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The Struggle for a Decent Meal:
Household Food Consumption in Santiago de Cuba

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology

by

Hanna Garth

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Struggle for a Decent Meal:

Household Food Consumption in Santiago de Cuba

By

Hanna Garth

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Carole H. Browner, Chair

As the welfare state disintegrates in the post-Cold War era, through the changing practices of everyday life, there are also shifts in community interactions, family dynamics, and individual subjectivities. Drawing on 16 months of ethnographic research in 22 households in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba's second largest city, I reveal that recent changes in food consumption practices are the grounds for reworking longstanding parameters for ethical conduct at the household and community level, which, in turn, influence how individuals see themselves. While in capitalist settings, states have been weakened as corporations have gained immense power, in Cuba there are no non-state-based intermediaries, and the state still has the ultimate power. Increasingly the work necessary to maintain households and keep food on the table is shifting away from state responsibility onto individuals and families.

I analyze study participants' longing for a "decent" meal as a highly emotional means of clinging to the social ideal of well rounded, culturally appropriate, and calorically adequate meals. However, given that the late-socialist state can no longer provide basic necessities free of cost, those who adhere to this standard are challenged to find new ways to access food. Most of my research participants do not fully achieve this ideal; rather they endure a less than decent

standard of living and a great deal of stress. Some families engage in practices that may not meet local standards for ethical behavior in order to acquire food they deem appropriate for consumption. The struggle to acquire food is compounded as solutions to practical barriers are met with moral dilemmas. As people reflect on their shifting ethical standards for interaction with family, friends, and community in the face of food scarcity, they begin rethink who they are as people. This represents a shift in the community relations surrounding consumption leading to a transformation in subjectivity. I analyze this struggle and transformation to offer critical insights into the social implications of shifting consumption patterns during the decline of the welfare state. I also reveal the ways in which social relationships and subjectivities are reconfigured as political economic systems change.

This dissertation of Hanna Garth is approved.

Lauren Derby

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2014

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmothers, Irene Royal Garth and Carol Dean Fitzmaurice.

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A life that cannot be separated from its form is a life for which what is at stake is its way of living itself. It defines a life—human life—in which the single ways, acts, and processes of living are never simply *facts* but always and above all *possibilities* of life, always and above all power. [Such a life] always retains the character of a possibility; that is, it always puts at stake living itself. That is why human beings are the only beings for whom happiness is always at stake in their living, the only beings whose life is irremediably and painfully assigned to happiness.

--Giorgio Agamben 2000:4

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the spring of 2014 *Carniceria Las Tres Niñas*, a butcher shop located in the heart of downtown Santiago de Cuba, made the international news. The butcher shop had become “a site of obsession and anguish for its clients” (Benitez 2014). The article describes people with “[bed] sheets in hand, positioning themselves to sleep on the sidewalks around the location, and capture the first spaces in the tense battle for meat” (Benitez 2014). It is striking not only that so many people would wait in line over night for meat, but also, even more confounding, Las Tres Niñas does not sell choice cuts of meat. These Santiagueros are experiencing anguish and obsession over pork and beef organs such as “livers, hearts, tongue, blood sausage, kidneys, and animal heads” (Benitez 2014).

An intense desire to access meat and other scarce foods has been brewing in Cuba for many years. Everyday life in Cuba has been undergoing constant change since the early 1990s, when after the collapse of the Soviet Union, then their major trade partner, Cuba entered into a period of extreme economic difficulty known as “the Special Period in Time of Peace.” During the Special Period the Cuban state implemented policies similar to wartime measures of reductions in services and goods. In the worst of the Special Period when the state significantly decreased wages, thus decreasing purchasing power, at the same time the prices of goods rose. In

the mid 1990s “twelve percent of urban Cubans (in 2002, three-quarters of Cubans lived in urban areas) earned less than 100 pesos per month (less than US\$5 per month at the prevailing exchange rate), had no access to dollars, grew no food, and received no food subsidies” (Domínguez 2004:21). There was also rarely any food available for purchase. “Calorie intake fell by 27 percent from 1990 and 1996” (Domínguez 2004:21). There was a significant reduction in the quality and quantity of food available in state day care centers, workplace cantinas, and other long-standing state operated food centers.

Cuba has recovered significantly from the worst of the Special Period, however nothing has returned to the era of Soviet mutual aid. Cubans still feel uncertain about where their next meal will come from. Whereas in 2000, Gonzales estimated that the food rations supplied 61 percent of the calories, 65 percent of the vegetable proteins, 36 percent of the animal proteins and 38 percent of the fats in the average Cuban diet (Gonzales 2000:146). In recent years the Cuban state food ration has been cut back even further and more products have been made available at unsubsidized markets, which the Cuban state calls “liberated” foods.

As items are “liberated” from the rations, consumers must turn to other outlets to acquire food. Cubans supplement their monthly food rations through state-run stores that sell in the Cuban national peso, and state run stores that sell in Cuba’s second currency, the CUC, worth about 25 times the national peso. They also access food at farmers’ markets, through workplace cafeterias, and through the black market. In this context, the effort to piece together a high quality meal that feeds a whole family becomes a stressful process, locally described as *una lucha* (a struggle), scattered between purchasing small amounts of food at different locations across the city, borrowing from friends and neighbors, using the black market, and innovating in the kitchen.

Cuba's present food system is a product of a long history of flows of goods to and from the island, a process that has given rise to certain tastes in the Cuban palate. Under Spanish colonial rule most foods in Cuba were imported from Spain, and the local economy was based on agricultural production for export. In the first decades of the 1500s African slaves were brought to Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean as labor for that export market. While Spanish colonists maintained culinary traditions and imported foods from Spain, enslaved Africans cultivated a different set of food consumption habits more akin to those their countries of origin.

The forms of *mestizaje*¹, the social and biological mixture of European colonists, African slaves, and local native peoples, that took place under the colonial plantation system were crucial for establishing Cuban cuisine, and this process also laid the groundwork for the formation of Cuban nationalism after independence from Spain on January 1, 1899. The United States military occupation of Cuba that began immediately upon independence from Spain was the start of over 50 years of strengthened ties between Cuba and the United States. During this time the United States has an overwhelming commercial influence on Cuba, and American products could be easily found at stores throughout the island. This influence continued through the 1950s, when Cuba's most popular magazine, *Bohemia*, was filled with ads for Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Heinz Ketchup, Quaker Instant Oats, and other American products. The fact that Cuba's independence came hand-in-hand with an increased commercial influence from the United States is reflected in the present notions of an ideal cuisine: for some they are actual memories of

¹ The ideology of *mestizaje*, racial and cultural mixing, has a long history in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the Caribbean the term *mestizaje* is simply used to connote racial mixing. It is loaded with colonial and contemporary aspirations to improve Caribbean society by whitening the population, with the goal to diminish Africanness in terms of phenotype as well as cultural expression.

consuming these foods, for others they are an ideal.

The food system established through colonialism and the first decades of independence came to an end after Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement took over the island on January 1, 1959. Cuba's food rationing system, still in place today, was officially established on March 12, 1962. Every Cuban is eligible for a ration card, with which they can purchase basic food items. The ration is commonly referred to as "*la libreta*." Prices are very heavily subsidized, but households must still pay a small amount for the rationed foods, which are distributed at *bodegas*, *placitas/puestos*, and *carnicerias*. Although the original ration booklet optimistically included ham, cheese, pepperoni, sausage, beef, pork, lamb, goat, fish, seafood, fruits and vegetables, due to lack of state resources most of these items were never actually available. The monthly ration per person included: five pounds of white rice, 10 ounces of beans, three pounds refined sugar, one pound raw sugar, one kilogram of salt, four ounces of coffee, 250 milliliters of oil, and a roll of bread per day². Meat products consisted of six ounces of chicken, 11 ounces of fish, 10 eggs, and eight ounces of ground meat mixed with soy.³ This ration costs about 25 national pesos a month, or about one U.S. dollar. However, the items included in the ration fluctuate with national scarcities and surpluses.

During the Special Period of the 1990s food imports and agricultural inputs decreased abruptly. Because Soviet imports had formed the basis of Cuba's food system since the 1960s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the food system radically changed. In the 1990s many food products became scarce and those that were available had prohibitively high prices.

² During the course of my research in Santiago the items available in the ration slowly changed. These quantities are as of March 2011.

³ People with certain chronic health conditions, such as high cholesterol, diabetes, cancer, renal problems, etc. are able to purchase additional or different food items.

Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley found that during that period a typical household spent 15 hours per week waiting in line for food, a task that was usually shouldered by women (Eckstein and Wickham-Crowley 2003:99). School cafeterias, day care centers, and government job sites provided fewer and lower-quality foods than they had before. In order to deal with the food shortages, the state attempted to introduce new foods into the Cuban diet, for instance soy and other vegetable proteins were substituted for meat, soy products were substituted for dairy, and people were exhorted to eat more vegetables, tubers, and legumes.

In addition to the changing food system, institutional changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union have had wide sweeping effects on everyday life on the island (Andaya 2007, 2014; Brotherton 2005, 2012; Hernandez-Reguant 2005, 2009; Wirtz 2003, 2014; Viddal 2006, 2013). The free universal health care system that had transformed women's lives on the island, recreated the Cuban family dynamic, and transformed citizens into disciplined socialist subjects (Andaya 2007), began to fall apart after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Families are increasingly forced to turn to "private" and black market resources for care, thus creating a "*doble-moral*" of having to undermine the egalitarian system in order to access healthcare (Andaya 2007; Brotherton 2012; see also Rosendahl 1997). Changes in socialist health policies affect individual self-care practices, and redefine the ways in which "state power is enacted through and upon individual bodies" (Brotherton 2005:341). Brotherton demonstrates the ways in which the new Cuban public health system affects individual citizens' senses of self. Beyond health care these issues are also common in the experience of food acquisition and consumption.

The shifting relationship between the state and the citizen has brought about an increasing number of "unsatisfied citizen-consumers" in Cuba (Weinreb 2009), who yearn for more goods and services, and quietly acquire them through underground economic activity,

which Weinreb calls a “shadow public” (2009). Maintaining distinct public and private personas, Cuban citizen-consumers participate in underground economic activity in a public arena that is hidden and protected from the eyes of the state and prying others. Weinreb argues that it is within these private spaces and shadow publics that power is shifted from the state to the citizen consumers. However, Weinreb concludes that despite the power citizen consumers find in the “shadow public,” the rules and regulations leave Cubans feeling trapped and as if they lack freedom (Weinreb 2009).

On the aggregate level Cuba is deeply embedded in the global food system. Eighty-four percent of all food consumed in Cuba is imported (USDA 2008)⁴. After Hurricane Michelle in 2001, Cuba began importing food and agricultural products every year, and since 2002, the United States has continued to be Cuba’s largest supplier of food and agricultural products⁵. Cuba has consistently ranked among the top ten export markets for U.S. soybean oil, dry peas, lentils, dry beans, rice, powdered milk, and poultry. Cuba also has been a major market for U.S. corn, wheat, and soybeans (USDA 2008). Vietnam is Cuba’s second largest food supplier after the United States. In 2009, Cuba imported \$191 million in rice from Vietnam (Reuters 2010).

While Cuba is increasingly part of the global food system, due to the socialist distribution system, and little influx of new consumer products, many consumers do not have increased access to food products. In her analysis of consumption in post-Soviet Santiago de Cuba, Anna

⁴ In October 2000, then United States President Bill Clinton signed the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA), this allowed US entities to export food and agricultural products to Cuba.

⁵ All of Cuba’s imports are handled by the government agency *Alimport (Empresa Cubana Importada de Alimentos)*. *Alimport* is the Cuban government agency that negotiates all purchases from the U.S., coordinates payment through a third party country, and manages the distribution of these imports within Cuba. All sales to Cuba must be made in cash, no credit is ever issued in these sales to Cuba. The goods are never shipped until the payment has been received in the United States.

Cristina Pertierra (2006) applies an “anthropology of decline” (Ferguson 1999) model to understand how a society that once had material goods in abundance deals with the sudden and sustained decline in access to material goods. Examining women’s strategies of the acquisition of basic domestic necessities, including food, media technologies, and decorations for the household, Pertierra (2006) finds that the acquisition of household goods is often characterized as *una lucha* (a struggle) given the economic difficulties.

Consumption is an important site through which to understand how people and communities adapt to globalization and changing relationships between citizens and the state. Food consumption in particular is highly telling of the ways in which citizen-consumers experience rapidly changing sociopolitical worlds (Appadurai 1981, 1988; Caldwell 2009; Douglas 1966; Phillips 2006; Throop 2009, 2010; Wilk 2013). Across the globe communities are being inundated with new foods and the processes of determining how to integrate or exclude new foods from their local cuisine. As food systems change individuals rethink the meaning of authenticity and “real” food (Heldke 2003). Consumption and marketing, particularly when in flux “can open a space for discursive debate on social identities and public standing” shifting how people articulate with particular “subjectivities, identities, and individuals particular modes of belonging” (Davila 2001:10-11). Food consumption, due to the nature of agricultural production and food distribution also necessitates cooperation, reliance on community, and learning from ancestors (Throop 2009).

When I began recruiting families into my study in January 2010 Quimara⁶ was one of the first people I approached regarding participation. It was a cool winter evening when I caught Quimara, a white-identified middle class Santiaguera in her mid-50s, sitting on the front steps of her Santiago city center home. Quimara often sat outside in the evenings awaiting friendly chats with neighbors and friends. I stopped to talk to her that night as I had done on many other occasions, but this time I was trying to muster up the courage to ask her to be a part of my research. After making small talk for about 20 minutes I finally said to her, “You know that I am here studying the Cuban food system right?” She nodded, for I had explained this to her with varying degrees of detail several times already. “Well, as part of that study I am trying to find households that are willing to have me observe household cooking, food buying, meal times, and some other things. I will also conduct interviews with everyone, take photos of the kitchen and food, and document some other things in the household. Do you think you might be interested in being a part of my study?” I asked tentatively. She took a deep inhale and paused for a minute. Finally she responded and said, “I would really like to help you out, but here in this house *there is no food.*” I was puzzled by this answer and pried further, “What do you eat then?” Quimara shrugged and said: “Crap. Whatever appears.” I said, “Well then that's exactly what I would like to study -- how you turn ‘crap’ into food.” I was genuinely excited that she felt that they didn't eat real food in her household; I felt it would make an instructive addition to my study, but no matter how much I explained that to her, she declined to participate. Finally she said to me, “It sounds like an interesting study, but what we eat here in this household is pure trash, it's not dignified. I would be ashamed to show you how we eat. No, I can't let you observe here. You'll

⁶ All the names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms used to protect research participants' identities.

have to find someone else who really eats Cuban food, but it will be difficult so I wish you the best of luck.”

Quimara’s feelings that her household did not consume real food, that they ate “crap” or “whatever appeared” were common among Santiago families. Although she and her husband allowed me to interview them, I was never able to convince Quimara to fully participate in my study due to her feelings that her household food practices were not dignified enough to be worthy of study. However, I learned important perspective from this first rejection regarding the ways that people living in Santiago de Cuba (Santiagueros) might think about their own eating practices and eventually I was able to convince several other households that regardless of what they ate and how it measured up to their ideal cuisine I was still interested in studying their food-related household practices. My interactions with Quimara reinforced the validity and importance of my research questions.

Figure 1: A Decent Cuban Meal



In my initial trips to Santiago in 2008 and 2009 I was confused by the paradoxical responses Santiagueros had to the Cuban food system. Cuba has virtually no malnutrition or hunger, so why did people so often say to me that “there is no food”? People all around me seemed to regularly enjoy heaping plates of rice and beans served with pork and fresh fruit juices, but then they would describe their food as “crap” or “trash.” I was confused about why so many people described the national food ration, in place now for 50 years, as inadequate and using the food system as a “struggle” even though the monthly food ration provides approximately two weeks worth of basic food staples at virtually no cost to them. The unraveling of these food paradoxes during the course of my research has slowly revealed to me the great complexity of this problem. Indeed, to be fully understood this problem must be deconstructed both in practical terms of shifting food access and in ideological terms of what counts as real food, what matters in the making of a “decent meal,” and the ways in which cuisine is connected to community life, ethics, and subjectivity.

In this dissertation, I investigate the daily efforts of Santiago households to assemble a “decent” meal. I analyze the relationships between types of eating that do not meet local ideals for Cuban cuisine and those that are considered adequate. I use the term “decent” to capture Santiagueros desire to maintain or attain a certain level of what they express as alimentary dignity, a dignified cuisine. The concept of a decent meal involves a cuisine that not only provides adequate nourishment, but this concept also implies the ability to assemble a meal that is perceived as categorically complete with starch, beans, meat, and vegetable components and the opportunity to serve an aesthetically plated meal. The decent meal is in contrast to food that is somehow lacking in the previously stated dimensions, and would not be deemed appropriate to serve to others as well as potentially being a source of shame for the individual who must eat it.

As Quimara's reflections on eating "crap" or "whatever appears" reveal, although families may have full bellies and may be adequately nourished with respect to calories and micronutrients, they do not view their cuisine as adequate for meeting their standards of a decent meal.

My research shows that the notion of a decent meal has considerable moral connotations. It is the idea that as a part of our basic human rights we all deserve to have a decent meal. I have found that the ways in which Santiagueros insist on decency and dignity in their cuisine implies an underlying belief that the ability to consume a decent cuisine should be a basic guarantee in Cuban society. For many Santiagueros, it is the state's moral imperative to ensure that the governmental food system and other local structures function in a way that facilitates access to the resources necessary for Santiago families to assemble a decent meal. As long as the state fulfills its role to provide an adequate structure for food access, families and heads of household in turn have an ethical imperative to assemble a decent cuisine. That is, rather than spending resources in other areas, providing adequate nutrition and a decent cuisine for the family is viewed as a moral imperative: as the right thing to do. As I discuss in several chapters, this moral imperative to maintain a decent household is among the ways in which Santiagueros develop and maintain their sense of self, individual subjectivity, and relationship to their family and community.

Many Santiagueros say that the transition to state control over food production caused a great shift in the everyday eating habits of a typical Cuban household, yet when asked what typical Cuban meals consisted of before the revolution, most respond that the standard foods: rice, beans, and tubers—have in fact not changed. It is true, however, that for many people the *acquisition* of these essential ingredients has become increasingly difficult. Moreover, food acquisition shifted radically from a system where a wide variety of foods, from cheap to luxury

goods, were easily accessible in various types of markets, to a system where fewer and fewer things were available in markets, prices rose and the process of food acquisition involved going further and further from home, spending more time and money to acquire less food than they had before (cf. Garth 2012).

Research Setting and Population

This study took place in Santiago de Cuba, the island's second largest city, located on the southeastern part of the island. If Havana is symbolic of the official narrative of the Cuban nation state, then Santiago represents the subaltern. Or as some local intellectuals in Santiago say, if Havana is the New York of Cuba, then Santiago is the New Orleans. Despite the relatively large population of nearly 500,000 people Santiagueros often self-identify as *guajiros* or peasants. Santiago is known for its vibrant black culture⁷; many Santiagueros are proud to continue what they perceive to be African traditions not only through music, dance and ritual forms, but also through culinary practices. My research subjects explicitly link their *comida criolla* to their African ancestry. Santiago provides an urban setting through which to view food acquisition and symbolism in a very distinct cultural and social context compared to Havana.

⁷ Here and throughout the dissertation I try to use black as the descriptive term for African descended Cubans and their traditions. The term Afro-Cuban is also used by some scholars of Cuba, but its use has been critiqued as a hegemonic use of a Western construct that is not often used in the local context. Indeed, I rarely heard Santiagueros refer to black Cubans as “afro-Cubano” and it was much more common to use black or “negro” to refer to both people and practices associated with Africa and the diaspora.

Figure 2: Panoramic View of Santiago de Cuba 1



This study consisted of 16 months of fieldwork between July 2008 and September 2011. This included preliminary research during the summer months in 2008 and 2009, 3 months of dissertation research during the summer of 2010 and 9 consecutive months from January 2011 to September 2011. Twenty-two households officially participated in the study, which included a total of 107 household members. In order to be included in the study households had to have at least two members who were of working age in Cuba (18-60 years of age) and at least one other household member. Children were not interviewed but were part of all other aspects of the research. I chose to use more in depth, intensive methods with fewer families in order to gain an understanding of the complexities and paradoxes of daily life from research participants' perspectives. My research provides critical insight into everyday life, as this type of in depth analysis of household life has not been systematically done in an anthropological study of Cuban life. Although I privileged depth of information, by virtue of the fact that Cuban households tend to be quite large I was still able to study over 100 individuals over the course of the time that I

spent with each family. I also conducted interviews with some individuals whose households did not fully participate in the study (see Appendix).

Figure 3: Panoramic View of Santiago de Cuba 2



Most of the households that I studied consisted of at least three generations, and some had up to five⁸. The oldest generation, *la tercer edad* “the third age,” was born in the years between 1910 and 1940, they ranged in age from 99 to 70 years at the time of the study. They remember Cuba as a relatively developed country with strong ties to the United States. They also

⁸ I thank Hope Bastian Martinez for sharing her suggestion to incorporate this explanation of the different generations in Cuba. (Bastian Martinez, N.d.)

remember severe social and economic inequalities. They came of age under the Machado (1925-1933) and Batista (1940-1944; 1952-1959) dictatorships. Many from this generation are now great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents; their children are nearing or have already retired, and are already grandparents.

The children of the oldest members of the study are also considered part of the “tercer edad.” They are between 50 and 70 years old. They were born in the final years of Batista and the beginning of the socialist revolution. Many of these Cubans remember the overwhelming changes that came about during the 1960s, particularly the expansion of opportunity for the poor and the exodus of friends and family, many of whom they would never see again.

Cuba’s generation Y was born in the 1970s and 1980s⁹. The name Y is inspired by the overwhelming popularity among their parents to give children of this generation names that begin with the letter “y”. These Cubans recall a childhood rather abundantly filled with material goods from Russia and a strong sense of solidarity with international socialism. They also recall vividly the fall of the Soviet Union and the many ways the Cuba that they had always known came crashing down around them. *La juventud de hoy* (the youth of today) comprises the final generation included in the study (though they may also have children themselves now). They were born just before, during, and after the Special Period of the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. For them the crisis state is completely normal. Food insecurity, crumbling education and medical services, and rampant black marketeering are normative within their childhood memories and their current everyday lives.

⁹ In some ways not unlike America’s generation X, this group has become infamous for its critical views of Cuban politics via Yoani Sanchez famous blog aptly named *Generacion Y* (<http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony/>).

Methods

My broad research objectives were to understand the following questions: 1) How do household members navigate the state food system and draw on a diverse range of practices to acquire food? 2) How do these practices influence household and community relationships?

In order to address these questions I used several research methods:

- 1.) systematic observation of household food acquisition and consumption practices
- 2.) phenomenological embodied approach to ingestion
- 3.) photographic documentation of kitchens and household food preparation, serving, and consumption practices, and markets and food access locations,
- 4.) time allocations and caloric intake
- 5.) semi-structured interviews and locally determined household socioeconomic status

In addition to the household based part of the study I also studied food unsystematically in other contexts such as: restaurants, peso markets, CUC markets, black market vending and redistribution, black market production of food items, hotels and resorts (these are all elaborated in Chapter 2). I have also reviewed newspaper articles, television programs, and radio shows related to food.

Systematic Observation

In each household, I began by spending approximately one week conducting general observation of the household, allowing me to become familiar with household dynamics and identify significant, routine practices and activities. I took extensive handwritten fieldnotes on the household observations while the activities were going on, and wrote further reflections on

the households after I finished each evening¹⁰. I then used the initial findings to develop an observation protocol and in the subsequent weeks conducted systematic observations focused on household food acquisition practices, intra-household dynamics and inter-household interactions surrounding food. I continued to add novel practices to the protocol as I observed them.

During this time I participated in household tasks if I was asked to, including help with food preparation, assisting in carrying foods home from bodegas and markets, cleaning, laundry, childcare, animal care, and other small tasks. This form of participation both helped me build rapport with the families and to experience first hand certain aspects of their everyday life. In situations where I was enlisted to participate in household activities I took fieldnotes immediately after I finished the activity and reflected on my own experience and the insights that I learned by participating.

Phenomenological Embodied Approach

In addition to broad participant observation I used what I call a “phenomenological embodied” approach to further immerse myself in the everyday life experiences of my interlocutors. This approach was based on using my own body to understand my interlocutors’ embodiment within their own habitus and culturally constructed world. I gained deeper levels of understanding tasks by actually doing them, for instance, on an occasion where I was asked to cut tomatoes with a dull knife and no cutting board, I learned that the local method of holding vegetables while cutting them is a very different experience from the sharp knives and cutting surfaces that I was accustomed to in the US. Following Csordas (1990) and Jackson (1998)

¹⁰ *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (1995) by Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw was a very influential book for me in both the writing of this section and in my methodological approach to fieldwork.

primarily I used the “phenomenological approach,” to illuminate perceptual processes and better grasp the meaning and experience of senses in the grounded lived experience of the body (Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Throop 2003a, 2003b; Throop and Murphy 2002). The phenomenal field for me is about sense experience, about grasping the meaning and experience of senses in the grounded lived experience of the body (Throop 2008). The idea is that through putting oneself in the place of another we come to inhabit their world. For me this approach meant that while I was a participant observer in the households I made every effort to ingest--eat, drink, and smoke—just as they did. I tried to eat, drink or smoke at the same time, in the same place and in the same amount that they did. These practices, of course, varied from person to person within each household, so I would follow the head of household’s—usually a female--practices, which other members of the family often followed as well. For instance, if the head of household smoked a pack of cigarettes and drank 10 small cups of coffee a day, so did I. If they ate six cups of rice at each meal followed by a sugary dessert, so did I. However, I did not take the same medications that they took and I maintained a fairly regular exercise routine even if they didn't. There were occasions when I broke with this practice, such as when I fell ill or had some other obligation.

Photographic Documentation

General observations were supplemented with photographic documentation (El Guindi 1998) of food acquisition, meal preparation, and food consumption. According to Collier and Collier (1986) photographic documentation helps observers to see through “native eyes” and the photograph establishes a visual artifact of the observations as audio recording do with interviews. Although photography was conducted throughout the study period, I conducted systematic

photographic documentation of food acquisition, meal preparation, and food consumption after the first week of initial observations.

Time Allocation

Time allocation is used here to approximate the percentage of time spent on various everyday household activities. The time sampling used in this study followed each individual adult household member during one day of the study from around 6 a.m. to approximately 12 a.m., every 15 minutes his or her activity was recorded. I made sure to do the time allocations toward the end of the study period for each family in order to reduce reactivity problems. To the extent possible I followed the household member throughout the home and the city recording their actions and the location of their actions. There were, of course, some situations in which I could not record their actions. For instance, some participants had jobs where I was not allowed to be present, or there were moments when they wanted to be alone with a loved one. I recorded approximately 73 actions per person per day. During this day I also recorded their food consumption and other ingestive practices, which can be used to approximate a daily caloric intake.

Semi-Structured Interviews

After gaining rapport with each household, I used semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews based on a short interview protocol designed to elicit basic information on household food acquisition. Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to keep the participants focused on topics related to food while still allowing me to ask further questions about things that were mentioned in the interview that were particular to that household or were not foreseen in my interview protocol. I usually conducted a minimum of two interview sessions with each

consenting household member. The first was used to elicit basic household demographics and general processes of food acquisition. The second and third (if necessary) interviews covered more specific detail about household members' experiences of the food system. Including strategies for coping with scarcity, problems or difficulties they have with the food system, and their hopes for future changes in Cuba. As part of the interviews I also elicited information regarding households assets in order to determine household socioeconomic status (e.g. DeWalt and Pelto 1976).

Using the data derived from these methods, my work builds upon a growing body of ethnographic work on Cuba that investigates of the waning of the state (e.g. Brotherton 2005, 2012; Andaya 2009, 2014; Viddal 2013; Wirtz 2014) to reveal the ways in which changes in state systems impact family and community life. I show that these shifts in family and community life have profound effects on the ways in which Santiagueros experience their practices of everyday life, and the ways in which they do or do not understand these changing practices to be morally and ethically appropriate.

The Cuban case is one among many in the world today where consumption is a global process embedded in particular historical, political, and social contexts, and household consumption practices lie at the center of tensions between state authority and individual desires (Wilk 2006; Sawyer 2013). Many such studies have analyzed consumption practices in urban capitalist settings. In contrast, this project focuses on food consumption practices under an urban socialist provisioning system to illuminate the ways in which changes in state systems impact household and individual strategies and practices for basic everyday needs, which themselves may influence the ethical parameters of household and community relationships.

There are a variety of implications for this research beyond contexts of socialism. Most generally the common thread of experience Cubans share with others across the globe is the experience of living through and responding to ongoing sociopolitical change. In the case of Cuba the constant changes influence the way that the state structures individuals' lives. Change is nothing new in Cuba, since the fall of the Soviet Union, indeed even since the 1959 revolution (one could even argue that since conquest), the political economic systems that have structured life on the island have undergone rapid and ongoing change. The ongoing changes in policies that effect basic aspects of everyday life, like food access, leave citizens in a constant state of flux, always uncertain about whether or not they will be able to access basic needs. This feeling of uncertainty, a sense of precarity, is something that is increasingly experienced in capitalist and neoliberal contexts (cf. Allison 2013; Biehl 2005; Garcia 2010; Molé 2012; Muehlenbach 2012; Stewart 2012). In the midst of mounting uncertainty and precarious existence individuals and communities grapple with how they will maintain the freedom necessary to build meaningful lives without losing their sense of ethics (Faubion 2011; Foucault 1997; Laidlaw 2002).

Many recent food studies have focused on single aspects of a food system in the context of increasing availability of goods, such as the rise of fast food or the use of farmers' markets. Other works have demonstrated how groups of people attempt to maintain local ways of eating despite being inundated with global commodities (cf. Caldwell 2004, 2009; Sawyer 2013; Wynne 2013; Wilson 2013). However, little work has focused on how people access food across an entire food system, or analyzed situations in which the availability and accessibility of foods have decreased across an entire population. Given increasing food scarcities after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cuban food system provides an excellent setting to study the practices through which Cubans deal with the tensions between state-determined adequacy for

provisioning and individual needs. This dissertation demonstrates that even in the context of Cuba, where there are no multinational corporations flooding the market with new foods, people still struggle to maintain control over what they consume as the Cuban state shifts food distribution systems (cf. Garth 2013b).

In contrast to the rise in individualism across the neoliberal capitalist world, I demonstrate the ways in which the waning of the socialist state generates increasing reliance on other people—family, friends, vendors, black marketeers, and more. Thus, increasing the importance of community, and further enmeshing people within their social networks, and diminishing the possibility of a more individualized society. The late-socialist context, although similar to many neoliberal societies, fosters a unique context where the social importance of community is strengthened.

As such, the shift in the way people access food has ramifications for other areas of social life in Cuba. The new food system has exacerbated already existing inequalities across class, gender, and color lines. The changes have caused people to rethink whether their consumption behaviors are ethical. As people reflect on their shifting ethics of consumption, many people reevaluate who they are as individuals, as community members, and as Cubans in the late-socialist era.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2: Food Acquisition and Family Life in Santiago outlines the workings of the rationing system. I show that the ideals and expectations for what types of foods should be available were established during the period of independence with a strong North American influence, and the height of Soviet material aid, where there was an abundance of cheap imported goods. I detail how the ration functions, and then explain the ways in which households

acquire food outside of the rationing system, through national peso markets, the “gray” market, the black market, borrowing and trading, self production, gifting, and hard currency (CUC) purchases. Showing how three families use this complex food system to acquire food, I provide an overview of everyday family life and composition of household structures.

In Chapter 3: *!No Hay Comida!* The Search for Satiation in Post-Special Period Santiago, I explore relationships between the stressful experience of food acquisition and participants’ notions of an ideal or decent cuisine based on their memories of previous eras of the Cuban food system and remembered pasts told to them by those who lived through even earlier food systems. To illustrate this point, I analyze participants emotional responses to these changes juxtaposed with their memories and ideas of what life should be like and concepts of an ideal Cuban cuisine.

Chapter 4: Household Food Acquisition across Skin Color, Class, and Neighborhood, addresses food-related inequality across race, class, and neighborhood. I outline the social and historical significance of skin color and class in the Caribbean in general, and in Cuba before and after the 1959 revolution. I elaborate on the ways in which families with difficulty acquiring food innovate strategies for acquisition, which might involve borrowing food or money from family and friends, further exacerbating inequalities between groups of people in Santiago.

In Chapter 5: *Virtuous Womanhood: Food and the Maintenance of Harmonious Households and Happy Husbands* I outline the ways in which gender inequalities are exacerbated by the changing food system. Despite women’s much improved ability to access to education, work, and health care, I found that as the Cuban food system shifts away from state provisioning women take on disproportionate amounts of increasingly difficult, time-consuming, unpaid household labor. I demonstrate the ways in which deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies and

locally conceived ideals of virtuous womanhood drive this gendered division of labor. This chapter sheds new light on previous understandings of gender relations and feminism in Cuba, revealing that in the post-Soviet era nuanced socially-based understandings of gender that build upon longstanding, pre-socialist gender ideologies undergird a social system previously thought to be economically and structurally based.

Chapter 6: The Ethics and Morals of Food Acquisition argues that the collapse of the Cuban food system has shifted participants' moral and ethical relationships with their communities. My data illuminate the ways in which these shifting morals are enacted on the ground, and individuals' emotional responses to shifting morals in contemporary Cuba. I then discuss how these shifting morals relate to broader anthropological theories of morals and ethics. I use the dilemmas of food acquisition to shed light on ethical subject formation, and the ways that people maintain their self and social identity. I also use these theories of ethics to illuminate the ways in which food acquisition relates to changes in how people see themselves and how they relate to others in late-socialist Cuba.

In Chapter 7: Food, Stress, and the Body, I illuminate the ways in which my research participants connect food consumption with their bodies *via* body appearance and size as well as the manifestation of disease in the body. I detail dieting and exercise practices used to correct corporeal appearance and discuss the ways in which participants implicate the state in their food-related bodily ailments.

Chapter 8: Public Culture under Socialism: Ceremony and Celebration addresses the importance of happy emotions and celebratory events, and consumption habits during these times. Despite my interlocutors' complaints about their struggle to make the Cuban food system work, their lives are simultaneously pleasant and enjoyable in other ways. In this chapter, I focus

what these events mean emotionally for Santiagueros, demonstrating how such events counterbalance frustration with everyday life, become spaces for the circulation of gifts, and spaces of cultural and class distinction. I argue that these events are loci of Cuban “public culture”, where the completely state-run media plays a different role in shaping peoples lives, these celebrations are spaces of cultural flow and change.

In Chapter 9: Resistance, Hope, and Subjectivity in Post-Soviet Socialist Cuba, I use participants’ experiences of the food system to attend to the ways in which individuals are empowered to resist in contemporary Cuba. I turn to local ideas about the future of the Cuban food system and how people see themselves fitting into that imagined future. I show how through small daily actions of subverting the system my interlocutors are able to maintain a decent quality of life, and hope and dream of the future.

No meal can be an exact repeat of the ones before it, because of the irreversibility of time; the diners will have aged, the tablecloth accumulates stains, the vegetables you buy this year are subtly different from the ones you cooked last year. You simply cannot eat the same food twice. To borrow a metaphor from Mark Twain, food and cuisine in the present can rhyme with those of the past, but they can never be perfect reproductions.

-Richard Wilk 2013:xi

Chapter 2

Food Acquisition and Family Life in Santiago

Building upon the outline of the development of Cuba's socialist food system and changes to that system after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the Special Period of the 1990s developed in the Introduction, in this chapter I outline the workings of the rationing system. The ideals and expectations for what types of foods should be available was established during two periods: 1) the period of independence with a strong North American influence in the first half of the 20th century; and, 2) the height of Soviet material aid in the 1970s and 1980s, where there was an abundance of cheap imported goods. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the foods that are affordable and available have significantly changed and many consumers are unsatisfied. After the Special Period services that were once guaranteed by the paternal state dissolved and households are forced to do increasing amounts of work and spend more money to make ends meet. These remembered pasts establish the present day expectations for the food system.

I begin by detailing the work of one of my study participants, Cecelia, who happened to work at a local ration station. I then explain the ways in which households acquire food outside of the rationing system, through national peso markets, the "gray" market, the black market, borrowing and trading, self production, gifting, and hard currency (CUC) purchases. The next

section provides an overview of everyday family life and composition of household structures in Santiago de Cuba. I then show how three different families use this complex food system to acquire food. Thereafter, I elaborate on the many ways that Santiagueros can acquire food items under the current Cuban food system.

The Food Ration

Cecelia, a 54 year old, middle class, white Santiaguera, works as a *bodegera*—the person who runs the ration station where dry goods are distributed, known as the *bodega*. Cecelia is a beloved member of her community who has worked in the same bodega for nearly 30 years. Bodegas (and carnicerías—where meat rations are picked up) are interspersed every few blocks throughout Santiago neighborhoods and service the families in the immediate area. Those who receive their rations at Cecelia’s bodega view her as someone that is on their side, helping them out as much as she can within the limitations that the state puts on her and the supply of ration food.

Figure 4: A Typical Cuban *Carniceria*



Organizing her inventory and paperwork are a large part of Cecelia's job. When she arrives in the morning she fills out inventory forms, checking the amounts of each food item left from the previous day and filling that information into a form. The amounts of food available at the start of each day should be the same as the amount of food available at closing time the night before. If there is a discrepancy she must account for it, report it, and fill out more paperwork about it. She is also in charge of retrieving more supplies from centralized distribution points. The non-perishable products for the rations are either shipped *via* truck or train from Havana or arrive in Santiago's port and are then stored in warehouses near the port where they are divided for distribution to neighborhood centers. A neighborhood center stores the food for several bodegas and the products are distributed to each bodega as needed. Perishable foods are delivered by truck to the carnicerías, which must have working refrigeration units. Cecelia bought her own cart for transporting these food items across the neighborhood, a responsibility that is entirely up to the person running the bodega. Whenever she is running low on a certain item she must pick it up and bring it to her station. There are additional papers to be filled out and signed when she does so.

The bodega is open from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. in the mornings and from 4:30pm to 7:00 p.m. in the evenings. The bodega is closed on Sunday and opens a bit later on Saturdays. Cecelia has a huge ledger, approximately 12 inches by 24 inches, which lists the nearly 200 families that she serves. The goods that each family eligible for is noted, and as they come in to pick up the month's ration she crosses off what they picked up.

Figure 5: Typical Cuban *Bodega*



As of January 2012 the following products were available on the ration (per adult per month): Salt, five pounds of rice, 10 ounces of beans (the type of bean varies with availability, common types are: black, red and white beans), three pounds raw sugar and one pound refined sugar, 250 milliliters cooking oil, four ounces of coffee, and a roll of bread per day delivered to their house daily by the *panadero*. Babies up to age 3 years, 11 months, 29 days receive one twelve ounce can of fortified fruit puree *compota* per day, and from zero to seven years old all children receive one liter of powdered milk per day. Children from seven to fourteen years old receive one liter of soy yogurt per day. Around 2000 the Cuban state began allocating rice “*suplementos*” for people over 60 years old and “*adicional*” rice for children from zero to fourteen years old. There are also meat products in the ration; these are distributed at a *carniceria*. Each registered individual receives six ounces of chicken, six ounces of fish, and

either eight ounces of ground meat with soy, eight ounces bologna, or 10 ounces of additional chicken per month depending on availability. Eggs are also distributed at the carniceria. From the first to fifteenth day of the month there are five eggs available per person that cost 15 cents each. From the fifteen to the last day of the month there are five eggs available per person for 90 cents each. All of these items together cost the consumer about 25 national pesos (CUP) per month¹¹. Each item arrives on a particular day in the first half and second half of the month, that item can be picked up beginning the day it arrives until the next shipment comes in the second half of the month. Each ration station has a chalkboard indicating when the items will arrive. Many people pick up each item on the day it arrives both because they need it and for fear that they might miss out on their allotted amount (due to spoilage or pilfering).

