

## **‘Food Voice’: The Culinary Landscape in Cecilia M. Fernandez’s *Leaving Little Havana. A Memoir of Miami’s Cuban Ghetto***

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**Abstract:** The article discusses the ‘food voice’ as a substitute for verbal communication in the memoir *Leaving Little Havana. A Memoir of Miami’s Cuban Ghetto* by Cecilia M. Fernandez (2013). The culinary landscape of the memoir is examined through the anthropological perspective as the foodscape overlaps with the diasporic experience of the protagonists. Foodways show how Cuban identity is constructed in response to social and political developments. The geography of the memoir determines foodscapes by fusing Cuban cuisine with American regional cooking styles. The literary portrayal shows Cubans’ flexible attitude towards acculturation as their Floribbean cuisine maintains continuity with Caribbean cooking styles but, at the same time, it presents readiness to embrace new ingredients available in Florida. The emerging new food culture indicates the formation of complex hybrid identities.

**Key words:** memoir, culinary landscape, Cubans, hybrid identity, Little Havana

### **„Język potraw”: Krajobraz kulinarny w pamiętnikach Cecili M. Fernandez *Leaving Little Havana. A Memoir of Miami’s Cuban Ghetto***

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł analizuje tzw. „język potraw” (‘food voice’) w pamiętnikach *Leaving Little Havana. A Memoir of Miami’s Cuban Ghetto* autorstwa Cecili M. Fernandez (2013). Krajobraz kulinarny pamiętników jest ukazany w perspektywie antropologicznej, a sceny spożywania korespondują z doświadczeniami bohaterów, uchodźców z Kuby. „Język potraw” odzwierciedla proces kształtowania się tożsamości etnicznej diaspory kubańskiej pod wpływem transformacji społeczno-politycznych. Geograficzne umiejscowienie bohaterów pamiętników wyznacza mapę potraw i sygnalizuje fuzje kulinarne zachodzące pomiędzy kuchnią kubańską a amerykańską kuchnią regionalną. Pamiętniki ilustrują elastyczne podejście Kubańczyków do akulturacji, a tzw. kuchnia Floribbean wprawdzie podtrzymuje style kulinarne Karaibów, ale też wykazuje otwartość na nowe, dostępne na Florydzie składniki potraw. Powstająca nowa kultura kulinarna wskazuje na kształtowanie się złożonych tożsamości hybrydowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pamiętniki, krajobraz kulinarny, Kubańczycy, tożsamość hybrydowa, Mała Hawana

The article discusses the culinary landscape and communicative function of food in Cecilia M. Fernandez's *Leaving Little Havana. A Memoir of Miami's Cuban Ghetto* (2013). Food is an informant about social relationships and an important entry into the process of cultural transformations. The essay explores the changes in cultural identity through the prism of foodways. The meanings of foodways have been analyzed by numerous scholars, which has led to the development of the interdisciplinary field of research known as 'Food Studies' examining the relationship between food and other academic disciplines such as art, culture, literature, anthropology, or culinary history.<sup>1</sup> The American food anthropologist E. N. Anderson argues that "Food is used in every society on earth to communicate messages,"<sup>2</sup> e.g. offering food can substitute a verbal greeting. The French social and literary theorist Roland Barthes stresses the communicative function of food in the words: "Substances, techniques of preparation, habits, all become part of a system of differences in signification; and as soon as this happens, we have communication by way of food."<sup>3</sup> The term 'food voice' has been coined by Annie Hauck-Lawson who defines it in her article "Hearing the Food Voice: An Epiphany for a Researcher" as "the dynamic, creative, symbolic, and highly individualized ways that food serves as a channel of communication."<sup>4</sup> 'Food voice' tells stories of families, migrations, acculturation, nutrition, tradition, and cultural identity. As stated by the Polish literary scholar Urszula Niewiadomska-Flis: "Food metonymically informs all aspects of human existence."<sup>5</sup> Generally, foodways serve as both a bridge and a barrier to cultural communication and reflect the construction of new identities. According to Zilkia Janer, who specializes in Latino studies and food studies: "Food plays an important role in the construction of identity, and as a new identity is being forged, a new food culture is also created."<sup>6</sup> In the words of Donna R. Gabaccia, whose research focuses on migration and food studies: "To understand changing American

<sup>1</sup> The most valuable works in the field of 'Food Studies' are the following:

W. R. Dalessio, *Are we what we eat?: Food and identity in late twentieth-century American ethnic literature*, Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2012.

D. M. Kaplan, *The Philosophy of Food*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

J. M. Pilcher, *Food in World History*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

J. S. Thursby, *Foodways and Folklore: a Handbook*, Westport, Connecticut, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> E. N. Anderson, *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2005, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> R. Barthes, *Toward a Psychology of Contemporary Food Consumption*, [in:] *Food and culture: A reader*, ed. C. Counihan and P. Van Esterik, Third edition, New York and London: Routledge, 2013(1961), p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> A. Hauck-Lawson, *Hearing the Food Voice: An Epiphany for a Researcher*, "Digest: An Interdisciplinary Study of Food and Foodways", Vol. 12, No.1/2, 1992, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> U. Niewiadomska-Flis, *Live and Let Di(n)e. Food and Race in the Texts of the American South*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2017, p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Z. Janer, *Latino Food Culture*, Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2008, p. 102.

identities we must explore also the symbolic power of food to reflect cultural or social affinities in moments of change or transformation.”<sup>7</sup>

