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Re/mediating Revolution:

Cultivating Solidarity in a Queer Cuban Community

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in Anthropology

by

Yanina Gori

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Re/mediating Revolution:

Cultivating Solidarity in a Queer Cuban Community

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Professor Hannah Appel, Co-Chair

Professor Christopher Jason Throop, Co-Chair

Based on fifteen months of ethnographic research, this dissertation explores how the latest political and economic "update" of Cuban socialism is experienced, interpreted and re/mediated in the work of artists at "the Concoction" (*El Mejunje*), one of the oldest LGBT cultural centers in Cuba, located in the city of Santa Clara. After the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the infrastructures of universal provisioning of the Cuban socialist welfare state broke down. The delivery of goods and services by the state became increasingly scarce and shaped by arrhythmic waiting. Art became one of the central affective means by which ordinary Cubans participated, debated, critiqued, and made sense of this changing political economic reality. The everyday struggle (*lucha*) for acquiring goods and services, constitutive of the lived experience of post-Soviet socialism in Cuba, drastically intensified as socialism was updating on the Island – a process which formally started in 2010 and led to the approval of a new socialist constitution in

2019. In this dissertation, I posit that artists in Cuba play central roles in moments of transition, during the so-called Special Period of the 90s and the current socialist update. They act as mediators, through different artistic mediums, between an increasingly faltering revolutionary state and the Cuban people.

The Concoction emerged out of the political urgency of the Special Period, queering revolutionary ideology by problematizing multiple forms of marginalization and exclusion within the cultural politics of the Cuban Revolution, including (but not limited to) its hyper masculine heteronormative canons. I illustrate how, within the open community of the Concoction, the everyday lived experience of struggle in post-Soviet socialist Cuba is transformed into art, and how in turn art provides for an affective infrastructure that makes life livable and meaningful within and outside of Santa Clara. In the wake of 'disasters,' from hurricane Irma to Covid-19, artists at the Concoction cultivate forms of solidarity that activate people as a form of infrastructure, remediating for the lack of food, electricity, or medicines through their performances. By engaging with the past and present of this queer community, I argue that over the last thirty-five years, the Concoction have been functioning as a 'good enough space' to reconstitute revolutionary feelings in the midst of political disillusionment.

The dissertation of Yanina Gori is approved.

Hanna Garth

Akhil Gupta

Hannah Appel, Committee Co-Chair

Christopher Jason Throop, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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Al Mejunje todes,

y a Lucia,

que tu voz se siga oyendo inmortal desde las raíces del Framboyán.

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AKWOLEDGMENTS

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VITA

EDUCATION

M.A. University of Bologna, Political Science.
Summa Cum Laude, 2009.

B.A. Bocconi University, Milan.
Major in: Economics for Art, Culture, and Communication
Cum Laude, 2004.

PUBLICATIONS

Gori, Yanina. The Cuban Decameron: re/mediating Hurricane Irma. In preparation for *The Journal of Latin America and the Caribbean.*

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2021 "It's a psychological war:" The politics and poetics of waiting in Cuba.
Society for Psychological Anthropology, April.

2019 "Pure Feelings:" Mercedes and Maga's documentary.
American Anthropological Association Annual, Vancouver, November.

2017 Back to ethnography itself: Alberto Granado's shoes.
American Anthropological Association, Washington, November.

2017 Uncertain futures, Spectral moods, and the 90th birthday of Fidel Castro.
Society for psychological anthropology, March.

FELLOWSHIPS, HONORS, AND AWARDS

2019 Summer Research Grant, UCLA Anthropology Department

2018 Dixon Award Summer Research Grant, UCLA Anthropology Department

2016 Graduate Summer Research Mentorship, UCLA Graduate Division

2006-2009	Fellowship for outstanding student, ARSTUD/ERGO, University of Bologna
2001-2004	Fellowship for outstanding student, ISU BOCCONI, Bocconi University

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

2021	Graduate Student Researcher, Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, UCLA.
2021-2018	Teaching Fellow, Department of Anthropology, UCLA.
2017-2016	Teaching Associate, Department of Anthropology, UCLA.
2016-2015	Teaching Assistant, Department of Anthropology, UCLA.
2016	Graduate Student Researcher for Hannah Appel, UCLA.