¹¹ The products available in the ration vary from province to province and within each province as well. The quantity and frequency of the rationed goods also changes frequently. As such there are not a reliable source of official information on the ration published by the Cuban government. Thus my data comes from cross referencing the following data: 1) my interview data with Cecelia; 2) Cecelia's ration ledger and bodega chalkboard detailing the available items in the ration; 3) the chalkboards and written documents posted in other Santiago ration stations; 4) observations and interviews with other study families regarding what they acquire through the ration.

Table 1: Items Available in the Ration in 2011

Bodega Items	Monthly Quantity Per Person
Salt	1 kg (per three months)
Rice	5 lbs.
Beans	10 oz.
Raw Sugar	3 lbs.
Refined Sugar	1 lb.
Cooking Oil	250 ml.
Coffee	4 oz.
Carniceria Items	Monthly Quantity Per Person
Chicken	6 oz.
Fish	6 oz.
Additional Meat (ground meat with soy, bologna, or more chicken)	8 oz. (10 oz. if chicken)
Eggs	1 st -15 th of the month: 5 @ 15 cents each 16 th -31 st of the month: 5 @ 90 cents each

Table 2: Elderly and Children's Ration

Item	Daily Quantity Per Person
Fortified fruit puree (compote)	12 oz. can (up to 3 years, 11mos, 29 days)
Powdered Formula or Milk	1 liter (age 0-7)
Soy yogurt	1 liter (age 7-14)
Additional Rice	5 lbs. (age 0-14)
Supplemental Rice	5 lbs. (over age 60)

The ration is absolutely essential for most families to survive. Although it is no longer an adequate source for a full month's food, the ration still provides every Cuban citizen regardless of socioeconomic class with many of the basic nutrients that they need for part of the month and the ingredients to make culturally appropriate Cuban cuisine. It creates a very basic baseline of equality with respect to food access. Despite some problems, given that there is a *bodega* and *carniceria* every few blocks, the ration is relatively easy to access. The service hours seem to be adequate and although lines often form just before the workday begins and after it ends, for the most part waiting times are usually 30 minutes or less. Problems include instances where shipments arrived late, or the contents were spoiled.

While the rations are the most common and most important way that Santiagueros acquire food, few people would be able to survive on rations alone. Most of my study participants stated that the food provided in the ration only lasted from one to two weeks rather than the full month.

The amount and types of foods in the ration has been changing rapidly and erratically over the past few years toward ultimately eliminating the ration and “liberating” all food products¹². However, the process through which the rations have been reduced has been a chaotic experience for many users and leaves people with a sense of uncertainty about what they can count on being available. For instance, since 2009 the amount of *chicharro* (split pea) in the ration was slowly reduced from 20 ounces a month to 10 ounces a month until it was finally eliminated in January 2010. Now *chicharro* is a “liberated” product sold at the bodegas at the unsubsidized price of 7 CUP per kilogram. This process was announced and rolled out slowly,

¹² In November 2010, the Cuban Socialist Party announced a plan to slowly eliminate the food rations.

however around the same time that the *chicharro* was eliminated the bean ration was suddenly cut in half from 20 ounces to 10 ounces. Just when the *chicharro* was eliminated and people only had beans to rely on for vegetable protein, this source was halved. These types of changes leave Santiagueros with a sense of uncertainty and a feeling that they must scramble to come up with new solutions as their long-standing food system is swept out from under them. People also find the changes in the ration to be confusing and hard to keep track of. For example, previously one kilogram of salt was allocated per person per month, but after 2010 one kilogram is allocated for 1-2 people for three months, two kilograms for 2-4 people for three months, three kilograms for 5-6 people for three months, or five kilograms for 7-8 people over three months.

I consistently found that one of the foremost concerns of many Santiagueros is the supplementation of their monthly food ration with food items that they view as essential to maintain their ideal of Cuban cuisine. Deciphering the ration system alone is complicated, and in addition to the food rations Santiagueros must acquire food through other avenues that are also complex and often difficult to use. The different ways of acquiring non-ration foods have benefits and drawbacks with respect to the quality, quantity, variety, and affordability of the foods that are offered. The food system as a whole, like the ration, is also changing rapidly. Given this unstable, uncertain food system users cannot establish a routine or plan their meals and food budgets because they cannot rely on the system to consistently provide what they need at prices they can afford. The main ways in which Santiagueros supplement rations is through: national peso markets, the “gray” market, the black market, borrowing and trading, self production, gifting, and hard currency (CUC) purchases.

The Dual Currency Economy

Before further describing the ways that people acquire food in addition to the rations it is imperative to understand that Cuba has a dual currency economy. In 1993, the government began to allow Cubans to legally use foreign currency; previously the possession of hard currency was a crime. Cuba operated on a dual U.S. dollar–Cuban peso economy until 2004 when dollars ceased to be accepted and the Convertible Cuban Peso (CUC or *Chavitos* or *Divisa*) came into circulation. At the time of my research in 2010 and 2011 the CUC was equivalent to one dollar and eight cents, and the national peso is worth about \$0.04. However, Cubans do not get paid in CUC; Cuba’s second currency, the Cuban national peso is the currency that most Cubans are paid in. There are 25 national pesos per CUC. Whereas there used to be many stores that accepted the national peso, these stores are increasingly converting to CUC, thus forcing Cubans to convert their Cuban national pesos into CUC to make their purchases (Centeno and Font 1997; de la Fuente and Glasco 1997; Phillips 2009). After converting to CUC, a Cuban worker who receives 300 national pesos per month in salary has only 12 CUC per month. Items in the CUC market are priced similarly to US prices (Garth 2012; Gordy 2006). Those with access to remittances or other means of acquiring CUC are likely to make more of these types of purchases (Garth 2013b).

CUC Purchases

Currently, CUC purchases are the only way to acquire many of the products Cubans consider necessary, including additional cooking oil, imported spices, and bouillon cubes, and personal hygiene products. Items in the CUC market are priced similarly to U.S. prices: a can of soda is 0.75 CUC, a bar of soap one CUC, a liter of cooking oil 1.10 CUC, or 16 ounces of pasta

for 2 CUC. Most of the families in my study were able to make very few CUC purchases each month. Many essential items that used to be sold in pesos are increasingly only available in CUC, (such as cooking oil and butter) however, access to CUC has not increased (Garth 2012). The high prices and difficulty accessing this currency lead many people to avoid buying things in the CUC. Very few people mentioned purchasing the food items available in the CUC stores, however many cited soap and deodorant as their most important monthly CUC purchases.

National Peso Markets

Although the CUC is increasingly important, there are still many ways to make food purchases with the Cuban national peso. At the time of this research there were five large markets that sold goods only for pesos in Santiago. Many of the people that I interviewed noted that these markets are very expensive for them, so much so that they try to only shop at these markets when absolutely necessary, that is, once they have consumed everything provided by the ration and any foods they can acquire in cheaper ways. While the supplies these markets have are often inconsistent, they also are often the only places where certain types of food items are available, such as fruits and vegetables that easily perish or are not conducive to sale by street vendors. Those with more resources use these markets more, but complain of their limited and irregular supplies. The prices at these markets vary greatly. During the summer of 2008 I calculated the average prices of some common foods: okra, five pesos per piece (\$0.23); small cucumbers, three pesos (\$0.14); small slices of squash, one peso (\$0.05); malanga, nine pesos per pound (\$0.41); yuca, 2.50 pesos per pound (\$0.11); small plantains, 7.50 pesos per pound (\$0.34); and tomatoes, four pesos per pound (\$0.18). These are moderate prices to many Santiagueros. For those who only earn the equivalent of \$12 per month spending nearly \$1.50 on all of the vegetables listed here is not sustainable. As I elaborate in later chapters many

families are often left with no other options but to go into debt to buy food. Some of these items are also available through street vendors, however because of the small quantity they are able to carry they often run out of popular items.

Some of the items available in these markets are also available through street vendors, however, only in small quantities and therefore often sell out quickly. There are also food stalls that are heavily subsidized by the Cuban government where people often buy food, however, these stalls are not usually well stocked. For the most part street vendors, whether they have a permit to legally sell food or not, accept pesos for their goods. Food sales between friends and family normally use the national peso. Many black market purchases are made in pesos, though illicit vendors increasingly demand CUC for their products.

There are also smaller neighborhood-based markets and meat or vegetable stands that sell food items in pesos. These markets are more convenient in that they are closer to home, however they usually carry less variety, have smaller quantities to sell (so they may sell out), and the prices are higher. In my experience people tend to use these locations to buy items they forgot to purchase on a trip to the larger market or something they need at the last minute. However, in some cases community members build relationships with these vendors, who tend to have been part of the same community for several generations, and those relationships can lead to discounted prices or sometimes the vendor will set aside the better quality products for a family with whom they have an established relationship.

In recent years, Santiago's new provincial socialist party leader, Lázaro Expósito, has been tremendously successful in expanding opportunities for Santiagueros to buy foods in the national peso. One area in which he has been particularly successful is in the establishment of markets

(and restaurants) that sell fish and seafood. Whereas, prior to 2010, my research subjects repeatedly lamented their difficulties accessing fish, shrimp, and other seafood, now many of these same people rejoice about the increase in seafood products available for purchase.

Study participants also credit Expósito with the establishment of two large markets that sell canned products and two that feature dairy products. One participant joyously told me of the variety of products that she could now buy all these products that used to only be available in CUC:

They have different flavors of yogurt and plain, different flavors of ice cream for the same price as the yogurt, cheese, cream cheese, etc. They also have meat products like ham, ground meat, pate, smoked ribs, and canned products like fruit in a can, tomato puree, drinks like soda and alcoholic beverages. They have cookies and crackers. They have so many products now! Most are at a good price ... –Ariana, interview August 2010
Santiago de Cuba

Gray Market: Street Vendors and Pregoneros

In Cuba, the grey market involves situations in which the legality of the transaction is unclear, or where it is officially illegal but a very rarely sanctioned activity. Unlicensed street vendors are the main grey market vendors in Santiago. In addition to peso markets, street vendors whether or not they have a permit to legally sell food accept pesos for their goods. Food can also be acquired through *pregoneros*, who, known for their *pregones* (jingles), navigate Santiago streets from sunup to sundown singing songs of the quality of their goods. Some street vendors sell and acquire their goods legally; others do not. Although *pregoneros* are quite

convenient as they come to your home, their prices are marked up and their goods irregular and inconsistent.

Black Market

As the amount of food in the ration has decreased and the number of foods available only in CUC increased, many told me that they turn to the black market (see also del Real and Pertierra 2008). Broadly speaking, a black market is a market of goods or services that operates outside of the official formal state system. Due to the nature of the black market, accurate and systematic documentation of its activity are nearly impossible to come by. Yet through my study, I was able to acquire some ethnographic data on the Santiago black market. Throughout Cuba, black market activity includes not only situations where the possession, consumption, or sale of the product is illegal, but also cases in which the manner in which the product is acquired or produced is illegal.

Many of the products that are distributed on the black market are goods that are stolen from the state that would otherwise be destined for legal sale as a state transaction. These are often supplies such as foods, building materials, clothing, etc. that are provided to the citizenry by the state. Employees and their associates along the distribution chain pilfer these goods before the goods reach the people they are intended for. The employees and their associates then sell these goods to the public on the black market; the individual makes a profit that makes up for their small salary. Foods that are original supposed to be rationed to the public are the most common type of illegally acquired black market food¹³.

¹³ According to my research participants and my own observations, although this activity is illegal it often goes unpunished despite the fact that it happens on a daily basis in visible public spaces. Occasionally local law enforcement will sanction a few illegal vendors, and on rare

Frozen, imported lobster, shrimp and other seafood, often originally destined for hotels and resorts, are also traded on the black market. These foods along with myriad other items, from industrial sized cans of vegetables or capers, to U.S. cigarettes and foreign beer, are all goods stolen from the hospitality industry and constitute a great proportion of the black market goods in Cuba.

Additionally, tourists and relatives who are living abroad provide a category of goods bought and sold black market, some of which are legal to possess, canned or freeze dried foods, while others are not, such as certain appliances. The people who bring these products to Cuba are known as *mulas* (mules).

Illegal Production and Resale

Officially a permit is required for an individual to grow any food products or raise any animals in their homes, even for just their own personal/familial consumption. These permits are cost prohibitive for many Santiagueros. Yet some choose to risk large fines and produce food items for their own consumption and for sale. Common foods that are grown in and around urban dwellings in Santiago include: plantains, mangos, limes, and herbs (often used for teas or religious ceremonies). Animals that are commonly raised in or around Santiago homes include: pigs, chickens, goats, turtles, and pigeons. These are foods that are most easily produced clandestinely and sold illegally within social and neighborhood networks.

Illegally grown or manufactured goods

Black market goods sold directly from farmland are also quite common in Santiago.

occasions there will be a large sweep cracking down on the whole infrastructure of the black market trade. Such large crackdowns were common during the beginning of Lázaro Expósito's term.

Legally a certain proportion crops harvested are to be sold to the government, but many farmers hoard parts of their harvests to sell directly to the public. Farm fresh eggs and freshly ground coffee are among the many direct from the farm specialties commonly sold in Santiago's streets. These goods are usually sold clandestinely through social networks. Black market beef was probably the most sought after and most important black market food product at the time of this research. Beef is unavailable to the general public except on rare occasions.

Illegal Sales: Hoarding and Reselling

As a strategy for making money, sometimes those with more resources buy products in bulk when they are available in the stores and markets, and later they sell these items at a profit to friends, family, and extended social networks. For instance, one of my research participants, who I discuss further in chapter six, illegally acquires large quantities of rice and then resells it to her friends and family when their own rations ran low. She thinks of this as an investment and source of income for her own family. Another common practice is changing money, those with enough money can go to the bank and sell CUC for pesos at a better rate than the state money exchange facilities called the *Casa de Cambio SA* (CADECA) has, but they must change at least 250 CUC. They then change money at the same rate as the CADECA, but save people the time waiting in line, they make a profit of 0.10 pesos for every peso they sell.

Similar to those who hoard and resell, many Santiagueros and other Cubans with access to transportation, such as taxi, bus, or truck drivers, pilots, or train conductors, participate in elaborate processes of buying foods in provinces that are selling them at cheaper prices or where the products are abundant and then reselling them elsewhere where the product is scarce for higher prices. Another group who hoard and resell goods are people with certain diseases,

including HIV/AIDS, diabetes, and kidney disorders, who receive beef and other highly sought after foods in their rations. Many who receive this special diet ration sell all or part of their share of these highly desirable foods on the black market.

Borrowing and Lending

Due to the general scarcity of goods and the extreme irregularity of product availability in Santiago, trading within social networks are essential to overcoming household hardships during times of scarcity. Practices of borrowing and lending work well when things are in abundance; it does not significantly influence a families food supply if they lend a friend a cup of sugar, salt, some bread, etc. However, when things are scarce and the borrowing and lending practices become more difficult and put more strain on social relationships as people feel pressure to lend even if they don't have enough for their own families.

This is an example from my own experience of borrowing and lending to illustrate how quickly common goods circulate this way:

On July 1, 2011 Orlando started out with 10 pounds of sugar. He had to lend half of the sugar to his mother, Mari, so she then had five pounds left. Orlando's ex-wife Mabel needed sugar urgently¹⁴ that same afternoon and she went to her ex-mother in law¹⁵, Mari's house and borrowed all five pounds. That same evening Mari came back to Orlando's house and borrowed two more cups of sugar. Within two days Orlando was left with only three of the 10 cups of sugar. Three days later Orlando's brother came over

¹⁴ Sugar is a very common ingredient in Cuban food. It is used for coffee, in making fruit juices, preparing powdered milk for children, and as seasoning in many sauces used as main dishes.

¹⁵ Among my research participants it was common to maintain social relationships with divorced or separated partners and their families. These extended kin tended to have more close relationships when there were children shared by the divorced or separated partners.

to borrow one cup. He ran out of sugar within five days, and it only lasted that long because Orlando uses very little sugar relative to other Cubans. –fieldnotes July 2010

Self-Production and Gifting

Just as it is illegal to produce certain foods for sale to others it is illegal to produce them for your own self-consumption. Many households raise chickens, goats or pigs without a license for their own consumption, this is illegal and, if caught, punished with a harsh fine. These items are also sometimes given away as gifts to others, which is also illegal without licensure to raise animals.

Gifts, in general, are another way in which Santiagueros acquire food. Apart from gifts for celebrations and momentous occasions, Santiagueros give and receive small gifts on a fairly regular basis. In many households whenever there is an abundance of something the woman of the household will allocate that extra among friends and family by visiting them with a small gift. It is expected that the parties who receive the gifts will return the favor by gifting back something that they might have in excess at a later time.

Housing, Households, and Family Life

In Cuba, for most families, food acquisition is a household level activity. Food is acquired for the household as a whole; meals are cooked together and shared among household members. Often the tasks of food acquisition are divided between household members. In other instances only one household member will be in charge of all food acquisition. Before delving into my research participants' experiences of the food system, it is important to establish an understanding of the setting in which this research took place, and specifically to explicate the household-based approach to this research. While I take a household based approach to the study

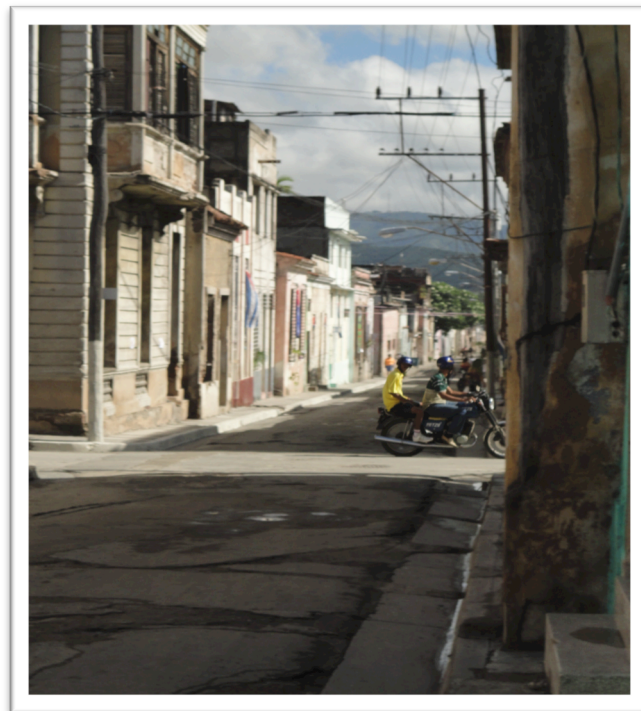
of food in Cuba, I begin and end with the individual household members and their practices and perspectives on everyday life in Cuba today.

Households are not uniform across the globe or even across Santiago de Cuba, but there are some generalizable characteristics across the households in this study and within socioeconomic class groupings (low, med, and high) in Santiago (I elaborate on the relationships between food and class in chapter four). Santiago households, like many across the Caribbean, tend to include more than the nuclear family. A typical household might include three or four generations of kin, fictive kin, employees such as maids and nannies, beloved pets, and animals being raised for consumption or religious sacrifice.

In recent decades, as the housing shortage in Cuba has become more acute, it has become very difficult for a young nuclear family to acquire a separate place to live. Instead new families must live with parents or other relatives, or they may come to an agreement with their family to split the home into multiple dwellings. Many of the middle and upper-middle class families that participated in this study had divided their ancestral home into two or more distinct dwellings. In the case of one family this meant creating a two story home out of a old colonial house that originally had ceilings over 15 feet tall, now there are two stories with ceilings approximately seven feet tall. In other cases this means splitting the house down the middle. One might simply build a wall down the middle, and then add a new front door on the other side, as well as bathrooms, kitchens, and any other aspect of the home necessary to duplicate in the new second dwelling. Another household that participated in my study lived in a freestanding structure that was built on the property where their parents and grandparents also lived. The property had been given to the family because of their parents' involvement in the 1959 revolution.

The relationship between housing and family life is important for understanding food acquisition. Although many of my research participants prefer to live near their relatives, the current housing situation in Cuba forces them to live in even closer quarters than many families would like. There is often a tension among younger generations and older generations; as new families are established they often feel that they would prefer to be more independent of their parents and grandparents but space and financial resources do not permit this. Whereas the new family would prefer to maintain their own nuclear family budget, acquire their own foods, and cook for their own nuclear unit often bureaucracy (e.g. they can not get their own rations) and financial barriers prevent them from fulfilling these desires.

Figure 6: Santiago City Center



Family Profile: Casa Centro 1

This household consisted of three generations of Santiagueros, a fourth was on the way, but was lost before birth while I was studying this household. As part of my research with this family I would join Maria de la Gracia (MG), a 62 year old, white, middle class Santiaguera, on her morning walks everyday around 6 a.m. We talked about life and the past as we accumulated mileage across the city, waving to old friends and when passing by places where significant moments took place in her life MG would tell me the stories of her past as we moved through the landscapes where the events had happened. One morning as we passed her old house in the “humble” neighborhood near Santiago’s city center, she told me that when she was young, a child, she met Leonardo (Leo), her husband.

Leo, a white, middle class Santiaguero, was 67 at the time of this study. Like MG he is a white middle class Santiaguero. Though they had fallen in love, their age difference of 10 years was too great for them to get married when they were young. MG admired Leo’s devotion to Cuban socialism. She explained to me that though she admired him for his military service to Cuba and going to war to fight for socialism abroad, she couldn't wait for him to return before starting her life, so she married someone else and had two children with him. She didn't talk about this much, but she told me that she divorced her first husband because he beat her and had children with another woman. Leo also married someone else, moved to La Habana, and had four children, but as soon as he found out that MG was divorced he started to pursue her again, eventually leaving his wife for her and returning to Santiago. They were married just before the Special Period and still act like newlyweds. Her children think of Leo as their father, but his children rejected her at first and are slowly warming up to her over the years.

MG's son now lives in La Habana, and Elvira is her only daughter. Elvira, a 38 year old mulatta identified, middle class Santiaguera, has lived with her mother her entire life. When MG and Leo purchased their current house in the city center it was a crumbling ruin, Leo was able to purchase the property at a steep discount because of his service to his country during the revolution. He also got access to virtually free construction materials and he and his brother-in-law intended to completely renovate the place to a modern masterpiece, but fighting between Elvira and her mother ensued and eventually they were all convinced that the best thing to do was to split the property into two households, next door to each other but separating Elvira from the rest of the family. Leo and MG still resent her for making them “chop” their house in half, and they roar with anger when she threatens to sell her half of the house—a house that she does not own, but still could sell or effectively lease for life to someone else.

Elvira's son, Esteban, lives with his mother, but spends a lot of time with his grandmother. His girlfriend who was pregnant at the time of my research also lives with them, but spends most of her time in Elvira's part of the house because of animosity with MG and Leo. Elvira makes and shares meals with her husband, son and son's girlfriend. Leo and MG usually eat alone, but occasionally Esteban joins them for a meal.

Family Profile 2: Casa Terrazas

Tomás, 54 years old and his wife Carmen, 51 years old are both upper class white Santiagueros. The abundance of food in the household and their large home structure their food consumption habits in somewhat different ways from many of the lower and middle class families in this study. In his view, Tomás is one of the few Cubans lucky enough to have received his Spanish citizenship. In recent years the Spanish government has started recognizing

children and grandchildren of Spanish citizens living in Cuba, which applies to many Cubans.

The process of getting the Spanish passport is very difficult and costly, but Tomás has been able to get one for himself and his two daughters, Daisy and Shana. His wife, Carmen, has the right to travel with him but cannot get a passport herself.

They have decided to start saving to go to Spain. One way has been renting rooms legally to foreign tourists and students. They remodeled one interior room putting in a private bathroom with a toilet, sink and shower with hot water, and they built an exterior structure, which consists also of a bedroom and a private bathroom in their back yard. They bought a television and refrigerator for each room and installed air conditioners. They tiled the ground in the backyard and built, stuccoed, and painted a 12-foot cinder block wall to enclose the patio. Above the patio they placed bars and planted grape vines, which serve to both shade the patio and provide grapes for making wine, which they both sell and consume themselves. In addition to the grapes they have two lime trees, a noni tree, a cherry tree, and they are raising a few chickens in one corner of the yard. They also have herbs for tea growing—mint, chamomile, and some others. On the rooftop of the house Tomás has built a small fenced-in storage area where he keeps random appliances, car parts, pieces of scrap metal and wood in case they might be necessary in the future. Alongside the house Tomás keeps two cars, neither of which were functioning, but he knows that with a little investment he could have them running if he needed them, or he could sell them in the condition that they are currently in if he needed money quickly.

Besides the two rooms that they rent to foreigners the family shares two bedrooms—one for Tomás and Carmen and one for their two daughters. There is also a very large kitchen with new appliances and a small eating area, a formal living room, formal dining room, and a TV

room. The four share one bathroom and have two small areas for washing clothes and storing items used for cleaning. They have a washing machine and a large freezer. They built an additional small room off the detached guesthouse where they house the refrigerator to protect it from weather.

Although Carmen is trained as an engineer, she does not work outside the home. Carmen stays at home all day, everyday. She shares the views of many Cuban women of her age (54) in believing that a woman should not be out in the street. She says she needs to stay at home in case her children need her, or if a guest might need something or another might come by asking about a room—a job she thinks should be done by the lady of the house rather than the man. She cooks three meals a day, cleans the house, guestrooms and patio everyday, and does all of the household laundry. Carmen has a son from a previous relationship, Yorlanky, who lives with her parents just a few houses down. He is 28, identifies as white, and takes care of his 85 year old grandmother, cordially called Abuela B, and 79 year old grandfather Abuela D, both of whom also identify as white, but there are many things he does not do for them or himself that Carmen does such as washing clothes, and cleaning their house.

Tomás is also trained as an engineer. Both he and Carmen worked up until 4 or 5 years in their profession earning 400 MN a month but eventually decided to give it up and go into “tourism” where they could make much better money and save for their pending move to Spain. Although they have several eating areas, including two tables in the outdoor patio that seat 4 and 6 respectively, the family takes their meals on the couch in front of the TV where they eat together and watch the evening programming—often old recordings of Cuban or American musical performances or *telenovellas*.

*Family Profile 3: Palos Verdes*¹⁶

I met “El Rey” (or “the King) at his place of employment before I independently met his wife Sula, who is friendly with another family that participated in this study. Rey, a 40-year-old middle class black man, works as a cook at a Santiago tourist hotel and is a Freemason who practices at the Masonic Lodge in Santiago¹⁷. Sula, a 30-year-old middle class Santiaguera of mixed black and Chinese heritage, is a receptionist at the same hotel. Because they both work in tourism they have frequent contact with foreigners. They both work every other day, but on opposite days, and as a result they rarely see each other, although one of them is always home with their two-year-old mixed race son Landi.

When they got married, they decided to construct their home above Rey’s parents house. The remodeling process took about three years and “a lot of money”—which Sula says she and Rey earned and no one else helped them. The house is very comfortable with tiled walls, a huge balcony, a completed kitchen, and dining room, but still missing tiles on the floor, which she hates because it makes it harder to clean.

Sula laments that she had her first child when she was 28, which according to her is “*very* old” for the first child. She said she waited until she found the “right man”, the one that she thinks “will be with her forever”. Rey has another child from his first marriage, who lives downstairs with Rey’s parents. Although she doesn’t get along with them, she is close with and her son absolutely loves his brother. On the days that Sula stays home, she cooks for herself and

¹⁶ This is a pseudonym for the area. I need to use a pseudonym for this area because there was only one family that participated in my study from this area and it is a small enough community that they would be easily identifiable if I were to use the real name of the area.

¹⁷ Freemasonry is common among Cuban men. There are over 300 Masonic lodges in Cuba with lodges in all of the provinces on the island. Membership with the Masons garners a great deal of social prestige and respect among Cubans.

the two boys upstairs, so her stepson comes up from downstairs at least twice a day to get his meals. Rey does not cook; when he is off work his mother still cooks for him. On the days that he is home, they all eat downstairs with his family.

These three different family profiles show the range of households that were included in my study, how they are spatially configured, and the general arrangement for how the families eat. While many families prefer to have the more nuclear arrangements that the families profiled here have, others must share meals with multiple generations of kin often eating in shifts, taking turns sitting at the kitchen table or in front of the television. As Ochs and Taylor (1992) have elaborated meal times are often the only time of day when a whole family interacts together. Ochs and Taylor illuminate the ways in which “family political order” is developed through mealtime narratives. In this chapter and throughout the dissertation I analyze similar situations to understand the ways in which family and household structures impact food acquisition and consumption. In the following section I describe the typical ways that three different families use the Cuban food system.

Daily Practices of Food Acquisition in Santiago de Cuba

Building on the arrangements of household life that I have outlined above, in the section that follows I ethnographically illuminate the ways that the Santiago families in my study acquire food using the complex food system outlined in the first part of this chapter. I outline a typical day of food acquisition for three Santiago households with different neighborhood, class, and family structures.

Regina's Search for Lunch

Regina is a 46-year-old low income Santiaguera who identifies as black. As I will elaborate in chapter five, she lives in a poor neighborhood with 24 people listed as officially living in her house. Regina is usually in charge of acquiring food for the household members who eat most of their meals there, usually about 8 people but it varies from day to day.

As Regina entered the Plaza Market she slowed down to let her eyes adjust to the dark windowless warehouse, having just come in from the Santiago summer sun. She blinked and slowly scanned the countertops to survey what was available. She had just walked 14 blocks uphill to get here after she woke to find her cupboards bare and realized that she would not be able to borrow food for the day's meal from her neighbors—who were also empty handed. She held in her hand just a few coins, not enough to get her much at her neighborhood food stand. She made her way to the city's central market hoping to find lower prices to stretch what little she had into a meal for at least the women and children in her household. The others would have to fend for themselves.

Figure 7: Mercado La Plaza, Santiago de Cuba



She clutched her canvas bag to her chest as she walked past counter after counter of under-ripe tomatoes. She was not interested in tomatoes—it would take far too many to make enough sauce. She stopped in front of one stall that had plantains—she didn't have any oil for *tostones*, but she could boil them to make *fufú de plátano*, a traditional dish made by mashing boiled plantains with pork fat, garnished with fried pork skin. Keeping the plantains in mind she moved into the next room where there were more stalls with more variety of food. She paused to examine the okra, noting the price at the first stall—was it cheaper than in her neighborhood? She remembered it being the same price there, but she knew that she could get the man working at her neighborhood market to throw in a few pieces for free. They wouldn't do this for her here—they didn't know her and wouldn't favor her because of her dark skin¹⁸. She decided to just pick up a few onions and cooking peppers at the Plaza, and she would walk back to her neighborhood to get *quimbombó* (okra) and hoped she would get a few extras thrown in for free.

Figure 8: Food Stalls in La Plaza



¹⁸ I elaborate the role of skin color and prejudice in chapter four.

Figure 9: Food Stalls in La Plaza 2



On her way back home she stopped by her butcher friend's house to see if he had any scraps he would give her. Indeed he gave the leftover pieces of meat that were still on his cutting block to her, giving her just enough for flavoring and grease in her *quimbombó*.

Figure 10: Small Neighborhood Butcher



Now, she turned to her most important task: rice. It would not be a meal without rice. She knew that her neighbors and usual friends didn't have any to lend, so she decided to drop in on, Asulema, a cousin who was a bit better off than she and lived in the city center. Carrying her canvas bag with all of the day's meal except rice she made her way to her cousin's house. The door was open so she called out her cousin's name as she walked into the fully furnished living room. Asulema was in the kitchen well into the day's lunch preparations, delighted to see her cousin. She wiped off her hands and met her with a kiss on the cheek. She dispensed a little cup of coffee from her thermos—always full of coffee just in case a guest drops by, she explained. She served the coffee to Regina along with a glass of water asking her how things were down in the barrio. As she later told me, Regina felt a sense of shame in having to ask her cousin for food, in an effort to save face she tried to make conversation but it was clear that she wanted something from Asulema. Asulema finally asked Regina if she needed anything and after she said no, and Asulema asked again, Regina finally asked if she could borrow a few cups of rice. Asulema scooped about 5 cups of rice out of her full bin of rice directly into Regina's canvas bag with the other vegetables and meat scraps. Regina thanked her and got up to leave, explaining her quick departure as necessary so they could both get lunch on the table at a decent hour.

Regina's tactics of food acquisition are typical of a lower income Santiago household. The daily quest for food and complexities of navigating the changing food system routinely provoke high levels of anxiety and stress. As Regina's quest illustrates, the difficulties of food acquisition lead many Santiagueros to characterize the process as a *lucha* or part of *la lucha*—a daily struggle to acquire food. In post-Soviet socialist Cuba, the term *la lucha* describes both ongoing daily efforts to achieve the goals of revolutionary society and efforts that individuals

must go through to get beyond the controls and barriers that have been in place since the revolution. That is, to *resolver* (to resolve) their everyday problems.

As I elaborate further in chapter four, the landscape of food acquisition is a viewed, across social class, as cumbersome by Santiago families. For Regina, the intensity of waking up to a bare cupboard heightens the anxiety of the daily search for affordable food. Regina struggles each day to acquire the food necessary to feed her family each day. Budgeting and meal planning are difficult given that she has so little. She often resorts to borrowing food or money to feed her family. These struggles are typical of poor Santiagueros. However, even among higher socioeconomic status families the acquisition of food is viewed as a struggle. In the section that follows I outline the daily process of food acquisition for an upper-class household, referred to locally as a family “*con posibilidades*” (with possibilities), and a middle class Santiago household.

Carlos' Kitchen

Armando, who is a white identified 68 year old upper-class Santiaguero, and Rodulfo, a black identified upper class Santiaguero who is 45 years old, are two gay men who cohabitate but are not in a relationship. Both of them were rejected by their families once people found out they were gay and they have since formed a very close bond over the ten years that they have lived together. Armando works as an engineer and Rodulfo as a doctor, they also have the good fortune of receiving about 300 CUC a month in remittances from Armando's sister who lives in Miami. Because they both work outside of the home it is very difficult for them to complete the domestic work of cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the home. With some of the money from Armando's sister they were able to hire Carlos as a live-in domestic worker. Carlos, a 35-year-

old white Santiaguero, is also a gay man who was left with nowhere to go after he came out. Carlos comes from a low socioeconomic class background, but has access to money and other resources because he lives with Armando and Rodolfo. Because homophobia is still prevalent in Santiago de Cuba, the fact that they are out gay men impacts their ability to access resources and thus impacts their food acquisition practices. They do not have the same ability to rely on family and friends for borrowing food, or for the social connections to acquire food as others might have. They are careful to hide their sexual orientation around new acquaintances and people who might be potential connections for acquiring goods, as they fear that their sexual orientation will lead people to discriminate against them.

Carlos has developed an elaborate system for planning meals, shopping, and food budgeting. He spends most of his mornings running around Santiago looking for deals on the black market. He tries to buy food in bulk and stock up on things that might become scarce. They have a large freezer, a rare asset in Santiago, and two refrigerators.

After preparing everyone's breakfast of toast with scrambled eggs and coffee Carlos headed out to the street with several canvas bags. He does not usually bother stopping at the ration station or carniceria on his block, instead he headed straight to the panaderia to see if they will sell him any flour, sugar, yeast or other ingredients. He was able to buy some yeast from them. He then started toward the bay where the port and warehouses are. In this area he spoke with various contacts to see what is available on the black market. On a given day he might acquire some of the rationed items in bulk, such as 10 lb. sacks of beans, rice, sugar, salt, or other goods. He might stumble upon some industrial sized cans of fruits or vegetables that were destined for hotels or other tourist industry destinations. He'll also be sure to acquire some sort of protein either from the fishermen who sell down there, or the illegal lobster and shrimp

dealers. Often he will acquire so much that he has to take a motorcycle home. On this particular day he walked him with two heavy sacks filled with the yeast he bought from the baker, an industrial sized can of tomato sauce, and a large bag of frozen shrimp.

Once he arrived at home, he took everything out in order to assess which items he needs to use right away, which can be stored or frozen and how to combine them with other ingredients he has. He decided to keep the shrimp frozen, but felt that he should use the yeast because he didn't know how old it was or how it had been stored. After a brief rest he headed back out to the local market, ration stations, and carniceria to pick up whatever was available. He was back home to start lunch around 11 a.m., which he usually serves lunch by 1:30 p.m. when Armando and Rodulfo come home for their breaks. Once he got home he decided that he was going to make pizzas to use the yeast and tomato sauce. With the meat that he picked up at the carniceria, he had all of the ingredients that he needed except cheese; while the dough was rising, he got out some of the CUCs that Armando and Rodulfo had left for him and went to the CUC store to buy a small amount of cheese. Since he didn't want to use their small electric oven he baked the pizzas in a small stovetop contraption that he made out of old cans.

Armando and Rodulfo can afford to pay someone else to do most of their household labor; they are also able to give Carlos ample funds in advance so that he can buy in bulk and plan the household meals. While it is not clear that this actually saves them money, it does give them access to a wider variety of food and makes the problem of food acquisition considerably less stressful.

Making Sense of Family Life and Food Acquisition Practices in Santiago de Cuba

In this chapter I have outlined the complex structure of the Cuban food system, detailing the different types of foods that can be acquired via the ration, CUC and peso markets, the black and gray markets, gifting and trading, and self production. Most households in this study acquire, prepare, and consume food as a household. As I have outlined a Santiago household may consist of a nuclear family, nuclear and extended family, or networks of extended and fictive kin. Cultural and historical notions of the family coupled with the practicalities of the housing shortage shape the dynamics of family life and household structure. In most cases one household member dedicates several hours per day to food acquisition, in many cases this person's sole labor is dedicated to food acquisition, preparation, and related tasks such as cleaning and organizing the house. The person dedicated to food related tasks in many households is female, and often an older retired female.

From the perspective of my research participants this system is very stressful and seems to be undergoing a slow change away from a heavily subsidized food ration toward the need to purchase increasing amounts of food at various kinds of markets in the city in either the Cuban peso or in the CUC. This situation is stressful because salaries have not increased but family must spend more money on food and other household necessities. Whereas previously households were able to rely on the ration to provide the majority of their food, now families must increasingly turn to social networks in order to access sufficient food for the household.

Lower income families, as illustrated by Regina's story of food acquisition, rely heavily on one another just to put together a decent meal. In most of these exchanges there is an understanding of reciprocal borrowing and lending; someone borrowing food or other items

becomes indebted to the lender. The outside observer can easily idealize what appear to be very strong familial ties in Cuba. In the chapter that follows, I show how these bonds are in fact strengthened by increased reliance on family, but also illustrate the ways in which this situation is very stressful and not ideal for many household members.

Practice is personal, whatever else it is. This is all the more true in those dramatic moments of life where things are “at stake” in an especially urgent way or in periods of life that seem to demand a particular arduous task of transformation.