The author of the memoir—Cecilia M. Fernandez—is an independent journalist and college instructor. She has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of California, a master’s degree in English Literature from the University of Miami, and a master’s in fine arts and creative writing from Florida International University. Her work has appeared in *Latina Magazine*, *Latina Style*, *Accent Miami*, *Upstairs at the Duroc: the Paris Workshop Journal*, *Vista Magazine*, and *Le Siecle de George Sand*. She worked as a reporter for *The Stockton Record*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *Hollywood Sun-Tattler*. Then she moved into broadcast journalism, reporting for the Miami television stations WPBT, WSVN, WSCV, and WLTV. She also worked for The Associated Press Radio, Telemundo Productions, and National Public Radio. At present, she teaches composition and literature at Broward College and Miami International University of Art and Design. Fernandez is also the author of short stories: *Prom* (2012), *The Button Box* (2012), *Sylvia* (2012), and *Summer of My Father’s Gun* (2012). Her awards include an Emmy nomination from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, Dartmouth University’s Champion Tuck Award, the Scripps-Howard Award: News Writer of the Month and a Fellowship for Independent Summer Study from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Her memoir *Leaving Little Havana: A Memoir of Miami’s Cuban Ghetto* won the first place for the most inspirational nonfiction book in the 2015 International Latino Book Awards, and the second place for drama in the 2015 Latino Books into Movies Award. It was selected as a 2015 top ten nonfiction book by TheLatinoAuthor.com and as a finalist in the Bread Loaf Writers’ 2011 Conference Book Contest. The book was also translated into Spanish as *Adios, Mi Pequena Habana*.<sup>8</sup>

The book *Leaving Little Havana: A Memoir of Miami’s Cuban Ghetto* that chronicles her early years as an exile in Miami began as an essay for a nonfiction creative writing class at Florida International University. It was followed by other essays which together composed the true tale of a Cuban refugee girl. The story begins in Cuba where the dictator, Fidel Castro, takes over the island, spurring an exodus of refugees, including the family of a physician, doctor Rafael Fernandez Rivas, who hopes to rebuild his career in the USA. There, he leaves his wife and his only daughter Cecilia Margarita Fernandez (often called Cecilita) to start a new comfortable life with his mistress. Thus, the six-year-old Cecilia is displaced from her safe middle-class Cuban home into the low-income Miami neighborhood of *Little Havana*. Nicole Akoukou Thompson from the *Latin Post* writes in her

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<sup>7</sup> D. R. Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Biographical details of Cecilia M. Fernandez are available at [www.ceciliamfernandez.com/](http://www.ceciliamfernandez.com/) and [thelatinauthor.com/authors/f/fernandez-cecilia-m/](http://thelatinauthor.com/authors/f/fernandez-cecilia-m/)

review of the book: “Fernandez’s personal story is embedded in the story of two nations, two histories that helped to create her during her formative years, affecting her in a profound and devastating way.”<sup>9</sup> The book focuses on Cecilia who grows up in the USA and struggles to survive her mother’s depression and her father’s abandonment, and finally establishes a place of her own in the new land. Throughout the book, Fernandez captures the fears and frustrations of Cuban exiles in the 1960s, as well as their experiences regarding acculturation.<sup>10</sup> The memoir resonates with her generation of immigrants who arrived in Florida. “I began to recognize how my story intersected with recent U.S. and Cuban history,” said Fernandez during an interview with Ana Veciana-Suarez from the *Miami Herald*.<sup>11</sup> In an interview with Jennifer Martiza McCauley from *Origins Journal*, Fernandez explains that her story reflects the experiences of many young immigrants: “Every immigrant story is filled with trouble, especially for the children and teenagers who are taken along by the parents into a journey they can’t fully understand. The story connects with every immigrant’s story, whether Cuban or not.”<sup>12</sup>

### Food as nourishment

The cultural anthropologist Richard Wilk argues that food provides “physical nourishment and a key mode of communication that carries many kinds of meaning.”<sup>13</sup> The author of the memoir mentions the processing site for Cuban refugees in Miami—The Freedom Tower where the authorities distributed rations of canned meat called *Spam*.<sup>14</sup> This type of food does

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<sup>9</sup> N. A. Thompson, *Cecilia Fernandez Weaves a Tale of Acculturation and Immigration in Leaving Little Havana: A Memoir of Miami’s Cuban Ghetto*, “Latin Post”, 16 September 2014.

<sup>10</sup> The post-revolution Cuban exiles usually chose Florida (Miami, Key West, Tampa) as their destination. The early arrivals comprised mainly the upper- and middle-class Cubans who were already familiar with the USA and the English language. The refugees arrived during an economic recession and were unable to practice their professions. Although the Cubans got assistance from the Catholic Church and voluntary relief agencies, they experienced radical downward mobility during their first years in the USA.

María Cristina García, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959-1994*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 15-16 and 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> A. Veciana-Suarez, *Interview: Cecilia M. Fernandez, author of ‘Leaving Little Havana’*, “Miami Herald”, 15 November 2014.

<sup>12</sup> J. M. McCauley, *Regarding the Immigrant Narrative: Cecilia M. Fernandez*, “Origins Journal”, 5 March 2016.

<sup>13</sup> R. Wilk, “Real Belizean Food”: *Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean*, [in:] *Food and culture: A reader*, ed. C. Counihan and P. Van Esterik, Third edition, New York and London: Routledge, 2013, 376.

<sup>14</sup> The name *Spam* stands for canned meat food made by the Hormel Foods Corporation. There were numerous speculations concerning the meaning of the name *Spam*. According to some theories, it could mean either “Shoulder of Pork And haM” or “Scientifically Processed

not have any positive connotations apart from its nutritious function. Cubans were eating it not for its flavor but for the fact that it was free and they could not afford to buy anything better. Ashley et al. claim in their book *Food and Cultural Studies* that “Notions of ‘a proper meal’ are often linked to nutrition.” Then they add “The proper meal is also home-cooked.”<sup>15</sup> Fernandez does not mention what meals were cooked from *Spam* or if any recipes developed to include canned meat in the dishes. In her memoir, *Spam* is simply eaten to satisfy hunger.

Cecilia’s friends have ‘home-cooked’ meals served by their mothers and grandmothers. It is not the absence of the father that deprives Cecilia of a proper diet but her mother’s illness. After Cecilia’s parents are separated, her mother becomes extremely depressed and this state intensifies after the divorce. She lies in bed and appears not to be strong enough to prepare a meal for her daughter or maybe she just keeps forgetting about it. One day she is asked to see the teacher, Mrs. Martinez, who informs her that Cecilia was kissing a boy outside the school. This must be shocking news for the mother as she spends the whole evening afterward sitting on the couch at home and does not cook any dinner for her daughter. Cecilia is very hungry and cycles to a 24-hour grocery store to purchase *empanada* and a carton of milk.<sup>16</sup> In a situation where the meal is to serve its basic nutrition function, Cecilia selects a common Cuban dish which is simply some pastry with filling.

