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HUNGER AND MEANING IN THE NOVELS OF CRISTINA GARCÍA

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## Abstract

This thesis offers a novel interpretation of the relationship between food and cultural memory starting from the concept of Gothic food and its relationship to colonialism. This work evolves from anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's contribution to Cuban cultural memory and his metaphor of *transculturación* through Cuba's national dish, the *ajiaco*. The *ajiaco*, a soup, will be considered in connection to slavery and forced labour on the sugar plantations in Cuba. It symbolises the amalgamation of all the different cultures that interacted on the island because of the colonisation of the indigenous populations and the slave trade starting from the arrival of Christopher Columbus. The Cuban food metaphor provides an opportunity to compare the different ways in which cultural memory operates and specifically how the metaphor has been translated outside of Cuba, through the work of Cuban-American diasporic writer Cristina García in the U.S.

The five García novels I have selected to be the focus of this study are: *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), *The Agüero Sisters* (1997), *Monkey Hunting* (2003), *The Lady Matador's Hotel* (2010) and *King of Cuba* (2013). I consider these works 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 legacies. The five novels selected for analysis exemplify how, in the specific context of the 1959 Cuban Revolution and its aftermath, food and consumption are carriers of a notion of hunger which harbours the violence of colonialism revived by revolutionary upheaval.

The thesis 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. The aim of this project is to recentre food in relation to models of memory that shed light on the negative consequences of globalization and capitalism. 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.

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I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

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## Introduction

This thesis will investigate the concept of “food-memory language” as an expression of cultural anxiety in the fictional works of the Cuban-American writer Cristina García. Cuban migration to the US since the 1959 Cuban Revolution has inspired a body of literature in which the depiction of food is used to express anxieties about transnational identity. Cuban exiles who left the island lived in a state of limbo, on the brink of an imminent return that did not take place. The works of transnational Cuban-American authors such as Achy Obejas and Gustavo Pérez Firmat, as well as García, focus on the frustration, anger and loss of living in a state of uncertainty.<sup>1</sup> Their memories of the Revolution create a palimpsest of experiences that are repeatedly relived by their characters as an undigested part of their history. The narratives are set either shortly before or after Fidel Castro’s rise to power in 1959, an event which became a dividing force that separated multiple families in a matter of a few years. García is the first Cuban-American woman to have published a novel written in English, and her narratives, all centred around the upheaval of the Revolution, make use of food as a way to reconstruct the past and create new experiences through memories. Food-memory language, the form of communication that expresses 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. Reconceptualised within the framework of cultural memory and applied here in the Cuban-American context, this idea will be referred to as “dark food”. Dark food can be understood as representing the role of food in relation to memories which perpetually recreate narratives of violence. I consider this notion specifically in relation to the impact of colonialism and its role in the creation of Cuba’s plantation economy and sugar production industry. Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz’s 1936 use of *ajiaco*, a traditional Cuban soup or stew, as a

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<sup>1</sup> Achy Obejas is the author of *Memory Mambo* (1996) and Gustavo Pérez Firmat is the author of *Life on the Hyphen* (1996). Both discuss issues of memory and identity following exile from Cuba.



metaphor symbolising Cuban identity, will be used as an example of how references to consumption can be an effective narrative tool for understanding the processes of cultural memory in the context of Cuban transnationalism and issues of borderlessness and migration. I found it to be a useful example of the power of food as a metaphor when it comes to breaking down complex issues relating to memory, migration and diaspora, all of which are present in García's work.

The term "dark" is already used in relation to memory and consumption within the field of tourism. The phrase "dark tourism" was first coined by Malcolm Foley and John Lennon in 1996, and focuses on the relationship between tourist attractions and death. Since then, a revised model of dark tourism as "engineered and orchestrated remembrance" (EOR) has been proposed by Tony Seaton in *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies* (2018), which shifts the focus of dark tourism from contact with death to "encounters with remembrance of fatality and mortality" (Seaton, 2018, p2). This shift has had a significant influence on historical perspectives. For instance, Alan Rice, in *Museums, Memorials and Plantation Houses in the Black Atlantic: Slavery and the Development of Dark Tourism*, refers to Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, and how these become *lieux d'oublier* (Rice, 2009, p230) in the case of plantations open to tourists where there is a misrepresentation of the brutal effects of enslavement or elision of the slave presence.<sup>2</sup> Dark tourism is considered a form of consumption, as are other forms of tourism, though it is not necessarily death that motivates visitors (Biran and Hyde, 2013, p192); 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 term "dark" in relation to food is also already in use: "dark cuisine" is used to refer to a category of foods combined in ways that can be considered dubious. It comprises

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<sup>2</sup> The example discussed is the Wye Plantation in Maryland.

unorthodox culinary pairings that have come to signify a cultural shift, particularly in the context of Chinese cooking, from a more traditional and rigid approach to food to a less conventional one. Furthermore, recently the term “dark kitchen”, also known as “ghost kitchen”, has been used to refer to a new business model, a service provided to cater to the increasing demand for takeaway food due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dark kitchens are, essentially, production units unconnected to restaurants but which act as such in producing and delivering food. The disconnect between the idea of food had by the customer and the reality of its sites of production leads to the consideration of food as a symbol, and its meaning in the context of this thesis. Here I will propose a novel meaning of “dark”, associated with cultural memory and modalities of remembering specifically portrayed through references to consumption in García’s work. Dark food is essentially a way in which experiences linked to a traumatic event are relived and expressed through a language involving memory as a result of consumption. I will first look at food as a symbol more generally, then explore food and its connections to cultural memory (with reference to memory theory), the relevance of gender in the context of food, and references to two specific foods that are emblematic in relation to Cuba, sugar and *ajiaco*. In the context of memory, I will discuss the work of the author Fernando Ortiz and his use of *ajiaco* as a metaphor in relation to Cuba, and in parallel consider how García uses food and consumption in her novels. The comparison between the two authors involves viewing them as narrators who construct and deconstruct an idea of Cuba through their use of food references.

The relationship between the work of Ortiz and García is seen, in this thesis, as a dialogue between layers of memory that are dependent on how the authors’ personal experiences are tied into broader ones that provide an insight into the meaning of these foods from a cultural memory perspective. It is possible to understand how this can be achieved

through references to food if we consider food itself to be a language and form of communication.

### **Food as a Symbol**

Food allows for alternative ways of interpreting cultural memory, and can lead to new dialogues surrounding practices of remembrance. This thesis is based on the premise that food, as Roland Barthes suggests, can be considered a form of communication in the way it encompasses different customs and habits (Barthes, 1975, p58). If consumption can be a way for individuals to express a sense of cultural belonging, the opposite is also true: food can restrict individual choice. In García's work there is a focus on the limitations that the culinary can impose, and the meanings that food produces acquire a special relevance in the case of the Cuban diaspora.

In the first volume of *Mythologiques, The Raw and the Cooked* (1964), Claude Lévi-Strauss explains that the ways in which food is prepared are forms of communication that reveal the structure of a society. Strauss's culinary triangle of the raw, the rotten and the cooked is the visualisation of a pattern which displays the ways in which food can be transformed from nature into culture. In "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" (2008), Barthes defines food not just as a substance that provides nutrition, but as "a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviors" (Barthes, 2008, p21). The 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, p48). In García's work, the symbology of sugar runs through the narratives, providing a backdrop through the plantations, and changing its meaning as contexts change through the eyes of different characters.

Mary Douglas takes the analysis of food one step further by considering the relationship between meals. 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, pp249-250). 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.

Repetition, in food terms, can be associated as much with celebration as with incarceration and entrapment, as cycles of meaning create solid connections between characters through ritual and habit. The meanings associated with food can change across different locations and over time, and as García's writing progresses we are introduced to the separation between food production and consumption, a type of void that pervades the characters as much as it does the global market.

Massimo Montanari investigates the concept of the "calendification" of food in *Food is Culture* (2004), showing that although traditionally the seasons dictated what foods were served, there was always a desire to modify products in order to preserve them "beyond their seasonality" (Montanari, 2004, p136). It is possible to observe a changing food landscape in *Spicing up Britain: The Multicultural History of British Food* (2008), where Panikos Panayi writes specifically about the post-war technological developments which allowed food to be preserved and stored in places like supermarkets throughout the year and out of season. The impact of globalisation encouraged multinational companies to promote recipes replicating dishes from the colonies. In Panayi's study, food reflects Britain's "rise and fall" as an imperial power, encompassing financial growth and immigration, which have influenced the food eaten both by immigrants and by "the population as a whole" (Panayi, 2008, p210). This speaks to a

spatial containment of multiple “adapted” temporalities, whose shadows exist in every mouthful taken by consumers.

Margaret Visser also focuses on the symbology of food, stating that supermarkets are sites of a uniformity that is both dependent and created by consumers, and that “uniformity, disguises itself as it may behind the multiplicity of cans, boxes, bottles, and cartons in our supermarkets, is a particularly modern curse” (Visser, 1986, p55). The borderless transnationalism that becomes uniformity has also been explored by philosophers and anthropologists. In *Non-places* (1992), Marc Augé considers that humans are subject to a blurring of borders between the body and the outside world, paying a price to escape the alienation that comes with the societies in which we live. The homogenisation of food, the supermarket mentality of consumer capitalism and our ability to purchase floating signifiers, transpose original recipes and package them in a more accessible form, cuts out the process of cooking while conserving the idea of a particular food via the modality of processing it. Our attitude to food becomes the manner in which we assimilate today’s world – a fast paced one with multiple presents to take in at an ever-increasing pace – before we have had time to fully digest our past. We are separated and detached from the sources that “provide” us with food, yet made to feel heavily responsible for the “choices” we make: we are weighted with a sovereignty that is crowned by the illusory “freedom” from the horror of the unknown that financial competence promises to provide. Food shows how the past becomes part of the everyday and is literally incorporated through the body. There is an instability when it comes to consumption, which takes on layers of meaning depending on cultural and societal tendencies, filling a “gap” or void created by the separation between sites of production and distribution.

Sidney Mintz states that food represents not just the mystery “of people unknown to one another being linked through space and time [...] but along a particular chain of connection

maintained by their production” (Mintz, 1985, xxiv). Food, therefore, as well as being familiar, also increasingly becomes the unknown, it represents what is Other, devoid of meaning and unattached to a calendar of ritual belonging. If “food is never simply eaten [but contains] histories associated with the pasts of those who eat [it]” (Mintz, 1996, p7), then what we are eating today is a distorted version of the past, at times exotic and adventurous. It packages the idea of something that goes beyond the food itself: the memory of a “glorious” past. Though cooking is guided by recipes and timings that aim to create a standard version of a meal, what happens to food after we have ingested it is beyond our control. Cooking as a transformative process can never be fully controlled, and two meals are never identical. In this sense, there is an uncanny quality to how food can encapsulate different temporalities, creating a separation in the consumption process between the consumer and the food being consumed. This uncanniness creates a bridge between food and a “dark” idea of consumption, in which food becomes an agent of temporality that lends itself to the expression of the supernatural and hooks into the human sphere through different types of possession. Different types of media are increasingly portraying the human condition as strongly intertwined with the decline of the planet, the demise of humans as a species expressed through the anxious portrayal of environmental disasters, but also, on a more general level, through the threat posed by the unknown (Bond, De Bruyn and Rapson, 2018). The Gothic and horror as genres lend themselves to depictions of these anxieties, and in the context of death caused by an otherworldly threat, food can function to symbolise a fragile connection between temporal realities. Yet food, familiar and comforting in the bonds it creates at a social level, can itself become a source of disconnect and danger when it reflects changing landscapes and the threat of planetary destruction.

## **The Gothic as a Starting Point**

The first chapter of this thesis will explore how the symbolism of food can be understood as a language that reconstructs memory as a way of exploring trauma, discrimination, revenge and machismo, the themes of each of the five chapters focusing on García's novels. 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). There is a need for more flexible frameworks in order to consider transformations in our awareness, and the awareness of our own potential destruction in horror and the Gothic is one example within the wider framework of cultural memory where food can symbolise the changes taking place. These changes are one with capitalism and globalisation, which can be viewed as the causes of a parasitic and insatiable condition which metaphorically transforms, through its associated labour, the flesh of the living into the unliving. This theme occurs repeatedly in all types of media, and the horror genre in particular focuses on developing the concepts of vampirism, zombification and possession in association with the separation between "worlds". In this context, food, a particularly human experience, becomes imbued with the symbolism of anxiety and detachment in the context of consumerism.

The starting point for this study came from observations of how food is portrayed in film, where it often symbolises a range of anxieties by functioning as a signifier of change, frequently within a family setting. The use of food, and locations associated with food, transmits signals of unease within a storyline, culminating in transformations that include instances of zombification and monstrosity, among others. I argue that an association exists between the idea of communication breakdown 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 by drawing on situations that express disgust, hunger, abjection and violence, as well as matters that concern

corporeality and the monstrous. The boundaries of the human body meet with the uncanniness of consumer identity in a place dominated by socio-political anxiety. In connection with the monstrous and the supernatural, food can play a dynamic part in driving the action in a narrative. 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.

Food brings to the surface who we are as human beings; it is a pervasive cultural force that can both unite and reveal differences between people. As a foundation of culture and society, food is fundamental to our health and wellbeing, while also playing a vital role in our relationships with the environment and nature. Transformations in the human interactions associated with food acquisition, preparation and consumption are indicative of broader societal change. 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 occurring in films often come about via supernatural or monstrous "interventions", closely preceded or followed by changes in the food with which the characters come into contact.

The work of Lorna Piatti-Farnell on "food horror" has informed my ideas on the Gothic nature of consumption due to the ways in which food is often associated with violence: from methods of production to the act of eating itself, there is an aggression that accompanies this most vital of survival instincts. Piatti-Farnell states, in fact, that the act of eating is disturbing and evokes a horror that reveals the "repressed animal urges that we so desperately try to keep



hidden” (Piatti-Farnell, 2017, p234). Her concept of food horror enriches pre-existing ideas about the horror genre by creating an explicit link to “culturally specific concerns such as consumerism, sexuality, health and body size, and family politics” (Piatti-Farnell, 2017, p263). I seek to build on these components to provide a novel perspective on contemporary issues relating to food in the context of cultural memory. In fact, by taking the idea of food and violence one step further, I specifically consider the use of sugar as an example of “food horror” that carries within it a historical violence linked to colonialism and enslavement on the plantations.

The rise in imports of goods from the colonies meant that products such as sugar became widely available to purchase in Europe during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Meanwhile, in the Gothic literary scene, vampires became a symbol of transformation that reflected these changes happening in the world. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), for instance, exemplifies the fear of the unknown and the Other, and can be considered in parallel with the new products being imported as Britain expanded as a colonial power.<sup>3</sup> Another example is the portrayal of the soul-extracting coloniser in John William Polidori’s novel *The Vampyre*, published in 1819; the character of Ruthven, supposedly a representation of Byron, is attacked by Greeks – an ironic echo of Byron’s frequent references to the latter being subject to the destructive power of the Turks. In Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), Laura and her father are colonisers in Styria when the former becomes a victim of the vampire Mircalla. Having been infected, Laura continues to travel, conjuring the idea of movement and the further spread of what happened to her in Styria. It is paradoxical that the “monsters” in these stories are those

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<sup>3</sup> “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 batter on the helpless” (Stoker, p60).

approached by outsiders in their own lands, “infecting” victims who then carry the Otherness in their bodies to different places. As Gothic monsters, they are essentially characterised by the idea of transformation and insatiable hunger. Food and hunger are simultaneously anticipated and feared, causing vampires to 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 of energy exchange for the “worse”, where food and consumption create the shadow the vampire lacks; food thus becomes the visible trace of the monster’s non-existent reflection.

Hunger as a Gothic trope, as mentioned in relation to the figure of the vampire, will be applied to the extreme scenario of starvation versus a fullness that goes beyond satiety, which García uses to symbolise the contrast between Cuba and the US. 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 “territorial borders by the forces of globalisation” (Lavin, 2013, pxii). Food, in this sense, becomes a lens that magnifies threats posed to the “sustainability of borders”: consumption becomes a way to analyse anxiety and disruption. Susan Ardill also argues that “food is about boundaries, maps of the body, the outlines of social give and take” (Ardill, 1989, p84), while Piatti-Farnell’s observations on how “the act of eating aids the actualisation of memory into the present” creates the idea of a materiality of existence which, distanced from itself, becomes solely “a reminder of the past” (Piatti-Farnell, 2017, p215).

In García’s fiction, the hunger for sugar evokes the violent history from which it is derived. Even when satisfaction and placation are achieved, the monstrosity is still there, and, in a Frankensteinian fashion, 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, she writes, 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, pxiv). Nowadays, on the other hand, food is knowingly “adulterated and spoilt” in ways that are “entirely legal” (ibid.). This idea of not being fully aware of “poison” in food is visible in the narratives of García’s characters, some of whom are haunted by memories of violence, with sugar as the “food” or ingredient that is best able to symbolise these dark legacies due to its connections with colonialism and the consequences of colonialism.

### **Conceptual Background: Food and Memory**

Whilst this thesis therefore has its origins in food horror and the Gothic, my focus will be on the construction of cultural memory through food. The end of the twentieth century saw Western nations manifesting a preoccupation with collective memory, followed closely by an anxiety about forgetting that has continued to unfold in more recent times. The West’s quest, in the context of cultural memory, has consisted in the anxious search for a narrative landscape of the past where its people could build an identity in the present: the appropriation of roots for an identity that could be claimed and could continue to be shaped. The creation of shared memory provided a stepping stone, perhaps illusory, to the creation of today’s identarian boundaries. However, this journey also carried a sense of loss from the past into the present, and I argue that this has occurred in part through processes of consumption. Paradoxically, the West has become an increasingly bounded community during the process of globalisation, the growing impenetrability of its borders to the poor juxtaposed with the freedom of the rich to move from place to place with ease. As Augé states, consumers are caught in a system of images through capitalism and globalisation, becoming part of a “worldwide consumption

space” where ideas become part of their worlds without ever making them feel at home (Augé, 1995, pp86-87).

In *The Remembrance of Repasts* (2001), David Sutton notes that on the Greek island of Kalymnos the use of the “transitory and repetitive act of eating as a medium for the more enduring act of remembering” was historically synonymous with “acting like a Kalyminian”; everyday foods punctuated and structured the islanders’ memories. But food, like memory, can never be reproduced exactly, as it is subject to a temporality that shifts depending on the context and who is eating. Food and memory both contain concealed meanings that can become externalised, and which are highly dependent on aspects of identity. In *Deciphering a Meal* (1971), 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 of different “food sentences”. As Sutton points out, memories are “formed as an interaction between the past and the present” (Sutton, 2001, p9), 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, pxxix).

Homi Bhabha’s theory of the third space provides further insights with regards to identity. He defines the third space as a liminal space that appears when cultures meet, where something new and unrecognisable is created. New cultural identities are formed and re-formed, and are constantly in a state of being. Bhabha describes certain characteristics of this hybridity in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994). To illustrate what he means by cultural hybridity, he explains that the third space: “makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, [and] destroys [the] mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code” (Bhabha, 1994, p 37). Here he questions the very idea of culture as being organic or uniform; rather, it is hybrid, and this

hybridity creates space for a questioning of authority and power. Food reflects the interstitiality referred to by Bhabha, a space in which it is possible to view alternatives to the dominant narratives of authority. I argue that in García's work food also acts as a medium through which a discourse of protest takes place. In the context of globalisation, consumption can represent the possibility of being at home whilst simultaneously experiencing what is foreign or Other. The space for protest emerges through the void created by the illusory stepping stones of capitalism. García's fractured identities give voice to a rootlessness in which meanings and temporalities change, and these shifts are captured and transmitted through a form of communication that relies on food.

### **Conceptual Background: Cultural Memory and Memory Theory**

The idea that it is impossible to pin down memories or trace them in such a way that identical meanings can be produced has been taken on by various thinkers, including Astrid Erll. Her idea that cultural memory is inconceivable without media is considered at both the individual and the collective level. On the individual level, how memories are shaped depends on communication within the family, for example when photographs are used as a way to reconstruct versions of childhood. Meanwhile, Erll explains, memory on a collective level, which is the construction and transmission of versions of the past in sociocultural contexts, is created solely through media. This can occur orally, for example, as was the norm before the age of broadcast media enabled the transmission of versions of the past to large sections of society, and through monuments, which serve as opportunities to remember through rituals. Erll's concept of how memory is mediated through a "switchboard at work between the individual and the collective dimension of remembering" (Erll, 2011, p113) encompasses the infinite ways in which memories can occur and reoccur in different mediums. How information is organised will determine an individual's future experiences, with media as the channel which

provides the openings to these experiences and memories (Erll, 2011, pp116-117). It is not possible to quantify the occurrence of memories, and I aim to focus precisely on the endless ways that an experience can be interpreted – between the individual and the collective – as discussed by Erll and also by Dominick LaCapra in his writing on absence and its connection to loss and trauma.

In the context of traumatic events entailing loss, LaCapra states: “One is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one’s people) back then while realising that one is living here and now with openings in the future” (LaCapra, 2004, p22). He refers to a process of “working through” that is obstructed by a conflation between loss and absence, as an absence of an absolute, where borders are blurred and a utopian desire to avoid reengagement with life becomes confused as a form of respect towards those who have been victims of a traumatic event. In this context, the concept of anxiety is connected to an inability to identify something precise as the source of this feeling of discomfort. If a way of dissipating the anxiety is to attribute it to a specific object, the loss conflates with absence, that is to say the historical with the transhistorical, which gives that “anxiety an identifiable object – the lost object – and generates the hope that anxiety may be eliminated and overcome” (LaCapra, 2004, p57). The lack of a boundary between the concepts of loss and absence leads to a situation where the idea of a nation, for instance, can be used as a way of contrasting this anxiety with an endless quest for a utopia, a “misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community” (LaCapra, 2004, p46). García’s mode of narration does not offer a resolution to the problematic issues raised by the conflation of absence and loss; if anything, it highlights the deficiencies and irrationality of utopian ambitions.

The lack of control experienced by trauma sufferers arises from a confusion between the self and the Other, leading to a mode of discourse characterised by undecidability. LaCapra

notes a relationship between this discourse and Barthes' theory of the middle voice, a voice which shows how the subject of a verb is affected by the action. In this sense, it could be said that food functions as a material form of middle voice in García's work: food 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. Therefore, food can become an expression of a traumatic memory, as the trauma is symbolically and materially reproduced through the use of particular ingredients, but these often remain latent – unspoken – forms of remembering and forgetting. Jan Vansina's concept of the "floating gap" (Vansina, 1985) focuses on the space between the "here", contemporary history and communication, and the "there", a fixed set of meanings. The more recent past has a stronger hold on what is remembered but a shorter time in which the memory of it remains active; the more remote past is remembered with many gaps in information and the most remote past exists in a more intense, formalised and ritualised manner. The gap shifts along with the generations, which is why it is called "floating" and it opens and closes depending on the switchboard, impacting the relationship between the individual and the collective. The "here" and "there" will also be compared to LaCapra's concepts of loss (as the "here") and absence (the "there"), with the degree of conflation between loss and absence parallel to the degree to which the gap widens or closes. If "all memory work involves a reconfiguration of the past from the perspective of the present" (Bond, De Bruyn and Rapson, 2018, p11), works of narration can connect the here and there in novel ways that offer reinterpretations of the past.

In *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin maintain that new media transform older media, retaining some features whilst discarding others. Remediation is "the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another" (1999, p59); it is "the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms" (1999, p273). The media through which the past is interpreted

carries within it “genres of memory [that] implicitly encode particular social or political values that become naturalized through repetition” (Bond, 2014, p61). As Bond argues, narrative frameworks become just as important as their content, and these structures, according to Vygotsky, are limited by biological factors. The tools of adaptation of the culture in which an individual develops is socio-culturally determined. From a sociological viewpoint, Vygotsky writes that “through repeated experiences [...] children learn covertly (mentally) to plan their activities” (Vygotsky, 1978, p 29). Such a repeated experience, he suggests, “proceeds here not in a circle but in a spiral, passing through the same point at each new revolution while advancing to a higher level” (Vygotsky, 1978, p56).

Vygotsky considers that collective memory is mediated through external instruments and communication, which can ultimately construct new forms of behaviour (1978, pp38-39). I will show how events such as the Cuban Revolution contribute to the questioning of collective memories by revealing the different viewpoints found in intergenerational discourses, and argue that the medium of food acts as an external instrument through which this contestation can occur. In this context, migration and exile find in food and its remediation of memories a site where variations on these differences are perpetuated outside Cuba. An internalisation of social speech takes place, which, after an upheaval, is interrupted and reconstructs itself, re-elaborating loss into different degrees of absence. In this context, considering Vygotsky’s thinking on how language not only facilitates behaviour but actually controls it, food is a language that can mediate memories and create a remembering that has effect on the future (1978, p26). How García’s characters view their present is connected to how their past is remediated through external instruments. In this way, memories are recreated and conveyed through the medium of food, which has the power to uncover the darker aspects of an experience. A language that can communicate remediation through the medium of food, and which as part of its nature is constantly constructing and reconstructing meaning, parallels the



idea of language that can construct action, as theorised by Vygotsky (1978, p26). The intergenerational aspect of García's work, in this sense, is particularly interesting. We observe how her characters, belonging to different generations, interact with their memories, and how these memories are passed on from one generation to another in the narrative.

On a related note, Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" was originally developed to explore how the children of Holocaust survivors relate to their parents' memories, although the concept can be extended to include any relationship between family members of different generations. Hirsch's work focuses on "the relationship that later generations or distant contemporary witnesses bear to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of others—to experiences they 'remember' or know only by means of stories, images, and behaviors" (Hirsch, 2014, p339). Hirsch's concept of the intergenerational transmission of memory will be compared to Alison Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory", which explores how mass culture and its connections to capitalism make it possible for anyone to circulate and share in collective memories. This new form of cultural memory is made up of transportable memories that can be experienced by those who did not bear witness to specific events in the first person.<sup>4</sup> Both Hirsch and Landsberg provide opportunities to discuss how food is experienced as a memory passed on intergenerationally and experienced in new diasporic contexts in relation to globalisation. At the heart of García's narration there is a focus on the longing to return to a Cuba that no longer exists as the characters remember it. The characters experience migration as a rupture with their past and their national identity as they imagine it to be, reflected through their memories of time spent on the island.

Duncan Bell discusses memory as part of national identity, focusing specifically on collective memory in this context. Bell describes the conflation that occurs when theorising

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<sup>4</sup> Landsberg's work is contentious and critics (e.g. Gary Weissman) argue that it is not memories themselves but their cultural forms that are being experienced.

nationalism leads to a “collective remembrance”, what he calls the “governing myth” of a nation. Bell argues that all theories that contribute to the concept of nationalism are founded on storytelling, defined as an “evocative narration of the links between past, present and future” (Bell, 2003, p66), which leads to myth becoming a central component of nationalism as a process. Memory, as an organic form of remembrance, can raise discourses that counter the sustaining ideological myths of a nation, and in this sense, memory can represent voices that go against the national collective memory, the resulting “mythscape” being a space within which conflicting narratives can be rewritten. A focus on the process of reconstruction of remembrance highlights inequalities in the case of gender, for instance, and an analysis of consumption in this field allows for further insight into why certain narratives exist and are amplified.

### **Conceptual Background: Food and Gender**

A gendered perspective in the field of consumption is an important area of investigation as it reflects how socio-cultural systems operate and organise themselves. Inness posits that even today, cooking is one of the domestic activities that has the most resistant association to women, despite changing gender roles (Inness, 2001, p3-4). In their role as gatekeepers (Counihan 2004), women take part in keeping alive gendered ideologies about women, family, and domestic labour. Their gatekeeping is mediated by their control of food consumption and preparation and they express their power through purchases that contribute to shaping their identity.

Gendered behaviour in relation to food, which is integral to rituals in society that are repeated cyclically, is also considered under the lens of memory. Gender is strongly connected to food, often acting as a vehicle for forms of memory. For instance, Counihan investigates food as a way of providing women with a voice within the context of family, specifically in 20<sup>th</sup> century Florence (2004), and Benay Blend (2001) discusses tortilla making as a ritual-based activity that connects Latina women to a gendered cultural identity: “tortilla/tamale making [is a] woman-centered, role-affirming communal ritual that empowers women as the carriers of tradition” (Blend, 2001, p42). If, to quote Lambek and Antze (1998, pxxix): “Identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding”, then memories are formed as the result of a relationship between the past and the present. Sutton (2001) states that women have primary access to the transmission of memories through food as food preparation is first and foremost a woman’s area of expertise and there is an inheritance and transmission of food memories from older to younger women. Although men are also cooks, it is less frequent for them to use their culinary expertise on a daily basis.

Food and memory are central themes in many works by Cuban-American novelists such as García. Women are, in fact, usually considered to embody strong links between Cuba and Cuban-Americans in the US. They are seen as mediators who support the peace-making process between the two countries, maintaining communication and acting as a bridge between members of families fractured after the rise of Castro. Where families were divided, there were widespread efforts among older Cuban women who refused to leave the island, and the younger generation of women who fled to the US, to keep connections alive, while fractures between matriarchal families can be considered in parallel with the rifts between the two nations. Sonia Torres (1995) considers writers who, through their fiction, seek to piece together the history of their family as individuals while also aiming to reduce divisions between Cubans in the two

countries. There appears to be a prevalence of women writers, which could be a result of the US embargo making it difficult for official channels of communication to be maintained, meaning that the transfer of information has often had to rely on so-called feminine discursive practices (Fusco, 1995).

In García's novels, consumption is considered a form of repression for the female characters, as it reinforces the social constrictions that trap the protagonists of her novels. Her characters' relationship with food gives shape to memories of nostalgia and regret, revenge and oppression. García's use of food and memory builds up an idea of consumption that is both the cause and result of the violent mechanisms of labour and capitalist production, the very foundation of dark food. At its best it produces an image of the past as an idealised landscape through food and at its worst, it is a weapon used by the characters as a form of punishment against themselves, in a symbolic cycle of violence and enslavement.

I will also be referring to the concept of masculinities, and specifically to R.W. Connell's theory linking colonialism to masculinity, with the aim of demonstrating how one of García's characters in particular manifests bodily ills that are connected to machismo as a form of hegemonic masculinity. These bodily transformations in García's texts are portrayed as a direct result of consumption, and rooted in violence related to a colonial mindset that is reflected intergenerationally. What is outside the characters' bodies is not them, and the incorporation of items of consumption also presupposes the incorporation of ideas and experiences belonging to a past they did not live but did, somehow, inherit.

Ideas of what is Other also enter our bodies through consumption, directly and across and beyond borders. It is, as Mexican writer Laura Esquivel tells us in *Íntimas Succulencias* (1998), the smells and tastes of the countries we are exposed to through food that form our bonds to those territories. C. Nadia Seremetakis claims that the body is unconsciously aware of these bonds formed through food, stating: "My body involuntarily knew what I consciously did not"

(1994, p16). This leads to the question of how food can encapsulate experiences transmitted in ways that are not always conscious, and which encode layers and layers of cultural references built up over time that relate to each other in the same way that memories do, in patterns that cannot be tied down to a fixed temporality or meaning. As will be seen in the next section, the rise in value of products such as sugar, also meant that those involved in the production of such products were part of a system of exploitation.

### **Historical Background: Cuba and the Sugar Plantations**

My research increasingly focused on Cuba's plantations as the context within which *transculturación*, the process of cultural mixing, took place, and how it was possible to witness this, from a transnational point of view, within the Cuban-American community after 1959. Sugar plantations, for this reason, are the focus of my research as I investigate how evidence of their enduring influence is visible in García's literature. Another reason for the focus on sugar is that the introduction of the plantation system of cultivating sugarcane was one of the most significant events in history in terms of its impact on societies across the Caribbean (Benítez-Rojo, 1992, p38), and the contrasts that have arisen due to the juxtaposition between the commercial power of sugar and the people producing it are what makes the product so important in García's work.

Christopher Columbus's second voyage, beginning in 1493, brought sugarcane to the Caribbean from the Canary Islands, and thereafter it became the dominant crop in the economy of the Caribbean region as a whole, although only in the 1800s did it come to fully dominate Cuba. I focus on Cuba precisely because of colonialism and its legacies, which are central in the production of sugar. From a geographical point of view, Cuba's position was advantageous in the access it offered to the coastlines of Florida and Mexico, routes that were already used by the Indigenous Taínos to exchange goods (Granberry, 2005, p153). When the Europeans

arrived, although Cuba proved disappointing as a source of precious metals, it became a base from which to travel to other places in search of gold, and a stopover location for the Spanish, French, British and Dutch, as its harbours and inlets made it an ideal place for ships to moor.

Slavery on Cuba's sugarcane plantations, and the subsequent forms of labour which took its place, was part of the system of capitalism and its driving force. The process of deculturation that was carried out on the plantations was designed to make it difficult for enslaved people to communicate with each other, and thus to prevent social cohesion. The objective of this violent process was to create a space to maximise profitability through the exploitation of manual labour, and the system of slavery remained long after its official abolition in 1886. The first Africans who were brought to Cuba were between the ages of 15 and 20 (Fraginals, 1999, p29) and mostly male. Their young age ensured that the process of deculturation would be more effective, and that they could spend their most active years working on the plantations. From 1830 onwards the trade in enslaved people would focus on children between the ages of 9 and 12, as it became increasingly difficult to purchase older people. Younger children were also preferred because, culturally speaking, they had less to transmit. The plantation was a business, and as such it adapted to the changes that occurred as the process of industrialisation took place in the second half of the century. Slave labour became incompatible with the technological revolution that was developing at the time, and the system evolved into a coercive economy, which is what capitalist exploitation relied on to succeed. The mechanical progress of the industrial revolution was not compatible with the type of work carried out by enslaved people. Sugar production methods began to change, and it was no longer possible to justify the country's adherence to a capitalist system whilst continuing to employ slave labour. This led to a search for other forms of exploitation, such as indentured Chinese labourers from 1847 onwards. These workers, although they received wages, were transplanted into the same system in which slavery had operated. Thus, the end of slavery in

Cuba was not really the end, in the sense that the socio-economic structure persisted. US capital was present at this stage in Cuba's sugar industry, along with French, Canadian and German, and it is important to note that nearly all the US owners of the sugar plantations were either Cuban or Spanish natives who had recently acquired North American citizenship (Fraginals, 1999, p81). Cuba became financially annexed to North America when the 1871 Sugar Act was passed, ruling that the island could only trade with the US, and that prices were controlled by the New York Produce Exchange. Following US intervention in the 1898 Cuban War of Independence from Spain, several Spanish colonies were handed over to the US, 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, and by the 1950s almost all the sugar grown in Cuba was exported to the United States (Suchlicki, 1990, p135).

In 1956, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara began a revolutionary war against Fulgencio Batista's US-backed military dictatorship (1952-59). The culmination of this war saw Batista fleeing the island and the formation of Castro's new government, one which expressed an ambition to free the island from US influence through a process of nationalisation and land reform. The wages of sugar labourers were pegged to the annual market price of sugar, meaning that these workers' livelihoods were impacted by fluctuations in production (Suchlicki, 1990, p136). Sugar thus became a symbol of Cuba's dependence on the United States. Though Castro made it part of his manifesto to oppose class hierarchy and difference, the capitalist system on which Cuba's subsistence depended was tied to the same colonialist blueprint that had perpetuated, and continued to uphold, the legacies of slavery.

Following the Cuban Revolution and Castro's rise to power in 1959, many people left Cuba for the US in search of temporary political asylum, convinced that the regime would not

last long. They became known as Cuban-Americans, a community whose status as exiles distinguished them from other North Americans of Hispanic origin as it was assumed that their residence in the US would be temporary. Cuban-Americans like García form a distinct “second generation” minority group, which includes individuals who arrived in the US from Cuba when they were children, and those born to Cuban parents in the US (Pérez Firmat, 1995, p3).

### **Historical Background: Cuba and the *Ajiaco* metaphor**

The fact that plantation life only took hold in Cuba in 1790, later than in the rest of the Caribbean, together with the continuous cultural exchange made possible by a situation where there was less segregation compared to other colonies, contributed to extensive mixing between different populations. *Ajiaco* is the culinary representation of this process of *transculturación* (Benítez-Rojo, 1996, p63). Through its ingredients, including indigenous root vegetables, meat, spices and *aji* – the chilli that gives *ajiaco* its name – it provides an insight into the relationship between migration and food after the beginnings of globalisation in the 1500s. According to Ortiz, the dish, because of its changing ingredients or cultural elements, symbolises what it means to be Cuban: a *cubanidad* (Cubanness) that transcends external factors, such as origin, citizenship and race, as a celebration of hybridity and diversity (Duany, 1997, p12). The ingredients in *ajiaco* have changed over time in ways that are connected to the waves of migration that arose because of colonialism and the plantations.

At the time of Columbus’s arrival it is thought that there were three different Indigenous groups in Cuba: the Guanahatabeyes, whose name means “palm”, a symbol that appears on the Cuban coat of arms today; the Ciboneyes, who left an archaeological legacy of stone pestles, huts, shells and corals, and barbecues for roasting fish, turtles and *jutías*<sup>5</sup>; and the Taínos, a branch of the Arawak people from South America, who established agriculture on the island

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<sup>5</sup> *Jutías* are small rodents widespread in the Caribbean (hutias).



and left evidence of having consumed mostly fruit and vegetables such as pineapple, maize, tomatoes and root vegetables (Ortiz, 1949, p3). The *ajiaco* stew or soup can be traced to this last Indigenous group, and symbolises their transition from nomadic to sedentary life. It was made in a pot with boiling water filled with vegetables, greens, roots and meats such as rodents, quadrupeds, birds, reptiles, fish and molluscs, all seasoned with *aji*.<sup>6</sup> As the soup was eaten, more water and ingredients would be added; ingredients that began to change as new cultures arrived in Cuba. For example, Columbus and his crew brought cattle, and beef eventually replaced indigenous meats (Ortiz, 1939, p11); Berti (2014, p118) notes that the colonisers preferred to import food rather than eat local food that was fresh (Earle, 2010, p708). However, *ajiaco* is an example of *transculturación*, as a dish that offers the flexibility to incorporate new elements whilst still maintaining, to varying degrees, a consistent base. With the mass introduction of enslaved people from Africa, additions included fowl, plantains and yams, as well as new cooking techniques. Asian influence was added through the Eastern spices introduced by Chinese laborers, and mild peppers were brought by immigrants fleeing revolutionary Haiti. Whilst the French brought flavours that tempered the strong flavour of the wild pepper, the Anglo-Americans simplified food preparation through their introduction of new metal cookware that replaced the clay pots in which *ajiaco* was originally cooked. The simmering of different cuts of meat, along with the vegetables and spices added at particular intervals to create new tastes and textures, resulted in a continuous bubbling that was constantly evolving to create something new (Ortiz, 1939, p6).

It was not the finished dish that led Ortiz to see Cuba reflected in the pot, but the cooking process itself. “The Cuban pot has always been renewed by the addition of exogenous roots, fruits, meats, by an incessant simmering of heterogeneous substances” (Ortiz, 1939, p6).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The name *ajiaco* itself is a cultural hybrid, a combination of the African word for the Amerindian chilli *aji* (chilli) together with the Spanish suffix *-aco* (Pérez Firmat, 1989, p24).

<sup>7</sup> Siempre en la olla de Cuba es un renovado entrar de raíces, frutos y carnes exógenas, un incesante borbotar de heterogéneas sustancias” (Ortiz, 1939, p6).

Cuba's nationhood is represented by *ajiaco* because the dish contains evidence of the different cultures that shaped the island, whose constant interaction created a unique sense of Cuban identity. Mintz (1964, pxxiv) points out that "Cuba as a Spanish colony had more nationhood than the colonies of other European powers in the Antilles might have had as sovereign states" (cited in Suchlicki, 2002, p27). However, beginning with Cuba's Amerindian inhabitants, all the cultures that have played a part in the island's history can be considered the ingredients in a mixture that makes Cuba what it is today and whose memory is kept alive by an ever-changing recipe that continues to evolve. Ortiz states that it is the very process of change that characterises Cubans as a population who, at their very core, are a combination of nationalities.<sup>8</sup> Building on Ortiz's work, I will investigate further what lies behind the *ajiaco* metaphor and the foundations it relies on, namely slavery and indentured labour, the missing part of the recipe which has thus far been omitted.

### **Historical Background: Fernando Ortiz and Cuba**

A clear-cut perspective of Cuban cultural identity is unattainable if we use the metaphor of *ajiaco*. Africa, America and Europe are no longer distinguishable inside the *olla cubana*, the Cuban pot. There are, at the most, varying degrees to which one transforms into the other, and this process of decomposition followed by re-composition creates an infinite number of perspectives. Violence is an integral part of this process, just as it was part of Ortiz's life. Latin American anthropologists had a strong nationalist mission in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; the focus was on interpreting their own nations, and Ortiz was part of this. He used the metaphor of *ajiaco* as a way of defining cultural fluidity, and in doing so reached a definition of national culture, an understanding that characterises Cubanness as a process rather than an essence. Born in 1881 in Havana, Ortiz grew up on the Spanish island of Menorca after

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<sup>8</sup> "no son pocos los nacidos en Cuba que se han dispersado luego por otras tierras" (Ortiz, 1939, p6).

his family moved there in 1882. He spent part of his adolescence in Cuba, where he witnessed the last war of independence in Havana, which ended in 1898 with the American invasion and what became known outside Cuba as the Spanish-American War. Cuba officially became independent in 1902, after four years of American occupation. The same year, Ortiz became a diplomat for the newly established nation, representing Cuba in Spain, Italy and France. He settled permanently in Cuba in 1905 at the age of twenty-four, going on to study criminology and anthropology. In his first book, *Los Negros Brujos*, published in 1906, Ortiz attributed crime and witchcraft to biological factors. He wrote several monographs on what he called “Afro-Cuban” subjects over the next ten years: mythology, religion, slavery, revolt, and language. He eventually discarded the race-based views expressed in his early work, which drew on problematic racial distinctions between elements of Cuba’s history, in favour of a more cultural approach, and by the 1920s he had become a vocal opponent of Cuban racism. Ortiz also wrote articles and delivered speeches exposing many issues affecting the republic in its early days and proposing solutions, in particular to Cuba’s economic dependence on sugar and the US influence on Cuba’s economy and politics, calling for a change in the terms of Cuba’s relations with its neighbour. As a member of the Liberal Party, Ortiz was also involved in politics, and in many ways his own life was tumultuous and characterised by a degree of violence which is also encompassed within the *ajiaco* metaphor.

In terms of how food can be used to produce and reproduce memories of a nation, and how that fits into the approach to cultural memory that I will be taking, I will compare Ortiz’s work to that of García: two different approaches to how food can be used to “explain” and portray the situation of migration and exile through consumption. In 1939 Ortiz gave a speech at the University of Havana in which he used the culinary metaphor of *ajiaco* to provide a nationalistic definition of Cubanness as a process of *transculturación*. Ortiz further explains

his understanding of “*transculturación*”, a revision of ethnographer Bronisław J. Malinowski’s term “acculturation”, in his monograph *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar* (1940). While acculturation refers to the processes of assimilation, such as the assimilation into US society of European, African, and other migrant populations, *transculturación* addresses layered and complex processes of exchange: interactions that are linguistic, economic, racial, gendered, and cultural. From Ortiz’s perspective, cultural assimilation, rather than being a one-way process involving the assimilation of a less powerful culture into a more powerful one, was a multiple exchange of cultural influences, unfolding in the ever changing and “open” context of complex processes of power and mechanisms of production.

In exploring Ortiz’s *ajiaco* metaphor, it is useful, in this context, to consider how the stew takes shape within the borders of an open pot. Referring to Cuba, Ortiz writes: “An unusual pot, this land of ours, just like the pot of our *ajiaco*, which must be made of clay and quite open” (Ortiz, 2014, p461).<sup>9</sup> Ortiz focused on Cuba as an imagined community, mainly because he was conscious of how it was Other to the West.<sup>10</sup> He held nationalistic views on Cuban culture and its roots in a mixture of European, Indigenous, Asian and African elements, and his writing considers how historically marginalised ethnic groups contributed to the formation of Cuba’s fundamental national self (Ortiz, 1939, p6). It is possible to draw a parallel between the culinary metaphor of *ajiaco* and the idea of *cubanidad* as a process rather than a “fixed” essence, and the process of memory, and how “places of memory” can determine what becomes worthy of consideration, remembrance or celebration. Ortiz states that no one can claim to have roots in Cuba, not even the Indigenous population, who also migrated from elsewhere. In *Los Factores Humanos de la Cubanidad* (1939), Ortiz uses references to

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<sup>9</sup> “Cazuela singular de nuestra tierra [...] que ha de ser de barro y muy abierta” (Ortiz, 1939, p4).