Introduction

"*Our daily bread, our daily performances*"

The flour for bread disappeared in Santa Clara in November 2018. With the flour, disappeared the pizza, which for 5 CUP had been a quick fix for the lunch of Cubans across the city. In the State's owned *hamburguesería*, in the central Square of Santa Clara, only burgers were left—and the same happened to the privately owned burger shop right next to it. The local State's *panadería*, a few blocks away, closed entirely, and bread also disappeared from the private shop of doña Neli. The bread street vendors, whose distinctive chants ("*Bread, warm bread, pan caliente, El pan…"*) would enliven the everyday soundscapes and rhythms of the City, also went silent.

Since the 90s, no such shortage of wheat flour had been experienced in Santa Clara. This was just the first of many signs that as socialism was updating on the Island so was the everyday struggle to access basic goods and services, an everyday struggle that shapes the lived experience of post-Soviet socialism in Cuba. The disappearance of bread was re/mediated in the work of artists who regularly perform at *El Mejunje*, the Concoction, the LGBT cultural center where I conducted my fieldwork. In December, during an end of the year concert at *El museo de artes decorativas*, Esperanza—a Concoction member and my adopted Cuban mother—asked me to recite Mario Benedetti's *Latin American Our Father,* a poem that reinterprets the traditional catholic prayer from the experience of the Global South where the daily bread is not always granted. We changed some of the verses to let them resonate with the feelings and lived experience of the audience, and ours.

> Holy Father, I'm not sure if I like the style
> in which your will chooses to assert itself

I say it with irreverence and gratitude
two emblems which will soon be the same thing
I say it above all thinking of our bread
of every day and every little piece of the day
Yesterday you took it from us, and before yesterday too
Esta Perdida la harina de trigo[1]
Give it to us today!
or at least the right to be given our daily bread
not only the one which was the symbol of something
but at least the *casabe,*[2] our daily bread of the 90s
now that we have few hopes left and debts
forgive us if you can our debts
but don't forgive us our hope."

During an end of the year concert at the *UNEAC* (The National Union of Artists older than 35), La Trovuntivitis, a collective of *trovadores* (musicians of trova), also made of the disappearance of bread the central theme of their songs. Alain, a 50-year-old white musician, reinterpreted a song he had composed during the Special Period of the 90s, *Como me gusta el pan con pasta,*[3] and Roly, a 45-year-old Black musician, composed a new song titled *El pan caliente*[4] which verses follow:

Baker, the hard crust bread,
The warm bread, warm is the bread

Between a thousand and one doubts
Madness matures faster than love
The tree of *bitterness* is saturated with fruits
In and out of season
And it has reached such a height
that the sun almost does not pass
The branches are pure tears
moistening the dark land of *frustration*

Baker, the hard crust bread

[1] Wheat flour got lost

[2] *Casabe* is a bread done with cassava flour. During the Special Period of the 90s, due to the shortage of wheat flour, it became the daily bread of Cubans.

[3] How much I like the bread with spread

[4] "Warm bread." You can find the music video of the song at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_3fYOfo6Ls You are highly encouraged to watch the video since the lyrics alone do not do justice to the song. The music video also offers a viewer a tour through Santa Clara's streets. Roly Berrio is one of the original members of La Trovuntivitis. The song was written during the crises of Bread in November-December 2018. The musical video was filmed and published during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The warm bread, warm is the bread

The same in Cuba with the flu
than in Russia, Argentina or Cyprus
I have the same impression
All the leaders enjoy more privileges
than the average of their nations
And that's the cruel harmony
That's the real temptation
To accept privileges
More than biting the bait
It is the first betrayal of the people

Baker, the hard crust bread
Warm bread
Baker, the hard crust bread
Warm is the bread

As the soul is the last thing that is abandoned
I only wear my heart
Although a little stubborn for the miseries
And the poison of *despair*
Hey, that they give us back our daily bread!
That they cook reality a little!
It is so raw that there is no tooth that can resist it
Look that the false teeth cannot make it anymore
They should dress in shame and humility

I bring butter for the toast
And I bring soft bread for those who are *tired*
For the one who is tired, for the one who is *bored*
For the one who can no longer, and feels broken, *broken*

I bring butter for the toast
And I bring soft bread for those who are tired
Joy, *joy*, we need joy holy god

Hey, look that the bread is lost![5]