Since there is never any food in Cecilia’s home, she develops a habit of eating at her friends’ homes, e.g. Sylvia’s grandma prepares tuna sandwiches with mayonnaise and chopped lettuce which makes a simple but nutritious meal. Cecilia gets used to visiting the house of her friend Ibis, where she can always find “a pot of rice, a pot of *picadillo* and a Cuban espresso maker brimming with black sweet cold coffee”.<sup>17</sup> The *picadillo* dish is a popular Cuban preparation of minced beef cooked with tomatoes, bell peppers, onion, garlic, and flavored with black pepper and cumin. It is typically served with black beans, rice, and fried plantains.<sup>18</sup> The *picadillo* dish is extremely nourishing and Cecilia, who is always hungry, develops a habit of putting spoonfuls of the dish directly from the pot into her mouth. Not being able to satisfy her hunger at home, Cecilia does it in other private places, usually in a family surrounding with her Cuban friends who eat Cuban cuisine.

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Animal Matter”. However, the owner of the corporation claimed that the product was named for a combination of the words “spice” and “ham”, namely “SPiced hAM” (DeJesus 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Ashley, Bob, Joanne Hollows, Steve Jones and Ben Taylor, *Food and Cultural Studies*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> C. M. Fernandez, *Leaving Little Havana: A Memoir of Miami’s Cuban Ghetto*, Orlando, Florida: Beating Windward Press, 2013, p. 123.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

<sup>18</sup> Janer, *op. cit.*, 77; M. F. Nenes, *American Regional Cuisine*, Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley, 2007, p. 145.

Once, in the spring of 1968, the father picks Cecilia up at home and takes her for lunch to a restaurant *El Baturro*, where she orders “*caldo gallego*, a white bean soup made with collard greens and pork”, and her father chooses “the *cocido madrileño*, a stew of ham, sausage, pork, cabbage and potatoes”.<sup>19</sup> Cecilia is always hungry so she tries to exploit every occasion to eat, whether she is with her father or while visiting friends. While she is consuming her lunch, the father informs her that he is about to start his practice in Miami and has rented an apartment on Biscayne Boulevard which is an extremely luxurious area. The contrast between the sophisticated lifestyle of a successful doctor and his poor and starving daughter is striking. During the meal, the father informs Cecilia that he has married his former mistress Beba. At that moment Cecilia feels that the soup starts to taste “like unsweetened oatmeal”.<sup>20</sup> It seems that both the nutritious function of a meal and its flavor suddenly disappear. The father shares this important piece of news with his daughter in a public space and, evidently, she is not ready for the definite end of her parents’ marriage. It seems likely that she would stand the situation better in a more private environment, like her father’s kitchen, while consuming a meal prepared by him. Ashley et al. claim that ‘home-cooked’ meals are associated with warmth, intimacy and the private sphere in contrast to foods originating in the anonymous system of public production.<sup>21</sup>

## Ethnic identity

The acts of cooking and eating play an important role in the lives of immigrants. Dallen Timothy claims in his introduction to the book *Heritage cuisines: Traditions, identities and tourism* that foodways serve as a significant marker of ethnic identity because immigrants settling in the new land carry with them memories about ethnic cuisine and recipes which they try to adopt in the new circumstances.<sup>22</sup> Ashley et al. argue that “Food consumption not only works to reproduce ethnic identities but also to negotiate their meaning.”<sup>23</sup> Cooking and eating traditional foods help recreate immigrants’ ethnic identity, whereas switching into American cuisine may suggest an attempt to abandon their ethnic identity. Cecilia’s father displays his identification with American culture and rejection of his ethnic roots in a situation occurring at the restaurant which is his favorite breakfast place.

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<sup>19</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>21</sup> Ashley et al., *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> D. J. Timothy, *Introduction: Heritage cuisines, foodways and culinary traditions*, [in:] *Heritage Cuisines: Traditions, identities and tourism*, ed. D. J. Timothy, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Ashley et al., *op. cit.*, p. 71.

Together with his mistress, Beba, they are eating a typical American meal consisting of “a feast of eggs sunny side up, bacon and ham, grits, hashed brown potatoes, a basket of muffins and pastries and coffee”.<sup>24</sup> Then Cecilia’s mother comes in and shouts at her husband and pushes the table causing some water to slop over the glass. When the father takes her outside, she shouts and bangs on the hood of the car showing her emotions in a Latino way. The father pays the waiter, keeps cool, speaks softly to his wife, and distances himself from explicit emotions as if was trying to indicate that he behaves in accordance with American standards. This situation marks the process explained by the American ethnic literature theorist William R. Dalesio in the following words: “Many immigrants switch from an identity of ethnic Otherness to one of ‘Americanness’.”<sup>25</sup> Cecilia’s father demonstrates a particular fondness towards American breakfasts. When he moves to Beaumont, a small Texas town south of Houston, and Cecilia visits him there, they eat breakfast at the Toddle House which at that time used to be a national restaurant chain specializing in breakfast meals.