<sup>10</sup> Benedict Anderson stated that nations are socially constructed and he defined the nation as “an imagined political community” (1991, p6).

vegetables to evoke this idea of an absence of roots, a metaphor for the people who arrived in Cuba from elsewhere, suggesting that the only real roots are those included in the recipe for *ajiaco*.<sup>11</sup> In a passage suggesting that figurative roots have been replaced by physical roots added to a soup, Ortiz provides a counterpoint to established mainstream views of culture and hybridity. Since *ajiaco* is not frozen in time, its consumption presupposes the internalisation of the transitional aspects that make the recipe what it is. The moving parts that are the building blocks of Cuban culture cannot be frozen into monuments; they need to be consumed whilst in movement. For Ortiz, Cuban culture is in constant flow, like the water that Cuban roots are cooked in. He refers to migrants arriving in Cuba in “exogenous streams” and “abundant migratory flows”, and writes that Cuban history is full of “waves, whirlpools, bends, rapids, and quagmires” (Ortiz, 1939, p13). The water itself, in addition to its power as a metaphor for the flowing culture, is also of interest in the sense that it becomes a homogenising agent for other ingredients.<sup>12</sup> However, because of the constant flux of people entering and leaving Cuba, there will never be an end to the number of new cultural ingredients that become part of the soup. This is what makes *ajiaco* an apt metaphor; because it is constantly cooking and never completed, the process of boiling and “mixture” never ends.

In terms of cultural memory, this is significant, because Ortiz locates *cubanidad* in the temporary results, as well as in the mixing process:

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<sup>11</sup> The poet Gustavo Pérez Firmat offers a Cuban-American perspective on Ortiz’s metaphor: “We Cubans have a peculiar relation to our roots: we eat them. What is the *ajiaco* if not a root roast, a kind of funeral pyre? You take your favorite aboriginal roots—*malanga*, *ñame*, *yuca*, *boniato*—and you cook them until they are soft and savory. In keeping with your roots’ roots, you might even cook them in a hole in the ground. But then you consume them. You don’t freeze them. You don’t preserve them. You don’t put them in a root museum” (Pérez Firmat, 1994, p16). This is the new type of memory that food offers: an edible monument to the past, a past which incorporates an element of violence and which is transferred to a contemporary anxiety – an anxiousness to be authentic, to find roots in an increasingly globalised and capitalistic world.

<sup>12</sup> “Even today exogenous streams [...] ceaselessly arrive, stir, and get dissolved in the Cuban broth, delaying the consolidation of a definitive and basic national homogeneity” (Ortiz, 2014, p478).

One might think that it is necessary to search for *cubanidad* in this sauce of new and synthetic succulence, formed by the fusion of the human lineages dissolved in Cuba, however, *cubanidad* is not only in the result, but also in the complex process of its very formation, disintegrative and integrative. (Ortiz, 1943, p5)

The transformation in the process of cooking is endless, and it includes the decomposition of the elements that constitute the recipe, the fractures and unstable degrees by which one culture influences another. The metaphor of *ajiaco* is, in many ways, a subversion of the idea of “roots” as a way of affirming belonging to one nation as opposed to another. The concept of “roots”, as the main ingredient in most nationalistic discourses, is here turned on its head by Ortiz, along with its connection to territory. Roots exist, but their very definition is questioned in the context of *ajiaco*. Ortiz’s metaphor, which represents a fluid and evolving form of collective memory, is crucial to understanding how the concept of Cuban national identity was developing in the period before the 1959 Revolution.

*Cubanidad* and *cubanía* are two terms used by Ortiz in the context of *ajiaco* to define Cuban identity. *Cubanidad* refers to a complex process of interaction between different elements that together capture the essence of what it means to be Cuban. *Cubanía* is the result of these intangible processes of interaction between cultures: Ortiz refers to *cubanía* as a “mass” of “tenacious essences”. The metaphor of *ajiaco* therefore describes what it is to be Cuban as both a process and an outcome.

Drawing on Ortiz’s conceptualisation of reciprocal cultural influence, my intention is to use the same metaphor to exemplify the ways in which memory can be remediated by food at different points in time. *Ajiaco* will be considered as a blueprint in parallel to García’s work, particularly with reference to Ortiz’s ideas on migration, *transculturación*, and issues relating to gender and space in relation to political power dynamics. Cuba is certainly a place full of

contradictions: its black market economy, its double currency, and its isolation and consequent atemporality mean that the country is easily “forgotten” when it comes to publications, even those that are global and encyclopedic.<sup>13</sup> By focusing on the ways that food and cooking processes can be metaphorically linked to nation building, I explore how Ortiz’s use of the *ajiaco* metaphor contributes to an understanding of how trauma can filter into the everyday through the present, and specifically through food. In this context, *ajiaco* represents an incorporation of “Otherness” that, through the act of ingestion, becomes a part of Cuban identity. As my analysis of García’s work progresses, I will draw comparisons between Cuba’s national dish and how her characters express their traumatic memories following exile and migration. Garcia shows us the same melting pot that Ortiz sees in the *ajiaco*, but she also focuses on its darkness, the violence – both past and present – that underlies the process of *transculturación*.

### **Cristina García**

There is a strong culinary tradition in Latin American literature, as can be seen in the work of writers such as Laura Esquivel and Rosario Castellanos, and a powerful connection between food and memory in diasporic writers such as Sandra Cisneros and Julia Alvarez in the US. Food-centred nostalgia is a recurring theme in the latter’s work, with an emphasis on how identity is deconstructed rather than constructed by food. Food can become a way of reconnecting with childhood memories, or even constructing memories of a past that was never experienced. Cristina García’s family fled Cuba in 1961, after Castro came to power, and she was 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 belonging to

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<sup>13</sup> Frank Trentmann’s *Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (2012) contains only two brief references to Cuba in relation to consumption and slavery.

different generations, whose actions alternate between attempts to bridge divisions between families and acts of attempted revenge: food, as a source of tension and rupture due to the ongoing US embargo, plays a crucial role in conveying these messages.

The case of Cuba offers a particularly appropriate basis for an investigation of transnationalism: Cuban diaspora communities, as far back as the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, demonstrated their transnationalism through their active participation in Cuban politics and wars. Furthermore, transnationalism was at the centre of colonialism, slavery and other exploitative forms of control related to globalisation. Through transnationalism, therefore, it is possible to trace “the paths not taken in the formation of dominant national narratives” (Cesari and Rigney, 2014, p6), which is precisely what García achieves through her writing. García’s work, in contrast to Ortiz’s mode of remembering, represents a negative process of *transculturación*, and thus the metaphor of *ajiaco* acquires a mixed emotional resonance, representing both nostalgic and traumatic memories.

Both Ortiz and García’s writing are fictionalised versions of the past, and while Ortiz’s work represents Cuba as a utopian land of cultural diversity, García’s places a clear emphasis on the suffering caused by colonialism and slavery. The writings of both can be considered “mediums of cultural memory” that have introduced new images of the past into an ongoing process of “dynamic interplay between text and context” (Erll, 2011, p171). A relatively large amount of scholarship exists on García’s first two novels, *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*, particularly in relation to nostalgia and memory, with much discussion surrounding feminism and postcolonialism. *Dreaming in Cuban*, nominated for the National Book Award in the US in 1992, has become an established work in the US ethnic literary canon, having been included in anthologies such as *Masterpieces of Latino Literature* (1994); *The Brooklyn Reader: Thirty Writers Celebrate America’s Favorite Borough* (1994); *Little Havana Blues: A Cuban-American Literature Anthology* (1996); and *The Latino Reader: An American Literary*



*Tradition from 1542 to the Present* (1997). Critical discussion of García's texts generally affirms that she contests the linearity of concepts such as nation and patriarchy. Critics also cite her positive depiction of migration, with second-generation characters moving between Cuba and the US. The journey home to Cuba allows some characters "to preserve that family history" (Payant, 2001, p174), and their lives become a discovery and affirmation of identity. Though all her characters decide to return to the US after completing their "mission", this process of self-discovery is not viewed negatively in critical discussion. These storylines provide an alternative history to the dominant, collective one, and trips back to Cuba allow characters to establish connections with previously unknown family members. However, it is globalisation itself that makes such journeys possible within the context of the diaspora. Some of the characters in García's novels travel back with a desire to quench a thirst related to the capitalistic society they now live in. Their nostalgia is accentuated by the experience of exile itself and engendered by imagery connected to a Cuba that has changed since their departure. Although none of García's characters stay in Cuba after their return, they have fulfilled their dream of reconnecting with a side of themselves they have fantasised about since the beginning of their exile.

My examination of García's novels, in the context of distorted memories and the dynamics between different generations of the same family, seeks to take into consideration the more capitalistic message behind the writer's narratives. There is a commodification of Cuban culture which García points to through her transnational characters, who live in an in-between space that leans on nostalgia, but when confronted with reality this nostalgia does not translate into a real desire to live in a country that does not match up to their expectations. This thesis will consider the discourse of nostalgia as a contrast between individual and collective memory, rooted in the ideal of *transculturación*, represented by the Afro-Cuban cultural aspects of the novels. There is some scholarship on the magical realism in García's works,

especially in relation to feminism (Mrak, 2014), and also on the Gothic elements in García's second novel *The Agüero Sisters* (González, 2012). In "The Emergence of Afro-Hispanic Literature" (Jackson, 2002), Richard Jackson refers to Cuban writers such as Nicolas Guillén, who helped bring to the fore experiences of Black people and aspects of Black culture in Cuba. Jackson states that the canon of Afro-Hispanic literature is being expanded to include, for instance, US authors who uphold elements of African cultural traditions. García's descriptions of her characters include many Afro-Cuban references, although these are not always celebratory. I focus on how her characters incorporate different aspects of Afro-Cuban culture whilst also displaying European characteristics. García creates a new narrative which focuses on how her characters relive violent experiences through foods which represent their nation and the contrast between cultural elements. Her protagonists are possessed by an insatiable hunger to re-experience past memories and reformulate them, making them part of their present: as a concept, dark food, encapsulates this re-interpretation of consumption.

My first chapter, "Food-Memory Language: How Memory is Mediated and Remediated by Food in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*", focuses on how the memories of three characters in the first of García's novels are mediated and remediated through food. My first chapter also introduces the idea of food-memory language, which draws on the following: Mary Douglas's theory that food and its meaning are dependent on the idea of repetition within a wider "network" of foods and their signifiers; Sydney Mintz's definition of "societies of the Caribbean", referring to the social structures and social organisation typical of many Caribbean nations which are modelled on aspects of the plantations (Mintz, 1966); and the idea of repetition specific to the plantation model (Benítez-Rojo, 1992) and how this is relevant to the US in a transnational setting. The memory of violent events becomes part of the characters' present through their memories of food. The process of cooking suggests the idea

of identities in constant flux, similar to memories themselves but also to the process of memory “construction” through mediation and remediation. The first step is therefore to draw a comparison between the culinary process and the process of memory formation in relation to constructions of identity and nation, which will be continued in the second chapter. The second step involves linking understandings of Cuba to a social discourse built on sugar. Why sugar? The relationship between sugar plantations and the Cuban economy, its close links to the US, and the historical events referred to through Ortiz’s metaphor and in García’s texts are all underlying reasons. Dark food, here, relates to the drastic rupture in the social discourse of Cubans who left following the violence of the Revolution, and who utilise a food-memory language based around sugar and its own intrinsic historical violence to make the past part of their present through memory, thus dictating how they act in the present.

In my second chapter, “Bodies of Memory in García’s *The Agüero Sisters*”, I discuss how the characters’ bodies bridge the gaps between memories belonging to different times. The body thus plays a role in closing the “floating gap”, which Vansina has defined as the space between distant and more recent memories. My interpretation of food in the context of memory, through the lens of Vygotsky’s external instrument theory, takes a step in the direction of material memory based on the work of cultural theorist Aby Warburg: here, the body becomes a carrier of memories that display “versions” of history. The contrasting “versions” of memories are displayed through eerie corporeal transformations that start occurring when the novel’s main character uses Cuban-inspired food to evoke nostalgia and capitalise on the exile community’s desire to live on the island again. These transformations reveal the sinister aspects of representations of the transitory nature of history, be it of a family or of a nation. The second chapter also takes a closer look at the physical impact that memory has on the body, and illustrates the impact “repressed” memories have on García’s characters. Here, I aim to explain how the metaphor of *ajiaco* and the idea of *transculturación* are carried to the US by

the sisters in ways that make them appear monstrous, suggesting that a distortion of memories is taking place. A component of dark food, here, is how the protagonists of *The Agüero Sisters* are both supernaturally possessed by their mother and father. This act becomes a metaphor for the appropriation of memories of events that were experienced differently until a “true” version of events, or at least one that they can believe in, occurs.

The third chapter, “Gender and Nation Building in García’s *Monkey Hunting*”, addresses the topics of nation building and gender. I use food references in the novel to illustrate how García’s work inscribes the repression of women in rituals of consumption. These rituals of consumption narrow the floating gap, addressed in the previous chapter, as they allow gendered memories to continue into the present, where they serve as a reminder of women’s subordinate position in society. Though women appear to have the opportunity to subversively re-interpret male-dominated historical discourse, this still occurs within an oppressive framework that is expressed and enforced by food-related issues. This third chapter revisits Ortiz’s metaphor, noting that he makes no specific mention of women in his references to nation building. García looks at the Chinese and African cultural elements in Cuba through two characters who are “built into” consumption rituals over which they have no control. This chapter takes on the idea of nostalgia for an “ideal” Cuba, drawing on Benedict Anderson’s ideas on nation building and the flexibility around which elements are singled out as relevant when ideas of nation are constructed. In this context, the way women are typically marginalised in processes of nation building is an important point of observation, and informs discussions of why women may be led to identify with an “ideal” or utopian community. Here, the idea of dark food emerges in the ways the characters’ “insides” are affected, metaphorically portrayed through consumption, implying a submission to the demands of society while aiming for a “greater ideal”. In this sense, a remediation of memory takes place internally through the body, as well as “externally” through facial and bodily features, as discussed in the second chapter.

Women are thus constructed just as nations are constructed, serving the wider purpose of nation building in adapting to flows of power, guided by men.

The fourth chapter focuses on *The Lady Matador's Hotel*, set in an unspecified location in Latin America and bringing together a variety of characters with contrasting cultural backgrounds and experiences. The location plays a central role in how the story unfolds, revealing details that provide insights into the characters' pasts and the impact these have on events. The hotel acts as a structure that contains the characters' memories, just like the metaphorical receptacle represented by the *ajiaco* pot. Again, *ajiaco* becomes a *lieu de mémoire*, a living process rather than a monument frozen in time. The mix of ingredients in the pot is represented by García's portrayal of the hotel, where the different rooms and spaces become places where the characters "live" out their different cultures, mixing and interacting according to changing flows of power. These places include spaces of vulnerability associated with food, such as restaurants, kitchens, and rooms where characters consume food ordered from room service, and memories are repeatedly reinscribed within these boundaries like ingredients in the pot. Augé's idea of "non-places" is used to explore the concept of transition as it applies to space, and what this means in a globalised, capitalist world. Here, the idea of dark food emerges from the vulnerable pathways opened up by memories triggered through consumption, creating a poisonous channel that allows violence to reoccur.

The fifth and final chapter, focusing on *King of Cuba*, will also look at capitalism and globalisation and what these entail for the novel's male characters, Goyo and Goyito. In keeping with the theme of sugar and the transnational dimension, this chapter takes on the issue of anxiety and machismo: a masculinity transformed by the advent of colonialism, as recorded in 1542 by Bartolomé de las Casas (De las Casas, 1992), and by globalisation. The chapter also explores how these themes relate to Castro and the Revolution. This time, memories of sugar represent a frustrated masculinity for male exiles who left Cuba and were branded "worms".

Their desire to fight back is not “absorbed” by their sons, who have no desire to fight. Drawing on Hirsch’s concept, I argue that sugar represents a “postmemory” bridge between Goyo and Goyito, which evolves into a form of what Landsberg calls prosthetic memory. The latter becomes a mode of communication that takes on the darkness of the violence of machismo and the violence of the plantations. Although other types of plantations existed in Cuba, it is made clear that those where sugar was cultivated had a particular tie to capitalism which others did not have. Sugar becomes the “transferential space” (Landsberg, 2004, p23) referred to by Landsberg, where horror can be experienced intra-generationally even when specific events were not experienced first-hand. Here, dark food emerges from the fact that the sole non-violent means of communication between father and son is based on sugary junk food, and although this food provides a type of nutrition, it also leads to illness and suffering. The expression of dark food through food-memory language is achieved through a focus on the perpetuation of suffering through this form of food, sugar.

In summary, this thesis reformulates the idea of Gothic food into the concept of dark food through a reconceptualisation of food horror narratives within the framework of cultural memory. US domination in Cuba was played out through a political strategy which damaged Cuba’s ability to trade and export food, and the language of this domination belonged both to a colonial force and the nations that rejected it. The contrast arising from this relationship is expressed through food-memory language as a modality of communication able to incorporate this struggle and history of violence. The interaction between migration and cultural memory creates a depiction of food that holds anxiety within it as a product of capitalism and globalisation. Specifically, my research seeks to answer questions that arise from this context of socio-political anxiety manifested through food, in the specific context of the Cuban diaspora after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The relevance of cultural memory in relation to

consumption becomes apparent through investigation of the intergenerational, migration-related and gender-based issues in García's novels. The process of colonisation created the plantation mindset through links between sugar and capitalism, which took hold to a much greater extent than in other industries such as tobacco, for example. Variations in sugar prices meant that social discourse depended on these fluctuations. The Cuban Revolution interrupted that discourse, and food-memory language is a tool that can be used to analyse how a new type of communication, based on memory, is used in García's novels to reflect cultural change. The five chapters that form this thesis will focus on how the following five points form the components that build the concept of dark food in the specific case of García's novels: violence and haunting; possession and the controversies of incorporation; the repression of women incorporated in society's unseen rituals; the trust inspired by food even when it is actually poisonous; and masculinity and its part in perpetuating the horror of colonialism.

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 p36) provides the focus for my conclusion. The concept of dark food that emerges from food-memory language gives voice, through how food is used in the novels, 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.

## **I. Food-Memory Language: How Memory is Mediated and Remediated by Food in Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban***

*Dreaming in Cuban* is the debut novel by Cuban-American author Cristina García, first published in 1992. It is set in both Cuba and the United States, and focuses on three generations of the del Pino family. The novel centres on the women of the family, beginning with matriarch Celia del Pino before turning its attention to her daughters Lourdes and Felicia, and finally her granddaughter Pilar. For the purposes of my study, I have chosen to analyse the characters of Celia, Lourdes and Pilar to explain in the clearest possible way how the intergenerational family dynamics work in the text between Cuba and the exiles in the US, with a focus on how cultural memory and memory processes can be observed specifically through García's use of food. The story is narrated in a nonlinear fashion, and, moving between different places and times, it explores themes including family relationships, exile and diaspora, immigration and assimilation, and the ways in which political upheaval can divide a family.

*Dreaming in Cuban* begins with Celia Almeida as a young woman living in Havana. She meets and falls in love with a married Spaniard named Gustavo, but he leaves to return to Spain. Celia is devastated and ends up marrying Jorge, who turns out to be a cruel husband, and abandons her to the mercies of his sadistic mother and sister while he travels. By the time Celia gives birth to Lourdes she is confined to a mental institution, and Jorge takes custody of their daughter. When Celia is discharged, Lourdes is close to her father but has no connection to Celia. Celia and Jorge also clash over politics, with Celia supporting the Cuban Revolution and Jorge siding with the pro-American government. Lourdes goes to university and falls in love with Rufino Puente, the son of a wealthy ranch family. She gives birth to her daughter, Pilar, as the Cuban Revolution takes place. Two years later, she miscarries her second child in a horse-riding accident, and returns home to find Rufino being assaulted by



soldiers. More soldiers come later, seize the family home for the Revolutionary government, and rape Lourdes. The family flees to Miami, but Lourdes finds it hard to adjust. They later move to New York, with Rufino trying to become an inventor and Lourdes supporting the family as a baker. In New York, Lourdes' business becomes successful and she opens a second bakery. Her relationship with Celia is confrontational, and she sends her mother pictures of food that is unavailable in Cuba. Lourdes visits Cuba with Pilar, who has been communicating with her grandmother through supernatural means, but the family is irreparably fractured. When Lourdes and Pilar leave Cuba, Celia walks into the ocean, never to return.

This chapter will argue that in *Dreaming in Cuban's* literary representations of Cuban-Americans, food represents an anxious meeting point between the individual and a context of global political unease. The chapter also foregrounds the notion of "food-memory language" in the specific context of Cuba and the Cuban diaspora in the United States after the 1959 Revolution. This is achieved through comparisons between the memories of Lourdes and Celia del Pino. The former leaves Cuba following the Revolution, and her memories are mediated and remediated through food, relaying aspects of the anxiety linked to her life as a migrant in a transnational context. The latter stays in Cuba, and her memories of the island become a mythological ideal that is reflected in the food she prepares.

The origin of food-memory language lies in the theory that food is comparable to language, since both are made up of sets of symbols that enable the transmission of information in social relationships, as posited by Levi-Strauss (1983). The connection between food and culture, insofar as it relates to things that members of the same society have in common, is created, shaped, transmitted and learned through communication, and communication practices are, in turn, predominantly created, shaped, and transmitted by culture (Stajcic, 2013, p6).

Although subjective and contingent, language is able to communicate our understanding of the world. Food, acting as a conveyor of meaning through its multidimensional aspects, which correlate with identity, culture and society, is also a language. Going beyond the idea of food as being purely nutritional, 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, p48). In this context, and following from this notion, the ingestion of food, according to Mary Douglas, involves the consumption of a system of meanings that is comprehensible only within a pattern of repetition. Hence, the patterning of food itself is a code that contains within it the potential for various different messages (Douglas, 1972, pp249-250). The repetition of patterns of food consumption presupposes a memory of those patterns which allows for those food analogies to occur and which carries them 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 take place.

My reading of García's work will illustrate how her intergenerational story of a family impacted by the Cuban Revolution is told through a language that relies on a correlation between memory and food in the context of the post-Revolutionary Cuban diaspora in the United States. The fractured family created by García is divided both geographically and ideologically. The contrast between the characters who stay in Cuba and those who leave creates a springboard from which to illustrate the interconnections between food and memory in the context of migration. Celia (b.1909), Lourdes (b.1936) and Pilar (b.1959) are fictional characters from three generations of the del Pino family, all born in Cuba, whose lives will take different paths following the Revolution. The different characters' stories form ever-shifting patterns of individual narratives that contrast with the standardised and dominant versions of events created both by the Castro government and by the exile community in the US. I create

a parallel here between these shifting patterns, Lev S. Vygotsky's notion of mediated memory (1978), and Andrew Hoskins' idea of the remediation of memory (2001), by considering food as a medium through which it is possible to observe how channels of consumption carry within them powerful hidden meanings, as has been suggested by David Sutton (2001).

This chapter will begin from the established link between food and identity, which, in the specific case of Cuba, can be exemplified through Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's reference to Cuban *ajiaco* (1939). This soup, made from beef, chicken, vegetables and a variety of starchy roots, is used by Ortiz as an illustration of the uniqueness of Cuba and its inhabitants and the ways in which migration and exile have had an impact on the island. It is, in fact, a metaphor for cultural exchange between the Indigenous, African, Asian and European individuals who, at different points in time, have contributed to and influenced Cuban culture. Ortiz's concepts of *transculturación* (transculturation), a two-way exchange of cultural influences, and *cubanidad* (national identity) versus *cubanía* (the desire to be Cuban), will be considered alongside Sidney Mintz's definition of the Caribbean as a societal area defined by the sugarcane plantation system (1966). The term *transculturación* was coined by Ortiz in his essay *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar* (1940) to describe how cultures merge and converge. *Transculturación* encompasses more than just a transition from one culture to another; it does not involve merely acquiring another culture (acculturation), or losing or being uprooted from a previous culture (deculturation). Rather, it merges these concepts, and also incorporates the idea of a resulting emergence of new cultural phenomena (neoculturation) in which the blending of cultures produces something entirely new.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo's (1992) more recent work theorising the ways in which the plantation model has been able to morph and survive in multiple locations is also relevant to the themes of transnationalism and migration that are explored in this research. This chapter draws on these theories, with a focus on Cuba's importance as a site for the cultivation of

sugarcane plantations, and their effect both within and beyond the island's borders, in order to form the basis of an innovative reading of García's text. I will argue that García's characters represent a continuation of certain societal and cultural elements of Cuba within a new transnational environment in the United States. To the character of Lourdes, sugarcane, as a product destined for export, is carried beyond the borders of Cuba and "reinterpreted" away from its roots, processed from the raw product into the form sold by Lourdes in her bakery.

I will also draw on Vygotsky's work on collective memory, mediated through external instruments and communication, as a tool for constructing new forms of behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978, pp38-39). I will show how events such as the Cuban Revolution contribute to the contesting of collective memories by focusing on the different viewpoints found in intergenerational discourses, and show how this is expressed through the medium of food, which acts as an external instrument and is comparable to Hoskins' concept of mediation. In this context, migration and exile find in food and its remediation of memories a site where variations of these differences are perpetuated outside Cuba. The sugarcane plantations, and the products derived from them, represent a way to communicate a process of memory remediated through food, which is also applicable to a transnational setting, one that finds a deeper mode of expression through food-memory language. Food-memory language, in fact, relays the mediation of memories through a focus on food in order to accomplish, and indeed to modify, that same communication.

García takes on the topic of the transmission of memory in the context of transnationalism. Food and consumption serve as ways to express the fluidity of memory. Like memories, food and the culinary are in constant flux, and do not exist in a fixed form; their form is, in fact, constituted by constantly changing symbols and meanings to be interpreted in relation to specific contexts, rather than something static. Both *Memory Unbound, Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies* (Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, 2017), which considers the

interdisciplinary nature of memory studies and the mobility or “unbounded character” of memory itself, and *The Transcultural Turn* (Bond and Rapson, 2014) emphasise the open-endedness of memory, and consider how memories travel beyond official national borders in often uneven ways. Likewise, the modality of how food and consumption circulate in García’s novels decentres and displaces common notions and biases to reveal alternative historical perspectives through the characters’ eyes.

The first part of this chapter will provide some background to the unique ways in which food and identity are linked in Cuba and expressed through a food-memory language which is able to mediate memories. This will be achieved via a study of the character of Celia del Pino, a representative of the *transculturación* that characterises Cuban *ajiaco*. The character of Celia, who stays in Cuba and who supports the Revolution, embodies the *ajiaco* metaphor that Ortiz employs to describe the syncretism between different cultural elements. In this sense, she is the “past”: the generation that represents the constant flow of different cultures through the *ajiaco*’s ingredients, and she believes that memories cannot be contained. The violence encapsulated by the metaphor may not be apparent at first sight, as is the case with the oppression suffered by Celia, but it is encased within the social aspects of her everyday life and made visible through events in the story that involve her.

The second part of the chapter concerns Lourdes’ post-Revolutionary remediation of memories through food. Food-memory language is used as a way to highlight her anxiety through a channel that is symbolically represented by sugar and its impact on Cuba and the expansion of the plantations. The plantation economy represented a societal area that functioned, through commercial exchanges, beyond the island’s borders. Staying true to the ideology of *ajiaco*, in its incorporation of different cultural elements and its ability to mutate, Lourdes carries sugar from the Cuba of the past to a globalised future. Her memories find a

mode of expression through a type of consumption that turns her fight against the Revolution into a fight against herself.

The third section will consider Celia's granddaughter, Pilar, a character who stands for the present. Here, food-memory language is employed to contrast her present with a past that she has not experienced directly. We are able to observe a transnational viewpoint that is the consequence of a rupture caused by the Revolution. Celia's memories are able to "flow" to Pilar, whose voice is the awkward juncture between the two sets of memories belonging to Celia and Lourdes.

### **Celia: The Hybrid Embodiment of the Cuban Values Represented in *Ajiaco***

Celia, the matriarch of the del Pino family, is portrayed as the socialist bastion who safeguards the coasts of Cuba and the ideals of her "Líder".<sup>14</sup> She is the head of a family that spans three generations, one that is located both in Cuba and the United States. *Dreaming in Cuban* begins and ends with Celia, a supporter of the Revolutionary cause. She guards the coastline of her island following a rumour that the US has spread poison in order to provoke a counter-revolution (DIC, p3). Cuba's sugarcane fields, a main source of income for the country, have also been the victims of US warfare. References to the sugarcane fields occur from the opening pages, and have the significant role of building up to a crescendo of images representing the contrasts that exist both within and outside Cuba, and which are replicated again and again throughout the novel. Celia, on the waterfront, embodying *ajiaco* as a metaphor for Cuba, and her daughter Lourdes, in the United States, an anti-Revolutionary who has been traumatised by events of which her own mother is an ardent supporter, represent a pair of opposing ideological poles.

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<sup>14</sup> "El Líder" is Fidel Castro, the communist revolutionary politician who came to power in Cuba in 1959, serving as its president until his death in 2016. He is never referred to by name in the novel.

Celia's narrative is communicated through letters written to her Spanish lover, Gustavo, who left Cuba and abandoned her. The references to food that surround Celia's character mark transformations on a societal level that assist in reading the present through the past. Celia's letters follow the non-linear course of memory, connecting events from different spheres, such as the political, historical and social; for example, the first chapter is set in 1972, but recounts historical events that took place in 1952 and 1967, causing significant societal changes. In this context, she recounts a history of the island, and does so using a mixture of elements from the European, African and Indigenous cultures that she represents. She embodies the symbology of *ajiaco*, with its steady flow of cultural components that come and go, and may be present to a greater or lesser degree at any given time. Celia closely associates European historical references, mythical utopian Indigenous ones, and Afro-Caribbean symbols such as the ceiba tree. Celia is also intimately linked to the Revolution, and evokes the violence inherent in the *ajiaco* via her proximity to imagery related to Christopher Columbus, and through her abuse at the home of her mother-in-law, who throws away food she has prepared (specifically a soup). She is also portrayed as perpetrating a deep-rooted violence through her support of El Líder and his dictatorship.

The novel opens with Celia observing the flow of water on the ocean front, conjuring up memories of her past and consolidating her belief that memory cannot be confined (DIC, p47). She sees three fishing boats in the distance: the *Niña*, the *Pinta* and the *Santa Maria*, and thus a link is established with the European perspective early in the novel, as these were the names of the ships used by Columbus during his first voyage across the Atlantic in 1492. García draws a parallel between Celia and Doña Inés de Bobadilla. From one of the richest families in Spain, and closely involved with the exploration and conquest of the Americas, de Bobadilla became the first female governor of Cuba "after her husband, Hernando de Soto, left to conquer Florida" (DIC, p43). Celia's viewpoint is juxtaposed with that of de Bobadilla, blurring the

lines between Europe and the Caribbean in the way they are both described as “staring out to sea, searching the horizon” (DIC, p43) for the people they have lost to events determined by history.

Celia’s abandonment by Gustavo is followed by an unhappy marriage to Jorge del Pino. García links Celia’s narrative to food early on in the novel; in fact, the first dish Celia prepares as Jorge’s wife, for his mother Berta and sister Ofelia, is a soup. Berta and Ofelia, who both reject their cultural hybridity, pour the soup, along with its symbology relating to *transculturación*, into the gutter (DIC, p41). Furthermore, at night they confine Celia to the dining room, where they normally take their meals, in a gesture suggesting that they consider her a commodity (DIC, p39). Berta and Ofelia try to eliminate traces of their mixed ancestry by applying whitening cream to their faces (DIC, p41). Celia, in contrast, embodies a mixture of the cultural differences her new family find unacceptable. At different stages in her life, and in the narrative, Celia rebels against external or foreign domination through food. When Celia and Jorge’s daughter Lourdes marries Rufino, his mother changes all Celia’s plans for the wedding in favour of a celebration at the Tropicana Club, where the French food provided includes eels and pheasants, and Celia comments that there is not “a suckling pig in sight!” (DIC p208). Pork emerges repeatedly in García’s writing as a traditional Cuban food, originally brought over by the Spanish and incorporated into Cuban cuisine.

Celia arranges her entire life around the Cuban Revolution, and when she loses her husband to exile she throws herself fully into the country’s Revolutionary social reformation and replaces his photograph with one of El Líder. Celia’s memories from before the Revolution are contrasted with those from post-Revolutionary times, and food references are replaced by references to memories of rationing, but the narrative also highlights Celia’s renewed sense of worth and pride in a country that has rebelled against yet another attempt at foreign domination. Celia’s initial description of her fridge, empty except for some vegetables and the food she is



able to obtain with her coupons, evokes a sense of scarcity: “three carrots, half a green pepper, a handful of spongy potatoes” (DIC, pp47-48). As she cooks the rotting onions, she thinks about Cuba’s isolation, its history and memories. From being rotten, the onions are turned into what promises to be an appetising dish, and Celia’s memories of an alienated Cuba coincide with the transformation of the onions into a food that is translucent, golden and sweet: “Celia presses her thumb against the rotting onions [...] She finishes chopping the onions and stirs them in a frying pan with a teaspoon of lard. They turn a golden yellow” (DIC, p48). Her support for the Revolution and pride in her country change the outcome of the dish she is cooking.

Vygotsky argues that memories are mediated through 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” (Vygotsky, 1978, p39). Food, as an external instrument, prompts Celia’s memories of Cuba, and she conjures up 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 El Líder proposes as part of his campaign, which rests on a decolonised and idealised history of the island, and represents the Revolutionary government as the pinnacle of Cuban history. Celia’s support of the Revolutionary Cuban regime, demonstrated through her handling of food, is paralleled with how the Revolution devours its own history, endlessly reprocessing it to make way for a more appetising future. El Líder’s aim is to create a new Cuban citizen, devoted to their homeland. This is conveyed by Celia in the text:

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. (DIC, pp111-112)

Celia's memories of Cuba are aligned to El Líder's efforts to incorporate the island's Creole population into the workforce assigned to cutting sugarcane. García, in writing the character of El Líder, may have been inspired by Fidel Castro's real efforts to adopt an anti-US stance by incorporating Afro-Cuban and Indigenous people into his socialist campaigns rather than Cubans of European heritage, as this group had closer connections to the US.

Cooking, as a form of mediation, also reflects the act of incorporating into society the ideology of struggle and change. Efforts to include sections of the population that had previously been marginalised correspond to the message of an idealised past that incorporates a mix of cultural elements, and this has a "real" effect on the food Celia prepares. She has internalised El Líder's discourse of an inclusive ideology for Cuba which, through the preparation of food, turns that ideal into reality. Hoskins states that the process of memory exists over a period of time and in different forms, and in view of this it could be argued that food as a form of media reflects such changes, in this case following the Revolution and the campaigns that El Líder carries out in order to "revise" history.

This idea shows how Celia relies on food to mediate her remembered images of Cuba from her past. In this sense, food is a medium of memory, both passive as a recipient of memory but also active in the way it recreates and produces a renewed version of the past. Food is a version of memory that forms new memories, and like memory, food is never static. 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, p334). However, 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. As mentioned in the introduction, “remediation” refers to “the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another” (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p59).

For Hoskins, how the past is viewed is necessarily connected to how it is mediated and remediated in the present (Hoskins, 2001, p334). Though no two culinary processes can ever be exactly the same, cooking can be regarded as an activity that conforms to Hoskins’ idea of technologies that function as networks to filter memory processes: “The process of remembering is not about retrieval (as the common myth would have it), as there is no ‘fixed’ moment to recall. Rather, to form a memory requires a (re)construction of an event, person or place, which is ultimately contingent on (or rather, in) the present” (Hoskins, 2010, p335). This theory can be used to explain how Celia’s preparation of food converts it from a signifier of loss into a meal with positive symbology. Food becomes a tool that assists not only in remembering a version of the past, but creating an original one from “self-generated stimuli”, what Vygotsky refers to as “signs”, which generate new forms of behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978, p39). Such stimuli allow memory to be extended beyond the biological sphere and become something cultural. Similarly, for Celia, food is transformed into something new during the act of cooking by the memories conjured by that same culinary process.

The rationing of food, as the outcome of the vision of socialism promoted by the Revolution, reconfigures memories to fit the epic view instilled by El Líder’s revolutionary efforts. Celia considers photographs an “act of atrocity”, and it is through pressing rotten onions and “indenting them”, picking the “pebbles from the rice” and rinsing it in the sink, sterilising a chicken over a flame and watching its “puckered skin blacken and curl”, that she thinks about Cuba “alone in the Caribbean sea with its faulted and folded mountains, its conquests, its memories” (DIC, p48). The process of cooking, the preparation and transformation of food, allows for a development of memories into thoughts that have an impact on Celia’s present. As

an aid that stimulates change within her environment, food can also embody that “atrociousness” Celia refers to in the static images of photographs, which “imprison emotions on squares of glossy papers” (DIC, p48), whilst communicating a fluidity of meaning that those same memories have in her present and which match her current set of beliefs. In this context, both Hoskins’ view on mediation and Bolter and Grusin’s theory of remediation, the way in which the present and its environment determines how the past is viewed, are relevant when following on from Vygotsky’s external instrument theory. In the same way that a particular type of lens can provide a unique view depending on the perspective of the person using it, Celia, as a supporter of the Revolutionary cause, accepts the rationed food as something positive, a signifier of the steadfastness of El Líder’s ambitions.

Cuba’s isolation from the rest of the world is transformed into something to be proud of, García’s narrative implies. In the context of collective memory, Celia deviates towards a mythologised version of Cuba, as can be seen in the “transformation” of the food she cooks that embodies the ideals of the Revolution.<sup>15</sup> What is rotten cannot but become more decayed, yet it is through Celia’s positive outlook in her present environment and her loyalty to El Líder that “the withered contents of her refrigerator” (DIC, p46) are cooked until they reflect her pride in Cuba to the point of becoming appetising.

In one of her letters to Gustavo, Celia describes dinner with Lourdes’ future father- and mother-in-law. During the meal, she makes the point that the US has always interfered in Cuban affairs. Don Guillermo, refusing to acknowledge her comments, describes his pro-American outlook in 1956, the time when Castro was beginning the guerrilla warfare that would last until the end of the Revolution in 1959 (DIC, p207). In the background, Celia can hear Doña Zaida’s Indigenous mother, who is not allowed to attend the dinner, and who is, in fact, locked away –

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<sup>15</sup> Collective memory acting here as the construction and transmission of versions of the past in sociocultural contexts.

a hidden human ingredient in the Cuban *ajiaco*, resurfacing despite attempts at suppression. Celia is disgusted by the conscious effort on the part of Rufino's family to erase their heritage, with the Indigenous grandmother locked away while the rest of the family eat together.

Celia remains loyal to the Revolution's ideals, and she represents the physical island itself, with its syncretism of European, Indigenous and African elements. The latter is demonstrated in the text through the way Celia interacts with the ceiba tree, which, according to Santería, a religion deeply influenced by African and Indigenous beliefs, has magical powers. In Havana, Celia wanders into the square near the ceiba tree, asks its permission to cross its shadow and, circling it three times, invokes its help (DIC, p43). She notices that "Fruit and coins are strewn by its trunk and the ground around the tree bulges with buried offerings" (DIC, p43). In the same square, Celia notes that the palm trees "dwarf a marble statue of Christopher Columbus" (DIC, p43), in what might be interpreted as a reference to the continuing underlying strength of Indigenous cultural elements as opposed to Spanish colonial ones. If we consider that the palm tree is a symbol of one of the island's Indigenous groups, Celia's observation denotes her allegiance to a cultural aspect of her genetic heritage that contrasts with the European aspects. The palm tree is a symbol of the Guanahatabeyes, who lived in the forest. Their name means "palm", and this is still a symbol used on the Cuban coat of arms today. Hartman states that the ceiba tree is an Afro-Cuban "symbol of interlocking meanings affected by both space and time" (Hartman, 2011, p36). Yet García's earlier parallel between Celia and Doña Ines de Bobadilla exemplifies how contrasting cultural elements and influences, European, Indigenous and African, remain present, and find ways of resurfacing.

As we see, Celia, in her efforts to support the Revolution, is involved in the cultivation of sugarcane. We are thus able to witness a societal shift whereby the plantation becomes a place where the interconnected elements of *ajiaco* continue to merge within a societal area, in accordance with Mintz's view of Cuba. Sugarcane, slavery and the plantations shaped the

landscape of the Caribbean, violently bringing together large numbers of people of different origins, who went on to interact socially and culturally. Mintz's view of the Caribbean, though, was that it could not be considered a single "cultural area", as the mix of different colonial powers made it too heterogenous to be defined as such. Mintz used the word "society" instead, describing the Caribbean, based on its social structures and organisation, as a socio-cultural area: "It would probably be more accurate to refer to the Caribbean as a 'societal area' based on the plantation system" (Mintz, 1966, pp914-915). Mintz's term "societal area" captures the fragmentary nature of different cultures, stitched together by a language of colonial dominance until they fused to create something new. The organisational structures holding together this patchwork of cultural variety is what Mintz refers to as society: a site driven by capital and slavery, and the first production location for what he calls "proletarian drug foods", such as sugar.

Celia, as an embodiment of *ajiaco* and a contributor to the cultivation and production of sugarcane, represents a link to colonisation and the plantation society it produced. The food-memory language surrounding Celia, cutting sugarcane for the Revolutionary cause, is an unromantic and stark depiction of insects, rats, and hardship that raises thoughts about the end products to which she will be contributing: birthday cakes in countries far from Cuba (DIC, p45). She ponders:

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. (DIC, p45)

Through her thoughts we are presented with a picture of complete separation between Cuba, as a place of production, and the countries it trades with. This labour carries with it a sense of hardship, but also pride, as in Celia's eyes it is a source of prosperity for the island.

Celia dreams of a tree swelling with fruit that then shrivels and dies, which initiates a comparison to the cyclical process of how, though the act of consumption, food is a reminder of our own mortality, tied in as it is to impermanence: "For food [...] continuously demands to become us, and, as such reminds us [...] of our own materiality" (Piatti-Farnell, 2017, p265). The images García conjures, in this respect, are able to convey an uncanniness around the consumerist rules accepted in society, which find an expression in food and its production. It is in this memory of food, expressed through language, that the uncanny is externalised and made manifest through the separation between the consumer and the products they consume. The uncanny, in this sense, is a strange unfamiliarity and food represents what is familiar but within the boundaries of an unsettling context. In fact, through the act of eating, we are reminded of how we are attempting to fill a void, as a temporary remedy against the inevitable: death. The actualisation of memory through food interrupts the wider network of living, a form of "physicality of life and the present, estranged from itself" (Piatti-Farnell, 2017 p215). This imagery forms a connective cord that unites and, at the same time, unties the link between Celia and her exiled daughter Lourdes, through the contrast between the description of the labour needed to produce sugar and the references to how the product is then used. Celia's embodiment of the transmission of memory through rituals is "passed on" to her granddaughter Pilar, who, from the US, carries out these same bodily enactments that express her desire to be Cuban: "*cubanía*" (DIC, p200). The neologism *cubanía* is distinct from Ortiz's concept of *cubanidad*; although both terms might be understood to mean "Cubanness," the distinction – like that between "culture" and "identity" – is central to Ortiz's argument. In his view, one could have *cubanidad* without having *cubanía*, that is, one could be Cuban without identifying

oneself with the nation (Ortiz, 1939, p8). Ortiz's aim is to define *cubanidad*, "the specific quality of a culture, the culture of Cuba", and to distinguish it from *cubanía*, a neologism referring to "a *cubanidad* that is full, felt, conscious, and desired" (Ortiz, 2014, p460).

Celia's epistolary mode of narration, which is rooted in the past, is used to create a connection with the present on the day that her granddaughter, Pilar, is born. On this day, she stops writing to Gustavo, as she declares that her new-born granddaughter "will remember everything" (DIC, p245). In this way, Celia moves us away from her memories, which are traceable to a pre-Revolutionary past, to a crossroads represented by Pilar, who becomes a channel through which memories overlap and continue to interact with each other through a new modality of communication, one dictated by migration and expressed in terms of food and memory: food-memory language.

