

***‘Good Things [...] from Bristol and Ireland’  
Dietary Ambiguities in the British Caribbean (1790s-1850s)***

ILARIA BERTI  
University of Florence

**Introduction**

As is widely renowned, food is more than the simple act of nutrition, it is also a bearer of strong social significances – identity being the most relevant – whose meanings and rituals can be politicised. Among the scholars who have treated food history according to its cultural and social dimensions, British Caribbeanist Christer Petley has examined the written accounts of nineteenth-century British colonists in order to evaluate how they depicted the food habits of the Creoles, using this as a means to understand the relationship between the emerging abolitionist movement and the changing British perception of the white planter class. Therefore, Petley’s emphasis on food and identities becomes a useful tool for the representation of some of the Creole patterns of food consumption, portraying the members of the planter class from the outside, through the eyes of British travellers.<sup>1</sup>

For the sake of this article, Creole is taken to mean only white people with British ancestors who were born and grew up in the West Indies and were usually part of the economic and political elite even though the term also referred to all people born in the Caribbean, including individuals with African ancestors, among others. Mrs Carmichael, a Scottish gentlewoman who lived in the archipelago during the 1820s, explained who was part of the Creole population: ‘As the term Creole is often in England understood to imply a Mulatto, it is best to explain that the word *Creole* means a native of a West India colony, whether he be white, black or the coloured population.’<sup>2</sup>

Drawing from Petley, I aim to compare and contrast the food customs and dietary ideas of Creole planters and British travellers in the colonial space of the Caribbean. I hypothesise that the various food habits and their connected diets encountered in the colonies were more than a problem of nourishment and instead

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<sup>1</sup> CHRISTER PETLEY, ‘Gluttony, Excess and the Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean,’ *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 9, no.1 (2012).

<sup>2</sup> MRS CARMICHAEL, *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured and Negro Population of the West Indies* (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Co, 1833-34), 2 vols, I, 17. For a better analysis of the concept of Creole and creolisation, see ILARIA BERTI, ‘Curiosity, Appreciation and Disgust. Creolization of Colonizers’ Food Patterns of Consumption in Three English Travelogues,’ in *Caribbean Food Cultures. Practices and Consumption in Caribbean and Its Diaspora*, eds WIEBKE BEUHAUSEN et al. (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2014), 115–32.

concerned wider processes of identity construction and community-building as also defined through a common diet, a similar contempt for different food habits, and opposition to unfamiliar diets, dishes and ingredients. After all, as Sidney Mintz argued in his well-known work on sugar consumption, ‘One could *become* different by *consuming* differently’;<sup>3</sup> similarly, Warren Belasco has stressed, ‘food choices establish boundaries and borders.’<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the ingredients and dishes described, chosen and eaten by white planters could be both valid indicators of their opinions about themselves and their views about not being born in the United Kingdom and not being British; in other words, food was used as a tool to express a sense of community and otherness. That is why I focus, firstly and mainly, on the white Creole planters’ diet and their love for local food, their feelings of difference and, in some implicit aspects, the supposed inferiority when they related their food to British cuisine. Secondly, I analyse the British colonists’ opinions about the unknown and alien dishes eaten by the local elite. Thus, I reconstruct how individuals perceived *their* food and the food of the *other* in order to assess how British travellers and Creole residents regarded the local diet and also how Creole planters performed the act of eating both in public and in private, when they believed the British were not observing them, in order to evaluate the role played by the consumption of local, European and British food in the invention of their Creole identity.

### Sources and Methodology

I employ various sources to assess whether and to what extent British and Creole identities were modified through culinary encounters in the colonies and their ambiguities in decisions concerning diets. Among the documents produced in and on the Caribbean during the nineteenth century, I mainly use diaries, autobiographies and letters focusing on a specific socio-cultural group, that is, the British and Creole elites who left these written traces.

Even though literary scholars could develop a far-reaching discussion on the varieties and structures of these sources,<sup>5</sup> for the sake of this article it is of fundamental importance to remember that a memoir ‘is a retrospective narrative about a portion of the writer’s life,’ an autobiography is a sort of long memoir that covers a good part of its author’s life, while a diary is a registration in which the author notes his/her feelings, events and ideas, often on a daily basis or when he/she feels the need to note something down.<sup>6</sup> As shown by the representative case of Thomas Thistlewood’s diary studied by Trevor Burnard, journals are precious sources for historians, not only to

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<sup>3</sup> SIDNEY MINTZ, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1985), 185.

<sup>4</sup> WARREN BELASCO, ‘Food Matters: Perspectives on an Emerging Field,’ in *Food Nations: Selling Taste in Consumers Society*, eds WARREN BELASCO and PHILIP SCRANTON (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2–23, see 2.

<sup>5</sup> Among the vast scholarship on the autobiography, see PHILIPPE LEJEUNE, *Le pacte autobiographique* (Seuil: Paris, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> PETER HEEHS, *Writing the Self: Diaries, Memoirs, and the History of the Self* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 6.

reconstruct the life of an individual, but also the context in which the individual lived his/her life. In the specific case of the diary of Thomas Thistlewood, Burnard has remembered that, along with others, it provides plenty of evidence ‘about what white and black Jamaicans did within their peculiar society. They are the richest source into either white or black society. [...] They offer a wealth of material about white society [...] and the manner of living in the [...] British tropical world.’<sup>7</sup>

Concerning letters, in his study on American letter manuals, Konstantin Dierks reminds that correspondence was and is usually full of apparently mundane topics because ‘every aspect of quotidian life stood available to build an emotional connection between letter writer and letter reader.’<sup>8</sup> Some of the authors of letters used in this paper belonged to families divided by the Atlantic Ocean, for whom writing to relatives and friends in the colonies or in the metropole was the only way to communicate in order to bridge the distance.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Ann Brodbelt’s letters to her daughter Jane, which are discussed in this article,<sup>10</sup> we can assume that letters were also a ‘form of mothering at a distance.’<sup>11</sup> As a part of their role, mothers wrote about even small and trivial aspects of their banal daily life in order to recall home to their children who were typically attending school in the United Kingdom. Sarah Pearsall also confirms this aspect of communicating ordinary moments of time and space with the aim of bridging distance and building and maintaining emotional bonds. In her *Atlantic Families* she examines mothers’ correspondence in order to offer a novel point of view on the social and cultural changes of the eighteenth century, while inserting them in their Atlantic and imperial context. Pearsall wrote that letters were imbued with ‘subtle messages about their time and place that might elude the casual observer,’ allowing their culture ‘to exorcise demons of distance and dislocation.’<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the use of these sources gives us a sense of the atmosphere in which people – mainly Creoles – thought about and discussed food during their era. The abundance of small details that was functional to building and preserving attachment

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Thistlewood was a British overseer of a Jamaican sugar cane plantation. For thirty-seven years he wrote a diary that has been studied, among others, by TREVOR BURNARD in his *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 24–31.

<sup>8</sup> KONSTANTIN DIRKS, ‘The Familiar Letter and Social Refinement in America, 1750-1800,’ in *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*, eds DAVID BARTON and NIGEL HALL (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2000), 31–41, see 35.

<sup>9</sup> For a recent research on letters in the French Caribbean see ANNIKA RAAPKE, ‘*Dieses verfluchte Land*’: *Europäische Körper in Brief Erzählungen aus der Karibik, 1744-1826* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2019), and Annika Raapke, ‘Liebes-Sirup und Trost-Makkaroni. Essen und emotionale Zugehörigkeiten in Briefen aus der französischen Karibik des 18. Jahrhunderts,’ *Historische Anthropologie*, 25, no. 1 (2017): 32–48.