Cecilia also rejects some aspects of Cuban culture, e.g. she is suspicious of *santeria* devotees. When her boyfriend’s mother sacrifices a lamb and then intends to cook lamb stew, Cecilia convinces him not to eat it, and go to McDonald’s instead (189).<sup>26</sup> According to Ashley et al., young people rejecting traditional ethnic foods to consume American dishes may express “the desire to establish some degree of independence from the family culture.”<sup>27</sup> Cecilia clearly shows that she is ready to begin a new stage of her life which is going to be less Cuban and more American when she decides to leave Little Havana and together with her husband they start their journey westward to study at the University of California. On Christmas Eve (*Noche Buena*) they are still on the way and make a stopover at a motel. While staying there Cecilia in her nostalgic memories recalls her previous life in Cuba, and then her family and friends left behind in Miami’s Little Havana. She immediately creates nostalgic images of them enjoying the feast of roast pork which stimulates her to prepare a feast of her own. Cecilia buys canned spaghetti and plastic spoons, and then in a bathroom sink in their motel room, she pours hot water over the cans to warm the dish. She narrates: “Our first married *Noche Buena* feast was one of the best”.<sup>28</sup> Warwick Frost and Jennifer Laing in their article “Cuisine, migration, colonialism and diasporic identities” claim that preservation of ethnic foodways serves as a means of social bonding with other members of the diasporic community. It can also help to deal with nostalgic memories, especially if the food is

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<sup>24</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> Dalesio, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>27</sup> Ashley et al., *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

prepared according to the recipes from the old country.<sup>29</sup> Instead of cooking a Cuban meal to keep social bonding with Cubanidad, Cecilia prepares a quick meal from a can and is happy about it. Dalessio in his book *Are we what we eat?: Food and identity in late twentieth-century American ethnic literature* suggests that “We are becoming what we eat precisely because who we are and the contents of what we are eating are constantly changing.”<sup>30</sup> Cecilia is no longer a Cuban refugee but an American university student and a married woman.

## Family recipes

The cultural anthropologist Christine Folch claims in her article “Fine Dining: Race in Prerevolution Cuban Cookbooks” that “There is an inherent nostalgia to the recipe: it involves a remembering, a recapturing of an event that happened before. The imagined “iterability” of a recipe is its defining characteristic. The recipe qua recipe assumes that it has been made before and therefore can be made again in the present.”<sup>31</sup> According to the Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, exchange of recipes is “the first stage in a process that leads to carefully controlled interethnic dining.”<sup>32</sup> One secret recipe shared with Cecilia’s mother by her tenant Reina Fierro concerns the instructions for making the popular Cuban refreshment, known as *el Cafecito*, which is prepared with a fork missing a prong. The secret recipe for the drink involves beating “a froth of freshly brewed, dark brown espresso with three tablespoons of sugar in a metal container, then pouring it back into the rest of the coffee in the pot”. After pouring “the boiling liquid into small cups, the coffee became a thick shot of sugar and caffeine that made hearts beat a quick rhythm”.<sup>33</sup> According to Gregory Ramshaw, who analyses heritage cuisines and family recipes in his article “Food, heritage and nationalism,” the ways of food preparation are part of heritage as many families have ‘secret recipes’ that are passed within the family circle and remain a part of family pride.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, Ms. Fierro is proud of her secret recipe and by sharing it with Cecilia’s mother she provides a way to what the food anthropologist Carole

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<sup>29</sup> W. Frost and J. Laing, *Cuisine, migration, colonialism and diasporic identities*, [in:] *Heritage Cuisines: Traditions, Identities and Tourism*, ed. D. J. Timothy, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> Dalessio, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>31</sup> Ch. Folch, *Fine Dining: Race in Prerevolution Cuban Cookbooks*, “Latin American Research Review” Vol. 43, No. 2, 2008, p. 208.

<sup>32</sup> A. Appadurai, *How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India*, “Comparative Studies in Society and Culture”, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1988, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> G. Ramshaw, *Food, heritage and nationalism*, [in:] *Heritage Cuisines: Traditions, identities and tourism*, ed. D. J. Timothy, London and New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 54.



Counihan calls forging “familial and extra-familial relationships.”<sup>35</sup> The act of drinking coffee was analyzed by Anderson in his book *Everyone Eats: Understanding Food and Culture*, and Barthes in his article “Toward a Psychology of Contemporary Food Consumption”. Anderson writes about the importance of coffee for social life and claims that “caffeine has been the stimulant of sociability for centuries, more so even than alcohol.”<sup>36</sup> Barthes elaborates about the function of coffee by stating that food can “signify materially a pattern of immaterial realities” e.g. coffee produces relaxation.<sup>37</sup> Cecilia’s mother does not drink alcohol with her tenants but preserves a certain level of sociability with people from the lower class through drinking coffee which is prepared according to the secret recipe.

The culinary arts scholars Lou Sackett and David Haynes write in their book *American Regional Cuisines: Food Culture and Cooking* about South Florida cooking, its recipes and techniques, and claim that they were mostly “passed on orally, from friend to friend and from one generation to another”.<sup>38</sup> In exile, Cecilia’s father wants to cook for his family and friends and is interested in the recipes Cecilia got from her grandmother in letters from Cuba. There is some mystery about the recipes passed orally from generation to generation or written in a private letter to a granddaughter. Senior Rafael Fernandez Rivas is certainly willing to cultivate the Cuban foodways, which can be explained by Janer in her book *Latino Food Culture* in the following words: “because of nostalgia and the political need to assert Latino identities, there seems to be more at stake in conserving them.”<sup>39</sup>

After moving to Huston, Cecilia’s father displays more appreciation for traditional Cuban cuisine than when he stayed in Miami. This can be explained by the fact that the Cuban diaspora in Texas is very small at the time and it is a rarity to be Cuban in the non-Cuban environment, therefore Rafael Fernandez wishes to acknowledge his ethnicity through foodways. When Cecilia visits him, he cooks for her *empanadas*, which is both a traditional and nutritious Cuban dish. In some aspects of his culinary practice the father demonstrates pride in Cuban techniques of food preparation, e.g. he insists on using only olive oil and rejects the idea of getting oil out of corn, as used in brands like Crisco and Wesson, as he believes that corn oil should be used only for automobiles, not for cooking.

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<sup>35</sup> C. M. Counihan, *The Border as Barrier and Bridge: Food, Gender, and Ethnicity in the San Luis Valley of Colorado*, [in:] *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*, ed. A. Voski Avakian and B. Haber, Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts, 2005, p. 204.

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>37</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>38</sup> L. Sackett and D. Haynes, *American Regional Cuisines: Food Culture and Cooking*, Boston: Pearson, 2012, p. 752.

<sup>39</sup> Janer, *op. cit.*, p.102.

