouth "moving feverishly, like a terrible furnace" (García 1992, 173). She eats in a crescendo of cultural anxiety that finds an outlet through food: the way Lourdes views and talks about food has consequences for the effect food has on her. As her desire for food becomes frantic, her behaviour becomes increasingly manic, expressing a duality that can also be related to how Lourdes thinks about society.

In this context, we might consider Vygotsky's (1978, 26) thinking on how language not only facilitates behaviour but also controls it: food as a language can mediate memories and

create a way of remembering that affects the future. Lourdes simultaneously overeats and "scours the newspapers for calamities" (García 1992, 174) in her quest to read awful stories that keep her pain fresh. This pain relates to the resurgence of memories of the people she has lost in Cuba as a result of the Revolution, and her antidote is to eat 'as if famine were imminent' (García 1992, 174). This represents an "internalization of social speech" (Vygotsky 1978, 27) following a change in the discourse of nation after the Cuban Revolution. As part of the Cuban diaspora, Lourdes is removed from the social language of the nation, and this rupture has opened a space for food to become a key player in a specific dynamic. Here, it is structured as an instrument of memory that emerges in a process of displacement. If "words can shape activity into a structure" (Vygotsky 1978, 28), food provides the mould for memories to form within the context of language.

Memory is essential to the maintenance of a person's identity during exile, and food is a way of expressing a collective identity "in waiting", ready for an imminent and triumphant return to a life left behind (Mannur 2007, 11). The 1959 Cuban Revolution created violent ruptures in family units, and in *Dreaming in Cuban*, the impact of this event on the population finds an interpretive voice through food, its meanings, and its associations. Lourdes realises that although her migration may be temporary, the changes that have occurred in her community and family are irreparable. Although she is allowed to return, the fractures are deep, based on both ideological and physical distance. If collective memory generally functions as a way of standardising historical events, the characters in *Dreaming in Cuban* illustrate how food can disrupt the creation of collective memory.

The Revolution's impact on Lourdes and her subsequent anxiety are expressed via a language in which food can both mediate and remediate memories. In this way, memories are re-created and conveyed through the medium of food, which has the power to uncover the darker aspects of that experience. Awful stories in the newspaper keep Lourdes' pain fresh:

she "scours the newspapers for calamities as she dunks sticky buns into her *café con leche*" (García 1992, 174). A language that can communicate remediation through food and that is constantly constructing and reconstructing meaning as part of its nature parallels Vygotsky's (1978, 26) theorisation of language that can construct action.

Lourdes' post-Revolutionary remediation of memories takes place in reference to food; her anxiety is highlighted via a channel that is symbolically represented by sugar and its impact on Cuba and the expansion of the plantations. Historically, the plantation economy represented a societal area that functioned beyond the island in commercial exchanges. Thus, Lourdes is engaged in a historical transition, carrying sugar from the Cuba of the past to a globalised future. Her memories find a mode of expression in a type of consumption that turns her fight against the Revolution into a fight against herself. Lourdes' violent memories prompt her to take refuge in the consumption of sugar, which also becomes a very weapon against the self. There is an awareness that the cakes and buns are a form of attack on the self and there is no 'bridge' to Cuba, as there are with other characters; in this way sugar approximates violence, illness, or suicide. Dark food thus becomes a means by which to express memories of violence in the novel.

Conclusion

Mexican author Laura Esquivel's thoughts on how "the colonised and the colonisers were the same [and] what is below is also above" (Esquivel 1998, 36) provides the focus for my conclusion. In García's fiction, the hunger for sugar evokes the violent history from which the product is derived. Even when the hungry body is placated, the monstrosity remains, and in a Frankensteinian fashion, it follows its creators and consumers. As Jane Grigson notes, present day dangers are no longer as visible as they used to be: in the past, food was often poisoned by "unscrupulous purveyors – sand in the sugar, dried hawthorn leaves in the tea, water in the

milk – but at least this was recognised as a vicious thing to do" (Grigson 1974, xiv). Now, food is knowingly 'adulterated and spoilt' in ways that are "entirely legal" (Grigson 1974, xiv). This idea that 'poison' is present in food without characters being fully aware of it is visible in García's narratives. Her characters are haunted by memories of violence, with sugar as the 'food' or ingredient that is best able to symbolise these dark legacies owing to its connections with colonialism and its consequences.

As has become clear, food as a signifier can represent and symbolise what is dangerous within a community or a society. In Western terms, our patterns of consumption have been altered by capitalism. The cultural shifts that have accompanied this change highlight fear and food as two intersecting spheres. However, there is a contradiction in the idea that food serves as a source of danger even as it operates as a source of nutrition, which leads to a sense of anxiety for those unable to trace their feelings of unease to a cause. The breach of trust is too great to be fully comprehended. Rituals involving consumption typically serve as a means to reproduce a damaging hierarchical and patriarchal order, a process that often goes unnoticed because these traditions are so intricately woven into our social tapestry.