<sup>10</sup> GERALDINE MOZLEY, *Letters to Jane from Jamaica, 1788-1796* (London: The Institute of Jamaica by The West Indian Committee, 1938).

<sup>11</sup> JENNY HARTLEY, ‘Letters are Everything These Days,’ in *Epistolary Selves. Letters and Letters-Writers, 1600-1945*, ed. REBECCA EARLE (1999; London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 138. On family letters and communication within the British Empire, see also Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families. Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 130–45.

<sup>12</sup> SARAH M. S. PEARSALL, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1, 7.

acts as an open window onto the culture of the epoch in which the letters, memoirs, diaries and autobiographies were written, thus offering a privileged point of view into the past. These documents can be especially useful when we do not concentrate on the supposed ‘truth’ expressed by their authors or the ways in which the writers tried to give a good impression of themselves and their families; they are especially helpful if and when we focus on the apparently ordinary topics described in these sources in order to reconstruct what Baxandall called the ‘period eye.’<sup>13</sup> Indeed, we could question these sources in various ways: we could inquire as to what an individual of the past did on a specific day or what he/she thought of other individuals. These are issues connected with identity; with the idea of themselves that the writers wanted to transmit to their readers; or with their secret agenda, in which case we can imagine that the authors did not necessarily write the truth. However, if we ask the same person the colour of the walls of the room in which he/she spent the afternoon or what he/she had for breakfast, we can guess there was no reason to lie: neutral and evidently banal questions were the ones in which it did not make any sense for authors of a letter or a diary not to lie. Furthermore, even if the authors of the documents employed in this essay did not tell the truth, the information provided with a descriptive aim was plausible and realistic because it had to be inserted in the specific context, wherein whoever was reading could recognise any misrepresentation.

The common feature of the sources used here is that their authors shared the same social and economic background, respected the same norms and conventions, and addressed their writings to the same readers. It should also be noted that people’s tastes and opinions are never separate and distinct from the geographical and historical context of their lives, but are generated by this context and can therefore be used as effective indicators of the mind of a place, society or age; this becomes particularly important when common themes emerge from the analysis of documents produced in the same period by different authors. The shortest note, however apparently unimportant, is thus connected to and influenced by its setting and by the cultural codes of the specific environment in which its author is located. Thus, the authors were fully aware of the ideas that they held in common with their contemporaries, and commented on these; but they also recorded if, when, and how they themselves or others violated the norms of their circles, and when they expressed opinions that differed from customary thinking. The use of the abovementioned documents as a historical source has also been defined as a ‘mirror’ to reconstruct everyday life and culture in the colonies.<sup>14</sup> They are of great utility to reconstruct and understand to what extent the British adapted their food habits to the new environment, but, above all – like in the case discussed in this article – they serve to illustrate how the food habits of the white planters were perceived and described in a way that could also lead to a new perception of the self and otherness. The analysis of these sources, therefore, revolves

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<sup>13</sup> MICHAEL BAXANDALL, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> MARY PROCIDA, *Married to the Empire: Gender, Politics and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 131.

around the issue of how the Creole diet was represented and whether and how the Creole and British accounts described the ambiguous and dual process of maintaining or modifying their diets.

To sum up, the shared methodological trait is to read between the lines of the sources in search of small, seemingly mundane details that do not add anything of relevance to the writer's identity but are of central use for this study on the seeming trivial aspect of food history. Indeed, also in the case of novels, their authors added details of plausible daily life, as well as sensations and impressions typical of the environment in which the novels were set and in which the letters and autobiographies were written too.<sup>15</sup> This point of adding specific aspects of likely thoughts and sensations is especially helpful because, as underlined by French historian Madeleine Ferrières, ideas, worries, opinions and representations of food can seldom be traced in official documents. In Ferrières's work on the history of food fears from medieval times to the twentieth century, she observed that, along with the taste of food, the act of feeding seemed too trivial to be worthy of note.<sup>16</sup> Because food was and is a silent and marginal phenomenon, there was not any need to record it in the official documents.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it is natural enough that official sources did not register food impressions, opinions or tastes. However, neither the scarcity nor the ambiguity of sources on food and diet should be an insurmountable obstacle to progress in this area of research. Taking the cue from slavery studies, we should remember that the historian Marisa Fuentes says that the presence of enslaved women in the Caribbean archives is intermittent and full of gaps; nevertheless, she successfully attempts to reclaim a sense of their lives from the documentary fragments available by reading between the lines and challenging the nature of the archival record.<sup>18</sup> In addition, when Ken Albala was interviewed on the use of sources in food history, he observed that 'when you get [back before] the nineteenth/twentieth century, personal narratives are very interesting. What people talked about in their autobiographies or interviews or things like that.'<sup>19</sup> Therefore, besides reading between the lines of the sources, here we are challenging the nature of the archive by using personal narratives, that is, mainly memoirs, diaries, travellers' autobiographies, novels, and correspondence between the Creoles and colonists and their relatives, friends, acquaintances and business partners who had stayed in the

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<sup>15</sup> On the use of the novel as a historical source, Jocelyne Kolb writes that '[w]hen social historians like Norbert Elias, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-François Revel, Peter Gay, Stephen Mennell, Alain Corbin, or Margaret Visser consider subjects that traditionally have been excluded from scholarship, they often use literary texts as "evidence" to be read with an eye for its literal rather than its poetic function, as confirmation of their findings in nonliterary documents.' JOCELYNE KOLB, *The Ambiguity of Taste: Freedom and Food in European Romanticism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 24–25.

<sup>16</sup> MADELEINE FERRIÈRES, *Storia delle paure alimentari dal Medioevo all'alba del XX secolo* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2004), 14.

<sup>17</sup> However, it should be observed that *quantitative* aspects of food are usually well documented.

<sup>18</sup> MARISA J. FUENTES, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2016), 1–6.

<sup>19</sup> KEN ALBALA, 'A Conversation with Ken Albala,' in *Food Studies: An Introduction to Research Methods*, eds JEFF MILLER and JONATHAN DEUTSCH (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009), 91–100, see 97.

mother country, in order to discover qualitative and cultural aspects of everyday life, as is the case here of opinions and feelings about food in the colonies.

More specifically, the article mainly focuses on Trollope's *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1859) and *Lady Nugent Journal* (1839); on the novels *Years Ago: A Tale of West Indian Domestic Life of the Eighteenth Century* (1865) and the anonymous *Marly* (1828); and on the correspondence of *Letters to Jane from Jamaica, 1788-1796*. The common feature of these sources – whether they be letters, diaries, autobiographies or novels – is that they are documents that tell a story with its own plot.

However, because the sole examination of letters and diaries does not allow us to discover all aspects of the diet in the colonies, I also use periodical sources to see to what extent and how often the topic of food was discussed and which aspects of diet and food were examined in the West Indies colonies. The investigation was carried out on 140 different West Indian newspapers in the period from 1791 to 1857 through a keywords search.<sup>20</sup> I explored the occurrences of the words 'food and diet' (1,825 references), 'beef' (12,226 references), 'potato' (487 references), 'milk' (2,670 references), 'yam' (333 references), 'pepper pot' (8 references), 'soup' (2,163 references) and 'callaloo' (1 reference), which were chosen because they are the same words that constantly appear in the diaries, correspondence and novels. The year 1857 was the last for which I used periodicals as a source because, as of 1853, the West Indian newspapers showed a general tendency to maintain the same announcements on imported food commodities, with no changes over time. Also, in the second half of the century an alteration was seen in the subjects of the articles: instead of publishing local issues, the newspapers began to copy the news distributed in the international press, from all over the world, leaving the scattered pieces of Caribbean news in a more marginal position.