### **Lourdes: Food Memories and Anxiety**

Lourdes, an exile and an active anti-Revolutionary, with her processed and refined sugar-based products, represents a different version of the sugarcane imagery used to describe the society in which Celia lives in Cuba following the Revolution. The social changes brought about by the Revolution involved a redistribution of wealth, which Celia is in favour of and which Lourdes detests. If Celia is the unprocessed raw sugar, unromantic in how it is depicted as surrounded by vermin, her daughter is the processed end-product. Lourdes believes in the capitalist system that has allowed her to become rich, and believes that communism is all "lies, poisonous [...] lies" (DIC, p132), whereas Celia completely supports her Líder and the Revolution, and "consigns her body to the sugarcane" (DIC, p44).

Lourdes' rebellion against a post-Revolutionary Cuba takes root in her "Yankee Doodle" chain of bakeries, a name chosen to highlight her ideological affiliation with the United States. *Yankee Doodle* is the name of a song first sung by British soldiers to mock



American troops during the 18<sup>th</sup>-century French and Indian Wars. Paradoxically, the colonial troops claimed the song as their own and sang it to deride the British during the American Revolutionary War. Lourdes' appropriation of this name suggests an awareness of her migrant status, but also an element of pride in connection to this. It is an example of acculturation rather than *transculturación* on her part, as she rejects her links to Cuba. Lourdes' bakeries become places where extremists congregate, and Pilar calls this "mom's brand of anarchy" (DIC, p176).

At around the same time that her father Jorge, who travelled all over Cuba as an electric broom and portable fan vendor (DIC, p6), loses his job following the breakdown of US-Cuban relations as a result of the 1959 Revolution, Lourdes is raped by a pro-Revolutionary Cuban soldier. This occurs in the process of the expropriation of her family's home and business in Cuba. Her pro-US stance is therefore consolidated by various events related to the Revolution, and her reactions to these events find a fertile ground for expression in food references. Lourdes eats sugar buns, cakes and pastries: "[She] eats like a Hindu goddess with eight arms, eats, eats, eats, as if famine were imminent", and this results in a memory of loss, as "Lourdes sees the face of her unborn child, pale and blank as an egg, buoyed by the fountain waters" (DIC, p174). She leaves for Miami, but finds life there intolerable; she mentions not wanting to be with her husband's family, as she is reminded of the wealth they once possessed and then lost, and remarks on the difference between their old life and the one they have now, competing for "dishwasher" jobs (DIC, p69). In this sense, Lourdes feels the need to differentiate herself and to become more of an American-style businesswoman, but in order to do this she needs to distance herself from Cuba even more. Lourdes decides she wants to move away from the heat and go somewhere colder, a metaphorical departure from the tropical climate that Miami shares with Cuba. This move shows her intention and desire to be a "real" American, buying into US society rather than living in a community of Cubans in the United States. The family moves to New York, with her husband Rufino attempting to become an inventor, and Lourdes providing

the main source of income for the family by opening a chain of bakeries. Lourdes' weight fluctuates, and when she is at her thinnest, she reminisces and conjures memories of all the foods she has eaten since moving to New York (DIC, p173); foods that symbolise the fast-food, consumerist society of which she is now part. She bridges the differences between Cuba and the US in her adoption of El Líder's technique for winning battles: having people armed and ready at all times. She patrols the streets as a member of the auxiliary police (DIC, p132), in a gesture that represents a continuation of the violence she has left behind.

Lourdes' anti-Revolutionary enthusiasm leads her daughter Pilar to hand her a book of essays on Cuba that shows a picture of happy children surrounding Che Guevara. When Lourdes throws the book into a water-filled tub, she watches Che Guevara's face swell like the face of a young girl she once saw washed up on the seashore. In an act of masculine symbology, she uses barbecue tongs to fish the book out, and places it on "a porcelain platter she reserved for her roasted pork legs" (DIC, p132). Pork is once again used as an example of a typical Cuban food – a symbol of self-sufficiency and independence that Lourdes reinterprets and rebels against. In fact, there is a correlation between the memory of what the Revolution has done both to her and that girl, and her reaction: a gesture that places the object of her discomfort in a place where she would normally consume food. It is, in a way, a gesture of violence, a reaction to a violent memory, but one contained within symbols of social constraint. Specifically, the gesture of placing the book on a platter and using tongs indicates that Lourdes is preparing for the symbolic incorporation of a political agenda with which she does not agree.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, therefore, Lourdes completely embraces a different society in the United States, and 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 through memories related to the Revolution. The consequent anxiety is rendered by the repetition that occurs through the continuous remediation of memories through food. When

Celia cuts “the sugarcane that El Líder promised would bring prosperity” (DIC, p111), the lack of prosperity is contrasted with Lourdes’ abundance of food in the US. When her exile first begins, we are given a list of “the instant foods she made when she first came to New York” (DIC, p173), contrasted with memories of scarcity in Cuba: “It was 1936 [...] Fat men gave her [...] tasteless lollipops” (DIC, p25). This 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, as previously mentioned, all the “societies of the Caribbean” (Mintz, 1966, p914). Mintz uses this term to refer to the social structures and organisation of many Caribbean nations, which are modelled on the structure of the plantations. The food-memory language used in relation to Celia and Lourdes is therefore rooted in a plantation-style society. Celia is the raw unprocessed cane, while Lourdes, a believer in the American Dream, envisions a chain of Yankee Doodle bakeries across the United States that will sell the finished processed product (DIC, p171). Since the plantation was a model of society that involved exporting produce to foreign markets based on a colonial blueprint, it saw the introduction of a capitalist organisational model (Mintz, 1966, p26). This model can be observed in the way Lourdes runs her bakery and manages her employees, in her vision of the manufacturing process, and in her vision of a chain of outlets stretching across the US (DIC, p176). She slaps down coins like pieces of dough (DIC, p229), in contrast to Celia, who 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 (DIC, p233). Lourdes replicates, through her bakeries, the lack of community life and community spirit, which Mintz notes as symptomatic of the plantation system (Mintz, 1966, p39). The motive behind Lourdes’ rejection of the Cuban community in Miami in favour of New York is that in the latter 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.

The processed foods that Lourdes consumes represent the many different versions within that collective memory, though both are connected through being examples of individual “interpretations” of Cuba’s collective memory. Antonio Benítez-Rojo also considers the defining characteristic of the Caribbean not to be a cultural one. He states that the majority of Caribbean nations “present parallel socioeconomic structures, which were determined by the same concurrent phenomenon: the plantation” (Benítez-Rojo, 1992, p39). Its ability to survive for centuries, even after the abolition of slavery, political change and different modes of production is proof that the characteristic features of the plantation have the capacity to morph and adapt to different contexts.

It is, in fact, significant that Lourdes’ rebellion against a post-Revolutionary Cuba takes root in her establishment of the Yankee Doodle bakeries, and it is a demonstration of her ideological affiliation with the US. In a description, we see nauseating abundance, in stark contrast to 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. (DIC, p19)

This description takes the reader back to the Eurocentrism and colonial aspects of capitalism. When Lourdes sends her mother pictures of her cakes, they are not meant as a gesture of affection, but rather each one is meant as an attack on Celia’s political beliefs, a reminder of Lourdes’ success and the abundance of food in the US in contrast to the shortages in Cuba. In

this way, García offers us a very different viewpoint on how a political protest can be manifested, through the correlation of memory and food. The denunciation of social structures through food-memory language in *Dreaming in Cuban* finds an outlet in the ways in which memory and food operate to hold together a fractured past. This past resurfaces through a food-memory language that is able to translate an “identarian” anxiety within a diasporic, postcolonial, multicultural and post-Revolutionary scene. For instance, Lourdes thinks back to when she was a “skinny child” in Cuba and strangers would buy her treats on the beach or on the main street of town, believing she was malnourished and motherless. This memory comes shortly after the reader is told that Lourdes has gained 118 pounds, and flesh is amassing so quickly on her body that her thighs are fused above the knees. This weight gain results from eating sugary foods in an attempt to embrace a society where she no longer feels malnourished and “motherless”, abandoned by her own country through a Revolution that took away her home, her land and her family.

These negative feelings start to have an impact on 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” (DIC, p169). This interplay between disgust at the very product she has sought to produce and is proud of is here interpreted as a sign of the contrast between different cultural approaches that are intertwined as much as they oppose each other. The metaphorical terms used to describe the food indicate her strong distaste for the food she sees. She begins to eat frantically, but then behaves in a completely opposite way soon afterwards, her mouth “moving feverishly, like a terrible furnace” (DIC, p173). She continues to eat in a crescendo of cultural anxiety that finds an outlet through food-memory language. The way Lourdes views and talks about food has consequences for the effect food has on her. As her desire for food becomes frantic, this manic behaviour ensues, expressing a duality that can also be related to how Lourdes thinks about society.

In this context, considering Vygotsky's thinking on how language not only facilitates behaviour but actually controls it, food, as a language, is able to mediate memories and create a way of remembering that has an effect on the future (1978, p26). For instance, Lourdes overeats while she "scours the newspapers for calamities" in her quest to read awful stories that keep her pain fresh. This pain is related to the resurgence of memories of the people she has lost in Cuba because of the Revolution, and her antidote is to eat "as if famine were imminent" (DIC, p174). This is an "internalization of social speech" (Vygotsky, 1978, p27), following a change in the discourse of nation after the Cuban Revolution. Lourdes, as part of the Cuban diaspora, has been cut out of the social language of the nation, and that rupture has allowed food to become a key player in the dynamic that sees it as an instrument of memory in a process of displacement. If "words can shape activity into a structure" (Vygotsky, 1978, p28), then food provides the mould for memories to form within the context of language.

Memory has the essential role of maintaining one's identity during exile, and food is a way of expressing a collective identity "in waiting", ready for the imminent and triumphant return to the life migrants left behind (Mannur, 2007, p11). The 1959 Cuban Revolution created violent ruptures within family units, and the impact of this event on the population finds an interpretative voice through food, its meanings and associations. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Lourdes realises that although her migration may be temporary, the changes that have occurred to her community and family are irreparable. Although she is allowed to return, the fractures are deep as they are based on ideological as well as physical distance. If collective memory generally acts as a way of standardising historical events, the characters in *Dreaming in Cuban* illustrate how food can disrupt the creation of collective memory.

The impact of the Revolution on Lourdes, and her subsequent anxiety, are expressed through a language in which food can both mediate memories and remediate them. In this way, memories are recreated and conveyed through the medium of food, which has the power to

uncover the darker aspects of that experience. A language that is able to communicate remediation through the medium of food, and which as part of its nature is constantly constructing and reconstructing meaning, parallels the idea of language that is able to construct action, as theorised by Vygotsky (1978, p26).

### **Pilar: Caught between Food Memories**

Pilar, Celia's granddaughter, was two years old when she left Cuba with her mother Lourdes, and she has a special connection with her grandmother in Cuba. She is caught between two loyalties and ideologies, part of a generation of Cuban-Americans who have a desire to return to the island to embrace a heritage that they feel they are losing. Pilar's special connection with her grandmother is expressed through the ceiba tree, and she states that there is something about it which feels familiar: "There's something about the vegetation, too, that I respond to instinctively [...] the orchids growing from the trunks of the mysterious ceiba trees" (DIC, p235). She buys a staff, herbs, and candles, which she uses in a ceremonial bathing ritual, and she recounts episodes from her time in Cuba as a baby, when her nannies would pray over her, massaging her with oil. A connection between grandmother and granddaughter is thus established through the Afro-Cuban component that they share culturally, through episodes relating to their shared belief in Santería, a belief that Lourdes vigorously rejects.<sup>16</sup>

Pilar's memories, transmitted to her by her grandmother, are not memories that she has experienced herself. This idea can be related to Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory". The concept can be extended to include relationships between family members of different generations in other contexts. As Hirsch explains: "Postmemory is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (Hirsch, 1997, p22). Ideas of

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<sup>16</sup> Santería is an Afro-American religion that developed in Cuba, a system of beliefs that merges the Yoruba religion, Christianity and Indigenous religious customs.

collective memory and postmemory are common in many Indigenous groups in Latin America, whereby what has happened to one is considered to have happened to all.

Pilar believes she experiences her grandmother's memories and a cultural heritage rejected by her mother, Lourdes. When Lourdes and Pilar return to Cuba, Pilar's decision to then go back to the United States confirms that the reality is different to her memories of the land and the food. Not long after realising that Cuba is not what she thought it was, Pilar wonders how she will be able to let her grandmother Celia know that sooner or later she will need to go back to New York, as she realises that is where she belongs, "not instead of Cuba, but more than Cuba" (DIC, p236). She "feel[s] [her] grandmother's life passing to [her]," she senses "a steady electricity, humming and true" (DIC, p222). She also starts to dream in Spanish, which "has never happened before" (DIC, p235). These changes start to take place as the lack of information she has about her Cuban ancestors is replaced with her grandmother's legacy of memory through "something chemical and irreversible" (DIC, p235). In this way, the recipe of cultural ingredients continues to replenish the pot that symbolises Cuba and those who belong to the island, although they continue to evolve elsewhere.

Pilar is at odds with her mother politically, and she defends the Revolution, which upsets Lourdes. When Pilar says, "I think migration scrambles the appetite [...] I may move back to Cuba someday and decide to eat nothing but codfish and chocolate" (DIC, p173), it provokes an instant reaction in her mother, who overeats frantically. The ensuing description in the text of how Lourdes devours, amongst other things, candied yams and "rhubarb-apple betty topped with cinnamon cr me anglaise"(DIC, p173), is indicative of how food and memory are connected in the context of the Cuban diaspora. The foods she eats so voraciously indicate an anxiety to be American and to "ingest" American food in order to incorporate its ideals and as a rejection of the Cuba that Pilar is increasingly drawn to.



Pilar's opposition to her mother's eating is connected to her political views. She is forced to work in her mother's bakery and reacts badly to Lourdes' intention to install an anti-Revolutionary hub in her business sites. When the Yankee Doodle bakeries become places where extremists congregate, Pilar accuses Lourdes of trying to fight communism from behind her bakery counter, focusing on her obesity when expressing her lack of confidence in Lourdes' venture (DIC, p136). Commenting on her mother's weight, Pilar expresses disbelief that Lourdes can effectively fight back if she is ingesting the very products she intends to use to wage war against the revolutionaries. Pilar comments: "She bought a second bakery and plans to sell tricolor cupcakes and Uncle Sam marzipan. Apple pies, too. She's convinced she can fight Communism from behind her bakery counter [...] My mother—all four feet eleven and a half inches and 217 pounds of her" (DIC, p136). Pilar's statement makes it apparent that she believes her mother is a victim of the very weapons she seeks to use against others.

Pilar's criticism of Lourdes' attempts to become Americanised is expressed through a language that relies on food references. She describes her, for instance, as being "as fat as a Macy's Thanksgiving Day float" because of all the pecan sticky buns she eats (DIC, p27). Pilar's mode of communication, when referring to her mother, highlights an Otherness on Lourdes' part. Pilar describes how Lourdes embellishes her stories in an attempt to make them more interesting, and how her imperfect English gives her a touch of Otherness that contributes to their authenticity. Pilar reflects that perhaps her mother's choice of words is not as important when compared to the truth she seeks to convey, "even if it is at the expense of chipping away at [their] past" (DIC, pp176-177). Her truths are a new ingredient added to the pot that makes *ajiacó* what it is, adding new flavours, textures and layers of memory. *Ajiaco* is a metaphorical representation of the interaction between different histories and cultures, and how all these "perspectives" have an effect on each other. Pilar's attitude to her mother shows that she is open to a blurring of borders that can resolve differences.

There is a fluidity and blurring of borders in transcultural memory, which Lourdes represents through her mobility as a migrant. Territorial mobility gives rise to a mixture of memories which do not belong only to one community but have their own language, carried by people. The touch of Otherness that Pilar refers to, which gives Lourdes authenticity, is this fluidity and blurriness speaking for itself, speaking for the territorial mobility of an exile.

Pilar is “in between” on this symbolic journey, and whilst in transit on a bus she is offered a chicken thigh by a woman who is “skinny [...], weirdly old looking for a young person” (DIC, p27). She notices that, under her seat, the woman has fried chicken, potato salad, ham sandwiches, chocolate cupcakes, and a lot of other food. Pilar refuses the invitation to share any of it, and explains that her father used to own beef cattle, cows, horses, pigs, goats and lambs. She says that her father fed those animals with nutritious food, full of vitamins, and also adds that, after Columbus arrived, the Indigenous population was destroyed by disease (DIC, p28). In Pilar’s speech, the contrasts between opposing elements or ingredients, this ongoing postcolonial and diasporic confrontation, is aided by the memories that are selected to represent the different historical viewpoints that feature throughout the novel. Her comment on the woman’s apparent age points to the contrasts present in the process of reconstructing cultural memory. This comment is prompted by a reflection which focuses on consumption: Pilar recreates a picture which connects her father’s life on a farm in Cuba to the process of colonisation brought about by the arrival of Columbus. This memory appears to take on the guise of an old “truth”, represented by the woman on the bus, who is in fact still young, as it is Pilar’s new interpretation of an unexperienced memory transmitted transgenerationally.

Pilar writes a diary in which she records her emotions in relation to her mother and grandmother: “I wonder how Mom could be Abuela Celia’s daughter. And what I am doing as my mother's daughter. Something got horribly scrambled along the way” (DIC, p178). Pilar, who is struggling to negotiate a hybrid Cuban-American identity, believes that her mother has

gone too far with her hatred for the Revolution. In this sense, Pilar is a symbol that links admiration for the Revolution on the one hand with doubts and fear regarding its effects on Cuban collectivity on the other. Pilar travels to Cuba in 1980, and once reunited with her grandmother on the island she feels torn between her love for Cuba and her love for the US:

I wonder how different my life would have been if I'd stayed with my grandmother. I think about how I'm probably the only ex-punk on the island, how no one else has their ears pierced in three places. It's hard to imagine existing without Lou Reed. I ask Abuela if I can paint whatever I want in Cuba and she says yes, as long as I don't attack the state. Cuba is still developing, she tells me, and I can't afford the luxury of dissent. Then she quotes something El Líder said in the early years, before they started arresting poets. 'Within the revolution, everything; against the revolution, nothing.' I wonder what El Líder would think of my paintings. (DIC, p235)

In the process of accepting the conflict and pain she experiences while negotiating these shifts of identity, Pilar's conclusion is that she belongs to both places. As she crosses the external and internal borders that separate Cuba from Brooklyn, Pilar states: "Cuba is a peculiar exile I think, an island colony. We can reach it by a thirty minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it all" (DIC, p219). Through her mother, Pilar reconstructs an image of herself as a transnational individual who is still open to keeping alive a connection with Cuba and with Celia. In this way, sets of memories confront each other intergenerationally, all connected, but deeply contrasting at the same time.

## Conclusion

The *ajiaco* recipe holds within it the same cultural differences, to varying degrees, which were also contained within the harsh environment of the plantation system from the 1800s onwards. The people coming together from different parts of the world to cultivate sugarcane also brought together the variety of cultures that have contributed to the recipe for *ajiaco*, violently contained within the confines of the plantations. People who travelled to Cuba did so mostly without their families, which made their exploitation even more radical in an environment where they were disconnected from any form of social structure that was not solely geared towards the production of sugarcane. The celebration of *transculturación* as a medium for the creation of new forms of identity through encounters between cultural practices rather than these practices simply displacing each other, as represented by Ortiz's *ajiaco* metaphor, also includes the workers who were socially displaced by the repressive and tragic conditions of the plantation system. In fact, the ingredients in the *ajiaco* are "rootless": an integral part of the "recipe" for being Cuban. If, as Ortiz suggests, Cuba is represented perfectly by the addition and subtraction of ingredients, then the effects various elements have on each other can provide the background to how certain components may become more or less visible over time through a process of absorption. The societal changes we are able to observe through the *ajiaco* recipe are an example of memories entering a frame that, through a Cuban-American narrative, can be viewed as transnational. The use of sugar in the US is portrayed in contrast to Cuba, and we are made aware of the brutality and opposition between the abundance of Western society, in which Lourdes lives, and Celia's Cuba, stuck in a time that takes us back to the plantations of centuries ago.

In their transnationalism, Lourdes and Pilar are still part of the *ajiaco* recipe, and they are still a continuation of the violence of the plantation, as can be seen through the ways in which food remediates their memories. Lourdes lacks Ortiz's concept of *cubanía*, the desire to

be Cuban. Her manic assimilation of North American culture, which occurs through food, makes visible her fight against her *cubanidad*, which cannot be ignored. The continuity of sugar between Cuba and the US thus symbolises her indissoluble link with the island, despite having adapted to a new environment. Food-memory language makes apparent an anxiety that is linked to her transnationalism. The impulse for this anxiety is the violence of the Revolution, to which she responds through food that reflects the new ideology she has embraced, even while it is predominately based on the same element that represents part of her Cubanness: sugar.

Vygotsky's idea of "mediation" through an external instrument, in this case exemplified by food, which is able to combine elements from the past and the present within a socially rooted dimension, becomes, in the context of the Cuban Revolution in *Dreaming in Cuban*, an example of how communication is ruptured. This fracture, and at the same time continuation, between sets of intergenerational memories, is expressed by food-memory language in the ways in which communication diversifies as it adapts to the new "realities" of sugar. Food, in connection with language, assists in the creation of action. The remediation of food, as proposed by Hoskins, takes place through the ways in which Lourdes "uses" food to create memories that, in turn, create more memories that have an impact on her physical form. Mintz's theory of the plantations as societal areas, and Benítez-Rojo's concept of their ability to morph, constitute the "backdrop" against which the continuation of food and memory-based communication takes place.

Food-memory language brings to the fore the more hidden aspects of memory processes because it focuses, through food, on how consumption can be used as a tool in complex multicultural scenarios. In fact, food-memory language has the power to express the contradiction of complex changes through migration and transnationalism, and, through

Lourdes, we see how her story is told through the sugar that is the background and history of her country of origin.

Through the consumption of a different lifestyle, different from that of Cuba, and different even from that of the community of Cubans who live in Miami, the “version” of sugar that Lourdes consumes does not fill the void created by a history of violence. It is a history that mutates from the brutality of the plantation to the aftermath of a Revolution that brought Cuba to a standstill; a large factory, with a plantation mindset, able to exploit even as it was being exploited. Lourdes’ memories, remediated through food, are related to the Revolutionary period, and they cause an anxiety that is made visible through the ways in which it impacts her body. This is an aspect that will be explored in the following chapter through García’s second novel, *The Agüero Sisters*, in which different sets of memories shape a narrative that finds a physical outlet in the bodies of characters whose experiences of the Revolution manifest themselves differently in each case.

## II. Bodies of Memory in García's *The Agüero Sisters*

In García's second novel, *The Agüero Sisters* (1997), food-memory language allows us to observe how the bodies of Constanica and Reina Agüero relay a message of loss that surrounds events relating to their mother and to Cuba, their motherland. The opening pages of the novel relate the murder of Blanca, the mother of Constanica and Reina, by her husband Ignacio. Subsequently, the sisters are separated by their father. Constanica, the older sister, eventually migrates to the US, where she sets up a successful business selling cosmetics based on Cuban foods, marketed to make the exiles in Miami feel more authentically Cuban. Constanica and Reina's corporeality acts as a mediator for memories, rendering visible the alternative perspectives that surround historical events, such as the Cuban Revolution. Constanica's Cuban-inspired food-based cosmetics cause changes in her physical appearance, while the surface of Reina's body is "repaired" with a patchwork of other people's skin after being struck by lightning. In this sense, both carry external texts that represent an internal cultural hybridity, which constitutes the very essence of *ajiaco*. With this in mind, *ajiaco* will again be used here as a metaphor representing fluidity and the contrasts between cultural identities. Here, in fact, the metaphorical hybridity of *ajiaco* is taken a step further in the direction of violence, and situated within a transnational setting: the characters of Constanica and Reina are part of a diasporic generation caught between inclusion/exclusion and belonging/not-belonging. The migrations that take place between the characters' homes in Cuba and their new homes in the US occur at different times. These trajectories are contextualised within the history of the Agüero family and the history of Cuba, producing different modes of remembering. In Constanica's case, the focus is on how recipes can reflect loss and absence through the body by bringing to "life" memories that have been repressed. Reina's narrative, on the other hand, brings to the fore issues of racial prejudice that are made visible through her body, a symbol of the coming together and new hybridity of the Cuban *ajiaco* and the American patchwork quilt.

Following on from this, this chapter's objective is to highlight the negative significance that García places on food-related memories, which are displayed through the body and expressed through food-memory language.

The first chapter established a connection between food and memory in the Cuban diasporic context, discussing how both *ajiaco* and sugar are integral to food-memory language in the specific case of Cuban memory culture. The metaphor of *ajiaco* emphasises the reciprocity of the process of cultural contact, resulting in the creation of a new culture (*transculturación*) which contributes to the uniqueness of being Cuban (*cubanidad*). On the other hand, sugar was presented as an ingredient engendered by violence, a violence which is continued in a Western, industrialised society, the United States, by the migrant character Lourdes Puente. Lourdes rejects the desire to be Cuban (*cubanía*) in a transnational setting, and from this perspective Lourdes' feelings of anxiety at the moment of remembering post-Revolutionary Cuba through food were considered as an expression of trauma through food-memory language. The chapter discussed how this occurs in a context in which food and its meaning are dependent on the idea of repetition within a wider "network" of foods and their signifiers (Douglas, 1971), in this case relating to sugar. This, in turn, was linked to migration and the "extension" of a societal area (Mintz, 1965) that carries with it an ideology specific to the plantation model (Benítez-Rojo, 1992). In this way, foods not only mediate memory but also remediate it, creating new and different points of view that can be expressed through food-memory language.

This chapter will also highlight the links between historical events and the memories that surround them, which in *The Agüero Sisters* are presented through a narration in which changes to the bodies of both Constanica and Reina play a central role. This chapter investigates the symbology of the European versus the African presence and influence in Cuba, and how the two sisters appear to reflect the contrast between these two elements whilst



simultaneously embodying their symbiosis as part of what it means to be Cuban. Homi Bhabha's theory of the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" in *The Location of Culture* (1994) is the starting point for my focus on the characters of Ignacio, Blanca, Constancia and Reina, and encourages a transnational reading of the "floating gap" theory (Vansina, 1965). This concept refers to the space between a memory that belongs to the remote past and one that belongs to a more recent one. I will argue that the body acts as a bridge that crosses this gap by externalising cultural aspects that lie beneath the surface. Astrid Erll's notion of remembering as a process that results in the formation of memories (Erll, 2011, p8) is the basis for the idea that food can become an externalisation of memory: material memory, mediated, and therefore remediated, by the body. Erll defines the term "cultural memory" as a union of "all the possible expressions of the relationship of culture and memory" (Erll, 2011, p101), and it follows that the way memory is expressed is visible through cultural signs that can also be expressed by food products, and consequently by the body as it is changed through food. Here, physical bodies and bodies of text, such as recipes, offer a perspective that derives from an uncanny combination of absence and loss. A process of food preparation that allows loss to be "acted out" reveals a latent framework of pre-mediation that does not normally operate in plain sight. I will refer to Dominick LaCapra's theory on how the conflation between absence and loss leads to an appropriation of trauma by those who did not experience it directly. This performative approach means that the past "is regenerated or relived as if it were fully present" instead of belonging to the realm of memory, and "hauntingly returns as the repressed" (LaCapra, 2014, p70). Recipes also allow the concept of absence to be taken a step further towards the idea of replacement, as in the case of *ajiaco*: through replacing specific ingredients, the meanings, and thus the memories, embodied in the *ajiaco* are also remediated. It is a recipe that has absence and replacement at the core of its identity.

The first part of this chapter establishes how an initial loss occurs through the murder of Constancia and Reina's mother, Blanca Agüero, whose character is closely associated with the Yoruba goddess Ochún. The death of Blanca Agüero at the hands of her husband Ignacio, of Spanish origin, creates a contrast between the Afro-Cuban and European aspects of Cuban culture. This allows for a focus on how the comparison with *ajiaco* provides an opportunity to consider the struggle between cultural elements that is central to the culinary metaphor. As opposing elements within Cuba, Blanca and Ignacio embody pre-existing cultural frameworks as, in their work as naturalists, they look for clues to the origins of their landscape, and are themselves descendants of the effects of *transculturación*.

The second part will explain how loss affects Ignacio and Blanca's elder daughter, Constancia Agüero, who flees to Miami after the Revolution and becomes a successful businesswoman by capitalising on Cuban food-inspired beauty products. This results in a terrifying metamorphosis of her physical features, making her identical to her murdered mother Blanca. This uncanny manifestation of her mother, who symbolises Cuba's Indigenous and African elements, takes place through food. Selling products representing "authentic" Cuban culture, which can be applied to the body's surface and which purport to provide those cultural references as something that can be bought, traded and capitalised on, is particularly meaningful in this context, establishing the body as a mediator that allows the reader to consider food as a symbol of paradox and contradiction.

The third part will look at Reina Agüero, who remains in Cuba after the Revolution, working for the government as an electrician. An accident forces her to undergo surgery which turns her body into a patchwork of other people's skin. In this way, her body also mediates and remediates memories, reflections of other people's cultural realities and prejudices. Eventually, she joins her sister in Miami, and together they "rebuild" a version of their past whilst also constructing their future. Loss will lead her to take the symbology of *ajiaco* one step further,

turning absence into a continuation of the idea of *transculturación* through her union with a North American.

### **Ignacio and Blanca Agüero: The Origin of Loss**

Blanca and Ignacio Agüero are two naturalists whose work takes them to remote places in Cuba to observe and record the island's wildlife. They are commentators on a Cuba prior to "the arrival of the Spaniards whose dogs, cats, and rats multiplied prodigiously and ultimately wreaked havoc on the island's indigenous creatures" (AS, p4). García's way of articulating temporal distance, relating it to the environment that currently surrounds the characters, creates a paradox that reveals Ignacio and Blanca's desire for an unexperienced landscape and time.

The Agüeros had travelled across Cuba with the breadth and depth achieved by no others and "knew intimately every cleft of the island's limestone mountains, every swell of its plains and pine forests" (AS, p4) and, in cataloguing Cuba's flora and fauna, they lamented the diminishing levels of species that once reigned over that territory. They observe that indigenous creatures that had inhabited the island, even before their lifetimes, are now no longer there. Blanca and Ignacio are imagining a Cuba that does not exist and conjure up the image of a pre-Columbian era. While the two naturalists are intent on noting everyday changes in wildlife, the "void" they witness becomes an object of mourning.

Benítez-Rojo refers to the concept of "lack" in the Caribbean as a vacuum that will always remain as such despite attempts to achieve the opposite effect: "In the end, nobody can fill materially the dense void of the Caribbean; one always perceives a lack" (Benítez-Rojo, 1992, p240). In this context, LaCapra's theory on loss and absence proves particularly relevant; he claims that the former concept refers to a particular event, while the latter cannot be identified with any specific object or point in time. Unattainability is expressed through the conflation between loss and absence, as an absence of an absolute, in the "death" of the

landscape observed by Blanca and Ignacio. Wherever they look, they can only see “the spreading monotony of sugarcane fields” (AS, p4). The monopoly of sugar becomes not just an effect but also an agent of colonisation, perpetuating a vicious cycle of slavery, oppression and violence, which contrasts with how the characters idealise the past of their surroundings. In raising the question: “Why, then, had so much been sacrificed to successive waves of settlers?” (AS, p4), the couple are uniting the negative idea they have of the plantations at the time of their existence in 1948 with the arrival of the Spanish in 1492. The fields are a site of production engendered by colonisation and perpetuated by the country’s dependency on sugar as its main export. European colonisation of the island is the cause of a loss that is continually reflected upon, especially by Ignacio, a descendant of the colonisers.

Reflecting on the loss of Cuba’s original landscapes and wildlife triggers a longing to return to something that cannot be recovered. It is a case of “unexperienced” loss that manifests itself as a result of trauma, as theorised by LaCapra (2001, p44). LaCapra views history as a series of historical processes and “variable movement of repetition with [...] traumatic change” (LaCapra, 2001, pxi) in its dialogue with the past. The recovery and renewed analysis of the past is a reaction to present-day anxieties, and this process requires an exercise of reconstruction. Blanca and Ignacio’s investigation of their modern-day Cuba includes a visualisation of a past, a process of historical reconstruction of a land whose history they no longer have access to. This narrative of change and its consequent link to a void attributable to the violence of the “waves of settlers” (AS, p4) is reproduced by Ignacio through the act of violence he commits towards his wife. The Cuba of the past had become a utopian dimension in the characters’ present but the paradox, created by the idea of absence for both Ignacio and Blanca, is taken one step further by Ignacio. He, of Spanish descent, creates a loss in the “here and now” by shooting and murdering his Afro-Cuban wife. His act of violence thus takes place in surroundings that carry echoes of a wider loss, paralleled by the destruction brought about

by European colonisers in Cuba. The murder in the Zapata swamp echoes a regression to violence and injustice that transposes the action to a different era. Ignacio's act of murder is one that evokes the "murder" of the territory, which has been subjected to a form of cultivation that has forced the island into a state of submission: the sugarcane plantation, which is itself a reflection of historic colonisation. The murder seems to symbolically recreate the colonial injustices that took place before Ignacio and Blanca were born, as Ignacio is a Spanish descendent and Blanca is connected in the narrative with Ochún, a deity of the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria.

LaCapra's theory comparing absence, relating to an event that did not take place, with loss, relating to something that did take place, is here exemplified by Ignacio, who recreates this loss through Blanca's death. García portrays, through the characters' actions, the concept of absence as a "transhistorical loss", as referred to by LaCapra (LaCapra, 1999, p49), reconstructing this in the present through Blanca's death in order to narrate it. La Capra states: "When absence itself is narrativized, it is perhaps necessarily identified with loss" (LaCapra, 1999, p49), and loss in the here and now is the manifestation of one of the infinite possibilities present in the concept of absence. Ignacio's response to loss through Blanca's death is a latent potentiality that manifests itself within the process of narration as an element of Otherness. In this sense Ignacio is similar to Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), although Lourdes is primarily violent towards herself, and seeks to add authenticity to her experience through a reconstruction of events. Driven by absence, these characters strive to create a sense of authenticity by being something they are not, but which they believe they ought to be.

The opening passages create an arena in which contrasting cultural and historical positions take root in the novel from the very beginning, and these continue to meet head-on throughout the narrative. Blanca is closely associated with cultural elements pertaining to Indigenous and African heritage. Ignacio refers to the latter as being the root of her

“strangeness”, i.e. her belief in Santería and worship of African deities. Food-memory language, making a connection to the past through food choices in a context that allows the memory of that food to infiltrate into the present, externalises the contrast between the two characters, as Blanca refuses to touch the doves and *jutías* that Ignacio kills for dinner (AS, p185). Traditionally, *jutías* were a sacrificial food for the Orishas and were prepared by *santeros* during ceremonies of worship (Nuñez, 1992). Ignacio explains: “But the food I cooked did not sit well with her, as always, she brought her own provisions for her predawn repasts” (AS, p185). The dove, also an important sacrificial animal in Santería, is associated with Blanca’s character during the scene, and this association is made again by Constanca at her funeral: “[Ignacio] held a clod of wet dirt to throw into the grave, but aimed it at the dove instead. The bird drifted interminably until it came to rest on Mamá’s coffin” (AS, p132). Amparo Marmolejo-McWatt states that Blanca’s “entire characterisation is connected to the changing nature of the goddess Ochún, who exhibits power, control, the figure of ‘the bad mother’” (Marmolejo-McWatt, 2005, p93). When Blanca disappears, abandoning her first-born, Constanca, Ignacio appeals to a *santera*, who tells him that there is nothing he can do to bring her back and that she will return of her own accord, bearing a child for the god Changó. She returns some time later, pregnant with Reina (AS, p261). When the child is born, Ignacio describes her as “nutmeg brown, with huge hands, and eyes that devoured the world” (AS, p263), and her father as a “giant mulatto, tall lamppost and with incalculable heft” (AS, p265).

Reina, the daughter born following this extra-marital affair, externalises the Indigenous and African characteristics with which Ignacio seems to be so at odds, even at the beginning of his courtship of Blanca as well as later in their relationship.<sup>17</sup> Ignacio and Blanca appear to represent opposite sides of a discourse that has roots deep in a past replete with contrasts. As

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<sup>17</sup> Reina cannot remember her father ever touching Blanca or stroking her hair (AS, p237).

we can therefore see, the characters of the Agüero family appear to represent two major opposing yet symbiotic parts of Ortiz's concept of *cubanidad*: Western and non-Western, or European and non-European. However, despite this opposition, there is a circularity. The divided family stands for the divided nation, and consequently the novel includes different and multiple voices, which describe the distressing effects of the Revolution on families separated by political and ideological differences. In fact, Constanica and Reina Agüero traverse their history elliptically, returning again and again to the same point without progressing directly ahead. Though it is also possible to read the novel in relation to a narrower opposition between the Spanish and African presences in Cuba, García sets up the contrasts only to subsequently dissolve their existence through the changes that occur to both Constanica and Reina, aiming to demonstrate that instead of the fixed cultural symbols their father believes in, they are living representatives of the fluidity of memory. If the origins of the Caribbean are constituted from voyages leading to and from Europe and to and from Africa, *The Agüero Sisters* reflects on how this dichotomy fails to exhaustively represent what it is to be Caribbean and a migrant. Migration and transnational displacement inevitably have an impact on the characters' points of reference, which appear to be "frozen" in the novel. The Agüero sisters' father, Ignacio, through his passion for taxidermy, has a desire to "immobilise" the birds he collects. The act of freezing the animals he captures suggests a comparison to the freezing of time. A parallel can thus be created between the island's history and the Agüero family's history, in which the history of violent death remains hidden in the Zapata swamp. The novel implies that Cubans' relationship with death has been profoundly affected by the unpredictability of their transnational condition. Split between island and mainland, the rituals of burial and mourning have lost their referential meaning. Even those who die on the island cannot always find their peace, as can be seen by the re-emergence of Blanca's "ghost" through Constanica's features and through Ignacio's "possession" of Reina.

The fluidity of cultural elements is thus portrayed through the uncanny medium of revealing a loss through the present. There is an interchangeability among the “ingredients” that emerges through the themes of loss and absence, revealing a type of idealisation comparable to LaCapra’s notion of utopia as the result of “misplaced nostalgia [...] in the quest of a new totality or fully unified community” (LaCapra, 2001, p46). LaCapra defines this as a limitless desire, “open to a series of infinite displacements” (LaCapra, 2001, p59). It is a vacuous utopia, “whose fulfilment is impossible or endlessly deferred” (LaCapra, 2001, p218). Ignacio’s desire to freeze time through his work as a naturalist is also connected to his inability to fully “capture” Blanca. García presents this as a contrast between the European and the Afro-Caribbean: Ignacio can never make Blanca more like him, she is always different. The cultural difference is beyond his grasp and he feels excluded. Therefore, the wider sense of loss due to the destruction of the island’s landscape is conflated with the loss he feels over their failed relationship, which he attributes to the cultural differences between them.

Ignacio and Blanca’s firstborn daughter, Constanca, whose narrative is closely constructed around maritime and religious references, displays a European stance within the Caribbean context, thus approximating her to Ignacio in the first instance.<sup>18</sup> However, she will later “turn into” her mother as she becomes involved in the sale of food-based beauty products that are marketed to “reconjure” a pre-Revolutionary Cuba. The sisters’ differences appear to be clear from the outset: Constanca leaves Cuba because of the Revolution and becomes a successful businesswoman in Miami. Reina, in contrast, stays in Cuba, working for the government as an electrician. In fact, the sisters are described as opposites in every way, sharing only a “fragile” digestive system (AS, p21) and the absence of their mother (AS, p47; p67). However, the way that both Blanca and Ignacio symbolically and physically manifest

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<sup>18</sup> The presence of the plantation and maritime systems determine the economic and social dynamics in the Caribbean. (Benítez-Rojo, 1992, p203).



themselves through their daughters, switching from one to the other, could be interpreted as a symbol of syncretism that comes alive via their bodies, the mediators of memories.<sup>19</sup>

### **Constancia: Uncanny Bodies of Cuba**

Constancia leaves for the United States in the wake of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, becoming a successful businesswoman. As a manufacturer of beauty products whose “recipes”, made with authentic Cuban ingredients, aim to render exiles “more Cuban” (AS, p132), she is the subject of a metamorphosis that changes her features into those of her dead mother, the embodiment of Indigenous and Afro-Cuban culture. In this way, Constancia’s entrepreneurial activity, “Cuerpo de Cuba” (Body of Cuba), leads to the “discovery” of family truths, such as how her mother died. In piecing together contrasting versions of their family’s story, Constancia creates an alternative narrative for her family history, which is sutured into a wider history of wars between nations, migration and a new existence in the US after the Cuban Revolution. The “reconjuring” of memory through food, applied as an emollient on the surface of the body, is translatable as a cultural superficiality that fits in with the idea of capitalism and the neo-liberalisation of the society that Constancia caters to in the United States.

Constancia receives dozens of letters from women who feel more *cubana* after using her products. In fact, through “Cuerpo de Cuba” they are able to remember long forgotten details of their childhoods (AS, p132). Constancia also experiences memories that recreate parts of her family history through their cultural contrasts, embedded in syncretism, that start to come back with increasing intensity as her business profits increase. These mnemonic episodes, beginning with her mother’s mysterious death, culminate in the “possession” of her body. To begin with, Constancia prepares emollients that recreate memories of plantain soups

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<sup>19</sup> “Reina is bewildered each time she goes shopping in Miami. The displays of products she’d forgotten, or didn’t even know existed. Red pepper spaghetti. Giant artichokes, looking vaguely medieval. Bread in countless textures and shapes. Anything, it seems, can be frozen or freeze-dried here. Instant, instant everything!” (AS, p294).

during the summer in Cuba (AS, pp130-131) and she does so solely for the purpose of advancing her business. For instance, the adverts she designs for “Cuerpo de Cuba” are glossy, filled with antique mirrors and tropical foliage, and they appeal to her clients’ memories from the remembered prime of their Cuban youth. Her motto, “Time may be indifferent but you needn’t be” (AS, p131), appeases their anxiety. She takes pride in the way her products manage to bring back memories for her clients: “Politics may have betrayed [her] customers, geography overlooked them, but “Cuerpo de Cuba” products still manage to touch the pink roots of their sadness” (AS, p132). On launching “Caderas de Cuba” (Hips of Cuba), Constancia states: “I’ve got nearly two thousand bottles, but I don’t think it’ll be nearly enough. You know how much women hate their hips” (AS, p257). Constancia’s adoption of a consumeristic strategy, which essentially entails restricting supply to stimulate demand, initiates a wave of overwhelming memories that give rise to a terrifying “possession”.<sup>20</sup>

Constancia's change happens at night, and she wakes up to discover that her face has changed into that of her mother (AS, p104). When she turns on the bathroom light, she “finds [her face] in disarray, moving all at once like a primitive creature” (AS, p105). Her neck and temples itch and are bumpy. García’s description of Constancia’s face and its fluidity brings it to life. Her mother’s face takes over in a metaphorical re-emergence of a repressed aspect of Cuban identity. Blanca’s abandonment of Constancia meant that her daughter had always hated her, and, by association, the symbols of Santería. Believing she is dying, Constancia shouts “A! E! I! O! U!” as loudly as she can, still believing that language, in its traditional expression (reciting her vowels), is proof that nothing too irrational is happening to her (AS, p105).

With regards to communication, Mary Douglas (1971) states that language is not enough to express things relating to food. In fact, she argues that linguistic analysis is often

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<sup>20</sup> “Her first success, an eye repair cream called “Ojos de Cuba”, sold out in forty-two minutes at the Bad Harbour shopping mall” (AS, p131).

inappropriate in understanding meals: a sentence can be said in a minute, but a “food sentence” takes a lifetime to complete.<sup>21</sup> Constanica’s food-based creams are comparable to the “meals” that Mary Douglas refers to: meals that remind people of other meals and that therefore acquire meaning, become metaphors, in the same way that memory is contained in the cannibalistic media that expresses it – ingestion, digestion – and the production of a renewed version. Here, food-memory language is able to convey what verbal language cannot fully explain when it comes to identity, as can be observed through Constanica’s attempt to prove that she is still herself through the use of language, once she can no longer recognise herself when she looks in the mirror: “As she passes her reflection in the hallway mirror, she barely stifles a scream. Her mother’s face hovers in the glass, appearing as frightened as Constanica herself” (AS, p106).