[5] Panadero, el pan de corteza dura,
El Pan caliente, calentito el pan
Entre las mil y una dudas
La locura se madura mas rápido que el amor
El árbol de la amargura de fruta se nos satura
Dentro y fuera de estación
Y ha agarrado tanta altura que casi no pasa el sol
Las ramas lagrimas pura
humedeciendo la oscura tierra de la frustración
Panadero, el pan de corteza dura
El pan caliente, calentito el pan

The renewed struggle for bread—along with provoking affects of bitterness, frustration, despair, tiredness, and boredom—was re/mediated in work of artists who critiqued the growing inequalities between the governors and the people, while opening "good enough" spaces of play, creativity, and joy to reconstitute a political illusion in the midst of disillusionment (Winnicott 1973). Jokes about the disappearance of bread were also incorporated in the performances of the theatre artists of the Concoction, provoking laughter and amusement among the audience. The everyday struggle (*lucha*) for acquiring goods and services is constitutive of the lived experience of post-Soviet socialism in Cuba and drastically intensified as socialism was updating on the Island, a process which formally started in 2010 and lead to the approval of a new socialist constitution in 2019 (Weinreb 2009; Pertierra 2011; Brotherton 2012; Fernandes 2006; Frederik

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Lo mismo en Cuba con gripe
que en Rusia, Argentina o Chipre
Tengo la misma impresión
Toditos lo que son jefes gozan de mas privilegios
que la media de su nación
Y esa es la cruel armonía
Esa es la real tentación
Aceptar los privilegios
Mas que morder la carnada
Es la primera traición al pueblo

Panadero, el pan de corteza dura
Calentito el pan
Panadero, el pan de corteza dura
Calentito el pan

Como el alma es lo ultimo que se abandona
Solamente llevo puesto el corazón
Aunque un poco testarudo por las penas
Y el veneno de la desesperación
Oye, que devuelvan el pan nuestro de cada día
Que cocinen un poco la realidad
Es tan cruda que no hay diente que resista
Mira la postiza dentadura no da mas
Que se vistan de vergüenza y humildad

Traigo mantequilla para el pan tostado
Y traigo el pan suave pa' el que este cansado
pa' el que este cansado, pa' el que este aburrido
Y no pueda mas se sienta fundido, fundido

Traigo mantequilla para el pan tostado
Y traigo el pan suave pa' el que este cansado
Alegría, Alegría, necesitamos dios santo
Oye que el pan está perdido!!

2012; Garth 2020). This dissertation explores how the "struggles of the everyday" are transformed into art, and how in turn artists offer an affective infrastructure that makes life livable and meaningful within and outside of the city of Santa Clara. Against Max Weber's characterization of modernity as a process of progressive rationalization, bureaucratization, and disenchantment of everyday life, many scholars have stressed the affective, *enchanted* nature, of our unevenly shared modernity. William Mazzarella (2009) has stressed the pivotal role played by affects in any social project that wants to be effective without recourse to force alone. Habermas's (1989) public sphere, rather than a sphere of rational consensus, is rethought as a sphere of affective resonances, a space that interfolds impersonal social forms with the intimate currents of experience (Mazzarella 2009, 2017; see also Fernández 2000). In Cuba this *enchantment* of the everyday is deeply entangled into the work of artistic and cultural centers on the Island that in the project of the Cuban Revolution were meant to provide the 'quotidian bread' for the cultivation of ever new selves for a new society. Artists in Cuba play central roles in moments of transition (during the Special Period of the 90s and in its haunting returning in the present Socialist Updates) by acting as *mediators,* through different mediums, between an increasingly faltering Revolutionary State and the people.

As the Cuban state shifts its promises, services, and subsides to Cuban citizens, what kind of subjectivities – "modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear and so forth that animate acting subjects" (Ortner 2005, 31) – emerge among those citizens, and what role does art play in mediating these new selves? And how does an ethnographic focus on "art and culture" enhance our understanding of the role of affects and emotions, circulated within artistic public spheres, in shaping political economic transformation and in constituting subjectivities that may fit or exceed the political-economic project of the Cuban nation state?

Marxist cultural studies and the cultural politics of the Cuban revolution.