## Hybrid food

Senior Rafael Fernandez Rivas establishes a thriving medical practice in Beaumont, Texas and sets up his office with two other Cuban doctors, Wilfredo Garcia, and Raul Reyes. Together with Beba, his partners' families and another Cuban couple in the town they form a community that meets regularly to play dominoes on Saturday nights and cook *lechón* and *congrí* on Sundays.<sup>40</sup> Although the area has minor Cuban influences, this small Cuban diaspora cultivates Cubanidad. An American scholar and writer specializing in the history of food—Psyche Williams-Forson—claims in her text published in *Redefining Foodways in a Changing World* that “meals are political acts because they mark our identity and cultural location.”<sup>41</sup> The geography of the memoir determines foodscapes by fusing Cuban cuisine with American regional cooking styles. Cecilia’s father does not stick only with Caribbean cooking but likes to prepare a sort of fusion cuisine by mixing some Texan and Cuban ingredients in his dishes. Frost and Laing claim that diasporic communities take their familiar ingredients and introduce them to their new neighbors. Thus, migrating cuisines evolve into new hybridized forms articulating elements of their ethnic and mainstream culture.<sup>42</sup> Cecilia’s father presents his hybrid cooking style when his daughter visits him at Christmas and he prepares a barbecue with beef tenderloin which is accompanied by side dishes cooked by Beba: “black beans and smashed cloves of garlic for the boiled yucca, a white starchy vegetable”.<sup>43</sup> The father calls this meat dish ‘chauteaubriand’ explaining that it is served at a French restaurant in Houston. He intends to create a hybrid dish and try “something new with our rice, beans and fried plantains”.<sup>44</sup> The father demonstrates a great deal of creativity in his culinary practice. After Christmas Eve, he prepares what he calls ‘Banana Royale’ which consists of over-ripe bananas placed in a concoction of butter and sugar and melted together in a frying pan. Then, he spoons on vanilla ice cream and puts it onto slices of Sara Lee pound cake.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the cake is covered with the hot banana mixture and orange liqueur. The dessert is served with café Cubano, prepared by Beba. The Texan dessert contains a typically American cake that can be bought at any supermarket and Caribbean ingredients

<sup>40</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>41</sup> P. Williams-Forson, *Other Women Cooked for My Husband: Negotiating Gender, Food, and Identities in an African American/Ghanaian Household*, [in:] *Redefining Foodways in a Changing World*, ed. P. Williams-Forson and C. Counihan, New York and London: Routledge, 2012, p. 142.

<sup>42</sup> Frost and Laing, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>45</sup> Sara Lee pound cake was originally produced by the Sara Lee Corporation. It was called ‘pound cake’ because all the ingredients together (flour, butter, eggs, and sugar) weighed in at four pounds.

accompanied by the coffee served in a Cuban style. “Powerfully symbolic in its ability to communicate, food conveys messages about where we come from, who we are as individuals, and how we think and feel at any given moment.”<sup>46</sup> Rafael Fernandez Rivas’s experiments with food indicate that he accepts American ingredients but does not forget the Caribbean flavor. The ‘food voice’ suggests both a certain level of his acculturation with the American mainstream and cultivation of Cuban heritage.

Differences in geography determine the type of plants that can be cultivated in a given area as well as the taste of food reflecting so-called ‘geographies of taste’. Those unique geographic characteristics affecting the flavor of food are also known as *terroir*.<sup>47</sup> Cecilia is open to new types of cuisine whether it is determined by *terroir* or simply because it is influenced by the ethnicity of the population inhabiting the particular region. Her flexible attitude towards food may be explained by the fact that she got used to her father’s experiments with hybrid cuisine. According to Williams-Forson, food is “an important marker of cultural borders.”<sup>48</sup> When Cecilia travels with her newlywed husband, Robert, to study in California, she notices that in Bakersfield the landscape changes into Mexicanness which is indicated with billboards advertising brands of Mexican beers and numerous Mexican restaurants serving: tostadas, *chile rellenos*, *menudo*, dishes based on chili pepper which Cecilia “would grow to love”.<sup>49</sup> Robert complains that Cubans do not like Mexican food as it is too spicy for them. When they reach their destination, they walk to the Student Center and order “alfalfa and cucumber sandwiches on white bread, marveling at the unfamiliar medley of tastes”.<sup>50</sup>

## Social class

The sharing of food habits is one of the elements defining ethnic identity but the access to various types of food differs depending on social class. The foods we eat are not simply an expression of individual tastes but have a wider basis in class cultures as social and cultural factors shape food habits.<sup>51</sup> The first part of the novel, describing Cecilia’s life in Cuba, indicates her family’s high position in the social hierarchy and it is particularly visible in the scenes involving dining which take place in luxurious places like the beach villa of Cecilia’s uncle Cesar Perez and his wife America Castellanos, or the apartment of Senor Pablo in the fashionable suburb of *Nuevo Vedado*.

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<sup>46</sup> Williams-Forson, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>47</sup> Timothy, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Williams-Forson, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> Ashley et al., *op. cit.*, p. 60.

As stated by Anderson “Elite groups *always* try to mark themselves off by consumption of special status or prestige foods.”<sup>52</sup> When Cecilia’s family visits their uncle at his villa, the food they eat signifies the high position in the class hierarchy of both the hosts and the guests. It is not only the food itself but also the fact that it is prepared by the cooks employed by the villa’s residents. The guests are served “a feast of *lechón asado*, roast pork rice, beans and *tostones*, fried green plantains”<sup>53</sup> and then they are offered flan which is a typically Cuban dessert that flavors the traditional French custard with almonds, coconut, rum, or caramel topping.<sup>54</sup> America Castellanos explains the best method of cooking flan, which involves “steaming the dish of custard in the middle of a pot of boiling water.”<sup>55</sup> Afterward, she shows respect for her housekeeper, Mercedes, by asking her for approval of the cooking technique she recommended. Cecilia’s neighbor, Senor Pablo, also employs a cook who prepares delicious dishes, like *bacalao*, marshmallow-soft codfish in olive oil and garlic (21).<sup>56</sup>

