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FOOD “PROPER FOR AN ENGLISHMAN”. *NEOPHILIA*
AND *NEOPHOBIA* IN ANTHONY TROLLOPE’S *THE*
*WEST INDIES AND THE SPANISH MAIN*¹

(Comida “Adequada para um inglês”. Neofilia e neofobia em
The West Indies e o Spanish Main, de Anthony Trollope)

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes ideas and impressions of West Indian food found in the diaries, memoirs, autobiographies and travelogues of British colonists in the West Indies during the nineteenth century. These elite British travellers struggled to maintain the same eating habits that they had in their motherland. From their writings we can see how they were convinced they should only eat food “proper for an Englishman”. However, this analysis shows that, instead of eating only known food imported from their homeland, they also ate local food. In fact, they resorted to various strategies to adapt their previous consumption patterns to the new environment. The sources analyzed demonstrate that British colonizers learned to eat local food by describing it as similar to their usual food; by searching for analogies between their traditional food and the unknown West Indian food by finding replacements for what was not available in the local environment, and even by changing (at least in their descriptions) the provenance of local food.

KEYWORDS: food, british colonies, West Indies, Trollope, nineteenth century.

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa idéias e impressões da comida indiana ocidental, encontrados nos diários, memórias, autobiografias e viagens de colonos britânicos nas Índias Ocidentais durante o século XIX. Esses viajantes britânicos de elite lutaram para manter os mesmos hábitos alimentares que eles tinham na sua pátria. A partir dos seus escritos, podemos ver como estavam convencidos de que só deveriam consumir comida “própria para um inglês”. No entanto, esta análise mostra que, em vez de comer apenas alimentos importados de sua terra natal, eles também consumiram comida local. Na verdade, eles recorreram a várias estratégias para adaptar seus padrões

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de consumo anteriores ao novo ambiente. As fontes analisadas demonstram que os colonizadores britânicos aprenderam a consumir comida local, descrevendo-a como semelhante à sua comida habitual; procurando por analogias entre seus alimentos tradicionais e o alimento desconhecido da Índia ocidental, encontrando substitutos para o que não estava disponível no ambiente local, e mesmo mudando (pelo menos em suas descrições) a proveniência desses alimentos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: alimentos, colônias britânicas, Índias Ocidentais, Trollope, século XIX.

According to the French scholar Claude Fischler, two opposite and conflicting forces exists in every human being, neophilia and neophobia – behaviors known as the “omnivore’s paradox”². While neophilia is a desire to experiment with unknown food, neophobia is a fear that the food we eat will be harmful to our health. This constant tension is not only a characteristic of the twenty and twenty-first centuries, but also concerns past individuals and societies as demonstrated by historians³. Therefore, the object of this article is to understand how the “omnivore’s paradox” was experienced by British travellers and colonists in the West Indies during the nineteenth century – a phenomena made more relevant by the fact that we are analyzing migrants. In this case, neophilia and neophobia were stronger as well as more indistinct and, from a particular point of view, even more confused. In fact, even if the physical distance from the native country and the difficulties in finding familiar food amplified the omnivore paradox, both curiosity and fear for unknown food coexisted alongside the proximity of foreign food, were forces that contributed to the emergence of practices that diminished the conflict between desire and anxiety surrounding new/different food.

This article is part of a wider research on British colonists’ ideas and perceptions of West Indian food and how their opinions on local cuisine became part of a process of invention, construction and modification of their identities⁴. By taking its cue from Sidney Mintz’s assumption that “One could *become* different by *consuming* differently”⁵ and from Roland Barthes for whom every population uses food as a powerful “system of communication”⁶, this article aims to use food as a lens through which to understand broader processes of cultural hybridization by analyzing how the experiences of known and unk-

² Fischler 1990.

³ See for instance Ferrières 2002.

⁴ Hobsbawm et al. 1983; Anderson 1983.

⁵ Mintz 1985: 185.