Following this initial episode, in a stance that marks her separation from Cuba and its revolutionary direction, Constanica adopts a consumeristic approach to the “resurgence” of family memories. By using her mother’s picture on the bottles of creams she sells, she transforms the spectral apparition into an even more flourishing business: commodifying memory and providing an outlet for nostalgia. Her venture is so successful that it prompts her to launch a full complement of face and body products “for every glorious inch of Cuban womanhood: Cuello de Cuba, Senos de Cuba, Codos de Cuba, [...] and so on” (AS, p131).<sup>22</sup> The emollients, made with food-based ingredients that remind her of her past, are bottled and labelled, each featuring her mother’s face beneath the logo “Cuerpo de Cuba”. The food Constanica uses for cosmetic purposes brings her closer to a “version” of the past, which she

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<sup>21</sup> “A meal stays in the category of meal only insofar as it carries this structure which allows the part to recall the whole.” At the same time, ordinary quotidian meals “metonymically figure” in the structure of celebratory or holiday meals, so that these meals simply elaborate the basic structure: A + 2B becomes 2A + 4B. There are significant patternings of meals as well: daily, weekly, and yearly cycles are the most obvious, but they can stretch out over the life-course as well (Douglas, 1971, p67). In the case of Cuban cuisine, it is the particular combination of ingredients that renders them Cuban: their centrality as Cuban food is what links them so closely to Cuban identity (Garth, 2013, p105).

<sup>22</sup> Neck of Cuba, Breasts of Cuba, Elbows of Cuba.

capitalises on. Constancia's business acumen, and her capitalist attitude, prove that anything can be bought with money. The more successful she becomes, the more she is taken over by a potentiality that is bestowed by the use of food ingredients that are reminders of her Cuban past. When shopping for food, there are "pyramids of juicy mangoes, soursops, custard apples, and papayas. In a flash, they'll make her a milkshake that tastes of her past. Every Friday, [she] loads up her Pink Cadillac convertible with fresh fruit to purée and cries all the way home" (AS, p46). In this way, food plays a role in reconjuring the stories of her past that she has difficulty accessing.

In industrialising this ability to share stories through the recreation of memories in the wider Cuban-American community, Constancia has crossed a boundary that leads to a "utopian" Cuba. Immediately, she realises that there is a void – this utopia is comparable to LaCapra's "blank" one. It corresponds to the collective idea of what the memory should conjure, but "has nothing to do with the processes in the present" (La Capra, 2011, p153). The "interstitial place" created by a rendering of displacement, as posited by Homi Bhabha, is a space that cannot be filled. The performative aspect of this irretrievable loss is achieved through food ingredients that aim to close gaps that have already been subjected to "the overlap and displacement of the domains of difference" (Bhabha, 1994, p2). Constancia rubs the emollient she makes onto her face, and feels that her energy has increased since "becoming" her mother: "the soft stretch of Mamá's flesh over hers is oddly sustaining, as if she were buoyed by a warm tidal power" (AS, p130). However, contrasting feelings increase, as she sees it as a "penance [...] to wear Mamá's mouth, her eyes, like a spiteful inheritance, to suffer the countenance that scorned her..." (AS, p130). She asks herself where her own face is now – "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" (AS, p130), but the rational explanation does not suffice. The spectre of the Caribbean's concentricity looms and, fittingly,

Constancia considers that however far she may travel away from her mother, she finds that Blanca is waiting for her in each new place.<sup>23</sup>

If Constancia realises she can capitalise on those memories, she now also realises that her body will not let her forget her past. In fact, although she has succeeded in recreating an ideal of Cuba, her quest for authenticity occurs through a capitalist process in which food is “cooked” and bottled for cosmetic application, and this has allowed her to become wealthy. Her creams have created a “utopia in a bottle” of what Cuba was before the Revolution, marketed to consumers who, like her, are living “in-between”. The food preparation carried out by Constancia, and her use, in a transnational context, of food-based ingredients for cosmetic purposes, aims to affirm an authenticity in belonging to Cuba, the country from which she is exiled.

According to LaCapra’s theory, loss begins with the act of mourning, which “turns into absence and when absence is conflated with loss, then mourning becomes impossible, endless” (LaCapra, 2014, p69). The historical loss suffered through migration coincides with Constancia’s loss of her mother. Constancia’s mourning for Blanca’s death is conflated with an absence that becomes endless through the repetitive ritual prompted by the effect of the creams. These recipes mediate memories of the past, but they also create an awareness, through the very process of sourcing the ingredients, of details that have become hidden over time. This remediation allows for an exploration of territories that are at once familiar, through the repetition of the recipes, yet at the same time overwhelmingly unfamiliar, as Constancia’s ideas of the past possess her physically, ultimately sabotaging her commercial activity. Strange occurrences take place in her factory and in one instance: “bloody chicken feathers floated down from the ceiling, prompting half the staff to quit on the spot”; and “a family of dead bats [was] found in a tub of elbow abrasant” (AS, p191). These unusual events introduce a sense of

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<sup>23</sup> The Caribbean that has transition as part of its essence (Benítez-Rojo, 1992, p241).

incongruity are within a familiar structure of her workplace and gives rise to an uncanniness. Freud's interpretation of the uncanny is of something that is at once familiar, yet out of place (Freud, 1955) and his concept of *nachträglichkeit*, afterwardsness, describes how an experience is fully felt only in its echoing repetition on another occasion (Freud, 1895). Here, this idea is applied to the way that recipes are examples of a repetition that can never be identical: the premediated framework of an "original" recipe can never be reproduced in exactly the same way. The disruption of Constancia's business is thus directly proportional to the intensity of her physical transformations. Whilst her body is being haunted by the memory of her mother, Constancia nonetheless considers her own body to be the most effective sales tool. A subtle anxiety surrounds her actions as she goes to great lengths with her appearance and her sales pitches to add to her wealth (AS, p20). The more Constancia exploits her mother's image, the more instances of "re-memory" occur to unsettle her. The old memories give life to new ones prompted by her dead mother. It is a resurrection of memories that gives rise to a different version of the past: Constancia is "attacked" by images of her uncle, "stirring a plantain soup [...] devouring guayaba paste beneath a ceiba tree" (AS, p253). Aby Warburg considers images to be "cultural objectivations", and therefore carriers of memory (Assmann, 2011, p16). In this context, Constancia herself becomes a carrier of memory, sending pictures of herself to be developed by her daughter only to be confronted with the irrefutable proof that her mother's face has indeed become her own. Blanca's tenacity in becoming part of her image prompts Constancia to ask herself, "How strong are the dead?" leading her to conclude that dying is "merely a transition. Nobody is ever truly dead" (AS, p259). She realises that playing with food and its ability to conjure up the past in a spiritual way has its consequences, and also, through the transformation of her own features, that these are real.

By the time Constancia's face appears on the cover of the Florida financial magazine, she is fighting against the anxiety of entrapment within the boundaries of a body that is not

hers (AS, p232). The products she applies to her body are remediating memories that “are fixed inside her, like acts many centuries old” (AS, pp174-175). In fact, she begins to ingest small quantities of silver, remediating the age-old belief that silver can effectively fight germs: “I’ve been ingesting small amounts of sterling silver [...] I heard on the radio that it soothes hallucinations” (AS, p160). It is important to note that Constancia uses food products purely for superficial application. Her use of food makes it clear that it represents material memory, an “externalisation” according to Erll’s view, of how channels of communication facilitate the creation of cultural memory (Erll, 2011, p122). In fact, through food, the remediation of memories is re-proposed to a collective – the Cuban-American community – in order to recreate a cultural memory. The recipes for Constancia’s creams, as material memory, also contain traces of an absence: the absence is the story that is personal to every individual, each of whom, as a migrant, has experienced a loss. The memories that those food products recreate encapsulate the stories of families that were fractured and broken by the Revolution. In this way, the recipes assist in the construction of versions of past realities.

Constancia’s return to Cuba years later provokes feelings of gratitude on seeing that a landscape in which “every origin shows” is part of her past (AS, p296). Moreover, this comment, as a transnational individual, shows that Constancia’s desire for the “real” Cuba does not match the feeling she was trying to achieve through her products. Her journey between the United States and Cuba evidences her state of transition, in which memories cannot be fixed, and it is this that makes “Cuerpo de Cuba” dangerous in its intention to recreate a displaced reality. If repetition is the framework within which food operates and through which food acquires meaning because of its position within a network of meanings that relies on memory

(Sutton, 2001; Douglas, 1971), then the recipes used by Constanica produce an outcome that is symbolic of transition.<sup>24</sup>

Constancia's mourning of her mother's loss turns into an absence through its utopian desire for a Cuba of the past, through a repetition of how food ingredients are applied in order to relive an idealised version of Cuba. By using her dead mother's picture on the bottles, making a profit from an image of someone who is dead and who represents a Cuba that no longer exists, Constanica is expressing her own separation from the mother she never really knew. Furthermore, this is also a separation from her motherland: the maternal extends from the parental figure to that of her homeland through the sense of belonging that Constanica seeks to find and transfer to the rest of the exile community. In this way the idea of absence as a primordial loss, which affects each and every human, engulfs her and extends to the loss caused by the Revolution, which resonates both with Constanica and with the rest of the diasporic community she caters for. In attempting to "bottle" and define authenticity, Constanica gives in to absence, and the ensuing utopia widens the gap between the "there" and the "here". She has contributed to loss becoming more visible and given new life to uncanniness: what should be, but is not.

By creating memories through her recipes, Constanica is accessing the cultural elements she has cast aside, but which have also rejected her. She both rejects and possesses her mother through her capitalistic approach, by using Blanca's image to evoke nostalgia and make money. Constanica, furthermore, is shaping the market by combining these different links transnationally, thus sparking a process of remediation.<sup>25</sup> This remediation implies a memory of media, and food as a form of media can encompass both loss and absence.

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<sup>24</sup> If transition is a dangerous state (Douglas, 1991, p.18), then food-memory language is a suitable way to highlight the inadequacies and paradoxes of Constanica's life. Transition is a dangerous state because it is not definable – the essence of anxiety is indefinite and indeterminate (Freud, cited in LaCapra, 2014, p57).

<sup>25</sup> Erl and Rigney's *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (2009, p5) gives a definition of remediation as an ongoing transcription of a "memory matter" into different media.



The way in which Constancia and her mother are “unified” suggests a coming together of different versions of the idea of Cuba, and finds a parallel in Jan Vansina’s (1985) concept of the “floating gap”. This notion describes a phenomenon of historical recollections that shifts with successive generations (Vansina, 1985, p23). I argue that from one generation to the next, through a remediation that occurs through food, different versions of the same event come to life simultaneously. A parallel can be drawn here between Constancia’s recipes and memory, as they are both mediated by human bodies. If remembering is a process and memories are its results (Erll, 2011), then cooking is a process that requires remembering, and the recipe is the result. The results of this process are visible on the body, which can express the process of ingredients coming together as “closing a gap”, rather than simply as an end result. Constancia’s branding of her products offers the potential to create a more authentic Cuban woman: the products are constructions of versions of past realities. The application of her products leads to the manifestation of different times, an uncanny way of closing the “floating gap”. The utopian dimension, where the void created by a loss becomes absence, expresses a yearning that turns into something dangerous.

As mentioned, Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* proposes the idea of “sites of memory” that stand in for an absence of memory, where a version of events is offered in an institutionalised and fixed manner in order to replace lost environments of collective memory (Nora, 1986, p39). In the context created by García, there is no fixed version of collective memory: applying the food products can provoke any number of reactions through the memories evoked and lead to the enactment of any number of the potentialities present in the framework of the transnational individual.<sup>26</sup> This transitory state, given impulse by food and expressed by the body, conjures unconscious and unintentional versions of the past, where the concept of the “floating gap” is expressed through food-memory language and its power to

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<sup>26</sup> Frameworks that derive from our social environment – a symbolic order (Halbwachs, 1992, p38).

express this transition and the interstitial spaces between boundaries. A new version of the story is created through the body:

When you give birth, Constanica thinks, you cede your place to another. You say in effect, when I'm gone you will live, you will remember. But what is it exactly you're supposed to remember? (AS, p211)

Through Constanica's very act of creating her recipes, she is contributing to a new version of memory. The fact that she bottles them in identical blue containers obscures the fact that in each one there is a slight difference – a piece of information that has been changed by the act of producing it. Each recipe is made to create a new version of a dish and is an iteration of the past. Through what she creates, Constanica also reconjures death and violence, both of which are part of her past, but also her present. Constanica ships the bottles in a symbolic gesture that is reminiscent of conquest and discovery.

Like Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban*, Constanica journeys back to Cuba. On her return to the island she begins to change, even while she is still approaching the shores, and her previously moderate intake of food turns into an enormous hunger (AS, p282). This shift in food patterns also denotes a move away from her capitalist approach to life. Once in Cuba, Constanica reflects on what money is unable to buy for her: "actual communication" (AS, p291). When Constanica cannot phone home, she struggles to remember how she would spend her evenings and what she used to eat. A food-related activity, such as dining, becomes her point of reference within an unstructured reality. Like Lourdes, Constanica is a successful businesswoman, capitalising on Cuba by marketing products to increase "*cubanidad*" amongst exiles in the US. The products that both characters use are symbols of what it is to be Cuban, in an adulterated form. The "misuse" of food that symbolically relates to Cuba sends out

messages by changing Constancia's features, a transformation that provokes fear, both in her and in those around her. The more Constancia becomes her mother, the more her affiliation to a capitalist way of life in the US seems at odds with running her business successfully. The sabotage of her factory is indicated, as mentioned, by episodes such as finding a family of dead bats in a tub of elbow cream and ointments curdling unexpectedly overnight.

Constancia's factory, like Lourdes' bakery, is a production site that adapts to the capitalist ideology of uniform, standard methods of production in order to make money. The clients to whom Constancia sells her concoctions are displaced Cubans, holding on to a memory of their past which blocks their circulation and movement. This community is portrayed as sailing in the swamps in luxury boats but never venturing out into the ocean. In fact, Constancia expresses a longing for a small body of water, self-contained and secure (AS, p109) where she can indulge in the "uneasy indolence of exile life" (AS, p157). The more Constancia tries to block her memories, the more her products are able to trigger memories of a past life in Cuba before the Revolution. The truth of the ingredients, and what they represent to Constancia, as well as to other Cuban-American women, appears, through García's text, to be at odds with the capitalist way of life in the US. The capitalist mode of production "bottles" the ingredients of a recipe to create standardised memories.

When Constancia looks in the mirror, the reflection shows what can be seen collectively: another person and not herself. With food acting as a form of material memory, a different perspective is enabled that projects the present back into the past, remediating memories and reshaping them for the future. When Constancia's sister Reina arrives in Miami, the process of "re-memory" is precipitated. Reina remembers how, when her mother died, everyone's vision splintered. Her father said he saw a common crow, Constancia an electric blue bird and Reina a bird on fire (AS, p67). A new perspective is thus introduced into the

recipe of the Agüero family's history with a sister who carries, both within and without, the traumatic cultural differences that have forcefully manifested themselves in Constanca.

### **Reina: A New Idea of *Transculturación***

While Constanca is described in the novel as being petite, stylish and self-disciplined, Reina is the exact opposite. Known as the "Compañera Amazona" (Amazonian comrade) in Havana, where she continues to live after the Revolution, surrounded by "half empty [supermarket] shelves" (AS, p48), she is Constanca's younger sister and was six years old when her mother, Blanca, was murdered. The flat she lives in is filled with Ignacio's taxidermy "conquests": stuffed birds. As an electrician, she disassembles and reassembles wires, but also relationships; her long-term lover is, in fact, a married man, who we see bringing her the best food from the black market (AS, p15). Reina is portrayed as having an insatiable appetite, and as a person who is extremely comfortable in her own skin. However, this all changes after she begins investigating her family history following an accident in which she is struck by lightning.

The sisters in the novel both bear the marks of a past that re-emerges in the transnational's need to reconstruct a coherent discourse between realities. However, Reina's body is marked and scarred irreparably by burns that keep her from her usual active life. The sense of foreignness that Reina experiences as she is struck by lightning whilst up a mahogany tree also likens her to a tree, and she blends into the Cuban landscape: the lightning bolt "scraped acres of cinereous flesh from her back, charred a foreign grey" (AS, p35). When Reina decides to move to Miami, Constanca is impressed by her sister's "mesmerising slabs of soft, beveled flesh" (AS, p171). The use of the word "beveled" is significant as it is normally associated with mirrors, and we see that Reina's body will become a walking reflection of a combination of shades that represents the variety of the Cuban cultural landscape: the mixture of ingredients in Ortiz's metaphorical *ajiacó*. Reina is not comfortable in her "new skin", she

is no longer at home in her body, and she is pursued by the stench that it now emanates. The different textures and colours that cover the surface of her body emit a smell that underlines the socio-cultural differences that endure for the diasporic individual.<sup>27</sup>

Benítez-Rojo's ideas regarding the ability of plantation society to morph and survive are exemplified by the different colours on Reina's body, which signify more than just different shades of skin. With regard to conquest and colonisation, and in reference to the plantation system, Benítez-Rojo writes that the skin can portray conflict, both within an individual's body and with others. The centrality of Reina's uprootedness and the irritability caused by her instability mean that the colour of her skin defines neither itself nor the Other. It is, in fact, a "no man's land", where the fight for a non-fragmented "Caribbean Self" is continuous (Benítez-Rojo, 1992, p201). Reina is a patchwork of different shades of "cultures" where the "memory of the skin", a term used by Benítez-Rojo (1992, p199) to explain the concept of inherited racial prejudice, plays an important role in externalising the memories that time can hide. Reina thus becomes a monstrous character, sutured into a history that transcends her, and memories inhabit her through the surface of her body. Since the accident, no one wants to bring Reina a mirror (AS, p35). Reina looks at the missing area of skin on her daughter's leg, which was donated to her, and it reminds her of her own mother's scarred arms (AS, p37). Here, the loss of her skin acts as a reminder of the loss of her mother's; when she last saw her, Blanca's throat was "an estuary of color and disorder, as if a bloody war had taken place beneath her chin" (AS, p68). Reina is now able to relive this memory through her own daughter. When Constancia sees Reina, she notices her own unfocused reflection amongst the mosaic of "memories" Reina carries on the surface of her body (AS, p274), and thus an exchange of different memories takes place. Memories are metaphorically grafted into the skin, creating a

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<sup>27</sup> "[...]one never becomes a wholly Caribbean person; one is also something more or something less [...]" (Benítez-Rojo, 1992, p235).

parallel with Ignacio's taxidermy activities, maintaining a version of events that can remain intact forever, and keeping the same plantation model alive in different contexts.

Reina's patchwork of skin grafts distract her with their smell, and in this sense they constitute an obstacle to moving forwards. In fact, when Reina thinks about her existence in Cuba, "a drift of memories overcomes her, reversing the progress of her life" (AS, p14). The impossibility of linearity is made clear as she reconstructs her world in concentric circles that keep leading back to the same points, "trapped on a magnetic plateau, with no fix on the blackness" (AS, p14). Premediation is the framework within which remediation occurs, where material memory or memory matter manifest themselves. It provides a "mould" that shapes the way memories are transferred: "Pre- and remediation are basic processes of cultural memory [...] They make the past intelligible" (Erl1, 2011, p143). Premediation in this case is offered in the form of this concentricity, and constitutes the background to all the actions possible within the framework in which García's characters are contained. The possibilities, though, are many, and they are ultimately unpredictable, as there is no control over who will remember what:

Who will remember Mami in thirty years? Who will remember her father? Who, Reina wonders, will remember *her*? We hold only partial knowledge of each other, she thinks. We're lucky to get even a shred of the dark, exploding whole. (AS, p201)

By appearing to lack any control over the shaping of her own histories, Reina embodies the impossibility of achieving homogeneity: she wonders if history is little more than "a series of erasures and perfected selections" (AS, p163). As George Steiner points out, different histories do not add up to create a uniform language, time or culture, but tend to make more vivid "the experience of the untranslatable, the untranslated, the 'unreceived'" (Steiner, 1996, p153).

Reina struggles throughout the novel with inadequate language to express her feelings and memories. The way Reina describes how it feels to learn English expresses this awkwardness: she “isn’t sure she likes the way English feels in her mouth, the press of her tongue against her palate, the lackluster *r*’s” (AS, p235). She considers the Spanish spoken by Cuban-Americans to be out of date, a homeless idiom that cannot grow on foreign ground. Reina also notes that language is changed by a temporal gulf created by ideology, which promotes separation and distance. The Spanish spoken in Miami is filled with self-pity and revenge, whereas Reina’s Spanish is aimed at the Cuban government in the present day. Constancia’s old fashioned expressions from the fifties, meanwhile, are frozen in the past (AS, pp23-26). Her version of Cuba has, through memory, become something different from the present-day reality. Constancia is stuck in a past image of Cuba: “she even sounds like the past” (AS, p236); she speaks “a flash-frozen language, replete with outmoded words and fifties expressions. For Constancia, time has stood linguistically still”. Her sister wonders how people can speak to each other like this (AS, p236).

The contrasts between the sisters are further highlighted by Reina’s embodiment of Santería, a symbol of her proximity to her mother because of how she was conceived, though she is also able to “channel” Ignacio. Constancia, who, on the other hand, is closer to her father, is subsequently possessed by Blanca. Through their bodies, the sisters externalise signs that are characteristic of different waves of migration to the island. Constancia carries symbols of European Catholicism: she can tell the time from a glance at how the ships are positioned in the harbour and, even more markedly, she has crucifixes inscribed on her thighs (AS, p107). The sisters embody an absence, an absent history of all the people that came before them: the European and Afro-Caribbean elements that they represent. There is an uncanny unawareness,

exemplified by the changes which takes place through their bodies, bodies that act as the mediators of the novel's food-memory language.<sup>28</sup>

The final confrontation between the two sisters takes place on a boat called *Flower of Exile*. Here, Reina delves into the memories of her family history, externalising with her words, as well as with her body, the grey areas created through fractures and upheaval. Finally, Reina reveals the family's long-buried secret to Constanica: "[Ignacio] shot [their mother] like one of his birds, and then watched her die" (AS, p275). Reina is the one who will eventually force her sister to face the family's unacknowledged, fragmented past. She stares at Constanica, as if trying to see through the intoxication of her mother's face, and explains: "Sometimes we become what we try to forget most" (AS, p175). Both sisters have bodies that decipher messages about the past's historical differences and their influence on the present. Constanica and Reina's transformations communicate a story that is not really about them as individuals; rather, it is about them as a collective, a collective that starts from the individual: they are an ensemble of the various elements that make up a whole that is represented by the body. The mediation of memories through different channels gives life to the potential for those recollections to take the characters in different directions, even when the memories are not experienced first-hand. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory refers to an experience of memories that reveals a gap between events that were lived and those that are transferred to a realm of idealisation by subsequent generations (Hirsch, 1997). Both the sisters are symbolic of an interpretation of the past that dictates their present-day in ways that reconjure previous generations, that existed during pre-Revolutionary times.

The novel concludes its narrative in Miami, where Reina begins a romantic liaison with Russ Hicks. Russ is a self-made millionaire who is writing an autobiography about his life and

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<sup>28</sup> This relates to the concept of embodied memory, particularly in the context of Paul Connerton's performative bodily memory theory (Connerton, 1989) and Marianne Hirsch's idea of postmemory (Hirsch, 1997).



is attracted by stocks, real estate and antique cars (AS, pp235-236). Reina begins learning Russ's "American songs" (AS, p235) and eating his "barbecued steaks" (AS, p235). She is described as a "glorious titanic beast" – she immerses herself in the water, and when she re-emerges "her own pungent scent steams up from her mismatched skin" (AS, p159). Though the Cuba she knows has started to fade "in the luxury of her sister's existence" (AS, p157), the smell her body emanates is still with her, a reminder that even with her move to the US she is still carrying the visible marks of a fragmented past. This "patchwork of violence" is the skin of a woman who carries new life within. In an image that points to the procreation of new life with her US counterpart, she provides a novel transnational definition of Ortiz's *cubanidad*. Migration accentuates the connection between family memories and wider repressed cultural memories, and here García is able to show this through her characters' bodies. In a "trail of collective memory about another place and time" (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 1989, pi), history cannot be hidden, and the body reveals memories that are inscribed on and expressed through the skin.

## **Conclusion**

If Constancia represents the European influence and Reina the African, their contrasting ways of approaching family memory can be transposed to a wider level, in parallel to the history of nations at odds that come together through the bodies of García's characters. The social aspect of food, in particular the positive significance it holds in migrant communities, is further developed when it comes to transnational individuals. In an era of globalisation, these individuals react to subversive events, such as the Cuban Revolution, through the use of food-memory language, a tool that highlights the darker aspects of life in relation to memory following the upheaval of migration. The encounter between the two sisters provides an

opportunity to reconstruct their family history, and slowly the truth behind their mother's death is revealed through flashbacks of their father. In a way, the history of the Agüero family is a shorthand history of Cuba itself, especially in the character of Ignacio, who is born on Cuban Independence Day in 1904 and lives through the subsequent revolutions and dictatorships that have marked Cuban politics. Having discussed the idea of a framework, provided by a recipe in which the ingredients are potentialities that simultaneously dictate and are dictated by events, here we see how they are realised through the body, which acts as a mediator that allows us to view potentialities in their transitory form, as they develop.

In *The Agüero Sisters*, Cuban syncretism, the Yoruba deities, and the Catholic saints find a meeting point in the body, which has a power to change its features that is enhanced through the application of food products. It is this fluidity that forms the basis of Ortiz's concept of *transculturación*. The repressed cultural memories that emerge through a character's features, in the case of Constancia, and through the skin in the case of Reina, show how the bodily space becomes a mediator through which lost cultural memories re-merge with a visible message. The body is ideally positioned, in the context of the Cuban diaspora and the Cuban-American community, to express the transitory nature of memories, since the body is itself the most transitory of things. In fact, it changes every day as it is modified through food, which interacts with the pre-existing corporeal, but also cultural, boundary (Korsmeyer, 2002, p101). In the cases of both Constancia and Reina, the focus is not on incorporation, but rather on applications to the body at a superficial level.<sup>29</sup> The characters act in ways that go beyond ideas of nationality or transnationality as they know it, and this occurs through an embodiment of cultures that takes place through them, and is described using a food-memory language that

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<sup>29</sup> Benítez-Rojo's "irreducible memory" of skin colour in his chapter "Los Pañamanes, or the memory of the skin" (1992, p202).

assists in conveying the idea that the contrasting sides they carry within are at odds with each other.

The reconfiguration of Constancia's face is a metaphor for how memory acts in its constructed nature and relationship to the present. The medium of the body that expresses those repressed memories thus becomes visible, impossible to ignore. In the construction of a nation, Ortiz's *ajiaco* metaphor serves to bring together the contrasting elements and, in doing so, the elision of certain ingredients – certain historical memories – speaks to the idea that in creating, one is necessarily also destroying, or eliminating, aspects of the same culture. Individually produced and collectively accepted, these “recipes”, like the historical patchwork that Reina carries and the reconfiguration of Constancia's features, are the emergence of the elided aspects of repressed memory that come to the fore in a diasporic, transnational context.

*The Agüero Sisters* is a novel that shows an attempt to reconstruct a family history and the difficulty of reconciling different perspectives, paralleled here with different “origins”. With regards to family memory, Angela Keppler states that whether there is any unity in family memory depends not so much on whether the stories are consistent, but more on whether there are opportunities to share those stories (Keppler, 1994, in Erll, 2011, p56). In the case of transnational individuals, and in the specific case of Constancia's life as a migrant following the Revolution, from which she fled, these acts of storytelling become even more difficult (AS, p.48). The Revolution caused a rupture in communication, which is why food-memory language, by appealing to a different type of communication, is able to render those difficulties visible. Reina's monstrous body, connected through its relationship to electricity to the Frankensteinian creation, finds its much-desired partner, and in doing so ensures the production of a future generation in the US, and a new version of the *ajiaco*. The next chapter will look at

the relevance of female bodies and gender in the construction of a narrative which contains a “silent” ingredient that contributes to upholding the ideology of nations.

### III. Gender and Nation Building in García's *Monkey Hunting*

This chapter will discuss how in García's third novel, *Monkey Hunting* (2003), the normalisation of female oppression is achieved through rituals of consumption that consolidate female self-exclusion from cultural memory. The different stories represented in the narrative develop against a backdrop of the creation of "new" nations, such as Cuba following the Cuban Revolution (1953-1959) and China during Mao's Revolution (1966-1976). This leads my focus back to Ortiz's comments on nation building in his 1939 speech, which sought to define Cuba as a nation through *ajiaco*, presented as a dynamic culinary metaphor for the mixing of different cultural elements. This renewed image of the island stands on the silent building block of an unspoken ingredient: the contribution of women. Ortiz's idea of a recipe constituted through the import and export of cultural memories, empowering minorities through a process of *transculturación*, overlooks women as key players in the process.<sup>30</sup> In fact, the few brief mentions of women in Ortiz's speech are found in a comparison of how best to comprehend the *ajiaco*'s cornerstone concept of *cubanidad*, both as something elusive and as something that either is, or is not, possessed.<sup>31</sup> As we have seen, an integral part of Ortiz's *ajiaco* is made up from the migratory movement of different cultures, such as those originating in Africa and China. The African contribution to the pot has only comparatively recently been evaluated as

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<sup>30</sup> "Since Cuba was colonized, patriarchalism has been a strong force, partly because of the European and African heritages, but also because Cuba was largely an agricultural society, thus putting heavy burdens on a rural labor force. These challenges required women to work both in- and outside the home, a condition commonly referred to as "the double-shift." As Cuba became urbanized in the twentieth century, and a stable working class developed in some areas, women were absorbed into the labor force in offices, factories and the booming tourist sector. However, while Cuban men had a more privileged position in the labor force, more free time, and fewer social strictures; for women, the burdens of the double-shift continued" (Centre for Democracy in the Americas, 2013, p3).

<sup>31</sup> "Cubanidad is most of all the specific quality of a culture, the culture of Cuba. To speak in contemporary terms, cubanidad is a condition of the soul, a complex of feelings, ideas, and attitudes. However, there is still a fuller cubanidad. One might say that it comes from the entrails of the native land and it envelops and penetrates us like the breath of creation that springs from our Mother Earth after she has been made fecund by the rain that is sent to her by the Father Sun. It is something that makes us languish in the love of our breezes and snatches us away in the vertigo of our hurricanes. It is something that attracts us and draws us to love, like a woman who is one in three persons: mother, wife, and daughter. Mystery of the Cuban trinity, for in her we are born, to her we give ourselves, her we possess, and in her we must survive" (Ortiz, 2014, p459).

a positive addition in terms of the ways in which it adds depth to the metaphor of Cuba as a nation. In fact, Ortiz centralises previously disregarded cultural aspects that had begun to acquire new meanings among Cuba's middle classes, particularly between 1902 and 1958 (Moore, 1997). At a time when a new constitution was being written, Ortiz's statement, through the symbolic language of food, suggests that the country's strength derived from its open "culinary borders", and this was also the driving force behind the integration of other "ingredients", such as the Chinese contribution. If Ortiz positions Cuba as a nation whose very essence is deeply rooted in a history of travel beyond its own national frontiers, García's *Monkey Hunting* focuses on food as a defining aspect of how characters differentiate themselves within a nation. Philip Schlesinger's (1987) thoughts on identity formation as a form of exclusion and inclusion can assist in the consideration of food as a tool through which it is possible to identify who is part of a nation and who is not. In *Monkey Hunting*, Chen Pan, a Chinese man who emigrates to Cuba, and Lucrecia, an Afro-Cuban woman, are the grandparents of Chen Fang (b.1899), the main focus of this chapter. Chen Fang is born female, brought up in China as a boy and is later imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution as a woman.

The following reading of García's work will highlight the fact that, regardless of the Chinese or African origin of the "contributions" to Ortiz's pot, the common denominator is, at all times, the consistent oppression of women. Margaret Visser's work on gendered behaviour manifested through food hierarchies, as well as Lorna Piatti-Farnell's idea of the role of anxiety and control through consumption, provide different perspectives from those which see food as fulfilling a positive role, both culturally and socially. In particular, the character of Chen Fang provides us with the opportunity to observe how gender changes operate by reflecting the needs of the nation, set within a story of diaspora. My reading of the novel will focus on how memory provides an opportunity to express an imagined remembering that contributes to the

construction and reconstruction of Chen Fang's gender. Ichijo and Ranta (2016) state that food culture builds a relationship between the individual and the nation; food is how people view both themselves and their national identity. In this sense, Chen Fang's case is an example of how persecution leads to the creation of an imagined community, a notion that stems from the presence of Western food in her diet.

Set in China, as well as in the US and Cuba, *Monkey Hunting* shows, through its characters, how food itself can create boundaries. These boundaries "move" with the trajectory of the characters' memories, giving rise to new actions and experiences. In this sense, food and consumption mediate and remediate memories, providing renewed versions of the past, as families are united and separated across borders. Andrew Hoskins' view, that remediation is a re-writing of memory matter into different means of transmission, is exemplified in the rituals of consumption described in *Monkey Hunting*. This chapter will draw on Astrid Erll's understanding of the mediation and remediation of memory as a switchboard between the individual and the collective sphere of remembering, creating different versions of the past and revealing the travelling nature of memories (Erll and Rigney, 2009). This thinking will be extended through an observation of how new memories are created and how these can be remediated through food.

Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that there is an infinite flexibility in the power states grant themselves to control and take over people, languages and religions in order to define themselves as emerging nations. In this context, the typical inflexibility in relation to the non-inclusion of women in the process becomes glaringly obvious. Anderson proposes that nations are created as "imagined communities" through a constructed sense of belonging that is formulated and reformulated through different media. How do women, often excluded from national discourses, create their own imagined communities within a repressive society from

which they are marginalised? Édouard Glissant's (1989) idea of "nonhistory", applied to the context of gender frameworks, will demonstrate how the function of memory provides an outlet through which women can have the freedom to "remember" an unexperienced past, whilst being bound to a collective memory.

In *Monkey Hunting*, gender changes appear to denote fluidity, yet they carry restraints that are reflected, as well as being reaffirmed and reinstated, by rituals of consumption. In fact, food-memory language highlights how a gender framework that is internal to a landscape can contribute to determining a pattern that positions and repositions the individual within the collective. With this in mind, food-memory language enables us to consider the character of Chen Fang through a lens that offers us a "double vision", from both socially constructed male and female perspectives. Furthermore, Chen Fang's storyline opens the reader to a double sense of displacement, encompassing both migration and gender.

Chen Fang's female gender, societally rejected because considered to be the cause of a possible lack of food, switches throughout the novel. This allows us to follow a cultural trajectory of oppression and ritualised discrimination that is produced through the codified transmission of consumption practices. This establishes the viewpoint that, like memory, gender also moves and shapes itself according to symbols that are set out socially, and that rituals of consumption, as depicted in the novel, aim to structure and restrain women.<sup>32</sup> In this way, the boundaries of memory and of gender meet at intersections that are created by food-generated perspectives.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the boundaries transcended by Cuban identity are determined by hunger itself. Food, in the novel, is intertwined with consumerism and capitalism and is

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<sup>32</sup> Hartmann (1981) considers the connection between patriarchy and capitalism and defines patriarchy as a set of hierarchical relations determined by a material base that creates solidarity amongst men and enables them to dominate women.



linked to memories that have an impact on the characters' actions. In *The Agüero Sisters*, the body becomes a tool that filters a number of historical possibilities, acting as a reminder of the framework of a past that was not experienced first-hand. The bodies affected by change in these examples all belong to women, specifically mothers, who are at the disposal of different nations in "showcasing", via their physical features, cultural symbols pertaining to their origins while part of the Cuban diaspora in the US. By acting as a filter, the body expresses possibilities that go beyond the function of simply "containing" memories; memories are also modified and interpreted in order to make sense of the characters' lives. Their need to understand their family history is positioned in parallel to the nation's need to make sense of its position globally. This interconnectedness is also present in *Monkey Hunting*, which features characters from five generations of one family, from 1857 to 1970, across different times and locations: Castro's Cuba, China during Mao's Cultural Revolution in 1966, New York in 1968 and Vietnam in 1969. It is separation itself that "unites" all the characters: they are fractured by a Western versus non-Western divide.

Between 1847 and 1874, approximately 125,000 Chinese people were sent to Cuba to work on the plantations, either as indentured or contract labourers.<sup>33</sup> By focusing on the Chinese migrants who were brought to Cuba as indentured workers, *Monkey Hunting* provides us with a view of Caribbean history from a starting point outside the Caribbean. The novel begins in China and crosses boundaries within narratives set in different eras. By juxtaposing stories that jump intergenerationally, García draws attention to waves of migration from different areas as a way of focusing on a wider, global diasporic community. Her decision to partly set the novel in China highlights gender-based issues relating to diaspora that are often overlooked.

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<sup>33</sup> "Asians, who have come by the thousands since the middle of the nineteenth century, have penetrated less far into cubanidad; but, although their trace is recent, it is not absent. They are often said to be responsible for Cubans' passion for gambling; but this passion was a sign of cubanidad before the arrival of the Chinese" (Ortiz, 2014, p477).

*Monkey Hunting* begins in China with a failed harvest that drives Chen Pan (b.1837) to undertake a voyage to what is described to him as a mythical land of plenty: Cuba. He lives through many hardships on a sugar plantation on the island before escaping to Havana, where he buys an enslaved woman, Lucrecia (b.1851), with whom he fathers three children. One of these is Lorenzo, the father of Chen Fang (b.1899), born female but brought up as male until she is sixteen, when she is forced to marry Lu Shêng-Pao. They have a son, but Chen Fang then moves away from her family home and rural surroundings to become a teacher in Shanghai. Here, in a Westernised urban setting, a notable contrast to her previous home in rural China, she falls in love with a French woman, Dauphine de Möet. Finally, Chen Fang is arrested and imprisoned during Mao's Cultural Revolution, punished for being too Westernised. An era of globalisation can re-position issues on changing maps, shifts that can offer renewed perspectives. In the novel, these are communicated via a food-memory language, which is contextualised through a gender framework. Chen Fang's points of transition are generated by the material necessities of the character's socio-political context. Her changes in gender presentation, highlighted by food-memory language, serve to demonstrate how, through rituals of consumption, social constrictions normalise female oppression within gender frameworks.

The first part of this chapter makes a comparison between male remembering and female re-remembering through a study of the Chinese Chen Pan and the Afro-Cuban Lucrecia, Chen Fang's grandparents. Here, I differentiate between linear versus circular dimensions of time, in parallel with men's upward trajectory in opposition to women's entrapped repetitive circularity. This section also looks at female perspectives through the modalities in which gender and nation intersect via rituals of consumption. Chen Fang, born a girl but raised as a boy in China, provides us with an opportunity to re-evaluate the role that the ritualised memory of consumption plays in recreating new memories of women as giving birth to nations through

gender frameworks that shape and enforce traditional values and moral codes. Through feasting, for instance, we are able to observe how gender frameworks are created and consolidated by rituals of consumption which perpetuate the oppressive conditions that define Cheng Fang's position in society.

The second section of the chapter explores how Chen Fang's migration from periphery to centre, rural China to urban Shanghai, has an impact on her memories, which are expressed through food. Here, the Western versus non-Western perspective parallels Chen Fang's male versus female view of the world. Food-memory language allows us to consider how national narratives and systems of power are enforced.

The third part of the chapter explores how identity and memory are fluid and always "temporary". In a parallel to the metaphor of *ajiacó*, these are all transient ingredients of the same soup. We will see how memory and food function as a network that allows Chen Fang to make connections with her wider diasporic Chinese transnational family. Her fluid gender identity keeps these connections alive through cultural interaction across boundaries, which can sometimes serve as a form of collective identity, and at other times disconnect the self from the context of the nation. However, it is made clear that the fact that Chen Fang is a woman not only means that her social inferiority ultimately prevails, but also, within gender frameworks, that female self-exclusion is at work and is made visible through food-memory language.

### **Chen Pan and Lucrecia: Trajectories of Male Remembering and Female Re-remembering**

*Monkey Hunting* begins in China in 1857 with Chen Pan's journey to Amoy in search of work. His crops have failed, and "winter rains had flooded his wheat fields, rotting the stalks already choked with darnel" (MH, p4). He is subsequently persuaded to leave his country for Cuba, where he is told that life will give him unprecedented prosperity and abundance. The person

who persuades him is described as wearing a “Western-style suit and a ring on his little finger flecked with diamond chips” (MH, p5), and represents the influence of European imperialism and capitalism in China. In China, “labourers were recruited from Amoy and Canton, through the agency of British firms, but when those sources were stopped, they used the barracoons of Macao. The methods of recruitment were: kidnapping on a large scale and the buying of prisoners taken in the civil wars in South China” (Augier et al., 1960, p202). In this way, García personifies the existence of global mechanisms that are enforced by the West, and relates these to hunger as the driving force behind Chen Pan’s departure.

The date of Chen Pan’s departure from China to Cuba, 1857, was the official date upon which Chinese immigration to Cuba began, as Chinese workers were brought in to work alongside enslaved people from Africa. Ten years later, approximately two thousand Chinese people would fight in the Ten Years’ War (Westad, 2012, pp227-228). García's description of how the ships transported the workers from China to Cuba highlights how human life was treated as dispensable, as suicides and beatings take place ceaselessly over the course of the three-month journey: “the ship [...] was outfitted like a prison, with irons and grates”, and the “recruits were kept below decks, like animals in a pen. The shortest among them couldn’t stand upright. Soon Chen Pan's neck ached from stooping” (MH, p8). Aside from the physical hardship, Chen Pan also experiences the turmoil of interrogating himself on existential issues; in fact, he expresses confusion around questions of identity at various points in the novel. However, he is able to envision a future that is not rigid in its attitude towards belonging, and this can be seen starting from his journey on the ship, where the narrator asks a question about exile: “Who was he now without his country?” (MH, p21).

Consumption contributes to providing an answer, as once Chen Pan is on the boat to Cuba food becomes the source of a revelation that is set to change everything: a taste of pickled cabbage conjures memories of home and triggers the realisation that he has been sold an idea

of Cuba that does not match reality (MH, p18). The boat carrying Chen Pan and the other soon-to-be indentured workers is a floating landscape that recreates the hierarchies of the sugar plantation on which they will all be forced to work as soon as they reach Cuba's shores. Chen Pan's worst fears are confirmed when he realises that although he is not enslaved, he will work side by side with the Africans who are. García makes clear, through her portrayal of the hardships they experience, that there is no distinction between how the Chinese and African workers are treated. In this way, the myth of the sugar plantation as a paradisiacal place, the image sold to Chen Pan, is "unmasked" before he even reaches Cuba's shores. Here, Benítez-Rojo's concept of the Caribbean as a site of transition finds confirmation. Once Chen Pan finally arrives in Cuba, he is auctioned as a slave:

The men were ordered to peel off their filthy rags and were given fresh clothes to present themselves to the Cubans. But there was no mistaking their wretchedness: bones jutted from their cheeks; sores cankered their flesh [...] The recruits were rounded up in groups of sixty [...] then parceled out in smaller groups to the waiting landowners. A dozen Cubans on horseback, armed with whips, led the men like a herd of cattle to the barracón to be sold. Inside, Chen Pan was forced to strip and be examined for strength, like horses or oxen that were for sale in the country districts of China. (MH, pp20-21)

Following his arrival in Cuba, Chen Pan's work with enslaved Africans makes evident the racial tensions following Cuba's independence from Spain:

Chen Pan knew it was only a matter of time before the Chinese no longer would be welcomed in Cuba. In times of economic necessity, they were usually the first

scapegoats. This infuriated Chen Pan because thousands of Chinos had fought hard for the country's independence. During the Ten Years' War they'd taken up machetes, fought under Calixto García, Napoleón Arango, all the great leaders. (MH, p246)

The novel's depiction of Chinese and African enslavement on a sugar plantation voices García's opposition to the idealisation of pre-Castro Cuba. The author blurs the line between slavery and indentured work, which was the official status of Chinese labourers: Chen Pan is "thrown together with slaves from Africa, given a flat, straight blade to cut the sugarcane [...] Blisters sprouted like toadstools on his palms. Nets of iridescent flies settled on his skin as he worked, as he inhaled again and again the yellow-green fumes of the cane" (MH, p22-23). The narrator adds: "From his first hour in the fields, it was clear to Chen Pan that he was in Cuba not as a hired worker but as a slave, no different from the Africans [...] he'd been tricked into signing his life away" (MH, p24).