In the years in which the newspapers still focused on local news, they mainly wrote about different varieties of imported food, with advertisements for ingredients coming from Europe, and about the food served in various taverns and hotels, its freshness, quality and consumer trust, all subjects connected to the 'slavery, sugar, and immigration' triad.<sup>21</sup> Also, and still connected to Atlantic migration, according to my analysis of the newspapers stored at the British Library, another constant topic in the Caribbean papers concerned the quantity and quality of goods arriving from Europe, which was always advertised along with a significant medical and imperial debate on the food rations – of salted or fresh food – given to the British troops in the

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<sup>20</sup> The only way to access the Caribbean digitised newspaper (1718–1876) database is from inside the British Library. A future research on digitised sources could also benefit from and be enriched by the use of OCR (Optical Character Recognition) programmes.

<sup>21</sup> RODERICK CAVE, 'Early Printing and the Book Trade in the West Indies,' *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 48, no. 2 (1978): 163–192, see 190. On Caribbean newspapers as a source for history, see also Bridget Brereton, 'Women and Gender in Caribbean (English Speaking). Historiography: Sources and Methods,' *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, no. 7 (2013): 1–18.

Caribbean.<sup>22</sup> Another aspect that regularly arises from the analysis of newspapers is the attention paid to the origin and quality of food, starting as early as 1791. Then, besides focusing on replicating news from the international press, from the 1850s onwards there is an abrupt discontinuity in the announcements printed in all of the 140 West Indian newspapers analysed. We see a significant change in the typographical format, its dimensions, the use of simple drawings, and bold and capital letters characters all in the same announcement while beforehand they were less emphasised. The result of this modification in the printing style is that, after the 1850s it drew the readers' attention to the advertisements for food arriving from the United Kingdom. Moreover, because at least for the West Indian newspaper commercials, this change in the style of composing articles was a novelty, the readers were even more attracted by this new form of communicating news on imported food commodities.

Even though the first Caribbean newspapers were typically published weekly, some of them had been appearing twice, three times per week or even on a daily basis in the most inhabited colonies since the end of the eighteenth century. In the smaller colonies, newspapers struggled to have a weekly edition.<sup>23</sup>

Before the 1850s, the typical newspaper had three or four columns per page: page one usually had official advertisements and other proclamations that followed on to page two; page three had local news as well as information copied from other Caribbean newspapers; and page four contained advertisements. Even if their proprietors, editors and printers hoped that the papers would have a long life, a good number of them only had a short duration. They were quite expensive and the price increased from the 1780s to the 1820s; after that date, the price of Caribbean newspapers dropped.<sup>24</sup> 'The number of copies of the papers circulated is very hard to judge, as information on this is seldom to be found. The *Jamaica Despatch* [...] was said to circulate 1,400 copies in 1836. Thirty years earlier, the *Barbados Mercury* had some 616 subscribers, probably much nearer the normal circulation figure for a successful paper in a prosperous and populous colony. But in the smaller islands the situation was very different.'<sup>25</sup> For instance, when the *Tobago Chronicle* concluded its publication in 1871, the editor communicated the news to its subscribers, who only counted 25 to 30 in a population of 17,000. In general, the number of subscribers on the smaller islands was so low that the majority of papers ceased to be printed.<sup>26</sup>

Because receiving news from the metropole was a slow process, the colonial newspapers also cooperated at a trans-colonial level to spread information. Subscribers asked the newspaper editors to quote overseas and European news in the local papers and 'by the middle years of the nineteenth century, the exchange of papers among the

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<sup>22</sup> ILARIA BERTI, "'Salt Meat [...] is Prejudicial to the Health of the Troops': The Battles Between Doctors and the British Empire over Army Diet in the Nineteenth-Century Caribbean,' *Culture & History Digital Journal* 9, no. 2 (2020), doi: 10.3989/chdj.2020.019.

<sup>23</sup> CAVE, 'Early Printing and the Book Trade,' 179.

<sup>24</sup> CAVE, 'Early Printing and the Book Trade,' 180.

<sup>25</sup> CAVE, 'Early Printing and the Book Trade,' 181.

<sup>26</sup> CAVE, 'Early Printing and the Book Trade,' 181.

West Indian islands had become automatic and formalized.<sup>27</sup> As shown in the newspapers examined for this article, it became increasingly common that a good number of them from various Caribbean islands printed exactly the same overseas news, which was often reprinted for several days or weeks.

Besides information on the numbers of subscribers for any single newspaper, the evidence on the quantity of copies circulating and read in the Caribbean is scant. Furthermore, retrieving information on the readership can be a tricky issue because the sole number of subscribers for any single paper does not provide the exact number of readers nor does it give us a thorough idea of the number of people reading any single copy of the newspaper. In fact, it is not always easy to get information on reading habits because as an activity it was (and still is) usually not registered except for books lent from libraries that kept notes on who borrowed them.<sup>28</sup> A stimulating essay on books, libraries, reading and readers in the small white Jamaican community between 1768 and 1777 shows how they exchanged books through the case study of Thomas Thistlewood's 700-title personal library. The analysis of his diaries gives us information on the intellectual world of the British and Creoles in Jamaica, their networks and cooperation, their interests and reading tastes, the connection between reading and status, if and to what extent they trusted each other in lending books, their identity and so on. However, Shelford's essay on Thistlewood's library only gives information on reading, lending and borrowing books and magazines but not on newspapers which, we can deduct, were not preserved, widely lent to others, or returned to their original owner.<sup>29</sup> Still, taking for granted that the members of the Creole elite were cultured people, able to write and read and also anxious to receive news that could be beneficial for their businesses, we can guess that they were also eager to read newspapers full of valuable information on local and global facts.

So, to sum up, I cross diaries, letters and novels with newspapers in order to give a more complete view of the complex cultural process concerning the Creole elite and British colonists' perceptions of diet, the dualism between public and private consumption, and the interactions between local and British and European food.

### **The Dietary Ambiguities of the In-betweener White Planters**

The period subject to analysis is mainly the first half of the nineteenth century in the British colonies of the Caribbean. The islands' climate and lands were optimum to grow sugar cane, a consumer good under constantly increasing request in Europe. In fact, since the end of the eighteenth century, sugar had lost its aura of a luxury commodity to become a product consumed by the masses.<sup>30</sup> The colonists employed

<sup>27</sup> CAVE, 'Early Printing and the Book Trade,' 185–86.

<sup>28</sup> Among the studies on books, reading and readership see the influential GUGLIELMO CAVALLO and ROGER CHARTIER, *Histoire de la lecture dans le monde occidental* (Paris: Seuil, 1995) and ROBERT DARNTON, 'What is the History of Books?' *Daedalus, Representations and Realities* 111, no. 3 (1982): 65-83.

<sup>29</sup> APRIL SHELFORD, 'Of Mudfish, Harpsichord and Books: Libraries and Communities in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,' in *Before the Public Library. Reading, Community and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, eds MARK TOWSEY and KYLE B. ROBERTS (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2018), 73–97.

<sup>30</sup> MINTZ, *Sweetness and Power*.



enslaved Africans to work in the sugar cane plantations and, even though a good number of them were defined ‘absentee’ because they owned plantations while living in the metropole, others built their lives in the colonies, starting a family there. Here we define these people born in the colonies with British ancestors using terms such as white planters, members of the Creole elite and so on.