⁶ Barthes 1961. See also Mennell 1985: 331 and Belasco, Scranton 2002: 2, “food choices establish boundaries and borders”.

known food in the colonies modified the social actors involved in this process, and how they invented a community that defined itself, in part, through its food choices. The examination of British colonists’ food also demonstrates how, during the nineteenth century, a strong tension existed between the two ways of perceiving and evaluating food – *our* food and *their* food⁷. Therefore, this study of food culture addresses broader perspectives and allows us to see how the colonists’ attitude towards specific food, dishes and culinary practices demonstrates that food is more than merely nutrition. It also concerns problems of fundamental importance, such as the construction of identities, asymmetries of power, agency of subalterns, reciprocal influences between colonizers and natives, and the role of imperial powers in the colonies.

I. OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

One of the main questions of this article is to analyze how the British deal with local West Indian food and how the encounter between British and local food contributed to the modification of the colonists’ identity. Therefore, we answer questions concerning how they evaluated, identified and consumed local food (if they do so at all); what the colonists’ impressions were and how they evaluated local food; and how the phenomena of colonialism contributed to changes in the food culture of the colonists. Focusing on how British colonial cultures represented people from the same social group as well as people excluded from their group, we also examine how the acceptance and rejection of food contributed to the colonists continuing sense of alterity or, conversely if the British colonists accepted unfamiliar food. After all, food and kitchens are zones where food and techniques of diverse origins can mix together⁸. Moreover, in the Atlantic colonial space, as well as any other areas in which daily contacts and exchanges are the norm, connections between different food and cuisine are the norm.

2. EGODOCUMENTS AS A SOURCE TO STUDY FOOD

The sources used to reconstruct the process in which the differences between familiar and unfamiliar food are blurred, often unconsciously, are egodocuments. Although the term “egodocument” only came into common

⁷ A similar modification in the definition of familiar and unfamiliar food has been seen in British colonists in the East Indies during the final part of the nineteenth century. Leong-Salobir 2011. See also Leong-Salobir 2015: 132, 150.

⁸ See Laudan 2013.

use during the 1990s, the Dutch historian Jacques Presser coined the expression in the 1950s. Presser defined egodocuments as every source in which the self is present with its ideas, actions, sensations and emotions⁹. Among the egodocuments produced in the nineteenth century Caribbean, we have mainly used diaries and autobiographies¹⁰. Therefore, taking into account these brief methodological notes on the use of egodocuments as a source, we have focused on a specific socio-cultural group – British élites who left written traces of their experiences. The authors of these sources share the same social and economic background, respected the same norms and conventions, and addressed their writings to the same readers. Diaries and autobiographies as sources have been defined as a “mirror” to help reconstruct everyday life and culture in the colonies¹¹. More specifically, the central source used here is *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (1859), a travelogue written by Anthony Trollope (1815-1882)¹². We compare here Trollope’s opinions and experiences of the food in the West Indies to other documents in order to support, discuss, analyze and interpret the colonists’ ideas on food.

Trollope is one of the most prolific and best-known novelists of the Victorian age. Even if he mainly worked as an official of the British Royal Mail¹³, he was also a productive professional novelist¹⁴: he published forty-seven novels (about one per year) in addition to various stories of his travels, an autobiography and short novels¹⁵. In order to modernize the British postal service, Trollope travelled extensively in a number of the British colonies, including the West Indies¹⁶. What is particularly interesting in Trollope’s writings is the interaction between the character(s) and the pressures of their society and culture¹⁷. Because Trollope is both usually very rational but also critical of the values of his time¹⁸, his travelogue is a valid instrument to evaluate how colonists reacted in their encounters with unknown food;

⁹ Presser 1958: 208-210; Rudolf Dekker, *Introduction*, in Dekker 2002a: 7-20; Dekker 2002b: 13-37; Heehs 2013.

¹⁰ See Magnarelli 2002: 29-57; Lamberti 2002: 73-80. Various scholars have examined the nature and validity of these sources. For instance, on autobiography, see Lejeune 1975 and GUSDORF 1991.