Through the character of Chen Pan and his suffering, we are able to see how Cuba incorporates people from beyond its boundaries in order to "bulk up" the soup of its own nation – one that, as Ortiz sees it, is made richer by all its different elements, including the Chinese influence. The moment of *transculturación* is made apparent through the birth, or rebirth, of Chen Pan, who manages to escape from the plantation and lives in the wild for nine months. He kills a *jutía*, a sacred symbol for Indigenous Cubans and a traditional ingredient in *ajiaco*, and it is only at the moment of eating it that he decides Cuba will be his new home. His rebirth is the rebirth of Cuba as a country: it is at once a gain and a loss. His capture and feasting on the meat of the animal is a symbolic passage, a ritual that consecrates him as a Cuban national from then on. We are thus able to observe the process of *transculturación* as it takes place through its different components and their dependency on one another due to global

mechanisms enforced by the West. As a Chinese individual, he becomes the new element added to the pot, responsible for one less *jutía* on the island, a symbolic give and take that shifts the axis of a recipe for a nation as it forms. Following his escape from the plantation and living in the forest as a fugitive, Chen Pan ceases “dreaming of returning to his village”. Once he reaches Havana, “he knew it was where he belonged” (MH, p62). Chen Pan “wasn’t the least bit nostalgic” (MH, p81), and this sets him apart from his Chinese friends. This depiction suggests a parallel between Chen Pan’s male Chinese companions and Cubans living in exile in the United States following the Revolution. The Chinese men often talk nostalgically, and maintain that “Only in China [...] was life lived properly” (MH, p83).

Chen Pan eventually becomes a successful businessman and starts a new family with an enslaved African woman, Lucrecia, whom he buys from Don Joaquín, a character who represents colonialism and Catholicism in Havana. Lucrecia, Chen Pan’s slave and partner, has no control over her body. She is violated and incarcerated by Cuba’s national slavery discourse through Don Joaquín. Her rights are in the hands of men, both as a woman and as a mother in her reproductive ability, and once united with Chen Pan she provides the “new” version of the concept of the Cuban nation, one that gives birth to “brown children with Chinese eyes who spoke Spanish and a smattering of Abakuá” (MH, p209). Lucrecia mentions *ajiacó* as a metaphor for the benefits of diversity: “it was better to mix a little of this and a little of that, like when she prepared an *ajiacó* stew” (MH, p129), but, symbolically, through food, she becomes Chinese (MH, p180):

Sometimes Lucrecia questioned the origin of her birth, but she didn’t question who she’d become. Her name was Lucrecia Chen. She was thirty-six years old and the wife of Chen Pan, mother of his children. She was Chinese in her liver, Chinese in her heart. (MH, p138)

In fact, although of African heritage, and so part of a cultural “majority” in comparison to the Chinese “minority” in Cuba, Lucrecia is absorbed by Chen Pan in terms of gender hierarchy as she becomes “Chinese in her liver, Chinese in her heart” (MH, p138). This reference to her organs suggests the idea of dismemberment that begins with her union to Chen Pan: a change that starts from within and that is related to the food she eats. Lucrecia’s new life as Chen Pan’s partner sees her cooking meals that prompt memories of those she used to cook for her previous owner, Don Joaquín, who refused to eat anything that was not meat (MH, p134). This remembering occurs during a process of re-membering and the reconstruction of herself through the act of cooking. A knock on the door brings her face to face with a lost Polish taxidermist, as if to confront her with the still undigested fact that she is herself undergoing a process of reconstruction (MH, p136). Though Lucrecia finds humour in the incongruity of this event, it nonetheless calls our attention to the fact that she appears to be unaware that she is undergoing a “taxidermy” of her own. A newly reconstructed Lucrecia already exists, food having mediated and remediated her painful memories. She now states that everything she loves can be found in Chinatown: the tamales with smoked duck, the fried sweet potatoes and even her favourite dessert, whose unappealing name relays her total commitment to her new owner, Chen Pan.<sup>34</sup> Though she tries to transmit her love for Chinese culture and food to the children she has with Chen Pan, only Lorenzo shows any interest. Lorenzo will, in fact, travel to China and father Chen Fang, who is in this sense, therefore, a direct descendent of the culinary nomenclature of Lucrecia’s “dismembering” and “re-membering”.

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<sup>34</sup> “[...] a pound cake with so many sesame seeds it was called *chino con piojos*, chinaman with fleas” (MH, p137).



Lucrecia is trapped in a circular narrative that is dictated by her gender, since she serves the purpose of populating Cuba with newer versions of *ajiaco*. On the other hand, her “owner” Chen Pan reflects on his own successful transition from slave to wealthy businessman, and he observes the differences between China and Cuba: “This could never have happened in China. There, the future was always a loyal continuation of the past” (MH, p70). Thus, he highlights his position on a linear trajectory. Though he decries the unpredictability of life, from being a plantation worker he does indeed succeed in becoming a wealthy man in Havana. This linear, ascending trajectory towards “success” cannot be claimed by any of the novel’s female characters. Both Lucrecia and, as will be seen, Chen Fang (except when she is “male”), play out food-memory roles that are oppressive, where remembering turns into a re-membering of themselves in order to adapt to the male network into which they are born. The food-memory language that highlights this gender framework makes the oppression clear, as we see how Chen Pan buys Lucrecia and sets his role as her “master” in terms of consumption. He gives out instructions that underline the cultural differences between them: “Don’t eat the duck”, he warns her (MH, p70), since during his time as a slave he had heard that the Africans practiced cannibalism, and he has a sense of anxiety that she will not have the same food boundaries as he does and worries about his pet duck, Lady Ban (MH, p91). As explained through the focus on the consumption practices that Lucrecia adopts and makes her own, she adapts to the gender frameworks of the society she now lives in with Chen Pan: from the food focus of one male hierarchy (through Don Joaquín’s meat eating) to that of another (Chen Pan’s Chinese food), trapped in a cycle of repeated dismemberment and re-memberment.

### **Chen Fang: Food-memory Language and How Societies Remember to Forget Women**

Erll’s concept of how memory is mediated through a “switchboard at work between the individual and the collective dimension of remembering” (2011, p113) illuminates the ways food can pass on, and consolidate, traditions relating to rituals of consumption. In this sense,

memory itself can be viewed as a switchboard in its ability to structure experiences according to criteria dependent on cultural memory. How the information is organised will determine the individual's future experiences. In *Monkey Hunting*, the male hierarchy that is made visible through the focus on food exposes a gender framework that acts as a switchboard between the individual and the collective. Both that which is remembered and that which is not operate within the switchboard, mediating memories and remediating them, attributing new meanings to them according to the context.

Chen Fang is the daughter of Lorenzo Chen, a successful herbalist and son of Lucrecia and Chen Pan. Lorenzo leaves China permanently when Chen Fang is four months old. When Chen Fang is born in China, she becomes the third sister in a family that is desperate for a boy. She is the third consecutive daughter, and as a result her mother worries that Lorenzo will go back on his promise "to build a new well for the village" (MH, p89). As Chen Fang says, she is simply "another mouth for rice" (MH, p89), and her mother tells Lorenzo that the new child is a boy and convinces him to send money for Chen Fang to go to school, where she excels. It is not only Chen Fang and her family who are involved in the performance: "Every villager went along with the deceit [...] Mother dressed me as a boy, treated me as a boy, and soon everyone seemed to forget that I was a girl" (MH, pp89-90).

Chen Fang's mother decides that she will be male rather than female in order not to disappoint her father, and the way this works in practice recalls Judith Butler's assertion in *Gender Trouble* (1990) that gender and sexuality are performance constructs that are normalised through repetition. At Chen Fang's birth, her father, Lorenzo, believing her to be a boy, creates a pyramid of oranges in her honour, and the feast lasts three days (MH, p89). Margaret Visser (1991) writes that feasts symbolise a celebration of the relations that interconnect diners, an expression of a specific order. In this case, the ceremony is founded on a fraudulent belief that is justified by the social pressure exerted on mothers to produce male

children in a particular society, and a ritual of consumption is performed that legitimises the gender change for the new-born. It is an important symbol that carries within it the silenced female gender of Chen Fang.

The “forgetting” of Chen Fang’s gender is consolidated by a ritual of consumption that makes this distortion of the truth acceptable and voices the issue of unspoken rules of female inclusion and exclusion. From birth to adolescence, Chen Fang is thus presented as an alternative, male, version of herself, who can only be accepted if the rest of society forgets that she was born a girl (MH, p90).<sup>35</sup> The “change” in gender means that the “male” Chen Fang is able to go to school, unlike her two sisters, and is sent money by her father, Lorenzo. She becomes an exception to the hierarchy, and is not forced to bind her feet, work in the kitchen, or learn tea rituals (MH, p88).

When there is no more money for schooling, Chen Fang is called back to “become a woman”, and she finds this extremely difficult. She states that “there is no harder work than being a woman. I know this because I pretended to be a boy for so long. This is what men do: pretend to be men, hide their weaknesses at all costs [...] For women there are no such blusterings, only work” (MH, p96). She is forced to marry Lu Shêng-Pao, and she thinks about escaping to Cuba (MH, p95), having heard that it is a magical place with “fish that rained down from the sky during thunderstorms” (MH, p92). Years later, she recognises that her difficulties in life have resulted from not being correctly inserted within a gender framework: “In China, women do not stand alone. They obey fathers, husbands, and their eldest sons. I lived outside the dictates of men, and so my life proved as unsteady as an egg on an ox” (MH, p226). This confirms the view that anyone who operates outside the pre-ordained gender framework will suffer consequences.

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<sup>35</sup> A performative forgetting that shifts attention to the act of forgetting in the present something that has already been forgotten time and again in the past. Connerton discusses how performative remembering sustains memory in *How Societies Remember* (Connerton, 1989, p104).

Once Chen Fang is taken out of the male hierarchy to get married, she is inserted back into the system by her mother, a system that ascribes to her duties as a wife and mother. Her wedding, at sixteen, re-inserts her into a family structure that is male dominated, and her freedom as a “male” child makes the transition to the role of wife and mother even more oppressive. She does not find it easy to become a woman, and she is untrained to pour tea or to cook (MH, p96). Furthermore, as she has not been inserted by her mother into the “process of gender” that acquires strength through repetition, she is not able to fulfil her duties. Her mother-in-law calls her unbound feet “clumsy hooves” (MH, p96) and her hardships continue as she performs her “main duty” as a woman, becoming pregnant and finding herself under tight social control, although female reproductive capacity represents the only means for women to have any power within the male hierarchical system.

It is Chen Fang’s mother-in-law who informs her, in front of the rest of the family, that Chen Fang has missed her monthly period. This happens at the dinner table, which makes the delivery of the news all the more incongruous. In this way, Chen Fang’s loss of control is again stated through a ritual of consumption that restrains and consolidates her status in a situation where eating in company “necessarily places the individual face to face with the group” (Visser, 1991, pxii). Erll’s idea of memory as a switchboard that organises experience “prospectively” (2011, p112) is especially useful when considering how recipes function and how they become a switchboard that works between individual and collective acts of remembering. The mode of transmission incorporates traces of the message, and these assist in the formation of a particular version of the past. Catapulted into a very different world, Chen Fang offers the reader a different viewpoint, a different identity within society that comes with a different gender. Women’s roles within the nation are here shown to be based on their reproductive capacities, incorporated within a gender framework. This can be seen in the lack of communication around decisions concerning procreation.

After both are forced into an arranged marriage, Chen Fang's husband Lu Shêng-Pao attempts to poison her. Chen Fang feels ill during her pregnancy and her husband offers to make her tea. A subversion takes place through a male "interference" in the traditionally feminine consumption ritual of tea making. Male but also female power over Chen Fang's body, both in the production and attempted abortion of her child, is thus brought to prominence, positioned in a framework defined by gender which is made visible via food-memory language. A man doing what a woman should be doing, and thus subverting an "order", brings about a negative result. Chen Fang ponders on Lu Shêng-Pao's attention to detail: "He offered it to me in a fine porcelain cup" (MH, p98), and this contributes to the ritual being "authentic" enough to trick her. If, as discussed in the previous chapter, we are able to observe how the characters in *The Agüero Sisters* lose power over their own bodies, we can now say that the fact that they are female also plays a role in contributing to a disempowerment enforced by the very rituals of consumption that contain them. The fact that Chen Fang is not "used to" being female empowers her husband to contaminate and poison her. "Ritual recognizes the potency of disorder" (Douglas, 1996, p1), and the attempt to contain this social "disorder" can be fatal for a woman: punishment for a pattern that she disrupts herself.

The repression of women, at a collective level, is thus enforced in the novel through acts of consumption that provide a space within a gender framework in which unequal nomenclatures of power operate in plain sight. If Margaret Visser's studies on the rituals of consumption lead to the theory that power struggles between men and women are frequently expressed through the medium of food (Visser, 1991, p220), they also provide an equation that, in broad daylight, consolidates systems of injustice in society. Visser states that "because food is such a powerful metaphor for love, and sharing it such a binding force" (Visser, 1991, p220), particularly brutal acts can be carried out through the medium of food. Accepting the constraints of rules enforced by individuals who are now dead "forces" people to enter into a

relationship with the past. The newly accepted constraints occur through a system in which gender operates as a language of symbols which enables codification through these consumption rituals. Barthes states that “food has a constant tendency to transform itself into situation” (Barthes, 1997, p23), and in a situation of gender control the darkness of the food ritual lies in the fact that it operates to assist in the endeavour of “forcing” gender upon an individual due to cultural pressure from a male-dominated society. In this sense, Lorna Piatti-Farnell’s idea of food as an anxiety-ridden way of controlling others (2017, p254) is inscribed in socially accepted occasions that bring to the fore the horror hidden in plain sight, as the displays that celebrate birth create an uncanny framework in which being female means being tied to a life of less opportunity compared to being male.

### **Food-Memory Language: Double Displacement and Double Vision**

Whilst Chen Fang is heavily pregnant, her sister visits and brings her a letter which is a passport to “freedom”, a recommendation which will enable her to become a teacher in Shanghai (MH, p99). Shanghai is portrayed as a cosmopolitan city that is closer to a Western lifestyle, and Chen Fang’s migration echoes those of her father and grandfather before her. Chen Fang’s move means that she can openly use her education to teach without having to hide her gender (MH, p101). Gender has “always been a primary metaphor for the allocation of roles in society” (Visser, 1991, p272), and as a woman Chen Fang now suffers from a case of “double displacement”, where she is caught between temporary states of illusory permanence, between gendered perspectives. Although the society she lives in changes from a rural to an urban one, the same systems of repression persist, and the unequal dynamics that apply to women extend into different spheres, cutting across varied societal landscapes.

In societal terms, the food-memory language around feasting allows and consolidates a change within the gender framework for Chen Fang, allowing relationships that would otherwise be deemed unacceptable to evolve within the parameters of what is socially

acceptable. This can be seen in “the Full Month celebration after my [Chen Fang’s] birth, [when] a pyramid of oranges stood tall in my honour. Mother [...] hosted a feast that lasted three days. She’d told Father that I was a boy” (MH, p89). Following the transgression that is imposed upon her, Chen Fang is punished: “the greatest glory for a woman is to bear and raise sons for the future” (MH p149), and Chen Fang is alone with no children. This is the price she has to pay to be “free” as a woman. Once she does have a child, she decides to leave him in the care of his grandmother and go to Shanghai. However, she will always regret the decision to be separated from her son and, as we will see, the political implications of her absence as a mother: “I thought I would be pleased to leave him, to seek my freedom. Instead I swallowed my bitter heart again and again” (MH, p100). The text seems to imply that being a woman and a mother, yet transgressing the rules of motherhood, carries repercussions for Chen Fang as she fails to uphold her duties as a woman, mother and citizen of a nation. This is where it is made clear that Chen Fang is unable to fulfil her maternal responsibilities because she has been raised male, unable to carry out her traditional role within the gender framework, unable to carry out the duties that being a mother entails for a nation. The concept of memory with regard to nation building carries with it the invisible ingredient of women’s contributions, upholding the same values that exclude them.

In rural China, where women are peripheral, Chen Fang lives at the centre as a male, but in Shanghai she experiences living marginally in a cosmopolitan city. Here, as a liberated woman and a teacher, Chen Fang is even more powerless: in Shanghai, “of all Chinese cities, the most urbane and Westernized” (Pan, 1991, p281), we see how the rituals of consumption that first trapped Chen Fang as a child, and then as a mother, continue to exert their power, as accusations of being corrupted by the West lead to her imprisonment. It all starts with a change in consumption practices that sees the inclusion of “Westernised” food into Chen Fang’s life. This occurs when she meets Dauphine de Moët, the mother of one of her students. Their

encounters take place in Dauphine's home, which becomes a gateway to the Western world for Chen Fang, an affiliation that will eventually lead to her imprisonment. Contributing to a Westernised view of Cuba, Dauphine points out the elements that Cubans and "Spaniards" have in common, through the culinary sphere as well as through their joint responsibility for the "boom-and-bust" of prosperity that saw an increase in speculation and foreign investment. Dauphine's way of cooking for Chen Fang is also Westernised, preparing food in a way that highlights the differences from what Chen Fang would normally eat: "*croque monsieurs* [...] with pickles and beer", or steamed mussels (MH, p142). Dauphine's personal chef prepares "longevity noodles" for her on her birthday, and she gives her some green plums, even though they were "long out of season" (MH, p142); she serves rare jasmine tea, along with sweetmeats wrapped in "crimson paper" and "miniature cakes oozing cream" (MH, pp140-141).

Through Dauphine, Chen Fang accesses unexperienced memories that link her to the Cuban branch of her family through a food-memory language that is assisted by pictures going back to a time when Dauphine lived in Cuba herself. As in *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters*, photographs and food prompt memories that consolidate Chen Fang's "imagined community". Dauphine's pictures of Havana include one of "an old Chinese man in a doorway smoking an opium pipe", whom Chen Fang imagines to be an acquaintance of her father or grandfather (MH, p141). The French woman, with whom Chen Fang falls in love, also tells her stories of a place in Havana "where women wore men's evening clothes and kissed each other on the lips" (MH, p142).

For Cheng Fang, through her relationship with Dauphine and the stories she tells of Havana, Cuba becomes her "West", as it did for Chen Pan: a place to which she can escape and change her life. This shift in concentricity, where ideas of what the "West" is are constantly shifting, is made clear through food-memory language within a gender framework.



Dauphine's stories help to create a world for Chen Fang, fostered by her desire to fit into a family history where she can feel free to be herself. They create a void that is expressed by the erasure of anything that she thought was true until that point: "I knew, listening to her, that I knew nothing at all" (MH, p142). When Dauphine returns to France because of "markets failing, of their family in ruins" (MH, p143), Chen Fang's desperation is expressed through her facial features: "[her] face grew sallow, [her] eyes filmed with ash" (MH, p144). She asks herself where history goes, if it cannot be retold (MH, p144). Through her lack of interest in food, even the taste of roast duck with pepper and salt eludes her (MH, p144). Chen Fang expresses a loss of opportunity that arises through memories that connect her to her family's past and that position her within a wider network. Food has assisted in the destruction of barriers between past and present, and the loss she experiences reflects a void between the present and her future.

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, p20). 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". Food acts as an in-between, mediating these two positions and marking the fact that there is an opposition between Chen Fang and her relationship to food and what food has opened her up to in terms of loss. The conflation between the end of her relationship with Dauphine and the wider loss of her Cuban heritage, or absence, as LaCapra defines the overlap, means that the "temporal system" she has been opened up to is unavailable to her. Chen Fang is in fact experiencing LaCapra's idea of a blank utopia, one that holds the promise of a "redemptive" future (LaCapra, 2001, p57). Her relationship with Dauphine, through food, introduces her to a void and a mystery that, for Chen Fang, ultimately, encapsulates emptiness.

The previous chapter looked at how loss and absence give rise to a utopian sense that leads to dissatisfaction, this is also true for Chen Fang, as she situates herself within Chinese society through a sense of what she is not, as opposed to what she is. Here, food-memory language creates a sense of loss, with its focus on Dauphine's pictures which, along with the Western food Dauphine offers her, spark in Chen Fang a longing to live in Cuba with a family she does not know. The conflation between Western food and the transitory sense of freedom it offers in terms of Chen Fang's sexuality, creates a sense of utopia. This utopia derives from a nostalgia for the unexperienced, an ideal that is disproved by García's account of Chen Pan and Lucrecia's own experiences as migrants, but that Chen Fang finds so appealing in the snapshot offered by Dauphine's photographs. It is Western food that sparks a process of "remembering" through a static narration offered by the images. This ideal romanticises the past, and history, communicated through discourse and represented by the static nature of the photograph, is unattainable. The limits posed by the photograph as a snapshot of a very limited time can also be seen in Celia's and Constanca's considerations in relation to images in the previous chapters, where there is a sense that the fixed form imprisons reality and that "capturing images suddenly seems [...] an act of cruelty" (DIC, p48). García operates from a premise of fluidity: "If only everything could stop, remain fixed and knowable for an hour. Instead, everything race[s] forward, unrelentingly, like a river, never settled or certain" (MH, p212).

*Monkey Hunting* sees nostalgia as the configuration of a visualised past that puts to one side the more unpleasant aspects. García contrasts nostalgia for pre-Castro Cuba with the idea of commodification. She does so through her portrayal of sugarcane cultivation and harvesting, explaining that it took a "mountain of corpses" to make possible the pleasant "endless, swaying green" of the sugar fields (MH, p190). García makes the link between capitalist wealth and the

horrors of globalisation when Dauphine explains to Chen Fang how food shortages during World War I helped to expand Cuba's sugar economy, and likens the Cubans to their own colonisers, the Spaniards (MH, p141):

It was the time of the Dance of the Millions, she explained, when Cubans made overnight fortunes in sugar. Palaces lined the boulevards, and fancy cars cruised up and down the city's seawall. She said that the Cubans like the Spaniards, used a spice in their rice that turned it the color of kumquats. (MH, p141)

The materiality of food is the language used by García to contribute to Chen Fang's utopian, idealised version of Cuba. Food is the gateway through which she reaches into the past, and can be better understood in relation to the idea of LaCapra's "blank utopia". When events have not been experienced directly, a perception is formed: "when absence itself is narrativized, it is perhaps necessarily identified with loss (for example, the loss of innocence, full community, or unity with the mother)" (LaCapra, 2001, p49). García, in narrating Chen Fang's perspective, possibly underlines her own utopian vision as an author, which emphasises that rearticulating and recovering particular patterns and traces of the past is essential to moving beyond totalitarian communism and Western imperialism.

However, Chen Fang's sense of belonging is imagined, as her double displacement, through being "outside" her gender and "outside" her roots, means she aspires to be somewhere she has never been before, with people she has never known and who may no longer be there.<sup>36</sup> She is an outcast from the nation of China, but she also symbolises, through her family connections to Cuba and the US, a wider diaspora at a global level. These connections are

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<sup>36</sup> Anderson's discussion centers around the idea that nations are "imagined" because they are based on an idea of shared community among groups of people who do not know each other.

created through a network of family memories which are mediated through her gender and transmitted through a food language that give an idea of abundance and prosperity: fish rains from the sky in Cuba, and seeds are planted and become green overnight (MH, p92). The sense of belonging to her transnational family is developed through the images she sees at Dauphine's house, while the "Western" foods she eats trigger memories of an imagined community. Here, food not only mediates but also remediates memory, creating new versions of an imagined past and possible futures. Chen Fang's story is sutured into a wider family history of migration that belongs to the Caribbean and that finds its cornerstone in Cuba, moving like a magnet between versions of the past that are constantly remediated by the characters in the novel. Chen Fang is a migrant and, more importantly, a female migrant; the gender aspect acquiring more weight than her nationality. The fact that her family, her Chinese and Afro-Cuban kin, were involved in Cuba's political landscape during the Ten Years' War, the Vietnam War and the Cuban Revolution, becomes an inspiration for Chen Fang, who believes she has done nothing that could be considered worthy of admiration. Chen Fang tries to make sense of her own life as a woman through her memories of her Afro-Cuban and Chinese family at different intersections where loss and absence, transformed into utopia, unite versions of the past that connect her own story in a diasporic experience that transcends borders. Through Chen Fang's eyes, we are able to see how she lives in both "territories", the double vision of being at once a woman and a man. She is persecuted by the East for being a follower of the Western way of life.

The Western set up in Shanghai, and Chen Fang's affiliation to the bourgeoisie and capitalism, which are expressed through themes of consumption, precede the beginning of Chen Fang's decline, when "mostly, all foods taste the same" (MH, p149), leading on to her persecution and imprisonment under Mao's Cultural Revolution. Chen Fang explains that "When the Communists took over, they threw out the foreign teachers [for] burdening the students with alien ideas" (MH, p227). At first, Chen Fang is allowed to stay on, and does her

best to “implement the policies imposed upon us by Party officials” (MH, p227) but she ends up being accused of favouring the children of Chinese capitalists and introducing the students to “contaminating foreign authors (Kipling, Dickens, Flaubert)” (MH, p228). Chen Fang is beaten with sticks by her own students, assigned to work in a factory, and finally imprisoned. During her incarceration, she also discovers that the baby she gave birth to years ago in rural China and then left behind has become one of Mao’s followers. Here, we see reconfirmed the idea that women are betrayed by the same system into which they are inserted socially – a paradox whereby women are unable to help themselves because they are the very procreators of the injustice that imprisons them. Chen Fang also discovers that the son she left with her mother-in-law has “made his reputation running an important southern province. A reputation, no doubt, built on corpses” (MH, p230). These corpses contaminate the water, thus having a direct physical impact on Chen Fang, forcing her to collect rainwater in cooking pots (MH, p148). At the start of the novel her grandfather Chen Pan is convinced by the manipulative recruiter, the man wearing a “Western-style suit”, to leave China because the “drinking water in Cuba was so rich with minerals that a man had twice his ordinary strength” (MH, p5), and the symbology of water as a force of vitality outside China is here reinforced by the danger it represents to Chen Fang, creating a circularity between Chen Pan’s desire for better opportunities, ultimately achieved, and his granddaughter’s thwarted dreams and fate of imprisonment.

Her inability to completely fit into the female framework has made Chen Fang unable to bear and raise her own son, thus turning him into a tyrant:

In China, they say the greatest glory for a woman is to bear and raise sons for the future. So where, I ask, is my place? I am neither woman nor a man, but a stone, a tree struck

by lightning long ago. Everything that has followed since counts for nothing. (MH, p149)

Chen Fang's gender fluidity, borne within a framework of inflexibility, results in the following paradox: "What would become of him if it were known that his mother was a traitor? Would he have to shoot me to prove his allegiance to the Revolution?" (MH, p231).

The loss of her son feeds into the absence of a family history with which she can identify, thus creating a utopian idea of a community that she has never visited. Chen Fang's past as a "male" rather than a "female" links to her detachment from her child, over whom she believes she has lost control. Chen Fang's story ends with her being incarcerated indefinitely, yet imagining a future in Cuba with her father, in Havana, still a city of unfulfilled dreams and freedom. From there, she imagines she will have the courage to write to her son in Shanghai (MH, p233). Severed from her family ties (both father and son) because she is a woman, yet with a perspective modified precisely because she was brought up as male, her desire to be reconnected to both highlights the paradox of women as mothers and their role within the community and in the nation itself. Their gender is simultaneously a reason for them to be celebrated and inscribed in the memory of a nation, and a basis on which to restrict them socially (Paletshcek and Schraut, 2008).

In understanding issues relating to her gender, Chen Fang looks for resolution in her family history as the granddaughter of Chen Pan and Lucrecia, and Cuba becomes a destination which she dreams about as a place of freedom. Both she and her grandfather are attracted by the myth of the Cuban nation, where fish fell from the sky, an example of how myths act as a nation-building strategy in order to attract migrants. Chen Fang has an Afro-Cuban heritage that she can reach back into through her memories, such as trips to take "coconut balls or fried pork rinds" to the goddess Yemayá (MH, p127). In this way, she is able to reduce the

geographical distances created through space, and create a landscape of her own through her gender displacement. This displacement is brought about by women as much as by men, which creates a sense of the circularity of never-ending injustice.

García also shows her opposition to communist tyranny in her depictions of Chen Fang. Chen Fang is a teacher in China, and opposes the communist regime during the Cultural Revolution because she is a believer in openness of thought and in teaching foreign writers. The government accuses her of “working for French intelligence” and “engaging in decadent behaviour with the enemy” (MH, p229). As a result, Chen Fang’s own students are allowed to “beat [her] with sticks” (MH, p228), while the only student who is supportive of her is “sent to a labor camp in Manchuria. No one knows what has become of her” (MH, p230). Chen Fang’s refusal to support the Revolution is a stand against the regime’s authoritarian vision. Chen Fang says: “The new generation, I fear, is largely without history or culture, boys and girls weaned only on slogans. Guns have taken the place of intellect. In the old days, it was not unusual for millers to blind the mules they used to turn their grindstones. Is this what we have become? A country of blind mules?” (MH, p227-228).

First and foremost, Chen Fang is persecuted for being a woman, and this persecution originates from the women in her own family. García’s inclusion of a Cuban social minority, the Chinese community, juxtaposed with the Afro-Cuban majority, creates a comparison where the conclusion is that women in both communities suffer. Where a loss of “blood” parallels the loss or erasure of cultural memory, we see how women become celebrated societal elements that promote that change: in Mao’s China, women are upheld as equal, but only if they serve the purposes of creating the new idea of nation, otherwise they are persecuted and starved. To perform a grand gesture of participating, as men would, in revolutions, and to thus be remembered and commemorated, incurs a sacrifice. Being a woman who makes choices, and thus does not conform to the gender framework, means not having the opportunity to be part

of “history”, and such a woman is therefore forgotten and excluded from the historical narrative, relegated to a space of nonhistory. This voicelessness is rectified by García, who revisits and reconstructs this non-historical void. Édouard Glissant, among others, has noted the Caribbean writer’s role in a mission to reconstruct a past from the void left by Western historians, and revising the West’s account of the history of the Caribbean. However, as Andrea O’Reilly Herrera (1997) states, women were marginalised from political and economic events. They were relegated to an ahistorical space both within and outside the Caribbean.

In their introduction to *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature* (1990), Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory underline the fact that women and their points of view are typically absent from Caribbean literature and the creation of history. They state:

By voicelessness, we mean the historical absence of the woman writer’s text: the absence of a specifically female position on major issues such as slavery, colonialism, decolonization, women’s rights and more direct social and cultural issues. By voicelessness we also mean silence: the inability to express a position in the language of the ‘master’ as well as the textual construction of woman as silent. Voicelessness also denotes articulation that goes unheard. In practical terms, it is characterized by lack of access to the media as well as exclusion from critical dialogue [...] The Caribbean woman writer has been historically silenced in the various ‘master discourses’. (Boyce Davies and Savory, 1990, p1)

Through women, García offers a new perspective of the events of the Cuban Revolution, and thus suggests new ways of understanding the events of the upheaval, through the lives of the women in her novels. Through the Cuban Revolution, García also offers a revisioning of the wider effects of colonisation – creating a parallel between the violence of the Revolution and of colonialism since the arrival of Columbus in 1492. Her vision centres the lives of women



who have adapted to the Revolution and have established patterns of communication through violence, diaspora and exile. The private and the public, the individual and the collective, are interwoven through García's retelling. The Revolution has separated women from the rest of their families, as we see in *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Agüero Sisters* as well as in *Monkey Hunting*. Chen Fang is separated in more ways than one, through how she is treated as a woman and how this separation from her family leads to a reflection on her wider separation from the family in Cuba that she has never met. Thus, there is a connection between Chen Fang's immediate context and the wider backdrop, a disconnect between the private and the public, the individual and the collective, where the link is provided by consumption and food. The generation who find themselves receptors of those experiences which they did not directly experience, those who were affected, but not in the same way as their grandparents, are in a unique position to offer a viewpoint. García's narrative proposes that this generation's view is just as valid as the memories offered by the generation that lived through the events, as suggested by Chen Fang's experience, distorted by her enforced gender change to fit the needs of society. By creating a connection between the private domestic sphere and the public, and elevating women as active figures in the context of historical events, García offers an alternative to a Western discourse that has patriarchy at its centre and which relegates women to the margins and to nonhistory. Through the trope of the divided family, García offers a historical perspective on the nonhistory that the Caribbean in general, and Cuba in particular, has undergone since its initial encounter with colonialism (Glissant, 1989). Through the parallel with Mao's Revolution, there is an echo of the failure of the Cuban Revolution and the sense loss and frustration that many Cubans experience at various stages as they become increasingly disillusioned with Castro's regime.

## Conclusion

*Monkey Hunting* explores how nation building incorporates institutions that systematically repress women and perpetuate traditions that aim at female oppression through pre-arranged unions, excluding women from education and enforcing physical practices that seek to constrain the female form (e.g. foot binding). Across different locations, it is possible to compare different scenarios experienced by García's female characters, and understand that, in whatever version of the past the novel chooses to focus on, their realities share an experience of powerlessness that is inscribed in rituals that encompass a struggle for change. By positioning Chen Fang's experience within a wider transnational community, *Monkey Hunting* provides an insight into how food can mediate gender formations and transformations. Within these transformations we are able to see certain discourses, ones that uphold gender hierarchies.

*Monkey Hunting* makes clear the ways in which Jan Vansina's floating gap is widened and narrowed by a food-memory language that brings to the fore the individual and the collective, gender, and the need to be part of a shared culture, specifically, part of a national discourse that excludes women as a founding principle except in their vital reproductive role.<sup>37</sup> Female characters who create lives for themselves as individuals attempt to move beyond the collective erasure of women enforced by national discourses and become "reborn". However, none of these women succeed, and the only character who manages to be "born again" is Chen Pan, after nine months in the wild following his escape from slavery and through his ritualistic consumption of a *jutía*. In contrast, Chen Fang and other female characters are violently reinstated to their original positions by consumption rituals. Stuck within gender frameworks, the structures that create a social state that upholds traditional hierarchies continue to be

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<sup>37</sup> Jan Vansina's floating gap theory proposes the existence of a space in constant flux between communicative and cultural memory.

reinforced by women, strengthening the position of men through the memory of heterosexual discourses (Butler, 1997, p135).

The ingredients of *ajiaco* are supposed to represent all aspects of Cuban culture, with an emphasis on the incorporation of minority populations such as the Asian community. It is precisely these “globally” less visible elements, compared to the African and the European in the Caribbean dynamic, that parallel the most repressed individuals: the women of García’s stories. Their invisibility is made more apparent in this context. Cuba is the central connecting element between the main character, Chen Pan, who migrates to Cuba, and his granddaughter, Chen Fang, who never leaves China. The concentricity of Chen Fang’s “gender narrative” reflects a Caribbean dynamic involving a circularity of movement, sometimes real and sometimes illusory. Chen Fang is, in fact, punished for being a female who does not know her own “gender rules” because her mother brought her up as a boy in order to “comply” with societal expectations. Though she never leaves China, Chen Fang is the moving point connecting a wider transnational family that embodies the possibilities of the Caribbean. Lucrecia and Chen Fang’s positions as wives and mothers demonstrate how the memory within gender frameworks exerts control over gender roles. Food-memory language here stresses the part that women play in paradoxically assisting in the construction of nations that tie them into the divisions between traditional male and female roles.

Chen Fang exemplifies a gender change induced by cultural convictions that are influenced by the material conditions of the present, and that contrast with established gender roles and claim a fluidity that also corresponds to the fluidity of memory. Chen Fang’s re-interpretation of historical memory occurs from within the realm of gender, and is exemplified through rituals of consumption that are established as a food-memory language through which we can observe a framework for gender roles. To become a symbol of resistance, she must return to being female and being incarcerated. This circularity is a prison that is dictated by

men, in which to do anything noteworthy one needs to be male, and therefore to be born female means necessarily to “become” male. Although to be of service to the nation you must be female, being female leads to oppression, so it is sociably desirable to be born male. The feasting (at Chen Fang’s birth), and the scarcity of food (during her imprisonment), are rituals of consumption that act as signs of both freedom and constraint. An understanding of gender in memory must include a consideration of material conditions: it is Chen Fang’s mother who decides on her daughter’s gender change, due to hunger. Her gesture is a submission to a male-dominated framework that both includes and excludes her. Female auto-exclusion, consolidated by rituals of consumption, is the darkness that provides a new perspective on these food-based acts between members of a particular society, which have always tended to be considered as positive.

Where the boundaries of territory end, and where gendered boundaries begin, demonstrates “an order” that goes beyond geography, working to uphold a patriarchal ideology. The structure is upheld by systems of gender and the birth and rebirth of memories as the enforcers of a “normality” tied into consumption rituals that undermine the position of women through the institutionalisation of those practices. Consumption, as a ritual, is structured in a gendered way that parallels the structure of nation building in the way it incorporates what is necessary to its ideology and expels the superfluous. García, by including transnational perspectives through her characters’ memories, enables the boundaries established by nations to be overcome. This in turn, via food-memory language, facilitates a more fluid understanding of the role of women in memory.

Food-memory language draws our attention to the ways in which we remember, and by exposing gender frameworks it also provides us with a record of how we remember. Food rituals have the power to unite the “here” and “there” of the floating gap, highlighting a gendered imbalance. Ingrained rituals of remembering allow gendered memories to continue

into the present: a reminder of women's inferiority in society. Though women appear to have the opportunity to re-interpret male-dominated historical discourse subversively, this still occurs within an oppressive framework. The fact that Chen Fang's mother has the "power" to change her own baby's gender, only to reverse this when she reaches a marriageable age, points on the one hand to the "expendability" of gender, and on the other to the fact that gender is determinative for Chen Fang, instilling a tension between an ideal vision of gender as fluid and a societal vision that reinforces strict binaries. Being female is subservient to a cause that goes beyond the individual; it serves a perceived societal need, adapting to a gender framework in which male hierarchy prevails. The darkness resides in how rituals of consumption render visible, and societally acceptable, the lack of control that women have over their own bodies, simply because they are women. Societal constraints are exemplified by the material memory matter of consumption rituals, and where there is female subversion it is nonetheless inscribed within male frameworks of power. The storyline of Chen Fang's move to Shanghai, and the events that take place there, make clear that she is carrying within her a new space created by her transitions between genders and cultures. This new space is turned into a physical reality in García's fourth novel, in which a hotel becomes a parallel for a new territory, where migrants embody an illusion of permanence within a space of transition.

#### **IV. Memories in Transit: The Dead Can Talk in García's *The Lady Matador's Hotel***

*The Lady Matador's Hotel* (2010) continues with the idea of rituals of consumption by immediately introducing the reader to the character of Suki Palacios, who uses such rituals to try to determine the outcome of her bullfights. If Chen Fang's destiny was dictated by the social injustices that are ingrained within the rituals of food and drink, Suki, conversely, appears to be fully in control of the implicit societal rules which she believes always lead to her success in the ring. She is the Lady Matador the title refers to, a Japanese-Mexican-American bullfighter who is introduced at the start of the novel as she dresses for a fight, proposing to make "death most eloquent" (LMH, p209) by killing a bull. She comes from Los Angeles, and appears to be above any restrictions that apply to the other women portrayed by García. She embodies the epitome of masculinity as a bullfighter, and states that "ritual is everything" (LMH, p5). One of her rituals involves eating imported pears before her fights, depicted as a luxury that not many others can afford in the unnamed Central American location where the novel is set. Suki has inherited both her looks and her trade from her grandfather, a world-famous matador known as El Azteca, and García's fourth novel poses the question of how the dead can communicate through the memory of violent events. Suki conveys a sense of the cyclical violence of history through generations by following in her grandfather's footsteps. A preoccupation with death characterises and affects all six of the novel's main characters, whose lives are intertwined through the corridors and rooms of the luxury Hotel Miraflor, whose unspecified location contributes to the sense of ambiguity and in-betweenness which characterises the novel. The characters who inhabit the hotel are continuously drawn to the magnetic Suki, the living focal point towards which they gravitate like moths, though they are never able to get close enough to touch her. She is a woman who defies death, a living and breathing example of the performative role of fighting for glory, attracting and inspiring both

the highest forms of respect and more basic carnal desires in others. Portrayed by García at the beginning of the novel as breaking with tradition as a bullfighter, by the end she perpetuates an established tradition of violence, confined within the perimeters of the bullfighting ring.

As well as Suki, the novel features a multicultural mix of characters, each with their own trajectory and personal narrative, but the text itself has no central plot to speak of. This factor contributes to a feeling of suspension; the focus is on how different cultures coexist rather than solely on the actions of the characters. Apart from Suki Palacios, the main characters include Gertrudis Stüber, a lawyer of German origin who uses the hotel as a base for her “export” business involving babies sired specifically for adoption by US parents. This adoption process is what attracts Ricardo Morán, a Cuban exile and poet, and his American wife Sarah, a pastry chef, to the hotel. We also meet Won Kim, a Korean businessman who owns a local textile factory: his workers are on strike, and his teenage mistress Berta is pregnant and waits for him in the Miraflores’s honeymoon suite. Aura Estrada, a waitress and vengeful ex-guerrilla, and Colonel Martín Abel, the organiser of a military conference taking place at the hotel, are the two most closely connected characters, as Colonel Abel was responsible for Aura’s younger brother’s death during a civil war. Thus, García brings together in one location histories of fracture and dislocation that highlight complicated interactions within a global network. The Miraflores is inhabited by characters who, in following their own destinies, forget their place within a larger context. The hotel functions as a narrative space that, while detached from its environment, also imposes a network of communication, and I will argue that this occurs through consumption. *The Lady Matador’s Hotel* considers a more extended vision of global politics compared to the Cuban-American focus of García’s earlier books, and the author’s exploration of uneasy social structures through the culinary acquires new dimensions in the context of this book.

The Western and non-Western protagonists render the hotel a modern melting pot of different identities, where lives cross and intersect to create new “existences”, quite literally through the sale of babies to mainly US-based adoptive parents. This suggests, of course, that although the hotel may be a melting pot, different power dynamics and privileges remain strongly in play. The hotel is a modern space, but at its “periphery” is a sugar plantation. Past and present, time and space, clash with and confront each other within the boundaries of the hotel and its surroundings.

García focuses on the trauma of exile for those who have had to flee their home countries because of revolutions and economic despair. Her characters are doubly displaced: far away from home, they are having to navigate different temporalities in a way that makes clear the debilitating process immigrants experience whilst also dealing with issues of identity. The hotel as a space highlights contrasting scenarios: chance encounters but also the connections between the hotel and what lies beyond it. There is a degree of freedom within the hotel that allows it to function as an apparently independent microcosm, but it is still dependant on the outside world.

The periphery of the Miraflor, from where babies are taken to be sold in the hotel lobby, recalls the sugar plantations in the idea of incorporating outside elements, literally new blood in the form of the illegal trade in babies, to form part of what will be commercialised as a product to be traded and profited on. The parallel with slavery is evident in García’s portrayal of the hotel, a modern version of the now-obsolete hacienda. It is an old-style structure surrounded by peripheral, forgotten local inhabitants who provide the means through which the characters can trade, eat, earn, and live. From the hotel roof, it is possible to view the capital city of the unnamed country, and to see the backstreets and alleys of the land inhabited by those who are too poor to fight for their basic human rights but who provide, quite literally, “life” in the form of newborns to those who are fortunate enough to be able to afford a different type of



existence in the US. The hotel is a through zone, a pick-up place, where the characters reconvene, rest, and retire from public life; here, they display themselves at both their best and their worst.

The characters and their relationships with each other provide an opportunity to look at how concepts of cultural memory and ideas of space work together in the novel to create a modern day parallel between slavery in the sugar plantations and Western spaces of consumption. Layers of time and space form and interact through the characters' memories and their experiences of the events that led to their stay at the Mirafior. In this sense, García's hotel is comparable to Ortiz's *ajiaco* metaphor. However, García's version of the metaphor displays how anxiety takes hold of the characters through the coexistence of different layers of experiences, or ingredients, "trapped" by the boundaries of the pot that contains them. In Cuba, as well as the rest of Latin America, *ajiaco* is the name given to several types of dish from the intertropical region which have *aji*, chillies, as one of their ingredients. Methods of preparing *ajiaco* vary depending on where it is made, but it is a constructed recipe that can have boundaries anywhere.