The choice of the period under investigation depends on a number of reasons: besides the author’s research interest, the period from the 1790s to 1850 is dense in events and processes that caused deep social, economic and political modifications to the plantation system that was the economic centre of the Caribbean. We see the rise of the abolitionist movement in the 1780s, the abolition of the slave trade (1807) and of the institution of slavery, along with the emancipation of the enslaved people (1834–38); on the economic level, there were enormous changes such as the passage of the British Caribbean from an economic jewel in the empire’s crown to its negligible value because of the declining value of sugar cane production due to competition from other sugar cane-producing lands and the parallel extraction of sucrose from beetroot, a more suitable vegetable for cultivation in European temperate climates.

In the British Caribbean colonies, whites only counted for ten percent of the population and the majority of its inhabitants were enslaved people. Due to the inclusion of British Guyana among the Empire’s possessions, in 1830 the British West Indies occupied a space of 105,295 square miles and had 684,995 enslaved individuals at that date, falling to 664,970 in 1834. All in all, through the slave trade, the enslaved increased from 98,000 in 1690 to almost 700,000 by 1800, ‘and it enabled slave productivity to increase by over 50 percent in the same period.’<sup>31</sup> Due to the impossibility of increasing the stock of slaves by acquiring others since the abolition of the trade in 1804–07, the planters began to apply a series of amelioration policies in order to aid a natural increase in the slave numbers. Nevertheless, the decline in their population continued.<sup>32</sup>

According to the scholarship, the British who provisionally moved to and lived in the Caribbean suffered from the hot and humid climate, seasonal hurricanes, insects and mosquitoes, disease and high mortality rates, and feared slave revolts.<sup>33</sup> The American, French and Saint Domingue revolutions and the Napoleonic wars also contributed to the instability of life in the Caribbean colonies.<sup>34</sup> Besides the British who temporarily moved to the colonies, the main part of the society examined here were the Creoles also described by the renowned Caribbeanist Trevor Burnard. As the abolitionist movement of the 1780s increased its pressure against slavery, the British began to change their opinion on the Creoles. The British abolitionist debate played a

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<sup>31</sup> TREVOR BURNARD, *Planters, Merchants and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650-1820* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015), 18, 20.

<sup>32</sup> ILARIA BERTI, “Feeding the Sick Upon Stewed Fish and Pork.” Slaves’ Health and Food in a Jamaican Sugar Cane Plantation Hospital,’ *Food & History* 14, no.1 (2016): 81–105.

<sup>33</sup> On the high mortality rates, see BERTI, “Salt Meat,” 4.

<sup>34</sup> KENNETH MORGAN, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (1993; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 47–48.

role in describing the Creole elite as a negative class because they lived on slavery, an immoral institution. More and more Creoles were perceived as cruel, corrupt, uneducated, intemperate, greedy, gluttons<sup>35</sup> and ‘sexually lascivious deviants’<sup>36</sup> who preferred their ‘colored mistresses’<sup>37</sup> to their white spouses and, therefore, did not have enough white children and failed to reproduce a white Creole society. And, as we will better see further on, some of the members of the Creole class tried to reject these ideas and wrote petitions and pamphlets to expose their views on slavery, which were strictly connected to their identity.<sup>38</sup>

Along with the British revulsion for the Creole attitudes came the decline of the plantation system which, between 1670 and 1820, had been the most lucrative commodity for the British Empire.<sup>39</sup> Its fall was connected with the Atlantic revolutions including the American Revolution (1776–83) and the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>40</sup> Among the Atlantic Revolutions, we cannot forget the uprising in the French colony of Saint Domingue (Haiti, 1791–1804) which led to the first republic founded by ex-slaves. This also caused a steep drop in the local sugar economy, as ‘the key revolution in the fall of the plantation complex.’<sup>41</sup> However, the Saint Domingue revolution temporarily proved remarkably beneficial for the British West Indies, as they experienced an increase in productivity due to the lack of cultivation in Saint Domingue.<sup>42</sup> Even after the end of slavery, the plantation continued to be the main economic institution of the Caribbean, still managed by individuals with European roots whose main labour source came from people of African origin.<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless, the topic discussed here concerns a cultural process whose beginning and end, as we know, are not as defined as political events such as wars, changes of governments, or the introduction of a new technology or ingredient, and so on. In fact, even though both the poorer locals as well as the British troops were nutritionally impacted by a more limited diet during revolutions and wars,<sup>44</sup> there does not seem to be an exact moment of rupture or cultural modification in the way in

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<sup>35</sup> ILARIA BERTI, ‘Food and Colonists’ Identity in Lady Nugent’s Diary in the pre-Victorian British Caribbean,’ in *Transgressive Appetites: Deviant Food Practices in Victorian Literature and Culture*, eds SILVIA ANTOSA et al. (Milan; Udine: Mimesis), forthcoming; Petley, ‘Gluttony, Excess and the Fall of the Planter Class.’

<sup>36</sup> BURNARD, *Planters, Merchants and Slaves*, 216, 224.

<sup>37</sup> BURNARD, *Planters, Merchants and Slaves*, 268.

<sup>38</sup> MORGAN, *Slavery and the British Empire*, 51, 52; RAPHAEL DALLEO, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 21.

<sup>39</sup> MORGAN, *Slavery and the British Empire*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> PHILIP D. CURTIN, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 144–45.

<sup>41</sup> CURTIN, *The Rise and Fall*, 153–54, 58.

<sup>42</sup> BURNARD, *Planters, Merchants and Slaves*, 222.

<sup>43</sup> CURTIN, *The Rise and Fall*, 173. To better see how the shift from a commercial capitalism to an industrial one affected the British Caribbean and its plantation system, see FRANKLYN W. KNIGHT, ‘The Disintegration of the Caribbean Slave Systems, 1772-1886,’ in *General History of the Caribbean, III - The Slave Societies of the Caribbean*, ed. FRANKLYN W. KNIGHT (2003; New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 322–45.

<sup>44</sup> BERTI, “‘Salt Meat.’”

which Creoles and British colonists evaluated food and diet, resulting in a specific change in their dietary habits. As the article demonstrates, what we see are veiled and multidirectional changes in how people perceived ingredients, dishes and diet that were (and are), of course, connected to their identity.

Mrs Lynch (1812–65) described the daily life and culture of the white planters in her novel *Years Ago*. Née Theodora Elizabeth Foulks (Dale Park, Sussex, UK),<sup>45</sup> she was the daughter of Arthur Foulks (1776–1840) and Mary Ann MacKenzie. Her father was a Jamaican sugar planter, owner of the estate *The Lodge* in the parish of St Dorothy, Jamaica. In December 1835, Theodora married Henry Mark Lynch, son of John Lynch of Kingston, Jamaica. After her husband's death from yellow fever in 1845, Theodora moved back to England where she wrote fiction, mostly for young people. An interesting note on the cultural context is already contained in the author's pen name, Henry Lynch even though, as we have just seen, she was a woman. The author used a masculine pseudonym because, as happened in other spheres of life, in the Victorian period writing for publishing was dominated by men. Women were afraid that, if they wrote under their real female names, readers would not take them as seriously as their male counterparts. So, in order to ensure that readers would accept their texts, Victorian women often used male names.