¹¹ Procida 2002: 131.

¹² Trollope 1859.

¹³ Trollope is known for creating the Royal Mail’s postbox, the characteristic red cylinders still visible today in UK cities.

¹⁴ Smalley 2007: 1-5.

¹⁵ Ivi 1, Deven, Niles 2011: 1.

¹⁶ Deven, Niles 2011: 13. Trollope travelled extensively in Europe, North and Central America, the West Indies, Africa, Australia and New Zealand. For this reason he is defined by Turner as a “global man”. Turner 2011: 12. See also Hall 1992: 97; Davidson 1969: 3

¹⁷ Smalley 1969: xvii, 5, 13. See also Dever, Niles 2011: 1; Aguirre 2015: 1-20.

¹⁸ For instance, the 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, Niles 2011, p. 1.

particularly if their descriptions and perceptions hid a specific political objective such as constructing their identity as colonists.

The tension between familiar and unfamiliar food, or between neophilia and neophobia, is well demonstrated in Trollope’s account of the West Indies¹⁹. The first edition of *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* was published in London during the 1859 and tells the story of his travels during the last months of 1858 and the beginning of 1859. One of his main objectives was to discover how the sugar cane plantations survived after the abolition of the slavery in the British Empire in 1834²⁰. Besides his excellent descriptive ability and his close observation of the society depicted, we decided to analyze Trollope because an initial reading of his *The West Indies* seemed to reveal food consumption patterns similar to the first British colonists and the Spanish *conquistadores* in the Americas.

3. FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN THE COLONIES (16TH TO 18TH CENTURY)

The eating habits of the first European colonists in the Americas have already been the subject of historical research, including the work of Richard Dunn on British colonists in the West Indies during the seventeenth and eighteenth century²¹, the analysis of Rebecca Earle on Spanish America in the sixteenth and seventeenth century²², various articles of Gregorio Saldarriaga on the New Kingdom of Granada during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries²³, and the writings of Michael LaCombe on European colonists in the area now known as New England (USA)²⁴. The general trend emerging from this scholarship is not only the European’s rejection of local food and the desire to return to their home country in order to stop eating “strange food”²⁵, but also the practical difficulties in finding familiar food and the resulting efforts to look for it. Dunn explains that the consumption of familiar food comforted the colonists in the unknown and hostile Caribbean environment in addition to underlining the hierarchical designs of the colonists²⁶. Both Dunn and Earle declare that, since the beginning of the American colonization, colonists preferred importing preserved food from their home country

¹⁹ Hall 1992: 97; Davidson 1969: 303.

²⁰ Buzard 2011: 172.

²¹ Dunn 1972.

²² Earle 2010.

²³ Saldarriaga 2011.

²⁴ LaCombe 2012; LaCombe 2010: 669-687; LaCombe 2013: 859-868.

²⁵ Dunn 1972: XVI.

²⁶ Ivi 263.

instead of eating fresh local food, with the exception of eating some fruit. According to Rebecca Earle, Spanish colonists were afraid that “without access to European food, Spaniards would sooner or later turn into Indians.”²⁷

If the investigations mentioned above describe the food consumption patterns of Europeans during the first phases of colonization in the Americas and the same pattern described by Trollope, the analysis of around sixty travelogues, autobiographies and diaries written by British colonists during their stay in the West Indies paints a different picture. In their accounts, encounters with food of different origins consumed by people of diverse backgrounds in the same geographical area, were the norm. If local food was harmful for the colonists as described especially by Earle, and Dunn but also, under certain aspects, by Saldarriaga and LaCombe, too, in my examination of nineteenth century egodocuments, mistrust is replaced with curiosity and interest that not only led to the acceptance, but also the appreciation of local food. The sources demonstrate how colonists learnt to enjoy unknown food by researching equivalent substitutions for their food in the West Indies²⁸. For instance, they described *callaloo*, a local vegetable, as “the spinach of the West Indies”²⁹; or the taste of the *manatee*, a water mammal, as similar to veal³⁰. Moreover, the documents display how, even if travellers and colonists were willing to maintain their previous food habits, their desire clashed with the unavailability of certain food, due to a different climate, health problems and the high cost of some imported food.