This argument will be explained through a framework that is reliant on Marc Augé's concept of "non-places", where the anxiety of globalisation is tied to a new way of thinking about the contemporary world, and where forms of modernity involve the preservation of multiple temporalities. Specifically, Augé's non-places are anthropological spaces of transience, where human beings remain anonymous; they are places that do not hold enough significance to be regarded as "places". His concept of "supermodernity" is based around three "figures of excess" that characterise contemporary life: time, space and the individual. Similarly, Ortiz's metaphor of *ajiaco*, based on colonisation and subsequent globalisation, reflects a desire to incorporate a multilayering of times and spaces where the individual becomes a reflection of the collective and contains these aspects of decentring within the

boundaries of a “pot”. Augé’s idea that “any representation of the individual is also a representation of the social link consubstantial with him” (Augé, 1995, p16) can help to make sense of the context of *ajiaco* and its connection to the sugar plantations. These were also sites which brought together the rootless migrants transposed by Ortiz into the rootless ingredients that make up his metaphor: his effort to represent the variety of cultures that constitute Cuban identity. The areas around the Hotel Miraflor are places of transition for the children destined to be sold off in the hotel, but they remain sites of violent permanence for those who live there. In the same way, sugar plantations aimed to generate a product that relied on oppression and violence for the purpose of exportation and profit, making them both sites of transition and sites of permanent violence.

Non-places are sites of “transition”, which constitute the essence of Ortiz’s pot and García’s hotel, but whose existence depends on painful sacrifices. Barthes’ theory that food products carry within them the “process” of their production, when applied to the *ajiaco* metaphor, can assist in the interpretation of the “rotting” ingredients at the bottom of the pot as non-places, sites where suffering is silenced. It was not the final result that led Ortiz to see Cuba in the *ajiaco* pot, but the cooking process: varied cuts of meat disintegrating after a long simmer, with vegetables and spices added at certain intervals to create new flavours and textures, a “constant cooking” that was always evolving, creating something new but also something in a state of decomposition.

And there, at the bottom of the pot, is a new mass already settled out, produced by the elements that, when they disintegrated in the historic boil, were laying down as sediments their most tenacious essences in a rich and deliciously-garnished mixture. It already has its own character of creation. *Mestizaje* of kitchens, *mestizaje* of races,

mestizaje of cultures. Dense broth of civilization that boils up on the Caribbean cookfire... (Ortiz, 2014, pp462-463)

These ingredients are an additional dimension that always remains, contributing to the outcome of the process with harmful, silent components. Transposed to García's hotel, that dimension is the basement of Hotel Miraflores – specifically the kitchen – where a victim of revolutionary violence makes a poison which is then sent up through the various floors of the building with the intention to contaminate the perpetrator of that violence.

### **Hotel and Hacienda: Gertrudis Stüber**

In the novel, Gertrudis Stüber resides in a hacienda, where she takes her morning coffee and biscotti. A hacienda is a type of large, landed estate system which originated in Latin America during the colonial period. The Spanish Crown first started granting land in the form of haciendas to conquistadors such as Hernán Cortés, who in 1529 was the first to be given land in an area that is now part of Mexico. In the Caribbean, haciendas were developed primarily as sugar plantations. Gertrudis observes as gardeners work her land, ensuring that it yields enough to “bring in a tidy profit” (LMH, p107), and this is not her only income: she also sells babies from families living in the areas around the hacienda to couples who come mainly from the US. The link between the commodification of babies and that of enslaved people is clear as Gertrudis goes from home to home on the estate, taking the babies from the community in exchange for money. Works such as a Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery Passage* (2007) and Walter Johnson's *Soul by Soul* (2001) document the process through which enslaved people were transformed into a commodity, taken from their homes to a new existence. To commodify is to recognise someone or something as a product that can be bought or sold, and for the enslaved, considered objects of trade, this process entailed being stripped

of all human signifiers and being treated as a marketable product. Enslaved people were not considered to be human beings, and were legally a form of property, a commodity. Both as individuals and as a collective, they were used in business transactions and were traded for other kinds of goods and services. As Smallwood argues:

Always doubling back on return voyages, ships made loops and spirals as they carried the commodities that sustained transatlantic markets: gold and silver, sugar and tobacco, rice and coffee, woolens and silks, cottons and linens, wine, brandy, and rum, muskets and gunpowder ... and captive people. Unlike the ships, which plied back and forth, though, the human commodities followed a relentlessly linear course: the direction of their transatlantic movement never reversed. Ships traced circles, commodities travelled in a straight line. For people who traveled not as emigrants seeking new lives in new places but as commodities, transatlantic exile admitted none of the return journeys, correspondence and other means of contact [...]. (Smallwood, 2007, p6)

Smallwood's study demonstrates the mechanisms and sources by which enslaved people became a market commodity, primarily in mid 19th century Virginia. The market made it possible for those who held people in slavery to detach themselves from the immorality involved in treating people as commodities.

Gertrudis also attempts to separate herself from acts that are objectively amoral. As with the reference to the pear that Suki eats, the use of the European term "biscotti" is significant in drawing attention to the fact that, though she resides within the same geographical boundaries, there is something about Gertrudis that sets her apart from the other characters. What Gertrudis consumes sets her apart from the rest: biscotti, an imported food as is clear

from the name, are consumed by Gertrudis but not by the people who work for her, who are fighting for basic rights such as a decent place to live. García uses food as a marker of difference linked to a preoccupation with unscrupulous profiteering, which, as detailed from the start, is mirrored by the hacienda itself. The borders around Gertrudis's estate are guarded by sentries with machine guns. She orders her car to be brought to her, and the walls of her house are festooned with barbed wire which resembles "a widow's stiff lace" (LMH, p108). Gertrudis takes on the role of the harsh plantation owner transposed to a modern context. She is an anachronism, and this notion is reinforced when she notices that the sentry's clock is three minutes late: "'Fix it,' she orders him" (LMH, p108). Though Gertrudis operates in modern times, a version of slavery is still alive here. As she leaves the estate, she sees people holding up signs demanding better working conditions, such as fewer hours and more benefits, but Gertrudis has no time to "disabuse [them]" (LMH, p109). These lands skirt the capital city, and are full of shacks built from tin and wood, with no plumbing. It is from here that Gertrudis takes babies from families who are too poor to refuse the offer of land in return.

García emphasises through Gertrudis the violence of the perpetuation of Ortiz's concept of *transculturación* by showing how she takes the children of native Latin American women and sells them to North American couples. She is well connected with the military, and she works hard to "keep relations with the army exceedingly supple" (LMH, p112) to ensure that she encounters no obstacles to her activity. The "selling" takes place in the hotel lobby or atrium, both in-between places, where she also networks to ensure the success of her trade (LMH, p52). These locations act as a half public, half private, space. It is here that Gertrudis runs a marketplace that sells children for \$30,000, human lives exchanged like inanimate commodities, against the backdrop of a more socially accepted marketplace made up of shops. She is seen making her way through the lobby, which is full of military men, and an association is created between the different types of "trading" taking place, both using the non-Western

world as a source of new “blood” to support their future (LMH, p14). The hotel is liminal because it exists between home and non-home, allowing for the internalisation and internationalisation of frontier spaces. Existing in an in-between space, the hotel becomes a structure within which it is possible to behave in different ways to how one would behave either outside or within the home.

Tallack’s definition of the lobby as a “semi-public” space can be applied to García’s use of the hotel. He states that to consider spaces contained in the hotel to be “private” must presuppose that there are different degrees of privacy, if compared to spaces in a home (Tallack, 1998, p6). The more public a space is, the greater the likelihood that staff will be present, and the less privacy is available. The restaurant presents an exception, however, in that the act of eating is private and public at the same time. It is within the boundaries of the restaurant, in fact, that García continues with her metaphors of consumption. Once acquired, the babies are shown off by their new mothers in the hotel eatery, turning it into a stage where purchasing power is performed (LMH, p81). Two of these new parents are Ricardo and Sarah, who are picking up their adopted baby. Sarah is a pastry chef in New York, and Ricardo is presented as a victim of her bad temper. Disaster, in Sarah’s world, is “a fallen soufflé, a shortage of Belgian chocolate, an electric mixer on the fritz” (LMH, p22), and Ricardo questions her ability to look after children. García implies that Ricardo will be the main caregiver, since he is already a father, although he was forced to abandon his daughter following exile from Cuba and this provides a subversion of traditional roles. He remembers the misery of Cuba, his almost deadly exodus from the island to Florida, and his loneliness in New York, taking orders from his wife, who treats him as she would one of her kitchen staff. García provides a view of subverted domestic life in which we can observe a separation between Ricardo’s and Sarah’s experiences via food-related incidents. Sarah complains about breakfast pastries made with lard that are “barely suitable for doorsteps” (LMH, p23), while Ricardo’s hunger for them creates memories

of his own mother's excessive cravings for food that became harder and harder to find in Revolutionary Cuba: "breadfruit, palomilla steak, chow mein [...] her longings grew more varied and virulent with each passing year" (LMH, p23). Following the description of his relationship with Sarah, Ricardo sees Suki on TV, a vision of strength and arrogance, and this further diminishes his own sense of masculinity (LMH, p64).

García makes clear that there is a lack of communication between Ricardo and Sarah which extends to the cultural level, where the US is regarded as devoid of spirituality. When Ricardo wants to comment on how the baby's feet remind him of Chinese women's "bound 'lotuses'", he does not bother, since "if it can't be measured, kneaded or put in the oven, she isn't interested" (LMH, p24). Ricardo's sense of loss is expressed through food: "Ricardo wants fried plantains, but they are not available" (LMH, p25). A narrative based on loss continues outside of the boundaries of the hotel. As Ricardo expresses his political views to a vendor about how communism is not an adequate solution to help the poor, the watch he has just bought stops: "As he's winding it, the screw comes off, freezing the hour forever at twelve minutes after six" (LMH, p27). This image conveys the idea of an individual's perspective having an "influence" on time, the body being a centre for action, a creator, "the brain [determining] the representation of the whole material world" (Bergson, 1908, p7). Furthermore, if the body's surroundings reflect its possible actions upon them, then we are able to see the significance of García's reference to time stopping, which can be interpreted in this context as a moment in which a significant transition occurs, one that is relived over and over again. Ricardo takes the chance he is given to relive fatherhood, and in the concluding part of the book, entitled "The Border", he takes the baby with him on a bus towards the outskirts of the city. This escape sends the message that though he may not believe in communism, he also does not believe in the Western way of life.

If Gertrudis, by feeding the centre with new life from the periphery, is presented as the figure who transfers past versions of slavery into a present characterised by neo-slavery, then Sarah is her exemplary consumer. She purchases a child from Gertrudis, but is also, as a pastry chef, closely associated in the novel with sweetness and sugar, creating a parallel with the sugar plantations and a marked contrast with Cuban Ricardo's experiences of hunger and exile. Her Western wealth allows her to treat human life as a commodity just as sugar planters did the enslaved. Time freezes, both figuratively and literally, through watches and clocks stopping or running late, and the reader has the impression that much has remained unchanged within the boundaries of the hacienda estate. Through the German Gertrudis, García creates a link to the German colonisation of Latin America. This link to a colonial past becomes part of the present day in a decentred, yet strongly connected and prosperous location which injects new blood through oppressive means. Those who can afford it profit from this new blood: this is the Western part of the world, represented by Sarah. Time "stops" and "starts", reproducing versions of slavery in different patterns over time, all of which carry the core defining characteristics of oppression and violence. Time as a structure that conveys a set of attributes or a legacy can also be seen through the character of Won Kim.

### **Won Kim**

The hotel offers a refuge for Won Kim, on the wrong side of the fence from what would be considered socially acceptable at his age: having a child out of wedlock with a teenage girl. The hotel represents a limbo, an in-between space that even protects him from the law. Through the eyes of Won Kim, the hotel is thus simultaneously a place of freedom and a carceral space. He spends his time mainly in the honeymoon suite, where he continues an illicit liaison with Berta, a young Mexican girl. His dissatisfaction with life, and the additional stress of Berta's pregnancy, lead him to think constantly about committing suicide. We are shown his true nature



through the manner in which he discusses the possibility of abandoning Berta if she gives birth to a girl. Should she give birth to a son, however, he would feel obligated to take him to Korea, to arrange to have him raised as his own. If the boy resembles him, all the better; the nature of his conception would not matter: “A boy, *his* boy, after a generation of girls. What choice would they have?” (LMH, p21). There is a superficiality to his mode of thinking rendered through the medium of food, as he alternates between thoughts of suicide and the everyday choices that are available at the hotel: “They have waffles today” (LMH, p21). He expresses a preference for “American-style breakfasts; pancakes and bacon, mounds of scrambled eggs and toast, washed down with large volumes of orange juice and coffee”, whilst observing, with criticism: “There are dozens of them [Americans] speaking loudly from Spanish phrase books, scooping up the country’s children, like so many souvenirs” (LMH, p21).

Contradictions define this character, as we see how he is also torn between the US and Korea through food as opposite lifestyles clash: “A man planning suicide should not be thinking of his stomach, he scolds himself, but he cannot help it” (LHM, p61). In a scene in the hotel elevator, he sees Suki, whom he has just seen on TV (LMH, p17), breaking the rules by smoking a cigar in the hotel. He wonders how much it would cost to sleep with her, and we understand that this character is unable to control the fact that he views women as disposable. The reader is reminded of this on multiple occasions via the different media through which Won Kim views women. He is stuck in a loop where he contemplates suicide every morning, and when he enters the elevator, a transitory element within the wider transitory metaphor of the hotel, he sees his own mirror image, a “colourless, lifeless, already dead” version of himself (LMH, p62). The Cuban exile Ricardo, a stranger to him, also steps into the lift, and in this “inescapable” location states: “our two countries [Cuba and Korea] have much in common. Bitterly divided by politics. Pawns of the United States. I’ve always thought of Cubans as the Koreans of the Caribbean” (LMH, p63). Won Kim feels “attacked” by this statement and the

forced proximity of the elevator space. He is distracted by the Western-style food in the hotel because it appears to provide a refuge from stifling or unfulfilling relationships. Torn between tradition and modernity, the transient nature of the hotel existence enables Won Kim to avoid the reality of the lack of meaningful personal relationships in his life, providing a temporary illusion of choice, though as can be seen from the elevator scene this is not always possible. He has no desire to engage with the other guests, particularly with their opinions, which he finds intrusive.

It is, in fact, from other people, but also from their own memories, that many of the characters seek refuge, and the hotel provides an opportunity for change, to re-write history again and again, injecting new blood into the *ajiacó* metaphor. García turns this non-place, the elevator, into an opportunity for cultural confrontation between memories linked to different nations that cross over into each other's "space". Augé's theory posits that "supermodernity" produces non-places, unlinked to any previous place, enabling transit points to achieve the "status of 'place of memory'" as a symptom of the "luxurious" (Augé, 1995, p63). The luxury hotel offers the opportunity to witness how locations such as the elevator can become sites where cultural memories ride side-by-side through the floors within the hotel as a metaphor for consumption, a temporary mixture of different perspectives united by luxury. It is possible to observe this in the lobbies and eating areas, where people either consume food or purchase goods, cancelling out the class differences between them through their ability to spend.

The manner in which García locates her characters' memories within a transitional space leads us again to the idea of liminality, which is central to the hotel as a space. The word "liminal" denotes a spatial or temporal zone that exists, as Robert Preston-Whyte suggests, "in a limbo-like space often beyond normal social and cultural constraints" (Preston-Whyte, 2004, p350). In *Rites of Passage*, first published in French in 1908, the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep identifies events such as birth and marriage as "liminal rites" or "rites of transition"

(1908, p27). He sees liminal spaces as physical constructs, and acknowledges the significance of thresholds, doorways and borders in rituals. Van Gennep's ideas on liminality conceive of it as a time or space that is transitory and temporary, with the potential to become a space of anxiety when, for instance, approved norms, behaviours and identities are suspended and thus become uncertain (Van Gennep, 2004, p11). Kim Won's anxiety when confronted by Ricardo in a space they are obliged to share stems from a feeling of entrapment, of powerlessness. They are both guests in the same hotel, they have both paid to be there, they are both in the luxury "pot", and they are therefore forced in some ways to confront each other because the space they are inhabiting at that precise time provides an opportunity for their identities to "interact".

Situated between the capital city, the hacienda, and the surrounding land, the Hotel Miraflor itself exists in a liminal position. From this position it injects darkness into the typical capitalistic space represented by hotels, according to Augé's ideas on "supermodernity". Both public and private, the hotel is comparable in its transience to other modern spaces such as the train station, airport and waiting room, which vary in the degrees of privacy they offer. The hotel provides a higher level of privacy, as it shares many common spaces that are typically present in the home: most hotels have lifts, corridors and balconies, in-between spaces that are characterised by impermanence. There is a complex liminality to the variety of different spaces in the hotel too; the atrium, the lobby, and the bedrooms provide views of various parts of society. Furthermore, as mentioned above, being located between the capital city and the hacienda means that the hotel is a space that exists between locations, where the histories of marginalised people are brought together in spaces that allow for cultural "crossover", or Ortiz's concept of *transculturación*, to take place. Through the take on *transculturación* that emerges through García's work, we see how the characters are never really at home; they live in a state of rootlessness and transience, and their existences are marked by their movement from one "area" of the hotel to the next. Thus, Kim Won's restlessness can be explained

through his lack of control over events in his life, which continues in the hotel setting; even though he has paid extra for a honeymoon suite as his escape route, he will never really be able to get away.

The thresholds between social frameworks cross over and influence each other, just as García's characters, who all have their own private "room" or space in the hotel, cross over into less private spaces that lead to a sharing of ideas, such as the elevator scene, in which characters are exposed to, and influence, one another.

### **Aura Estrada and Colonel Martín Abel**

García's narrative uses food as a language that favours the expression of collective memory over individual experience. In the Miraflores, there is a well organised network of food distribution: room service, bars and the garden restaurant, where different groups of people gather. The mothers-to-be carry out "their mid-morning ritual" (LMH, p81) of ordering pastries and coffee, and talk about children, while, in contrast, attendees at the military conference change what they eat and drink to emulate the most authoritative member of the group, the American military representative Colonel Martín: Bloody Marys and pork chops for everyone. In Aura's view, this uniformity is responsible for much of the pain she, her family, and her nation have lived through: "It's no wonder these officers commit the atrocities they do. Not a single one has a mind of his own" (LMH, p11). This is most apparent when one of the generals uses the food Aura serves to him as a basis for inappropriate comments:

One of the generals sent his [pork chops] back, complaining that they were too tough.

'A sus órdenes,' Aura said, taking his plate. She noticed him noticing her as she walked.

When the pork chops are ready, Aura discreetly spits on them, working in the saliva until they gleam. [...]

'Now they are extra juicy,' he says, giving her a wink.

‘Algo más, General?’

‘Save me some of your most delicious dessert.’ The snub-nosed general says this loud enough for the neighbouring tables to hear. Everyone brays on cue. (LMH, pp7-8)

Aura’s body becomes the food she carries; the general’s comment indicates that she is as desirable an object of consumption as the pork chops she serves. The fact that Aura spits on the meat is a gesture of resistance as a desire for revenge against the collective response of approval to the general’s vulgarity. Aura’s use of food is a form of communication and resistance, woven into the fabric of the hotel’s consumption patterns.

Barthes’ analysis of social coding shows how items of consumption create opportunities for instances of self-performance that are also restrictive. The hierarchy and ritualistic levels that consumption encapsulates is shown through the two groups Aura serves: the adoptive mothers and the attendees at the military conference. The food these groups order is also gendered, and the collective act of eating binds the groups together. In my study of *The Lady Matador’s Hotel*, I consider food to be a medium through which “the dead can speak”, where food is used as a way of transcending restrictive and binding norms. While the novel opens with Suki as a powerful character who seems to be in control of her surroundings and the people around her, Aura is instead portrayed as an apparently helpless character. However, as the story progresses this dynamic is subverted.

In *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), we were able to observe how memories are passed on generationally, from parent to child to grandchild, but also how the trajectory of those memories may vary and “skip” the normal channels of communication. Similarly to the way Pilar’s dreams contain messages from her grandmother in *Dreaming in Cuban*, Aura “speaks” to the ghost of her tortured brother Julio, killed mercilessly during a revolution. Julio’s arrival differs each time: “on a gust of wind, in the plaintive call of a mourning dove, with the shifting whispering leaves” (LMH, p47). The hotel guarantees varying levels of anonymity, and when

Aura receives flowers from Julio, along with a note instructing her to meet him at noon on the rooftop, she does not consider the possibility of the delivery taking place through any means other than the supernatural (LMH, pp46-47). Readers accompany Aura on several secret trips to the hotel's roof, where she brings offerings to her dead brother's ghost: "Her pink-and-white uniform provides the necessary camouflage. No one will question her carrying this tray of sugar buns and tea" (LMH, p47). Communication through food, in these scenarios, transcends the limits of time, space, and social order: Julio's ghost identifies his murderer and leaves Aura with the task of revenge. Thus, the journey into a space that lies beyond the well-organised hotel routine also signifies another transition: Aura the waitress turns back into Aura the guerrillera, beginning a silent operation that undermines the hotel's elaborate narrative system. As Aura carries a tray of sugar buns to the rooftop for her brother, she reflects on how different the city looks from above, the view from the hotel allowing for considerations of social disparities: "If everything were turned upside down, would the people on the bottom end up on top? Not a chance, Aura thinks. The rich would still find a way to reign" (LMH, p46). The horrible memory of her brother's death is followed by her encouraging him to bite into the sugar buns that she has brought him, but she ends up eating them herself. Sugar, here, becomes a mediator between life and death, and Aura feels as though, with each visit, her "brother siphons off another measure of her strength", lost to the memory of past events framed by Cuban war tactics (LMH, p51). A rush of energy from the consumption of sugar seems to provide Aura with an opportunity to reconstruct a memory related to the war through her encounters with her dead brother.

Aura's character is, undoubtedly, strongly connected to sugar. She prepares poison with the aim of killing Colonel Martín, whom she considers responsible for her brother's death. She carries this out in the hotel kitchen in the basement while her assistant eats a "sugar biscuit", adding continuity to the sugary imagery that surrounds her (LMH, p105). As a waitress, Aura

has access to most areas of the hotel: the kitchens, basement, restaurants and terraces. She is in charge of hauling sacks of sugar from the stockroom to the restaurant (LMH, p83) and then serving the processed sugar in its pastry form.<sup>38</sup> Contained within the boundaries of the hotel, it is possible to observe both ends of the spectrum: the unrefined product and the processed result, both handled and delivered by Aura. Aura resents having to wait for her brother to “appear”, and as she smells the sweet fragrance coming from the Tres Leches bakery she ponders on the fact that men are still determining her existence, “only now she’s serving both the living and the dead”(LMH, p152). As Aura decides she must stop “inhabiting the past” (LMH, p152), we see her transitioning to other locations outside the hotel, such as the cinema, where she eats “candy devils”, cakes and sugar buns (LMH, p189). The violence of how sugar is produced is connected to the resurgence of Aura’s memories, and is the reason she brings sugary foods to her dead brother. She consumes the sugar herself, and it coincides with violent and anxiety-provoking memories. Her brother Julio was set alight by an army patrol while he was defending the family’s cornfield. Her mother, after witnessing her son’s death, stopped eating, and Aura’s lover Juan Carlos was blown apart by a land mine. These memories are in some way “activated” by the sugar and in turn trigger violent thoughts through the voice of her brother.

It is indeed sugar which mediates Julio’s encouragement to commit acts of revenge: to avenge his death by murdering a representative of the military. He appears in the restaurant, and he points out who Aura should kill by indicating the food that the person is eating: it is Colonel Martín, one of the men “fussing over their fried pork chops and eggs” (LMH, p6).<sup>39</sup> Colonel Martín is in the Miraflores Hotel for a military convention that he is helping to organise, at which top officials compare notes on how to defeat insurgents, “asserting their political

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<sup>38</sup> Guayaba pastries for the new mothers showing off their babies (LMH, pp81-82).

<sup>39</sup> He points out who he is to her by reminding her of what he ate: “You served him pork chops yesterday [...] Aura tries to pinpoint his face. Then she sees him: yes, the one with the cartoon muscles and sunglasses, sitting with the Americans” (LMH, p50).

relevance, swapping the latest torture and detainment techniques” (LMH, p28). Aura has a physical reaction to the memories of violence and atrocities that surge from her conversation with her brother, and his words follow her: “there’s a place in the universe where memories are written down, where nothing is forgotten” (LMH, p50).<sup>40</sup> When Aura speaks to Julio, time stops, as memories seem to fill gaps in time in a way that does not respect its normal passage: “It’s five minutes to noon. Aura is no longer surprised at Julio’s tricks of time. At least nobody will have missed her in the kitchen” (LMH, p51). Generally, the absence of personal possessions in a hotel creates an anonymity, leading to the conceptualisation of the hotel as a space in which it is possible to avoid memories. In contrast, the tragic events contained in the characters’ pasts – family loss, the deaths of lovers – drive them to the hotel as a place from which to plan revenge. As Aura puts it: “The civil war might’ve ended years ago but the grief, the grief is flourishing still” (LMH, p8).

There is also a sense of anonymity highlighted by the fact that, as “U.S.-trained puppet[s]” (LMH, p10), the soldiers all order the same thing at mealtimes. Although they are in Latin America, where they represent perpetrators of a civil war, they are able to eat pork chops and drink Bloody Marys, “protected” by the hospitality implicit in the concept of hotels. There is a continuous clash and crossover between Aura and the colonel, whose suspicions are constantly aroused by her behaviour: his unsettled stomach sends him messages that are fermenting with a mistrust directed at the “kitchen workers” (LMH, p29). Aura’s role as a waitress allows her to build an intimacy with the very guests she despises, through the ingestion of what some leave behind on the tables. She eats their leftovers while reading their discarded newspapers as a means of incorporating not just their food but also their views on the news that most interests them. She has an ongoing interaction with the president of the Universal Fruit

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<sup>40</sup> “[Aura] recalls the other villagers killed by the captain’s soldiers that day. The thief’s head bashed in with the butt of a rifle. The Gutierrez brothers shot at point-blank range, the baby girl kicked around like a soccer ball in her christening gown” (LMH, p49).



Company, another character she is at odds with, and makes a point of reading his discarded newspaper on her break. She consumes real leftovers most nights (LMH, p10), but also “information” leftovers, reading that the president is supported by the same people who had previously brutalised him (LMH, p9). Though she harbours feelings of hatred for these hotel guests, a one-sided desire for communion and secret revenge leads her to participate in their lives without them knowing.

The Hotel Miraflor is principally a space of consumption in which guests not only pay for a room but also for the service of valets, maids, chefs, waiters, and other staff who are there to attend to their every need. Guests pay for the luxury of having things done for them but, as previously noted, within a space which guarantees an element of trust. The hotel also plays the role of a refuge for those who are displaced or exiled, or for those who have no home to which they can return.<sup>41</sup> It is suspended in time, governed by an “unwritten code” that creates a vulnerability for those who trust this aspect of modernity. Characters such as Aura are constructed by the transient, liminal spaces of the hotel, spaces whose uncertain boundaries are reinforced by the presence of supernatural apparitions. These liminal spaces are where the dead “talk” and memories come to life, prompting the re-enactment of violence and war.<sup>42</sup>

Restaurants are a site of trust, and Aura, though simply employed by the hotel as a waitress, is repeatedly able to use this as a source of power. Aura describes her uniform, a pink

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<sup>41</sup> Such as Aura and her assistant, Miguel, who is also a guerrilla in the guise of a barman. It is when Miguel is introduced that the reader journeys into Aura’s memories of why she became a guerrilla. Miguel’s actions occur within the confines of the hotel, so also within the “field” of consumption, as he admits to dropping a measure of stool hardener into the Americans’ drinks (LMH, p10).

<sup>42</sup> The environment Aura operates in as a waitress is the garden restaurant, which resembles the jungles she lived in for months, “when she’d carry a hunter’s knife and a Russian pistol”.<sup>42</sup> Nobody at the hotel suspects her previous life; they know she suffered in the war, but “in that she’s no different from anyone else” (LMH, p9). Aura refers to the entire country succumbing to a collective amnesia, which she attributes to a society which does not allow people to grow old slowly, implying that upheavals are not pondered exhaustively: “nobody talks of the past, for fear their wounds might reopen” (LMH, p9). What follows is a series of contrasts between anonymity and the collective aspect of the consequences of the war, which is followed by her memories of the contents of the “guerrilla-training” pamphlets printed in Havana, exhorting people to take the revolution into their own hands “*The struggle is your personal burden*” (LMH, p11), and her taking a food order from a North American guest, who wrinkles her nose, as if “disapproving of her choice in advance” (LMH, p12). This interpretation highlights the constant contrast between the individual and the collective and seems to imply, perhaps, that not even the simplest of choices is fully under the characters’ control.

and white apron, as the perfect “camouflage” (LMH, p47) since, as noted by the colonel himself, the hotel is also pink and white (LMH, p90) creating a parallel between the space and those who inhabit it as they become one and the same in the eyes of the consumer. Aura imagines the plate she brings to the table as a discus with sharp edges, able to decapitate the colonel on the spot, while he pats his stomach with satisfaction. She calls him a “butcher” (LMH, p8), and the reader is let into his private thoughts and dreams through Aura, who is able to enter them: he remembers murdering a butcher, a repetition of violent imagery which connects the two characters as she serves his food. Food, though darkened by the shadow of violence, becomes an enabler of the liminal imagined space which unites individuals. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, memories of an idealised Cuba transform food and the cooking process carried out by Celia, as per Vygostsky’s theory. Here, food as an interruption of a social discourse is taken one step further, as Aura’s memories are closely linked to sugar when she remembers her violent past, and sugar is also connected to the murder she will commit because of this. The link to sugar is a direct bridge that incites her to action, and a ruptured existence due to war and violence creates the memories that then lead her to perform an act of violence herself.

Colonel Martín prefers life inside the hotel to that outside, his air-conditioned room to his balcony. From above, Martín “surveys the perimeters of the garden, inspecting every inch of landscape in his view [...] The Miraflores is a fortress, Martín reminds himself” (LMH, p90). It is from here that he can also spy on Suki. He thinks that “only the restaurant ten floors below [...] is vulnerable” (LMH, p90). With regard to the restaurant environment in which Aura operates and where Martín feels exposed, David Sutton’s thoughts are relevant: he defines restaurants as contemporary spaces of social and cultural life, and states that in a capitalist context relationships within the perimeter of the restaurant are “framed by the market” (Sutton, 2007, p3). Modalities of exchange and production are all contained within the idea of

consumption, and restaurants are seen as entities that can challenge these market-based relations by reflecting non-market alternatives through rules relating to gender, class and ethnicity, the private and the public sphere, family and strangers. Sutton also defines restaurants as locations of postmodern performance, and the people in charge of running them as “powerful cultural brokers and potent symbols for protests against a globalised and industrialised food system” (Sutton, 2007, p3). He believes they are highly sensory environments, in which the aim is to shape identities through symbolic processes that embody memory. They may be considered as between nations, on borders, as they represent social relations in different locations.

The restaurant itself becomes a mode of remembering, with García using it as a platform from which to insert adversity into a modern, capitalist context, in this case the hotel, rather than upholding the more common view of restaurants as places where social ties are renewed. As this strand of the story develops, food becomes involved in new practices, from Aura possessing the soldiers by consuming their food to the colonel being psychologically tortured through anonymous gifts of chocolate cake (LMH, p97), orange juice, coffee, bread, and muffins (LMH, p115). The chocolate cake is accompanied by a cryptic letter; the second one the colonel receives. The first says “*My dearest colonel, Soon you will be mine...*” (LMH, p93), and the second warns him “*Our time is growing closer*” (LMH, p97). Planned as an attack on the colonel’s excessive show of masculinity, the messages subvert the typical scenario where men woo women through gifts and confectionary. The gifts are poisoned but not deadly; they serve the purpose of heightening the colonel’s anxiety that his defence system is about to be breached.

The reader is shown a different type of warfare which starts at the beginning of the novel when Aura spits on the general’s pork chops. We also see how the bartender puts “stool hardener in the Americans’ drink” (LMH, p11). The staff abuse the system of trust which

implicitly accompanies the hotel's services and structures. The dangerous and debilitating gifts of food do not kill the colonel, but they weaken him to the point that his defences are lowered, and when Aura enters his room he is no longer able to defend himself.

Aura is tempted to kill the colonel with his own pistol, make the world think he took his life. This is the ultimate humiliation for a military man. Instead she brought a knife from the hotel kitchen. She removes it now from her satchel. It's eight inches long and slightly curved, used for butchering beef and lamb. But the colonel isn't a lamb. He's a killer of children, of brothers and lovers, a destroyer of lives. (LMH, p192)

Aura uses the hotel's appliances to bring down the defences of the Miraflores. By utilising a kitchen knife, she re-establishes the connection between food and violence first set up in the garden restaurant when she comments on how the group of generals order Bloody Marys simply to go along with the American's choices (LMH, p11)

Aura finally manages to kill Colonel Martín, a murder that has its origins in a violence ultimately connected to sugar and its production. Armed with a knife taken from the kitchen, "Aura studies the colonel's face, feels trapped by it, as if in a magnificent empty mirror" (LMH, p193). The mirror conveys the idea that both Aura and Colonel Martín are connected through violence. She sees herself in him; at different points in time both are victims and perpetrators. As she does so, she "enters" his dream to witness his escape on a frozen riverbank thinking he sees the "Viciosa", the ghost of the murdered butcher who was mistakenly killed for being a transvestite and who haunts his dreams. Subverting the earlier comparison of Aura's body to a piece of meat, it is now the colonel who is put in this position, with deadly consequences, as the knife becomes a tool of separation that also unites the different parts of García's narrative. In this way a connection is made between Aura and Suki who, as a matadora, uses a sword to

kill. An association between food and violence materialises through Aura's action against the colonel, closing the space between centre and periphery. Aura's last thought, in fact, sounds like an answer to Suki's final doubts: "The last word in history, she fears, must be fought for again and again" (LMH, p193).

### **Fighting Food Rituals: Suki Palacios**

Suki's stay at the Hotel Miraflor is prompted by a desire to secure an audience for her show. She arrives early for a bullfighting championship, hoping to inspire a "clamoring for blood" in the civil-war shaken country (LMH, p4). We are presented with an ambitious character, interested mainly in marketing herself. Suki's choice of hotel, therefore, is unsurprising in its function of constituting a protected space:

Every window of the hotel looks inward to a crosshatch of courtyards and fountains, banyans and Madeira palms. The pool is visible beneath Suki's window, a glazed and artificial blue. A cascade of bougainvillea brightens the patio. Aviaries with raucous jungle parrots outmatch the mariachis in volume and plumage. (LMH, p4)

Her ritual assists her in creating a routine:

The lady matador devours the sliced pear she ordered, at great expense, from room service. [...] Ritual is everything. Her father, a professional dancer, taught her this. [...] One sliced pear. For extra luck, silent sex with a stranger two nights before a fight. [...] Then in the shadowed moment before she steps into the ring, Suki repeats three words in Spanish and Japanese: *arrogance, honor, death*. (LMH, p5)

Along with Ricardo and Colonel Martín, Won Kim's view of Suki as an object to be dominated contributes to his sense of frustration at the impossibility of being able to possess that "type" of woman. García's depiction of the gendered dynamic sees Suki indifferent to the fact that she is an object of male desire, as she is fully in control of the rituals that determine her success. She is not dependent on men, and her only interest is in winning the bullfights. She refuses to be exploited in any way, and she eats her steak rare, believing that this will make her more powerful than her enemy, the animal she will confront in the ring. The bloody steak can still be categorised as cooked meat, but being able to see the blood is central to an idea which is part of the "core values of western society: of power, of superiority...of civilisation" (Fiddes, 1991, p93). In his book *Meat: A Natural Symbol*, Fiddes underlines that "Bloodshed is central to meat's value" (1991, p65). He also looks at how meat has "long stood for the freedom to exploit freely" (1991, p64), and how it was historically associated with freedom and was not eaten by enslaved people (Twigg, 1983, in Fiddes, 1991, p23). Consumption of meat and tolerance for blood are also characteristics conventionally associated with masculine virility.

Suki knows what she wants: "a simple man, not too intelligent, grateful and discreet" (LMH, p44). She objectifies men, having sex with one and then not wanting to know his name when he tries to tell her. She is an interloper, one of the "scandalous women playing at being men" (LMH, p4). Suki comes from the US to fight in the first Battle of the Lady Matadors in the Americas, but she is half Mexican and half Japanese. She has a ritual that leads to her victory in the ring every time, which includes eating an imported pear. The imported pear is significant because Suki's ambitions as a lady matador depend on a successful ritual made possible through the availability of food products that are more difficult or expensive to import. Augé's suggestions that "every big town is a world" and that "to cross international borders brings no more profound variety than is found walking between theatres on Broadway" (Augé, 1995, pxii), are particularly relevant here and shown through food. According to Augé, cities

across the world are all linked to create a kind of interconnected chain of sites that can offer the possibility of consumption through codes and the same experiences all over the world. There are boundaries, but these can be overcome by capital.

Death is just another of the “frontiers” that is disregarded in García’s novel, within the boundaries of a site that functions as a metaphor for globalisation and Western interconnectedness, and made real, in Aura’s case, by the consumption of sugar. As Aura is the character seen to transgress the boundaries of life in her communication with her brother, sustained by the energy provided by the sugary food she eats, she is also the character with the most mobility within the walls of the hotel. In fact, Aura is also the character who has the most direct access to Suki, the Lady Matador. She delivers her pear, always imported, closing the gaps between the international borders that no longer exist once capital is made available. Though the pear is not always of the best quality, Suki must respect the ritual before her fights in the ring. When it comes to performance, Suki is very much dependent on rituals where food performs the function that allows her to exert control and test whether she is stronger than the bull. Suki explains: “Since my father retired, I’ve decided to manage myself. There’s already too much testosterone in my life as it is” (LMH, p42). The food she consumes, the rare meat, is the masculine framework that symbolically replaces her father’s guidance. The rituals preceding her fights also help her remember her mother, in contrast with the masculine energy she conjures through rituals in preparation for her fights.<sup>43</sup> Suki’s rituals span different elements: food, sex, and language. They are original, and denote her multiculturalism and her ability to rise above a fixed understanding of gender roles. Suki’s rituals appear as a mirror image of the discriminatory comments that Aura is a victim of at the garden restaurant. The

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<sup>43</sup> Suki bathes in lemons, remembering when her mother was ill and she would eat fish sticks and lemons (LMH, pp80-81).

way in which Suki handles the gendered aspect in her rituals replicates the male sexism Aura experiences.

The locations where we observe Suki are not “hidden” as they are for Aura. She is given performative locations, such as the pool, the bullring, the television, the ballroom. It is in this last space that she agrees to be interviewed by TV reporters, who ask whether she considers herself to be a feminist. Her response indicates that she does not care for categorisations as long as she has the right to choose. Her hatred for journalists is only superseded by the knowledge that she needs them to gain visibility, to promote her performance. In fact, she defines them as being a “necessary evil”, and says that “if she were forced into cannibalism” theirs would be the flesh she would eat last (LMH, p40), which serves as proof that the performative aspect is extremely important and serves to reconnect consumption and violence. Suki defines herself as full of testosterone, so much so that she has decided to manage herself after her father retires.

Suki constructs and reconstructs herself through memories of her mother, which contrast with how she seeks to appear to the outside world. The combined factors of privacy, anonymity, transience and liminality construct the hotel room as a unique space in which characters can explore and construct a range of identities. As we see how Suki is observed from multiple viewpoints, we note how the hotel functions as a space in which characters are able to construct an alternative version of their reality. In this context, though she continues to perform within the context of the luxury hotel which allows her to construct her own individuality, Suki does not feel free to be herself, and when a journalist asks her: “if you could be any smell in the world, what would it be?” she does not give the truest answer, “The cyclamen in her mother’s garden” (LMH, p43), but instead answers “burning sugarcane”, part of the normal harvesting process, which could be interpreted as a burning of tradition (LMH,



p43)<sup>44</sup> – perhaps representative of the destructive process that is necessary to make changes leading to a new harvest, a new way of life. Whilst suggesting an apparent departure from tradition, this is in fact a symbol of a real adherence to it. Suki is herself a destructive force: the contrast between her will to maintain a uniformity, expressed through the will to perform at all costs, clashes with her multicultural essence which, like the *ajiaco*, defies categorisation.

García's novel offers an opportunity to consider the “disintegrative” aspects of the process of *transculturación*. By presenting us with a mixture of spaces in relation to the different characters, we are offered a perspective on transition in “real” time: versions of the past and the present. The characters represent the different roots that are thrown together in the spaces of transition, liminal places of the in-between, within the context of the Hotel Miraflor. The *ajiaco* pot itself, in Ortiz's metaphor, is described as a clay container that is subsequently replaced by a metallic pot: a change determined by flows of power, again allowing for a parallel with the hotel, as García questions ideas of home, belonging and exile through a distinct unhomeliness and impermanence.<sup>45</sup> As the pot evolved from mud to metal, symbolising the evolution of space, the plantation also evolved, contributing to a different type of memory formation, a space of transit as people came and went. In García's novel, the locations in which the action takes place, i.e. the restaurant, hotel, bus, church, cinema, gym, and bullring, all form part of different temporal realities. The pot's borders change with the arrival of more people and their different identities, and we are able to witness a change in the material of the pot itself.

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<sup>44</sup> Sugarcane burning is carried out before the harvest to make it easier to cultivate the crop <https://sites.google.com/site/sugarcane/pm/pre-harvest-burning>.

<sup>45</sup> “And the Anglo-Americans with their domestic machines that simplified the kitchen—and who want to metallize and convert into one of their “standard” kettles the earthen pot that nature gave us, along with the flush of the tropics to heat it, the water of its skies to compose its broth, and the water of its seas for the sprinklings of the salt shaker. Out of all this our national *ajiaco* has been made” (Ortiz, 2014, p462).

The hotel, as a symbol of capitalist society, forces characters from different backgrounds together, “subjecting” them to the power of money and the currents that dictate the homogenising flow. The water in Ortiz’s pot is heated by the fire underneath it, and the degree to which one ingredient survives compared to another, is a metonym of Ortiz’s use of the metaphor itself. The flows of power dictate the strength of the flame – upheaval and events – and the force of the water. Capital has the power to determine which events will occur at any given time; it is perfectly acceptable for a military summit to take place, going against the beliefs of other guests at the hotel, since the dominant ingredient is always led by the political currents that dictate what is financially viable at any given time, masking and creating differential relations of power and violence. In the hotel, therefore, it is possible to find a variety of characters who are living very closely together but who do not necessarily share the same ideology. García unites these characters, with the hotel as a structure acting as a pot, but the “*olla podrida*”, “the mouldy pot”, harbours ingredients at the bottom that still have agency in the rest of the mixture. In the hotel, the sites located at the bottom, such as the stockroom and the kitchens, are also where the more dangerous ingredients can be found. García’s hacienda can also be compared to Ortiz’s description of the plantation as a source of the people who contribute to the mix. In García’s case, babies are taken and sold within the hotel, addressing the transactional side of migration that turns the luxury “pot” into a container of the unknown as much as the known, of dislocation and alienation as much as belonging. It is the in-between, the transit, the “initial” part of the process, as described by Barthes (1961, pp50-51) when he refers to the stages of production that are incorporated into the overall meaning of the “recipe”.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> “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, 1961, pp50-51).