Mrs Lynch's novels are of interest for the aim of this article because they usually had a West Indian setting.<sup>46</sup> We can assume that Mrs Lynch grew up in Jamaica because it is there that her father owned a plantation, there she married her husband, and her novels and poems had Jamaica and the West Indies as a backdrop. The author was, therefore, internal to the socio-economic elite both of the British and the white Creole society of the Caribbean. Therefore, following on from the historian Kathleen Wilson, we could define Mrs Lynch as an in-betweenner, that is, a woman who knew, mixed and adapted her life to the worlds of both Creole and British society. Even though the term in-betweenner could refer to any person living between two different cultures, in this article it is only taken to mean British and mainly Creole whites who left a written trace of their life in the Caribbean colonies and had something to say about how they mixed familiar with local habits and showed duplicity in the ways they perceived, desired, refused, described and evaluated local and British food, dishes and ingredients as well as other cultural habits.<sup>47</sup> Also, as explained by Pamela Scully, when historians examine

<sup>45</sup> See EVELYN O'CALLAGHAN, *Women Writing the West Indies, 1804-1939: 'A Hot Place Belonging to Us'* (London: Routledge, 2004), 190 where the author notes that Mrs Lynch was born in England even though Lowell Ragatz claimed that she was born in Jamaica.

<sup>46</sup> GEORGE CLEMENT BOASE, *Lynch, Theodora Elizabeth* (London: Smith, Elder, and Company, 1893); THOMAS W. KRISSE, *Lynch, Theodora Elizabeth (1812-1865)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); CATHERINE REILLY, *Mid-Victorian Poetry, 1860-1879, An Annotated Bibliography* (London: New York: Mansell, 2000), 285. See also 'Arthur Foulks,' *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership*, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/18133>, accessed June 26, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> A similar concept is developed by KATHLEEN WILSON in 'The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and in the Atlantic South,' *The William and Mary Quarterly* 6, no.1 (2009): 45–86. Here Wilson notes how visitors were struck by the Creoles' mixing of habits during the first phases of the colonisation. They would drink chocolate, an American ingredient,

the life of people ‘who crossed cultures’ they are faced with ‘many subjectivities’ because ‘movement across and within cultural and political systems opens up spaces for re-imaginings of self.’<sup>48</sup> A similar observation has also been made by Pearsall in her *Atlantic Families* in which she quotes the Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner and his idea of ‘liminal entities [that] are neither here nor there, they are bewixt and between. In much the same way, Atlantic families were “neither here nor there,” were both and yet neither, in between what became nation-states but also in between the most usual forms of household formation, continuity, and authority.’<sup>49</sup> Therefore, as the Creoles were people that experienced their lives in at least three different worlds – the local one permeated by native ingredients, African cultures and culinary techniques, and British habits – they had a sort of multiple identity and could suitably also be defined by the term in-betweeners. As we will see, their living between two different cultures aided the emergence of a new self, which I define a Creole identity, that, according to its own name, arose from the creolisation of local, African and British cultures.

*Years Ago* is a novel written in the form of a journal of a 15-year-old girl, Dorothy or Doss, which the author writes in the first person and whose narration begins on July 3, 1790. Doss’s family of five people included her father, her mother Lucia, her 17-year-old sister Philippa, a 20-year-old young woman Lucille, and herself, the 15-year-old narrator.<sup>50</sup> On the cultural side, one of the subjects emerging frequently in the novel is the wish, or better, almost the need, to often underline the different identity of the Creole elite from the British one. All in all, despite their small number, white Jamaicans ‘developed a rich, vibrant, and distinctive culture.’<sup>51</sup> For instance, according to Mrs Lynch, the British believed that the Creoles were uneducated. In fact, when Doss described her father’s love for written culture and writing, some of the reviewers of his texts ‘expressed their surprise that a West Indian wrote so well.’<sup>52</sup> Again, stressing an ambiguous Creole sense of distinction, on February 1, 1791 Doss wrote:

We West Indian girls have such a foolish family pride instilled into us, that we begin almost from our cradles to think ourselves better than those who very often are far superior to us. Colonial life is calculated to make one narrow minded. We give more

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and sangria, used African chewsticks to clean their teeth, slept on hammocks and bore their children on their hips as Africans did. Wilson defines these mixed habits as ‘cultural heteroglossia,’ 51. However, we should also take into account that a good number of the first immigrants in the British Caribbean were poor people trying to find a better life in the colonies. Due to their life in poverty and to their main need – survival – it is possible that they did not take care to preserve their old habits but acted according to their daily necessities.

<sup>48</sup> PAMELA SCULLY, ‘Peripheral Visions: Heterography and Writing in the Transnational Life of Sara Baartman,’ in *Transnational Lives: Biography of Global Modernity, 1700-present*, eda Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 27–40, see 32, 34. That moving from one place to another contributed to the formation of a new identity is also clear in the reconstruction of the life of Elizabeth Marsh and the contexts in which she lived: see LINDA COLLEY, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007).

<sup>49</sup> PEARSALL, *Atlantic Families*, 54.

<sup>50</sup> See MRS HENRY LYNCH, *Years Ago: A Tale of West Indian Domestic Life of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Jarrod and Sons, 1865), 1–11.

<sup>51</sup> BURNARD, *Mastery, Tyranny and Desire*, 245.

<sup>52</sup> LYNCH, *Years Ago*, 1.

weight than is due to colonial employments, colonial honours, &c.; and I have been feeling all this time [...] that a West Indian planter's daughter was too noble [...] to be the wife of an English merchant's son.<sup>53</sup>

After having emphasised the ambiguous feelings of Creole distinction, I will now evaluate if their food habits were also distinct from British ones and if the Creoles imitated the metropolitan colonists in their diet.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, I will also look at some of the white planters' reasons for their dietary choices and the British opinions on local food. Finally, I will examine if new and different food habits played a role in the invention of a Creole culture.

According to Mrs Lynch, the father of the family in *Years Ago* loved 'roasted plantains, [...] black crabs, [...] "Twice Laid", which is salt fish dressed very deliciously with egg and yam, and browned till is crisp and of good flavour.'<sup>55</sup> None of these foods had a British origin but they were routine in the Creole diet, a diet also shared by the African and Creole slaves.<sup>56</sup> However, when Doss described *The Glebe*, the sugar cane<sup>57</sup> plantation inherited by Hugh, the young man she will marry at the end of the novel,

the provision store was full of good things which Hugh said came chiefly from Bristol and Ireland. Barrels of herrings and salted cod, pickled tongues and smoke-dried hams, salted beef and pork, 58 boxes of soap, hard wax candles [...] then there were hogsheds of salt, and barrels of flour and peas, and large jars of groats.<sup>59</sup>

What is striking here is the gap between the awareness of their sense of 'superior' Creoleness, despite being despised by the British, and their fondness for Creole dishes, which clashed with the 'good things [...] from Bristol and Ireland.' We should reflect on how these two opposite and contrasting attitudes about food could be inserted in a unified discourse on food and diet. It seems that the ambiguity described above was a contrast between subjectivity, namely Doss's father's fondness for local food, and objectivity, namely the 'good' food that came from Bristol and Ireland.

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<sup>53</sup> LYNCH, *Years Ago*, 255.

<sup>54</sup> On distinction see the influential PIERRE BOURDIEU, *La distinction. Critique social du jugement* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

<sup>55</sup> LYNCH, *Years Ago*, 13.

<sup>56</sup> See BERTI, *Curiosity, Appreciation and Disgust*.

<sup>57</sup> See LYNCH, *Years Ago*, 24, 25 where Hugh, the owner of the plantation, decided to cut down some pimento trees because they were not as profitable as the sugar cane. On a more general level, one of the main reasons for the British colonisation of the West Indies was economic because they developed a plantation economy based on sugar cane there. For a better analysis of the plantation economy see, for instance, GAD HEUMAN, *The Caribbean* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006); MANUEL MORENO FRAGINAL, *El Ingenio. Complejo socioeconómico cubano* (La Habana: Comisión Nacional de la Unesco, 1962); MANUEL MORENO FRAGINAL, *Plantations in the Caribbean: Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); HENRY PAGET, 'The Caribbean Plantation. Its Contemporary Significance,' *Sugar, Slavery, and Society: Perspectives on the Caribbean, India, the Mascarenes, and the United States*, ed. BERNARD MOITT (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 157–185; TREVOR BURNARD, "'Prodigious Riches': The Wealth of Jamaica Before the American Revolution,' *Economic History Review* LIV, no. 3 (2002): 518–20; and FRANK MOYA PONS, *History of the Caribbean: Plantations, Trade, and War in the Atlantic World* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publisher, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Salt food is discussed in BERTI, "'Salt Meat.'"