4. FOOD “PROPER [...] FOR AN ENGLISHMAN”

Despite holding the opposite attitude towards food from the colonists of his era, Trollope believed that British colonists in the West Indies only ate familiar food and avoided local dishes. After his arrival in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, a city “not lighted at all”³¹, Trollope asserts that the female owner of his accommodation should “abandon the idea that beefsteaks and onions and bread and cheese and beer composed the only diet proper for an Englishman.”³² Trollope’s impression was that people in Jamaica only cook and eat food “proper [...] for an Englishman” like steaks, onions, bread, cheese and beer because “the people are fond of English dishes and that they

²⁷ Earle 2010: 708. In her volume, Earle clarifies that the Spanish fear of turning into Indians depended draw on humoral and Galen theories.

²⁸ Berti 2014: 115-132.

²⁹ Ivi 119.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Trollope 1859: 13.

³² Ivi 21.

despise or affect to despise their own production.”³³. Trollope also observed that economic factors could impact on the food choices of “the people”³⁴, with specific reference to “the white inhabitants of the West Indies.”³⁵. It would be cheaper eating turtle (perceived as a luxury food in the United Kingdom) instead of oxtail, beef steaks and roast beef “at almost every meal” or eating “yams, avocado pears, the mountain cabbage, plantains and other twenty other delicious vegetables” while “people will insist on eating bad English potatoes; and the desire for English pickles is quite a passion.”³⁶. According to Trollope, the non-acceptance of local food depended on the fact that “love for England which is so predominant a characteristic of the white inhabitants of the West Indies.”³⁷. According to Trollope, the white’s colonists “love for England” helped their enjoyment eating of only British food. Therefore that “love” also included food practices and choices because food strongly reinforces identity and belonging, particularly in the case of people who live far from their home country³⁸. The fact that food can be evocative is even more apparent when we combine the love that “the white inhabitants of the West Indies” have for their British food with Trollope’s shrewd observations about the term “home” for “the white people”³⁹ of Jamaica. Trollope begins his reflections by comparing the areas colonized by the British with the comparatively few dominated by French. Logically, this disparity is the main reason why they were more British living far from their native country than the French. However, the French were wiser than the British because, even if they continued to love both France and Paris, they made a concerted effort to build comfortable new lives for themselves through marriage, raising children and building homes and infrastructure in the West Indies⁴⁰. Conversely, Trollope goes on, the British in the Caribbean lived their life with “regret” and nostalgia for their past life because “the word “home” with them is sacred, and means something holier than a habitation in the Tropics. It refers always to the old country. “[...] It always signifies England.”⁴¹. So, according to Trollope, the British in the West Indies did not

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ The role of food as a strong marker of identity, with the ability to evoke our past, becomes even more relevant when scholars investigate, as in this case, migrant communities. See Bardenstein 2002: 353-387; Charsley 1992; Bower 1997; Gilroy 1987: 98-109; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1987: 8-12; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991: 75-105; Kugelmass 1990: 57-80.

³⁹ Trollope 1859: 90.

⁴⁰ Ivi 99, 159.

⁴¹ Ivi 99.

live life to the full and spent as little time there as possible only “to make money enough by molasses and sugar to return *home*.”⁴².