However, the fact that the pot is open makes it a non-place for the ingredients, which are absorbed into each other, and the contribution of those stuck to the bottom is “invisible”; as per Marc Augé’s definition, it is a place of transition. The *ajiaco* pot, along with the plantation which forced together different nationalities through the brutality of slavery, is a product of colonisation: it is the *olla podrida*, a hodgepodge of different “rotting” ingredients. The mouldy pot is here interpreted as a social space that, at the same time, is a non-place, a place of transition, a colonial place. The idea of the *ajiaco* as a place of passage allows the hotel too to be considered as a place of passage – a transitory location in which humans are protected by a degree of anonymity. The guests, each with their different nationalities – the varying degrees of flavour – are still communicating from a “non-place”. Ortiz’s *ajiaco*, which encompasses the idea of Cuba as a nation-state, is housed within the modern concept of the hotel, a non-space, with the space outside it, the periphery, functioning as a visible temporal dislocation of the culinary metaphor.<sup>47</sup>

García’s positioning of the hotel in an unnamed location in Central America brings us to the question of transnationalism. As mentioned, Ortiz’s views are clearly nationalistic, but there is an openness that characterises his thinking. This relates to Benedict Anderson’s statement that because nationalism can be “transplanted” its formation is always transnational (Anderson, 1991, p4). Furthermore, transnationalism was at the centre of colonialism, slavery and other exploitative forms of control that are connected to globalisation. Through transnationalism, therefore, it is possible to trace “the paths not taken in the formation of dominant national narratives” (Cesari and Rigney, 2014, p6) and to turn them into new *lieux de mémoires* (Nora, 1984-1992). With Ortiz’s metaphor in mind, and in reference to the Hotel Mirafior, the idea of boundaries and thresholds between different parts of the hotel and the characters that inhabit it

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<sup>47</sup> A reference to Cuba itself being “a-temporal”, or frozen in time.

also recalls Bhabha's description of liminality as an "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" (Bhabha, 1994, p5): a space which is passed through, crossed. In García's novel, the hotel functions as a threshold, a boundary crossed by her characters into what Bhabha describes as the "unknowable, unrepresentable", into that which does not permit "a return to the present" (Bhabha, 1994, p6). "Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable—the stubborn chunks—as the basis of cultural identification" (Bhabha, 1994, pp312-313). Bhabha suggests that diasporic individuals construct unmarked in-between spaces as realms of identification. An example is Aura, who is stuck in the past and needs to exact revenge. She is acting on events that happened in the past, though she eventually moves on by murdering the colonel, through a repetition of violence that brings her into a new present.

These "non-places" are not devoid of memory, however, as García fills them, through the presence of food – in particular, sugar – with memories of past events, which she presents as food prompts that allow action to take place.

"So even the dead are busy these days," Aura grins. "I've brought you sugar buns and tea. Drink. It will give you strength."

[...]

Aura bites into a bun, licking the sugar from her lips. A few errant raindrops prick her forehead. "Are you still fourteen. Julio? Or have you gotten old like me?" (LMH, p49)

These exchanges with her dead brother allow Aura to carry out her plan of revenge.

A temporal dislocation is made visible between the hotel, with its modern luxuries, and the surrounding area, not far from the Miraflor and the capital. This peripheral, yet crucial, area appears not to have progressed in time: stuck in a loop where human beings are a commodity

in transactions that take place openly, echoing the freedom of those who held people in slavery. Gertrudis, who uses the hotel as a site for financial gain, is another part of the “system of trade”. There are no ethics involved here; the military congregate, amongst their enemies, to share tips on how to kill innocent people. The hotel is part of a capitalist equation which sees part of this capital invested in ensuring that the guests “forget” the part that money plays in the creation of hierarchies and injustices. An incorporation of unethical ideals takes place because they serve as part of a bigger plan – to maximise profits at all costs as part of a capitalist society, exercising a panoptic form of control in order to do so.

The Hotel Miraflores windows overlook an internal view of patios and gardens rather than the city. The guests have a shielded view of the world once they step inside the hotel through the illusion of invulnerability and wellbeing the hotel provides. However, the contrasts present and represented by Gertrudis and Martín, for example, are clear even within the cushioned luxury that the Miraflores offers. Suki wishes to “submit to the hotel’s shielding niceties, to ignore the afternoon torpor awaiting her in the ring” (LMH, p4), spending time in the hotel (we recall that the title of the book is *The Lady Matador’s Hotel*) because she wants to make a change – burning is a similar gesture; all it does is make the next sugarcane harvest better. However, the opposite occurs, and we realise that Suki’s desire to “draw blood” is in some way heightened by her surroundings.

While Suki immerses herself in the hotel pool, other characters experience the space as restrictive, just as their personal narratives contrast with Suki’s in this sense. As Suki’s behaviour demonstrates, the Miraflores is a symbol of “amnesia”: the landscape is moulded to reflect the idea of a paradise where all desires can be met. Aura thinks that “the entire country has succumbed to a collective amnesia” (LMH, p9), and her frustration can be sensed as she “smoothes her pink-and-white apron” (LMH, p8) and “wills her hands to stop trembling” (LMH, p7) when serving pork chops to her brother’s murderer.

The hotel space forces the guests to move in certain ways, as can be seen in the behaviour of Ricardo and Sarah, who are there to “adopt” a child. The amnesia that the Miraflores creates in Suki turns into a kind of persuasive force. In reality, Gertrudis has a “mutually lucrative” agreement with the Miraflores’s director, whereby any movement and financial transactions are limited to within the perimeter of the hotel: “no leaving the hotel with the baby; meals must be eaten at the hotel; formula and baby supplies must be purchased at the hotel sundries shop” (LMH, p16). There appears to be a sense of danger surrounding the hotel, a force that keeps the characters safe only within its confines. When any of the characters do decide to leave the hotel, they experience severe difficulties: for example, Ricardo is attacked whilst walking along a nearby street and carried to another confined space, a hospital, before returning to the hotel (LMH, pp64-69; pp129-134). Won Kim tries to leave the hotel, as well as his career and complicated love triangle, by jumping off the hotel’s roof. However, this is prevented by Aura, the ex-guerrillera and hotel employee (LMH, pp153-154). Berta, a former factory embroiderer, tries to transform her surroundings. She embroiders the hotel’s cushions: “her fancy handiwork will cost him a fortune” (LMH, p18), Won Kim thinks. She breaks porcelain and performs other acts of resistance: “Berta has thrown soap off the balcony, taped hotel stationary to the pink toilet seat. He cannot guess what might be next. If he strung her nonsensical utterances together, Won Kim wonders, would they constitute a manifesto of sorts?” (LMH, p19).

García’s hotel world displaces her characters into a space of amnesia. The structure of the Miraflores Hotel, and the way in which the characters move around in it, is comparable to a panoptic structure where different hierarchies are brought together at different levels. The concept of the panopticon, a prison with a central observation tower, was developed as a metaphor by Michel Foucault (2020) to explore the relationships between systems of social control, people in disciplinary situations, and the transition to a disciplinary power where every

movement is supervised and all events are recorded. The hotel guests become more or less visible to each other, meeting in locations such as the terrace, the garden restaurant, and the swimming pool, but also on the TVs inside their rooms, where other guests see news stories about Suki, for instance. In fact, it is significant that the different characters can view Suki on televisions whilst also being able to see her in person at different points in time and in different parts of the hotel, creating an idea of the same reality being experienced in different ways and remediated over a short space of time. This speaks to the overabundance of information, as posited by Augé, where a story is recounted very shortly after it occurs, which makes it difficult to think about time; in García's novel the characters are able to access "versions" of history shortly after it has taken place, reinforcing the idea of "history snapping at our heels" (Augé, 1995, p25). The fact that "the capital looks different every time Aura surveys it from the hotel rooftop" (LMH, p152) also contributes to the sense of rapid change.

However, there are places in the hotel that are not under surveillance, and these represent the dark currents that run through the routes of implicit trust embodied by food. Here, waiting staff, barmen and cooks exercise control – subversive forms of rebellion from within an established "institution", an approved and undisputed structure that encourages guests to expect pre-established standards of behaviour. There is a degree of trust in spaces like hotels, where cleaners have keys to the rooms, and García shows us how Aura uses that trust, within spaces of consumption, and turns it into something lethal. The idea of trust implicit in food allows for its use in a way that can actually cause damage: a symbolic ingestion of other people's vengeance. Food occupies a "liminal" space, as Paul Atkinson explains in *Eating Virtue*: "food is a liminal substance; it stands as a bridging substance between nature and culture, the human and the natural, the outside and the inside" (Atkinson, 1983, p11). Lorna Piatti-Farnell elaborates on this concept by focusing on the idea of the food coming from a particular cultural context, which makes the process of ingestion one of "cultural

familiarisation”. However, after having traversed the bodily boundary – the mouth – food has the potential to become “steeped in horror [...] once the oral threshold has been breached, we have been colonised by the food, connected to its sensorial and physiological boundaries in virtue of its liminal properties” (Piatti-Farnell, 2017, p15). If the food is Other, once ingested it becomes part of us, and we become Other: “the unfamiliar matter, the unknown” (Piatti-Farnell, 2017, p15).

The corporeal subject is constructed and re-constructed by his or her environment. The relationship between the body and space is mutually affective, and the characters in the novel continually construct and re-inscribe the environments they inhabit. We see this through the reference to the stiff widow’s lace suggested by the barbed wire surrounding Gertrudis’s hacienda; Aura’s pink and white apron which allows her to blend into the colours of the hotel itself; Suki and her performative connection to the bullring and ballroom; Kim Won in in-between places such as the lift; Sarah in the restaurant as a site for showcasing babies; Ricardo pulled towards the periphery and surrounding area of the hotel; and Colonel Martín, often seen on the balcony where he is able to observe and control events. The anonymous nature of the hotel space offers its inhabitants the opportunity to temporarily relinquish their everyday identities and the societal restrictions placed upon them.

## **Conclusion**

The idea of the hotel as a space outside of the everyday in which habitual identities can morph into alternative ways of being is reinforced by the glamorous surroundings of the Hotel Miraflor. Nevertheless, a suspension of everyday life leads to the formation of a temporary state, and the knowledge that real life must be resumed at some point. This rootlessness and sense of instability is the feeling that García conjures in the novel, as the characters transition



from one state of temporariness to another. They are constantly moving within and outside the hotel, which is further confirmation of the hotel as a liminal space, and which recalls Bhabha's reference to the "temporal movement and passage" that are necessarily involved in liminality (Bhabha, 2004, p270). The idea of the hotel as a space of transition is also taken further by Pritchard and Morgan's work on the definition of liminal space. It is not simply seen as the "in-between", but also as "the metaphorical crossing of some imagined spatial or temporal threshold" (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006, p271). The hotel becomes, like the *ajiacó* pot, a place of change and a catalyst for change. The freedom that the guests possess to place a distance between themselves and social norms creates moments of transition that are continued beyond the walls of the hotel. Transition becomes central, not just a passing feature or a moment in time. Time itself is fluid in adapting to the events that happen within the confines of the structure, and the characters' perceptions are seen to influence the passage of time. Even the dead can talk because of this; boundaries can be transcended with money, and memories are a catalyst for action through the remediation of food. Kim Won considers an upside to having a son able to provide American pancakes. Ricardo's memories of his mother's hunger "talk to him", but the contrast with the vile Western oppression embodied by Sarah prompts him to plan his escape with the baby. Colonel Martín's memories of a crime make him vulnerable. Finally, Aura's memories of violence, remediated by sugar, lead her too to commit an act of violence. All the characters' actions are dictated by violence situated in the past, made real through their relationships with food, which helps determine their actions in the present.

The portrayal of food in *The Lady Matador's Hotel* highlights how it not only solidifies social hierarchies but is also a channel through which we can identify fractures. Aura's subversive acts through food take rebellion one step further in terms of violence compared to characters in García's previous novels. For instance, Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban* and Constancia in *The Agüero Sisters* act within a framework, whereas Aura deliberately subverts

the Miraflores's network of communication. However, *The Lady Matador's Hotel* is similar to García's earlier novels in how it highlights the oppressive present through culinary discourse while showing how characters change consumption patterns as an act of societal rebellion.

The Miraflores acts as an externally glamorous container, which is a tropical façade for social and political amalgamation, much like Ortiz's *ajiaco* metaphor. However, beneath the surface and in the underground places within the hotel there are tensions and injustices that ooze out from the bottom to the top. Not everyone is aware of the discrepancies, and most guests wish to abandon themselves to the hotel's "amnesia", but the colonel's death signifies that the eruption of tension is inevitable. As in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* (1999), this meeting of different cultures is not just a benevolent absorption, as Ortiz proposed through his culinary metaphor, but a clash. In contrast to Ortiz, who positions the mixing of cultures and identities in a pot, García's characters are unharmoniously thrown together within the walls of the hotel, whose luxury makes the sense of upheaval through memory all the more uncanny. The women in this novel are strong characters whose past stories push, through gestures of violence, into the present, bringing together repressed historical events in contexts that normally inspire trust, such as restaurants, cafeterias, and hotel room service. These internal "avenues" become opportunities to kill and suppress, figuratively and physically, both the memories and the perpetrators of past acts of violence. Within the confines of the hotel, Suki, Aura, Martín, Ricardo, Won Kim and Gertrudis are obliged to cross over, to meet, and to interact, creating new "lives" and re-inscribing collective memory repeatedly: "the last word in history must be fought for again and again" (LMH, p193). As mentioned above, these are the words which accompany Aura's actions as she avenges her brother's death. They suggest that memory is open to repeated reinterpretation, and there is an anonymity in this which creates a sense of universality, common to all individuals.

If supermodernity is at the heart of what sustains the hotel, García underlines that this is founded, even in a contemporary context, on slavery, globalisation and capitalism. Here, death also becomes a threshold that is broken down by consumption, specifically the violence of the sugar plantations, and it follows that the voices of the oppressed are able to communicate their experiences and prompt new violent responses. Masculine culture is strongly connected to violence, a violence portrayed in García's fifth novel, *King of Cuba*, through intergenerational relationships in Cuba and the US, made evident through consumption. The following chapter continues to explore these themes, as García takes a closer look at aspects of leadership and its consequences. García never refers to Fidel Castro by name, but refers to him as El Comandante, again suggesting a universality in Cuba's position and condition within the wider context of the Caribbean.

## V. The Memory of Masculinity: Post-Revolutionary Machismo in García's *King of Cuba*

This chapter addresses the role of food as the mediator and remediator of the memory of post-Revolutionary machismo in Cristina García's *King of Cuba* (2013). This novel, like most of those discussed in previous chapters, focuses on a family impacted by the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The portrayal of the Herrera family is narrated through a food-memory language which is reliant on the correlation between memory and food in the context of the Cuban diaspora. The novel is set in Cuba and Miami, and it depicts the thoughts and memories of a fictionalised Fidel Castro, and Goyo Herrera, an elderly Cuban exile whose only aim is to seek revenge against the dictator. Castro, referred to as "El Líder" or "El Comandante", is an ageing tyrant, depicted in his mansion in Havana going about his daily life, which is devoid of any of the heroism that may have once been associated with him and the Revolution. In Florida, Goyo Herrera, an eighty-year-old exile, plots against Castro, who he blames for "stealing" the woman he loved, for his father's suicide, for his younger brother's death in the Bay of Pigs and for "destroying" Cuba.

García depicts the contrasting reality of two Cubas: one on and one off the island. Goyo and Castro resemble each other more than might be expected; both are consumed by a desire to retain their former "manly" selves and project the impression of immortality. The novel is driven by Goyo's ambition to outlive and assassinate the dictator, whilst depicting the daily activities of both men as centred around food. Goyo is a widower and father to a daughter, Alina, and an addict son, Goyito, while El Comandante spends his time reflecting on his past and carrying out his official duties, culminating in a speech at the UN, where Goyo plans to assassinate him. El Comandante is the epitome of machismo, whose only desire is to enjoy food, but he cannot because of his ill health. Instead, he eats *ajiaco*, Cuba's national dish, and uses this food against protesters who are on a hunger strike to manifest their hatred of his

regime. *Ajiaco*, as has been noted, is an established metaphor symbolising how different cultures come together in Cuba – the Indigenous Taíno, as well as African, Asian, Spanish, and other European cultures. Elements of these cultures are combined in a dish that has evolved, and continues to evolve, within a society centred on plantations, part of a history of colonisation and food production primarily centred on the export of one product: sugar. Castro’s character in the novel is closely associated with the “pure” version of sugar in Cuba, in contrast with the processed form which is consumed in dangerous quantities by Goyo’s son Goyito in the United States. Through the character of Goyito, food becomes an anxious meeting point between the migrant and a context of global political unease. A transnational and second-generation Cuban-American, Goyito suffers violently at the hands of his father for not being “man” enough, is afflicted by his father’s thirst for revenge and excessive machismo, and eats vast quantities of sugar in processed products, distancing himself from his father’s oppressive behaviour whilst still transferring a message of oppression. In fact, Goyito dwells in the memory of his father’s past through food, seeking to fill a void that has been transferred to him intergenerationally.<sup>48</sup> Revenge provides the opportunity to remember an act of violence, and in the specific case of García’s work in relation to the Cuban Revolution it creates a “hunger” for new memories transformed through food, with the potential to produce violent outcomes.

This chapter addresses the ways that issues of national and transnational identity are tied to an increasing anxiety connected to a crisis of masculinity and the global politics of food. Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory will be considered in the context of intergenerationality and compared to Alison Landsberg’s theory of prosthetic memory. Prosthetic memory refers to how people are able to take on the memories of historical events they did not directly experience, and provides a tool for understanding how father and son are linked through trauma in *King of Cuba*. Taking this one step further, food becomes the primary

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<sup>48</sup> Second generation Cuban-Americans were those who arrived in the US as children or were born there.

mode through which the memories of a traumatic event, the Revolution, are experienced. Landsberg's idea of the transferential spaces through which memories, constructed by mass media, are "relived" as if based on first-hand experience, is transposed here to the sphere of food, specifically sugar. Goyo is associated with sugarcane as a symbol of manliness in connection to memories of the Revolution, and Goyito represents a failed reflection of this memory through processed sugar. Landsberg defines prosthetic memory as a space through which we are exposed to a narrative about the past, such as through film, where an individual "does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live" (Landsberg, 2004, p2), with which they then form an "experiential relationship" (Landsberg, 2004, p135) that contributes to their identity. Landsberg specifically looks at cases connected to the transmission of memories relating to the Holocaust, "in which the very possibility of something like 'organic memory' has been destroyed" (Landsberg, 2004, p120). Such a transferential space, in which memory finds an opportunity to re-articulate itself, can form from the ruptures caused by diaspora. In *King of Cuba*, we are taken on a journey depicting examples of post-Revolutionary machismo as we follow the transformation of sugar from production to post-production. This chapter illustrates the ways in which memory and food work together to uncover how Castro and Goyo's machismo leads to Goyito's addiction to sugary "junk" food.

### **Machismo in Cuba**

According to Fernando Ortiz's study of tobacco, the cigar represents "a figuration of seminal potency which penetrates, fecundates, and animates life in all its manifestations" (Ortiz, 1970, p114). The persona of Castro has always been closely associated with cigars, and he is also considered the figurehead of Cuban machismo; under his leadership, the task of constructing the *patria*, the nation, fell mainly to men. *Patria* is a word with Latin roots meaning

“fatherland”, and Castro, the “father of the Cuban Revolution”, reconstructed a nation according to the rules of machismo.<sup>49</sup>

Both patriarchy and machismo promote male-dominated hierarchical societies, although machismo is more complex, more romantic. While maintaining the dominance of the masculine, machismo also simultaneously claims a devotion to the feminine, to protecting the female. This accompanies another feature of machismo that is absent from patriarchy, the sense of honour that comes from a man protecting his family. The Mexican theorist Octavio Paz asserts that machismo is a defence mechanism, and a reaction to the denial of Mexico-Indio subjectivity within the dominant culture. Constantly reminded of their subordination in a postcolonial society, Paz’s theory is that Chicano and Mexican men retaliate against the only people over whom they have power – Chicana and Mexican women (Paz, 1947, p29). Analysing how her father understood the word “macho”, the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa writes that it has connotations of having the strength to support a family, along with demonstrations of love. This is the first type of machismo, familiar machismo, that Anzaldúa writes about in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987). She also considers two other types: false machismo and modern machismo. Anzaldúa considers familiar machismo in opposition to false machismo, which she regards an “adaptation” to poverty and oppression that causes men to act violently, and defines modern machismo as a Western invention (Anzaldúa, 1987, p101).

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<sup>49</sup> Between 1965 and 1968, thousands of dissidents were interned in re-education labour camps run by the Military Units for Assistance to Production (UMAP). Under the normative gaze, these dissidents were considered to be insufficiently masculine, as illustrated by a slogan posted at the entrance to a camp: “Work will make men of you”. The UMAP camps served as a form of alternative civilian service for Cubans who could not serve in the military because they were conscientious objectors, homosexuals, or political enemies of Fidel Castro or the Revolution, or because of their religion. In a 2010 interview with *La Jornada*, Fidel Castro admitted, in response to a question about the UMAP camps, that “Yes, there were moments of great injustice, great injustice!” (Lira Saade, 2010).

In her book *Masculinities* (1995), R.W. Connell emphasises that masculinities come into existence at particular times and places and are always subject to change. She also stresses that the growth of Western power, specifically North American and European, and the construction of global empires and of capitalism, are key factors that shape masculinities (Connell, 1995, p185). Hegemonic masculinity, part of Connell's theory on gender order, proposes to explain why men dominate women, as well as people of other genders considered to have "feminine" identities. Hegemonic masculinity describes multiple masculinities, which vary across time and cultures. It is understood as a practice that legitimises men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of marginalised women, men and others. The idea that Goyo and Castro are "fighting" on opposite sides of an ideological and geographical boundary fits with Connell's thinking, according to which "we cannot understand the connection of masculinity and violence at a personal level without understanding that it is also a global connection" (Connell, 1995, p185).

One of the developments that Connell cites in relation to the production of masculinity within the "Modern Gender Order" (Connell, 1995, p186) is the expansion of overseas empires, specifically the empires of Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, France and England. Described as a "gendered enterprise", imperialistic expansion involved men who were soldiers and sailors, with the first group fitting the modern definition of the "masculine cultural type". These men were "conquistadores", figures closely associated with violence. Masculinity thus became linked to a loss of control in places located on the frontiers within the context of imperialism. Connell notes that Bartolomé de Las Casas' *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, written in 1542 (De las Casas, 1992) signalled the emergence of a new kind of masculinity, one dictated by ambition and greed.

Nineteenth century Latin America saw the prevalence of a hegemonic machismo defined through literary depictions of the *caballero*, and this became part of the revolutionary



tradition of Cuba. Simón Bolívar's wars of liberation throughout South America were a significant influence on Castro, the romantic image defining what the actions of a "real revolutionary" and a "real man" should be.<sup>50</sup> The Cuban patriot José Martí represented the paradigm of a free Cuban: both a poet and a revolutionary, personally leading his men into battle against Spanish imperial rule, eventually dying whilst fighting in 1895. The myth of José Martí as both a man of arms and a sensitive, artistic soul, both masculine and feminine, formed the Cuban ideal of manliness. Castro was certainly inspired by the actions of men who sought to fight for freedom, such as Simón Bolívar and José Martí, and was photographed cutting down sugarcane himself, a depiction of the father a new, independent nation whose main source of income, sugar, was also independent. This revolutionary tradition inspired Castro, and it was attractive in its promotion of a struggle against dominance that powered the Cuban people's desire for liberty during the Batista days; Ernesto "Che" Guevara also referred to the sentiment of love in order to engender commitment to the revolutionary cause (Charles River Editors, 2013).

In García's novel we witness a crisis after years of rationing and food shortages, and the stage is set for social change in Cuba that will affect traditional notions of gender. The title *King of Cuba* refers to Fidel Castro, and the book deals with the memory that Castro has of himself as the superhuman being who, against all odds, confronted the US. However, when the novel starts, we see him as an elderly man, dependent on others, particularly women. Castro, as a *machista* and provider, is the head of the Cuban nation, and through the sugarcane industry he "provides" for his country. *King of Cuba* repeatedly displays imagery relating to sugarcane plantations, the main agricultural industry in Cuba. By the time we encounter Castro in García's

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<sup>50</sup> In *Fidel Castro: My Life, A Spoken Autobiography* it is stated that in Castro's personal office in the Palacio de la Revolución, amongst other objects, there were statues of Simón Bolívar, José Martí, and a letter handwritten by Simón Bolívar (Castro and Ramonet, 2006, pi).

novel, the industry is in sharp decline, and his machismo, as provider and saviour through the sugarcane industry, is ridiculed through a language that uses food as a weapon to belittle his grandiose sense of self. A sense of powerlessness is conveyed through the depiction of Castro being made to eat dry toast and oatmeal “again” whilst dreaming of a “porterhouse steak and three fried eggs, over easy, followed by a double scotch” (KC, p5). After 1898, one third of the Cuban population was involved in cultivating sugarcane, and by the 1950s almost all the sugar grown in Cuba was going to the US. The wages of the sugar labourers depended on the annual market price of sugar, so their livelihood was affected by any fluctuations in Cuban sugar production. The Cuban government frequently tried to intervene and change the price, and the US would also modify the tariffs. With this system in place that was not designed to benefit Cuba, sugar drove events and fermented discontent; it became a symbol of Cuba’s dependence on the US. In the years immediately following the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, there was a series of incursions, mainly organised by Cuban exiles in the US, that did not target military installations but sugarcane fields, setting them ablaze as a form of a political attack. Thus, Castro’s “power” as a revolutionary was very much tied to the success or failure of sugarcane as a crop in Cuba.

Viewed through the lens of Maurice Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory as a shared body of knowledge and information that contributes to a group’s identity, the discontent linked to sugar as a product is reconstructed in the novel to reflect the present-day consequences of the hardship and violence attached to the history of this crop. Sugar becomes a space with the ability to construct what Halbwachs calls the “collective frameworks” (Halbwachs, 1925, p53) that people from a particular background share, even if they live in different places, “social frameworks” that also shape people’s recollections. Cuba’s livelihood being so dependent on sugar has meant that sugar has entered into the system of images, symbols and values of the island. The connection between sugar and the sugar plantations as sites which brought together

different cultural elements through the experience of slavery takes us back to *ajiaco* as a metaphor for the process of *transculturación*, as described by Ortiz. As a foundation, in food terms, for what it means to be Cuban, *ajiaco* is a symbol used by El Comandante to exert his authority; although it has its roots in violence, the dish is also what provides sustenance to the Cuban people. There is a crisis of power in both masculinity and national identity, and an overlap of identification that occurs where anxiety over the future of the nation coincides with anxiety over masculinity. El Comandante's memories of Cuba after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which marks the end of the Soviets' "five billion dollars in annual subsidies to Cuba" (KC, p89), focus on the scarcity of basic necessities, as a result of which "the plumpish populace lost, on average, twenty-two pounds [and] citizens were forced into prostitution" (KC, p89).

The theme of prostitution in Cuba, and even the idea of Cuba as a prostitute at the beck and call of the US, is explored by García. She gives voice to this imagery through a journalist at a press conference, when the dictator is asked by a reporter: "Many say that the Cuban people are starving, that they are resorting to prostitution again to survive", to which Castro retorts that since the Revolution "our people have never gone hungry" (KC, p172). The concept of "America's backyard" refers to the sphere of influence exerted by the US, particularly in Latin America, and can be connected to the sex tourism on the island that Castro's Revolution sought to eradicate. Following the Revolution, Castro drew a direct line between the provision of sexual services by Cuban women to US men and economic exploitation on a national scale. The new government saw prostitutes as victims of corruption and capitalism, a symptom of Cuba's pre-Revolutionary capitalist culture (Hamilton, 2012, p216). Cuba itself came to embody a feminine identity, penetrated and exploited by the US. As previously mentioned, based on Connell's theory on how men socially dominate women and other genders considered to have "feminine" identities, we can assume that García's portrayal of Castro seeks to suggest,

through assertions of his masculinity via frequent references to the size of his genitalia, that he is rebelling against the submission of Cuba and its approximation to prostitution.

In García's work, we see how, after the Revolution, Castro branded the people who had left Cuba as "*gusanos*": worms, spineless. Goyo embodies the desire to reaffirm a frustrated masculinity through a counterattack against El Comandante. Goyo's frustration over El Comandante's victory influences the behaviour of his son Goyito, who takes refuge in food. All of Goyo's energy is focused on plotting revenge against the despot, and Goyito embodies his father's anger, regret and vengeance. Goyo is violent towards his son, and his memories of machismo are depicted by García as "manly" modes of communication that represent failure. Goyito, anxiety-ridden and unable to be as macho as his father, and with no desire to plot against Castro or make plans for invading Cuba, takes refuge in sugary foods. Goyito eats so much sugary junk food, particularly buttermilk donuts, that he exudes a constant smell: "El pobre exuded a foul garlicky odor, most likely from all the junk food he ate" (KC, p111); these are words spoken by Goyo, who believes it a miracle that Goyito is still alive. There is a sharp contrast here between the excess sugar that Goyito eats, a food representing the harms of addiction, and the "healthier" version his father represents. To interpret this relationship between Goyo and Goyito, I draw on Marianne Hirsch's theory of "postmemory", a term she originally used primarily to refer to the relationship between the children of Holocaust survivors and their parents' memories. Hirsch's concept has evolved beyond these generational parameters to describe the relationship that later generations, or distant contemporary witnesses, bear to the personal, collective, and cultural traumas of others. These traumas become experiences that they "remember" through stories, images, and behaviours (Hirsch, 2012).<sup>51</sup> Goyito remembers the violence of machismo through food, in particular, sugary junk

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<sup>51</sup> As noted in *Memory Unbound: Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies*, Hirsch's theory is questioned by critics such as Ernst van Alphen, Gary Weissman and Amy Hungerford, who consider it problematic to conflate the "suffering of survivors with that of their offspring" (Bond, Craps and Vermeulen, 2017, p9).

food, which contrasts with the purity represented by the sugarcane imagery, connected to Cuba's struggles to remain financially independent. This distortion culminates in the fight that takes place, both ideologically and then physically, at the end of the novel. Sugar has become an element that corrupts and causes disease, as we see from the description of Goyito's stricken body, with "sore-infested diabetic feet" and his father's description of him as someone who is "dying from the bottom up" (KC, p182).

The plantation mindset, which is able to morph and survive, is "carried" by Goyo and passed on to Goyito through memories of Revolutionary machismo, which become post-Revolutionary examples of postmemory. These are attempts to instill a type of masculinity which Goyito cannot live up to. Goyito's story is told through the sugar that represents the background and history of his country of origin, through food references that express the contradictions inherent in the complex changes caused by migration and transnationalism. This is expressed through Goyito's love for all that is unavailable in Cuba, specifically in the form of processed foods: slushees, buns and flapjacks, "deep-fried Oreos smothered under scoops of candy-flecked ice cream" (KC, p141). Goyito does not, to his father's constant frustration, embody the traits of a *machista*. Goyo's fight against El Comandante is taken out on Goyito, and Goyito inherits his father's frustration and emptiness, a void he tries to fill with foods such as doughnuts, cakes and cookies, and what he ingests makes him ill (DIC, p171).

Castro and Goyo, the most bitter of enemies, both eat bland food. El Comandante feels emasculated by having to eat toast and oatmeal instead of the steak, eggs and scotch he desires (KC, p5), and Goyo's breakfast is likewise made up of "slow-cooked steel-cut oatmeal" (KC, p23). Goyo feels that the two have in common troubles with their daughters, who are nothing like them. Castro's daughters have written a memoir in which they discuss their bulimia, "an all-but-unheard-of-disease among [their] hungry fellow citizens" (KC, p13), and Goyo's daughter is an avowed liberal who argues against the "futile" trade embargo. Both Goyo and

Castro are heavily dependent on women: Goyo relies on his daughter for help to go to the toilet, while the Comandante's wife Delia wipes "spittle from his chin" and feeds him rice pudding and ice cream (KC, p29). While both El Comandante and Goyo are caught up in their mission to "save" Cuba – Goyo's dream of assassinating Castro leads to the hope of an epitaph that reads "Here lies a Cuban hero" (KC, p11) – Goyito throws himself into processed sugar products, and ultimately it is through the emblematic food, sugar, that we see the "result" of both Castro's and Goyo's machismo: disease and illness, specifically diabetes.

### **Castro: Dinner with a Despot**

Though still socially engaged, the now elderly Comandante has more time than previously to ponder on the events that have determined the situation in which Cuba currently finds itself. He considers exploiting the political advantage provided by the sanctions imposed by the US, knowing that the US embargo played a large part in the survival of the Revolution. It was a necessary component, acting as an outlet for blame and shifting the focus away from him when it came to finding a culprit for Cuba's economic ills. However, he attributes the real death of socialism to a "hunger" for a capitalistic way of life, to consumerism: "microwaves and computers, motorcycles, iPhones, Omaha Steaks" (KC, p40). Even when he is asleep, his thoughts take him to a place of contentious hunger: "For the first time since 1959, people went hungry. Not even the high-protein soy blocks imported from China helped" (KC, p72). His existence is riven with fights and disputes, most famously with the heirs to sugarcane fortunes (KC, p75). He has dispossessed them of their fortunes and driven them into exile, taking over the reins of what is really at the heart of the country, the sugarcane plantations. He has made his worst enemies from within Cuba, reinfusing the crop with the violence initiated through its connections to slavery, perpetuating that violence in the hatred of all those wronged by his political decisions. His abilities as a leader, compromised by the crop, are depicted as causing

widespread hunger in Cuba, and this is pivotal to his failure as a leader. Ailing, from a hospital bed in Trinidad, the heart of the sugarcane industry, he awakens in the middle of the night “inhaling the verdant sugarcane” (KC, p106), preoccupied with the hunger strike that is taking place and the international impact it will have. A hunger strike in a country where food is scarce is the ultimate form of protest, thus “the hunger strikers’ bodies become contentious political terrain and a public relations debacle for the Revolution” (KC, p132).

Following his decision to confront the hunger strikers, a guard takes El Comandante through a “fetid labyrinth of cells” (KC, p134) in which prisoners eat their own flesh to combat hunger. On meeting the prisoners in these hell-like dungeons where they are confined, Castro tells them that the “flesh remembers things” (KC, p132), and likens himself to them, explaining that he too was once “imprisoned [...] reviled and abandoned” (KC, p132). He purports to be part of history itself, “blinded by a sense of his own destiny, of [Cuba]” (KC, p133), reminding the men that he is in their bloodstream, and he invites them to join him in “history”. The scene conjures up a sense of “communion” through a unified suffering caused by the lack of food. Here, instead of food providing nutrition, it represents the Revolution itself, and thus the prisoners’ refusal of food is a strike against the Revolution that made them who they are. There is certainly a sense that the Revolution is figuratively and physically cannibalising itself and its memory, as embodied in the Cuban people, represented by the prisoners who “gnawed on their own flesh to stave off hunger” (KC, p134).

Castro’s comment that it will not be easy for the prisoners to recover from what they are doing to their bodies – their kidneys, livers, and, above all, their hearts – mixes the physical and the ideological through their abstinence from food, which he interprets as a rebellion against his political choices. The importance of ideology is reinforced by the warden accompanying Castro, a devout pro-Revolutionary from an anti-Castro background, who has lost a leg to diabetes, due to an excess of sugar, “but still moved with the same vigor of a biped”

(KC, p134). In order to communicate his ideas fully to the hunger strikers, the warden forces them, chained and shuffling behind him as “one tentacular beast” (KC, p134), to walk into a room where a dining table is set up, even adorned with plastic flowers. The appearance is that of a dinner party like any other, with waiters serving wine. The uncanniness is rendered by the performance of the staff, making the tension all the more tangible. The first course they bring in is *ajiaco*, symbolising the true Cuba and the meal El Comandante’s mother cooked him every Sunday. The fact that Castro eats the *ajiaco* is significant, as it becomes a tool that is used as a reminder of Cuba’s “real” heritage, what the island authentically stands for. This occurs through the way it acts as a reminder of his mother, and thus the past. Earlier on in the novel, in fact, Castro remembers that as a child he could smell the garlic used in the soup on his mother (KC, p8). As Cuba’s national dish, *ajiaco* signifies the ability to make do, and functions as an instrument of power against the strikers. After a prolonged period of time without food, Castro offers them a dish that, if refused, would also stand for a refusal of love and commitment to their country. Thus, El Comandante’s relationship with *ajiaco*, a staple dish since childhood, is one that enables him to view it as a political tool, engendering a form of performative nostalgia used as a mode of coercion in this context.

Lobsters, normally “exported, or reserved for tourists”, are brought in for the second course (KC, p135). Within the “normality” of the dinner table, incongruity is provided when one of the prisoners commits suicide by throwing himself out of the window, causing Castro to recollect how “Che used to dine at the firing squads” (KC, p136). In her analysis of the film *Hunger* (2009), Lorna Piatti-Farnell discusses the idea “of slaughter, of violence, of murder, and the deliberate subjugation of the human being as ‘prey’” (Piatti-Farnell, 2017, p94). There is a parallel between death and consumption in this scene in the prison, as violence and murder are paralleled to the act of submission of the prisoners, who become the objects of a hunt. In this way, Castro is effectively utilising food as a strategy against his enemies. Even after



cockroaches appear and one prisoner needs to have a tooth extracted, Castro still asks for dessert and continues with the meal, as there is “no sense in ruining a perfectly good luncheon” (KC, p136). In his persistence in finishing the meal, we have the idea of the strength of an ideology being hardier than death itself. Through the rigid structure of a meal, Castro is able to preserve his persona, since the table becomes a battleground for the different ideologies that are at war, a place of death more than an opportunity for nutrition, as we see from the presence of insects on the dissidents’ untouched plates. This could be considered an example of how a prosthetic space is created through food, and specifically through memories of *ajiaco*, used to evoke a sense of citizenship and bravery. These are qualities that Castro associates with masculinity, in fact, as a child El Comandante asks his mother if his manhood will grow to be the biggest in the world: “His mother grinned, eyes shining, and brought her lips so close to his that he inhaled the garlic from that night’s *ajiaco* stew. ‘Don’t you doubt that for a second’” (KC, p8). In a country where food rationing has been ongoing since 1962, the hunger strike scene has particular significance as a display of power and machismo, and this expression of power through machismo is rendered through food in a way that allows us to understand how relevant the symbology of food has become in the context of inequity and anxiety. El Comandante’s childhood memories include experiences of near-starvation, but he looks at the protesters while he eats and says, “Mamá used to make this every Sunday when I was a boy. Won’t you try some?” (KC, p134). From national dish to a symbol of knowing how to make do, and an instrument of power used against the strikers, the dish manages to contain within it a sense of violence. This violence is transposed from the extreme hardship of plantation life to the hardship of living in contemporary Cuba: underfed, yet never without *ajiaco*.

In an era of food shortages heightened by the embargo, Castro is utilising the medium of food strategically to sustain his political choices. He thinks of himself as a man of “action and appetites” (KC, p59) and is defined by what he chooses to eat, which goes hand in hand

with his machismo. There is a disassociation in food that can enable people to partake in the memories of events that they did not experience. In reliving memories through food, we are shown the dangerous meanings that it has come to incorporate, and in the specific case of Cuba it becomes a symbol of how injustice and violence have been incorporated and disseminated by capitalism. Food becomes the medium of its own dissemination, and also tells the story of its dissemination through Castro's body; having experienced the Revolution first-hand, he transfers these experiences to others through food. Of his own experience, he comments: "One's flesh, one's spirit remembers such things" (KC, p132). In this context, the table is an uncanny tool for this example of prosthetic memory. It becomes a site through which Castro seeks to show the dissidents what the "real" Cuba is by reminding them of the past glory of the country through the sight and smell of the food. The society Castro is attempting to cater to now has no real experience of the Revolution, and sees itself as the bearer of its negative legacy. Landsberg states that "postmodern society has no real experience. The channel of mediation becomes the experience" (Landsberg, p32), and the empathy that this connection establishes is riven with violence and oppression, since food in Cuba is a "transferential" space marked by contention.

### **Food as Ideology**

El Comandante's close association with sugar in its "original" state is reinforced by a scene where his birthday reception is held at a local sugar baron's residence. When Castro nationalised the sugar industry in 1960, the sugar barons fled Cuba and a new era began which saw close associations with the Soviet Union. The fall of the Soviet Union ultimately led to the decline of the Cuban sugar industry, thus Castro, by holding his birthday dinner in this location, is sending the message that he still believes that the choices he made were right, and asserting his link to sugar. He denies the claim made by a journalist during the feast

that Cuban people are starving and resorting to prostitution again in order to survive. “You are misinformed [...] since the triumph of the Revolution, our people have never gone hungry [...] Starving? What rubbish! If anything, we need to go on a campaign to *lose weight*...” (KC, p172). El Comandante continues with a “stream of facts” which prove the “caloric discrepancies” that divide the West and developing countries, with an emphasis on “the unrivalled purity of island sugar” (KC, p173). He upholds the conviction that, “despite the food shortages, nobody went hungry in Cuba” and argues that if the hunger strikers were starving, that was their choice (KC, p174). When the waiters bring in a gigantic meringue cake with flaming candles, El Comandante approaches the cake unenthusiastically “as he might a land mine” and “nobody got so much as a soggy piece of cake” (KC, p176). Castro, in favour of the pure version of sugar as a metaphor for the “pure” ideology pertaining to the Revolution, rejects processed sugar (associated with the United States) and thus rejects the cake. El Comandante is fighting a battle where there is an ideological contrast between Cuba and the West; a struggle to fight that which is “contaminating” his country.

As El Comandante ages, his decline as a masculine figure goes hand in hand with the ravaged Cuban economy, but always with an emphasis on sugar. This is reinforced by his breakfast request: “oatmeal, stewed fruit, multigrain toast that tasted like sawdust [...] coffee with 6 spoons of sugar” (KC, p119). His comments on a rice shortage connect Cuba’s decline with the decline of various countries in Asia, all victims of the West, while the US and the Soviet Union both function as agents of change. The dynamic between machismo and sugar as economic power is based on this relationship dictated by flows, both internal and external, one inextricable from the other. We are introduced to Castro’s thoughts on the role played by the Soviet Union; in fact, the Soviet element is an external signifier that plays an important part in the events that shape the relationship between Cuba and the US. Castro speaks disapprovingly of the Russians, but, ultimately, they are “part” of Cuba in the same way that the other

ingredients of the *ajiacó* are. When the smell of borscht stokes his appetite, it means that he has “incorporated” the Russian element into the history of Cuba.

Soon, they’d be flying over Miami. El Líder was inclined to order the pilot to empty the latrines over his enemies’ liver spotted heads. He adjusted the ventilation fan, which emitted the faint, unmistakable scent of borscht. It stoked his appetite... (KC, p217)

This is an involuntary incorporation, in some ways, that had to take place because Cuba needed Soviet support and money – a prevailing force of power flows that also determines what is eaten, and consequently finds a place of memory in the country.

The hatred that Castro expresses for the Russians is thus food focused:

Next to the Soviets he was a model of civility. For years El Comandante had endured their endless, vodka-fueled banquets – everyone two fistedly shoveling in heaps of caviar, sturgeon, sheep’s-cheese sandwiches, balyk (the highly prized dorsal sections of salted or smoked salmon), and those beastly pies, heavy enough to use as artillery shells [...] Colossal, stupefying pies stuffed with oily fish, congealed meats, cabbage. How he hated that stinking sour cabbage! Like eating out of a urinal. Kitchen sink pies. Why he’d half expected to find wrenches or chunks of farm machinery between their leaden crusts. His stomach, at least, had been ironclad then. (KC, p120)

The language used is composed of a rapid succession of food fired like gunshots at the reader to evoke a sense of oppression and hatred for the lack of choice Castro had. The strength he signals refers both to the food and the ideology, a compromise he was willing to make for the good of Cuba. The fortitude provided by youth has been replaced by a weariness and resistance

to both foods and thoughts that he does not believe in. Even El Comandante's speeches are not what they used to be for him; even in his greatest speeches now, such as one where he calls the US embargo a "noiseless atom bomb", he cannot match the thrill of the first he ever gave (KC, p205). In those days, at the beginning, his safety was constantly threatened. His brother Fernando hired body doubles for them, and El Comandante's was eventually killed as he feasted on a platter of cyanide-laced crabs" (KC, p207). García uses food imagery that connects the fictional Castro to events that have been recounted in real life in order to humanise him. Her portrayal of Castro is not as a superhuman force, but as a real man. She uses food to imply that Castro would be willing to compromise in order to do what is best for his country, and he continues to do so: following an assassination attempt, in fact, El Comandante stops on the northeast corner of Forty-Ninth Street in New York and orders a hot dog. Onlookers cheer when he takes a bite, dripping with sauerkraut, relish, onions, mustard and ketchup. Knowing that New Yorkers love anyone who love their hotdogs, in eating one he puts Cuba before everything else: "Never mind the gastric repercussions, he couldn't buy this kind of publicity" (KC, p222). He knows that the picture of him eating a hotdog will make the front page of the *New York Post*, as it in fact does, with the headline "THE TYRANT WANTS THE WORKS!!!" (KC, p222). El Comandante's actions, aiming to do what is best for his country, even if it means eating something he knows will cause him "gastric repercussions", humanise him and detract from the PR myths created around him. García's use of food in this case allows the reader to see behind the scenes of decision-making processes involving heads of state such as President Bill Clinton.