–Cheryl Mattingly 2010

Chapter 3

¡No Hay Comida! The Search for Satiation in Post-Special Period Santiago

In the previous chapter, I outlined the complexities of the Cuban food system and the processes through which families acquire food using this system. The complex food system requires that families dedicate a great deal of time to food acquisition, and there is significant stress surrounding the uncertainties of food acquisition. In this chapter I explore the relationships between the stressful experience of food acquisition and participants’ notions of an ideal or decent cuisine based on their memories of previous eras of the Cuban food system and remembered pasts told to them by those who lived through even earlier food systems. I analyze participants’ affective responses to the changes in the food system. I show how the official food system is not adequate to meet dietary and culturally based food needs. I detail the ways in which the difficulties of the current food system coupled with the inaccessibility of culturally appropriate foods creates stress, fear, and anxiety among Santiagueros.

In the following passage, Orlando, a 62-year-old, black-identified upper middle class Santiaguero, clearly outlines his views on how the Cuban food system has changed:

Orlando: With respect to nutrition, before the triumph of the revolution it was different. There was everything, all varieties of food. The stores had everything and sold things all day long. The typical Cuban dish has always been—well let’s talk about poor people.

Before the revolution poor people who did have this—um—purchasing power bought a lot of cod fish and [dried fish] and lots of sardines in cans. These things were cheap and it's what the regular people ate. Also lots of *viandas* (tubers) like the plantain, sweet potato, [etc.]. Rice and beans was a special meal. Their food was more or less sufficient nourishment. The people who lived outside of the city in the mountains and countryside had the power to obtain more food. They planted and cultivated their own food—but they didn't have this purchasing power and development didn't get out to those far places like it should have. There was no way to get them things. So they just ate whatever they could grow or raise. They had their little animals. Chickens, little pigs that they could kill. But they didn't have nutrition as it was. And by then in the city we had supermarkets, stores, and everything was different. In the city we had juices in cans like pear juice, cantaloupe juice, apple juice. There was, just in markets in other countries, there was meat—red meat. There was so many butchers, stores, and two big supermarkets that had everything at different prices. There was everything. The markets were private. They had everything and they were clean. There were different types of meat, high quality and lower quality. It wasn't expensive either. It was cheap. There was also real milk, pure cows milk. The milkman brought it to your door every day. It was cheap--twenty-five cents a liter. There was everything. There was tuna, there was that other fish what's it called—salmon! Whatever you wanted to buy—olives, olive oil, oils of all kinds, whatever you wanted there were cans of it. There weren't as many difficulties. Then we passed over the transition to the new government and they started to plan products—an internal embargo. In other words, because of the US embargo [against Cuba] they had to take measures and plan. The embargo started right after the

revolution until now, they started to take measures and then they started getting Soviet products and things came from, from where? Oh from China. Things were more or less adjusted to the new situation—they had prices that were what the people could afford. But then when the Soviet system fell that's when it started—they planned a lot. Rice was [set at] six pounds per person. Sugar was five pounds per person. Monthly. Milk had already disappeared. Then they started to give it to children up to age seven. Before it was cows milk then they substituted powdered milk. They started giving yogurt up to age 13. Red meat, as you know, doesn't exist; it disappeared. In other words, the planning made it so that only people like diabetics, people with cancer, and AIDS and other illnesses that require red meat, like people who are underweight get it. Then we started to see scarcity and malnutrition in the majority of children.

Hanna: When did that start?

Orlando: Starting in the 1990s until now. What happened was that many children aren't [sic] familiar with red meat. If you put it on the table they say, "I don't like that." Because they are adjusted to what they are given now—the ground soy, the fish that they give them now, eggs. [Among] those that were born after the revolution there are few who are familiar with red meat. And they are adjusted to that milk that they have. You understand? They don't know what real food is. The majority of the youth are they look much younger than they are—they look like they are 11 and they are in high school. They are short, they are practically—what's it called? Practically malnourished. It's true; it's not a lie. Nutrition is necessary and they don't have it. They need to drink milk, but they aren't given it.

After this I asked them about their own situation in the 1990s and Orlando responded:

Noooo we NEVER had problems, never. Not in my house or in my [current] wife's house. There were problems but we always resolved them.

Hanna: how did you resolve them?

Orlando: Well, the solution was, how should I put it? When you have the power to guarantee something you get it. . .Like now, we have a rice cooker and all of these other electric kitchen appliances, but the electricity bill is above our budget. In other words, you have to find a way to budget according to your pocket; you have to look for gas so you can save money. You always have to look for ways to save money...I haven't, nor has my wife, had so many difficulties acquiring food because we have struggled, we have worked. We have spent our whole lives working. And I have always tried to work hard.

Orlando tells of the history of Santiago's food system from his perspective. Like many of my other research participants he critically reflects on the difficulties of others, especially during the Special Period, but proudly and thankfully recounts that his own family didn't have any problems with lack of food because they "struggled" and worked hard enough to overcome any difficulties they may have had. Although few families recalled any severe periods of complete food scarcity in their household, as I outline in the following sections of this chapter many families still experience shortages of particular food items.

Food Shortages and Inaccessibility

One of the central reasons Santiagueros feel that the Cuban food system is inadequate is the under-availability of foods that they are accustomed to eating. Although food availability in

general has increased significantly since the worst of the Special Period in the mid-1990s, there are often shortages of specific food items (e.g. Garth 2012). It may be the case that a particular item is not available in any type of market across the city, or it may be that the item is only available at a higher price in pesos, or in only available in CUC, thus rendering the item as inaccessible for many Santiago families. When a food that is seen as a central part of a Cuban meal is unavailable or inaccessible, even if there are other foods available, many of my study participants reported that they did not feel satisfied unless then could access some particular food. Thus they experience the food system as scarce and think of themselves as living within a food shortage. For instance, Elvira, a 38 year old white middle class Santiaguera introduced in chapter two, talked about how difficult it is for her to go without rice toward the end of the month when the rationed rice runs low. Even though there might be pasta and other starches available, she is used to and expects to have rice with every meal.

Elvira: One day you tell yourself, just today because I don't have [anything] but then it's not just one day . . . one meal or two without rice in a row! That is what Maria Julia does, she doesn't eat rice, but me . . . I would die. To not eat rice . . . she can . . . but she must have a stomach like this [indicates small size with her hands]. . . the problem is that I have a very large stomach! –2011

Although Elvira cites Maria Julia as an example of the possibility of going without certain foods that are scarce, she personally feels that this is not a possibility for her. She invokes an embodied difference between herself and Maria Julia, and feels that she would “die” (suffer greatly) if she went a whole day without having any rice.

While on the surface this may not appear to be an urgent situation of food scarcity, for Elvira and many others, reduced access to foods such as rice that are central to their everyday diet causes a great deal of stress and anxiety. As Elvira says, it may be somewhat acceptable to have one meal without rice, but when she has to go multiple meals or even days without rice she begins to panic (. . . "I would die" . . .). The way that she relates rice consumption with her stomach size indicates the ways in which she ties rice to a particular form of satiation that cannot be achieved by eating other foods. For Elvira, even with other foods available as substitutes she does not feel that she can satisfy her hunger without rice. While her hypothetical death without rice is certainly hyperbolic, it is important to note that although she certainly would not die from starvation or malnutrition a part of her may *symbolically* die if she is unable to access rice or other ingredients that she views as quintessential for satiation.

This type of panic and sense of crisis over access to particular foods was very common among my research participants and clearly indicated a sense of urgency around food access that goes beyond the state's goal of merely meeting nutritional needs. The realities of food accessibility reveal the ways in which Santiagueros are entangled in a situation they see as political subjection to the state's unpredictable and unclear food provisioning practices. Yet, at the same time, there is a deeply emotional side of the food access scene that affectively links food with people's sense of subjectivity.

Lack of Culturally Appropriate Foods

As discussed in the Introduction the ideals of Cuban cuisine were developed over a long history of *mestizaje* and the incorporation of myriad ingredients coming from different cultural origins into contemporary Cuban cuisine. Although Cuban cuisine is dynamic, adaptive, and not

static most of my research participants do have sets of basic parameters for what constitutes an ideal Cuban cuisine and the minimum or basic foods necessary to constitute a decent meal. Somewhat similar to her sense of urgency around the ability to maintain her ideals of adequate rice consumption, in the following interview except Elvira reflects on what she thinks of as the basic ingredients necessary to satisfy her minimum standards for her diet.

Hanna: Ok then, tell me about the situation right now in your house, the food situation?

Elvira: The food is like the majority of Cubans . . . I have always said that I need to at least have one egg per day in the house. The only time that I didn't even have an egg, I said that although I could go 15 days without eating meat, I need to have my protein each night, an egg, at least an egg.

Hanna: You prefer to have protein at night?

Elvira: No, whatever time of day, when I have it, I eat it. I like to eat meat everyday, one day one kind another day another kind, even though they say it's bad for you, but it's impossible, at least in my house, I earn [money] but how long does my salary last?

-Interview 2011

While I found that most Santiagueros generally share the view that rice is part of what constitutes a “real” meal, I found that there is more variability in opinions regarding how important it is to include meat with each meal. Most of my research participants preferred to eat meat with at least two meals per day, but few were able to achieve this standard. In the exchange above Elvira discusses how she would prefer to eat meat everyday, to have a variety of different kinds of meat in her diet, but she settles for her minimum standard of eat least one egg per day.

Elvira's reflections on protein also underscore the desire for dietary variety in food consumption that was expressed by most of my research participants. Most people do not want to eat the exact same thing everyday and prefer to be able to select among various types of protein. For instance, ideally a family would eat chicken one day, then pork the next, fish on the third day, and ground meat on the fourth. However, it is often the case that only one type of protein is available at a low cost (because the market was flooded with it), so people will go nearly the whole month eating only one type of protein.

In the case of Elvira's concerns about consuming rice with every meal, her anxiety stems from her feeling of dissatisfaction with substituted starches as unable to satisfy her hunger. In contrast with respect to protein intake Elvira and many of my research participants make more explicit links to their nutritional needs. When these basic standards for variety in food consumption are not met, many Santiagueros become concerned that their basic nutritional needs are not being met. Especially when considering protein intake research participants often felt like they didn't get enough red meat, or meat in general and that too large of a proportion of their protein intake was egg and legume based.

When participants felt concerned about whether their diets were meeting nutritional needs, their stress and anxiety around food access and acquisition became heightened and more urgent. Fear of nutritional deficiencies often invokes memories of the worst of the Special Period, when micronutrient deficiencies became so severe that there was an outbreak of neuropathy that included symptoms of vision loss. Present day difficulties in food acquisition often caused my research participants to recall times during the 1990s when they spent hours and hours searching for particular kinds of foods to no avail. This invocation of memories of food scarcity clearly illustrates the trauma experienced by many Santiagueros during the Special

Period, and explains in part why seemingly banal concerns over variety in their diets is experienced by so many Santiagueros as an egregiously bad situation worthy of panic, fear, stress, and anxiety. In the following section I elaborate on this heightened stress and show how the added concern over food safety, particularly the safety of meat products, further heightens stress around food acquisition.

Food Safety and Poor Quality Foods

Due to decades of experience with faltering infrastructure, concerns regarding food quality and inconsistent availability are common issues for most Santiagueros. Consumers in Santiago have no way of knowing whether food safety standards have been met for the foods that they consume. They often wonder: would food that was brought into the city on a refrigerated truck be guaranteed to have been kept at the right temperature when so often those trucks broke down or their systems failed? Would the blackouts throughout the city affect the refrigeration of meat and dairy inside the city ration stations and warehouses? Would delays due to paperwork and bureaucracy have prevented the foods from getting to the public before they went bad? They often do not trust that the state has their health and best interests in mind; they fear that the state would rather dump spoiled food on them than have to pay to replace it or face the repercussions of not providing the rationed quotas. Many families in my study have their own system and standards for evaluating the safety of their foods: they observe smell, taste, and texture before they consume foods and they may adjust food preparation techniques if they fear the safety of a particular food item. In what follows I analyze a conversation between Elvira and her best friend, Maria Julia, a 45-year-old white middle class Santiaguera, regarding the lack of availability of meat and the poor quality of the “meat” products that are available.

Elvira: Ah! So, because my husband doesn't eat chicken, for him to eat chicken it's just once in a while, so he eats [red] meat, of course! "The prohibited meat" but it's so hard to acquire! So, it's pork that he likes and so I always try to make sure I have it for him. I dunno, like a little pack of hot dogs or some croquette meat, that kind of thing, and maybe one day a little piece of ham . . .that ham, ummm.

Hanna: Mortadella?

Maria Julia: Yeah, that one ham . . .Vicky.

Elvira: Yeah Vicky ham, which is sometimes vile, the last one that I bought . . .the same as a mortadella that was really good that they said was pure pork and that I had already bought before that was really tasty . . .but I guess it was poorly made or I don't know, it tasted like blood . . .horrible! Think about it, I have traumatized myself so much that I haven't gone back to buy any more.

Maria Julia: That's how it is . . .

Elvira: [My husband] bought a small piece of mortadella, the ones that are made by the government. It smelled so bad, it was so bad that we went to return it, but they wouldn't give us our money back. They said it was from the last cycle so they couldn't return our money because they didn't have any money.

Hanna: No? They took [the mortadella] back but didn't give you your money back?

Elvira: We went back home with it. I traumatized myself with this, and note that he had bought the ones that they call "*fiambre*" that they say is made of pork, it should be normal, a sausage, but *everything was blood*. I had to make it into paste and not even as a

paste would it work because it went bad. And then I added onion, and onion covers up everything, you know how strong onion is. I served it to my husband and he refused it and said “Don’t serve me this anymore!” (She laughed) “It makes me want to throw up. You eat it!” So I ate it that time, but now I have gotten to the point where I can’t eat it anymore. Sometimes we go 15 days without seeing any meat. It’s that bad, it’s like everything here. Yes, in my house we always try to make sure we have vegetables. I try to get it however I can (*lucharla como pueda*), because if you make white rice with a fried egg and some salad that will get you by.

In this exchange Elvira begins by expressing her concern over what to feed her husband who strongly dislikes chicken and prefers to eat red meat. As I elaborate further in Chapter 5, her focus on feeding her husband the appropriate food rather than focusing on her own needs is typical of many Cuban women in my study. Both Elvira and Maria Julia recall their experiences buying state-produced “Jamon Vicky” that seemed to them to have gone rancid, when they tried to return it they were not given their money back so they kept the meat and tried to find ways to make it tolerable. For Elvira this instance was the last straw with respect to eating these low quality processed meats produced by the state, she has reached a point where she would rather use eggs for protein intake than go through the trouble of trying to make these poor quality meats edible for herself and her husband. As she puts it, she “traumatized herself” with this instance of meat consumption, and her husband reacted viscerally to the meat, feeling as if he were going to vomit when he tried to eat it.

Figure 11: Processed Meats



As with general food inaccessibility and the lack of access to culturally appropriate foods (cf. Garth 2012), concerns over food safety also created a genuine sense of panic among research participants. Here again there is a clear sense of inescapable subjection to the state's unclear and mistrusted food distribution system. Families feel that they are stuck with unsafe, unreliable food provided by the state; many feel they must consume this food as it is the only financially viable option, but fear that the food will make them sick and strongly dislike the taste.

In contrast to these concerns regarding adequate and appropriate food access, a few of the Santiagueros in this study did not feel that these problems were as grave as others made them out

to be. Here Gerardo, a white male Santiaguero in his mid-50s, describes his perspective on the changing food system:

Gerardo: I have never gone hungry. I have never had to go to bed without eating like the other people say that they go to bed without eating. I have been lucky that I have always had something to eat. Thank God I have never gone hungry. Today I ate black bean soup, white rice, hayaca, fried chicken, and a tomato salad. It's true that sometimes I don't get to eat what I want to eat. Because you might say "Ay! I wish I could eat a steak!" But there isn't steak, so you have to eat in accordance with what there is and with your possibilities. But well, more or less, we can eat normally.

His wife Quimara, (first mentioned in the introduction) chimed in: Now all of these countries are sending help to combat hunger here, and it's true that there is scarcity. But well, we haven't died of hunger.

Gerardo: Something always appears

Quimara: Something always appears. Life [and] nature have given me—at the very least, my health and the intelligence to fight for life.

Gerardo and Quimara offer a counter-narrative with respect to the type of food access that Santiagueros are entitled to. With Gerardo's comment regarding the desire to eat steak and the need to eat in accordance with your possibilities he indicates that, unlike other Santiagueros in my study, he does not feel that everyone should have access to all the foods that they want all the time. For Gerardo, some people must face the fact that they simply can't always get what they want. But as he and Quimara reflect, between state provisioning and their own hard work they have always had enough to eat. Although most of my research participants share Gerardo

and Quimara's feelings that they have always had enough food to not go hungry, few share their sentiments regarding access to foods that they desire that are not provided by the state. In the following section I analyze the ways in which participants reflect on their desires to have access to certain foods that they view as necessary to create a decent meal, which they view as a basic entitlement.

A Decent Meal: The Search for Satiation

Three types of food related grievances are discussed here 1) food shortages and inaccessibility; 2) lack of culturally appropriate foods; and 3) food safety and poor quality food. Analysis reveals some of the local logics behind why Santiagueros have so much anxiety and stress surrounding food acquisition, and why they often conclude that "there is no food" despite the fact that there appears to be plenty of food around. Keeping in mind that food acquisition is one among many stressful daily processes that Santiagueros take on¹⁹, day-to-day inundation with high levels of stress surrounding something as basic and essential as food creates high levels of stress for individuals and creates strain on family and community relationships.

To fully understand the ways in which contemporary Cubans experience their food system, it is imperative to understand how the stress surrounding these three aspects of the food system affect their everyday lives. Furthermore because food is so centrally connected to notions of self, identity, and subjectivity, the inability to access adequate food has implications for my research participants' sense of subjectivity. This stressful connection between food acquisition and subjectivity is part of why my research subjects think of food acquisition as *una*

¹⁹ As discussed in chapter two the local housing shortage is another area of stress for Santiagueros, as well as recent lay-offs from state jobs and unprecedented joblessness across the island, dealing with faltering state infrastructure, and dealing with the difficulties of state bureaucracy when trying to solve problems related to these ongoing issues.

lucha. Indeed, it is more than a struggle to merely acquire sustenance; it is a struggle to maintain a local sense of identity.

Illustrating the ways in which food acquisition can become a stressful struggle, I share the experience of Amalia, a 48-year-old upper middle class mulatta-identified housewife, who attempts to make *hallacas*, the Santiago version of tamales. Her experience shows how complicated finding ingredients can be. At the beginning of the corn season, in late June, Amalia was planning a party to celebrate her niece's birthday. Her niece had always admired Amalia's homemade hallacas, so Amalia was determined to prepare hallacas for the party. I joined Amalia in the process of shopping for the ingredients. Amalia does not have a lot of money, so our shopping trip was mostly done on foot.

Figure 12: Making Hallacas



We began our search for corn at the Plaza market, but after quick walk through the one aisle with food it was clear that there was no corn there. Amalia asked one marketeer where we might find corn, and he told us to head to the Trocha y Cristina market. A 45-minute walk later we arrived at the Trocha y Cristina market only to find that there was no corn there either.

Figure 13: Trocha y Cristina Market



Here again Amalia asked a market employee where we might find corn and he said that there was none in the state markets, but he knew of someone selling it out of their home nearby. We walked uphill 15 minutes to the person who was supposed to have corn, but they had sold out of corn earlier that morning. They heard that there was more corn for sale at another house further up the hill. When we arrived at this other house they knew nothing about any corn and seemed doubtful that we would find it anywhere in the city. Exhausted after trekking across the city all day, Amalia decided that we should take a camion for 0.20 CUP to another market near the city center on Calle Marti. When we finally arrived there after waiting an hour for the camion, there was no corn. At that point we gave up for the day, we sat on a park bench and

shared a soda. Amalia was clearly distressed. She wanted so badly to make hallacas for this party that she was still racking her brain about how she could possibly find corn in time. I asked her when she started making hallacas.

Amalia: I didn't start until after I was an adult, watching my mother make them was how I learned. Over time one gets more experience and gets better. Everyone in my family made them, my mother, her mother, every generation. We [Cubans] have always eaten corn. . . There are two seasons July and December. There are different types of corn. Here in Cuba, in Santiago, we all know the different types of corn, we say “cold corn” and “summer corn”. Summer is the true corn season . . . With dry corn you can't make hallaca, it has to be with juicy corn that is white. It is the juice that gives it the flavor.

As Amalia started talking about hallacas she was drawn into a nostalgic state. She reminisced fondly about her childhood and other dishes made of corn that her mother often prepared. She remembered everything as delicious and requiring the juicy kernel of summer corn. As we finished our soda, her joyous nostalgia dissipated and she lamented our inability to acquire corn that day. “Now everything is una lucha,” she sighed, got up from the bench, and we started walking back to her house.

As I have argued elsewhere in certain contexts *la lucha*²⁰ can be thought of a Cuban “idiom of distress²¹” (Garth 2013b): expressions of socially, culturally, and historically grounded experiences of distress. Certain difficult or jarring experiences in the present can index past traumas. For food-related issues, specifically lack of access to certain foods, to become a socially

²⁰ However, it is important to note that “la lucha” has many different meanings both historically and in present day Cuba.

²¹ For further discussion of idioms of distress, see Nichter 1981, 2010.

significant idiom of distress that indexes subjective experience, it must be “integrated into an individual’s emotional and motivational concerns” (Obeyesekere 1981; Throop 2003b:112).

Thus, significant shifts in access to the material resources and personal symbols previously used in the construction of identity, as manifested through cuisine, become a source of distress. This can be so even if those changes are objectively improvements (Desjarlais 1994), as we see here with the fact that food access has actually improved since the worst of the Special Period (Garth 2013b, Passim).

The Emotional Experience of Changing Food Acquisition Practices

I have argued that in order to fully understand the dynamics of the lived experience of the changing Cuban food system, it is imperative to account for the practical aspects of food consumption relating to political economy and household food acquisition, as well as for the emotional and psychosocial experiences surrounding interactions related to food acquisition (cf. Throop 2003a; Throop and Murphy 2002). I have tried to honor my research participants affective response to the Cuban food system, a system or structure that they see as increasingly difficult to use, and as something that generates stress and difficulty in their lives. For many, these affective responses to the food system manifest as what they call *la lucha*—the struggle. By strongly emphasizing the significance of lived experience, I bring together my research participants’ accounts of meaningful personal and interpersonal experiences of Cuba’s food system and the large-scale political, economic, and social structures that interact with that system. The extremely complex food system with various types of markets carrying different goods at different prices, coupled with the dual currency system, and rising food prices at a time of high unemployment lay the groundwork for an overwhelming and stressful food acquisition system. But as an essential good it is absolutely necessary to acquire food and there are no

alternatives but to use this complex system.

My research participants remember a time in the recent past when food was cheaper, and this is part of why they now say “*no hay comida*” (there is no food) in comparison to the past, today there is less food in their food system and although the food system has changed, expectations for their cuisine have not. While some families assemble meals based on what is rationed to them each day, most have particular ideas about what meals should consist of and which ingredients are essential for assembling a proper meal. Thus, household members confront the elaborate system of food acquisition in order to find all of the ingredients they see as necessary for their family’s consumption.

To illustrate the importance of the emotional experience of food acquisition, I analyzed Elvira’s emotional responses to these changes juxtaposed with her conceptualization of what an ideal Cuban cuisine should be: although Elvira’s assertion that without rice she “would die” is an exaggeration, not literally the case, in that she is not at risk of starvation. It is true that she feels a sense of crisis and panic when she is unable to access rice because rice is so symbolically tied to her sense of subjectivity. Her deeply emotional response to inconsistencies in rice and meat provisioning reveal the ways in which the experience of food acquisition can become a moment in which Santiagueros are awakened to their political subjection under the state provisioning system. This realization of subjection, coupled with memories of extreme food scarcity, is part of the emotional response to seemingly simple practices of food acquisition.

Due to the ways in which Santiagueros link food with their sense of identity, food acquisition is a particularly emotionally charged. Yet even in a situation where food acquisition was simple and guaranteed, there would still be a great deal of emotion wrapped up with food

consumption. In the shifting landscape of the Cuban food system today, the precariousness of the daily task of food acquisition heightens the emotional experience of food acquisition and consumption. It could stir many different kinds of emotions in consumers-- excitement, hope, or a sense of renewal would all be possible, however I have found that in general, negative emotional responses—fear, stress, and anxiety-- are the most common reactions to the uncertainty of food acquisition. The emotions surrounding shifting food access are an integral part of the ways in which social and political structures influence subjectivity in the late-socialist era. In the chapter that follows I explore ways the process of food acquisition intertwined with longstanding forms of social stratification by skin color, class, and neighborhood.

If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him. . .
the people who give you their food give you their heart.
-Cesar Chavez

Chapter 4

Household Food Acquisition across Skin Color, Class, and Neighborhood

After overhearing an interview that I conducted with his uncle, a young man named Josi approached me and said:

Here in Cuba there is no such thing as race, we are all Cubans. Everyone knows we have different skin colors it's obvious, so no one asks you that. The first question someone asks you is –where do you live? And how you answer that question is how they will decide about you. Here in the barrio we are the worst, someone knows where I am from and they not only know that I am black, but they also know what kind of black person I am. They assume that I steal. If I were the same me but I lived over there [points to the other side of a major Santiago street to indicate the downtown area] I would just be a regular guy. But everyone knows where I am from, so I am not welcome over there. People look at me as I walk through, I could never move there. Well maybe if I married the right woman.

Josi referred to his neighborhood, just blocks away from the city center, as *los suburbios*—the suburbs. By suburban area he meant a more literal definition of the word than we would use it in the US. He meant “below urban” both as a figurative reference to the lower social status of these areas and as a literal reference to the fact that these areas are low lying and thus prone to flooding which is part of why they have become marginalized neighborhoods in Santiago.

Figure 14: A Street in Deseý



In this chapter I address the ways in which the socialist food provisioning system has alleviated food-based inequality in some respects, and also reveal some areas where food inequality still exists or newly exists after the Special Period. Specifically I address food-related inequality across race, class, and neighborhood. Before delving into the data I outline the social and historical significance of skin color and class in the Caribbean in general and in Cuba specifically before and after the 1959 revolution. I then outline my data on the differences in food acquisition experiences across neighborhood, class, and skin color. I elaborate on the different ways in which families with difficulty acquiring food innovate strategies to acquire food across these social groups. Given that these strategies often include borrowing food or money from family and friends, this often further exacerbates inequalities between groups of

Santiagueros (Certeau 1984). After discussing these patterns I argue for the importance of experiential level ethnographic data to account the emotional experience of food inequality.

Understanding Social Hierarchies in Cuba and the Caribbean

In most of the Caribbean skin color is central in determining identity. In countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, there are three main categories—white, black, and mixed. Yet while these are the officially recognized skin colors throughout the country, there are myriad other ways that people identify and are identified. The following list was created by Paul Ryer (2008) based on his observations of skin color categorizations in Cuba:

blanco--white

blanco lechoso—milky white skin

albino/a—albino

blanco blanco—a very blonde person, a truly white person

rubio/a –literally blonde, means same as above

castaño—chestnut-colored—fair skin and dark brown hair

trigueña/o- literally wheat-colored: a person with olive-white skin and dark but straight “good” hair

blanco Cubano—Cuban white, as opposed to “really” white, it implies an underlying racial mixture

chino—a person of Asian appearance, usually trigeños, but appearance of the eyes is critical

jabao/a—light but barely not white skin, wavy or curly hair

capiro/a—a person with “bad” but blonde hair

azafrán—with freckles, reddish-brown skin, curly red hair

sirio—to describe Ethiopians or East Africans—black but handsome with fine features and decent hair

mulatto/a—medium dark skin, either “bad” or “good” hair

yucateco/a—from the Yucatan—to describe Cubans of indigenous/mixed or Mayan appearance

mestizo/a—a person with caramel colored skin, with “good” hair

el indio—dark skin, straight hair

moreno/a—literally dark brown between indio and moro

moro/a—literally moor, dark dark skin with straight or curly black hair

prieto/a—dark, may be used in place of negro

negro—dark skin, “bad” hair

niche—akin to negro

azul or negro azul—blue, persons with skin so black they have a bluish quality

fosforescente—similar to azul literally phosphorescent

ñato—flat nosed—to denote an “African” nose

This exhaustive list of skin colors that Cubans use to describe themselves and one another illustrates the ways that descriptions of skin color and other phenotypic features are still common and important features of social life. In my research, beyond the basic categories of blanco, mulatto, and negro, I also heard people use color categorizations including rubio/a, castaño/a, trigueño/a, chino/a, jabao/a, mestizo/a, indio/a, moreno/a, Moro, prieto/a, and ñato/a. These categories were much less commonly referenced than blanco, mulatto, and negro, but these identifiers are important ways for people distinguish themselves from the three basic skin color categories. People also used these terms to describe someone when talking about them in the third person, for instance if trying to identify someone in a group of negras someone might say “la prieta” or “la ñata” to describe more distinct features in trying to identify someone. Often though, they would not use these terms in front of the person in question, as they might be offended by such descriptions.

Skin Color in Santiago Today

Race and skin color are important social categories in Cuba today. Likely because Santiago has a larger black population than other cities in Cuba, many Santiagueros distinguish between slight variations in skin color. In the Caribbean in general, and even more so in socialist Cuba, race is not viewed as a salient category for identity. Outward appearance, including skin color, and social status play a larger role than biological descent in defining a person’s identity. Often color and class are considered simultaneously when determining ones own or another person’s social class and identity. For instance, Austin-Broos (1994) outlines how in Jamaica the

public tends to move away from “race” as a category of identity using “class,” or “color class” instead to describe and understand social divisions and hierarchies between Jamaicans.

Jamaicans’ own ways of talking about identity and color class hierarchy varies along different sorts of social positions. Austin-Brooks (1994) builds upon R.T. Smith (1982, 1987, 1992) and Lisa Douglas’ (1992) characterization of this system as part of a hierarchy of natural difference rendered in “modern” biologized terms. So rather than race itself begin conceptualized as biological the whole color-class hierarchy is thought to be biological, or at least naturalized.

Class and Color in Cuba

Before the 1959 revolution, race relations on the island were characterized by inequality, segregation, prejudice, and varying degrees of racial discrimination, in part a product of Cuba’s history as a slave society. In some regions of the country this included segregated parks, beaches, and social clubs. Job and educational opportunities were limited for dark-skinned Cubans. Darker-skinned Cubans were more likely to be poor than those with lighter skin and also suffered disproportionately from infant mortality and shorter life expectancy. Inequality and discrimination were largely to blame for these discrepancies in morbidity and mortality.

After the revolution, Fidel Castro announced the state’s commitment to eliminate racial discrimination. In a March 23, 1959 speech, he presented the “four great battles for the well-being of the people” (Castro 1959). The battles were: 1) to end unemployment; 2) to reduce the cost of living; 3) to raise the salaries of the lowest paid workers; 4) to end workplace racial discrimination. He was concerned with what he regarded as the two main types of racial discrimination: racial discrimination in the workplace, and discrimination in recreation and cultural centers. Articles 41-44 of the Cuban Constitution in addition to granting women equal

economic, political, cultural, social and familial rights with men also prohibit discrimination based on race, skin color, sex, national origin, religious belief and other forms of discrimination.

From the Marxist perspective racism is rooted in the capitalist economic base. The idea was that once socialism replaced capitalism as the economic base racism and other social ills in the superstructure would simply disappear since they are no longer supported by a capitalist base. After the 1959 socialist revolution race became a taboo subject for public discussion: the state successfully convinced many Cubans that under socialism all problems of inequality including racial and gender based discrimination and inequality would simply disappear (Fernandez 2010). Indeed, the revolution did legally eliminate the worst forms of racism such as segregated parks and social clubs and blatant job discrimination, but in practice many of those places were still known to be only for white Cubans even though blacks were legally allowed. There were other forms of discrimination that continued, but these were rationalized as individual problems or residual issues that were not the fault of the state.

Under socialism race became a contentious issue for public discussion. The government feared that in the hands of Cuba's enemies, it could be manipulated to weaken the nation by driving a wedge between black and white Cubans. And individuals feared that talking about it would be interpreted as saying anti-government, anti-socialist, or anti-Castro things, which was strictly prohibited.

Nadine Fernandez analyzes the ways in which discourses on race in the popular press changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. She finds that people begin to be publicly critical of race issues in Cuba after the 1990s. Fernandez points out that in the beginning of the 1990s the articles tend to deny the existence of discrimination (i.e. abusive actions by whites against

black people based on social and legal conditions which the revolution has explicitly ended), while acknowledging the continued existence of prejudice (attitudes about race which presumably do not have material or social consequences). Fernandez reinterrogates the Cuban national myth of *mestizaje* to show that this myth is based on an idea of whitening and underlying *mestizaje* is the fact that it is deemed socially acceptable to be mixed race but being black is still negative. The myth of *mestizaje* in effect reduces the 12 percent of the population that is black—and even that number is not accurate because people who are black but of higher social classes become classified as mixed to elevate their status. For many Cubans of all colors racism is defined as a separation of and violent relationship between the races. Racism is seen as a foreign phenomenon found in the US and in the former apartheid system of South Africa, but it clearly does not apply to the Cuban reality. Racism is seldom a topic of conversation in an everyday Cuban household, but prejudice and discrimination are much more commonly discussed.

Race is a less commonly used description than skin color. Class, skin color, and other aspects of physical appearance are more strongly tied to social status than biological descent. As I discuss later in this chapter, “*nivel de cultura*” (culture level), a measure of social class is also a central part of the way that Santiagueros characterize one another. Although I asked all participants what their skin color was as part of basic demographics, many participants did not mention skin as they described their food practices to me. In this chapter I include the narratives of those who did include skin color or race as relevant to their food consumption practices.

Making Sense of Race and Skin Color

Similarly to most of Josi’s reflections on race above, Lázaro, a 64 year old middle class

Santiaguero of Chinese and black descent, made the following comments on race when I began a line of questioning to see if there was any link between his Chinese descent and his cooking practices:

HG: You have some Chinese descent?

Lázaro: Yes, my father is a Chinese national.

HG: Is he still alive?

Lázaro: No, he died in 1973.

HG: What does your ID card say? Chinese?

Lázaro: No, on my ID they put White, I am mestizo or Chinese but they put White for me because my skin isn't dark.

HG: They tell you what your skin color is? They don't ask you?

Lázaro: Right, right, they look at you and decide, so they put White but really I am mestizo.

HG: But you identify as Chinese?

Lázaro: Yes Chinese, well no, I identify as Cuban, in other words here. . . this thing. . . this obsession with race isn't that important, people look at me and say you're Chinese, but then they know that I am just Cuban, I live in Cuba, so I am Cuban. There isn't this marked division by race.

HG: You mean not like in the US?

Lázaro: Right, not like the US obsession. Here there are White, black, mulatta, mestiza and we are all equal, we treat each other equally we have the same rights. Yes we can talk and discuss race and skin color but as long as we are from the same neighborhood, the same level of culture we are the same.

Lázaro clearly agrees with Nadine Fernandez's theory that discussions of race and skin color have become more socially accepted. However, he would disagree with her interlocutors that race is still a salient category for discrimination. Like Josi, he implies that discrimination based on race does not happen in Cuba, but that discrimination based on neighborhood, and thus social class, as well as nivel de cultura do still exist.

Level of Culture

In Cuba the nivel de cultura identifier is an important category of identity. In fact, my colleagues at the Casa del Caribe stressed to me that it was essential to my study to include people with a high "level of culture" because these would be, in their view, the community members with the most articulate reflections on cuisine and food in Cuba. Nivel de cultura is a local category of social status less linked to economic status and more closely related to social status and education level. For instance those with a higher nivel de cultura are more likely to have read classic novels, be familiar with theater, ballet, and opera, and appreciate the fine arts. A person with a high nivel de cultura also has a "sophisticated" pallet and appreciates some of the foods considered to be rare and associated with high culture in Cuba, such as wine, champagne, capers, and olives. Nivel de cultura has historically been linked to race. Those with lighter skin were thought to inherently have a higher nivel de cultura. Today the category of nivel de cultura is still used, though most Cubans claim that it is no longer tied to race in such a

biologized fashion. Nivel de cultura is distinct from socioeconomic class. When I spoke with scholars in Santiago about how to gauge nivel de cultura they usually referred first to education level. A colleague at the Casa del Caribe explained the concept in this way:

A person with a high level of culture likes the fine things in life. They read the classical literature, listen to the symphony, know all of the famous Cuban theater, they like to talk about these things with their friends who also know about these things.

I responded by asking if food consumption was tied to nivel de cultura and he responded:

It used to be more so than it is now because of scarcity. So it used to be that drinking fine wines and eating things like caviar and capers was tied to nivel de cultura, but we don't have those things anymore so that has gone away.

I asked the same colleague if nivel de cultura was inextricably tied to education, for instance, could someone who hadn't had formal schooling but learned of these things on his or her own have a high cultural level. He was confused: "One couldn't really learn these things without schooling, they would just be a fake." Level of culture is an important social category for many people in Santiago de Cuba, while this category may be less linked to skin color than it once was, it is strongly linked to formal education and class based social training.

While racism, by the Cuban definition, is no longer a salient category for Santiagueros, colorism is undeniably still at play. Colorism is also known as skin color stratification. It is a social system that privileges lighter skin tones over darker ones in all social areas including employment, housing, marriage, and education (Hunter 2007). It is experienced not only in Cuba but throughout the Americas, Africa, and Asia since the colonial era. In Cuba racism and colorism persisted through the revolutionary era. Although many have argued and I agree that

racism still exists in Cuba today because racism is not acknowledged by my interlocutors I use the lens of colorism to look at discrimination and prejudice in Cuba today (cf. Allen 2011).

Color Difference after the Special Period

The structural reforms of the Special Period had racially differentiated effects, and many reforms have worsened problems of inequality. For example, the expansion of the second currency and remittances from abroad disproportionately favors white Cubans, who tend to have relatives abroad more often. Between the late 1980s and late 1990s Cuba's Gini coefficient²² rose from 0.24 to 0.41, the Latin American average in the 2000s was 0.53. Persistent racial prejudice continues to keep darker skinned Cubans out of the jobs where CUCs are available, such as working in the tourism industry, waitressing, or working with foreign-Cuban joint ventures in Cuba (de la Fuente 2001).

While the literature points to color and class as the most salient categories for determining social hierarchy in Cuba (de la Fuente 2001; Fernandez 2010; Ryer 2008), my own research further reveals the importance of neighborhood, both with respect to where people live now and their family's neighborhood of origin. Both *nivel de cultura* and neighborhood are ways of maintaining some of the traditional designations of social status that have been elided with economic changes under socialism and after the economic crisis of the 1990s. Analysis by neighborhood also captures some structural components of food access. Poor neighborhoods in Santiago are less likely to have stores and markets, therefore people who live in these areas must travel further, often paying for transport, to acquire food. If they do not travel outside of their

²² The Gini coefficient measures inequality. Zero expresses perfect equality and one expresses maximal inequality. Measuring Inequality in Cuba: <http://www.economist.com/node/21550421>

neighborhoods, they are subject to the higher prices and lower quality foods of ambulant vendors and small food stalls in their areas.

Differences in Food Acquisition Across Neighborhood

In this section I outline the food acquisition experiences for three groups of families in my study those who live in: 1) Peri-urban and rural areas that tend to have lower social class and varied skin color; 2) Well-off and middle class or *gente con posibilidades* areas where families tend to be of higher social class and have lighter skin color; 3) Poor areas or *gente humilde* where families tend to be of lower social class and have darker skin color.