Travelogues written thirty years before the colonization of the West Indies described British colonizers as individuals inextricably tied to their motherland, eager to maintain their traditional habits and customs. In fact, Trollope’s concept of “home” was discussed in the travelogue of Henry Nelson Coleridge (1798-1843) years before in 1825⁴³. Even though there is a difference of thirty-three years between the two accounts – respectively, the first part of 1820s and 1858-59 –, their opinions of British colonists were very similar⁴⁴. In Coleridge’s travelogue, the attitude of the British is compared to the French colonists who considered the West Indies as their home. By contrast, excluding a smaller group of Creoles, namely the local élite with European ancestry born in the West Indies, all of the British colonists and the majority of Creoles considered the colonies as only a temporary place of residence and “they call England their home”⁴⁵ even if a good number of them were born in the West Indies and had never visited “England”. Because of this feeling of alienation, food and other commodities were imported from the United Kingdom and they behaved differently from the French who sourced the goods they desired locally⁴⁶. Even an anonymous “resident” on the island of Dominica during the 1820s noted that the British remained bound to their motherland declaring: “the West Indian never speak of England but under the cherished name of Home.”⁴⁷.

One of the most well known histories of the island, *The History of Jamaica* by Edward Long (1734-1813), historian, administrator of the British Empire and slave-owner, contains similar depictions of British settlers in the

⁴² Ivi 159.

⁴³ n.a. Coleridge 1825. For an in-depth analysis of Coleridge, see Stephen and Lee 1885: 300.

⁴⁴ Even if there is a dearth of literature on this topic, the reading, examination and comparison between Coleridge (1825) and Trollope (1859) shows how *The West Indies* is, partly, copied from Coleridge. The investigation of a wide range of travelogues, autobiographies and diaries written by the British and North Americans demonstrates how the reproduction of sections, pages and entire chapters, was a common practice during the nineteenth century. Very often, the copied sections concern the history, botany and geomorphology of the West Indies. In copying other documents the writers usually did not quote the source.

⁴⁵ Coleridge 1825: 143.

⁴⁶ Ivi 143-144.

⁴⁷ N.a. A Resident 1828: 43. This quotation demonstrates the use of nostalgia as a means to construct, enforce and invent a community – the British community that suffered from living far from their home country. It is also possible that this feeling of nostalgia was not present in the colonists’ everyday life. However, because we work on perceptions instead of reality, there can be little doubt that writers used nostalgia as a way of constructing their community’s identity in the British West Indies. In order to be part of this imagined community (Anderson 1982) the colonists had to feel nostalgia for their motherland and for its food.

Caribbean. It was published in 1774 and examined the period 1665-1774⁴⁸. Long declares that “the inhabitants [were] closely attached to the interests or their mother country”⁴⁹ to the point that they relied on imports from the United Kingdom, even for materials to build their houses. This fact contributes, Long notes, to the enrichment of the metropole. The British also imported “their provisions such as cheese, hams, bacons, tongues, salmon, onions, refined sugar, confectionary, [...] spices, pickles, beer, porter, ale, cyder [sic], in vast quantities; and flour and biscuits.”⁵⁰ As clearly demonstrated by the sources discussed previously, the British in the West Indies actively tried to recreate a lifestyle as close as possible to the one they had at home⁵¹. The British colonists’ disposition to maintain their traditional habits was so strong that Long suggested a way of reducing the dependence of West Indian colonies on the North American colonies: he proposed it would be preferable to import “hams, fish, bacon, cheese” and “beef, pork and butter” from the United Kingdom instead of from North America⁵². After all, Long observed that even the Creole élite born in the Caribbean and the owners of sugarcane plantations wanted to imitate the British in every aspects of their lives, including activities concerning nutrition and the dining table⁵³. In the British West Indies of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, British colonists were also the promoters of style, the fashion influencers.

5. CIVILIZING THROUGH FOOD. THE CASE OF “OUR ENGLISH POTATO”

Even if we only analyze the writings of Long, Coleridge and Trollope, we can still identify the first moment of rupture in traditional eating habits of the British in the West Indian colonies. This is clearly stated in the description of the British colonists’ breakfasts. In fact, as Trollope observed, neither nostalgia for familiar food, nor the power of food to evoke their homeland prevented the British colonists eating local food. According to Trollope, breakfast is the meal where the British easily abandoned their habits: “at ten or half past ten the nation [the British “nation” in the West Indies] sits down to breakfast.”⁵⁴ The traditional “tea, and bread and butter, with two eggs for the master of the family and one for the mistress”⁵⁵ was substituted by a “stout,

⁴⁸ Cfr. duQuesnay, F. J., *The Longs of “Longville”*, in <www.jamaicanfamilysearch.com>.