García's fictional encounter between El Comandante and Clinton parallels their real-life encounter during the UN summit in 2000, during which they allegedly shook hands. During the summit Castro attended the lunch event but was excluded from the dinner that took place in the evening, with tensions growing over pressure on the US Congress to ease the embargo

on Cuba (ABC News, 2006). García offers a version of the encounter where Clinton comments on El Comandante's diminishing weight: "'The embargo, mi amigo,' he answered slyly, patting his stomach. Clinton's eyes turned to flint" (KC, p224). These exchanges debilitate him, however, and he wishes he had "hooves" (KC, p216) instead of shoes so as to return to a less premeditated existence, with more purity of thought and fewer complications and without the need for such PR campaigns. His departure from the US occurs amidst cramps and a stomach full of gas, bloated and ill from being exposed, through food, to an ideology with which he disagrees. This, once again, confirms that he no longer has the strength he had as a younger man to consume and literally digest, for the good of his country, ideologies that are not his own and that do not reflect his beliefs. The fictionalised encounter between the two heads of state is important for García, and speaks to her belief that "Fictio cedit veritati", fiction yields to truth (KC, p43). She destabilises the official narratives and makes way for viewpoints that are subjective, socially constructed and based on concrete experience to provide an alternative view of events.

### **Goyo: Memories of Machismo from a Place of Exile**

Goyo, El Líder's enemy, also finds it hard to digest his political reality as an outcast, a reality that consolidates into a plan for revenge. Goyo is portrayed by García as one of the many who were exiled from Cuba after the Revolution led by El Comandante. He was one of the "gusanos" who left and made a life for himself in the United States, living with the memory of a Cuba "destroyed" by Castro. There is a strong focus in this novel on the lack of food in Cuba, and on memories of the Special Period, when "street vendors were disguising scummy mop threads with batter and bread crumbs and selling them as fried steaks" (KC, p29). In contrast with García's second novel *The Agüero Sisters* (1997), in which Constancia's face is "transformed" by her mother's apparition, here we have Goyo's memories of his dead wife,

who had so much plastic surgery that “her body looked stitched together from disparate parts” (KC, p33). She also convinced Goyo to have work done on his appearance, until his “eyes had somehow drifted closer together, then migrated slightly, toward the right side of his face” (KC, p33). The idea that memories in transnational movements are founded upon the element of destruction is relevant here, as Goyo, a representative of the exile community, undergoes plastic surgery in an attempt to reconstruct an image of himself, conveying the idea of a dislocated history. Goyo is a bodily example that reflects Landsberg’s idea of “the borders of the mnemonic community [...] created prosthetically through mediated acts of remembrance” (Landsberg 2004). The plastic surgery changes their bodies physically, as they attempt to create for themselves the illusion of “living forever”.

Landsberg’s idea of prosthetic memory creates a shared experience for the Cuban exile community that is suspended in time, where the exiles have varying ideas about Cuba depending on when they left, but all identify Castro as their enemy. Their identity as a community is defined by Augé’s idea of the “non-place”, a constantly changing location that does not claim to have “fixed” cultural roots, and thus their memories are ever-changing, as can be seen in the characters’ contrasting versions of the same events throughout García’s narratives. In cases of sudden upheaval, where communities have lost access to their history and homeland, they typically create a diasporic memory through an “imagined” narrative, made real in the same way that plastic surgery gives renewed life to Goyo’s features and those of his wife. It is possible to draw parallels between this process and that of the continuous destruction or deconstruction that occurs in cooking, in which the elements of a recipe are brought together to create something new, never without exacting a change on the “original” ingredients. Goyo realises that all the exiles around him seem to have had some sort of plastic surgery – they are all artificial, convinced that the Revolution never happened, believing they will outlive Castro and “live again” when El Comandante dies (KC, p38). There is a sense here of a narrative being

blocked by Castro, who still survives: without his death, it is not possible for the community of exiles to live their lives in the way they imagine they should, finally free of the tyrant. The scene in which Goyo observes the “brooding” Manhattan skyline after 9/11 is significant as a prosthetic identification with another act of violence. It pools together distinct experiences of upheaval and making changes to the landscape as he knows it.

In García’s novel, the violence of machismo, as a means of punishment and domination, is exemplified by Goyo’s behaviour towards Goyito, “The first time Goyo punched his son, he blackened his eye. The second time, he dislocated his jaw. The third [...] he broke Goyito’s arm” (KC, p104). At first, Goyo tries talking to Goyito, instructing him how “real men” act, before demonstrating it with his physically violent actions.

García often portrays the ways in which Goyo’s thoughts are interrupted by messages from his addict son, who needs money. Initially, Goyo refers to his son as addicted to drugs, but he then recounts an episode when Goyito was a Wall Street runner, operating on a “high-octane combination of donuts and amphetamines” (KC, p36). Here, drugs and sugary food are grouped together in the same category of dangerous, addictive Western substances. This contributes an additional dimension of danger to the imagery associated with sugar. Goyo acts as Goyito’s “facilitator”, feeding him the version of sugar that is available to them: buying him cakes, bread pudding, coconut flan, and enough flaky guava pastries to “feed a baseball team” (KC, p83). The sugary food acts as the only bridge between Goyo and the anxiety ridden Goyito: other than moments where he communicates with Goyito via the purchase of food, there is a real barrier between father and son. Goyo’s worldview is translated to his son within a diasporic context centred around machismo. Hirsch’s idea of familial postmemory, which focuses on the organic transmission of memories between “close relations”, occurs here through violence, channelled via machismo in a diasporic context within which the processed food has created for Goyito a way of engaging with difficult memories. Taking Hirsch’s



concept one step further, therefore, within the context of capitalism, Landsberg's ideas surrounding how transference space enables people to acquire memories of events that were not experienced in person is what occurs between Goyo and Goyito (Landsberg, 2004, p121). Communication takes place within the transference space of food: this is where they are best able to communicate. However, this occurs through a rupture, because only a rupture can constitute the premise of this type of discourse, the fracture caused by the violence of the Revolution, which in turn is connected to that of slavery through the sugarcane plantations.

Goyo's mode of communication is based on a product that Goyito understands, in the sense that it is representative of the Cuba he originally comes from, but it is not in the "form" that transfers the ideology that it "should" convey. It is not Castro's sugarcane, the pure manly ideals that are conflated into the macho elements of survival against all odds. Goyo's man-to-man talks have no effect on Goyito, punching his son, dislocating his jaw and breaking his arm do not reap the desired results, and even putting a gun to his head leads nowhere (KC, p105). Goyo remembers a Havana where young men were "men" in different ways, which meant staying up all night with women and drinking rum, a time when "people ate whatever the hell they wanted [...] your body took care of itself" (KC, pp210-211). This conveys the idea of the real man being able to consume as much as he wants, without any consequences; in fact, "[Goyo] didn't bother checking his blood sugar. What for?" (KC, p225).

Through the depiction of violence, García conveys these "manly" modes of communication as symbols of failure, rendered by the sharp contrast here between the excess of sugar that Goyito eats, as a real food of addiction, and the "healthier" version his father represents. Goyo remembers walking the streets of Miami with his wife Luisa after they first arrived from Cuba, "alongside wealthy, corpulent dieters [...] forming a colourful parade in their size quadruple-X sweats" (KC, p141). These memories immediately precede a trip to the

“Devil’s Diner”, a “must” before Goyito’s stay at the Rice House, a detox centre where Goyo takes him in an attempt to cure his junk food addiction.

The Devil’s Diner serves cinnamon buns “larger than an infant’s head”, and has a ventilation system across the ceiling that sucks up the grease created by dishes such as “caloric sundaes erotically glistening with pecans” or “deep-fried Oreos smothered under scoops of candy-flecked ice cream” (KC, pp141-142). Goyito selects two breakfasts, specials three and seven, containing an enormous amount of food, including cinnamon buns, stacks of flapjacks, and a basket of biscuits, while Goyo asks for half a grapefruit and a bowl of raisin bran. Goyito “calmly and meticulously devoured his breakfast” (KC, p142), eating with precision, and after finishing he orders a slice of pecan pie à la mode. Though Goyo is able to observe that other customers are also consuming vast amounts of food, Goyito is “among the largest” and therefore in need of the Rice House’s “revolutionary” approach. The food at the Rice House consists of modest portions of white rice topped with steamed vegetables and “seasoned” with specks of animal protein. Goyo thinks that “Only Americans [...] would pay thousands of dollars to be meagrely fed, spartanly housed, and monitored by humourless nurses” (KC, p143).<sup>52</sup> Goyo’s commentary on how Americans view the Rice House’s approach to food as “revolutionary” is indicative of how he is part of a different “order”, like El Comandante, an “order” who are not “fooled” by the marketing of an age-old concept, which Goyito buys into. Nonetheless, Goyo pays for Goyito to go, a sign of his acceptance that he is one of the contradictions in a system encompassing the extremes of both types of excess: austere food and junk food, and opposing structures, such as the Rice House and the Devil’s Diner, which house both these extremes.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> “The rest of lunch – white rice, dry-grilled eggplant, a microscopic portion of minced chicken – worsened Goyo’s disposition” (KC, p143).

<sup>53</sup> In *Sweetness and Power*, Sidney Mintz notes that the majority of the “great sedentary civilizations” were founded on the cultivation of a complex carbohydrate such as rice, accompanied by “umunani”, some kind of stew functioning as a relish (Mintz, pp9-10).

Goyo defines memory as a plague, “corroding one’s soul with all that was lost and unforgotten”, and states that there is not a “single Cuban of his generation who wasn’t besotted with the past” (KC, p183). This is an obsession with the past that is expressed via food because of the link between Cuba and sugar. Goyito will become the embodiment of this unforgotten memory of violence and upheaval through sugar, but it is the type of sugar which opposes what Goyo and his machismo stand for in Cuba, and violence is the legacy that Goyo passes on to Goyito. Goyo is fully inserted into the capitalist life, and his memories of his father are of him attempting to “strike a bargain with the Devil himself in pursuit of a profit” (KC, p199). Goyo’s father, also a “chronic philanderer” was the head of the Herrera shipping company, which transported people as well as their regular cargos of sugar: “the going rate was three thousand dollars per man, woman, and child”. His father committed suicide in the US following accusations of extortion and profiting from the transportation of exiles, leaving a “simple meal on the kitchen table” (KC, p200).<sup>54</sup> Goyo is portrayed as inheriting his father’s traits as a womaniser and *machista*, whilst his suicide recalls Goyito’s death wish; three generations of Herreras united through the perpetuation of a nation’s violence embodied by sugar. The last voyage made by a Herrera ship from Cuba also carried Goyo himself, “cheek by jowl with Cuba’s elite like so many peasants on an immigrant ship” (KC, p200). There is a pattern in how guilt, violence and migration are linked through the expiation of those who at some point have sought to profit from other people’s suffering through slavery, persecution or exile.

The action in *King of Cuba* is driven by Goyo’s plot to assassinate Castro, and for this Goyo relies on the help of a Russian security guard. Yuri is described in food terms: “[his face] looked like badly baked bread: lumpy cheeks, sagging chin, a crusty split upper lip” (KC,

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<sup>54</sup> “In 1961, as panic over the Revolution skyrocketed, the Herrera ships were transporting people along with their usual cargo of sugar, tobacco, and coffee. The going rate for a spot on a northbound ship: three thousand dollars per man, woman and child. Passengers accused Papá of extortion, but later, after his suicide, Goyo received dozens of letters from exiles claiming that Arturo Herrera had saved their lives” (KC, p200).

p201), and his assistance as a spy over thirty years has included “arranging catering opportunities in exchange for roast-beef-and-horseradish sandwiches and multiple quarts of borscht” (KC, p201). We see how the Russians work on both sides, acting as agents of change for both Cuba and the US.

An image ensues of Goyo as a devilish figure, who descends into his “blackest soul” and then rises, bringing with him from “the bottom the residue of his scoured life”, like thousands of exiles (KC, p203). The word “scoured” brings to mind the *ajiaco* pot, the *olla podrida*, as Goyo scrapes the “leftovers” of what was cut out of Cuba’s narrative, the exile community. Fittingly, he enters a cathedral and has thoughts about the outcome of the assassination plot he is about to attempt: if it were to work out, then he would be “hailed as Cuba’s new liberator, take his place in history alongside José Martí” (KC p212). When he hears his own voice, “oddly feminine”, asking him if he is about to commit this act for his own glory, it prompts him to feel sorry for his own body and its fragility “against life’s slow river of ruin” (KC, p212). Hearing a feminine voice coincides with a feeling of defeat, the antithesis of the epitome of machismo that Castro represents. The reference to how water can cause damage as well as generate life is interesting here, as the US is compared to water in Ortiz’s metaphor.

When the time comes for Goyo to make his way to the United Nations, the Russian guard, bribed with smoked salmon and caviar, lets him in, “smacking his thin lips” (KC, p231). Amongst the people there, Goyo sees El Comandante, the “monster himself”. He compares himself to Castro, and feels proud that he is in much better shape (KC, p233). This surprisingly shallow remark denotes an emptiness behind Goyo’s final gesture of anti-Revolutionary rebellion; it will be his last thought before he dies of a heart attack, after shooting Castro.

In García’s fictional version of events, the roles of victim and perpetrator become interchangeable, and Castro and Goyo both die in the end, different versions within the collective memory of the Cuban Revolution. Furthermore, they both die at the same time: a

generation gone, leaving space for Goyito, the processed sugar, and his illness as the result of the ideological contrasts between the generations. The memories born of the diaspora and the struggle against the Revolution, and the collective memory that El Líder struggles to perpetuate as an attempt to define Cuba both meet their metaphorical end with the two deaths, and a new version, through Goyito, remains. García's narrative indicates that cultural memory is constantly evolving, and the way she depicts the struggle between contrasting viewpoints is not favourable to either. Through the character of Goyito, she points to the destruction caused by the Revolution and how food reinforces a negative bond between the different generation of characters involved. Goyito, as a negative example of prosthetic memory, is portrayed as the only victim. It is interesting to note that García herself is a second-generation Cuban, and the characters she portrays as victims throughout her works, such as Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban*, are also second-generation Cubans. These characters were not part of the Revolution, and were born as members of the Cuban diaspora or taken to the US during their infancy. The postmemory generation that Hirsch refers to is one that has absorbed the trauma of upheaval without the experience that generates organic memories. The transferential space theorised by Landsberg is represented by the food consumed, which creates a prosthetic form of remembering, a dark and violent one in the case of Goyito.

### **Goyito's "Last" Meal**

Goyo's sense of masculinity derives from the impetus to fight against Castro, and his whole life revolves around this until his death. As a consequence, illness becomes a part of Goyito's life as a rejection of the traditional definition of masculinity imposed by his father.

If the culture represented by *ajiaco* in Cuba stands for doing more with less, then Goyito is doing less with more in the US. He is unemployed, and concerned only with how he can get his next "hit" of sugary junk food. In this sense, we are talking about a memory of food, where

masculinity, and a sense of its loss, are transferred into the present. The past, the time before the Revolution, is presented as a lost golden age of endless opportunity, and the present is rife with ill health caused by sugar, in its different forms, as the key ingredient in highly processed food. Goyito lives in the memory of his father's past through food, filling the void that has been passed on to him. This is a memory that filters into the everyday and is incorporated through the body, as can be seen from the following description of Goyito's feet: "[Goyito] removed his sneakers and put his bare, sore-infested, diabetic feet on the dashboard" (KC, p182). Goyo's parental efforts with Goyito are focused on attempts to create a more masculine version of his son, according to the parameters of machismo. Since his lack of machismo is expressed through food, Goyo concentrates on ensuring first and foremost that he be "cured" in this sense. However, Goyito's stint at the Rice House ends when his father is called and told that he has been caught distributing buttermilk donuts to his fellow dieters (KC, p162). Goyito, infirm and weak, is looked after by his elderly father, whose impression of his son is described as follows:

His son was spread-eagled on the hospital bed, his left eye open and eerily flickering from left to right, as if reading an invisible text. El pobre exuded a foul garlicky odor, most likely from all the junk food he ate. Yet despite his girth, Goyito seemed impervious to aging. Half a century of cocaine and buttermilk donuts and, physically at least, he remained imperturbably hale. His son should leave his corpse to science, because nobody, in Goyo's opinion, had ever submitted his body to as much abuse and survived. (KC, p111)

The fact that Goyito seems not to age brings us back to a parallel with Landsberg, who considers Freud's idea of transference. Transference creates a region between illness and real

life: “The new condition has taken over all the features of the illness, but it represents an artificial [one]” (Freud, cited in Landsberg, 2004, p120). In a sense, the signs of disease are visible on Goyito’s body, but overall he is not affected by the passage of time. The artificial food he eats creates a metaphor for his own father’s history – the idea of artificial transmission through plastic surgery does not make the experience less real, it merely conveys the violence and horror through a different medium that is just as effective at transmitting the hardships in the same artificial way as the processed food Goyito eats.<sup>55</sup>

Goyito, a victim of the effects of sugar, is portrayed by his father as inane and unable to move. It is interesting to note, however, that Goyito is described as being “impervious to ageing”, and has also previously been referred to as having a “lineless face [that] seemed outside of time” (KC, p142). There is a sense that the processed sugar he consumes contains none of the hardship that promotes ageing, as it is not the “real” thing but rather an impure processed version of it, which recalls the timeless effects of trauma and being stuck in a moment from which it is not possible to move on. It transforms Goyito into a different man. Normally described as a “slob”, in the context of eating he becomes meticulous, calm, decorous, with an impressive focus, “impeccable” manners and “aplomb” (KC, p142). It is with dedication that he autodestructs; his constant need for food is also a need for his father’s attention. He stares at Goyo “psychotically”, his hands, “lumpy and mutilated”, showing how ill he is (KC, pp183-185). Goyo’s misogyny is made even clearer through his reference to Goyito as being “trussed up like a pig for a woman to abuse” (KC, p186), and he does not hide the fact that he considers his son to have failed as a man.

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<sup>55</sup> “In other words, the memory transmission—the way that Artie comes to inhabit his father’s story—takes place outside either locale, in a space between them that I call a transferential space. This space is much like the space opened up between reader and text by the spilling of the pills” (Landsberg, 2004, p120).

The only times Goyito is depicted as having energy are when he knows he is going to get food: for example, when Goyo pulls into a petrol station, Goyito “sprang out the back door and into the convenience store, emerging moments later with several hot dogs smothered with condiments [...] and the biggest cherry Slushee this side of the Greenwich Meridian Line” (KC, p182). Goyo’s disgust is conveyed by his reaction to Goyito taking his shoes off, and he is unable to keep his eyes away from his son’s feet, obliged to witness the consequences of his diet:

The thick, corrugated nails rising off the toes; the grilled-meat look of the flesh; the open, deeply crimson wounds. It was evident that poor Goyito was dying from the bottom up. His feet reminded Goyo of the photographs of lepers that had scared him senseless as a child. Without preamble, Goyito started to cry. The tears ran down his cheeks and neck, soaked into his junk food. His face shone with suffering. (KC, p182)

Goyito is the consequence of a “distorted” prosthetic memory, still carrying with him the suffering and pain of trauma passed down to him by his father. This relates to Landsberg’s view of the commodification of mass culture as a form of prosthetic memory: “prosthetic memories, like an artificial limb, often mark a trauma. [...] calling them ‘prosthetic’ signals their interchangeability and exchangeability and underscores their commodified form” (Landsberg, 2004, p20).

The leg is no longer there, but is replaced with the memory of a loss of homeland, and this replacement, in the form of processed sugar, is a cause of pain and illness. There is a parallel here with the twin towers that Goyo comments on with sadness: “The towering twin ghosts still hovered [...] like gigantic phantom limbs” (KC, p201). However, Goyo is unable to empathise with Goyito, who is losing limbs of his own through diabetes. The absence of the



towers solely serves as a reminder of his tryst with another woman while his wife was out of town. He has associated the two images, the destruction of the twin towers with his own individual memory: “He’d been uptown when the planes hit, lingering, dry mouthed, in the luscious Carla Stracci’s bed after a night of drinking champagne” (KC, p201), and this also serves as a reminder of a time when he had refused to be a “slave” for a large corporation: “He’d been a slave all right, but to the demands of his own business” (KC, p201). In recalling the destruction of the twin towers, Goyo has incorporated the collective memory of that loss and absorbed it within his own *machista* vision of the world and his quest for revenge, but he is still unable to communicate with Goyito, who is suffering from an illness that physically affects his legs and compromises his health. There is a difference between how women and men “convey” memories, as can be observed in the contrast between Celia’s way of communicating with Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban* and the way the male characters communicate in *King of Cuba*; notably, how Goyito’s grandfather’s suicide interrupts the channels of communication. In contrast with Pilar, Goyito will never journey back to Cuba – all ties have been cut.

### **Conclusion: *Ajiaco*, Memory and Masculinity**

Fernando Ortiz’s early studies of African culture were carried out with the aim of identifying the traditions of Afro-Cubans so that those customs could be eradicated.<sup>56</sup> Towards the end of his career, his views on Afro-Cubanism became a fight to validate those very same cultural elements, as can be gathered from his writings and the fact that he founded the Society for Afro-Cuban Studies. His research concluded by acknowledging the African contribution as an

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<sup>56</sup>According to Cass (2004, p5), Ortiz’s initial standpoint in *Hampa Afrocubana: Los Negros Brujo*, published in 1917 (Ortiz, 1973), was based on a “mission” to eradicate Black cultural atavisms in order to construct a national discourse that would maintain “white superiority”. Ortiz later went on to incorporate an opposing view within his conception of the national imaginary, as he fought racism in Cuba and became the founder of the Society for Afro-Cuban Studies, valorising the very traditions he had criticised.

integral part of Cuban culture. There are also other “inputs” considered by the anthropologist that, though significant, were not regarded as ingredients of the recipe per se. In “Los Factores Humanos de la Cubanidad”, Ortiz likens the influence of the US to a transformation of the *ajiaco* pot into a metal container in order to simplify the cooking process, although this comes at a cost. In fact, he refers to the US as a force that has consistently weighed heavily on Cuba through its imperialistic economy (*imperialista*), but which has also transformed the sugarcane industry through the steam engine (*la máquina de vapor*). Ortíz describes the US as a “Niagara”, a powerful force which Cuba must try to take advantage of without drowning. He criticises the US for its lack of generosity in not establishing a single charitable or educational association that could represent a “spiritual” return of what was taken from Cuban land: sugar (Ortiz, 1939, p13). Rooted in the exploitative force of colonialism, the currents of change are thus described as the US’s bursts of “water”, which dictate, through neo-imperialism, the availability or scarcity of foods.

García’s addition to the “pot” in *King of Cuba* is the Soviet Union, personified by Yuri, the guard who assists Goyo in murdering El Comandante, and the latter’s own references to the Russian influence in Cuba’s history through unpleasant memories surrounding food. Within the context of Ortiz’s metaphor, the Soviet influence acts as an external agent, like the fire beneath the *ajiaco* pot, influencing the cultural mixture of elements it contains. What was true for Cuba’s relationship with the US is true also for its relationship with the Soviet Union; Ortiz states: “Following the pendulum of our history, Cubans either get farther from or closer to the great neighbouring power. Contact with North Americans is now burning once again” (Ortiz, 2014, p476).<sup>57</sup> There is an interchangeability between the fire and the water, the US and Soviet influence, that determines the “cooking process” of the elements that are contained in

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<sup>57</sup> “Según el péndulo de nuestra historia, el cubano se aleja o se acerca emotivamente al gran foco vecino” (Ortiz, 1939, p13).

the pot. Ortiz's idea of *ajiaco* presupposes a certain mobility, depending on these agents of change, with what lies at the bottom of the pot still playing a part in the recipe of the nation.

The Special Period in Cuba in the 1990s was the darkest of times, especially when it came to food, fraught with scarcity and hunger. *Ajiaco* "took on" that hardship, as it became a way of cooking whatever was available, an open pot for the ingredients at hand, extending the sense of inclusion to that which was defined by loss and absence rather than the abundance of cultural variety. It carried within it "diverted" flows of power which this time turned their backs on Cuba, as Castro took political stances which had consequences for what could and could not be included in the recipe. The cultivation of sugarcane, as the country's main crop and source of income, meant that Cuba's economy was highly dependent on imports, but the US embargo, in place from 1960, restricted the movement of foreign goods to Cuba, as well as blacklisting those countries that did decide to trade with the island.

In García's novel, having failed to "provide" adequately for his "family", the nation, El Comandante makes the ideology of *ajiaco* his own, in the sense that he upholds the dish as a symbol of being Cuban, and, more importantly, of being a Cuban man. As his years in Cuba as a dictator continue, so does the hunger brought about by the embargo. His memories, rooted in the politics of food, are pushed to the surface by "sensory" experiences that give him the ideological strength to continue his challenging and contradictory relationships with those around him. Similarly, Goyo's memories of his life in Cuba before his exile are dictated by a machismo which he seeks to pass on to his son, but fails. Goyito, with his junk food addiction and "sensitivity", does not fall within the canon of machismo to which Goyo aspires, and which is emblematised by El Comandante. To be a man at the time of the Cuban Revolution meant to fight, and this "necessary" machismo during the Revolution had a clear motive. In *King of Cuba*, we see a continuation of this will to fight for ideals, depicted through the medium of food, as not to fight would be considered a form of emasculation.

García's novel raises the question of what happened to all the Cuban men who chose not to fight in the Revolution, those who were exiled and branded as cowards by those who stayed. García's narrative shows Goyo's desire to reaffirm his masculinity through machismo and his fight against Castro. She also shows the reader the effects of this on the second generation, the children of these men, through the character of Goyito. Goyito embodies a negative mode of prosthetic memory: he replicates all the patterns that Landsberg indicates, but in ways that lead to a failure of communication and recovery. Goyo's frustration against Castro's victory influences Goyito's behaviour, and he takes refuge in food through a corporealisation of anger, regret and vengeance. García manages to "uncover" the crisis of the implicit naturalisation of masculine perspectives through male characters who have a relationship to the Cuban Revolution. Here food functions as "material matter" to provide proof of how changes occur within gender frameworks, and how the sugary junk food eaten by Goyito is considered the cause of a diminishing "masculinity".

Goyito, living in the memory of his father's past, fills the void passed on to him through a "transferential" space opened up by food. There is a social rupture after the Revolution that allows for the creation of a new cultural discourse, and, as with many texts that take on the topic of slavery and oppression:

[The fact that these stories are] narrated by or organized around a child assumes greater significance. Just as the child is the site of trauma in abolitionist discourse, the child ultimately must be the agent of recovery, creatively producing his or her own genealogy or memory narrative. (Landsberg, 2004, p88)

A descendent who has not experienced a particular past first-hand is one who takes on the exposure of injustice in order to offer an insight into the oppression and violence that was experienced by others, and which, in one way or another continues to live on. Goyito is unable to redeem Goyo's story, or Cuba's for that matter, because the product he is ingesting represents an idealised version of memories that do not belong to him.

## Conclusion: Dark Food

This thesis has explored the idea that consumption and memory, considered together, offer a new angle from which to view theoretical approaches, from issues such as ritual and liminality, embodiment and space, to capitalism and globalisation. 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.

Dark food is the recreation of traumatic memories through the medium of consumption. The concept of dark food operates from the springboard contexts of exile, migration and diaspora, as a re-formation of memory through communication, a process which has been referred to here as food-memory language. Dark food represents the creation of new narratives, as García's characters relive violent experiences through foods which are integral to the memory culture of their nation. Therefore, at the heart of the idea of dark food is a hunger to relive past memories by rendering these translatable through food-memory language. This can be used as a framework to interpret García's work through a juxtaposition of Ortiz's culinary metaphor for Cuban culture, *ajiaco*, and García's use of food in connection with memory. The context for this interpretation is a historical event, the Cuban Revolution, and its impact on Cubans in both Cuba and the US. The ingredients in the recipe for dark food were illustrated in Chapter 1 in the analysis of *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), which discussed the impossibility of communicating traumatic events. Here, supernatural means assist in overcoming that barrier in the relationship between the exiled Pilar and her grandmother Celia while the character of Lourdes becomes the anxious symbolic territory where the fight between sugarcane and processed sugar takes place.

In the discussion of *The Agüero Sisters* (1997) in Chapter 2, we saw how repressed memories return and force their way into the physical appearance of Constancia, while Reina

also carries upon her body the visible marks of racial prejudice, with the two characters “reconstructing” each other’s narratives to arrive at an “official” version of events. Food plays a key part in forcing a revelation about the sisters’ family history, which is intertwined with the history of Cuba.

The third chapter’s discussion of *Monkey Hunting* (2003) explored how rituals involving consumption are upheld in society, focusing on the character of Chen Fang, persecuted and punished for both her gender and her political beliefs. The novel uses contexts of celebration and feasting to illustrate how her oppression is normalised.

The fourth chapter, on *The Lady Matador’s Hotel* (2010), explored the idea of poison acting through subversive means, through “trusted” and socially accepted points of entry such as hotels. It presented examples of how trust is breached in various ways that are already established parts of the capitalist system. The idea of the hotel, as a site where luxury and modernity also come with a degree of danger, represents a way of life which creates places of “vulnerability”: the hotel’s liminality creates a non-place, where memory can be restructured and changed.

The fifth chapter, on *King of Cuba* (2013), discussed the food-memory language of sugar, so intertwined with Cuba and its colonial history and subsequent wars, and linked this to the violence of the plantations. Ortiz’s metaphor of *ajiaco* expresses the idea of cultural elements “meeting” through colonialism, re-writing the recipe with different degrees of separation or mixing, dependent on flows of power dictated primarily by the US. This is taken a step further by García, with the Soviet Union ultimately having a hand in the death of her fictionalised Castro, El Comandante. Sugar, acting as a signifier, contains and carries within it a process which starts from colonialism and slavery and proceeds through the sugar wars and the fight for independence, the Revolution, and the Special Period, when hunger was at its most acute. Sugar carries such a depth of meaning that when we meet the characters in García’s

novels, exiles from Cuba now living in the US, we see them gorge on a type of sugar whose influence is inscribed in their Cuban cultural memory but which in the US provides an opening for harmful acts to take place. Its processed form and ubiquity have an impact on health and the body, while the message it transfers, as a product of the US market, is still connected, implicitly, to the violence that engendered it.

García's characters are all "affected" by sugar: Lourdes' violent memories prompt her to take refuge in sugar, which becomes a weapon against her. There is an awareness on her part of the fact that these cakes and buns are used as "weapons", whereas in Goyito's case the idea of violence is incorporated directly into the sugary product itself. Dark food displays itself in *King of Cuba* precisely through the lack of communication between Goyo and Goyito; there is no "bridge" to Cuba, as there is with Celia in *Dreaming in Cuban*, and sugar is approximated to either violence, illness or suicide. Goyito is completely immersed in the processed version of the crop, and, unlike Pilar, has no memory of a "healthy" past in Cuba, with cattle, chickens and prosperity. Dark food has taken hold, through memories of violence that are expressed in the novel through Goyo's machismo, and that are taken one step further compared to the protagonists of García's other novels, leading Goyito to disease and ill health. The comparison between El Comandante and Goyo shows how Cuba and the exile community are close, but at the same time distant, in the way that they view the history of the island and the Revolution; their simultaneous deaths at the end signify how inextricably linked the two characters are, both feeding off each other's narratives, each wanting to have the "last word", Goyo even going so far as to have plastic surgery in an attempt to create an idealised "version" of himself to create the illusion that he could live longer than Castro.

We all eat, we all have to eat, and yet there is an unfamiliarity that goes hand in hand with consumption. What is outside of our bodies, before it enters our body, is not us, so it follows



that there is an unavoidable Otherness when it comes to eating that embodies the uncanny. In mediums such as film and literature, when fast food is used instead of home cooking in the context of family this tends to symbolise troubling times ahead. It signifies that the person in charge of cooking, a task which most often falls to women in the context of the home, is not taking the time to invest in the family, to invest in cultivating the bonds between family members. Fast food, processed food, cuts out the bonding process, becoming the unknown, and thus the people consuming it also become unknown to one another.

Within the boundaries of the framework of horror and the Gothic, food becomes a medium through which the uncanny makes itself felt. I say “felt” because although films appeal mainly to our visual senses, they also awaken other senses and tap into our food memories, encoded culturally in what surrounds us. So, although eating is an act that takes place in the present, because we cannot eat when we are dead, it is nevertheless also a conduit to our past: it brings ghosts, of a sort, into our here and now. It is an interruption that at times calls out injustices, transgressions to be corrected and rectified. Sometimes it is a pure manifestation of evil, even as it complies with the “proper” cultural usages, like table etiquette and how food is prepared and served.

As discussed by Mary Douglas, the significance of cooking and meals relies on repetition, and, uncannily, our experience of food and food itself can never be exactly the same twice, but this repetition nevertheless allows us to react in ways that are rooted in a cultural understanding of the emotive responses evoked by food, as seen in the work of Landsberg. Films become a transferential area, which Landsberg defines as spaces that might instil “symptoms” or “prosthetic memories” of events we did not live through, but to which we now have an experiential relationship (Landsberg, 2004, p135), and these can contribute to the formation of identity. Food becomes a tool within this space that enables us to experience events even more fully. Landsberg refers to the Jewish Passover, and how the exodus is

remembered and re-enacted via a roasted egg, a shank bone, herbs, chopped apples with cinnamon and wine, parsley, and salt water – all foods that symbolise and help to recall events that were not experienced in the first person, turning oral cultural memory into an experiential event. This particular example is specific to Jewish people, but what makes some memories prosthetic is that they are made transportable through mediums such as film, and recirculated: “what makes these memories portable is the commodification produced by capitalism” (Landsberg, 2004, p27). Through food in films we are exposed to a vast variety of portable encoded messages, signifiers which we understand because of the patterns and sequences we grow with as individuals within a community.

If food is a signifier, it can also, therefore, represent and symbolise what is dangerous within a community or a society. In Western terms, the way we consume has changed with capitalism, and along with this there have been cultural changes that have seen an overlap between fear and food as the two spheres intersect. However, it is difficult to deal with the contradiction involved in fully incorporating the idea that the very same food that serves as a source of nutrition can also be a source of danger, which leads to a sense of anxiety for those unable to identify the reason behind their feelings of unease, as the breach of trust is too great to be fully comprehended. Furthermore, rituals involving consumption typically serve as means to reproduce a damaging hierarchical and patriarchal order, a process that often goes unnoticed as these traditions are so intricately woven into our social tapestry.

Cultural memory, like food, could be viewed as a set of choices we make 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 a description on a packet can capture,

memory also undergoes a type of repackaging process to reflect what people are “hungry” for at a given time. There is a hunger to fill a void through both memory and food, which reaches beyond the everyday and into the past, or an idea of the past. LaCapra’s thinking on absence and loss discusses the consequences of conflating the here and now with a non-existent past, or one so distant that it can never be reached. Capitalism and globalisation have offered the illusion of closing the gap between our world and a utopia by reducing the distances between places and creating an ever-greater availability of products for those with financial means. However, maintaining this illusion relies on a widening gap between Western society and those places that have entered into a utopian imaginary whilst afflicted by exploitation.

In terms of research on cultural memory for this thesis, Nora’s idea of narratives that become *lieux de mémoire* – identifiable points of reference when it comes to a nation’s past – has been explored in the specific context of Cuba. Cuba’s dependence on sugar as its main export contributes to a deeply fractured narrative around sugar as a product. Through the works of writers who have investigated the history of Cuba, such as Ortiz and García, each in their own way seeking to interpret the past, it is possible to uncover various ways in which sugar tells a story of its own.

In García’s novels, the characters are unable to fully participate in their present since 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. The choices they are burdened with, which are explored through food and consumption, force them to look beyond their present circumstances. In *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story* (1993), the Cuban-American anthropologist Ruth Behar reflects on how her inner conflict stems from a feeling of loss following her attempt to model herself according to the American Dream. In García’s narratives, inner turmoil is dictated by a cultural contrast through which an inherited legacy still manifests itself, particularly through sugar, and specifically sugar used in fast food.

The use of *ajiaco* as a symbol of Cuban collective remembering, a metaphor rife with contrast, as Ortiz's 1939 speech tells us, serves to illuminate how García's characters remember and identify with their past once they transfer this sense of identity transnationally. Western amnesia, the fear of oblivion, is compared in this thesis to forgetting where food actually comes from, where and how foods are made. In forgetting its origins, we also forget the principal social function of food: the idea of communion and communication with other people. The Gothic elements in which this research is rooted subvert the idea of food as an opportunity to bond. Gothic literary and filmic 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. In the same way that the creation and perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity occurs via its own existence, or that the same women trapped by social food-related rituals are also those who repeatedly recreate them, food becomes a social signifier which, at the same time, contributes to the direction society takes.

García's characters, in acting and reacting to their surroundings through food, are simultaneously adapting to society and creating its next steps. This is the Vygotskian change of discourse that allows for the evolution of society and food. What dictates this evolution, I theorise, 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 that also creates a void within the consumer. Political upheaval, migration and diaspora make this "separation" more visible. García makes food her channel of communication in order to focus on these topics. Dark food is exemplified by sugar, which as a concept provides an insight into the legacies of slavery and its relationship to capitalism. García's texts portray a contrast between the infinite Western hunger for excess and the hunger for basic commodities in Cuba, and this provides an opportunity to discuss the conflation between an insatiable appetite and the losses caused by historical upheavals. The idea of dark

food provides 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 identarian issues that allow for alternative interpretations of the past. Consumption in García's texts becomes a signifier for how cultural memory operates in the context of upheaval in a continual reinterpretation of memory in the fight between contrasting versions of the past that arise from a violent history. Dark food provides an opportunity to consider how loss is conflated with absence, as with the Cuban Revolution and the desire of exiled people to return to a mythologised version of the island. It also allows us to understand alternative viewpoints, in more depth and from a different perspective, as it is located both actively and passively within a discourse of contrasting sides and versions of an event. The experience of food is active in terms of the preparation process, but it is also passive in terms of how it resides in the traditions and customs that surround us. Experiences and depictions of colonisation as a process, viewed in the context of Erll's switchboard theory, can be approached in various ways when it comes to interactions between the individual and the collective. There are infinite possibilities in terms of how the cultural memory of a momentous event, such as the Revolution, is kept alive and food is one of them.

Dark food focuses on the negative and violent processes involved in recreating significant events, and I chose to focus on sugar as an element of this horror in order 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 made visible in the ways García recounts her characters' experiences through food. Hirsch's theory of postmemory is relevant here in terms of the observations she makes on intergenerational dynamics and keeping cultural memories alive among those who have not directly experienced an event. However, it is Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory that highlights, through the connection

it makes with capitalism, the way capital provides the means for some individuals to purchase and partake in such experiences. In this sense, my comparison between Cuba and the US, two countries so geographically close and whose histories have always been intimately connected despite huge social differences, particularly after the Revolution, aimed to explore how differences in the meanings carried by sugar can be defined and understood in both contexts, as illustrated through García's characters. In parallel to this, sugarcane as a monoculture also incorporates a sense of the death of diversity and healthy productivity. The strong and quasi-exclusive bond between Cuba's social discourse and sugar means that sugar becomes a lens through which to examine the changing relationship between Cubans and their Cubanness. In the novels, the areas where sugarcane is cultivated are a space through which we can observe social phenomena through the characters' idealisation of the past, providing insights into local social development and transnational processes.

Based on this premise, the concept of dark food functions, within the contexts of exile, migration and diaspora, as a way for memory to "reform" itself, a process which has been referred to in this thesis as food-memory language. Dark food represents the creation of a new narrative, wherein García's characters relive violent experiences through foods which are integral to the memory culture of their nation. In the specific case of Cuban memory culture, both *ajiaco* and sugar can be considered integral to food-memory language. The link between *ajiaco* and sugar is the plantations, with their violent history of slavery. The metaphor of *ajiaco* emphasises reciprocity in the process of cultural contact, resulting in the creation of a new culture, and this is the unique nature of Cubanness. On the other hand, sugar is an ingredient with deep historical connections to the violence of slavery, and these associations are ongoing in Western industrialised societies and in the transnational settings discussed here. From this perspective, food-memory language can be understood as a way of expressing feelings of anxiety in the context of intergenerational relationships linked to memories of post-

Revolutionary Cuba, and the co-dependence of Cuba and its exile community represent a key component of the idea of dark food. The different forms of sugar García describes, as mirror images of each other, symbolise an uncanny likeness in a shared history that takes different paths. Dark food relies on the concept of revisiting memories, through food-memory language, in order to relive a traumatic event, and here such memories create damage as they are relived through sugar. The power flows that determine how sugar is used cause death on both sides: Castro's visit to the US is determined by PR relations he believes are necessary because the sugar industry in Cuba is in decline, while Goyo engages the services of a Russian in order to gain access to and murder El Comandante. Both the US and the Soviet Union/Russia, representing the flows of power that Cuba depends on for its food supply, are responsible for the deaths of the two characters, who represent opposite sides or factions in an ongoing conflict. Dark food brings to the surface the "shadow" cast over certain elements of food, the "obscurity" that shrouds its more visible components. Barthes' theory on the signifiers that are carried within food from the beginning of the production process to the act of consumption itself, together with Benítez Rojo's idea of the "invisible" components of sugar, meaning the history of the product, beginning with its roots in colonisation and the fact that the sugar economy, as stated by Ortiz, was always a capitalist endeavour all point towards the idea that there is more to consumption than is immediately discernible.

Implicit in the idea of dark food is the post-colonial mentality, which sees García's characters having the choice to eat different, healthier foods, but choosing processed sugary alternatives because of a conviction that these are superior: a symbol of Cuba's colonial legacy. If the cultural memory of a country is the parts of its history that are relived in the present, then sugar, representing the aspects of Cuban history that are relived in Goyo and Goyito's present, is what leads one to his death and the other to illness. Dark food allows for a "reopening" of the wounds conjured up by memory as experiences that were not fully metabolised at the time

they occurred. In contexts where the consequences of acts of violence are not fully visible, the framework provided by food, and expressed by food-memory language, allows for the manifestation of a narrative which changes repeatedly. Landsberg's idea of prosthetic memory creates a shared experience for the Cuban exile community that is suspended in time; different individuals have different ideas about Cuba depending on when they left, but all the exiles in the novels identify Castro as their enemy. Their identity as a community is defined by Augé's idea of the non-place, a constantly changing location that does not claim to have "fixed" cultural roots, and thus their memories are ever-changing, as can be seen by their contrasting versions of the same events throughout García's narratives.

Beyond this specific case study, the concept of dark food is one that can be applied more widely to assist in developing interpretations of events that link how cultural memory functions within contexts of upheaval, and the effects of this on those involved, whether as active protagonists or passive victims. Dark food is a lens that provides an opportunity to remember an act of violence, specifically, in the case of García's work, the Cuban Revolution. This creates a hunger for new memories that are transformed through food, with the potential to produce violent outcomes. The theory behind dark food can be applied to different scenarios involving conflict and cultural memory. Essentially, both Ortiz and García are creators and storytellers of perceptions of identity, nationhood and boundaries. Their writing reflects how cultural memory evolves temporally in a non-linear way, telling stories that matter to people at the time they are living. Food is interconnected with the environment we live in, and if eating confronts us with our own death, it also reminds us of the ongoing destruction of our environment (Bond, De Bruyn and Rapson, 2018, p33). The anxiety that characterises García's work has been understood here as stemming from the gap between the West and the rest of the world, intimately connected as parts of a process, yet separated by an anxiety that can be understood



through food, as it reflects a sense of indeterminacy when it comes to provenance and modalities of production. The interrelationship of food, culture and memory has much to offer future research especially in the context of transnational migration and exile. As global flows change, so do perspectives which see food and memory intertwine to reflect current concerns on which consumption can provide an increasingly relevant angle from which to view the world.

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