While in Cuba, one Sunday afternoon Cecilia and her parents visit her favorite restaurant *Rancho Luna, Moon Ranch* which is styled as a replica of the rural houses inhabited by the farmers harvesting the sugar cane and tobacco that made the island rich. The family is served: “*arroz con pollo*, chicken with yellow rice, and *platanos maduros*, ripe fried bananas”.<sup>57</sup> This scene clearly shows how social status determines the lifestyle of the island’s inhabitants. The novel depicts people who worked for the wealth of the island but they cannot afford to eat in the ranch-style restaurant and members of the elite who either inherited their wealth, like Cecilia’s mother, or achieved their privileged position by their professional status, like doctor Rafael Fernandez Rivas. While consuming his meal, the doctor, in a Spanish manner, uses a piece of bread to push the rice onto his fork. Using a piece of bread as a utensil is common in Spain<sup>58</sup> and this custom must have been transplanted by the colonists on the island. However, it seems surprising to see people of lower social status make this usage of bread. Cecilia also behaves like a little lady who does not eat to satisfy hunger but rather tastes the food: “I ate a little of everything, just beginning to develop my taste for Cuban food”.<sup>59</sup>

An interesting relation between social status and Cuban cuisine can be found in chapter four of part one, which depicts the family’s trip to

<sup>52</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>53</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> Nenes, *op. cit.*, p. 144; Janer, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>55</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> M. James, *Dining etiquette in Spain: What You Should Know Before Dining out in Spain*, “GoNOMAD 2019”.

<sup>59</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

the province of Matanzas. There Cecilia's mother owns several houses in a working-class neighborhood and every Sunday she visits the place to collect rent from her tenants. The author explains in the book the origin of the name of the province—Matanzas—that translates into the indigenous language as “killings” which is supposed to commemorate the dramatic events when the Spanish conquerors slaughtered the Indians. In fact, the encyclopedic sources suggest that it was the Spanish soldiers who were tricked and drowned in the river while trying to attack the aboriginal inhabitants of the province.<sup>60</sup> The fact is that the history of the relations between the natives and the Spanish colonists was particularly dramatic in that place. Matanzas reflects not only ethnic complexity but also the social hierarchy of the islanders. Rafael Fernandez often invites himself over for dinner at tenants' houses and they seem happy about it since he is not a guest who needs to be served but rather an acquaintance from an elite group who is known for bringing some restaurant food himself. It seems obvious that the situation does not occur in the reverse direction—the poor tenants are never invited to the doctor's house. And it is not only because they cannot afford restaurant food but also because in Fernandez's house the members of the lower classes are never guests but only servants. Dalessio explains that food can be used as “an indicator of socioeconomic status”.<sup>61</sup>

While visiting the tenants, Rafael usually brings *ajiaco*—a dish that symbolizes the complex identity of the Cubans—as if he wanted to emphasize their origin and acknowledge that the differences disappear at the particular moment they consume the meal together. *Ajiaco* is a thick vegetable stew combining green plantains, maize, Calabaza, and root vegetables like yucca, with meats like beef, pork, chicken, and *chorizo*.<sup>62</sup> Folch explains that “A proper Cuban *ajiaco* is made by slowly boiling cuts of meat with starchy root vegetables.”<sup>63</sup> According to early Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, *ajiaco* is the perfect illustration of Cuban identity which developed over the centuries of interactions among different ethnic groups inhabiting the island. The gradual process of transculturation influences the development of Cuban cuisine, as in the words of Sackett and Haynes: “Cuban cuisine is a hybrid cooking style based on Spanish cooking, Caribbean ingredients, and African flavor preferences.”<sup>64</sup>

During exile, food indicates the differences between the social position of Rafael Fernandez, who is a wealthy physician, and his abandoned family. When Cecilia visits him in Texas, they spend time with other Cuban families

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<sup>60</sup> S. C. Tucker, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars: A Political, Social, and Military History*, vol. I. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2009, p. 384.

<sup>61</sup> Dalessio, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>62</sup> Janer, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>63</sup> Folch, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

<sup>64</sup> Sackett and Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 729.

in the town and meet at the gun range so that the men can practice shooting. Afterward, the families go to a fancy restaurant to eat deer. This may be explained by Ashley et al. who claim that food can be used “as a class code” to “create alliances with friends from the same class”.<sup>65</sup> When Cecilia phones her father from Miami saying that they have not received the check from him, he claims that he has already sent it. This is when Cecilia comes to understand the power of money and how her father controls her life, so she decides to take a job at “Diana’s Bakery” which serves Cuban pastry, like: “*pasteles de guayaba, churros, panatela de chocolate, and flan de coco*”.<sup>66</sup> While Rafael spends time with his Cuban friends and eats in luxurious restaurants, Cecilia sells Cuban pastry in the working-class neighborhood of Miami.

The leading figure in food studies—Jeffrey Pilcher—states in his book *Food in World History* that “Commensality, the sharing of food and drink, forges bonds of group identity.”<sup>67</sup> However, exclusive food and formal manners may cause distance among family members and at the same time indicate their different position in the social hierarchy, even though they share a meal at the same table. In 1968 Cecilia’s grandparents, Rafael Fernandez and Amalia Rivas, arrive in Miami to join their son. They are welcomed at his new villa furnished in the style of the French King Louis XV and overlooking Biscayne Bay. The father, a gourmet cook, serves tenderloin roast with béchamel sauce but according to Cecilia he does it “with an air of serving guests, not family”. When Cecilia reaches to help herself to *croquets de bacalao*, codfish croquettes, the father reprimands her to wait for the plate to be passed. They continue eating in silence.<sup>68</sup> The family members are in the same room, eating together, but separated, as class differences and borders have been marked.

## Cuban-American Celebrations

Food is used to indicate particular occasions. During their first date, Cecilia and her boyfriend Jaime drive to Tahiti Beach in Miami’s Coconut Grove to have a picnic of meat and *guava pasteles* brought wrapped in paper napkins. The first date marks a change and it is certainly an important occasion for a young Cuban girl who celebrates it in a place with a tropical sounding name—Coconut Grove—and eats tropical food. Although Cecilia lives in the USA, she is still a Cuban girl in her heart. Another time, Cecilia plans to spend a remarkable evening with her new boyfriend Robert at the

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<sup>65</sup> Ashley et al., *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>66</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>67</sup> Pilcher, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

ballroom of the Fontainebleau Hotel, but they become bored there and switch the place to the renowned Les Violins Supper Club on Biscayne Boulevard. There they spend a great time enjoying a Cuban meal of filet mignon with a side of rice and black beans. The waitress provides another Hispanic accent when she changes her clothes into a flamenco outfit and performs on stage.<sup>69</sup> When Cecilia spends time with her boyfriends she does it in an environment with distinctive Caribbean features.