⁴⁹ Long 1774.

⁵⁰ Ivi, Vol. III: 493.

⁵¹ See Greene 1988: 164-165.

⁵² Long, Vol. III: 541.

⁵³ Ivi, Vol. III: 374-375.

⁵⁴ Trollope 1859: 42.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

solid banquet consisting of fish, beefsteaks – a breakfast is not a breakfast in the West Indies without beefsteaks and onions, nor is a dinner so to be called without bread and cheese and beer – potatoes, yams, plantains, eggs, and half a dozen ‘tinned’ productions, namely, meats sent from England in tin cases”⁵⁶. It is true that Trollope, Coleridge and Long described the food habits of British in the West Indies as completely separated from the local habits. It seems that British did not hold cheaper and fresher Caribbean food in high regard. And yet, even in this case of British foreignness, they employed the strategy of combining their traditional food and local food; they continued drinking beer and eating potatoes, bread, cheese, eggs, steak, and onions to which they added and mixed indigenous starches like sweet potatoes and plantains unavailable in the United Kingdom. The fact that the quality of native starches was seen as inferior to British food was an attitude confirmed by the historian Sandra Oliver in her study on North American food habits. Oliver observes that the first North American edition (1805) of Hanna Glasse’s well-known British recipes book, *The Art of Cookery*⁵⁷, contained an additional chapter in comparison to the first British edition (1747). This chapter, *Several New Receipts Adopted to the American Mode of Cooking*, includes twenty-six recipes defined as North American, even though only eighteen of the twenty-six are truly American⁵⁸. Although some of the ingredients are not native to the Americas, the cooking methods, the time of the meals, and the assembling of various ingredients, encourage the book’s readers to recognize them as American. Even without examining any of the recipes, the process described by Oliver, in which unknown food is blended with the familiar food, is the same approach to food described by Trollope that the British community adopted in the nineteenth century Caribbean. Moreover, we should also remember that the British travellers and colonists depicted by Trollope are members of the élite for which it was not impossible to obtain food described as “the best of everything”⁵⁹. Among this excellent food Trollope described, he also included high-quality native ingredients that in the eyes of the British colonists “are as nothing, unless they also have something from England.”⁶⁰. Finally, Trollope observed that the British had a tendency to complain “bitterly and publicly because [they] cannot eat better” despite “the luxuries of a West Indian table.”⁶¹. This inclination also depended on the cultural and psychological need for eating familiar food

⁵⁶ Ivi 42-43.

⁵⁷ To better examine Hannah Glasse recipes’ book see Spencer 2002: 220-222.

⁵⁸ Oliver 2005: 1. See also Bak-Geller Corona 2015: 85.

⁵⁹ Oliver 2005: 50.

⁶⁰ Ivi 41.

⁶¹ Ivi 44.