Peri-urban and Rural Families

In the two sections above I refer only to families that live within what is considered to be the city of Santiago. In addition to the urban families my research also included three families who lived outside of the city, one in a nearby peri-urban area that I will call Palos Verdes²³, and two who live further out in an area generally referred to as “el Monte” the mountain. The family who lived in the Palos Verdes area was solidly middle income, two members of the household commute into the city to work and they also maintain a small farm, which they use for subsistence and sometimes sell surplus harvests. Members of this family identify as black or mulatto. The other two lived in a hillside community referred to by Santiagueros as “el Monte.” Although this area consists of mostly white farmers who have farmed the region for centuries there are increasing numbers of black families living in the area.

²³ This is a pseudonym for the area. I need to use a pseudonym for this area because there was only one family that participated in my study from this area and it is a small enough community that they would be easily identifiable if I were to use the real name of the area.

Figure 15: A House in El Monte



El Monte is resource poor with respect to the comforts of city life, such as processed foods like cooking oil, soda, or candy. It is located an hour's ride from the nearest stores, thus many families do not have as much clothing or other household items as a city family might have. On the other hand these families are wealthy with respect to food access. They are able to access fresh milk and dairy projects, fresh meat, vegetables and fruit all right there in their area. Other food items however are scarce in this area and families must go to the city to acquire them, these items include cooking oil, pasta and other processed foods, coffee, sugar, flour, etc. In many ways they experience the opposite difficulties of the urban families in my study that more easily acquire processed foods and staples and have difficulty supplementing those items with things like meat, dairy, and fresh produce.

Well-off and Middle Class Families or Gente con Posibilidades

The upper and middle-income families in my study all live in high or middle-income neighborhoods; none lived in lower socioeconomic status neighborhoods. The areas of high and

middle income where households included in this study lived were: Vista Alegre, Sueño, Terrazas, Santa Barbara, Portuonda, and the city center. Skin color varied more in the high and medium income households than in the lower income households. In over half of these households all participants identified as white. In the remaining households there was a mixture of black, mulatto, and mestizo, with a few people who identified as trigueña, chinese, and jabao.

Tomas and Carmen, the heads of a well off family introduced in chapter two, live in Terrazas, which is one of the well off neighborhoods northeast of the city center. They identify as White Cubans and are also proud that the Spanish government will recognize them as Spanish citizens. Carmen seldom does the food shopping, leaving much of it to her 23-year-old daughter Daisy and her 28-year-old son Yorlanky. Carmen directs Daisy and Yorlanky to only use certain trusted food vendors in the area. She plans her meals weekly, giving her children the same amount of money each week and has them purchase similar items for the week's meals. To supplement their rations, they purchase many food items, such as crackers, jams, sodas, and other snacks in CUC at nearby stores. From home Carmen makes a regular weekly purchase of vegetables from one trusted ambulant street vendor and will not purchase from anyone else. They also purchase additional meat, fruits, and vegetables from trusted vendors at a nearby peso market.

Figure 16: Vista Alegre Streets



Figure 17: A House in Vista Alegre



Food acquisition for Carmen and Tomas is a thoroughly planned and streamlined process. They rarely complain of shortages because whenever an item is not available at one market or in the peso market they simply make the purchase in CUC. However, they do often complain about the poor quality of the foods that they purchase. They expect to receive consist quality if they

are going to pay the same or higher prices for certain items, often this is very difficult to accomplish as the seasons change and high quality foods are not necessarily available. Carmen and Tomas very seldom need to borrow money or food from friends and family. They have enough money that they can make nearly all of their food purchases without reliance on social networks. Most of the people in their social circle are also from upper class families, thus they seldom encounter friends or family who need to borrow from them.

Like Carmen and Tomas, Lisandra, 59 years old, and Rudy, 61 years old, live in a newly built modest sized home in an upper class Santiago neighborhood. They have been married for 34 years and have two adult children, Miguel, their 33-year-old son, lives at home with them and Sandy their 35-year-old daughter lives in Spain. Sandy married a Spanish man who frequently visited Cuba as a tourist; she has lived in Spain for 10 years and sends large sums of money, about 100 Euro, home to her parents each month. With these remittances Lisandra and Rudy were able to move out of their old neighborhood, San Pedrito, a lower socioeconomic area, and into their current home and neighborhood. Lisandra identifies as mulatta, and Rudy identifies as black. Their son Miguel identifies as jabao. Both Lisandra and Rudy earn income informally. Lisandra sells homemade juices and candies out of her house and Rudy owns a motorcycle that he rents by the day to people.

Lisandra does all of the household food-related tasks, including all of the food acquisition, as she put it: “*Limpiar todos los dias, cocinar todos los dias—es el destino de una mujer Cubana.*” (Cleaning everyday, cooking everyday—it is the destiny of a Cuban woman). Rudy dedicates his time to fixing things around the house, and working on the motorcycle that he rents out each day. Like Carmen, Lisandra’s food acquisition is thoroughly planned and budgeted. In addition to the food ration, Lisandra purchases large amounts of rice on the black

market (which I elaborate on in chapter six), so that she is able to keep bulk quantities and does not have to buy so often. She does all of her additional meat, fruit, and vegetable shopping on Saturdays at the weekend street farmers market one block from her home. She rarely buys food items at CUC stores and doesn't purchase foods from ambulant street vendors; because she recently moved to the area she doesn't trust the vendors here because she does not know them.

Lisandra and Rudy never have to borrow food or money to buy food from friends or family, but unlike Carmen and Tomas they have had a hard time dealing with the number of friends and family members who want to borrow from them. Due to their physical relocation to a nicer neighborhood and their shift in economic class, they have a wide social circle within lower socioeconomic classes and fewer friends who are well off. Because of these changes they have been faced with dilemmas surrounding how much they can help out their friends and family financially. As I will elaborate in chapter six they have decided to stop lending money or goods to anyone and developed an explicit policy to never offer anything more than water to guests, refusing any requests for coffee, snacks, or meals.

Armando and Rodulfo, also introduced in chapter two, are less well off than the previous two couples. Their solidly middle class economic status and the fact that they live in the city center, leads them to structure their food acquisition practices somewhat differently from Carman and Lisandra's households. To maximize their food budget, Carlos developed an elaborate system for planning meals, food shopping, and household food budgeting. He spends most of his mornings running around Santiago looking for deals on the black market, and tries to buy food in bulk and stock up on things that might become scarce. They are able to purchase in bulk like this because they have a large freezer and two refrigerators. Because their food acquisition practices are so heavily structured around finding deals on the black market and they

are not able to rely on CUC purchases to supplement their household food, social connections are very important to maintaining their household. In turn, they do not mind being asked for food loans or gifts because they understand the utility this has in building their social network.

These three well-off to middle class households are emblematic of the importance of meal planning and budgeting as a central part of the practice of food acquisition for this particular social group. These families often have many different options for where they could buy food items and they have the possibility to purchase both in CUC and in pesos. Because of this wide variety of options, many of these families have developed elaborate systems to ensure that they are getting the best quality foods at the lowest prices. For these families, the amount of time and money spent in the process of food acquisition is less problematic because they often have one household member who does not work outside the home and can dedicate their time to the household labor. Often this means traveling throughout the city several times a week to acquire different food items at different places to get the best quality at the best price.

Poor Families or *Gente Humilde*

The lower income families that participated in my study also lived in low-income neighborhoods in Santiago. These lower income neighborhoods included: Chicharrones, Dese, San Pedrito, Los Pinos, and parts of the city center. One family who lived in the city center might be considered to be an exception in that they are on the cusp between low and middle SES. However, the city center is one of the few areas in Santiago where all socioeconomic classes live. All families who were classified as low SES also had a majority of household members who self identify as black, and the second most common self-identity in these households was mulatto, also a dark skin color categorization.

Figure 18: Houses in Chicharrones



Carla’s family is an upwardly mobile, lower class family with the majority of household members identifying as black. On my way to Carla’s house for my first day of fieldwork there, Alejandro, her nephew walked me through dilapidated streets with trash pile corners and streams of green sludge water. We ran into the family dog, flea covered and very pregnant, Alejandro coaxed her back up the stairs and into the living room. In the doorway stood little Obalo, at 18 months he was trying to close the door so that we couldn’t come in. This was the same living room where the previous summer a family of pigs was living. Since then they had built a new corral for the pigs under the stairs in order to try to keep them clean now that Obalo is walking. Carla built her current house in 1973. Carla worked as a maid and nanny for many years in addition to raising her own children and doing some sewing work for pay out of her home. For additional income, she has raised pigs in her house since 1980, under the stairwell. At the time of my research she and her grandchildren were also raising two goats and pigeons. The pigeons are raised and sold to neighborhood children as pets and the goats are either sold or slaughtered and eaten depending on the economic situation at the time.

Carla's husband recently passed away, but she told me that his income never made a significant contribution to the household because he worked inconsistently. Her youngest daughter Gema was just six years old when they moved into the house, and Gema has lived there ever since. Gema raised her two kids there as well. Gema currently works informally selling food on the black market. Today a total of nine people live in the household; Carla, her brother Cori, her youngest daughter Gema, Gema's two kids, Yaicel and Yordanis, and their significant others (Oruli and Mariladis) as well as Yaicel's two children all live in the house together.

Carla was quick to tell me that she had not only raised her own children, and her children's children, but now she was raising her great grandchildren. At age 66 she was a great grandmother and she did all of the childcare. She was in fairly good health, which she feels is because she doesn't smoke or drink. She has glaucoma in one eye and optic pressure in that same eye. She has a liver problem for which she makes special teas from the leaves of various plants such as the noni tree²⁴. Carla retired from working outside the home after she developed liver problems and her glaucoma made it difficult for her to work.

She spends most of her day inside the house preparing meals for her children grandchildren and great-grandchildren. While she prepares food and maintains the household Carla enjoys listening to soap operas on the radio. Carla also runs an illegal lottery out of her house; she collects money from neighbors, and friends and every day she rolls a die to determine the winning number. She makes a small amount of income from the lottery, but her main motivation is pleasure. Carla has dedicated her life to raising children; in one interview she told

²⁴ The Noni tree (*Morinda citrifolia*) was wildly popular in Cuba in the early 2000s because the fruit was thought to have curative properties for many diseases including diabetes and cancer. The fruit has since declined in popularity. The fruit has a pungent odor and bitter taste, so it is not commonly consumed for pleasure.

me that she was tired. In order to relax and rejuvenate herself, from time to time Carla will go visit her sister who has a beach house. Carla also goes to church regularly; she is a practicing Catholic and she believes that it's very important to bring her great-grandchildren church. As I elaborate in chapter eight, Carla's dreams and aspirations for the future are oriented around a better life for her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren she herself doesn't aspire for much change in her own life she's tired but she's happy to have she has in life.

Carla's household economic situation has improved in recent years. The marriage of one of her granddaughters has meant that the new husband contributes income to the household, defraying Carla of many of the costs related to Yaicel and her two children. Carla was able to invest in a better pigsty, which has kept her pigs cleaner and healthier; she hasn't had any pigs die in the past few years and has done well selling them. She also uses the money from the pigs to invest in some goats, that she keeps on the roof. Her grandson Yordanis brings them to graze daily in the field across the street. She is hoping to sell these goats once they are fattened up and buy a new television because hers broke a few years back and she is tired of going to the neighbor's house to watch. The addition of her grandson-in-law's income to the household has led to some economic upward mobility. With this upward mobility food acquisition has also become easier, she is no longer indebted to vendors and can easily purchase items from street vendors as they pass by her house. She relies heavily on the rations, street vendors and meat from the animals she raises. She rarely shops at the market; in fact she rarely goes further than her block to buy food. If she needs something she sends someone who owes her a favor or a neighborhood child to pick it up for her.

Although food acquisition is relatively simple for Carla and her family, the tradeoff is in food variety. Every morning breakfast consists of bread. When the egg rations are in, they will

each have an egg on their rationed bread roll, but once they eggs are gone its back to plain bread. The same goes for morning coffee, they only drink it as long as it lasts from the ration and they don't purchase more. Midday meals always consist of rice and beans with a small amount of vegetable or meat based sauce, again in accordance with the rations or whatever street vendors come by that day. For the evening meal they always wait for the day old bread to come around, this is bread from the previous day's ration that was not used, so in the evenings the panadero walks around distributing this. They will often eat day old bread alone, but if there is any thing left over from lunch they will spread that across their bread. Afternoon and evening snacks usually consist of seasonal fruit that is either very cheap or so abundant that it can be accessed for free if one of the household children goes to pick it.

Carla's household is typical of poor Santiago families in many ways. It is common to have many generations living in one household, to raise livestock for the family to consume, and to keep most food acquisition practices confined to the neighborhood. The effort of dressing up and accessing transportation to the larger markets is simply not worth it for many poor families who would rather stay close to home and just eat whatever "appears." Because Carla is often the only adult at home with several young children it is not feasible for her to travel to larger markets and leave the children alone, but she can easily step outside her front door and buy from an ambulant vendor.

Ramira, a low-income 34-year-old mulatta identified Santiaguera, lives in a humble two bedroom first story house in Chicharrones with 5 other adults and two young children. While Carla's household is economically upwardly mobile because her grandchildren and their partners have been relatively successful at bringing income into the household, Ramira struggles to maintain her family's lifestyle. Ramira's home includes an ample living and dining room at the

front of the house. The back half of the house has been divided into several very small bedrooms, there are four rooms and one household member, Ramira's uncle Vicente, sleeps on a narrow cot stored in the hallway. At the end of this hallway the house opens up to an enclosed patio where they store water tanks and two corrals for pigs, chickens, and goats. This is also the area for household laundry, a task mostly done by Ramira's daughters who do not work outside the home. Ramira's two daughters each have a child of their own. Her older daughter, Yakolyn, lives in the house with her husband, Francisco, and daughter. Her younger daughter, Yoselyn, is single and lives in the house with her one-year-old son. Her two daughters are not employed outside the home, but Yakolyn's husband Francisco has a motorcycle and offers rides for cash as a way to bring income into the household. However, most of this income is reserved for Yakolyn and their three-year-old daughter Luz. All household members identify as black or mulatto.

Ramira works as a server in a state-run restaurant on the other side of the city in Sueno. Her household's food acquisition hinges on her employment at the restaurant, both because of the amount of food she is able to pilfer from her job (which I elaborate in chapter six), and the connections she makes with others to acquire food both on and off the black market. Ramira does nearly all of the household food acquisition. She picks up the ration goods before or after work, and acquires the household's remaining food during her work hours at the state-cafeteria. Her uncle is the only household member who sometimes eats outside of the home, other than his occasional meals elsewhere all four adults and two children eat three meals a day at home. Ramira often eats one meal per day while on her shift at work, therefore she usually just eats two meals at home. Because of her job Ramira rarely has to buy food at the market, however she or her daughters will occasionally buy food from ambulant vendors that pass by the house as the need arises. Like Carla's household, Ramira and her family rarely venture outside of their

neighborhood to acquire food and most of their food purchases are made within steps from their front door.

Maria del Carmen's household, unlike Ramira's and Carla's, previously was middle class and in recent years she and her family have struggled to get by. Increasingly they fit the characteristics of a lower SES household in that they are unable to plan means and buy food in advance, they increasingly have to borrow money and food from friends and family, and they have started to sell household items for additional money to make ends meet.

On my first day studying Maria del Carmen's (Carmen) household, I arrived around 7 a.m. Everyone was still sleeping except for Carmen, who was sweeping and mopping the house. I arrived just as she threw out the bucket of dirty mop water, escaping a face full of mop water by mere inches. She didn't recognize me and started to yell at me, saying I should watch where I am walking. She was about to close the door on me when she paused, realizing that I am not Cuban and said softly: "Don't tell me that you are my son's friend that is coming here today?" I smiled and said, "Yes, that's me." She gasped and held her face in horror, "Oh my God! Forgive me. I can't believe I spoke to you that way. I didn't know you were you, I wouldn't have said that. I have no shame. Come in, *adelante!*"

She had me sit in the living room as she scurried to the back of the house where she took off her handkerchief and took the rollers out of her hair revealing a full head of thick black shiny hair. She hurried back out to sit with me in the living room and started saying, "I can't have you here today. . ." I gave her a disappointed and puzzled look and she continued, "I don't have any coffee." She stopped as if that was a clear explanation for why she could not have me. I started in, "Yeah I know, there is no coffee to be found in the city," which was true; even in households

with access to CUC and the vast black market there was no coffee to be found. My reaction seemed to soothe her, “Ah, so then you understand how things are around here. Well it’s fine then!”

I explained to her that my study involved observing her normal everyday food acquisition and preparation practices, that I would record some interviews, take some photos of the food, kitchen, and relevant things, and that mostly my study involved sitting and observing her food related practices. She seemed unconvinced that this was something valid to study, but agreed to participate nonetheless.

She started in right away on what she felt were the most relevant facts about her life. She explained that she had stopped studying for a man when she was 17, she wanted to dedicate herself to her household, to cook and clean and maintain a home for her husband and future children. When he left her five years later with two young children she regretted more than anything that she hadn’t continued her studies. She worked as a domestic—cleaning houses, doing laundry, taking care of children all of her life, until three years ago when she met her current husband—he told her she didn't have to work anymore if she didn't want to and she stopped. Despite the fact that they don't have young children she finds that maintaining her household is enough to keep her busy. She explained that they also raise pigs in the house, which is a lot of work and keeps her going all day long.

She paused and fretted again that there was no coffee. She went to wake up her oldest son, Frank, and yelled frantically at him to get up, go out, and look for some coffee! Begrudgingly he put on some workout shorts and slipped on some flip flops, half asleep he greeted me with a kiss on the cheek as he walked out the door to look for coffee. Frank returned

in half an hour with a pack of ration coffee. I asked him where he got it and he explained that he went to the market to talk to the people who sell dry goods there—rice, beans, sugar, etc.—because most of that stuff is pilfered from *almacenes* or ration stations and they would know where stolen coffee could be purchased—indeed they did—they sent him to a nearby house that was charging five times the ration price for a pack of coffee—taking advantage of the shortage in the city. I doubt they would have made this purchase if not for my presence in the house. By 9:30 a.m. Frank, Carmen, and I were each drinking a teeny tiny cup of coffee. Frank and Carmen had a piece of ration bread for breakfast that they dipped in their watery coffee.

Tico, Carmen's current husband, had traveled to La Habana for the week. Yamila, her daughter, was at Carmen's sisters house with her daughter. Carmen had sent Yamila to her sister's house because she was sick of having Yamila's daughter Estrella, her granddaughter running around and there were just too many mouths to feed and not enough food. Tico had to take some extra money with him for his stay in La Habana and hadn't left them with enough to buy extra food that week.

Carmen and her family previously had slightly higher socioeconomic status (see appendix), but they are still considered low SES. Recently they have been having more financial troubles. Tico, who is an English professor, has been travelling a lot for work, and needs to spend more money while he is out of town on those trips. Frank is 26 years old and unemployed. Yamila is 22 years old and only employed during the summer months. Yamila's three-year-old daughter is thus the financial responsibility of Carmen and Tico. Estrella's father is not involved in their life.

Carmen is accustomed to having certain comforts in her household; in the past she never would have entertained a guest without offering them coffee, even today she could not stand to sit and chat with me without coffee and found a way to stretch the household money to buy it. Carmen does not budget money or plan meals, and often once the rations run low she resorts to other measures like sending her daughter and granddaughter to stay with other relatives. Often when she hasn't planned a meal and doesn't feel she has the time or money to search for ingredients she and Frank will just eat street food, like a five peso pizza (10 pesos if it has meat on it) each for lunch or dinner. She told me that this seems like a good short-term solution, but she realizes that in the end spending 5-10 pesos per person per meal costs more than buying ingredients and making food at home. Carmen has not had to spend time building up her social networks or learning how to access foods on the black market. Although Frank helps her out with this, she knows that if she learned to do this herself they would be better off. The transition to a lower economic status has been difficult for Carmen, it is stressful as she realizes the different types of work that she must do to acquire food in this lower income bracket.

Socios and Palanca: Making Sense of Low Income Family Food Acquisition Practices

Given the complicated food acquisition system and the overwhelming difficulties faced by poor families in Santiago, how do socially marginalized, resource poor families manage to get food on the table? I found that the two fundamental things that hold this system together are: 1) reliance on a network of socios --friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and godparents-- is absolutely necessary to keep from going hungry in Santiago, and 2) willingness to “revolver” problems via illegal channels. Not only are these the fundamental ways in which Santiagueros make ends meet, but their uses of and movement within these practices have shifted in recent years.

The term “*socioismo*” (in place of *socialismo*) is used to describe the nature of the cooperative system the 1959 revolution created; social networking became the critical means through which people acquire the basics for daily life. The *socioismo* system of cooperative interdependence has existed in Cuba since the 1960s and continues to this day. Reliance on a network of “*socios*” (literally associates) a term that most generally means acquaintance, but also includes friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, godparents, is essential to make ends meet in Santiago. The declining food rationing system and the dual currency economy work together to inflate the importance of social networks. *Socios* both on the island and abroad are of increasing importance in many arenas, and most notably in the acquisition of increasingly scarce food items and other household goods.

Through maintaining a large network of *socios* one can attain *palanca* (leverage) or connections. Through *palanca* Santiagueros are able to access goods and services that might be closed off to them if they didn't maintain strong social networks. But the *palanca* one has usually remains within a social network and the sorts of things that one is able to access are determined by the amount of resources within it. An example of *palanca* might include having a friend or *socio* who works at a nightclub and can get you in without paying cover or having to wait in line. With respect to food acquisition *palanca* is particularly important for people who access food on the black market where social connections are crucial for access in general and especially for accessing higher quality or scarcer items. For instance, one must have good *socios* and a certain degree of *palanca* in order to acquire beef regularly on the black market.

Borrowing and Debt

The other way to access goods without palanca are through borrowing and debt. This also requires a social network of people willing to lend to you, but it means you probably do not have strong enough ties to get those things for free. Here Matitis, a 41 year old low income mulatta who works as a maid, reflects on her own problems with debt:

Am I ever going to get out of debt? Lies! Every month is the same, and some months I say “Aye!” This month I only owe 50 or 60 pesos and I go to look, what 50? More like 500! It just happens moment to moment—say I just go to see the neighbor, the one who sells coffee, and I get there and realize I haven’t had my coffee yet, I drink one of her cups and that’s 10 pesos that I owe her and if I do that 10 times in a month that’s 100 pesos. And she will keep track and find me when she doesn’t have any money.

Last week I had the bad luck of running out of oil and I had to buy some from a street vendor on credit, now I owe him over 70 pesos and that’s just how it works at the end of the month, once I get my pay I can pay these people back but then look at what little I have left to buy my own food for the month. I can’t escape it! And remember a liter of oil is nothing, I could still run out again before the end of the month. I have to cut back maybe I don’t eat dinner a few nights, just some bread with whatever I can find, but then I wake up hungry and eat more in the morning. And that’s just the small debts. You don’t even want to know how much I owe Maria from when our TV broke and we had to get a new one. Thank god she doesn’t hound me for money! This whole system is agonizing. It never ends.

Matitis's experience of debt and her feeling that it is inescapable and "agonizing" is quite common among lower and middle class status Santiagueros. Because food consumption is viewed as a fundamental necessity Santiago families are more likely to take on small debts to acquire food. Many people also feel that they must take advantage of opportunities to acquire foods that might become scarce and are thus willing to take on debt to buy such items (cf. Garth 2012).

Taking on debt to acquire food is common and happens often. Although the debts are small, because they are so frequent many families end up with fairly large food debts over time. This debt is often spread across many different food vendors across the city. For middle class families, paying off debts in a timely and respectable manner is essential to maintaining the social relationships and trust that are such a fundamental part of food acquisition in Santiago. Upper class families do not often face this situation, as they are rarely indebted to other Cubans, though they are sometimes indebted to Cubans living in the diaspora. Lower class Cubans are often in debt and often unable to pay off their debts in a timely manner, thus there is less of an expectation to have debts repaid quickly among lower class groups.

Jinaterismo and Hustling

In addition to social connections and debt, some families resort to hustling and "jinaterismo" to acquire food and other necessary items. The term jinatero, literally a jockey, is someone who engages in illicit or semi-licit hustling to acquire money. This may involve prostitution or pimping, or forms of hustling. When Cubans refer to someone as a jinatero, by and large they are referencing someone who hustles tourists and other foreigners rather than Cubans. A jinatero often describes their "work" as "luchando" or "luchando la vida."

One day during breakfast with Maria de la Gracia and Leonardo, introduced in chapter 2, a neighborhood jinatero came into the house and sat down to chat. It was clear that he wanted to borrow something and Maria de la Gracia (MG) responded to him saying: “People who want things should work for them.”

He retorted that he does indeed work, he raises and sells pigs, and he works as a “tourist guide,” MG and Leonardo retorted that this is not work. The jinatero started talking about how he wasn’t going to pay for a license to raise and sell pigs and that it shouldn’t be considered illegal, “I am not interested in any politics, here or there, I am not interested in politics or laws. If they fine me whatever, I am not going to get a license to raise pigs in my own house!”

Leo retorted, “It doesn’t matter what you think about politics, laws are laws and they are here for a reason,” speaking from his lawyerly background. The jinatero barked back, “Laws shouldn’t affect my business, its MY business, raising pigs doesn’t hurt anyone.” Esteban, the grandson, chimed in, “In this country nothing is yours, you don’t have YOUR business, everything is owned by the government, forget these ideas.” The jinatero clearly sick of this conversation turned to me in English and said, “This is why I work in tourism”:

He explained that although he has a Bachelors Degree in English from the Universidad de Oriente and he worked for 7 years as an elementary school teacher he was done teaching. His pay as a teacher was the equivalent of 15 CUC a month which for years he was happy with, until he started to want to buy more things. He gave me the example of perfume, he has always loved perfume but he couldn’t afford to pay 1 CUC for a bottle of perfume on his salary, so he was stealing his sister’s perfume. He decided to start selling cakes and cookies at the train station after work, earning about 5 extra CUC a month.

One day while he was at the station a couple from England got off the train and they were confused about how to make their connection, they ended up missing their connection and were panicked about what they were going to do. Since he understood and spoke English well he was able to help the tourists find a place to spend the night, and they asked him to come back the following day to help them get to the beach. He missed work that day and took them to the beach at Siboney, a beach that he himself had never visited because he couldn't afford the transportation and always thought of it as something out of his reach. He spent the night there with them at a house that, at the time, didn't have a license to have tourists stay. He watched as the English couple paid 100 dollars (as he tells it, at the time the dollar was still in use) and it dawned on him that this was where he could use his skills to really make money.

He told me that at the end of his time with them they tipped him 80 dollars, and he decided to never again work for the state. This tip made him reflect that he didn't feel that his work as a teacher was sufficiently compensated given how difficult the work was. Working in tourism he made 5 times his monthly salary in just a few hours. To this day he spends his time lingering in parks and at bus stations awaiting tourists to guide them through the city, bring them to houses where he makes a 5 CUC commission, and to *paladares* (small home-based restaurants) where he is also commissioned. He tells white lies to make them feel happy, saying that he is taking them to his aunt's house, that he has a sick child who needs medicine but doesn't have enough money to buy it, that his "uncle" fought in the revolution and will tell them all the stories they want to hear. He delivers to them the experience that they want in Cuba and they repay him with a small fortune.

While middle and upper class families tend to rely on vigilant household planning and budgeting in order to acquire food, lower income families who also tend to live in poor

neighborhoods and have darker skin color rely more heavily on networks of socios, connections via palanca, borrowing from friends and family, and hustling or jinaterismo. Their reliance on these tactics is due in part to the fact that they not only have lower incomes than middle and upper class families but they are also less likely to have relatives abroad that might send them remittances. With the exception of jinaterismo, these tactics for acquiring food all involve heavy reliance on social networks, which for lower income Santiagueros tend to be concentrated among lower income friends and family who also live in low income neighborhoods and tend to have darker skin colors. Poor families are much less likely to venture beyond their neighborhood and immediate social networks to acquire food. Thus the heavy reliance on these social networks may further exacerbate economic difficulties for those within the social network.

Social Inequality and the Different Practices of Food Acquisition

During my last few months of fieldwork I began to have a deeper understanding of the social effects of scarcity, and the ways in which scarcity differentially impacted people across class and neighborhood. The longstanding custom of borrowing and lending worked well when things were in abundance; it was not considered to be a big deal to borrow or lend a cup of sugar, salt, some bread, etc. However, when food items were scarce and the borrowing and lending tradition places more strain on poor and middle class families.

Cycles of scarcity and abundance have varied throughout the decades and throughout the month as well. Rations are usually most abundant at the beginning and middle of the month, thus approximately every 15 days families who rely heavily on the rations have limited access to food. Those who are not beholden to this cycle and can purchase food by other means are less subject to monthly cycles of food scarcity. At the end of the month when rations run low and so

does any money available for buying food, poor families turn to a set of stressful strategies that allow them to eat until more money and food come into the household.

This situation clarified to me that there might be other reasons that people so often say that there is no food when they do actually seem to have plenty to eat. I realized that they might use this discourse as a way to open up or close off conversations about borrowing and lending foods. If someone enters a room and starts going on about how they have no food, its very unlikely that someone will ask to borrow something from them. On several occasions across class and neighborhood, I observed friends and family in this a sort of jovial competition of “acting like you have less” even if you actually have plenty at home. Family members engage in such discourse as a way to avoid having to chip in money to buy something, as I observed happen with a group of men arguing over who was going to buy the next bottle of rum for them to share. This discourse also closes off the possibility of borrowing, thus rendering a listener less likely to ask to borrow things.

Regardless of the economic problems families face in acquiring food, the ability to understand and appreciate the elements of fine dining that one might sporadically encounter are important indications of nivel de cultura. Due to changes in socio economic status over the past 50 years there are many low-income families with a high nivel de cultura, and well-off families with a low nivel de cultura.

The data presented here show that despite the post-1959 struggle for social equality there are still inequalities in the process of accessing basic needs, including foods, across skin color, class, and neighborhood in Santiago de Cuba. Households based in middle and upper class neighborhoods tend to have higher SES and lighter skin tones; these families also maintain a

higher standard of life and are able to acquire a wider variety of food items. Although these families tend to have more food and higher quality foods than poor families, from the perspectives of these higher income families, they still struggle to maintain their higher standard of living. They grew accustomed to a certain lifestyle when food and other items were cheaper and easier to access and now they must do more work, spend more money, and plan more diligently to maintain an equivalent lifestyle. Many families find this frustrating and feel entitled to a simpler food system where they are able to access foods more easily and at lower prices.

In contrast poor families also have to do a lot of work to acquire food, but they remember periods where food acquisition was even more difficult and where their standard of living was much worse than now. Therefore although these families do a lot of work and spend a lot of money to acquire food they do not experience the process of food acquisition as negatively as higher income families; moreover, poor families do not usually feel entitled to a better food system with easier access to foods. Rather they appear to be more satisfied with what is available to them now. Whereas poorer families take on the burden of waiting in line and running their own errands in addition to their regular work, many better off families are able to pay someone to do this for them, or have a household member who does not work outside the home who can dedicate him or herself to this household labor.

Across social class there are different notions of what a decent standard of living constitutes, and the stress surrounding the maintenance of that standard of living is experienced differently across social and economic class. Households that grew accustomed to living well in the periods before 1959 and/or before the 1990s tended to be more distressed about the changes in the state provisioning system than those who were not well off in those periods. Thus, many poor households seem to have less stress and anxiety surrounding food acquisition than better off

families despite the fact that they have a much lower standard of living. However, it is important to point out that although many of the poor families do not complain as much or appear to be as stressed out as well off families, these individuals may be dealing with a great deal of stress but expressing and experiencing it differently.

The deepest logic of the social world can be grasped only if one lunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically-located and dated, but with the objective of constructing it as a 'special case of what is possible.

--Pierre Bourdieu 1998:2

Chapter 5

Virtuous Womanhood: Food and the Maintenance of Harmonious Households and Happy Husbands

One cool spring afternoon Elvira, introduced in chapter two, walked over to my house to tell me that the trip we were supposed to leave for the next day with her husband and son was cancelled. We had been planning to go to Guantanamo on what was to be a family visit and vacation for them, and a chance for me to study the process of the rare trade of bacon making with one of their cousins. Standing in the doorway of my Santiago house, Elvira who had clearly done her hair and makeup and gotten dressed for the occasion of walking over to my house, simply said, "The trip is cancelled."

I invited her in, but she declined, so I asked what happened and Elvira explained that the trip was cancelled because her husband Joaquin couldn't get the weekend off work. I said that the three of us should just go without him. She gasped and said, "I can't go without him, who will make his food and iron his clothes." I said, "He is a grown man, even if he can't make his own food he can just grab some street food, it is only two days." She looked at me like I was totally crazy and said, "Well I can't go, so you and Esteban [her son] can go alone, but you will look like a slut if you go alone with him." She walked away and I called after her, "Will you please

come with us?” She turned and said, “It’s not the correct thing to do” (*No es lo correcto*) as she walked back to her house.

After she left I sat and reflected on what had just happened: the short interaction was loaded with so many things. What had she meant by “the correct thing to do”? And really why couldn't Joaquin feed himself for just two days? Or was this about something bigger?

The study of gender provides an illuminating perspective on social change. To further understand the dynamic interplay between local practices and global forces in late-socialism, a gendered perspective reveals new sites of power and sources of change at the interstices of local and global structures.

In this chapter, I illuminate these questions by revealing the ways in which the increased work involved in food acquisition and meal preparation has been overwhelmingly shifted onto women as part of unpaid household-based labor. I specifically analyze household food related tasks, which are overwhelmingly done by women. The daily practices of preparing breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks punctuated by all of the other work it takes to get those meals into the mouths of husbands, children, and elderly parents can clearly illuminate relationships of women not only to their families but also to the political and social system.

I turn my attention to the ways in which Santiagueros interpret this work within a locally specific ethical frame, that of “the right thing to do,” in order to build on theories of the gender and feminism. This moral framing is part of local practices for cultivating virtuous personhood, a form of working being a “good person” *via* technologies of the self (Foucault 1997). In our discussions of food acquisition and preparation, several participants shared with me some of the characteristics of a “good woman,” often as a way of telling me that if I wanted to be a “good

woman” I should stop doing these things. Some of these good characteristics include: waking up and turning in early; not drinking; not walking alone or with other women in the street too much, especially at night; not talking to men, or going places with men other than husbands, sons, family members; planning meals and running an economically efficient household; serving (food to) husbands and children; cooking meals ahead of the hour of eating; keeping a clean house at all times; and always being available in the home to serve husbands and children, and always ready to receive visitors with coffee and conversation.

This chapter also reveals the daunting amount of household labor it takes to get food on the table in Santiago de Cuba. For most women in my study, their daily lives involve cleaning, and many tasks associated with caring for children, the elderly, and the disabled, as well as food acquisition, preparation, cooking, serving meals, and cleaning up after meals. This work, undertaken overwhelmingly by women, plays a part of the answer to my larger research question—if everyone is talking about how “there is no food,” how is it that Santiagueros end up with meals on the table and little incidence of hunger or malnutrition?

By and large the answer to this question can be found in observing the hard work of Cuban women. I present ethnographic data on the ways in which Santiago women grapple with the seemingly insurmountable household tasks they must undertake and at the same time while they must work outside the home in order to earn more money for the household as state subsidies diminish. I reveal the ways in which women’s work has become overshadowed by the ultimate provider in Cuba: the socialist state. Nonetheless, this household based labor is the other side of “la lucha” and the home is the locus of “inventar” and “resolver”. These notions of ideal womanhood are reinforced through social practices of “visiting” and the interactions that take place at points of food acquisition, especially in borrowing and trading practices. The gossip and

jealousy that circulate by way of these interactions reinforce ideals of the “good Cuban woman.”

Women’s Equality in Socialist Cuba

The Marxist position is that true gender equity can be established only through a socialist revolution, and that under socialism gender equality becomes the standard. Several policies intended to “liberate” women have been commonplace in Cuba, as in other socialist and communist countries, including: encouraging women to work outside the home through the provision of equal work and educational opportunities, creating programs to help with domestic work and childcare, and mobilizing women into political and government positions within the Cuban Communist Party. In Cuba, these efforts were established through the swift creation of laws and policies, but their implementation was relatively slow.

Cuba, like many socialist republics before it, has explicitly written women’s equity into law and over the past fifty years implemented a variety of state-based programs in an effort to ensure women’s equity in practice. Many of these programs focused on gender parity at all levels of the Cuban workforce, as well as programs that tried to ease the labor of childcare and maintaining a household. Through these programs, tasks that were historically (and often still are) thought of as “women’s work” were taken on by the paternal state. The revolutionary project of class equality overshadowed other forms of equality, as it was believed once class equality was established, all other forms of equality would fall into place.

For Fidel Castro the women’s movement was to be a ‘revolution within the revolution’ and not apart from it, thus an autonomous feminist movement that empowered women to work towards equality was never established in Cuba. While women officially have equality in Cuba and many programs were established to ensure this equality, in practice there is still not

substantive gender equality in the home or the workplace (cf. Smith and Padula 1996). Although several programs to improve women's equality were established as part of socialist Cuba after the 1959 revolution, however their underlying purpose was to involve women in the revolutionary project of class equality rather than to establish a feminist movement. Ironically, perhaps most of these programs were created and administered by men.

Even before the 1959 revolution women's participation in the Cuban workforce was relatively high compared to other Latin American countries (Smith and Padula 1996). According to a 1953 census women were nearly 13 percent of the labor force, although one quarter of these women were domestic servants (Smith and Padula 1996). In 1957, 48 percent of the Cuban service-sector employees were women. In one of the earliest comprehensive ethnographies of pre-revolutionary Cuba, Oscar and Ruth Lewis found that issues of class, gender, and race intersected with the dire poverty found in pre-revolutionary Cuba (Lewis et al. 1977a, 1977b). The Lewis's found that the poor households were often female-headed and that these women were unable to rely on men as sources of economic, domestic or emotional support; thus women learned to become self sufficient. After the revolution there was increased support for women to become more autonomous and increased acceptance of consensual unions rather than marriage.

A key imperative of the revolution was to help women enter into the workforce, because involving women in socially productive labor was key to women's "emancipation" according to Marxist thinking. In order to achieve the revolutionary goal of equality, the Cuban state implemented social policies focused on eliminating the structural dimension of social inequality. For Fidel Castro women were key to the success of the revolutionary movement: "It is evident that women need to participate in the fight against exploitation, against imperialism, colonialism, neoliberalism, racism, in two words: the fight for national liberation" (Castro 1974:9). The

Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas) (FMC) was formed in 1960 to formalize women's participation in the 1959 revolution, specifically to organize Cuban women and to encourage membership in the Communist Party. Fidel Castro's sister-in-law, Vilma Espín, ran the organization. Espín described the role of the FMC as "aimed at winning over more and more women, uniting them and with them building a conscious force on behalf of the revolution" (Espín 1975:94). The FMC still exists and consists of neighborhood, regional, municipal, provincial and national units. Local committees have monthly meetings. A woman's participation in the FMC is taken to be an indication of her acceptance of the revolution.

The FMC created a number of programs that were instrumental in moving women into the workforce. They launched the women's literacy campaign in 1961, and developed a program to encourage rural parents to teach their daughters important skills for the labor force such as sewing and clothes making. They were then encouraged to send their daughters to Havana to through the Ana Betancourt program, they were known as *Las Anitas*. Through this program they learned what was considered to be proper grooming, proper ways of dressing and speaking, and domestic skills such as cooking and sewing. These policies were very effective in increasing women's involvement in the formal labor economy.