My research was conducted at an historical moment of political-economic change in Cuba in which the partial withdrawal of the socialist Revolutionary state intertwined with the increasingly faltering state of its infrastructures of provisioning. In this dissertation I explore the work of artists and cultural producers in re/mediating the affective relationship between the State and its citizens and between citizens themselves. The role of art in mediating political-economic processes has been central to the thought of Marxist cultural studies (Gramsci 1971, Williams 1978, Horkheimer and Adorno 1969, Habermas 1991, Hall 2006). Raymond Williams (1978), inspired by the thought of Gramsci, advocated for a not vulgar Marxism that, instead of considering artistic production as an ideological element of the superstructure –reflecting the mind of the artist and/or its material conditions of production– looked at art works as mediating hegemony as a lived social process stressing the role of *temporality* and *feelings* in effecting social change. It is in order to understand the emergent (or pre-emergent) that Williams developed the concept of *structures of feeling*: "social experiences in solution, distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more immediately available" (133-34). Inhabiting the gap between experience and articulation, structures of feeling can be fully recognized only retroactively or at particular moments of struggle and transition that manifest in changes in aesthetic conventions (through the emergence of new artistic forms or the modification of old ones).

Since the 1959 Revolution, the process of cultural production and consumption was made an object of central governmental concern, as it was considered essential to the development of a socialist ethos at the individual and national level.[6] As such, in line with

[6] In *Man and Socialism*, Che Guevara envisioned a society of "new man"— "an idealized masculine citizen poised to confront the emasculating powers of U.S. imperialism through discipline, strong work ethics, and the expression of one's own human condition through *culture and art*" (Chomsky et. Al 2003: 374). National development of Third World nations was regarded as being not exclusively a technical or a formal economic problem: it was a political and

anthropologists who have studied the role of cultural producers in re/mediating political economic projects (bound into national/state projects) and in constituting heterogenous political and ethical subjectivities (Abu-Lughod 1999; Ortner 2013; Mankekar 1999, 2015), Cuban scholars have devoted careful attention to the roles 'art and culture' have played in mediating different moments in the Cuban revolutionary history, reflecting changes in the national economy in response to changing geopolitics in the world economy (Moore 2006; Guerra 2012; Fernandes 2006; Hernandez-Reguant et al. 2009; Allen 2011; Frederik 2005, 2012; Bodenheimer 2013; Gordy 2015). Scholars studying the post-revolutionary moment have stressed the democratizing role the Revolution played in making artistic production and consumption a citizen's entitlement, while tightly controlling its forms and products. The revolution greatly benefitted the working-classes as both producers and consumers of art. Many of the most renowned Cuban cultural figures of the present-day were from humble origins and would have never been able to excel in the arts would have not been for the reforms introduced by the Revolution (Moore 2006: 70-78; Guerra 2012). Silverio, the 70-years-old queer charismatic leader of the Concoction and its homonymous Theatre Company, rose to prominence in the 90s and became a recognized cultural figure, something he feels he could not have achieved without the Revolution:

> The Revolution opened this possibility here, it brought the first schools of art instructors of theater. I, who am a *guajiro* (peasant) from the most remote part of the Cuban countryside, could not have done what I did if the Revolution did not succeed. I believe that in this the Revolution has been fundamental. There are more theater groups than there should be. I think there is no country in the world that has the number of professional theater groups we have here.

Scholars studying the post-Soviet moment (i.e., the so-called *Special Period*) have stressed the role artists, particularly state sponsored ones, played in allowing dissenting voices while reimagining revolutionary ideology on more inclusive bases. The state was able to maintain

cultural problem. The development of a socialist ethos at the individual level was regarded as central to the development of the socialist nation as a whole (Fagen 1969).

hegemony during these vulnerable times, partially thanks to the work of artist that remediated the relationship between disaffiliated citizens and the state. New models of revolutionary subjectivity (i.e., the queer revolutionary, the urban cultivated campesino) emerged in the works of art of the time, reflecting a change in structures of feeling, that challenged previous notions of hyper masculinity and expressed the need for a more inclusive cultural politics (Fernandes 2006; Hernandez-Reguant et al. 2009; Allen 2011; Frederik 2005, 2012; Gordy 2015). After the 90s, Silverio gained increasing public recognition as an exemplary figure as he embodied and enacted through his artistic projects the virtues of a queer *Hombre Novisimo* who blurred the boundaries between rural/urban, queer/straight, peasant/artist (Frederik 2005, 2012). At an historical moment when shortages, and thus waiting, became central to the lived experience of Cubans, Silverio rather than dwelling in waiting (as a deferral of possibilities in the present) was able to summon those possibilities by inspiring processual participation in new forms of *action* that opened spaces, such as the Concoction, to reenact the cultural politics of the Revolution on more inclusive bases.