<sup>59</sup> LYNCH, *Years Ago*, 33.

*Marly*, an anonymous anti-abolitionist novel, tells the story of George Marly, a young Scot who travelled to Jamaica in order to reclaim his grandparents' sugar cane plantation. In Jamaica he fell in love with the daughter of Simon McFathom, the attorney who seized his ancestors' possessions. Similarly to *Years Ago*, a fundamental discrepancy can be seen between the private sphere – the Creole girls eating a local stew called pepper pot in the kitchen, squatting like the slaves and poking their fingers in the soup without the aid of an instrument like a fork or a spoon – and the public one, with elegant parties where European food was also offered in a sophisticated manner.<sup>60</sup> As clearly shown by *Marly*, not only did the white planters who were part of the dominant local elite share the same food eaten by slaves but they also had the same style of eating. Their performances during meals when the British could not see them were connected to African customs instead of the good manners of the *civilised* British. While in their private lives the white Creoles shared the black Creoles' style of eating, in public their dinners were 'elegant being nearly the same style as an English one: the wines were superior, the porter was delicious and the attendance of the negro boys pretty good manners.'<sup>61</sup> In fact, during a dinner at Happy Fortune, one of the possessions stolen from his grandparents, Marly observed,

The dinner was sumptuous and elegant, partaking more of an English one, than was common within the Tropics. All the rarity of the country, as well as of Europe, were called into requisition. Wines were of the first quality. The desserts, [...] were displayed in all the different modes of fashionable taste, so much so, that it would have been considerably grand even in the old country.<sup>62</sup>

Again, the Creoles had a private life in which they ate what they liked best, in the way they preferred, and a public one in which they imitated both a refined British diet and manner of eating.

Other in-betweeners were the family of Jane Brodbelt. From their documents – the family letters sent to Jane during the last decade of the eighteenth century – we can retrieve valuable information relating to this continuous oscillation between two different dietary styles.<sup>63</sup> The author of most of the letters sent to Jane was her mother, Ann Brodbelt. She wrote letters to her daughter because, even though Jane was born in Jamaica, she was 'a little school girl [...] in England.'<sup>64</sup> Even though we are aware that a mother writing to her pre-teenage daughter could not discuss every aspect of colonial life, their letters, written between 1788 and 1796, provide some useful hints on how the Creole elite perceived food. In publishing a review of this 'pleasant little book'<sup>65</sup> edited by Geraldine Mozley, *The Spectator* wrote that Jane Brodbelt's father came from an 'old Herefordshire family' who possessed various estates in Jamaica. 'Thus the Brodbelts moved in the best Jamaican society.' The author of the review

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<sup>60</sup> ANONYMOUS, *Marly; or a Planter's Life in Jamaica* (Glasgow: Griffin and Co., 1828), 211–12.

<sup>61</sup> ANONYMOUS, *Marly*, 10–11.

<sup>62</sup> ANONYMOUS, *Marly*, 111–12.

<sup>63</sup> See *The Spectator*, August 18, 1938: 32.

<sup>64</sup> MOZLEY, *Letters to Jane*, 32.

<sup>65</sup> MOZLEY, *Letters to Jane*, 32.

written in 1838, the same year as its publication, declared that this correspondence ‘is, as one would expect, of domestic rather than historic interest.’ However, the different sensibility of twenty-first-century historians and more recent approaches to history allow researchers to use these letters as a historical source of fundamental importance in studying family life, gender, emotions and, of course, food and consumption, too. For instance, in letter XVII written during 1792, Ann, the mother, wrote to Jane:

Tell Mr Raymond that I never have his favourite dish (a Pepper Pot) without wishing Him to be a partaker of it, but that I much doubt whether He would thank me for wishing him in a Country so greatly inferior in point of pleasures to those he enjoys in England.<sup>66</sup>

Here, the desire to eat a ‘favourite dish,’ a pepper pot, a Caribbean stew already described in *Marly* as well as in a good number of other documents, was connected with a feeling of inferiority. Compared with England, Jamaica appeared ‘so greatly inferior’ and even the desire to eat one’s favourite food again counted nothing because it was associated with the West Indies. Even though one could find a ‘favourite dish,’ in Jamaica, the Caribbean was worth less ‘in points of pleasure’ to the dishes Mr Raymond could have in England. Then, a year later, on November 24, 1793, Jane’s father, Dr Francis Rigby Brodbelt,<sup>67</sup> expressed his pleasure after receiving ‘a fine basket of Fruit’ from Mr Roche. He also wrote, ‘I wish we knew how to make him some return to show we are not unmindful of his Civility but the duties etc. upon every Article from Jamaica are so great as to render sending Things almost a prohibition.’<sup>68</sup> This letter, too, reveals their need to underline their manners, the topic of difference and inferiority perceived by the Creoles when judged by the British or when they had to compare their food with the British diet. The fruit received was ‘fine’ and Mr Brodbelt does not mention the fact that he could have shown his politeness by sending back some tropical fruit; all he says is that he could not send anything back owing to the high duties imposed on West Indian commodities. So, this time, too, as well as in the case of the Creole diet and the good food from Europe described by Mrs Lynch, foodstuffs were connected with a perceived sense of otherness and inadequacy. One year later, on May 4, 1795, Jane’s mother wrote a letter to Jane on the same piece of paper as a letter to her cousin who had also been sent to school in England. Jane’s mother wanted to send her some money, ‘half a guinea,’ to buy some fruit to ship to her in Jamaica.<sup>69</sup> Once more, the desire to taste English fruit was present in this source. If we reflect, again, on the variety of fruit available in Jamaica, it seems irrational, to our twenty-first century eyes, to ask for fruit from England instead of enjoying the tropical varieties from Jamaica, which, in some cases, such as pineapple, was still

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<sup>66</sup> MOZLEY, *Letters to Jane*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Francis Rigby Brodbelt was described as part of a group of ‘professionals from established island families who had chosen to live and, to die, in the islands.’ JOAN COUTU, *Persuasion and Propaganda: Monuments and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (Quebec: McGill-Queens University Press, 2006), 252–53.

<sup>68</sup> MOZLEY, *Letters to Jane*, letter XXXII, 72.

<sup>69</sup> MOZLEY, *Letters to Jane*, letter XLVII, 107.

viewed as a luxury product at the end of the eighteenth century, exactly the time when Jane Brodbelt was schooling in England.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, many contemporaries of the Brodbelt family were completely aware that fruit was the best variety of food available in the West Indies and that it was appreciated by the great majority of British travellers.<sup>71</sup> However, this attitude of perceiving British food – even British fruit – as superior to what existed in the West Indies is exactly the same behaviour already described by Mrs Lynch in her novel, *Years Ago*. The Creoles were ambiguous and insecure when they had to compare their local Caribbean food with British food.

### **How the British Perceived the Local Food and their Attitudes to the Creole Diet**

Because of the Creoles' willingness to reproduce the metropolitan habits, the differences and boundaries between their own and British habits often appear blurred. Therefore, analysing the colonial diet in the Caribbean is a truly complex but fascinating process. In this section we will see how the British perceived the local diet and how their opinions are connected to the aim of this work, namely, the dietary ambivalences of the Creoles between the public and private spheres.