Before the Revolution there were 194,000 women working in Cuba, about 70 percent of whom were domestic labor (Castro 1974:9). In 1974 there were three times as many women working, 590,000 of those women were working in production, services, and administration, and women made up twenty-five percent of the working population was women (Castro 1974: 9). While the percentage of women working in the military was 13 percent in 1974, women only made up six percent of the functionaries in the socialist party (Castro 1974:9). These numbers continued to rise over time; by 1985 women were 38 percent of the labor force, and in 1993, just

after the fall of the Soviet Union, that figure jumped to 41 percent (Safa 2005: 324).

These programs to encourage female participation in the work force were coupled with attempts to change traditional ideologies of the family and gender roles. By the 1960s there was a national movement away from colonial definitions of a “proper” family, a move away from life-long legal marriage as the idea and increased acceptance of common law marriage and visiting unions as typical Caribbean domestic arrangements.

The “Family Code of 1975” was another official position to promote equality and mutual respect between the sexes, establishing “the right of each spouse to get an education and pursue a profession.” In part, this was a way of encouraging men to share in household responsibilities. As a part of the Family Code couples agreed to share in household duties and child care as a part of their marriage contract. The code also made it legal for spouses to divorce if one spouse was not sharing in household tasks. While the Family Code enabled women to move into the workforce by encouraging and mandating equal access to education and jobs, it did not directly propose specifics for how men should help with household duties and childcare. Cuban men were not interested in losing the household authority they traditionally held, and according to Fidel, “a revolution was occurring among the women of our country, but no such revolution was followed by the men” (Garcia 2008: 99).

In addition to the Family Code and FMC work, the revolution brought many policy and legal changes to the status of women in Cuba. In 1992, a special charter on equality was added to the Cuban Constitution. Article 42 explicitly prohibits discrimination based on sex. Article 44 states that “men and women have equal rights in economic, political, cultural and social endeavors as well as within the family. The Cuban state guarantees women the same

opportunities and possibilities as men, so that women can achieve full participation in the development of the country²⁵” (Gaceta Oficial). Article 295 of the Penal Code (Ley No. 62 (1979)) also provides for sexual equality. Social policies were implemented to carry out this law. For example, the 1971 Plan Jaba was a program that allowed working women to drop off grocery bags and shopping lists on their way to work and store attendants would fill them with goods so that they could pick up and pay for the bags on the way home from work. In 1992 an official program was implemented to cover salary during three months prior to and three months after the birth of a child. An additional six months of unpaid leave may be taken and mothers are guaranteed the right to return to their jobs. The FMC has also already established Cuba’s national daycare system. Inaugurated in 1961 in Havana, there are now approximately 1,000 state subsidized, full-day childcare programs in Cuba, providing care for 184,000 children.

Despite socialist programs to aid women in their ability to move beyond the walls of the home, many still remained outside of the workforce, or if they did work outside of the home they were still burdened with a full load of domestic responsibilities; that many could only find service jobs further reified their roles as caretakers.

Yet despite all of these legal frameworks and official programs, there were fractures between the official Marxist ideology and Cuban cultural norms for social and family life. Traditionally the home was thought to be women’s domain, a social area over which they have control and are kept safe from the dangers of life in the streets. As throughout Latin America, the *casa/calle* (house/street) divide is used to mark the distinction between women’s space and

²⁵ Well before this, under Fulgencia Batista’s 1940 Constitution, discrimination based on sex was prohibited. Women gained a critical step toward equality with this measure that also called for equal pay for equal work.

men's space, with "men dominant in the public sphere and women in the private sphere of the household" (Safa 1995:47–48). The notion of the calle/casa division of gendered spaces has persisted since Cuba's independence from Spain (Garth 2010; Smith and Padula 1996). This categorization of women's place in the world is often linked to white bourgeois Spanish thinking, however it can be seen across racial lines throughout various economic classes in Cuban society²⁶.

Although matrifocality is most immediately observed in women-headed households, and although women-headed households are disproportionately found in Afro-Cuban families, the concept of matrifocality was applicable to all of the families I worked with in Santiago de Cuba, regardless of SES, race, and the presence or absence of fathers and husbands. The high proportion of Afro-Cubans in Santiago de Cuba makes discussions about the impact of slavery upon household practices, and the ongoing radicalized hierarchy of values in Cuba, particularly relevant.

Gender Roles After the Special Period

The Special Period of the 1990s brought many of these services and programs to a halt. During the economic crisis GDP declined about 40 percent, and as Soviet Material aid ended many Cuban state programs collapsed. By 1997 women's unemployment grew to about 10.1

²⁶ However, as Helen Safa (2005) has argued, the perception among Cuban people and within the Cuban government that male-headed households are more desirable than female-headed ones is not only an expression of racial hierarchies, but also of class divisions. As many of these class divisions have blurred through the policies of socialism, there has been a convergence of domestic practices between white and black and between formerly middle class and working class sectors of the population, even while people retain distinctions about 'respectable' household forms which maintain racialized and class-driven undertones.

percent about double that of men (Uriarte 2002:28). Nevertheless women are a crucial part of the workforce. By 1999, women made up 66 percent of Cuban professionals and technicians and as a group they had attained higher educational levels than men. Despite the equal pay for equal work mandates, women still earned less than men, making 80 to 85 percent of male salaries, because men were in higher paying jobs, chiefly in the managerial sector (Núñez Sarmiento 2001:44–47, quoted in Safa 2005: 328). Furthermore, to get a more accurate picture of women's rates of employment it is important to remember that some professional women have been leaving state-sector jobs for higher paying work in tourism and unofficial jobs on the black market.

In recent years the workforce in general has been drastically reduced, especially after the national lay offs of 2010 due to budget cuts, increasing numbers of women are leaving the official workforce and are primarily responsible for household labor. That is to say, although I cannot make an accurate estimate of how many there are actually more women and more people in generally who are earning money in unreported black market work. As unemployment is on the rise women still take on the bulk of unpaid household labor, even if they work outside the home and their male spouse is unemployed.

Despite the fact that women have been entering the labor force since the revolution, and they still have very high graduation rates and hold professional positions, Cuba's feminist movement has not been successful in creating equality in many aspects of everyday life. My data show that, with few exceptions, women are responsible for nearly all of the unpaid household labor, and as the state suffers economically this labor is becoming harder and harder to accomplish. As previously shown, I found that women (working outside the home or not) must dedicate large amounts of their time to food shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and child and elder care. Men spend very little time on these tasks and instead men (working outside the home

or not) focus on tasks such as: fixing, constructing and repairing machines, appliances, buildings, etc.; and the elusive activity of “being in the street” (*en la calle*) which includes acquiring goods and making social connections to get goods and services, but it can also include hanging out, drinking, and having sexual affairs.

Local Views on Gender Roles After the Special Period

In some of my interviews research participants reflected on the changing status of women in contemporary Cuban society through discussions about women working outside the home, the gendered division of labor, and gender equity. Carla, introduced in chapter four, did not feel like any policies, pre- or post-revolution had really changed her situation:

I have worked my whole life. Since I finished the 4th grade-- that was the last year of school I did before working as a domestic in people's houses. I worked in houses before the revolution and after, nothing changed [*sic*]. I always had to come home after cooking and cleaning on the other side of town to do the same thing in my house. I raised my four kids, their father was in the street. It was really hard, but I worked, I worked for everything. I went to the market. I made the food. I raised pigs and chickens to sell for us. Now I am almost 70 years old and I don't work outside the home anymore but I still do everything around here. I am raising my grandkids and great grandkids—they are here all the time and do you see their mothers? I work and work and work.

Here Carla reflected on her life with a tone of anger and annoyance. While she may have been annoyed at the naiveté of my questions, which implied that things should have changed over her life course and after significant political events, she nevertheless strongly affirmed that nothing has changed in her life. She went on to list the types of work she has done, inside and

outside the home, for pay or not, and she points out that no one else has taken up this work, though she insinuates that the children's parents should be doing it. Because these other people are not there, she has had to take on this labor.

Figure 19: Women Collecting Rations



Her reflections illuminate the larger point that women have historically taken on the dual burden of housework and plus work outside the home. In her case, she continues to take on this labor, caring for the children so that their mothers have less of a work burden. In my study population it is very common for grandmothers to care for grandchildren to alleviate some stress from their daughters lives.

Carla's reflections on over 50 years of household labor are in contrast with many male views on household labor. Berto²⁷, a 40 year-old black man who works as a gardener reflected on the benefits of the 1959 revolution for his family:

The childcare center is very cheap for us, because it is based on my wife's pay. She gets paid less. She takes our son at 7 a.m. and she goes to work. On her way home she stops to buy food for dinner. Usually either she cooks or my mother will cook something. My wife takes care of all of those kinds of things.

Berto fails to mention that in addition to dropping their son off at childcare in the morning his wife also picks him up at the end of the day. This is all in addition to her job, as a nurse's aid, which, as he notes, pays less than his job. Berto quickly glosses over the labor that his wife and mother contribute to the household, indicating his indifference to how central these tasks are to making the household function.

With respect to the gendered division of labor in household food acquisition, Mickey, a 41-year-old middle class Santiaguero who identifies as black, explained his family's practices for acquiring food and other goods for the home:

It is really about muscles. I go to the market when we need a lot because I have more muscle to carry it up the hill. [My wife] goes when it is just a few things because she can carry it. She does most of the shopping for little things. I do the big trips. Things are changing now [. . .].

I pushed him further, by inquiring about how things were changing, and he added:

²⁷ Berto is not included among the 22 households. I did an interview with him in addition to the households formally included in the study.

Sometimes it is the grandmothers that do all of the cooking in the house--this is not new, but other times children--both boys and girls will make things and men as well. For example, sometimes I make the breakfast at home--it is something easy that I can do. Or my son will help prepare fruit or the salad for meals. Things didn't used to be this way.

While it is true that some men appear to be taking on more household-based labor than previous generations, this is often a sensitive topic in that it is still not socially accepted. Mickey, like Berto, underestimates the amount of work that Cuban women still must undertake despite the fact that increasingly men and children help out with small household tasks.

Figure 20: Men In the Street



Some men and women feel that having men engage in household labor is too difficult for them emotionally and socially. For instance, Reina²⁸, a 54-year-old white female living in a middle class Santiago neighborhood, told me that having her husband help out around the house was what led to her divorce. As part of the 2010 layoffs her husband was out of work for the first time in his adult life, and rather than have him off “in the street” she sought to put him to work on the house. She had him repair a bathroom, refinish the furniture, take out the trash, as well as small everyday tasks like going to the market. One day she asked him to clean the kitchen, a task that usually falls under women’s labor. She told me that the next day he packed up his stuff and told her that, “He wanted a woman who would take care of him, not one that was his boss.” She added that her efforts to keep him in the house and thus prevent him from cheating on her had been in vain, because he moved out of her house and right into his mistress’s house.

Reina’s story and those like it circulate quickly and widely among men and women who spend many hours a day visiting and gossiping with friends. During my study I overheard or was told stories like this, that is stories told by both men and women of relationship problems where the blame was placed on the female partner’s actions or way of treating the male partner. These stories reinforce local ideas of traditional gender roles, fueling fear among those who deviate.

Now that I have outlined these more general ideas about women and gender roles in Santiago, I turn to an in-depth analysis of household food-related work. I begin with two examples of households where both partners work outside the home for pay, and follow with two where women stay at home—one a single mother, the other a married homemaker.

²⁸ Although Reina was not included in my 22 household sample, her perspective reflects that of many other female study participants.

Figure 21: Man Repairing Motorcycle



Working Women: How can you balance all of these things and work?

Case 1: Maria Julia, a single working mother

Maria Julia, briefly introduced in chapter three, is a workingwoman and mother. She is 45 years old, and has bachelors and masters degrees in architecture and urban planning. She works for the city historian's office mostly focusing on heritage building repairs and laws intended to maintain the historical integrity of Santiago's historic district in the city center. She works 40 hours a week, but is able to do about a third of her work from home²⁹. This works out well allowing her to drop 8-year-old Jose at school, go to work, and then leave early to pick him up and finish her office work at home. She lives with and cares for her parents—who, though

²⁹ She is only able to do this because her brother, who lives in Spain, sent her a laptop. She doesn't have Internet at home, but is able to do a lot of her typing work at home.

they are very independent, need her help with some things, such as cleaning the house, doing their laundry, and any heavy lifting.

My first day working with her family I arrived at 6:45 a.m. because she told me that she got “up early,” but turned out that by early she meant 4:45 a.m.! By the time I had arrived she had already made lunch and dinner for the day. In addition, she was already halfway done cleaning the house when she stopped midway to prepare breakfast for herself, her son, boyfriend, and parents just as I arrived. She explained that she usually did things this way, so that she would dust, sweep and mop the whole house except the kitchen before she finished her cooking—then she would finish the cooking for the whole day, including breakfast, and finally, after serving and eating breakfast, clean the kitchen as her last task before showering and getting ready for work.

Maria Julia is what I would call hyper-vigilant about cooking and cleaning. Since she doesn't go out to work everyday I wondered why she didn't just save the cleaning for her days off, or why she didn't enlist some help from the three other adults who live in her household. When I tried to ask her this question she simply said “no es correcto” ([it's] not right [to ask for help]). I found this confusing: What was so wrong with asking for help? I kept it in mind to explore further.

As I arrived that day she was already serving breakfast—one fried egg for each person, one roll of bread pan de bola, coffee for everyone but her son who had a yogurt and zapote smoothie (*batido de zapote con yogurt y azucar*). Her parents shared a banana as well. They ate quickly, clearly still sleepy and in a sort of automaton morning mode. As soon as they finished

Maria Julia cleared their plates and washed them. She swept and mopped the kitchen and wiped off all of the counter tops.

As she dumped the mop bucket in the plants she kicked off her shoes and ran into the bathroom where she turned on the shower—cold water only in the mornings, and not a full bath; she just quickly rinses and makes sure to not get her hair wet—which is set in big rollers—another thing she must have done around 5 a.m. that morning. After she gets out of the bathroom she throws on her robe, gets her son dressed, his backpack ready and plops him down in front of the TV while she finishes getting herself ready. She dresses and puts on makeup in about 10 minutes and grabs her son and flies out the door. Wearing high heels she walks to the corner of the block where her son’s school is and drops him off. Then she walks back past her house to the bus stop; some mornings she has to take a moto because she is running behind, but because I was with her we had to take the bus—she felt worried about being late so I said we could take motos, something she hates to have to do because it is expensive. She said, “50 cents when you only make 20 dollars a month is hard to justify when you could take the bus for a tenth of a cent.”

A man on the bus gave her his seat and she was very grateful. I stood as she said to me:

It’s so unfortunate that men and people in general in Cuba have lost the common courtesy to give up their seats for women and the elderly. Before a young lady would never have had to stand-- some young man would have given up his seat for you, but Cubans have changed.

I told her that I did not mind standing. She replied:

Well you didn't do that much this morning so it's probably ok, but when I work like a "bitch" (*perra*) in the house all morning and then I have to stand on the bus on the way to work I get angry! (*me molesta*) It's the least they can do—[after] all that we do for them.

Before I "dropped her off" at work, I asked about her plans for lunch. She said that she would not eat lunch, that she waits until she gets home because it's too much work to pack a lunch and too expensive to eat at a restaurant and she is distrustful of the safety of street food, so she just doesn't eat until she gets home around 6 p.m. She must have seen my dismay because she was quick to add: "I've been doing it for 10 years and I am fine, don't worry."

At 5 p.m. I waited for MJ outside of her office, she came out around 5:15 p.m., and we headed toward the bus—I had eaten a pork sandwich for lunch so I was sated. But I could see that she was completely deflated—she was exhausted, weak, it was hard for her to stand. She had to sit in the shade to wait for the bus because she thought she might pass out standing and that she couldn't even sit on a moto. We got on the bus, got a seat, and twenty minutes later we got off at our stop and she ran into the house, went straight to her room, changed into her house clothes. Her mother had picked up her son already and he was watching cartoons drinking a "Kool-Aid" like drink. She kissed him on the forehead and went into the kitchen where she immediately served herself a heaping plate full of the rice with chicken (*arroz con pollo*) she had made in the morning for dinner that night. By 7 p.m. she was nodding off in the rocking chair in front of the television and I headed home.

As I would find out over the course of a month studying her household, this day was quite typical for Maria Julia. To understand the logics behind her vigilance over her household

some background information is necessary. I first met Maria Julia during my first research trip to Santiago in 2008. I was introduced to her by her now ex-husband, who holds a high position in the local Santiago government. During my time there Maria Julia discovered that her husband had been having an affair with his coworker, who was younger than her, and that the other woman was pregnant with his child. Although she wanted him to stay with her and still financially support the second child, instead he left her for the other woman. Maria Julia was devastated; she could not understand why her husband would choose to leave her when she did everything she should have done to “maintain the house” and bring in an income working in his office. She even would have “done the right thing” and stayed with him despite his (now) public infidelities. She felt that she was entitled to keep him: she had played by the rules, and done what was expected. Instead she ended up a single mother with an ex-husband that barely even spoke to her.

Maria Julia’s job required that she continue to interact with her ex-husband. To recover after the breakup she took some time off, and returned to her job about five months after he left her. She told me that she was determined to prove to him that she was a perfect woman, a perfect mother, and that he had made the biggest mistake of his life. She went to work beautifully dressed and made up day in and day out but he didn't seem to notice. Eventually she started drinking. Reflecting on that period, she said she was so ashamed that she confessed to only one other person. At the same time she was sure that others had noticed and judged her for it. However by the time I was working with her household, things had turned around: she had stopped drinking, was dieting, and had a boyfriend who seemed to be good to her and her young son.

Maria Julia is a highly educated woman with an excellent job by Santiago standards. She is in a relatively comfortable socioeconomic position and able to provide a more-than adequate lifestyle for herself and her son. But her dedication to the household contrasts with her own dietary practices; she neglects herself and does not practice self care, instead putting all of her energy into caring for others. I suspect that her hyper-vigilance around housework is tied up with the trauma that she experienced when her husband left her. She has a clear set of ideas about what a good woman should do and feels that she failed to perform this role sufficiently in the past, so now she must work tirelessly to maintain a perfect household.

She told me that her desire to keep up the appearance that everything in her household and her relationships is perfect is a response to the stories that have circulated about her among the women in the neighborhood and in her social circle. Although I did not tell her, I had heard some of these rumors firsthand from her friends. They question Maria Julia: what did she do wrong? They feel that there must have been something that she didn't achieve, which was why her husband left her for a younger woman. She gets wind of these rumors and it further fuels her desire for perfectionism. Thus, she will not ask for help, she wants to prove that she can do it all. She is completely exhausted but willing to push on so that her son can show up at school with Kool-Aid instead of water, illustrating her achievements as a mother. At the same time she feels that this virtuous work should grant her certain rights and privileges, such as a seat on the bus. She told me that while her perfection did not make her husband come back, something she wanted for a long time, she does have a new man in her life, and thus her perfection begets a reward valued by women in Santiago: the stable companionship of a man (cf. Browner and Lewin 1982).

Except for the fact that she works outside the home, something a traditional woman would never have done, but something only a modern woman and ideal socialist would undertake Maria Julia embodies a traditional white Cuban ideal of womanhood. She measures her self worth by the appearance of her family, her home, and herself, and she garners respect by maintaining a relationship with a male partner.

Case 2: Caridad and Jorge Chino, a working mother and a rare helpful husband

Jorge Chino (JC), 45, and Caridad, 42, were one of the few couples in my study who both had formal employment outside the home. They are an upper class family and both identify as white. Their two children lived with them in their own modest home located on the same property as Caridad's parents house, in one of Santiago's upper-middle class neighborhoods where the pre-revolutionary wealthy class had lived. Many of the very rich left Cuba after the revolution and their homes were seized by the state. Now largely in disrepair, these homes were distributed to party members and those who fought for the 1959 revolution. Caridad's father acquired the property in this manner.

Caridad was really enthusiastic about participating in my study; she saw herself as a successful representation of women who work outside the home and still maintain what are viewed locally as good mothering practices. Caridad and JC are also exceptional in that they have been married for over twenty years, neither of them previously married another person nor had children outside of the marriage. Together they raised their two children Jorgito (17 years old) and Vira (8 years old), who are exceptionally far apart in age for most Santiago families.

Caridad and JC waited many years to have a second child because their first was born with a disability. Both JC and Caridad had worked tirelessly to navigate their ways through the

state bureaucracy and acquire the resources necessary to care for their disabled son. They had successfully gotten home health care nurses, special transportation and schooling for Jorgito, and they always kept him in the most modern wheelchairs available in Santiago.

To the surprise of many, Caridad has continued to work full-time outside of the home before and after both of her pregnancies. She works standard hours from around 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at a state sponsored art institute. She confided that she is very grateful to have been able to keep working, as it gives her a sense of self outside of her role as a wife and mother. She explained that she really enjoys her work and also feels that through her connections at her office she is able to bring extra resources beyond her salary back to the household. She has developed relationships that have helped her family acquire food, construction materials, entertainment such as movies and music, transportation, and even a family vacation at a local resort; all for free or at discounted rates.

Caridad and Jorge Chino are a rare couple who share household responsibilities. They equally share the tasks of food acquisition, each picking up specific things for the household on a daily basis. Jorge usually gets the rationed foods and stops at the cheaper markets on the outskirts of town when he is out there for work. He also acquires some food items directly from his employer. Caridad does some food shopping on her breaks from work. Since her office is located in the city center its convenient for her to pick up items as needed at the Plaza, one of the largest markets in the city. She also stops at small vegetable stands on her way home from work each day to purchase additional food items. Caridad is in charge of the laundry and the major household cleaning (sweeping, mopping, dusting, etc.). While Jorge Chino is largely in charge of getting the children ready for bed at night and for school in the morning. He also tidies up the house and make sure that it's cleared enough that Caridad can do her part of the cleaning.

Another exceptional characteristic of their relationship is that JC is one of the few men in my study that cooked for the household on a fairly regular basis. Because of the nature of JC's work as a taxi driver, there are days when he is off work and able to return home in the late afternoon before his wife gets home from work around 6 p.m. Without fail, if he gets home first he makes dinner for the family. One such afternoon I observed JC make a meal of Cuban style meat loaf, *tostones* (fried green plantains), yellow rice and salad. Through his job he sometimes is able to access beef cheaply on the black market.

Figure 22: JC's Meat Loaf



On this particular day, he acquired some low quality beef and decided to grind it up and make meat loaf (*carne prensada*), he added some pork to the beef and ground them together. He turned on the radio and listened to the late afternoon programming as he ground the meat. Once the meat was ground he rummaged through some big mesh bags next to the refrigerator that held plastic bottles, jars, cans, and other things they thought might come in handy. He found an aluminum can that was the right size for the meat loaf and rinsed it. He filled the rice cooker with water and set it to cook. I must have looked puzzled, for he offered up that he was heating water

in the rice cooker rather than the stovetop to save gas. As he mixed minced garlic and onion into the ground meat, seasoning it with salt and black pepper, he told me stories of occasions when he had dined with foreign clients and he reflected on how strange their eating habits were to him. He was particularly struck when he went for lunch to a buffet with two Canadian businessmen. He told me that he piled his plate up “this big” indicating about a foot high with “meat—beef, ham, turkey, chicken, pork”, he listed them off. He was shocked when they all sat down and the two men had huge plates full of lettuce with cucumbers, onions, tomatoes—“they were eating only vegetables for lunch. How strange!” He added that by now he had seen it enough to know that “you all (*ustedes*) eat that way.” He said “I know that it’s healthier, but a Cuban just could not eat a plate of lettuce for lunch, we need meat, something substantial, real food. . .” I told him that I had observed many Cuban meals thus far and that I had indeed seen what he had said—most meals were meat, rice, beans, and *viandas* (tubers and plantains), but I had not yet seen anyone make ground meat in a can. Where did he learn this?

He told me that he had learned to cook from his mother, who, in his opinion, was an excellent cook. She taught all of her kids to cook, two girls and two boys, in that she felt that cooking was a life skill everyone should have. He continued telling me that he loved cooking because it was “*una arte de inventar*” (an art of invention) and he loved to take new ingredients and make them into unique dishes— something that his mother did not do—she had her repertoire and didn't really stray from it. He said that although now he just “invented” on his own, it was Nitza Villapol’s television program and her book *Cocina Al Minuto* that first taught him to “*inventar*” in the kitchen (cf. Garth In Press). He stopped cooking for a minute, picked up the bag full of random bottles and cans to reveal a big old tin cracker box. He put the box on the table, opened it and took out a stack of pocket sized cookbooks, underneath which was a stack of

tattered pages that are all that remain of his copy of *Cocina Al Minuto*. He started flipping through the pages and found for me Nitza's recipe for *carne prensada*. He put it in front of me and explained that when he first got married to Caridad he would cook occasionally, for instance only on Sundays or just the meat dish. But then their son was born with special needs and Caridad got really depressed and stressed out about taking care of their son, so JC started to cook dinner most nights. It was Villapol's book that got him through. This was in the early 90s when ingredients were really, really scarce (cf. Garth 2012). He spoke at length about how difficult life was for most Cubans then, but noted that his job at a local store was what saved his family. It was during this time that he really learned how to cook, how to "invent" in the kitchen, and since things are better now, cooking has become easier and easier until now it's a fun thing for him to take some new ingredient and "make art".

What does it mean for Caridad's sense of womanhood that her husband helps so much around the house? In turn, how does Jorge Chino's contribution to the household reflect upon his sense of manhood? How do others perceive this household? In fact, this exceptional case is actually the ideal for many women in my study, many of whom stated that they would like to be able to work outside the home and rely on their husbands to assist with household-based labor. Both women and men judge men who take on too much household labor as being effeminate and relinquishing their household authority. Even women like Reina, who believed that her husband left her because she had him do some household work, gossip about other households where women "let" men take on some of the household labor. JC's relationship with his mother, and that fact that she was willing, even adamant, about teaching all her children to cook certainly shaped his values and sense of responsibility in the household.

Although gossip and envy of households where men help with the labor is common, in Caridad and Jorge Chino's case the gossip did not have an envious tone. Rather, due to the fact that their son was disabled, people in other households seemed to pity and feel sorry for the couple, referring to them as "*pobrecitos*" (poor things) who had been through too much to maintain the traditional roles of a Cuban household. On the contrary, however Caridad and Jorge Chino did not see themselves this way at all, at least not at this point in their lives. Rather, they felt that they had found a good rhythm that balanced the household tasks with economic and social needs in a way that made their family life and their romantic relationship flourish. The fact that they are such strong socialists also helped to reinforce the idea that their way of dividing household labor was the best thing for their family and for *la patria*.

Case 3: Regina, a single mom, does not work outside the home

From the city center, I walked through Santiago's commercial district, a few streets lined on either side with state stores, shelves filled with virtually all the same items, mostly made in Cuba with some imported exceptions. Turning out of the commercial district I walked down a long street of mobile food vendors, again mostly selling the same things—during these winter months it was lettuce, tomato, papaya, and other fruits and vegetables. At the end of this street I crossed from the city center neighborhood into "*El Hoyo*" (The Hole), which is the start of a large marginalized neighborhood. From the neighborhood's edge I walked downhill (as most of the area is low lying and thus subject to flooding and the runoff of all of the city's water). At the top of the hill one can see that during some past era this was a relatively nice neighborhood—some colonial era houses remain intact through crumbling, but for the most part the houses have been sectioned off into smaller dwellings, or collapsed and new structures have been built with a

hodgepodge of tin, wood, and repurposed brick. Moving downhill from this main street there is a stark change in the landscape. The sidewalk ends, and a perpetual puddle of watery sludge lines the side of the partially paved, partially dirt road. There are no trees, no greenery at all along the street, though there are trees that pop up from behind and between dwellings, are guarded by those who value the coolness that their shade provides in the summer. –fieldnotes February 2011.

Walking down this hill to the bottom of the first of many Santiago area valleys, I arrived at a narrow door with a *mal de ojo* symbol painted on it—to keep away bad spirits and evil people. This is the door to Regina’s house. Regina is a 46-year-old low income black-identified Santiaguera. As I arrived at her house around 8:30 in the morning Regina was still laying in bed. Of all of the heads of household in my study Regina woke up and started her day the latest. Regina’s three year old grandson, Chichi, had opened the front door and was sitting just outside it, next to a small length of cement that rounds down to a make-shift gutter that has a constant flow of wet trash, and sewage that gathers just to the south side of their house in big puddle around a clogged drain. He was sitting in his underwear, singing a popular reggeton song while stirring around the sludgy mix with a piece of wire. He saw me, looked up quickly and then returned to his focus on the sludge, he yelled “*Mama! La Americana está!*” (Mama! the American is here!), and he slightly inclined his head toward the door signaling me to go inside.

As I walked in, I had to stop in the living room to let my eyes adjust to the dark; the house has no windows, no light comes in from the outside. As I stood waiting for my eyes to adjust Regina got out of bed—which is in the kitchen—and yelled for me to head on back, as she looked around to assess what there was to eat. I sat on her bed and we made small talk, while she gathered three cloves of garlic, half an onion and a pack of red food coloring powder. She

held it all in the palm of one hand and said, “This won’t get us very far.” As she put on her shoes and started walking out of the house, she said, “You can come or you can stay.”

This is how almost all of Regina’s mornings begin. She wakes up late and the first thing she does when she gets out of bed is see what there is to eat, and its almost always virtually nothing. She doesn’t bathe, change her clothes, or do anything other than put her shoes on and go out to “*buscar algo pa’ comer*” (look for something to eat). Her first stop is her neighbor’s house where she pokes her head in and asks them “*¿que hay?*” “What is there?” Her neighbor, who is like a sister to her, gives her the daily update on how the bread is that day, what is in the ration station, what’s at the corner market, and what the regular morning street vendors have. She tells Regina about any “deals” and any “rip-offs”.

On most mornings, within thirty minutes Regina has returned to the house with enough ingredients to create a decent breakfast for at least a third of the people who live in her house, in order of priority—children (youngest to oldest), pregnant women, sick women, other women, sick men, young men, working men, and then finally older, out of work men. There are 24 people who officially live in Regina’s house, which she inherited when her mother passed away. Four of her siblings had nowhere else to live, so they and their spouses remained in the house. Over the years these nine adults and most of their children all have listed Regina’s house as their official dwelling, which is where they receive their food ration. Assessing how many of them actually live there at any particular time is quite complicated because they tended to come and go, so I decided to focus my study on the eight people that I observed to almost always eat at least two meals a day there.

Regina is a poor, black Santiaguera. She has been divorced twice, and she has two children, one from each marriage. When her mother was alive, she was the primary caregiver for both her children and Regina worked as a professional dancer. She danced with one of the top rated dance troupes in Cuba and travelled to over 15 countries performing all over the world. After her mother passed away, Regina stopped working and became the primary caregiver for her disabled daughter, who was 26 years old at the time of my study. Regina receives a small amount of money from the state as compensation for her care work. That is the only money Regina lives off and it is scarcely enough to feed her daughter let alone herself and the others that linger at mealtime.

While breakfast ingredients are often acquired relatively quickly, putting lunch together is generally much more of an ordeal. Regina often spends precious time and energy walking across Santiago looking for the best deals on food so that she can put together a filling meal with very little money. Like Maria Julia, Regina is completely exhausted by the end of the day. Between her role as the sole person dedicated to acquiring and cooking food for the household, she also spends several hours a day caring for and cleaning up after her disabled incontinent daughter. She does laundry by hand daily in the kitchen, hanging clothes to dry off the barbed wire fence that demarcates her property from the neighbors'. Impelled by the fear that the smells of urine and feces will remain in the air should a guest arrive, she scrubs the floors with kerosene at least once a day.

In some ways Regina's dark skin color and low social class place her within a different set of standards for women in Cuba. Historically, the calle/casa divide discussed above was specifically referred to white women of higher social classes, indeed under slavery enslaved black women were in the streets running errands for households, working in agriculture, and

other services. In the post-slavery era and continuing through today, employment as domestic workers is more commonly undertaken by non-white, lower social class women, who are required to move through the streets as part of their work. These historical and contemporary structures have influenced the ways in which black women and women of lower classes are judged with respect to their level of proper womanliness.

The daily practices of food acquisition vary across neighborhood, skin color, and social class in Santiago de Cuba. Regina's social networks are limited mainly to friends and family who live in the same neighborhood, many of whom are also struggling to make ends meet. Borrowing and lending food is a common daily practice in this neighborhood, but given that most living there are resource poor often borrowing can only go so far as an approach to food acquisition. Regina must also rely on kin networks outside her neighborhood and social class, a situation where she feels uncomfortable and feels more indebted to her lender than if it were someone in her own neighborhood.

When Regina moves beyond her neighborhood she is judged by a more general standard of "right behavior" which is largely based on white, middle class, socialist ideals. While budgeting and planning are upheld as the ultimate virtues of women in her close social circle, her inability to plan and properly control her home environment reflects poorly on her within this larger social realm. Despite these struggles and although she has one of the most dire food access situations of my entire study populations, Regina was among the happiest and least overtly stressed participants in the study. It could be that she expresses stress in a different way that I did not observe, it could be that she has grown so accustomed to living in these conditions that she no longer gets angry and stressed about it, or it could be that she and the women of her social circle have a different set of values and different things are important for living a "good life".

Indeed she is one of the only participants in my study who had repeatedly had opportunities to leave the island and live a much more economically comfortable life but she stressed to me that she chose to come back to Cuba every time because she loves her country and loves her way of life.

Figure 23: A Street Cockfight



Case 4: Marta, retired professor now fulltime caretaker for elderly parents

Marta, a 67-year-old retired professor of history, was thrilled to be a part of my study as a way to demonstrate her frugality and skill at stretching her pesos to feed her family. Marta lives with her husband, her two adult children, a live-in maid who she describes as “an adopted daughter,” her father-in-law, and her mother. Marta and her family are middle class and identify as white. She is the primary caretaker for her father-in-law who is 95 years old and her mother who is 99 years old. In addition to her unpaid caretaking duties, Marta supplements the household income by renting several rooms in her house at an hourly rate. She also offers food for sale to the lodgers. She does not have a permit for this work, so both the hourly room rental

and the sale of meals is illegal but she had managed to keep this business going for nearly 30 years. Her children and maid help with the food preparation and keeping the rooms clean.

Figure 24: An “Orderly” Home



I had initially approached her daughter, Ariana, who, at age 47, was still working age and met the inclusion criteria for my study, but Marta quickly stole me away from Ariana. I found myself at Marta’s side day in and day out in what seemed more like finishing school than an anthropological study. On my first day in the household Marta spent no less than two hours lecturing me on how, “Nowadays there is a lack of formal education, manners, etiquette, in the family, children are spoiled and the “deformation” is because of the way mothers raise their children.”

Marta took it upon herself to show me how through her exemplary practices, a woman who is diligent and knows how to run her household can save a lot of money through meal planning and her approach to food shopping. She connected her views on women's household planning and control to "forming" children into respectable adults,

A lazy woman will just feed her family pizza and spaghetti because it is easy, but it is expensive and does not have balanced nutrients. A woman who feeds her family pizza teaches her children that it is ok to just eat crap, that they can always have what is easy and tastes good. But a good woman will plan her family meals, taking the time to make beans, to cook vegetables in new ways, and only give her family pizza as a treat. This teaches the kids that hard work is rewarded.

Marta's vigilance over her household economy is certainly tied to the fact that she also runs a business selling food and is looking to make a profit. Due to her insistence, the entire family understands this and her husband and children were essential soldiers in her war against wasted time and money. They help by using their own social networks to scout out deals across the city on food items, and the sheer power of numbers helps them to efficiently and cheaply maintain a very frugal household.

Figure 25: Preparing Meals



Marta, though she appears to be relaxed, has a very stressful and highly structured daily schedule. She wakes up at 6 a.m. every morning. She cleans up after her incontinent mother before making and serving everyone breakfast by 7:30 a.m. After she cleans up breakfast and gets dressed herself, she has a daily practice of taking a kitchen inventory, that is, she assesses what foods are left, how she can put them together into meals without buying anything and whether or not she needs to buy additional items. She has two refrigerators and two large freezers and constantly monitors their contents to make sure that nothing spoils. She will then make a list of any food items that are needed that day and items that will be needed soon so that she and the rest of the family can start to look for deals. She gives money to her maid to buy any items immediately needed. She keeps a ledger with all of the money coming into the house and all of the money going out of the house, keeping track of which items are for the business and which are for the family, as well as how the business profits flow into the family needs.

To ensure that she gets the most out of her money Marta is sure to use every part of the meat that she buys at the market. One afternoon she bought a pork leg and spent hours guiding me through how to carefully butcher the meat so she could get the most out of every part. She explained how you must carefully separate the skin from the meat, frying the skin to make chicharrones. You must carefully debone the meat, so you can use the bones for soups and broth but without losing any precious meat in the butchering process. The main part of the leg is reserved for steaks, which she slices as thinly as possible to serve as many people as possible. She saves all of the secondary parts to use for flavoring beans, rice and soups. If there is enough extra fat she renders the fat into cooking oil.

My days with Marta were peppered with her mantras. “*Planificación de la comida en el hogar lo mas importante*” (Food planning in the home is the most important), “*Variedad es*

sumamente importante” (Variety is most important), “*No vivir para comer, comer para vivir*” (Don’t live to eat, eat to live), and “*En mucha comida lo que te trae es poca salud, Es un derroche*” (A lot of food brings little health, it is a waste) are among the many she repeated to me (and to herself) daily.

Marta spends about four hours per day doing direct care work for her mother and father-in-law. With the exception of breakfast she does not cook the household’s meals but rather manages and directs others to do the cooking and cleaning. She has unique and specific ideas about a balanced diet and tries to always make sure that whoever is cooking not only uses the ingredients in such a way that nothing in her household goes bad, but also combines them to make meals that balance proteins and starches. For instance, she is adamantly opposed to serving protein with protein, so she would never make beans with pork in them served with ham, and equally opposed to serving starches with starches— as she said to me, “you will never see rice and bread together on her table.” She also makes sure that at least one vegetable is served with lunch and dinner, a practice somewhat rare in Cuban households.

Marta spends a lot of time cultivating social relationships with both friends and the vendors she buys from. Whenever she is able to finish her household duties with time to spare, rather than relaxing in front of the television or sitting down to rest, she goes out into the street near her house to chat with the men selling things. She checks on the prices, asks them how business is doing and talks to them about their personal lives. She told me that she does this so that they will “keep her in mind” both for future discounts and free things and with respect to her business. She explains that this cultivation of social and business relationships is critical for making ends meet in her household.

In many ways Marta's feelings about her work to maintain her household are similar to those of Maria Julia. Both women invest large amounts of time in care of dependents; both maintain a high level of order and control over their kitchens and households. While Maria Julia's vigilance focuses on perfection of appearance, Marta's pride lies in her frugality and the ability to produce a variety of different dishes for her family while spending as little as possible. These two women are characteristic of a more general white, middle class ideal of womanhood that many Santiagueras strive for.

Figure 26: A Wedding at the Masonic Lodge



Food, Household Labor, and the Ideals of Womanhood

While there are exceptions, by and large as the food ration is reduced and state services in general contract the burden of work to ensure that families still eat and maintain some sort of decent quality of life has been shifted onto women in Santiago de Cuba. Despite the efforts for

equality under socialism, deeply entrenched patriarchal gender ideologies still remain in place. Many scholars have observed that women, especially in difficult economic situations, consistently shoulder domestic work.