to relieve homesickness. It is also possible that Trollope highlighted the British preference for eating familiar food instead local goods because, as the scholar Nicholas Birns emphasizes, Trollope shared the dominant attitude of his age: the British saw the colonies as a space needing to be civilized with their superior values⁶². According to the historian Catherine Hall, Trollope was a “believer in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race who was fascinated by the colonies, particularly those which were peopled primarily by Anglo-Saxons.”⁶³. So, food became part of a complex project with which the British were anxious to reimagine, rethink and reorganize their colonial possession⁶⁴. Moreover, the relevance of a superior civilization was shown by the clothes the colonists chose to wear. Trollope recalls how, for instance, it was “*de rigueur*”⁶⁵ to wear black clothes for dinner even in the West Indian islands. The decision to wear black, an impractical choice in a hot and humid Tropical climate, reflected British habits – black was, according to Trollope, “the thing in England”⁶⁶. From perpetuating the habit of wearing black we could argue that, in addition to clothing, food and nutrition also played a fundamental role in the civilizing objectives of the British. According to Trollope’s account of British habits in the West Indies, by consuming their traditional food they were following the same customs as the first European colonizers described by Gregorio Saldarriaga, Richard Dunn, Michael LaCombe and Rebecca Earle. After all, during a visit to a coffee plantation on the Jamaican *Blue Mountains*, Trollope remembered how the plantation was furnished with “the best of everything – beer, brandy, coffee, ringtail doves, salt fish, fat fowls, English potatoes, hot pickles and Worcester sauce.”⁶⁷. None of these food and beverages, except “ringtail doves”, was of local origin. This fact could also indicate an unconscious but strong civilizing attitude in Trollope, for whom the Caribbean’s best food was basically European food and drink. However, when familiar food was unavailable, the British were forced to eat local food. In order to accept that they were eating inferior food, the British used the same strategy as the first *conquistadores*: when introducing local food in their diet they tended to look for similarities with their traditional food. This tendency to look for similarities and substitutes is a practice commonly used also in our everyday lives when we try to describe

⁶² Birns 1996: 7-24. For an in-depth examination of the Europeans’ colonial mentality during the nineteenth century see Betts 1975: 195-204, in which scholars note that European civilizing intentions were present in the eighteenth century and did not emerge only during the nineteenth century.

⁶³ Hall 2002: 212.

⁶⁴ Bell 2007; Goodlad 2015.

⁶⁵ Trollope 1859: 43-44.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ Ivi 50.

something unfamiliar. If twenty-first century individuals that live in their native country use this strategy of similarity and substitution, we can only guess how strong this tendency would have been in a foreign land with a different climate, particularly an era where communications were not as fast as they are today. In the year 1856 Mrs. Henry Lynch published *The Wonders of the West Indies*, an essay broadly about botany⁶⁸. Because her father owned a sugar cane plantation, Mrs. Henry Lynch, lived the majority of her life in Jamaica. And yet, even though she lived in the Caribbean for decades, the search for similarities is also very present in *The Wonders of the West Indies*. Her depiction of the coconut underlines the literary trope of similarities with familiar food: it has “substance and taste of an almond”⁶⁹, the excellent quality of the meat of the *manatee* and the *callaloo*, as in various other sources, were said to be similar to beef and spinach⁷⁰. Besides being similar to the Europeans, Mrs. Lynch remembered that a good number of local foods were consumed as substitutes for more familiar ingredients either unavailable or too expensive in the British West Indies. Among these substitutes, Trollope affirmed that yam, the sweet potato that “is of a closer texture than our English potatoe [sic]”⁷¹, is an “excellent substitute for the potatoe”⁷². While plantain, a variety of banana requiring cooking before being eaten, “becomes an excellent substitute for bread.”⁷³

What appears in these descriptions of the similarities and potential substitutions – particularly in the similar consistency of yam with “our English potatoe” – is a political discourse of appropriation in which exists a fundamental tension between two different diets, the British and the local diet⁷⁴. Defining the potato as English is an example of the efforts made to construct a community that could only grow stronger with shared habits; it was a tentative attempt at culinary nationalism where the British used, and claimed for themselves, a food indigenous to the Americas⁷⁵. By defining the potato as British, it appears that Trollope wanted to affirm that the British in the West Indian colonies continued to eat in the same way as they did at home, and that they identified themselves as a community who shared common food choices. “Our English potato”, as described by Trollope,

⁶⁸ Lynch 1856.

⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 32.

⁷⁰ Ivi, pp. 48, 279.

⁷¹ Trollope 1859: 21.

⁷² Ivi 32-34.

⁷³ Lynch 1856: 240.

⁷⁴ An interesting and similar case concerns the Americanization of pizza, see Bonnie M. Miller 2015: 257.