Anthony Trollope described the white planters' attitude of perceiving British food as superior to the local diet.<sup>72</sup> A keen observer of the habits of the white Creoles, Trollope was one of the most prolific and best-known novelists of the Victorian age. What is of particular interest in his writings is the description of the interaction between people and the pressure of the society in which they lived.<sup>73</sup> Because Trollope was usually very sensitive to but also critical of the values of his epoch,<sup>74</sup> his travelogue is a valid instrument to analyse in order to show Creole behaviour in many food-related aspects. The first edition of his travel account, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*, was

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<sup>70</sup> KAORI O'CONNOR, *Pineapple: A Global History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013) and FRAN BEUMAN, *The Pineapple: King of Fruit* (London: Vintage Books, 2005). According to Beuman, pineapple was 'a potent status symbol in Europe and North America [...], the Prada handbag of its day, [...] functioned as a response to conditions that today might be deemed "status anxiety",' xi, xii. 76: 'By the mid 1720s every self-respecting aristocrat in England aspired to owing a pinery [...]. Therein lay the beginning of a frenzied fashion that was to engulf the country for the next 150 years.' 95: 'It was as if this fruit from the West Indies had appeared by magic, so alien did it seem amongst the soot and stench of life in the capital.'

<sup>71</sup> The Brodbelt family did not seem to despise local fruit, and indeed it was also one of the few articles generally appreciated by all British travellers. See, for instance, CARMICHAEL, *Domestic Manners*, I, 9 where she, as well as other travellers, appreciated local fruit.

<sup>72</sup> Besides being a productive professional novelist who published 47 novels in addition to various stories of his travels, his autobiography and short novels, Trollope also worked as an officer for the British Royal Mail. In order to modernise the British postal service, he travelled extensively in a good number of colonies of the British Empire in Europe, North and Central America, the West Indies, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. He is known for his idea to create the British Royal Mail postbox, the characteristic red cylinders still visible today in the United Kingdom. See CAROLINE DEVER and LISA NILES, 'Introduction,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Anthony Trollope*, eds CAROLINE DEVER and LISA NILES (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1–5, see 1; Mark W. Turner, 'Trollope Literary Life and Times,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Anthony Trollope*, eds DEVER and NILES, 6–16, see 13; DONALD SMALLEY, *The Critical Heritage: Anthony Trollope* (London: Routledge, 1963), 23.

<sup>73</sup> SMALLEY, *The Critical Heritage: Anthony Trollope* (London: Routledge, 1969), xvii, 5, 13; see also DEVER and NILES, *The Cambridge Companion*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> For instance, Trollope's satirical novel *The Way We Live Now* (1875) is a strong critique of British society and the collapse of its values and manners. See DEVER and NILES, *The Cambridge Companion*, 1.



published in London in 1859 and tells the story of his travels during the last months of 1858 and the beginning of 1859. One of his aims was to discover how the sugar cane plantations could survive without the work of the slaves after the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834.<sup>75</sup> When he arrived in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, he slept at the inn of Mrs Seacole's sister.<sup>76</sup> There, 'this patriotic lady' told him 'beefsteaks and onions and bread and cheese and beer composed the only diet proper for an Englishman.'<sup>77</sup> According to the lady, all the white inhabitants of Jamaica

are fond of English dishes and that they despise or affect to despise their own production. They will give you ox-tail when turtle would be much cheaper. Roastbeef and beefsteak are found at almost every meal. An immense deal of beer is consumed. When yams, avocado pears, the mountain cabbage, plantains and twenty other delicious vegetables may be had for the gathering, people will insist on eating bad English potatoes; and the desire for English pickles is quite a passion. This is one phase of that love for England which is so predominant a characteristic of the white inhabitants of the West Indies.<sup>78</sup>

It seems that a keen observer of the society of his time such as Trollope got the point: when he had the chance to observe them, the Creoles preferred English food. Despite Trollope's value judgement which claimed that the local vegetables were enjoyable while British food was bad, the Creoles seemed to love British food more than local products, at least when he could see their kind of diet with his own eyes.

An advertisement published in December 1791 in *The Daily Advertiser* wrote that the Bretton Hotel (Kingston, Jamaica) wanted to inform its public of some news about the hotel. All these modifications concerned the food served there. This announcement is of interest because it chiefly quoted British ingredients. The Bretton was improving its pastry, a dough about which Mrs Carmichael complained during her first Caribbean dinner party in St Vincent: 'experience soon taught me that it was impossible to make light flaky pastry, such as we see every day in England.'<sup>79</sup> The owner of the Bretton hotel also wanted to inform the ladies that he had a good range of typical English dishes for sale

<sup>75</sup> James Buzard, 'Trollope and Travel,' in *The Cambridge Companion*, eds DEVER and NILES, 168–180, see 172.

<sup>76</sup> Even though Trollope did not provide any other information on the sister of Mrs Seacole, especially on who she was, he was referring to Mary Jane Seacole, the Jamaican woman who served as a nurse in the Crimean War and who also published her autobiography in 1857. This fact is confirmed by ANTONIA MACDONALD SMITH, 'Trading Places: Market Negotiations in The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands,' in *Gendering the African Diaspora: Women, Culture and Historical Change in the Caribbean and Nigerian Hinterlands*, eds JUDITH A. BYFELD, LARAY DENZER and ANTHEA MORRISON (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 88–113, see 111.

<sup>77</sup> ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1859), 21. See also ILARIA BERTI, 'Food "Proper for an Englishman": Neophilia and Neophobia in Anthony Trollope's *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*,' in *Mesas luso-brasileiras: alimentação, saúde & cultura*, eds CARMEN SOARES and CILENE DA SILVA GOMES RIBEIRO (Coimbra; Curitiba: Coimbra University Press; PUCPR University Press, 2018), II, 177–94.

<sup>78</sup> TROLLOPE, *The West Indies*, 21.

<sup>79</sup> CARMICHAEL, *Domestic Manners*, I, 1, 3, 32, 34.

that he has now in sale the best flavoured Mince for pies, and, for two weeks before Christmas and during the same, he will make Mince Pye [*sic*]. Ice Cakes, and a Temple in Pastry which will contain cakes of different sizes and prices; [...] Confectionary, &c &c. – Viands dressed for families upon the shortest notice; Turtle and Gravy soup, Mutton chops and Beef Steaks every day at 12 o'clock – Collard Beef, do. Brawn, do. Eels and Calves Head rolled.<sup>80</sup>

According to historian Kathleen Wilson, the patterns of consumption of the white Creoles in the Caribbean were actually 'also shaped by efforts to reinvent the hierarchies and rituals of home (that is, Britain) while meeting the exigencies of a new environment.'<sup>81</sup>

The analysis of announcements of food imported from the United Kingdom shows that, even though the British and Creoles in the Caribbean could find British ingredients, some of them did not maintain the same taste after a long sea trip.<sup>82</sup> And, of course, many of these imported foods were very expensive both for British travellers and for the Creole elite. Consequently, the white planters ate and loved their customary Creole diet even though they also looked forward to having what they perceived as *superior* British food. A customary meal could resemble the one described in the letter of November 27, 1793 to Jane. The Brodbelt family was invited for a second breakfast by Captain Incleton. There they had a 'pleasant meal' comprising 'manati [*sic*], or sea cow [...] in appearance and taste very much like roasted veal [...]. An excellent pepper-pot [...] made from Lima beans, Indian kale, and ochro [*sic*]; yams and hot plantains, with cheese, fresh from England, and fruit.'<sup>83</sup> The great majority of ingredients eaten during this lunch were local, to which 'cheese, fresh from England' was added, clarifying its origin. The relevance of having some English food, besides the local products, depended on their mentality. Again, Anthony Trollope's acute observational spirit helps us: 'Though they have every delicacy which the world can give them of native production, all of these are nothing, unless they also have something from England.'<sup>84</sup> Already in the year 1791, *The Daily Advertiser* published the announcement of Joseph Volley, owner of a tavern in Spanish Town, Jamaica. He had to leave, I guess to come back to England, 'for the benefit of his health' as he wrote.<sup>85</sup> So, he 'begs those indebted to him to be speedy in their payments,' concluding his announcement with the note: 'The Tavern will be kept as usual – Beef steaks and soup every day –.'<sup>86</sup> The food served at Mr Volley's consisted of typical British food such as steaks and

<sup>80</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, Kingston, Jamaica, December 3, 1791, 1.