Once, Cecilia decides to cook a meal in her house together with her boyfriend Jamie and other friends: Gloria, El Chino, Ibis and Henri. They set the table accenting formality and Cuban heritage—using a white tablecloth brought from Cuba and arranging the silverware. Cecilia boils spaghetti, pours canned tomato sauce over it and then sprinkles the dish with grated cheese from a bottle. Finally, she spreads olive oil onto slices of Cuban bread which is served as a side dish for what Cecilia calls “*Pan como en Cuba*”.<sup>70</sup> The dish is supposed to be Cuban in its flavor but it is served with plastic tumblers and a pitcher of Kool-Aid.<sup>71</sup> It seems that they pay attention to Cuban heritage during the stage of table setting and cooking, but when they start to eat, American elements are introduced simultaneously. Cecilia narrates: “We enjoyed this simple meal as if it were a seven-course repast in a Tuscany villa”.<sup>72</sup>

According to Janer, Latinxs celebrate their holidays with other members of their community who are often away from their biological families. Sharing a meal is a way of binding together with other Latinxs.<sup>73</sup> When Cecilia celebrates some events of a civic rather than religious character, like a New Year’s Eve party, she usually spends time with her friends, enjoying typically Cuban cuisine, listening, and dancing to Latino music. Her friend Gloria and her mother invite Cecilia with her mother to a New Year’s Eve party in 1967. There: “Platters of roast ham, *conгри* and delectable pastries covered every table”<sup>74</sup> and listen to Afro-Cuban salsa. As stated by Ashley et al., the special occasions serve for working-class women as means to “emphasize the familiar: both traditional foods and the importance of family.”<sup>75</sup> Cecilia celebrates the New Year’s Eve of 1971 with her boyfriend Robert and other friends at the Di Lido Hotel on Miami Beach. They have a buffet of Cuban food: *lechón* and *moros* and dance to various styles of Cuban music: *danzonez*, *guarachas* and *guaguancos*.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>71</sup> Kool-Aid is a powdered drink mix invented by Edwin E. Perkins. The brand is worth millions of dollars today and the history of Kool-Aid is the story of the American Dream come true. <http://kool-aiddays.com/history/>

<sup>72</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>73</sup> Janer, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

<sup>74</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>75</sup> Ashley et al., *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>76</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

The Cuban food and Latino music assume a special significance in the celebrations.

Janer claims that Latinxs have adopted the major holidays celebrated in the USA, e.g. Thanksgiving Day. “The foods served during these holidays reflect the negotiations and the fluidity of Latino identity.”<sup>77</sup> In November 1967, Cecilia and her friends decide to cook a Thanksgiving meal at Cecilia’s house. They have a tin of *Spam*, which was given to them at the Freedom Tower, and they purchase a box of mashed potatoes, a package of green beans, and a small flan. Before the meal, Cecilia’s mother gives thanks to God for this dinner although she never used to pray before meals.<sup>78</sup> As stated by Anderson, “Eating together means sharing and participating.”<sup>79</sup> This Thanksgiving meal, prepared and eaten together with friends, shows that the Cuban community has started to follow the American celebration that was begun by the Pilgrim Fathers. This is also a sign of immigrants’ willingness to acculturate.

An important family event for U.S. Latinxs is the ritual of celebrating the daughter’s fifteenth birthday—*quinceañera*. Contrary to the *quinceañera* party organized for Cecilia’s friend Cari, Cecilia’s party is not an expensive ceremony, but a family gathering held in her dining room. Cecilia’s mother prepares tiny sandwiches filled with ham and cream cheese and her grandmother contributes with potato and apple salad.<sup>80</sup> Although the father refuses to pay for a reception, saying that the *quinceañera* ritual is a waste of money, he agrees to buy Cecilia a gift of jewelry. Unfortunately, it is not the antiques she selects, but a new ensemble made by his patient who happens to be a jeweler. Anyway, Cecilia does not like the pattern and is disappointed with the gift. Latinxs in the USA usually spend a lot of money on their daughters’ *quinceañera* parties, which can be very extravagant even if they cannot afford it, as it is usually the whole family that contributes to this event. Cecilia’s father seems to break with this tradition when he does not want the expensive ritual for his daughter despite the fact that he is a wealthy man. However, it is not so certain that he is rebelling against Cuban heritage because he is actually the one who displays attachment to the tradition from the old country where *quinceañera* parties are rather more modest family rituals.

The second to last chapter of the book depicts the wedding reception plans for Cecilia and her fiancé Robert. Doctor Rafael Fernandez Rivas acts differently than in the case of the *quinceañera* ceremony for his only daughter. This time he presents a great deal of generosity to prepare “a food *extravaganza* the likes of which his friends and family had not seen before”.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Janer, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>78</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>79</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>80</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 248.