⁷⁵ See Ferrières 2002: 128-141, in which the author describes the prejudices of the population to eating potatoes remained in the period 1777-1779.

represented a conscious ideological construction in which even indigenous food was perceived, described and represented as British. This use of food as an instrument to enforce and invent a common identity is confirmed by Charles William Day’s description of potatoes. Although this British traveller labeled the potatoes as “Irish”⁷⁶ and distinguished them from the “sweet potatoes or yam [...] the potato of the Tropics”⁷⁷, Day was fully aware that “the potato is indigenous to South America and it was introduced in England by Sir Walter Raleigh.”⁷⁸ So, even if the definition of potatoes as “English” or “Irish” was also used as a means to distinguish them from sweet potatoes and yam, the examination of these sources demonstrates that nutrition was a powerful means of creating an identity for a community of colonists that shared the same food habits. In this case, the appropriation of local food was the chosen method.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The sources examined in this article show how it was impossible for the colonists to fully reproduce the lifestyle they enjoyed at home, particularly their food habits. Even in the cases with the strongest attachments to old food habits – such as the examples examined in this article – the colonists were forced by unavailability, climatic and economic factors to modify their diet. In this way they supported the reconstruction of their self – a self that could not be defined as strictly British or European, but neither was it completely divergent from their ancient habits⁷⁹. Despite the fact that British colonists were committed to maintaining their traditional food customs, they inevitably created a synthesis between their old and their new diet. They did this by looking for similarities between local Caribbean food and their traditional food and by making valid substitutions when their food was not available in the Caribbean. Broadly speaking, what stands out was the dominance – at least in practice – of the concept of *our food* and *their food* that created a hybridized food culture, in its recipes, its substitution of ingredients, in its choice of dishes and eating schedule, as widely shown by Trollope. After all, in an essay on the Europeans in Africa, Malinowski notes how their “community is by no means a direct replica of its mother country at home.”⁸⁰ In fact, the analysis, intersection and comparison between the

⁷⁶ Day 1852: 27.

⁷⁷ Ibidem.

⁷⁸ Ivi 40-43.

⁷⁹ See Stoler 1989: 134-161.

⁸⁰ Malinowski 1945: 14.

sources has allowed us to observe how the British in the Caribbean changed their food habits despite a continuing tension between the old and the new diet. Although the colonists felt safer by consuming only familiar food, the evaluation of the sources helps us to understand how an exact reproduction of their old food habits was both impossible, as well as unhealthy in nineteenth century Caribbean colonies. As shown in Crosby's well-known study on Columbian exchanges⁸¹, the migration of humans, plants, animals and goods due to colonial expansion has also changed the eating habits of the world's population. Therefore, the British travellers and colonizers participated in this global process of changing traditional food habits through their experiences in the colonies.

Moreover, the case of the British potato as described by Trollope, can be interpreted as a political use of food to reinforce the nation or the empire. Although the travellers and settlers described here attempted to construct an imagined community that defined itself through the consumption of particular food, they did not, however, ignore the changes or the continuous tension that lead to the acceptance and the appreciation of local food. This article has, in fact, shown how, during the nineteenth century, colonists usually ate local West Indian food. These non-European food habits and techniques not only allowed the rise of new food practices but also created dynamic new spaces of transculturation⁸².

Therefore, the West Indies is a valid example of the processes of rejecting, adapting and re-interpreting food. Neophilia and neophobia worked as simultaneous forces to blur the boundary lines between desires and concerns for new food. An anonymous gentleman that lived in the Caribbean for many years between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, remembered that the Creoles were often ready to reproduce "an involuntary imitation [...] of the very manners and barbarous dialect of the negroes."⁸³ Beyond the linguistic aspects, the hybrid habits of the British colonies also concerned medical practices, manners and, as underlined in this article, food practices. The British in the West Indian colonies developed a new kind of diet through their decisions on matters of nutrition, by consuming and combining food of different origins in diverse manners⁸⁴.

⁸¹ Crosby 1972.

⁸² For more on the concept of transculturation, see Berti 2014.

⁸³ N.a. A Gentleman 1808: 160.

⁸⁴ Pilcher 2000: 1278-1288.

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