<sup>81</sup> WILSON, *The Performance of Freedom*, 52.

<sup>82</sup> For practical reasons I shall only remember the case quoted in Mrs Carmichael. During her first Caribbean dinner she had London porter, a traditional British dark beer that, in Mrs Carmichael's view, in the Caribbean weather 'acquires a degree of mildness and flavour far beyond that which it ever attains in Britain,' CARMICHAEL, *Domestic Manners*, I, 37.

<sup>83</sup> MOZLEY, *Letters to Jane*, November 27, 1793, 72.

<sup>84</sup> TROLLOPE, *The West Indies*, 41.

<sup>85</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, Kingston, Jamaica, December 1, 1791, 4.

<sup>86</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, Kingston, Jamaica, December 1, 1791, 4.

soups, the ‘something from England’ described by Trollope nearly 70 years later that seemed essential in taverns, too.

So, what kind of food did the white planters receive from England in the same period in which Mrs Lynch sets her novel and in the same epoch of the correspondence of Jane Brodbelt? According to the local newspapers, the West Indies of 1791 imported a good variety of ingredients usually consumed in the metropole:

codfish [...], salmon [...], Herrings in barrels. Beef in ditto. Butter in firkins. Pigs head in barrels. [...] Flour in barrels. Bottled clarets in puncheons and cases. [...] Madeira wine. Claret. Burgundy. Old hock. Sherry & Port. Philadelphia flour. Salt fish in hogshead and tierces.<sup>87</sup>

*The Daily Advertiser* wrote that at the store of Joseph Dewdney in King Street one could find not only British but also European food

Yorkshire hams, Dried tongues, Stilton cheese, [...] Blooms raisins and currants, French and Spanish olives in quarts and pints, Squarer [*sic*] of walnuts, Ditto mango, Ditto onions, [...] Capers in pints, Sallad [*sic*] oil in pints, Anchovies in [...] pots, Lemon pickles in do, Quin’ sauce, Ketchup in pints, Durham mustard in ½ lb bottles, Cherry and Raspberry brandy in pints, [...] Black, red or currant jelly in lb pots, Raspberry jam, Port of a superior quality per punch or dozen, and, A few tons of Excellent porter in hhds [hogshead], With an assortment of good [*sic*] of former importations.”<sup>88</sup>

Besides the advertisements for food commodities imported from the United Kingdom, it is important to note that, according to ‘the sister of Mrs Seacole,’ British travellers appreciated their familiar food more than the local diet and also that the white planters were aware that British food was different. Mrs Carmichael, too, wrote about this process in an excerpt that is worth quoting in full:

Those who have been long settled, and who are accustomed to this style of living, take it very contentedly, and ask their intimate friends to come and eat fish with them; but they know this is not the style of living in England, and it is not before a considerable lapse of time that they consider you sufficiently creolized, to invite you to come and eat fish, and when they do, it is a sure sign that they consider you no longer as a ceremonious visitor.<sup>89</sup>

The use of the term ‘accustomed,’ the contrast drawn between ‘this style of living’ and ‘they know this is not the style of living in England,’ and between ‘visiter [*sic*]’ and ‘long settled’ clearly indicates that Mrs Carmichael perceived that the white planters had a different diet and that it took the British a while to get used to new food and different techniques of preparing and cooking ingredients. In her own words, Creoles never invited newcomers to have local food and waited until they got used to the Creole diet.

<sup>87</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, Kingston, Jamaica, June 1, 1791, 4.

<sup>88</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, Kingston, Jamaica, January 1, 1791.

<sup>89</sup> CARMICHAEL, *Domestic Manners*, I, 51-54.

### Conclusion

I could summarise and conclude this essay with a brief note on Lady Nugent's stay in Jamaica. She lived there from 1801 to 1805 because her husband George was the British Governor of the island appointed by the Crown. Her whole diary is pervaded by disdain for everything Creole: especially for their food, their sense of cleanness, the ways in which they educated their children, their language, with a true disgust for the Creoles' lack of manners. However, on September 30, 1805, when she and her children were already in London, Maria Nugent wrote that they 'amuse all the family very much by their little funny talks, and Creole ideas and ways.'<sup>90</sup> One could, however, object that Creole manners and language were only good for children and not for adults. This critique on infantilising Creole habits and appreciating their customs only if referred to children disappears if we quote the entry of August 2, 1805 in which Maria Nugent asserted that it was 'very cold to *us Creoles*.'<sup>91</sup> In all four years of her diary, this is the first and only time that Lady Nugent declared with affection that she and her children were Creoles, something she had never written while she was in Jamaica. Maybe the distance from the habits of the white planters, even in their diet, contributed to this deep modification not only in her personality but also in the description and the definition of herself and her children. When back in London, Maria Nugent was a different woman compared to the person she was upon her arrival in Jamaica; this was a process of change in which food certainly played a dominant role. So, the dilemmas and ambiguities in the encounters between the Creole and British diets were part of this process of change at an individual level, not only in the Creoles' dietary habits but in the identity of British travellers in the West Indies, too.

The Creoles fought a constant battle between at least three different parts of their identity: their daily life when they thought they were not seen by the British in which they mixed local and imported ingredients; the food culture of the enslaved Africans that became prevalent through the agency of the slave cooks; and the supposedly more refined British dietary culture that also existed in the colonies.<sup>92</sup> As we have seen, their lives were lived between different cultures, in which geography, climate and a refined culture did not allow the Creoles to slavishly imitate either the superior British habits or follow the slaves' purportedly inferior dietary customs. They also experienced a clash between subjectivity, their personal idea about what they liked best, and objectivity, the idea that good food came from the metropole. They were aware, or they pretended to be aware, that British food was superior only if and when compared with their Creole diet. The duplicity and ambiguity with which they acted in their lives, their being in-betweeners, could also properly be defined in a different way:

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<sup>90</sup> PHILIP WRIGHT, ed., *Lady Nugent's Journal of Her Residence in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805* (Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press, 2002), 259.

<sup>91</sup> WRIGHT, *Lady Nugent's Journal*, 252.

<sup>92</sup> On slaves' cooking agency, see ILARIA BERTI, 'In the Kitchen. Slaves, Agency and African Cuisine in the Caribbean,' in *American Globalization, 1492-1850: The Introduction, Reception and Rejection of European and Asian Commodities in the New World*, eds Bartolomé Yun Casalilla, Iliaria Berti and Omar Svriz Wucherer (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming).

it was a key part of their unique Creole culture and identity, which mixed, creolised and hybridised the ingredients widely available in the local tropical climate, the cooking techniques of the slaves, and the dietary and good table manners to which they aimed when they were seen by the British.

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