This chapter has built on this work to show how the ideals of womanhood are reinforced by men, women, and society at large, and continue to drive women to strive toward perfecting the balance between work outside the home and maintaining a perfectly clean home invariably with delicious meals at the family table (cf. Browner 2000). The cumbersome, daily household labor done mostly by women goes unseen and uncompensated, but constitutes a significant portion of the efforts made by Santiagueros in everyday life to use the faltering food system and maintain a decent standard of food consumption.

This chapter has also revealed the ways in which household-based labor largely undertaken by women is the other, invisible side of *la lucha*. While a large body of anthropological literature has already demonstrated that this unpaid and thankless labor often falls onto women, in this chapter I revealed the ways that Santiagueros reproduced this ideal and tied it to virtue. This local ideal of the “good woman” is upheld in practice through the tangible results of women’s work—a clean home, well fed children, a well kept physical appearance, as well as the keeping and maintaining a husband (and sometimes lovers). I show how household based labor, often underestimated, its difficulty diminished by those who have never done it, is the mechanism for household-based “*lucha*” vis-à-vis efforts to “resolver” through the art of “inventar”. Furthermore these practices are essential mechanisms through which Cubans are able to make their faltering food system functional enough to keep food on the table. These practices of household maintenance and proper behavior are seen as “the correct thing to do” and are the measure of virtuous womanhood in Santiago de Cuba today.

Grub first, then ethics.

--Bertolt Brecht

The provision of food is indeed a central issue in general social ethics, since so much in human life does depend on the ability to find enough to eat. In particular, the freedom that people enjoy to lead a decent life, including freedom from hunger, from avoidable morbidity, from premature mortality, etc., is quite centrally connected with the provision of food and related necessities. Also, the compulsion to acquire enough food may force vulnerable people to do things, which they resent doing, and may make them accept lives with little freedom. The role of food in fostering freedom can be an extremely important one.

--Amartya Sen 1987

Chapter 6

The Ethics and Morals of Food Acquisition

Everything had already started to become scarce, like I told you before, it was terrible.

Terrible. The special period was cruel, cruel in the year 1993. I don't know if you have a lot of people who have told you this already, but it was terrible, that time, terrible. There were always clandestine things, people who worked in stores and stole things and still steal things, for economic concerns, understand? In those years [before the 1990s] the people were, they were . . . were . . . it's like-- in Cuba, there is this saying: God was in the land, in the Cuban soil. Before, people had better hearts, they were more human . . . then what happened was there was an economic crisis, and the special period started to change the character of the Cuban people, a change of disposition. Many people transformed and started to do things, things I don't view as right, like stealing or not sharing food with their own family members. And, well, really the mind of the Cuban has suffered a lot over these things, because of the scarcities. Yes, so the Cuban way of being changed a lot because of the shortages of goods, things became scarce until everything was gone, everything, to the point where even a leaf from a tree had a value. --Mickey

Mickey, introduced in chapter five, reflects on the ways in which the state economic crisis of the 1990s and ongoing repercussions have shifted daily practices of food acquisition and changed participants' relationships with their communities. Through borrowing, lending, gifting, and trading goods people increasingly rely on one another rather than the state to create a decent meal.

In this chapter I argue that the collapse of the Cuban food system, happening in tandem with the collapse of other state provisioning systems, has shifted participants moral and ethical relationships with their communities. As Cuba's food system changes, actors must innovate new strategies and tactics to acquire food, strategies and tactics that may not be part of what was previously considered to be moral or ethical behavior (Certeau 1984). They require new orientations toward collective activity and the public sphere. Unlike in many other contemporary settings in the case of late-socialist Cuba, there is an increased reliance on the community as state support wanes. However, similar to what scholars have found in contemporary late-capitalist settings there is a shift away from more utilitarian collectivist sentiments toward self-oriented consumption decisions. At the same time, my research participants uphold what they conceptualize as "traditional" moral and ethical framings of their actions as the right way to behave even though these moral framings are incommensurable with the needs of individuals to procure foods under the current food system. Thus, moral dilemmas surrounding the role and agency of individual action with respect to their community and the state often lead people to reflect on their individual understandings of ethics, an emotional process that reveals some of the ways in which subjectivities are shifting under late-socialism.

To understand the shifting morals of food acquisition I first outline the development of a "new" moral system under Cuban socialist called "the new man" to reveal the ways in which this

moral framing is still connected to Cuban identity and local ideals of *cubanidad*. I outline how the shifting moral codes in Cuba today have manifested in a “*doble conciencia*” (double consciousness), a dual morality central to the changing sociopolitical context of Cuba today, where Cubans simultaneously uphold the traditional moral character of Cuban identity and undermine it through their changing actions (Blum 2011). After outlining these theories I present data from various households that illuminate the ways in which these shifting morals are enacted in everyday life. I further consider the emotional responses that people have to shifting morals in contemporary Cuba. I then discuss how these shifting morals relate to broader theories of morals and ethics used within anthropology. I use the dilemmas of food acquisition to shed light on ethical subject formation, and technologies of the self. I also use these theories of ethics to illuminate the ways in which food acquisition relates to shifting subjectivities in late-socialist Cuba.

The “New Man” and Moral Framings of *Cubanidad*

Recent ethnographic work has revealed some of the ways in which changes in Cuba’s economic situation has produced an imbalance between material prosperity and moral standing (Andaya 2009). Andaya shows how such changes might destabilize the long-standing gifting and reciprocity system that underlies socialist moral hierarchies.

State discourse on morality is imbued with the socialist narrative of *el hombre nuevo* (the new man). Che Guevara spread the Cuban socialist concept of the new man through Cuba in the early years of the revolution. He advocated that a socialist revolution could only work if structural changes were coupled with changes in collective values. The socialist “new man” would have to change his attitude about race, gender, labor, and individualism to become a

cooperative, dedicated, hard working laborer who was obedient and non-materialistic. This “new man” would be colorblind and believe in and practice gender equity. Self-sacrifice for the good of the collective was central to the moral redrafting of the new man: “Individualism, in the form of the individual action of a person alone in a social milieu, must disappear in Cuba” (Gerassi 1968:115).

For Che Guevara a shift in consciousness as a part of a new moral development was crucial to the political economic changes underway in Cuba. The Cuban *conciencia* was changed through explicitly political goals and revolutionary programs (Blum 2011), for Guevara (1965) it was part of a “commitment to action.” For Fidel Castro this shift involved “an attitude of struggle, dignity, principles, and revolutionary morale” (1980:59). Cubans were reeducated into this new morality via explicit programs in the educational system (Blum 2011). Transforming Cuban consciousness was the foundation for transforming to a communist economic system. The underlying goal was to shift Cubans away from material incentives and toward moral incentives. Damien Fernández argues that these ideological shifts were part of the development of a “political religion” in Cuba, through which the government built an “affective discourse” relating Cuban moral action to *cubanidad* and *la patria* (2000:67). Unity and community harmony are emphasized as a part of the moral character of the “political religion” of Cuba (Fernández 2000:69). Fernandez emphasizes the affective side of Cuban politics, calling the revolutionary transition an “affair of the heart” (2000:2). Thus, although many Cubans are frustrated with the faltering socialist provisioning system, they continue to have a deep-seated emotional attachment to that very system. Building on these concepts Denise F. Blum proposes that in contemporary Cuba it is essential to consider what she calls the “*doble conciencia*” (double consciousness) a dual morality central to the changing sociopolitical context of Cuba

today, where Cubans simultaneously uphold the traditional moral character of Cuban identity and undermine it through their changing actions (2011:18).

The ethics of the new man were built up over the years of Soviet Material aid, but with the collapse of the Soviet Union the moral tenets of the new man have also dissolved (cf. Barnet 1995). Values have been reformulated as new challenges of the Special Period arise. Journalist Mirta Calderón notes that the economic crisis of the 1990s led to an erosion of the socialist new man and establishment of a new type of Cuban socialist, “We all resort to the underground market because the authorized quotas in the state stores are sufficient for perhaps 12 of the 30 days of the month. We have few conflicts of conscience over the double standard implicit in considering ourselves good revolutionaries and at the same time participating in the black market” (Calderón 1995 as cited in Brotherton 2005:358).

Andaya draws upon Mauss to illustrate the ways in which anthropological notions of reciprocity found in *The Gift* are still fundamental to the ways in which Cubans receive compensation for their work. Just like other Cubans the doctors in Andaya’s study are part of a system that assumes certain obligations around giving, receiving and reciprocating in the exchange of goods and services. As Mauss outlines these practices of exchange are not just individual practices but part of a holistic system that builds a sense of solidarity, and, building on Andaya, I argue that this system undergirds a sense of collective morality in Cuba. Within this collective morality, there is no “free gift” and indeed, the gift “is simply one act in a temporally delayed cycle of reciprocity that draws giver and receiver into irrevocable relationships of debt and obligation (Mauss 1990:59 as cited in Andaya 2009:362).”

As the food ration has been slowly reduced, the real wages of state employees also decreased by 44 percent between 1988 and 2000 (Mesa-Lago and Perez Lopez 2005), and have continued to decline in the first decade of the 21st century. At the same time there has been an increase in access to hard currency through remittances and the relaxation of laws regarding how much money can be sent to Cuba. This means that a growing number of Cubans are able to access more material goods, and for some there has been an increase in “consumerist lifestyles” (Andaya 2009). In my own research I have observed how the collapse of the soviet era Cuban food system (and other systems) has shifted participants’ relationships with their communities, and changed “the code of the street” (Anderson 1999). Actors now must innovate strategies and tactics in order to make ends meet, these strategies and tactics may not be part of what was previously considered to be moral or ethical behavior (Certeau 1984).

The Changing Morals of Food Acquisition

In past decades families across socioeconomic levels have increasingly turned to borrowing, gifting, and trading to assemble meals. The reliance on these practices places them in complex social and emotional entanglements: how do you tell your mother that you cannot lend her food because it will mean that you cannot feed your children? The better off members of social circles, locally called “*gente con posibilidades*” (people with possibilities) are turned to by their poorer friends and family most often; the sheer number of loved ones who come to them in need often puts them in uncomfortable situations. Some eventually refuse to give at all.

Lisandra and Rudy, who I introduced in chapter four, actually remodeled their home, so that there was a small front living room in which to receive guests that would shield their eyes and imaginations from the objects of wealth inside. This family had an explicit policy to never offer anything more than water to guests, refusing any requests for coffee, snacks, or meals. This was

both to protect themselves from people who might take advantage of their situation asking to borrow too much and to protect them from people who would possibly report them to the authorities.

In addition to these social and emotional entanglements, some families are faced with ethical dilemmas when they must turn to the black market to acquire food and other goods in order to make ends meet. Looking across socio-economic status and neighborhoods, the 22 Santiago families that I studied were all users of the black market. From reliance on the lowered prices of black market meat pilfered from state cafeterias to the purchase and resale of sacks of grains from security guards at state warehouses, every family seemed to be involved at some level. The well-off family that reconstructed their home to shield their wealth from the prying eyes of friends and neighbors also regularly purchased rice in bulk illegally: through a connection with a bodega employee, a 100 pound sack of rice would be delivered to their home just before sunrise several times per year. The rice, stolen from the rations of their neighbors, was nearly one-tenth the cost of buying additional rice off the ration, and helped to solve the problem of unpredictable shortages for this family. Lisandra, the female head of the household, reflected on this situation:

Sometimes it is difficult when I start to hear “There is no rice! There is no rice!” neighbors tell me that they didn't get their ration this month; others come to me asking to borrow rice. It's hard because I know that the rice I have makes it harder for them to get rice, but it is what I have to do to get ahead. We have the possibilities to buy rice like this and it saves us the money and trouble of getting the ration rice.

Faced with the discomfort of knowing that her black market activity directly and indirectly causes her friends and neighbors strife, Lisandra feels remorse but still justifies her actions as “the only way to get ahead.” Lisandra’s situation is one where the alternative to *not* participating in the black market creates stress and financial strain. She feels that in order to escape this and move toward achieving her life goals she must buy rice on the black market.

Ramira, a 34-year-old mulatta, introduced in chapter four, works in a state restaurant and takes food home from her job most of the days that she works. She only takes what can fit discretely in her backpack so as not to draw attention to herself. She reflected on this activity as necessary for her family to eat:

Yes, this is how we eat; stealing from work and then we use our salary to make it enough for the household. I want to make more money, to start my own business on the side. I am a good cook and I could take the ingredients from work. But I have to keep this job because it gives me access to things and it’s secure. If you get sick you still get paid, but if you are hustling on the street and you get sick then you can’t sell things and you don’t make money. Those youth who just sell in the street, well it’s not good, it’s not bad, but what’s bad about it is that they don’t have enough aspiration for their lives, it’s ok because they get some money. But they get caught, get things taken away, and then they have no education or job to rely on. –2011

Black Market, Pilfering, and Luchando la Vida

Many Santiagueros feel that they are left with no option but to use the black market. Within my sample there were several people who reflected on the common practice of pilfering goods from state and non-state workplaces for their own household use and for resale.

Employees might steal food items to feed their families, to sell directly to the public, or as a value-added good to sell to the public. For instance, a baker might steal some flour and leave the bread rations a little short, use this to make their own dough at home, or sell it to someone else who needs flour, who may also have their own small side business making cakes or other baked goods to sell to the public.

I return to Cecelia, the woman who operates a bodega in Santiago whose work I detailed in chapter two, to explore her practices of pilfering from the neighborhood rations. Cecelia makes a modest salary and works long hours six days a week. However, to make ends meet she must maintain her own side business selling things out of her ration station while she works as a state employee. Cecelia uses myriad practices to pilfer foods from her ration station without her customers or bosses noticing. These include a trick not unlike placing ones thumb on the scale: after weighing the foods for each family she leaves just a bit in the basin as she dumps the rest into their bags. She keeps that little extra bit of rice, beans, sugar, etc. and then later in the month when there are none of those things left in the ration she sells the extras out of the same ration station at a price higher than the ration price but lower than the peso market price. She only sells this pilfered food to trusted consumers who come to her regularly for it.

Cecelia is also connected to an extensive network of black marketeers who pilfer foods from ration warehouses and resell them. Although she does not participate in this specific activity, her cooperation often results in monetary or “in kind” kickbacks. While I was observing her work I saw her receive one such “in kind” donation. One morning as she was opening the bodega, a young man arrived with a 55 gallon of tomato puree. He told her it was all hers to sell, but that it was going to go rancid in a day or two. She did not ask questions, but quickly helped

him load it into the bodega. She wrote in big letters on her chalkboard “*!HAY PUREE!*” (There is [tomato] puree!), and placed it in the doorway.

In addition to selling the puree to her regular customers she also contacted half a dozen *socios* (acquaintances) and family members who might be interested in selling tomato puree out of their homes, which, although illegal without a permit, is extremely common and can be very profitable. Within an hour several Santiagueros showed up with buckets to fill with her puree. Because they were trusted friends they would be able to take the puree and pay her only after they had sold it. I was fascinated by how quickly they were able to move this puree into households across the city, making a small profit at each step. When I asked Cecelia where the puree came from she shrugged and said “*el estado*” (the state) seemingly uninterested in the people or place that was missing 55 gallons of tomato puree.

Here Carlos, introduced in chapter two, reflects on these types of practices:

This exists everywhere . . . For example, if I go to the Plaza de Marte now and I try to hustle some newspapers or something, to resell them for five cents more than I bought them for, even if the people from the state see me they won't say anything because it's-- there's always going to be this activity. You are just going to be one person losing five cents, and I am going to make a 1000 pesos and with that I can actually do something, you can't do anything with your five cents. So it's the way it is, it's how we get ahead, most of those people losing five cents don't even think about it.

Carlos continued:

You have to do something to get by, look for possibilities, abilities. Businesses, selling, buying, try to find some supplement to the salary so that you can buy things. And it's

hard work, this counts as working too, you have to work with others, find resources, stealing or not, I don't know, but if there is a ship unloading boxes of chicken, someone is going to have the skills to get a box of that chicken and sell it in the street. Whether I do it or you do it, it's going to happen.

Hanna: That's how food gets into peoples hands?

Carlos: No, that's how money gets into people's hands, you have to take food out of the state system, because it isn't working, it doesn't provide enough, and you have to generate money with it. Now we need money, if the state is not providing enough, we need money to buy things, so we have to steal from the state and that makes it provide even less, which just means we need more money to buy things so the stealing continues. That's the truth, that's how we survive.

Here Carlos reveals his own personal justification of black market activity and why he thinks that it is necessary for the functioning of the current food system. From his point of view, black marketeers provide the legwork to make the system work. The black market, then, is how money and goods "get into people's hands" thus circumventing the inefficiencies of the state system and alleviating a labor burden from the state in exchange for individual profit-making and state loss.

Yaicel, a 28-year-old black-identified Santiaguera from a low-income household, was struggling economically with two young children. She consistently did not get enough meat or eggs in her rations to feed them what she regards as an adequate amount of protein each day. As the meat ration ran out and her money ran too low to buy from the butcher, she purchased hot dogs and other processed meats on the black market. It was the only meat that she could afford

and the black market is the only place that she can get it. When I spoke to her about this, despite her devout socialist sentiments, she felt no sense of guilt for buying black market meat saying, “What else am I going to do? Starve?” This is a clear statement of her view surrounding the absolute necessity of her black market activity.

I know that it’s wrong to steal. I know that it’s not right to take from someone else's ration, but I am not the one doing that--they [the street vendors and the people who sell goods to them] are the ones that steal. I am just buying from them. I have to buy from them because I don't have enough money to go to the *shopping*. What else can I do? I always do try to make sure that they don’t cheat me, so I have my own scale and weigh things myself, because I do not support street vendors who are dishonest in that respect.

I asked Mayelin to tell me how people get by if salaries are not enough to both buy food and clothes, she responded: “Well Cubans have to eat well and they have to dress well. There is no option not to do either of those, so we do it by ‘*luchando la vida*’.”

I asked her to elaborate on what she meant by “*luchando la vida*” and she spelled it out quite clearly: “They steal. They steal things from the state or whatever or whomever they can to use or sell [stuff].” This understanding of *luchando la vida* resonates with Brotherton’s analysis of the ways in which Cubans see themselves as “filling the gaps” of the state, which can no longer provide for the citizenry as it did previously and as it continues to promise. Indeed as Brotherton notes with respect to Cubans’ use of the healthcare system, “Individual citizens draw on the metaphor of *la lucha* (the struggle) to describe their actions in a way that is similar to *la Revolución*’s historical use of Cuban independence fighter Jose Martí’s notion of *lucha* and *sacrificio* (sacrifice). Martí’s ideas, shaped by a political idealism, sought to create a political

utopia based on *lucha*, and stressed unity and morality over individual rationality and self-interest. However, the impact of the economic crisis on the primary health care system has meant that many individuals no longer feel concerned with the overall objectives of the revolutionary project, that is, the maintenance of the collective good, defined as putting state objectives ahead of individual wants and desires" (Brotherton 2005:21). My analysis builds on this work to demonstrate the ways in which individual forms of *luchando la vida* impact household and community dynamics. Thus, *luchando la vida* becomes a metaphor for the complex emotions wrapped up in the practices that individuals must undertake in order to meet their individual needs while attempting the least damage on the collective good.

Not everyone agreed. As Yaicel was completing her thoughts, a friend, Flavia, interrupted her to tell me that:

No, it's not necessary to steal, and what's more important is that it's not necessary to always have new clothes! Wear the same clothes you wore last year. Look, right now I could sell food out of my front window, but think about the time and the effort and the stealing that I have to do in order to do this, and without a *patente* it's illegal. Why would I do all of these things, these stressful things when I can just learn to be happy with what I have? But there are too many Cubans who don't want to work, or don't know how to work honestly, and they just want to have more and more stuff so they steal, or they sell their bodies, without any ethics, and feel like it's ok because that's the only way they can get these amounts of stuff.

Stealing from the state and by proxy from faceless community members is a widely known part of life in late-socialist Cuba, but in rare instances families also have to combat stealing within the walls of their households. In one such case the family had developed a solution to the problem of family members stealing one another's food. Each person had a locking cabinet in which they stored their foods. In the past they were all able to share food items but as it became more difficult borrowing slowly shifted into stealing, building into a situation where brothers and sisters, mothers and sons did want to share food but didn't trust the others not to steal from them. The family reflected on the locking cabinet system as sad, shameful, and unfortunate, but at the same time they felt it was the only solution to be able to retain the food items that each person had purchased.

While many people blame the government's lack of oversight for the problem of pilfering, because it is the people who work for the system that are actually stealing from the population. Some people will try to combat this situation by bringing their own scales to weigh their foods, others combat this by building strong relationships with food vendors and trying to establish an honest, trust based relationship. However, the successful hustler is always innovative and finding new ways to trick the system, so it is nearly impossible for users to always stay one step ahead of these professional tricksters. Furthermore, users cannot interject to stop the pilfering that happens at earlier points in the food system. Because this kind of corruption is so widespread, it is rare that anything will be done if it is reported to authorities, since they are probably doing their own pilfering as well. Moreover, when people do report these activities, their lives become even more difficult because those in black market networks do not trust them and these avenues close.

Research participants also told me people were eating foods that had previously been considered taboo, and still were for some. This included consumption of sacrificed meat from religious ceremonies, which Elizabeth, a 58-year-old middle class mulatta, reflected. As she stood over a pot of simmering goat meat, she lamented that while she did not have to acquire her meat in this way, her neighbor had just sacrificed goat meat for a Santeria ceremony, and according to this particular ritual they were supposed to sacrifice the meal raw and not eat it. Because Elizabeth just couldn't let it "go to waste," she took it after they had "thrown it out" and made a stew for her family. Elizabeth is a faithful Catholic and believes that Santeria is sacrilegious devil worship, and she believes that a practitioner of Santeria could do her harm if they wanted to so she tries to be respectful of it. Taking sacrificial meat is certainly not respectful of the religion and is something Elizabeth sees as morally wrong, but justifies it because she feels she has no other option:

I pray about it every time I do it, I sit with God and think about what it means to eat this meat. But God put this meat on earth to be eaten, not sacrificed in some witchcraft ceremony. He would not have wanted it to go to waste, so I feel it is OK to eat it. I have to feed my family.

In this situation Elizabeth and her family's consumption of "forbidden" foods has little impact on the ability of others to access foods, as these items would have been discarded had they not eaten them. What is important here is that Elizabeth feels that she is going against her own and others standards of moral conduct surrounding food consumption. This is a breach that she only engages in because she feels she has no other option: her individual and family's food consumption and nutrition are more important than maintaining proper moral conduct. She turns to her own religious beliefs as a way to alleviate her guilt about this moral breach.

Black Marketeering, the Waning of the New Man, and *Doble Conciencia*

Building on his reflections on the blurry ethical boundaries of pilfering and reselling foods at a higher price, Carlos connects these ethical quandaries with *Cubanidad* and the role of the Cuban state. He stated:

We have this idea that we have to rise up, to overcome and ironically we get this idea from the state, *el comandante* Che Guevara [said to Fidel Castro] ‘Don’t trust, or don’t follow the politics of the economy too much, forget about imports and try to create your own nutrition, because your country your people have it in them naturally.’ That’s what he said and we do have it in us, we naturally jump over problems and find solutions to feed ourselves.

Here Carlos connects the *doble moral* of Cubans today with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara’s framing of how the Cuban state should interact with the global market. Carlos continued:

If he [Fidel Castro] had listened to this advice, instead of relying on the Soviet Union, we [the country] would have developed. But he didn’t pay attention to Che, he just relied on the state and economic relationships with the Soviets and look where we are now. Now it’s too late for us to build our agricultural system. We don’t have the luxury of planting trees and waiting for them to grown now, we will starve while we are waiting. So we’ve learned lessons from this, we don’t pay attention to the political rules and we just do what we need to do to get by.

I followed up on these points by asking: “How do you apply these principles or ideas in your everyday life?”

Carlos responded:

I have worked in gastronomy since the 1980s. I have always taken food from my jobs, and it doesn't hurt anyone but the state. I sell things to the public to satisfy a need, and I am also part of the public, so I have needs as well, and that is the money that comes from selling those things. I sell beefsteak now, it's something everyone wants, [and] I make people happy. I always have at least three or four steaks in my house for the family to consume at any time. But there is always a boss, and sometimes that boss is more skilled than you are or there are angry people trying to preserve the triumph of the revolution. But it's not about who preserves the revolution it's about the laws of life in a group of people. Here we are, like for example playing dominoes and someone says there's no money, let's rob a bank and someone else is going to say you're crazy, and others will say no no, *compadre*, count me out: it's not the right thing to do. It's known that it's wrong, but in other things we agree they are OK even if the state says it's not.

Also reflecting on the connections between moral actions and a broader community ethics, Matitis, a 41-year-old low income mulatta-identified woman working as a maid in a middle income home in the city center, rattled off a set of Cuban refrains that she felt pertained to the food situation: for her the crux of the problem is a loss of ethics and a loss of Cuban character:

No, it's not that the food is expensive, it's that the salaries are low and that *el Cubano* is very materialistic, very obsessed with consumption. We always want to have new things, more and more and more and more. People who have the good sense to think and plan, people who organize their lives will have enough to feed their families.

Making Sense of the Shifting Morals of Consumption

In socialist Cuba, nationalist ideologies include an established orientation to the collective and collective needs that has historically been prioritized over individual desires with respect to consumerism. Stuart Hall (1997) notes that in the context of consumerism, shifting orientations toward “the collective” and the common good are often observed along with changes in consumption patterns. Since the Special Period there has been a shift in both consumption patterns and in “collectivist” moral orientations. However, I have not found that any associated decline in general collective activity and in the public sphere that comes along with these other changes has happened in Santiago de Cuba (cf. Hall 1997; Hernandez 2008).

With the food scarcities of the Special Period, as people turn toward more reliable, concrete social networks, many are forced to choose between collectivism and shifting towards more self-oriented consumption decisions. Paradoxically, as the state system crumbles they must increasingly rely on collective activity and work within the public sphere in order to be able to fulfill their individual desires. Social networks for consumption expand and contract in different ways: some consist of only close family while others expand across neighborhood to distant friends and relatives, in order to fulfill individual needs.

Previous rules of conduct focused on the common good of the collective, but that with increasing scarcities in the Special Period Cubans are forced to choose between following the rules of conduct that they once accepted and shifting towards more self-oriented consumption decisions (Sen 1985). Sen has argued that “shared norms can influence social features,” not only with respect to household activities and the roles of individuals in society, but also regarding “corruption and the role of trust” (Sen 2000:9). Some of the narratives presented here illustrate

Santiagueros' feelings of frustration and ambivalence with shifting orientations towards the morality of consumption. However, as I show throughout the dissertation, despite these shifting moral orientations toward the collective, community interaction and the importance of social networks are actually strengthened in contemporary Cuba as the moral orientations of consumption shift toward individual needs.

As Carlos wisely reflects, there are many ways in which ethical values are not commensurate with the current reality. There is some sort of breakdown happening here that opens a space for ethical reflection (Zigon 2008). The type of ethics that my research participants describe is less connected to the types of moral codes or absolutes, and more in line with an Aristotelian virtue ethics that incorporates social context into ethical logics. The types of reciprocal exchanges via the legitimate market as well as the black and gray market are part of an elaborate ethics of gift exchange that Santiagueros often interpret as virtuous and necessary to maintain their ideal way of life (cf. MacIntyre 2013[1981]). This whole system is part of an economy of reciprocity where everyone must consider many elements of ethics in their transactions and exchanges.

The gift economy includes obligations to give, receive, and reciprocate that are not mechanical acts with clear-cut boundaries (Bourdieu 1977). Individuals must weigh choices and make decisions about how to act on a case-by-case basis. The reflections of my research participants clearly reveal that their acts of food acquisition are well thought out and not based on routine or habits. They have clearly deliberated and chosen these courses of action. Although they present a clear logic for their course of action, this is only one part of the choice to acquire food in a certain way; indeed there are also deeper social, historical, and cultural aspects that underlie their practices (cf. Mahmood 2005). People yearn to eat a certain way; the moral

dimensions of food consumption are both political and sensorial (cf. Hirschkind 2006).

Furthermore these logics are indeed part of a “local and particular” landscape in which “highly specific ethnical-moral subjects come to be formed” (Mahmood 2005:28), and their logics for the morals surrounding the acquisition of food are not necessarily part of a universal understanding of the good life (cf. Foucault 1997a, b; MacIntyre 1984).

The moral dilemmas surrounding food acquisition are tied to shifting ethical subject formation in late-socialist Cuba. A Foucauldian framing of ethical subject formation as part of technologies of the self is useful for understanding the connections between the morals of consumption practices and subjectivity (Faubion 2011). Foucault extends human ethics beyond norms and habits to include bodies, desires, and “practices of the self” (Colebrook 1998:50; Mahmood 2005:27). In his study of human sexuality, Foucault became concerned not only with “the acts that were permitted and forbidden but with the feelings represented, the thoughts and desires one might experience, the drives to seek within the self any hidden feeling, any movement of the soul, any desire disguised under illusory forms” (Foucault 1988:16). Foucault draws on two types of technologies of the self, those related to the powers which “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination” and those related to technologies of the self “which permit individuals to affect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1988:18). My analysis demonstrates the importance of considering the ways in which household and community dynamics are also implicated in ethical subject formation.

My data reveal the ways in which dilemmas of food acquisition shed light on ethical

subject formation while at the same time I use these theories of ethics to understand how food acquisition affects subjectivity in late-socialist Cuba. Following Mahmood (and others) I argue that for contemporary Santiago consumers, an analysis of the “specific shape and character of ethical practices” (Mahmood 2005:29) can reveal key insights about the types of ethical subjects formed. The meaning of these ethical practices lies in the work the practices do in the process of cultivating ethical subjects³⁰.

Subjects understanding of the morality of their consumption practices and reflections on how these practices shape them as ethical subjects is critical for understanding the connections between practices, morals, ethics, and subjectivity. Foucault’s analysis of “modes of subjectivation” is important here because it provides an analytical frame in which to look at individual desires among subjects formed in historically and socially specific contexts without presuming an individualistic, autonomous subject (cf. Mahmood 2005). This work ties formations of the self and subjectivity with moral codes and ethical technologies through which a subject comes to know themselves. This view of the relationship between ethics and subjectivity provides a strong framework for understanding the ways in which historically and culturally constituted structures shape political subjectivity, while allowing space for individual agency and emotional response to these forms of political subjectivity.

The data outlined here reveal some ways in which new tactics and strategies of food acquisition have been developed in recent years. The analysis of how subjects experience these

³⁰Like Mahmood (2005) I do not “assume a homogeneous notion of a self that is coextensive with a given culture or temporality (120),” instead I assume that there are “different configurations of personhood can cohabit the same cultural and historical space with each configuration the product of a specific discursive formation rather than of a culture at large” (Mahmood 2005:120-121).

changing strategies and tactics helps to illuminate some of the local logics of the ethics of food acquisition (Certeau 1984). Carlos reflects on the ways in which strategies are both a calculation of power relationships between the state and the people, along with the ways in which such strategies are morally and ethically justified. Strategies require careful calculations of risk and relations with the state and the law, as well as nuanced understandings of how citizens of that state will judge the ethics of such strategies (Certeau 1984). Tactics also require careful calculations of moral and ethical judgment (Certeau 1984). Nonetheless, these strategies and tactics are now increasingly part of what is necessary to survive in Cuba today. Cubans use strategies and tactics to negotiate uses of their food system in order to suit their own individual and collective needs. These practices are always morally valanced and the individual must evaluate the moral character of each maneuver they make. The cumulative effect of shifting moral codes for consumption impacts individuals' ethical formation under local ideals for the ethics of consumption and technologies of the self.

Questioning the Ethics of New Practices

The dilemma faced by my research participants is based on Santiagueros' grappling with how to balance the seemingly incommensurable goals of maintaining a certain "decent" lifestyle and way of eating while remaining moral citizens. They attempt to achieve this good life while following the traditional ethical modes of conduct surrounding consumption practices, even as the state system makes this increasingly difficult for individual consumers. Although structural barriers make the consumption of the ideal cuisine increasingly difficult, there are other foods available for consumption that would be sufficient to meet caloric needs, but do not meet culturally appropriate standards for a decent cuisine. Individual desires to consume certain foods are much more than simple questions of individual agency; these tastes are wrapped up with

complex histories and local ideas of ethics (technologies of self) and subjectivity. The multifaceted sensorial experience of a particular form of food consumption is a deeply moral and political experience (cf. Hirschkind 2006). Therefore, rather than easily shift what they eat, Santiagueros go to great lengths to consume what they view as a “traditional cuisine.” For many the process of acquiring that “traditional cuisine” involves bending or breaking long established local moral codes for consumption, causing them to call into question their own ethics and how these shifting ethics impact individual and collective subjectivities.

Ironically, while others have argued that the norms for ethical behavior become blurred as societies shift to modernity (cf. MacIntyre 1984), in Cuba the moral and ethical norms established during the height of Cuban modernity in the early post-colonial period are precisely the “traditions” and old-fashioned “character” Mickey refers to in the opening quote of this chapter that Cubans today long to return to. Indeed as Bourdieu argues consumption in modernity is often part of a “material realization of the image of the good life” (Bourdieu 1990:105). Beyond ideology, these shifting ethics have a practical purpose as well; they serve to expand individual capacities to utilize the current food system (cf. Macpherson 1973).

Santiagueros grapple with how to still be “good people” under their traditional collective ethical systems and moral codes despite the fact that the structure of the food system hinders their ability to acquire food in an ethical manner. The structures of the food system and the traditional morals of consumption are incommensurate, and thus in order to continue eating in a “decent” manner they must shift their ethics. Because it is absolutely necessary to eat, and there are particular ways of eating that have been deemed “decent” and culturally appropriate (see chapter three), the shifting ethics of food acquisition and consumption play a very central role in the changing modes of Cuban subjectivity in the post-Soviet socialist era.

An analysis of bodily practices helps us understand the question of politics, particularly the relationship between social authority and individual freedom—different imaginaries of personal and collective freedom related to different understandings and relations to forms of authority.

-Saba Mahmood 2005:122

Chapter 7

Food, Stress, and the Body

In this chapter I discuss some of the ways in which the struggle for a decent meal is embodied. I outline how that the stress surrounding food acquisition can manifest corporeally, and how the body is then used to relieve stress. Building on the data presented in previous chapters I outline some of the possible explanations for the seeming paradox of increasing rates of obesity simultaneous with ongoing discourse about food scarcity. Throughout the discussion I reveal the ways in which the struggle for food and late-socialist subjectivity are materialized through the body. I argue for a specific understanding of the body through what I call an “ingestive practices” approach, which links the body to the external environment in fundamental ways.

Participants’ reflections on connections between food and the body further illustrate my analysis of essentialized fare. As I have examined elsewhere (Garth 2013b), participants underscore the importance of the self-conscious struggle to maintain what I refer to as “essentialized fare” in the face of the scarcity of particular foods. “Essentialized fare” is my interpretation of the local notion that Cubans were “made” to eat particular foods that are often

thought of as fundamentally Cuban in origin. This includes idealized notions that Cuban bodies are best suited to digest particular foods, that Cuban taste is best suited to certain food items, and that certain foods are an integral part of Cuban national and cultural identity. In practice Santiagueros often eat other types of foods, but they discursively maintain that Cubans *should* eat a certain way. Santiagueros link ideas about “decent” food to their sense of Cuban identity and their moral framings of what it means to live an adequate life. Notions of the decent cuisine and the ways Cubans should eat do not necessarily align with local ideas of healthy eating practices. As I have written elsewhere, efforts to encourage Cubans to adapt and appreciate a more healthy diet have been relatively unsuccessful (Garth in press).

Orlando and Maria Elizabeth, introduced in chapter three, reflect on the “bad nutrition habits” of Santiagueros.

Orlando: They say that we eat too much fat.

Maria Elizabeth: Black bean porridge, they say that porridge shouldn't be eaten in the summer.

Orlando: Because it is too hot for our bodies.

Maria Elizabeth: the calories [too]. Now they say that it is important to have a balanced diet with vegetables, this and that. Here we have never had the practices [*sic*] of eating vegetables, not even when I was a child or teenager. Now we are told to eat vegetables but we never did before.

Orlando: In order to eat vegetables here you have to be a millionaire, because vegetables are really expensive. . .and we have bad nutritional habits, we want to eat a lot of grease. For example, my grandfather ate beef everyday.

Hanna: Everyday!?

Orlando: Everyday morning and night.

Hanna: Too much!

Orlando: Yes.

Maria Elizabeth: and no one had gout [then].

Orlando: No one had gout or [high] cholesterol.

Maria Elizabeth: We used to be a healthy people.

Orlando: Used to be, but not anymore.

Orlando and Maria Elizabeth co-construct a narrative here that supports my theory of essentialized fare; they discuss certain foods being too hot for Cuban bodies, a reference to humoral pathology³¹, and they discuss the ways in which the changing Cuban diet has shifted disease patterns on the island. They link memories of a past that was void of vegetables and filled with red meat to healthier bodies free of gout and high cholesterol, diseases that they assert are now on the rise as Cubans increasingly consume high fat, high carbohydrate diets.

³¹ The logic of humoral pathology has been traced back to ancient Greece and is commonly found throughout Latin America. Humoral pathology is based on the idea that the human body consists of four humors—blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile—each of which have the characteristics of wetness, dryness, hotness, and coldness. Foods and drinks are also thought to embody these characteristics.

Figure 27: Sweets for Sale



My research participants viewed disease and weight gain as corporeal manifestations and material evidence of the effects of the poor Cuban diet. Over the course of my fieldwork in Santiago between 2008 and 2011, I noticed that people increasingly talked about wanting to lose weight. Whereas during my first few years of fieldwork in Santiago people were more likely to talk about a desire to gain weight, complain about not having enough food, or enviously compliment others who had more fat on their bodies. By the time I was wrapping up my fieldwork, it was rare to hear people express desires to gain weight and much more common for them to say they wanted to lose weight. Paradoxically, at the same time I had very clearly observed that it was becoming more and more difficult for people to acquire food. It was not clear to me why was there so much overweight in Santiago. In an interview Maria Julia clearly shared her perspective on the problem:

Why is there so much overweight? Because people eat a lot of pizza, because the people who want to survive, they stress out, and the first symptom is anxiety, and anxiety means snacking here and eating there, and not doing anything. Sendarism. And people don't take care of themselves, most women have already given up . . . People are sick with anxiety and they start to eat, listen Hanna, people are sick with nerves and anxiety here.

Stress and Food

The paradox of food scarcity and rising rates of obesity is made clearly by Maria Julia's reflections on the relationships between food, stress, and the body. It was hard for me to understand how there could be such a high prevalence of overweight and obesity in Santiago while many of my research participants seemed to eat so little and to constantly complain and worry about how and when they will acquire food.

While it is clear that it is easier to access high fat, carbohydrate dense foods such as pizza, there are other factors that Santiagueros relate to this problem. Lisandra, introduced in chapter four, also elaborated on the issue of stress and food in contemporary Cuban life here:

We have to be sure to eat well, just in case you get an illness so that you can combat it because here there is no medicine. But there are too many people who want to buy clothes before food, or shoes, but they don't have a bed to sleep in, they don't have food for tomorrow. Here is it obligatory to be stressed out. There are people who don't know what they are going to eat the next day and they sleep with the stress of this, especially those with small children. It's different if you are single, alone you can just eat some bread or whatever but with children you have to be stressed about how you will feed them well.