Cultural memory, like food, can be viewed as a set of choices made when we seek to remember what is important to us as a community and as a society. Our place within a social order is regularly reasserted through our individual interactions between what is collectively recognised as part of everyday communication and fixed points involving rituals and practices. Just as the meaning of food is much more complex than can be captured by a description on a packet, memory undergoes a type of repackaging process, reflecting what people are 'hungry' for. In García's novel her characters express a desire to fill a void created as a consequence of political upheaval and the food imagery is centred around sugar-based products because of the strong colonial ties between Cuba and the plantations which produced sugar. Cuba's dependence on sugar as its main export contributes to a deeply fractured narrative around sugar

as a product. Through the work of a writer such as García, who has investigated the history of Cuba and who is seeking to interpret the past in her own way, it is possible to uncover various ways in which sugar tells its own story.

García's characters are unable to fully participate in their present; rather, they are burdened by a form of postcolonial history that pulls them into a past that is repeatedly shaped and reshaped by memories of violence. In García's narratives, inner turmoil is dictated by a cultural contrast through which an inherited legacy still manifests, particularly by means of sugar. García's characters transfer their sense of identity transnationally, but they still remember and identify with their past. Western amnesia, the fear of oblivion, is compared to forgetting where food comes from and how foods are made. In forgetting the origins of food, we also forget its principal social function—the idea of communion and communication with other people. The Gothic framework in which this analysis is rooted subverts the idea of eating as an opportunity for bonding. Gothic narratives construct a new order, a new way of viewing the past by ingesting it, digesting it, and recreating it to produce something that makes sense in society today.

García's characters, while acting and reacting to their surroundings through food, are simultaneously adapting to society and creating its next steps: this is what can be defined as 'dark food'. The flows of power that direct how societies develop—reflected through food—create a separation and a void between sites of production and the products consumed; they also create a void within the consumer. Political upheaval, migration, and diaspora make this 'separation' more visible. García uses food as her channel of communication to explore these topics. The lens of dark food makes it possible to observe contrasts from a place that encapsulates how consumption can both passively and actively shed light on complex identarian issues that allow for alternative interpretations of the past. In García's text, consumption signifies how cultural memory operates in the context of a violent history;

consumption represents a continual reinterpretation of memory in the fight between contrasting versions of the past.

Dark food thus focuses on the negative and violent processes involved in the re-creation of significant events. I have focused on sugar as an element of this horror trope to propose an alternative understanding of consumption in the context of exile and diaspora. The violence of the Cuban Revolution and the subsequent upheaval and migration is rendered visible in García's recounting of Celia's and Lourdes' sugar related food references and memories in *Dreaming in Cuban*. The strong and quasi-exclusive bond between Cuba's social discourse and sugar means that sugar becomes a lens through which the changing relationship between Cubans and their Cubanness can be examined. In the novel, the areas in which sugarcane is cultivated become spaces for observing social phenomena through the characters' idealisation of the past, as seen with Celia's vision of a mythologised Cuba through the hardship experienced through lack of fresh food, providing insights into local social development and transnational processes. Based on this premise, within the contexts of exile, migration, and diaspora, the concept of dark food functions as a way for memory to 're-form' itself: dark food represents the creation of a new narrative, wherein García's characters relive violent experiences through foods that are integral to the memory culture of their nation.

The concept of dark food can be applied more widely using different memory theory to help in the interpretation of events that link functions of cultural memory within contexts of upheaval to the effects of these functions on those involved, whether as active protagonists or passive victims. Dark food enables the remembrance of acts of violence—in the case of García's work, the Cuban Revolution. This creates a hunger for new memories that are transformed through food, which has the potential to produce additional violent outcomes. The theory of dark food can be applied to different scenarios involving conflict and cultural memory; in the present case, García is a creator and storyteller of perceptions of identity,

nationhood, and boundaries. Her writing reflects how cultural memory evolves both temporally and in a non-linear way, telling stories that matter to people in their lives. Food is interconnected with our environment, and if in eating, we confront our own death, consumption also reminds us of the ongoing destruction of our environment (Bond, De Bruyn and Rapson 2018, 33). The anxiety that characterises García's work is understood here as stemming from the disconnect between the West and the rest of the world, which are intimately connected as parts of a process but ultimately separated by an anxiety that can be conceptualised through food. This reflects a sense of indeterminacy in the provenance and modalities of production. The interrelationships among food, culture, and memory have much to offer future research, particularly in the context of transnational migration and exile. As global flows change, so do perspectives wherein food and memory intertwine to reflect current concerns, highlighting consumption as an increasingly relevant angle from which to view the world. The concept of dark food gives voice, through how food is used in García's novel, to the idea that if the language of the colonisers is in fact also that of the colonised, it follows that the language "spoken" by the Cuban Revolution is also the same as that of the Cuban diaspora which so violently rejected it.

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