He is extremely careful about the selection of ingredients for the feast and forbids the use of margarine, Mazola or Wesson oils, and instructs the cooks to use butter and olive oil instead. He also studies dishes in a gourmet food encyclopedia and Cecilia's grandmother's Cuban and Spanish handwritten recipes. The description reveals the importance of preparing food with care to maximize quality and not worry about costs. The wedding buffet provides an opportunity for Senior Rivas to "flaunt his wealth" so during the party "the food spread out in magnificent abundance".<sup>82</sup> As claimed by Counihan: "Yet because cooking, feeding, eating, and fasting can be significant means of communication, food can be a channel of creativity and power."<sup>83</sup>

Cecilia elaborates on the reasons behind her father's commitment to the event and narrates: "He took control of my wedding buffet not only because he paid for it, but because he was an epicurean whose taste buds only came alive when stimulated by the very best ingredients, refusing to eat anything but freshly made meals, proud of his knowledge of fine cuisine."<sup>84</sup> For Cecilia, it is not parental love that guides Senior Rivas to organize his daughter's wedding, but she rather takes the view that the father simply treats the event as the opportunity to show his financial resources, culinary expertise, and high position in the social hierarchy. Moreover, his commitment to the culinary part of the celebration does not parallel his interest in Cecilia. He only shows any affection to her in those rare moments when his new wife Beba is not looking. Cecilia narrates: "I looked at my wedding reception as a farewell party".<sup>85</sup> However, at the end of her wedding reception, Cecilia contemplates her relationship with the father who deserted her and starts to wonder that perhaps "the buffet was a symbolic gesture of love" and "a gastronomical manifestation of emotion".<sup>86</sup>

The wedding coincides with Thanksgiving Day so the guests have two reasons to celebrate. According to Gabaccia "No other eating event so symbolized the changing eating habits in ethnic enclaves as an immigrant family's first American Thanksgiving celebration."<sup>87</sup> Cecilia's wedding feast includes dishes typically served on Thanksgiving Day: "Turkey, gravy, cranberry sauce, pork, frijoles, roast beef, mashed potatoes, salads."<sup>88</sup> The celebration combines in a natural way the private ritual of the wedding ceremony with the public holiday of the American Thanksgiving Day, which acknowledges a fusion of American national dishes with typically Caribbean cuisine. This process is illustrated by Sackett and Haynes who claim that

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 249.

<sup>83</sup> Counihan, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

<sup>84</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 249.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 250.

<sup>87</sup> Gabaccia, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>88</sup> Fernandez, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

“Cuban cooking acquired another layer of complexity when transplanted to South Florida.”<sup>89</sup> The foodways reflect the formation of new hybrid identities of people from the diasporic community.

## Conclusion

Foodways take on the role of a non-verbal means of communication that carries social messages, indicates socioeconomic status, depicts ethnic and class relations in the book’s description of Miami’s Little Havana. ‘Food voice’ signifies various meanings depending on the situation in which the food is consumed. “It has a twofold value, being nutrition as well as protocol, and its value as protocol becomes increasingly more important as soon as basic needs are satisfied.”<sup>90</sup> While the upper-middle-class status of the Fernandez family in Cuba is indicated when they eat meals prepared by cooks or restaurant chefs, their refugee experience is marked by food’s basic nutrition role when they collect rations of canned meat distributed for free. In Miami, Cecilia eats simple nutritious products when she needs to satisfy hunger and the dishes become more elaborate when prepared and consumed together on special occasions, especially during Cuban family celebrations. Wilk argues that food forms “one of the foundations of both individuality and a sense of common membership in a larger, bounded group.”<sup>91</sup> The culinary landscape of the book indicates Cubanidad in both cases: when the characters share meals, and when individuals present a great deal of novelty while creating hybrid dishes. How cuisine is consumed, and the context in which it is consumed, is often determined by the social position of the protagonists. The ‘food voice’ displays the change of economic status and the food choices reflect that improvement in the protagonists’ social hierarchy. According to Ashley et al., new dispositions toward food forsake the desire to satisfy hunger in preference for ‘quality’ over ‘quantity’ which is stressed by the visual aesthetics of a dish.<sup>92</sup> Rafael Fernandez as a gourmet cook is extremely cautious about the image of the dishes he prepares and even labels them with elaborate names, like ‘chauteaubriand’ or ‘Banana Royale’.

Foodways can indicate a tendency toward both preservation of ethnicity and acculturation within the mainstream culture. As claimed by Ashley et al., food consumption rituals are a “key mechanism for reproducing ethnic identities”.<sup>93</sup> Food accompanies rituals that are celebrated with a community, frequently with non-biological families in an urban context. By adopting the

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<sup>89</sup> Sackett and Haynes, *op. cit.*, p. 729.

<sup>90</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>91</sup> Wilk, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

<sup>92</sup> Ashley et al., *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 71.

holiday of Thanksgiving, immigrants signify their willingness to acculturate, but their feast includes turkey with Caribbean stuffing. The book includes numerous examples of Caribbean dishes indicating the ethnicity of the characters, e.g. *picadillo*, *ajiaco*, *empanada*, *lechón*, *tostones*. On the other hand, some food products exemplify American mass production, e.g. *Spam*, Kool-Aid, Sara Lee pound cake and the food from MacDonal'd's. This creates a sharp contrast between sophisticated Cuban cuisine and simple, processed American food. However, the only negative connotations appear in the case of *Spam* which is eaten only because it is distributed for free. The other mainstream products are purchased by Cuban refugees voluntarily and often used as additional ingredients for their culinary experiments. The Cuban protagonists are depicted as creative cooks who introduce new foods into their dishes. The literary portrayal shows Cubans' flexible attitude towards acculturation as their Floribbean cuisine maintains continuity with Caribbean cooking styles, but at the same time it presents readiness to embrace new ingredients available in Florida. The culinary landscape of the book bridges what used to be Cuban and American foods. The emerging new food culture indicates the formation of complex hybrid identities as members of the Cuban diaspora cultivate their cooking traditions but at the same time they are not afraid to accept American food as well.

The author mentions family recipes which are shared either orally or passed on in private letters. The recipes "provide a means by which readers and eaters can access, for example, a childhood past that was lost because of post-revolutionary exile."<sup>94</sup> Even the characters who appear to be fond of the new country, and present a high level of acculturation within the American mainstream, value the family recipes, indicating that they are not ready to reject their Cuban heritage and traditional food, which not only brings nostalgic memories but also makes them proud of their ethnic culture. Appadurai argues that regional recipes generate "images of the ethnic Other," and further create "a set of generalized gastroethnic images."<sup>95</sup> Certainly, in the language of food, the stereotype of the Cuban is closely linked with the image of traditional Caribbean food. Furthermore, the memoir depicts Cubans celebrating their special occasions not only with their ethnic food but also with Latino music. Both food and music are key elements for the "gastroethnic images" of Cuban Americans.

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<sup>94</sup> Folch, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>95</sup> Appadurai, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

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