The stress surrounding food acquisition is not only based on present-day struggles to acquire

foods, but is deeply affected by past periods of food scarcity as well.

Mickey, introduced in chapter five, reflected on the emotional difficulties from the scarcities of the Special Period. He explained:

“[...] many people shrunk--they got smaller--their body size. I am talking about a lot of people who came to lose like 30, 40 pounds--40 pounds without any money, without anything. It was a very critical situation. It was seriously severe.”

“So,” he said turning to the huge plate of rice and beans in front of him, “that is why I need to eat so much right now. I am working on having a big belly, so that in case there is another special period I will have an extra 40 pounds to lose,” and he laughed as he began to shovel food into his mouth (*Garth 2013d passim*).

Mickey’s decision to overeat in an attempt to gain weight shows that overweight is not just a matter of “out of control eating”, but also may involve economic decision-making, historical conditions, and daily psychosocial stress. Mickey references his own memories of Cuba’s Special Period and their effects on his present-day actions. Mickey not only relates Cuban food to his identity, but he also makes explicit reference to the relationship between the food he eats and his own body. In particular, he states his awareness of using food and his own agency over it to control his body size, a response to his memories of a time when people were even more powerless with respect to food access. Mickey’s memories of the past instill in him a sense of fear or insecurity about the future which he responds to by vigilantly controlling his food intake in order to gain weight. His jovial demeanor and humorous response reflect both his joy in succeeding to overeat and that he feels that it is somewhat strange to be trying to gain weight in this way.

After a decade of food scarcity the link between obesity, concepts of healthy bodies, and how one maintains control over the body must be problematized; indeed for some Cubans maintaining extra body fat is seen as a form of control and a physical protection against potential future food insecurity. In Santiago, memories of food scarcity position ideal body size within the margins of too fat and too thin, or as one participant put it, “not fat but wrapped in meat” (*no gorda pero envuelta en carne*) (Garth 2013d *passim*).

Figure 28: Enjoying Candy During Carnaval

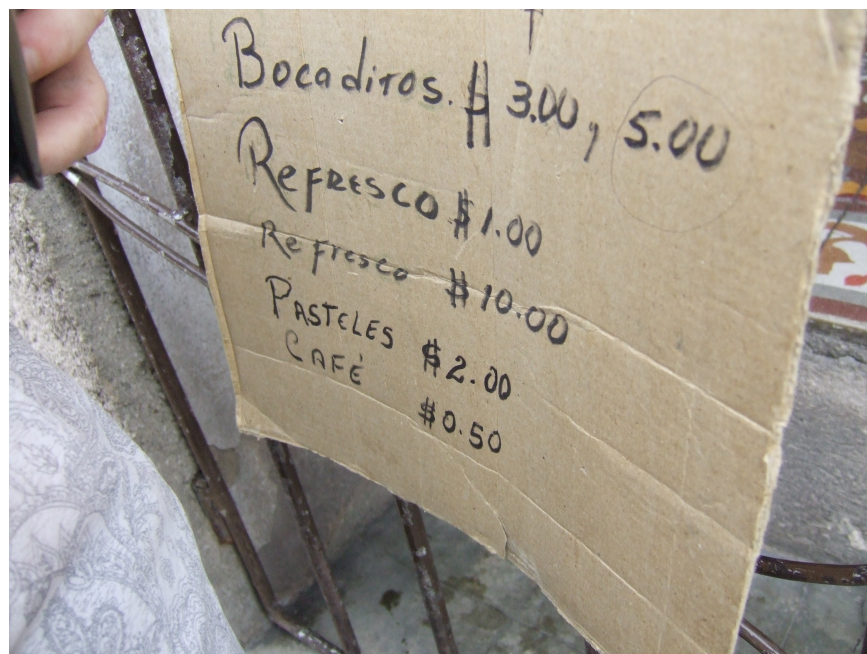


As I have discussed throughout the dissertation, Cuba’s food rationing system has been central in defining Cubans’ relationships with food, and is central to understanding obesity, food consumption, and weight loss in Cuba today. For nearly half a century nearly everyone ate the same foods and cuisine varied little from week to week. This is still the case. Based on my observations, the lack of variety in everyday food is one factor that leads Santiagueros to seek variety through snacking and eating street foods. Consistent with these observations, most

research participants presented in this chapter said that they did not limit consumption of sweets and high fat foods as part of weight loss efforts. Indeed they feel that they need to “take advantage of them” when they were around for dietary variety and for fear of food scarcities.

The food rationing system and memories of food scarcity are factors that lead Santiagueros to take advantage of sweets and high fat foods in order to vary their food consumption and please the palate. They express the need to “take advantage” of certain foods while they are available because they are uncertain of future access. Given the increasing availability of nutrients and calories, this approach to food consumption is one factor that has led to increasing levels of obesity on the island. These ideas directly affect their eating practices and dieting efforts. These data show that memories of the food scarcities of the 1990s still haunt Santiagueros. Their behaviors and choices today are shaped by memories of the past, and have a specific impact on the dieting practices that may be part of weight loss efforts today.

Figure 29: Street Food For Sale



Exercise and the Body

Speaking about body type and weight loss one winter afternoon, Yaicel introduced in chapters four and five stated, “I don’t eat pasta because it makes you fat.” When I followed by questioning if bread, rice, oil, or sweets made her fat and if she avoided them she gave me a blank stare and said, “No.” I asked her about exercise and she said that it was indeed the fastest way to lose weight but she didn’t have the time or the right clothes to go to the gym in the city center. I probed further, and she responded:

“To walk through *el centro* [the city center, where most of the gyms are located] you need to look good. You have to be well dressed. The clothes I have for exercise are old and tattered. I can’t possibly walk to the gym looking like that and I don’t have enough clothes to wear one thing and then change when I get there. Plus I just don’t have time.”

While Yaicel does not feel that she has sufficient material resources to exercise in a gym, others take advantage of the many exercise options available in the city.

Figure 30: Weightlifting



Felipe, a 30-year-old white-identified low income Santiaguero maintains a rigorous martial arts practice, training professionally for two hours three times a week, teaching classes six hours a week, and resting one day a week. While he says he exercises to stay in shape and feel good, his chief motivation is more health related.

Hanna: Why did you decide to start practicing WuShu [a type of martial arts]?

Felipe: It was really just a coincidence. When the Master came here to Santiago I was walking by the park and there was a group of people practicing and I stopped and watched them. Afterwards an older [Cuban of Chinese decent] came up to me and told me to join them the following night, so I did. And after that when I saw the benefits it had for my body I knew that I had to keep training. These hours I spend training, this is for me. This is my time, that I guard like it was gold. Martial arts are the best thing you can do for your health. I have trained with people with arthritis, arthrosclerosis, hip injuries, and asthma, even cancer who have cured their ailments with martial arts practice. The three most important things you can do for your health are through breathing, eating, and resting or sleeping. Here we do the breathing and the resting, if when you get home after class you eat well you have done everything you need to do to take care of yourself.

Felipe continued with anecdotes of the many people he has seen cured by WuShu in Cuba. At the end of our interview he shared with me an important observation:

Hanna, here in Cuba life is hard. We struggle. You have to have something, you have to believe in something in order to continue, in order to not go crazy. For some that might be religion like Santeria, or it might be drinking so that they drown their worries, but for

me its martial arts and I think that through exercise and dedication to a healthy way of life it's a better way to escape from the world's problems.

Figure 31: Tai Chi



With respect to exercise, Yaicel and Felipe share a variety of perspectives on the role of exercise in their weight loss practices. Yaicel's efforts to lose weight are focused on slight dietary shifts rather than exercise. She states that she does not exercise because of lack of material resources to use gym facilities, implying a sense of shame about her socioeconomic status and an understanding that physical exercise is reserved for those who have the economic means. Unlike Yaicel, Felipe maintains a regimented exercise practice. Focused on wellbeing, Felipe maintains his martial arts practice for "the benefits it [has] for my body," and views exercise as a way to escape from the stresses of everyday life. Yaicel and Felipe share a similar awareness of the role of exercise in weight loss and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, but their individual practices manifest in diverse ways. As these examples illustrate, exercise practices in Santiago today are motivated by various factors including the desire to lose weight, maintain a healthy lifestyle, and to promote wellbeing and alleviate stress. However, unlike the cases of

dieting participants focused on exercise do not appear to make the same connections between exercise and memories of the special period even though increased physical activity was obligatory due to decreased availability of transportation.

Figure 32: Martial Arts



Taste and the Body

Beyond these clear connections between ingestion and corporeal aesthetic, many of my research participants connected food with their bodies in other ways as well. In the following section I discuss the ways in which my study participants discuss taste and digestion as related to their overall struggle for a decent meal.

As I stated in the Introduction, during a period of my fieldwork in 2010 and 2011, I ingested food and drinks as the heads of household did; whenever possible I ate, smoked, and drank at the same time, in the same place, and the same amount as they did. These practices of course varied from person to person within each household, so I would follow the head of household's—usually a female-- practices, which other members of the family often followed as

well. I hoped that this approach would help me figure out what was behind their taste complaints as well as to see if there were any things I could observe from my own experiences of their ingestive practices that would help me to understand my research question.

My decision to incorporate this approach came from my preliminary fieldwork experiences where people complained about the tastes of certain food items—since I did not perceive those same tastes then I initially suspected that these complaints about the food were a symbolic way of voicing complaints about the government or broader struggles having little to do with the flavor of their food. Following Csordas and Jackson primarily I used a “phenomenological approach,” to illuminate perceptual processes and better grasp the meaning and experience of senses in the grounded lived experience of the body (Csordas 1990). Michael Jackson describes his own methodological strategy such that “participation becomes an end in itself (Jackson 1983:340),” arguing that to participate bodily in everyday practical tasks was a creative technique, which helped him to grasp the sense of an activity as others did with their own bodies. Jackson investigates the “lived body,” meaning the body as it is perceived--felt, experienced, and sensed-- by human beings themselves through actually living and doing the day-to-day work and activities of the people that we study. The phenomenal field for me is about sense experience, about grasping the meaning and experience of senses in the grounded lived experience of the body. Through putting myself in the place of the other I was able to get closer to understanding their lived experience, thus privileging bodily praxis over verbal practice as much as possible. Thus, through studying the body with a phenomenological approach we might be able to understand phenomena that cannot be expressed, or are expressed differently in verbal form, such as spontaneous emotions, or feelings in the body such as the sensation of falling.

After undertaking this practice for months I started to observe subtle differences in my own perceptions of taste. For instance, with respect to the taste of bread, throughout my fieldwork in Santiago it seemed like on any given day someone complained to me about bread—specifically the rationed bread rolls, distributed to everyone daily. These practically free rolls of bread are the least favored type of bread among my research participants, yet nearly everyone consumes it because the next cheapest bread is more than ten times the price.

One morning as I sat down to breakfast with one of my research families I noticed that the bread roll actually looked different on that day. While it was normally very light colored, and plump with fluffiness that day it was smaller, harder and darker than I had ever seen these rolls before. The family watched me as I bit into it to see if I would perceive what they already had—I swallowed my first bite and after thinking a bit about my response knowing that all eyes and ears were on me—I said “this bread tastes and feels like rocks!” An uproar of laughter ensued. These particular rolls were so bad that they had moved beyond the typical complaints and reached the level of comedic for this particular family. This was the first time that I perceived and agreed with all of the sensory observations related to bread roll consumption. The tastes, textures, and feeling in my mouth had been (I think) just what they described. Previously when families had specific complaints about the rolls, I hadn’t been able to perceive these senses in the ways that they described. I wondered if it was that these particular rolls were so bad that even my obtuse perception noticed, or if after months of eating the same rolls every day my palate was so used to a particular sensory experience that I now noticed when it was different. I would later approach the baker and bread delivery person to try to get to the bottom of the changed bread; they told me in a roundabout way that because Carnaval was coming up and they

needed to save up money they were selling some of the state-issued ingredients and making the rolls with less.

In contrast to the bread, which I thought tasted perfectly fine until I perceived the subtle differences in taste, with “mystery meat” croquettes my experience was quite the opposite—I went from hate to love. At random points in the month the ration stations would offer extremely cheap “croquette meat” which uses various animal parts that are about to spoil (innards, beaks, feet, etc.) to make a “ground mystery meat” of even lower quality than what my informants said went into a hot dog. Patrons shape this meat it into a roll and deep-fry it—making “croquettes.” This meat is sold with a cautionary “adults only” label—it has been deemed unsafe for children.

When I first arrived in Santiago I could always tell when this “meat” was around because I perceived the smell of rancid meat as I walked by the ration stations, a smell that for me was amplified when fried. One day early in my research I was suddenly overtaken by what I perceived to be a strong smell of rancid food—in the middle of a conversation I had to get up and go outside. Carla, the woman I had been talking to, yelled to Yaicel to come see what was the matter with me. Yaicel ran outside—she looked at me and said “Are you pregnant?” I said, “No, there is some smell that is making me feel sick.” She laughed and called to Carla, “Hanna must be pregnant, and the croquette smell is making her feel sick.” Carla started roaring with laughter too. They explained to me that there is a local idea that pregnant women have a heightened disgust response to the croquette meat, which everyone else is able to tolerate. I concluded that because I was not used to the smell I must have had this response that others who were used to it did not perceive.

Later that day, when I couldn't bring myself to eat the finished croquettes, the family again roared with laughter—"Even Hanna, who eats everything, won't eat these!" Yaicel said, "That means it's true that this isn't real food, it's true, thanks for confirming that for us!" And laughter continued.

Seven months later, when Yaicel invited me to her husband's birthday party and I was eating mystery meat croquettes by the handful with everyone else, Yaicel and Carla were delighted by this, telling me "Now you are really Cuban."

While there are many aspects of these interactions I could analyze and many ways to analyze them, I chose here to focus on the relationship between the sensory experience of taste and what constitutes "real food" and the relationship between taste and Cubanness—also termed *Cubanidad* or *Cubania*—that I take to be a type of 'native' account of capital C Culture.

As I analyze these two examples, I'd first like to point out that my interlocutors' concerns about my own perceptions of taste are indicative of their "ongoing work of reflexivity, and monitoring the relationship of self to the world" (Ortner 2005: 186). As subjects who seek to make meaningful lives for themselves, which for them includes eating a decent cuisine, sharing my taste experiences with them gave new meaning to their own affective responses to taste. Their responses to my participating in their lives in this way have given rise to a mutually constituted sense of empathy. This is not to say that any party could accurately know others' feelings or senses, but just that there is some form of empathy in the act of experiencing the same object and our verbal confirmation of negative responses to it (Hollan and Throop 2008).

The examples of bread and mystery meat illuminate a key distinction between edibility and what constitutes "real food"—something that is edible may not be "real food" and for my

interlocutors “real food” is determined by-- among other things-- sense of taste—it is similar to Bourdieu’s concept of doxa as the social process of accepting the “world of tradition as a “natural world” and taken for granted” (Bourdieu 1977:164)—or in this case “real.” However, I would like to parse out the differences between the sensory registers of taste and what is historically and cultural constituted as edible—two different issues that I think collapse into one if we use Bourdieu’s concept of doxa. I will use another example to illuminate this difference: the “*fongo*” a type of plantain that until the 1990s was used mainly as animal feed and not considered to be “real food” has become quite commonplace at the Cuban dinner table—people tell me that was not eaten, that it is not and was never considered “real food” but that they have come to accept that it is what they eat because, after all, it doesn't taste bad, provides them with so many nutrients, and its much cheaper than other types of plantains.

In the cases of mystery meat and bread that tastes like rocks, my interlocutors and my own sense of taste illicit a rejection response, but as they persist in being the only thing provided by the government food system our palates grow accustomed to these foods—but this does not change the fact that history and cultural constructions of foods tell us to reject them as real. In a situation where people are left with few options but to eat food that's “not real,” the power to define foods as real or not gives these interlocutors some agency over the situation. That is to say, they are not hungry and they are not starving because the state provides these things for them to eat. However, that does not mean that these things are real food, so it doesn't mean that they have food—hence the refrain “*no hay comida*” there is no food.

My rejection of certain foods before I was taken to be “a real Cuban” was interpreted as a confirmation that it was not “real food.” Through this observation my interlocutors confirmed that if the palate of the “other” whose habitus and cultural world was also wholly different still

rejected that these were ‘real foods’ that supported their sensory experience and categorization as “not real.” However, when I later was observed eating these foods, rather than rethinking their constructions of “real food” they concluded that I was now “Cuban.” I extend this to mean that they felt that we shared similar sensory experiences after I had lived their daily eating habits for several months. That is –part of being Cuban was to come to accept these tastes as edible—as “real food” because under the current food system there are no other options, so all Cubans share the experience of having to eat these foods.

This is what I mean by ‘cultural constitutions’ of edible foods and real foods—this is similar to the concept of “essentialized fare” that I have used elsewhere. By then I shared with them the daily realities of living under the Cuban food system for eight months and had shared the struggle over reconciling taste and food scarcity to end up accepting the mystery meat croquettes just as they had. This approach revealed the ways in which my research participants combine internal experiences of taste with the cultural internalization of state structures to formulate their feelings about the experience of Cuban food system, feelings that inform their practices and practical knowledge.

The Changing Food System and the Body

For most of my interlocutors the most salient connection between food and their bodies revolved around their body shapes, weight, and aesthetic appearance. The appearance of the body was closely tied to health status for many of my study participants. In general, I observed a more subtle connection between food, the body, and health in the ways in which Santiagueros link identity and cuisine to health and the body. For the most part foods thought to be part of ‘traditional’ Cuban cuisine are also thought to be healthier and better suited to Cuban bodies.

Due to these notions that only certain foods are appropriate to maintain the health of Cuban bodies, consumers feel a great deal of stress when these foods are difficult or impossible to obtain, for example during times of scarcity or as the food system changes. This stress, in combination with being forced to consume “unhealthy” foods is thought to lead to unhealthy outcomes and unfavorable corporeal appearance. That is, stress about food access exacerbates the health problems related to eating high fat and high sugar foods. This is how the “struggle” is embodied. As I will elaborate in chapter eight, people also turn to the body to relieve stress through daily rituals involving foods, celebrations, religious ceremony, and exercise and relaxation practices.

Figure 33: Homemade Pizzas



In Cuba, the state monitors and controls many aspects of the body related to health, but weight and body shape are among the few aspects of the Cuban body that are not regulated or monitored by the state; they are still regulated socially by cultural and social norms for appearance. Both the body and subjectivity are manifestations of relations of power or subjugation (cf. Mattingly 2010). Thus through an analysis of individual level bodily practices of

everyday life, we are able to understand broader social phenomena and structures of power.

“Disciplinary power works through the body; subjects learn to self-regulate their bodily practices, making it less necessary for states to intervene directly in their lives” (Gledhill 2000:149).

Orlando and Maria Elizabeth’s narrative clearly demonstrates some of the ways in which Santiagueros have implicated the state provisioning system in the health problems of Cubans today. The changes in nutrition that result from state systems become something that Santiagueros must struggle to overcome as the outward appearance of the body and the manifestation of disease become material evidence of the success or failure of the individual fight against state power.

Chapter 8

Ceremony and Celebration: The Joys of Food Consumption

In this chapter I discuss how, given all the struggles discussed throughout this dissertation, Santiagueros still manage to maintain happy dispositions and to enjoy life. Although my interlocutors complain about their struggle to make the Cuban food system work, their lives are pleasant in many other ways. Despite pervasive mental distress, life in Santiago is filled with all sorts of jovial spaces, such as: a weekly street party called *La Noche Santiaguera*, a week of celebration during *Carnaval*, and very elaborate birthday celebrations.

In this chapter, I focus on what these forms of celebration mean emotionally for Santiagueros and the role of consumption and ingestion in them. Offsetting the frustration with everyday life, rituals and celebrations are generally filled with positive emotions through, among other things, the circulation of gifts. During these celebratory times people move through the city and their lives within a different, more joyful and carefree register.

These events are also spaces for cultural and class distinction (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Celebrations are something to look forward to, to keep you going, to save money for—and spend on something that is not a material, productive capital. I argue that street festivals, birthday parties, and *Carnaval* are loci of “public culture” in Cuba, where the completely state-run media plays a different role in shaping peoples lives as these celebrations are spaces of cultural flow and change. I attend to questions regarding why are so many resources invested in celebration and partying, and what is the role of “excessive” consumption of “vices” such as alcohol, smoking, overeating, etc., in the face of scarcity. In this chapter I use my research participants’ views of the annual calendar as a cycle of weekly and annual forms of celebration as punctuating

with daily monotony. Santiago's biggest annual celebration is Carnaval in July (cf. Bettelheim 2001). Carnaval is a major point in the annual cycle: all year long people look forward to it and crash with exhaustion after it. This is similar to the workweek and weekend rhythm of household life. I consider the ways in which these celebrations are forms of resistance that are part of hope for the future, themes that I develop further in chapter nine.

Celebrations involve a great deal of emotional labor. While they are a form of relaxation and stress relief, they also generate stress and anxiety in different ways from the daily practices of everyday life. In contrast to daily food acquisition, birthday and other celebrations are planned months in advance by carefully scouring the city for every item necessary to put on the best possible event. The intention behind such careful event planning is to put on a respectable, "decent" event that friends and family will appreciate rather than disparage.

Beyond making the routine of everyday life more dynamic, parties and celebrations are also central to local patterns of reciprocity and gift exchange. These celebrations can become a space for conversion of capital (cf. Bourdieu 1984): those who lend money and helped out a family in other ways can expect to be invited to celebrate important events where the family shows their appreciation through elaborate meals, snacks, alcohol, drinking, and dancing.

La Noche Santiaguera

As discussed in chapter three, since 2010 the city and province of Santiago have undergone changes under the leadership of Lázaro Expósito, many of which are related to the expansion of locations for food and alcohol consumption throughout the city, and "*La Noche Santiaguera*" (Santiago Night) is one such example. Along Avenue Garzon from Fereiro to Plaza Marte, a stretch of about 20 blocks, state employees set up huts made of palm trunks with

roofs of palm fronds, pits for roasting pigs, tables and chairs, and speakers to play music. Restaurants come from throughout the city to operate the food stalls. Each restaurant offers a truncated version of their usual menu selling food mostly “to go” because there aren’t enough tables for everyone who would like to sit while they eat.

As part of my research I attended La Noche Santiaguera on occasions when the households where I was studying attended. Since it began in 2010 I attended the street festival at least 25 times. It is wildly popular among Cubans young and old alike. By 10 p.m. the street is filled with local families and couples, most consume beer or rum in CUC or MN as they dance in the street enjoying the opportunity to leave their homes and take advantage of a relatively cheap local nightspot. The blacktop of the street is hot from absorbing a days worth of sun, but cold beer cools hot bodies as they dance in the night air.

In an interview, Rudy, a 61-year-old black identified upper income Santiaguero commented on how wonderful La Noche Santiaguera has been for the city.

[Expósito] is a great leader. The people applaud his way of doing things. So do I, because he has given the youth places to go that they didn’t have before; spaces to dance, walk, sit and eat ice cream. [These are] spaces where older people can also enjoy [themselves]. Like on Saturdays, *La Noche Santiaguera*. . .what a beautiful thing! People can dress up, put on their little outfit, and even if they aren’t going to consume anything they can walk with their children, their girlfriend just to get out and look at things. And leave the house [and] enjoy life. There are musical groups, folkloric performers, and I don't know what else. People can go somewhere to look around and just be together. This is a great thing, and they are going to keep doing it. -- 2011

La Noche Santiaguera is a space not only where Santiagueros pass the time with their friend and family, but it is also where they keep up with the latest fashion trends, keep tabs on friends and acquaintances, and meet new people. Just as they would when going to a nice restaurant or dance club, most Santiagueros get very dressed up to attend La Noche Santiaguera. Young people are sure to wear their trendiest clothes, keeping up with fashion trends through keen observations of what others are wearing. Not only do people observe the outward appearance of others, but they also watch which groups of people are hanging out together, see who might have paired off as a couple, and to meet new people. For instance, Yordanis, a 23-year-old black-identified Santiaguero, pointed out to me that he was really excited to get a new MP3 player so he could wear it to La Noche Santiaguera. He was certain that doing so would impress his friends and increase his social capital.

La Noche Santiaguera is also a site where rumors and gossip are generated. For instance, in a conversation with Mariladis, a 20-year-old low-income mulatta-identified woman, we realized that a mutual friend was not being truthful. I mentioned to Mariladis that I saw and spoke to our friend Tony at the previous weekend's Noche Santiaguera. She looked surprised and told me that he had told her that he was travelling for work that weekend. She then speculated that he must be having an affair and going out with his new girlfriend while telling others that he is traveling.

Carnaval

While La Noche Santiaguera is a weekly space for Cubans to enjoy themselves, *Carnaval* is a weeklong annual festival for people to enjoy themselves on a much larger scale. Santiago's carnival is Cuba's most famous. Since its introduction to the island in colonial Cuba, Carnaval

has been a time and place for people to deal with shifting power dynamics in Cuba. Cuba's carnival is not a pre-Lenten celebration; it is a summer celebration that, under socialism, has culminated with a celebration of the 26th of July, the day in 1953 when Fidel Castro stormed the Moncada Barracks. There are many elements of Santiago's carnival that contribute to the multifaceted celebration. The two most important elements of Carnival are the official "*jurado*" (juried) performances where prizes are awarded for the best costumes and choreography, and the partying in street bars that are erected in various parts of the city.

Figure 34: Selling Beer During Carnival



I have attended Santiago's Carnival in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011. In July 2011 I participated in Carnival for the entire week, following the schedule of the family that I was studying at the time. In anticipation of the intense week of partying, Gema, introduced in chapter four, said to me: "During Carnival, by day we sleep off our hunger, by night we eat

away our tiredness.” To illustrate the intense schedule of partying during this week, here is an excerpt from my fieldnotes on a 2008 night:

At 8 p.m. Oruli picked me up on his moto after he finished working, he brings me to the house and he takes a shower. Everyone is showering, putting on make up, styling hair, and looking for perfume. Carla is in the rocking chair with little Obalo watching an old interview with a Cuban artist. Around 9:30 everyone is ready and some cousins from the countryside arrived, then we all started walking toward the area called “Santa Ursula”. A *tia* turned to me and said “If only I still had my butt from my youth the men would be all over me, but it has gone flat [*se fue pa’ dentro*].” And she took off running up the hill with her 7 year old son.

On the walk over, Yaicel asked, “Hanna, are you going to drink our dirty water?” by which she meant to ask if I would drink street beer. I told her it gives me diarrhea, but I would drink it and she laughed, saying: “Ay Hanna, everyone here always has diarrhea, that’s the life of a Cuban.”

We arrived at Santa Ursula and the kids wanted to ride on the carousel so a *tia* took them while we waited en masse so that we wouldn’t lose each other. Oruli went and filled two jugs with street beer and we passed them around while we waited. The cousins from the countryside were just as awestruck as I by the crowd, by the extent of inebriation, by the fact that everyone was here, from children less than a year old to over 90 years old. The great grandmothers and great great grandmothers started yawning about the same time I did. We moved to “the spot”, an area where their family likes to congregate each night, which is a mound of cement along the sidewalk where you can see

the stage a bit better. A band arrived around 10 p.m., but the main singers did not get there until 11:30 p.m. An uncle bought me some street pizza—one for me only—and one for the others to share. I tried to give some of it away but no one would take it, I kept trying until they finally let me share it with the kids. It was really good pizza. We passed around jugs of beer between the 11 adults, refilling every 15 minutes or so. Everyone, even those who didn't normally smoke, was smoking cigarettes every hour or so. Every time I looked like I was getting tired Yaicel would ask me if I was hungry, when I said no she would say: “Well you need to smoke then to wake up!” Around 3 a.m., well before even the 50 year olds began to slow down, I was tired and thinking about how to get home. People my age were in awe at my lack of energy. They kept trying to get me to eat something, smoke more cigarettes, and drink more to stay energized. Despite their efforts, I gave up, and I went home five hours before the others my age would, three hours before people my mother’s age would, and we all woke up around the same time. The Cubans my age were really confused about why I am like either a 90 year old or a seven year old; they thought something was wrong with me. I tried to explain that I am not used to this, and that on the rare occasions that I do go out at all in the US I am at home and in bed by 3 a.m. I explained that my friends and I don’t party till dawn for days on end. They gave me the strangest looks—like “What? How strange? I don’t believe you.” --fieldnotes July 2008

After arriving home at 5:00 a.m. from Carnival the night before, Ariana, a 47 year old middle class mestiza identified Santiaguera, slept until 2p.m. I noted her activities every 15 minutes for the rest of the day on July 21, 2011, a Thursday during Carnival week. Ariana’s is a typical schedule during Carnival.

After a long night of drinking and dancing she woke up at 2:15 p.m., drank coffee, and prepared and ate breakfast by herself. She was very leisurely about eating and getting ready for the day, after she finished eating she sat in the living room and talked to her parents. Still in her pajamas she watched the afternoon telenovela with her family, and then when the novella finished around 4:00 p.m. she called a friend to confirm their plans for going out that evening. They chatted for a while exchanging gossip about what had happened the night before. Ariana's friend told her that a mutual friend of theirs hadn't arrived home yet; the assumption was that she went home with one of the guys that they had all met the night before.

After she got off the phone, she shared the gossip with her parents who also shared it with their friends later in the afternoon. She then started getting ready for the day; she heated up water, took a long bath, and washed her hair. She then put on her robe and started the long process of straightening her naturally curly hair with a blow dryer and a very small flat iron. An hour and a half later, she had finished straightening her hair and gotten dressed. She then continued getting ready for the evening by heading to the manicurist to fix a broken acrylic nail. She had to wait for 30 minutes before someone could help her and then it took another 30 minutes to repair the nail. She arrived back at home around 7:15 p.m. and sat in the kitchen talking to her family while her mother prepared dinner.

The family sat down to a leisurely dinner with more conversation about previous night's events. Ariana's mother had spoken with a neighbor who confirmed that Ariana's friend had indeed gone home with one of the guys they met last night. She added that he had just gotten out of a long-term relationship and might be serious about her friend. As

the family was finishing their meal, two of Ariana's friends stopped by to say hello and see what her plans were for the night. The three of them sat in the living room visiting with Ariana's family and watching television before heading out to "the street" around 9:00 p.m.

They went to a different area of the city than the previous night. After spending nearly 45 minutes in line waiting for beer, they stood on the sidewalk and drank while they watched who was gathering in the street near them. Finally around 10:15 p.m. the crowd and the music were just right for the girls to start dancing. They continued dancing and drinking in the street until midnight when they took a break and bought three individual size pizzas along the sidewalk near where they were dancing. After a short break they returned to drinking, dancing, and socializing until about 3:30 a.m. when they started walking back to their houses. The three women were escorted home by a group of five men. When they got close to their houses the group stopped on a corner and talked under the streetlight for an hour. The group slowly dispersed and Ariana went home by herself around 5:00 a.m. –fieldnotes July 2011

Ariana's experience is typical for many Santiagueros who go out during the Carnaval. The week of Carnaval is a time when Santiagueros young and old stay out very late drinking and dancing in the street. Few people go to work during this week, so there is time to sleep in and relax during the day. Because there is loud music and large crowds drinking in the streets into the early morning hours, even those who do not attend the festival often do not sleep at night because of the noise.

Carnaval week disrupts normal food consumption patterns. Many markets are closed during Carnaval, and certain food items, such as the ingredients commonly found in street foods, like pizza, become more scarce. It is common for families to consume a lot of street food during this week. Furthermore, for some Santiagueros this is the only week during the year that they drink alcohol. For instance, in an interview Yasmanis, a 19 year old upper class black identified Santiaguero, told me: “I don't like to drink anything. Not even beer. But it depends on the occasion, like I drink during *Carnaval*. Because its like you're there and it's a party and everyone is drinking so you drink. You have to.”

Not only do people come from all over Cuba and the rest of the world to attend *Carnaval*, people from all over Cuba also come to work and sell food and other goods. For many food vendors from all over Cuba, the week of *Carnaval* is a time when they make their highest profits for the year.

Figure 35: Carnaval Street Bar



Birthday Parties

Like *Carnaval*, birthdays are annual celebrations. The majority of my study participants regardless of age hosted a birthday party for themselves each year. Usually the family members of the birthday celebrant host a party in the family home, inviting extended family and friends to come by for an afternoon of music, food, and drink.

Figure 36: Child's Birthday Party Clown



Children's parties are much more elaborate than those of adults. It is typical for parents to invite all of the neighborhood children regardless of age to their child's party; it is not uncommon for a child's birthday party to have 50 to 100 guests. Usually gift bags with a small toy, candy, and other trinkets are provided for each child guest. Typically *ensalada fria*

(macaroni salad) and croquettes are served, followed by cookies and cake. A D.J. and a photographer or videographer are usually hired. Occasionally a clown or other children's entertainment is hired as well.

Figure 37: The Birthday Boy



Children's birthday parties are often very expensive for Santiago families, and many households spend months saving by working extra hours to pay for them. Despite the high costs, Santiago families almost always find a way to host a birthday party; often families go into debt to pay for children's birthday parties. Such parties are important social events that serve as a form of reciprocal gifting, as each child that hosts a party can expect to be invited to the parties

of all the children who were invited to their party. Birthday parties are important celebrations of milestones for children, and they indicate a family's social status and amount of social capital.

Likely because birthday parties are such important events for children, they continue into adulthood. While it is slightly more common for an adult to not to celebrate a birthday, the vast majority of my adult research participants hosted birthday parties for themselves. Adult birthday parties are more toned down than children's birthday parties, but they are still big events that households have to budget and save for in order to host. It is common for adults to also serve *ensalada fría* (macaroni salad) and croquettes, followed by cookies and cake. The hosts often provide a few bottles of rum, however it is customary for guests to bring a bottle of rum to an adult birthday party. Adult birthdays may be just a small meal and conversation, but they often involve heavy alcohol consumption and inevitably include loud music and dancing.

The following is an excerpt from my fieldnotes describing a low-key adult birthday party:

I called Maria Julia to confirm the time of her father's birthday party; she told me to come by today at noon. I arrived on time, and I was the first to arrive at the birthday party. The honoree Jorge Alejandro had taken his grandson, Jose, to the park, and Maria Julia's boyfriend, Enrique, was called into work at the last minute. His wife, Milagros Santa, was cooking fried chicken for Jorge Alejandro (the chicken came from the special diet ration that is supposedly for Jose because he is underweight.) Maria del Carmen, her best friend, arrived next. We sat in the living room and made conversation about her upcoming emigration. She is ready to go to the US, her papers are ready, and a passport is waiting for her at the US Interests Section. Her husband had gone to the US 11 years ago, and her son left in July. As more guests arrived Maria Julia gave us all glasses and

poured warm rum into them. Enrique made sure to keep our glasses full at all times. By the time dinner was on the table most of us were drunk.

An interesting conversation transpired while we were eating dinner. Everyone started talking about leaving the island. Enrique confessed that two of his brothers left swimming in 1990, arrived in Miami and have been there ever since, another guest confessed that her cousins had left but were eaten by sharks. Jorge Alejandro counted 15 people from the block who had left in his lifetime. Stories of people leaving flowed. The way that people spoke about it was fascinating, *Quando me toca a mi?* [When is it my turn?] Everyone at the table wanted to leave whenever they got their chance, they wondered when would be their turn.

The special occasion lunch consisted of wine and champagne from Spain, fried chicken, *arroz con pollo* with canned veggies mixed in, *fufú de malanga* with pork fat, *tostones*, *ensalada de pepino, tomate, y repollo*, followed by cake and *ensalada fría*.

After dinner someone turned the music up, and we started dancing on the patio as we continued drinking. Before I realized it was already getting dark and some of the guests were starting to leave. By midnight, 12 hours after the party officially started, the hosts were beginning to fade, the music volume was turned down, and I headed home.” – fieldnotes, January 29, 2011

Jorge Alejandro’s 66th birthday party was typical of older adults. The party was lively but started out slowly and was relatively toned down. Music was played at a low volume, and some salsa dancing happened between several hours of sitting and chatting.

Figure 38: Birthday Provisions



The following is an excerpt of my fieldnotes describing Esteban, an upper middle class, mulatto identified Santiaguero's 22nd birthday party. Younger adults tend to have similar celebrations to the one described above, however the festivities usually last longer, often continuing until dawn. Younger adults' birthdays also tend to involve greater levels of alcohol consumption.

I was the first to arrive at Esteban's birthday. They told me to come in the afternoon, I thought it would be a lunch, but when I arrived he was still in the shower, so clearly I was too early. I decided to visit with a friend who lives up the street for an hour or so and then went back. An hour later there was only one other guest there, but at least Esteban was dressed and waiting to receive his guests. More chairs had been brought into the living room so that all of his guests would fit. His mother purchased the food for the party—the appetizers included hot dogs cut up on a plate and eaten with a toothpick, fried plantains, and *chicharrones*. Later a dinner was served that included slow roasted pork shoulder, mashed malanga, rice and beans, and the ubiquitous *ensalada fría*. Esteban

provided the alcohol for his own party. For his birthday, his father, who lives in Florida, sent him a new outfit and 100 Euro. He used the money to buy alcohol for the party, and was hoping there would be enough left over to buy some pirated video games as well. Three hours after the party was supposed to start most of the guests had arrived and were drinking, dancing, and socializing in the living room. When the food was served, neighbors and a few more friends arrived, so the party started to spill out of the house. Dancing commenced in the street. By nightfall everyone who was drinking was completely inebriated and Esteban's mother broke up the party. Half of the guests went home and the other half headed up the street to the nearest bar. -fieldnotes, January 11, 2011

Esteban's party was also typical of a Santiaguero of his age and class. I later found out that he and a small group of friends continued moving from bar to bar, and ending up at a friend's house where they drank and danced until morning. The fact that he was able to provide drinks for his guests at the party and continue to provide drinks as they moved from bar to bar is rare and was only possible because his father sent him money from Miami.

Figure 39: Party



Celebration Punctuates Weekly and Annual Cycles of Daily Life

All of my summer trips to Santiago were immediately met with inquiries as to whether my stay would encompass the highly anticipated celebration of *Carnaval*, or if I would be able to attend that person's birthday that year. Such inquiries indicated to me the social importance of these annual events. Preparations for *Carnaval* seem to take place year round; the only time people are not talking about *Carnaval* seems to be in the weeks immediately following the event after the streets have been cleaned and everyone is thoroughly exhausted. In my observation the emotional energy around *Carnaval* slowly builds for most of the year; people either highly anticipate the week free of work responsibilities filled with dancing, drinking, and food consumption, or they dread the noisy, dirty streets.

Although many Santiagueros complain about the noise and mess made by the event most seem to enjoy the festivities in some way. They may go out all night long seven days in a row, or they may just sit out in front of their house watching partygoers walk by one night, but in any case most people seem to be at least minimally entertained by the festival.

For most Santiagueros *Carnaval* is anticipated as an annual week of vacation from work that involves spending time with friends and family, drinking in excess, and eating street food. Through dancing in the street, drinking at street bars, and spending time with friends, this annual week of celebration serves as a time to release stress that has built up over the course of the year.

Like *Carnaval*, birthday parties are also an occasion when Santiagueros can relax and enjoy some time with friends and family. These parties also involve large amounts of food and alcohol and inevitably many hours of dancing and talking. Unlike *Carnaval*, birthday parties are usually only a few hours long and have much smaller quantities of food and drink. Still, like

Carnaval they are an occasion to release much of the stress that is built up over the course of the year.

The weekly *Noche Santiaguera* is another important time for Santiagueros to relax and enjoy themselves. Because it takes place each week, most attendees do not spend as much on food and drink as they would for a birthday or Carnaval. Attendance is free of charge and the purchase of food and drink is not required, so many Santiagueros attend *La Noche Santiaguera* as an inexpensive chance to get out of the house, to see friends and family, and to dance in the street.

Public Culture and The Cycle of Everyday Life

The three spaces of celebration discussed here involve varying levels of public display; the birthday party is a semi-public event when one opens up the private space of their home to a broader social group; and, *La Noche Santiaguera* and Carnaval are very public events taking place in completely open outdoor spaces where anyone can attend and anyone can watch what others are doing.

Investing large sums of money, Santiagueros often buy new outfits to attend public events so they can look their best. They scrounge to find extra money so that they can consume alcohol and buy food at these events. In a setting where resources are scarce, their high investment in these events illuminates the cultural significance of these celebrations. I argue that these are more than celebrations; they are also loci of public culture where trends develop and change manifests. Because all Cuban media is run by the state and there is very little advertising, consumption trends develop differently. Rather than developing an interest in new products based on television, radio, print advertisements, or the internet, Santiagueros become

invested in new products when they see their friends, family, and acquaintances consuming and using them. Trends are set in these spaces of celebration, and social capital is gained or lost based on how one looks and behaves in these public locations.

Beyond their role as loci of public culture, these celebrations punctuate the daily grind by providing much needed time for relaxation, socialization, and stress relief. They provide social spaces where Santiagueros can meet new friends, associates, or potential significant others that they might not meet in their usual daily interactions, thus allowing them to expand their social circles. Especially during *Carnaval*, the long nights spent dancing and drinking followed by slower nap filled vacation days give Santiagueros the social and mental circumstances some find necessary to let loose, forget all responsibilities, and fully enjoy themselves. Because these celebrations provide a much needed time and place for stress relief Santiagueros are willing to invest a great deal of financial resources into having a good time. Even without going anywhere *Carnaval* can become a weeklong vacation, and *La Noche Santiaguera* is often the only time people can get out of the house for a relaxing night on the town.

Chapter 9

Hope and Resistance in Post-Soviet Socialist Cuba

People have lost all of their beautiful traditions, like sitting down to dinner as a family each night . . . it's totally lost because the mental development (*desarrollo mental*) has completely changed. The world has changed, love is harder, love is more difficult to find now, and already, friends are not true friends. I ask myself why . . . it appears that the world has turned upside down, moved backwards, regressed [P]eople don't know what's happening, like Adam and Eve, they eat the forbidden fruit -- they do it out of necessity. I see it as necessity, but it is also hopelessness. This is very big, people don't know what to do, and then they are desperate to achieve what someone else has, they want to be on par with someone who has more means than them, but they can't be on this level. Everyone has to wait until their moment comes, there are people who reflect and understand that, and there are others who say, "When is my turn? My turn never comes, so I have to take it." So they lose the confidence and sincerity of many people, the friendships that were in the neighborhoods, people shared, everyone equally, and now it is all lost. Now even families are falling apart, everyone becomes independent; the union of the family is gone. –Manuel

The process of social change that Manuel, a 38-year-old, black, low income Santiaguero, glosses as a "loss of tradition" was a common topic of reflection among my interlocutors in Santiago. The changes Manuel observes are tied to shifts in the ways Cubans experience everyday life in the post-Soviet period, shifts not unlike those experiencing post-colonial shifts

all over the world. As I have outlined in previous chapters, these structural changes within political and economic systems have created new forms of stress and anxiety surrounding food acquisition, and the ability to consume a decent cuisine, thereby shifting the ways in which individuals experience everyday life. These political economic changes have exacerbated inequalities for people in Cuba with darker skin and women. The changes have led locals to think of their everyday life as a struggle. If David Sutton's (2001) notion that "we are what we eat," and "we are what we ate" is true, then as foods people have historically linked to their identity become less accessible how does the link between food and identity change? What do these changes in social life mean for how individuals think of themselves, that is, how they understand their own subjectivity?

In this chapter I draw upon research participants' reflections on the ways in which everyday life in Cuba has changed and how young Cubans experience those changes in different ways today. I show that participant practices of hope, including their determination to maintain a decent meal, are a way of coping with these changes. However, rather than finding comfort in the maintenance of tradition, I outline the ways in which the anxiety and fears that arise from the threat of losing tradition often make the meal a site of contention and struggle (Berlant 2011).

Further explaining the current situation, Manuel continued to expand on his feelings that Cuban traditions have been lost and Cubans today have changed, he said:

The old way no longer exists, there is a new generation, and most of the people who have taught us how to be [Cuban] have disappeared. All those people who had the discipline, all gone and now those of us who are 40, 50, 60 years old have entered a new era, a new phase. But we could not, the youth have slipped through our hands, we have lost them

with all of these catastrophic changes that have happened in the world. We could not make the youth think the same way that our parents did. [The youth] can't see, they can't see and even if you want to instill in them you can't. Say you're a politician and someone who wants --who doesn't want to develop themselves, they say to you "Hey old man, you're old." I mean, I am not old, I am the same as you, I dance the same as you, and [wear] the same clothes . . . well not the same clothes not those American brands . . . because I have a strong conscience and I won't change who I am because I am a [Cuban] countryman. I am a realist, I have my two feet fixed on the ground and my thoughts are fixed too. I don't live in the air like those guys . . . they live in a fantasy world too big to fall, too big, they don't adjust--they don't adjust to the system, everyday they are more and more ungrateful more, as I see it they have lost friendship, true friendship is our great loss.

Manuel contrasts his own generation to that of his more "disciplined" elders, who have left his generation in charge of the unruly Cuban youth of today. He references "catastrophic changes" that have led the youth to slip through the fingers of his generation. For Manuel, while the middle aged are firmly grounded in the reality of the fleetingness of material goods, changes across the globe in the circulation of material goods, media and technology, and the movement of people and ideas have infiltrated this younger generation of Cubans, leaving them with the false sense of identity based on "commodity fetishism" and an inability to value close interactions with others.

Also reflecting on the causes of change in Cuba, Hector, a 72-year-old retired engineering professor noted ways in which tourism and foreign influence have shifted Cuban ideologies:

If you think about it, in the last few years, Cuba has established a closer relationship with foreigners and I see many children eating junk food. It is either salty or sweet so they like it, but it turns into a type of privileged consumption for those who can buy this with hard currency. Maybe it's easier because you don't have to cook or prepare anything at home, but later come the economic problems . . . We have had an invasion of other kinds of food in our society.

Like Manuel, Gerardo, age 68, and Quimara, age 65, are a retired couple living in the city center who also reflect on the ways in which present-day changes in Cuba indicate an uncertain future for the island:

Gerardo: The future here, no one knows, one wishes it would get better because everyday it gets worse, the future is uncertain. Salaries don't go up, products get more expensive and the salary stays the same. The dream of every Cuban is that things [will] get better and you can buy what you need, you can just go to the store and buy things and they will be available like it is in all of the other countries in the world. You can eat what you want and you don't have to wait for something to appear. Here if you don't have hard currency you can't buy anything. It's too expensive.

Quimara: They are letting us have more freedom, allowing us to buy more things like cell phones, but they then charge crazy prices and have all of this paperwork, so that the barriers to getting things are so great that no one can have them anyway. Why even bother selling them?

Based on recent changes in the Cuban state's regulation of currency, imports, and the sale of goods to the public, Gerardo and Quimara express doubt about the improvement of everyday

life in Cuba's future. They both believe that in general Cubans want to be able to purchase products for basic needs and luxury goods. But both also note that constraints within the state system prevent most Cubans from being able to access sufficient funds in order to be able to more freely make such purchases.

Gema, at 48, is somewhat younger than the three Santiagueros referenced above, and she straddles the ideologies described by them. She is low income, identifies as black, and lives in her mother's home with her children and grandchildren. Gema comments:

If I could change something [about my life] I would make it so that I had the possibility to live on my own, to become more independent. You have to work hard to buy a place, it's not realistic to work so much and live, you can't buy clothes, shoes, and food when a pair of pants costs 1000 pesos [approx. 50 USD]. But you really want those pants.

Already people don't think the same, everything is advancing quickly and people can't think the same way anymore, all they think is, "there is no money, where can I get it?"

Like Gerardo and Quimara, Gema feels that the lack of opportunities to earn money through employment or generate income through other means is the central barrier that Cubans experience when attempting to fulfill dreams of living more independently and accessing material goods. Gema's reflections reveal that she accepts that most Cuban youth have shifted their thinking ("[they] don't think the same"), and based on these changes in ideologies, Cuban youth have different dreams for the future than older generations. Cuban youth today value independence and material goods more than previous generations, and thus they struggle even more with the barriers to accessing hard currency and material goods than older generations did.

Empowered to Resist, Motivated by Hope

The ways in which my interlocutors align hope and resistance resonates with Cheryl Mattingly's perspective that hope should be seen as a practice as much as an emotion (2010). Hope thus becomes part of the practice of trying to create a meaningful life, that is, to cultivate a form of selfhood and corresponding lifestyle that reflect one's desires and standards for a good life. Mattingly considers hope as something emotional that lies within the private, intimate spaces of personal life; situated within the daily practices of people struggling to survive. For Mattingly "hope most centrally involves the practice of creating, or trying to create, lives worth living even in the midst of suffering, even with no happy ending in sight" (2010:6).

I contend, however, that hope is not only a personal practice, but also a form of political resistance. The reflections on hope in the passages quoted above combine personal thoughts on experience with local understandings of political subjection. Throughout this dissertation I have outlined the ways in which Santiagueros use strategies and tactics to achieve their daily goals (cf. Certeau 1984). In this regard, I consider hope to be an even more intimate micro-level practice than tactics. Hope shapes actions in ways that people are barely aware of. I found that hope in the prospect of a better future is reflected in the small acts of resistance to the food system enacted by Santiagueros. The study of individuals' personal experiences of using the Cuban food system is crucial for understanding what is at stake for these subjects (cf. Hollan 2001). While it is true that macro-level relations of power and subjugation shape these personal experiences, it is also important to note that personal experiences of such forms of power are what link individual subjectivity with larger relations of power, such as state food systems.

In the case of Cuba, food allocation can be seen as a particular locus for discourses of nurturance and discipline. People link food access to local ideas of individual responsibility as well as notions of the state's duty to the people. The decent meal has become a symbol of an

ideal socialist subject—modern and responsible and loyal to the collectivist goals of the state³². This of course, does not mean that socialist subjects are not “self-governing, self-fulfilling, self-empowering individuals and communities” (Sharma and Gupta 2006:47). Although modern socialist subjects may have the propensity to become increasingly autonomous and individuated, through the ideology of collectivism, socialist governmentality limits the ability to realize this propensity.

The choice of the Cuban government to allocate food via a rationing system provides an example of prioritization of the collective over the individual. While the current monthly ration quantities may not be adequate to satisfy individuals’ needs and desires, the system guarantees a basic minimum for everyone. Although the ration system works to maintain collectivist ideals, for some Cubans the other processes of food acquisition --gifts and trades, black market purchases, peso markets, and convertible currency (CUC) markets—create tensions between collectivism and individualism.

The types of foods allocated by the government and the appliances provided for preparing them foods direct Cubans to structure their food preparation and other tasks in particular ways. Additionally, the fact that people must pick up their rations at three different places-- *bodegas*, *placitas*, and *carnicerias*—not to mention the various other locations where they must travel to get the non-rationed foods they consume, creates particular temporal and

³² It is also important to note that in many cases there are “unequal biopolitical investments” between different groups of citizens (i.e. people of color are less invested in than white groups), which results in an “uneven distribution of resources” (Ong 1999). This uneven distribution further exacerbates the tensions between needs and desires under conditions of scarcity.

spatial constraints. The fact that they do not know ahead of time what will be available at what prices necessitates a constant vigilance that directs human behavior in particular ways.

Resistance and hope are forms of agency whereby Santiagueros have the capacity to act in ways that align with their values and ideals³³. The ways in which Gema, Gerardo, and Manuel reflect on change in Cuba illustrate how the relationship between state power and change has transformed during this post-Soviet era known as the Special Period. There is ongoing change and unpredictability surrounding any particular practice of food acquisition at any given point in time. As illustrated in chapter three, for most of my research participants “change” is a viscerally experienced uncertainty and instability in everyday life. The mundane activities of the everyday to reveal the ways in which this perpetual uncertainty keeps Cubans in a state of fear, unable to predict the effects of their actions, thus, in effect perpetuating Cuban state power. The state, in other words, through its very changeability has managed to make itself present within the most basic activities of daily life. This uncertainty is a reflection of the ways in which state power has permeated even the most basic daily tasks, thus shaping the lives and subjectivities of Santiagueros.

As many of the interview excerpts discussed in this chapter and throughout the dissertation reveal, many Santiagueros live in a state of constant tension between hopelessness and resistance, helplessness and agency. The Santiaguero longing to maintain Cuban culinary traditions, and resultant practices of food acquisition, consumption, or refusal to consume, despite the high financial and social costs, is a contemporary form of resistance. These types of

³³ I do not understand agency to imply individual free will in the way that certain scholars have (e.g. Taylor 1985, Wittgenstein 1985; see Giddens 1979), rather I am interested in a socioculturally constituted agency located in the practices of individuals and their interactions with others.

resistance employed in an effort to save the sacred space of the meal and attempt retain some of the previously normal aspects of everyday life that have been jeopardized by recent political changes in Cuba. The desire to maintain culinary traditions and the insistence on a decent cuisine are ideological orientations that hold steady in the face of constant disappointments in the face of the changing Cuban political economic system.

In this chapter's opening quote Manuel reflects that "people have lost all of their beautiful traditions, like sitting down to dinner as a family each night." Clinging to traditions and insistence on ideals determined in the past, is not only a clear connection of the past, but a manifestation of the present as "mediated affect" (Berlant 2011:4) that subjects experience *via* the ways in which they infuse memories and ideals into personal and communal experiences of present situations and events. These ways of interpreting such experiences are spread through local discourses surrounding a decent cuisine.

The "beautiful traditions" like "sitting down to dinner as a family" are part of what I found to be a normative view of what constitutes "the good life" for many Santiagueros. There is a strong attachment to remembered pasts and idealized traditions that are seen to be disappearing in contemporary life. When spaces indexical of living the good life appear to diminish, there is a growing sense of moral panic surrounding the links between the changing structures of everyday life to questions of subjectivity and how one becomes or remains a good person. These traditions and similar expressive cultural forms are the areas where many Santiagueros cultivate and maintain their sense of subjectivity through moral and ethical processes of technologies of the self (discussed in chapter six). It is by and through these social interactions that Santiagueros establish their subjective understandings of what it means to be a good person and a good Cuban. These are the spaces for fulfilling technologies of the self that

are increasingly difficult to produce as political economic structures hinder the ability to create such scenes in everyday household life.

This explains, at least in part, why so many of the families in my study go to such great lengths to acquire a “decent” and idealized cuisine, rather than simply fulfilling their caloric needs with other available foods, for example, in chapter three Maria Julia and Elvira’s dissatisfaction with eggs as their protein source and Elvira’s insistence on eating rice rather than pasta or another starch. My research participants exerted overwhelming effort to acquire particular foods and consume them in particular ways as a means of holding on to “traditional” modes of life even though these efforts may have threatened their wellbeing in other ways (see chapter six). As Berlant reveals this sort of “binding to modes of life ... [that] recasts the object of desire not as a thing (or even as a relation) but as a cluster of promises magnetized by a thing that appears as an object...” (Berlant 2011:16). In the case of my research, it might be a meal, a family dinner, a dish, or a particular ingredient for a dish that holds this level of promise. Berlant illuminates the importance of understanding the role that objects of desire, such as a decent cuisine, can have on an individual with respect to their sense of subjectivity. Santiagueros understanding of the relationship between traditions and collective subjectivity is aligned with Berlant’s view that “subjectivity is represented as a category of ‘intuition’.” Intuition works as a kind of archiving mechanism for the affects that are expressed in habituated and spontaneous behavior that appears to manage the ongoing present” (Berlant 2011:17). Santiagueros cling to “beautiful traditions of the past” as a way of giving shape to their changing understandings of their own subjectivities in the present.

The tradition of family dinnertime is a ritual that, for many, establishes a sense of security with respect to the passing of time and constant change. Sitting down collectively to a

daily meal is a regularly punctuated assurance that everything is not lost, and that there is some hope for the faltering Cuban system. For many, mealtimes are supposed to be a secure time and space that people can rely on remaining relatively constant. This is a space for care of the self. But when the daily therapy of dinnertime is interrupted, suspended, or disappears entirely, that sense of security is lost and the temporal arc continues to move toward an unknown telos. The insecurity of the unknown future heightens people's anxiety around maintaining a decent cuisine. Furthermore, as Berlant (2011) notes if the mood changes, the event changes, thus even if meals are consumed as a family and traditional cuisine is a common occurrence, this sense of struggle and urgent clinging to these moments tempers the comforting feeling and sense of security associated with family dinners. Thus dinnertime is rendered a site of struggle, protest, resistance, and no longer a space of soothing assurance of the self. Even as families sit down to traditional Cuban dinners, the struggle to acquire foods and the ways in which those moments seem to be fleeting creates "a sense of out-of-synchness" (Berlant 2011:91) with local notions of what it means to be Cuban, and what it means to be a good person and to live the good life.

Not only are certain material goods and foods thought to be necessary for creating the spaces where subjectivity is maintained, the ways in which those goods are acquired is also associated with local ideals of what it means to be a good person. Returning to Manuel's reflections on the changing morals of food acquisition in Cuba:

I ask myself why . . . it appears that the world has turned upside down, moved backwards, regressed . . . people don't know what's happening, like Adam and Eve they eat the forbidden fruit, they do it out of necessity. I see it as necessity, but it is also hopelessness.

His words reflect a deeply emotional interpretation of individual and collective experiences of change in Cuba that is shared among many of my research participants. These changes in moral and ethical ideals become compounded and tied up with other social issues in the imaginaries of people like Manuel.

Everyone has to wait until their moment comes, there are people who reflect and understand that, and there are others who say “when is my turn, my turn never comes, so I have to take it.” So they lose the confidence and sincerity of many people, the friendships that were in the neighborhoods, people shared, everyone equally, and now it is all lost. Now even families are falling apart, everyone becomes independent; the union of the family is gone.

Many Santiagueros experience the present as stagnant. They feel a sense of “stuckness,” and the ways in which they discuss their feelings about a shared historical present reveal that the struggle for a decent cuisine is a profoundly political struggle that is experienced as a type of identity crisis. The struggle for traditional food consumption is tied up with resistance to the current state food system. In the post-Soviet era these subjects also experience what Biehl and colleagues describe as a “struggle with the possibilities and dangers of economic globalization, the threat of endless violence and insecurity, and the new infrastructures and forms of political domination and resistance that lie in the shadows of grand claims of democratization and reform” (Biehl et al 2007:1).

The fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent economic crisis in Cuba during the 1990s was the impetus for an avalanche of changes, unpredictability, and insecurity that continue to be experienced even today. These events not only set off an economic crisis but also unleashed a

crisis of political identity: What did it mean to be among the few remaining socialist republics after the fall of the largest socialist world power? As the former Soviet and other eastern European republics launched into Post-Socialism and China's ongoing market reforms moved it ever closer to a new form of neoliberal socialism, Cuba was left with few socialist allies. While Cuban socialism has always been unique and Cubans have always had a strong sense of identity apart from their socialist identity, this global political shift left many Cubans wondering what this meant for their identity as Cuban socialists and anti-imperialists. As Manuel phrases it, "the world has turned upside down." This wavering sense of political identity and lingering questions of who Cuba would ally with and what this means for deeply entrenched anti-imperialist identities planted the seed for a crisis of political subjectivity in post-Soviet era. This crisis opened up a space for a new emergent sense of self and for the development of new late-socialist subjectivities.

Conclusions:

Food Consumption and Late-Socialist Subjectivity

Cuba's changing food system makes it very difficult for families to access food, given that the amount of government subsidized food has significantly decreased but access to money with which to purchase food has not sufficiently increased. Because people must eat, in order to acquire food, some families engage in practices that would have been considered to be unethical behavior by these same families and their communities in the past. At the same time, families often have very distressing emotional responses to the fact they are engaging in behavior they consider unethical. Yet for most it is not be feasible to do anything but engage in these unethical practices. Rather than changing practices they sometimes rethink the ethical norms of food acquisition. That is, if one must eat and one must engage in unethical practices in order to do so, those practices should be considered ethical, as they are necessary for survival.

Due to changes in the sociopolitical system in the post-Soviet era, everyday life has changed in Cuba. When reflecting on how these changes impact individual practices, many Cubans believe that their individual subjectivities and group identities are changing in the late-socialist era. Under this transforming system people reflect that the very core of who they are as people is changing. I observed a great deal of emotion tied up with this process of shifting ethical orientations as consumption practices shift. I found that these processes of self-reflection often caused people to think of themselves differently; that is, they reflected on themselves as having changed, or become different people. This occurred both on an individual and a community level. People articulated this by saying things like "*el Cubano ha cambiado*" (the Cuban has changed), or "*el character del Cubano ha cambiado*" (the character of the Cuban has changed).

Or, less explicitly, they reflect that “the youth today are different,” “traditions have died,” “people are not the same.”

Understanding people’s emotional responses to changing consumption practices in the post-Soviet era requires an understanding of the historical developments of modernity and post-coloniality in Cuba. As discussed in the Introduction, the foundations of Cuban identity were most strongly developed during the colonial period with the rise of modernity and during the post-Colonial period with the rise of a sense of Cuban identity and nationalism. During these periods of global trade and heavy influence of the United States, the circulation of imported goods, including food, significantly shaped the Cuban consumer as a cosmopolitan participant in the global market. An expectation for certain standards of cuisine was established during these periods. In the socialist era and at the height of Soviet mutual aid, although the types of foods that were imported shifted heavily toward those produced in the Soviet bloc, the expectation of having a large set of imported products to choose from was still met. However in the post-Soviet era, the food system has radically shifted, and people are no longer able to access the goods and services that they had come to accept as the basic standard for a decent life.

When I first began conducting research on the Cuban food system I was also intrigued by how people actually used the food system. I knew that most Cubans were accessing some food at the ration stations found on almost every block, places that often look like just another house on the block. Peering into these dark buildings revealed chalkboards outlining what goods would arrive which days and in what quantities. For most Cuban consumers these chalkboards are the focal point of the store akin to a neon sign or weekly ad for stores in other countries. Inquiries about whether a particular food is available are more often than not met with the response, “*No hay*” . . . there isn't any.

The response many of my research participants gave to the initial explanation of my research, a study of household food acquisition and consumption practices, was -- “*Aquí no hay comida!*” But even as these discourses of scarcity circulated widely, I was observing families sitting down to heaping plates of rice, beans, pork, yuca, salad, fruits, fresh squeezed juices, followed by homemade desserts and coffee. After months of struggling with this seeming paradox, it became the central focus of my research.

In recent years, under Raul Castro, the Cuban government has implemented a number of changes that seem to loosen restrictions on citizens’ ability to buy and sell goods. This rise in the availability of goods has been coupled with the successes of Lázaro Expósito, Santiago’s provincial party leader. Expósito has cracked down on corruption in the city and under his tenure CUC and peso stores have popped up all over the city. Over the years that I have worked in Santiago I witnessed an important change in the city landscape: storefronts that were vacant five years ago are now filled with new products, and people who live on residential streets open their doors and windows to sell baked goods and snacks to those who pass by.

As the system and practices of acquiring foods in Cuba have shifted, families have innovated solutions for acquiring food and acquiring cash to purchase it. Many of these practices involve elaborate webs of friends and family from whom they borrow and loan goods and money and with whom they are in an ongoing cycle of debt. In addition, some families turn to practices that they do not view as ethical, but see as necessary for survival. These practices include stealing food from warehouses, ration stations, state stores, and other places. While many families do not feel guilty about stealing from the state, their awareness that these activities result in shortages for their neighbors, friends, and families is a source of guilt. As families innovate solutions to the barriers of food access many of my research participants claim that Cubans today

are “different,” that the youth of today don't have “values,” and that the “character of the Cuban people has changed.”

As I discussed in chapter six, the structure and state system have changed, causing families and individuals to adjust the processes through which they meet their basic needs and interact with others including the people who sell to them, others who serve as gatekeepers, as well as their friends, family, and neighbors. The ethical dimensions of consumption and food related transactions have changed, thus shifting the ethical practices and techniques of the self that are central to subjectivity. If the ideals of being a “good person,” living the “good life,” and being a “good Cuban” were established around the time of Cuban independence and really have not shifted much, then it becomes increasingly difficult to adjust to the changes in the state system and the changing ways in which Cubans must interact with each other and acquire goods in ways that hinder their abilities to maintain a sense of good character or to be good people by their own standards.

Furthermore, as I have illustrated in chapters three and six in particular, access to these foods and services has become incorporated into Santiaguero life processes for how they cultivate their sense of self, what it means to be a good person, and how they interact with family and friends. Beyond the ways in which individuals struggle with food acquisition, there is also an expectation of egalitarian distribution; Santiagueros expect that not only their own family should have access to basic needs but also so should their neighbors and everyone throughout the city. As the food system falters and the guarantee of egalitarian distribution is unhinged, Santiagueros feel a heightened sense of fear and uncertainty over the future of their community and their own individual security in that unknown future. They also experience different and ever changing standards for social interaction around accessing good and services. As discussed in chapter six,

the previously established moral codes for exchange and other social interaction are shifting and thus changing the expectations for how people interact. These changes lead to shifting understandings of individual subjectivities and collective identities, as Manuel phrased it: “The world has changed, love is harder, love is more difficult to find now, and already friends are not true friends.”

At the same time that people told me that the character of the Cuban people has changed, they were also observing that the younger generations, the *la juventud de hoy*, were different. Many remarked that today’s youth were lost, that they had “no values,” that they were a new hybrid of combined socialist and capitalist values. How do these changing codes of the street relate to the idea that the youth of Cuba are “different” from older generations? One answer to this question is that when I asked research participants about their future hopes and dreams many oriented toward the younger generations. Many Santiagueros reflected that they both wished for simple things for themselves or their children, like finding love, remaining in a happy and stable marriage, and having children. Others hoped for a bit more: that their children would have better economic opportunities, such as higher salaries, or that they might have a home of their own rather than having to live with several generations, as they and their parents had. Most common was the wish for some combination of a stable conjugal union, a long standing ideal based on traditional views of the Cuban family and advanced economic advancement through business and entrepreneurial opportunities. At the same time that the older generations talked about the youth being lost because of their new hybrid of socialist and capitalist values, they wished for themselves the continuation of this hybrid identity via the juxtaposition of traditional socialist ideals and progressive market-based economic opportunities.

Subjectivity is a constellation of meanings based on the social imaginary and the way that individuals emotionally experience that social imaginary. Thus, while part of subjectivity is clearly political and must be understood with respect to individuals' political, structural, and systemic subjection, it is also crucial to analyze the experience of this change as a personal and emotional shift in how people go about their everyday lives. This shift is rooted in individual and social entanglements with myriad new and stressful life encounters. In Santiago de Cuba today, the changing food system leaves Santiagueros feeling "stuck" in a political and structural maze. They thus feel subjected to difficulties that cause stress, anxiety, and social strain. This experience coupled with the emotional realization that the basic foods they feel are necessary to create a decent cuisine are increasingly difficult or impossible to access creates an internal crisis of self, an unraveling of the foundations upon which their subjectivity was once based. Thus opening a space for new and different subjectivities, but it is a space of uncertainty that is fearsome for many; a space where love is harder and friendships are no longer true.

This dissertation has been about bringing together the two realms of experience that my research participants struggled to reconcile -- the ideal and the practical. The ideal is the realm in which the standards for being a good person, mother, woman, man, Cuban, socialist, etc. are established. That ideal is often based on long-standing traditions, on ideas established during the period of Cuban independence, the early socialist period, and the height of Soviet material aid.

The practical realm is where the resources, practices, and systems that structure life reside. The practical realm is based largely on availability and accessibility. Are the items or services that I need to live my life available? Do I have enough money to buy them? Do I have to

do unethical things to acquire them? Much of the practical realm relies on the state under Cuban socialism as the main provisioner of goods and the gatekeeper for accessing services. Do I have the paperwork that I need to acquire these goods? Do I have the connections necessary to circumvent the bureaucracies that slow down my access to certain services? These practical issues are met with ethical dilemmas—am I willing to break the law if it means I can get what I need? Outside of breaking the law people are faced with other ethical dilemmas: Can I access this item by borrowing it or money for it from a friend or family member? If so, will that put them in a precarious situation? Am I willing to put my friend or family member in a bad situation? These ethical conundrums fall at the boundaries of the practical and the ideal.

This situation is experienced differently across neighborhood, skin color, and social class. As the food system changes, the process of acquiring food becomes increasingly difficult for lower income families. Many families in this study acquired food through borrowing or purchasing on the black market—both types of exchange are established through social connections. But the lower income families tended to have less extensive social connections, their social networks tended to be geographically confined to their marginalized neighborhoods, and were restricted to other low-income families who also had limited access to resources and fewer opportunities to access food as easily as lighter skinned ones. Furthermore, given this heavy reliance on social networks, the ongoing problem with racism in Cuba keeps many darker-skinned Cubans from accessing food. These inequalities are much more severe at the end of the month when rations and money run out. The temporal cycle of these data reveal the importance of an experiential level analyses that accounts for differences in experience through time, and the complexities of race and class relations in an ostensibly “post-racial” and classless socialist society in understanding contemporary Cuban socialist subjectivity.

This analysis of a changing food system reveals the ways in which changes in political economic systems impact individuals' experiences of everyday life. In the case of the Cuban food system, the process of constant change, change without warning, illogical change, and a lack of teleology leaves people in a perpetual state of uncertainty, which has its own effects on lived experience. The fact that this analysis centers on food—a vital substance necessary not only for survival but linked in fundamental ways to subjectivity makes this set of changes even more important in the everyday lives of those experiencing them, and thus creating an even greater sense of urgency around the situation.

Most of my research participants dream of simple things for the future. They hope to live a out peaceful life with their families, grow old with a partner who loves them, watch their children create their own families who flourish in careers that make them happy, raising grandchildren who have a better life than they did. Single men and women dream of traveling abroad, seeing the world, or moving away to live out their dreams by making money and experiencing life away from the island. Many of my interviews ended with humble dreams for the future, of improvements in the system that would make life easier, for instance, the ability to enjoy a Sunday afternoon with the family eating ice cream at a local ice cream parlor, or as one person put it “I just want to be able to have all of the things that I want at the same time, I want to drink chocolate milk and not pass days where I have chocolate but no milk.” May they live to see their dreams come true.

Appendix: Demographic Information on All Study Participants

Name	Chap	DOB	Age (2011)	Sex	Skin Color	Religion	Neighd SES	Education Level	Job
Carla	3 5 8	1943	68	F	Black	Espiritista	Low	middle school	maid/nanny
Cori	3	1947	64	M	Black	Catholic	Low	high school	none
Gema	3 8	1963	48	F	Black	Espiritista	Low	high school	black market food sales
Yaicel	3 6 7 8	1983	28	F	Black	None	Low	high school	dancer
Oruli	3 8	1979	32	M	Black	None	Low	high school	moto driver
Yordanis	3 8	1988	23	M	Black	None	Low	college, nursing school	student
Mariladis	3 8	1991	20	F	Mulatta	None	Low	college, nursing school	student
Livia		2003	8	F	Black	None	Low	n/a	n/a
Obalo	3 8	2008	3	M	Black	None	Low	n/a	n/a
Tomas	2 3	1957	54	M	White	Catholic	High	college	engineer/ rents rooms
Carmen	2 3	1960	51	F	White	Catholic	High	college	engineer/ housewife
Daisy	2 3	1988	23	F	White	Catholic	High	high school	none
Shana	2 3	1977	34	F	White	Catholic	High	college	foreign joint venture
Yorlanky	2 3	1983	28	M	White	None	High	high school	owns truck, driver
Abulea B	2	1926	85	F	White	Catholic	High	high school	none
Abuleo D	2	1932	79	M	White	Catholic	High	college	retired military
Elvira	2 3 5 8	1973	38	F	Mulatto	Piedad Popular	High/Med	tecnico medio	private seamstress
Joaquin		1968	43	M	Mulatta	Piedad	High/Med	tecnico	beer factory

						Popular		medio	
María de la Gracia	2 4	1949	62	F	White	Piedad Popular	High/Med	tecnico medio	retired hospital aid
Leonardo	2 4	1944	67	M	White	Piedad Popular	High/Med	College BA equiv	retired military
Esteban	2 8	1989	22	M	Mulatto	None	High/Med	tecnico basico	cook particular
Mayelin	6 8	1992	19	F	White	None	High/Med	tecnico basico	podiatry assistant
Jorge Alejandro	8	1945	66	M	White	None	High/Med	college	retired
Milagros Santa	8	1943	68	F	White	None	High/Med	college	retired
María Julia	3 5 7 8	1966	45	F	White	None	High/Med	college	architect
Enrique	8	1956	55	M	White	None	High/Med	college	transport
Jose		2003	8	M	White	None	High/Med	n/a	n/a
Cecilia	2 6	1957	54	F	White	None	High/Med	college	bodega
Rosa		1956	55	F	White	None	High/Med	college	nurse
Ramira	4 6	1979	32	F	Mulatta	Piedad Popular	Low	tecnico basico	server cafeteria
Vicente	4	1966	45	M	Black	Piedad Popular	Low	tecnico basico	garbage man
Yoselyn		1996	15	F	Mulatta	Piedad Popular	Low	middle school	none
Yakolyn	4	1994	17	F	Mulatta	Piedad Popular	Low	middle school	none/black market
Francisco	4	1995	16	M	Black	Piedad Popular	Low	middle school	moto driver
Rafael		2010	1	M	Mulatto	Piedad Popular	Low	n/a	n/a
Luz	4	2008	3	F	Mulatta	Piedad Popular	Low	n/a	n/a
Regina	2 5	1965	46	F	Black	Santeria	Low	college	caretaker
Manuel	8	1973	38	M	Black	Santeria	Low	college	local gvt/musician

Yisela		1987	24	F	Black	Santeria	Low	high school	housewife
Rafael		1978	33	M	Black	None	Low	high school	real estate agent
Albert		1970	41	M	Black	VooDoo	Low	high school	custodian
Isabel		1985	26	F	Black	None	Low	none	none
Chichi		2008	3	M	Black/P rieto	VooDoo	Low	n/a	n/a
Fe		2009	2	F	Mulatta	None	Low	n/a	n/a
Caridad	5	1969	42	F	white	None	high	college	driver for foreign owner
Jorge Chino	5	1966	45	M	mulatto	None	High	college	city of stgo
Jorgito	5	1994	17	M	white	None	High	some college	student
Vira	5	2003	8	F	white	None	High	n/a	n/a
Dagmar		1970	41	F	Mestiza	None	low	middle school	domestic
Javier		1980	31	M	Black	None	low	middle school	farmer
Yolexis		1992	19	F	Mestiza	None	low	Some college	student
Yadel		1994	17	F	Mulatto	None	low	n/a	student
Marandis		1997	14	F	Mulatta	None	low	n/a	student
Namcy		1999	12	F	Mulatta	None	low	n/a	student
Ariel		2003	8	M	Black	None	low	n/a	student
Carlos	2 3 6	1976	35	M	White	None	med/high	College	male prostitute
Rodulfo	2 3	1966	45	M	Black	None	med/high	College	mechanic
Armando	2 3	1943	68	M	White	None	med/high	Phd	retired chemist
Mickey	5 6 7	1970	41	M	Negro	Catholic	med/high	college	unemployed
Monika		1986	25	F	Mestiza	Catholic	med/high	middle school	unemployed
Raydel		1979	32	M	Black	Catholic	med/high	high school	unemployed/

									black market
Yakel		2007	4	F	Mulatta	Catholic	med/high	n/a	n/a
Reina		2009	2	F	Mulatto	Catholic	med/high	n/a	n/a
Lisandra	3 7	1952	59	F	Mulatta	None	high	Some High School	retired
Rudy	3 8	1950	61	M	Black	None	high	Technico	retired
Miguel	3	1974	37	M	Jabao	None	High	Technico	none
Sula	2	1981	30	F	Black/C hinese	Catholic	med	College BA equiv	tourism
Reinaldo aka El Rey	2	1971	40	M	Black	Catholic	med	College BA equiv	tourism
Landi	2	2009	2	M	Black/C hinese	Catholic	med	n/a	n/a
Cosmo		1983	28	M	Black	none	High/Med	High School	none/black market
Florentina		1985	26	F	Mulatta	none	High/Med	Some high school	none/ housewife
Abelardo		2010	1	M	Mulatto	none	High/Med	n/a	n/a
Lázaro	3	1947	64	M	Black	Palo Monte	High/Med	college	chef
Amalia	3	1963	48	F	Mulatta	Palo Monte	High/Med	college	housewife
Yasmnis		1969	42	M	Mulatto	Palo Monte	High/Med	technico basico	bus driver
Teresa		1988	23	F	Mulatta	Palo Monte	High/Med	high school	maid/nanny
Marta	5	1944	67	F	white	None	med	college, phd	retired historian
Ale		1937	74	M	white	None	med	College, phd	retired engineer
Ariana	8	1964	47	F	white	None	med	high school	unemployed
Josué		1966	45	M	mulatto	None	med	tecnico medio	black market
Margarita		1981	30	F	white	None	med	high school	none

Pepe		1916	95	M	white	Catholic	med	college	retired
Nena		1912	99	F	white	Catholic	med	high school	retired
Tania		2008	3	F	white	None	med	n/a	n/a
Robertico		1981	30	M	white	Catholic	med/high	tecnico medio	none
Yamila		1985	26	F	white	Catholic	med/high	high school	none
Corazon		2008	3	F	white	Catholic	med/high	n/a	n/a
Matitis	4 6	1970	41	F	mulatta	None	low	middle school	maid/nanny
María Elizabeth	6 7	1953	58	F	mulatta	Catholic	med/high	college, medical school	retired MD
Orlando	2 3 7	1949	62	M	black	Catholic	med/high	college	retired military
Marcos		1971	40	M	black	Catholic	med/high	college	unemployed
David		1973	38	M	black	Catholic	med/high	high school	unemployed
Norina		2008	3	F	trigueña	Catholic	med/high	n/a	n/a
Omara		1963	48	F	black	Espiritista	high	college	accountant
Eugenio		1948	63	M	black	Espiritista	high	college	military
Yasmanis	8	1992	19	M	black	Espiritista	high	college	librarian
María del Carmen	4 8	1968	43	F	Mulatta	none	med/low	high school	housewife
Tico	4	1952	59	M	Mulatto	none	med/low	Masters	English Professor
Frank	4	1985	26	M	Mulatto	none	med/low	high school	unemployed
Yamila	4	1989	22	F	Mulatta	none	med/low	high school	custodian
Estrella	4	2008	3	F	Mulatta	none	med/low	n/a	n/a
Berta		1951	60	F	white	none	low	High School	farmer
Noah		1938	73	M	white	none	low	High School	farmer
Felipe	7	1981	30	M	white	none	low	College	farmer
Aida		1971	40	F	white	none	low	College	housewife

Raulnelis		2003	8	M	white	none	low	n/a	n/a
Felipe Jr.		2007	4	M	white	none	low	n/a	n/a

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