The cultural life of political economy

Substantivist approaches in economic anthropology (Tsing 2005, 2015; Ho 2009; Yanagisako 2002; Elyachar 2005, 2012; Bear et al. 2015) and the social study of finance and economic performativity (Callon 1998; Butler 2010; MacKenzie 2008) have challenged Polanyi's (2001) thesis of the modern disembeddedness of "the economy" from larger social structures. They have stressed the necessity to consider the autonomy of the economic sphere as performatively (re)produced rather than something that happened once and for all at the dawn of European modernity. As such, these scholars have problematized "the state" and "the economy" as pre-given entities and have focused on how such singular and monolithic notions of "the state" or "the economy" are (re)produced through heterogeneous cultural processes and

practices that converge in producing the "effect" of an already given and knowable singular "state" or "economy" (Mitchell 1998; Gupta 2012; Appel 2017). In line with the work of these scholars, the anthropological study of post-socialism, has contested teleological narratives of 'transition' from socialism to capitalism. It has payed close ethnographic attention to the role played by kinship, gender, race, and subjectivity, in (re)generating economic "systems" and enacting formal 'updates' of the national economy. Stressing the embeddedness of the latter in cultural practices, anthropological work on post-socialism has problematized Euro-American notions of market economy, property, commodity, civil society, and the state through ethnographic investigation of how such abstract concepts are translated, enacted, and rendered meaningful in the lives of social actors and cultural institutions on the ground (Verdery 1996; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Humphrey 1998, 2002; Lampland 1995; Berdahl et al. 2000; Han et al. 2002; Yurchak 2005). The Cuban state is not post-socialist; instead, it would be more apt to say that Cuba is still-socialist in a largely post-socialist (or perhaps pre-socialist) world (see also Garth 2020, 12). I engage with the anthropological literature on post-socialism as relevant to Cuba on these terms.

In the dissertation I argue that 'disasters', from hurricanes to epidemics, work to render visible the localized practices, "affective states," and discourse which performatively re/constitute "the" Cuban socialist nation-state, its national economy, and its "culture" (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017; Gupta 1995, 2012; Appel 2017, 2019; Butler 2010). The artists at the Concoction play a central role in re/mediating such disasters by remediating the break-down of State's infrastructures, which is distinctive of socialist governmentality after the 90s. My dissertation, following Graeber (2001) stresses how the value generated by cultural institutions such as the Concoction does not easily fit within economic theories of value production. Rather, the activity of cultural producers at this site is better captured if understood as "labor not directed as much at the creation of objects as at reshaping human beings and the relations

between them" (Graeber 2005, 452). I thus stress the moral, aesthetic, and symbolic aspects of value generation.

The work of art: re/mediating affective states

Raymond Williams (1978) can be considered a precursor of the affective turn in the humanities and social sciences. Inscribing themselves in the tradition opened by Williams—yet re-actualizing his concerns about culture, power, and social transformation through a post-structuralist sensibility— the affective turn in the humanities has brought to the center the work of emotions and affects, circulating within public spheres, in the constitution of economic and political "systems" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Massumi 2002; Berlant 2011; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Stewart 2007; Mazzarella 2009). Feminist scholars in cultural studies have increasingly been stressing the work of temporality and affects as *mediums* constituting the very boundaries between subject/object, self/other, public/private, material/imaginative (Ahmed 2004; Berlant 2008, 2011; Mankekar 2015). Purnima Mankekar expands William's theorizations to draw attention to the multiple dimensions in which time and affect matter in processes of constitution and disarticulation of the nation and its heterogeneous subjects in transnational public cultures (2015). Similarly, Lauren Berlant exemplifies an attempt to grasp the American public sphere in its sensorial (and therefore aesthetic) dimension in an affect-full political present. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Berlant has taken affect as constitutive of our *relationality with objects*, in *between* the constitution of "subject" and "object," with an attention to the way through which we maintain, sustain, and return to specific libidinal "objects" bearing an unconscious affective attachment (2008, 2011). For Mankekar as well, while constitutive of our relationality with objects, affects do not reside either in the subject nor in the object but rather are generated through the encounter between subjects and particular objects that "constitute nodes in the circulation of affects" (Mankekar 2015, 73). Sarah Ahmed has analyzed the work of

everyday, lived emotions, in the formation of the capitalist nation-state. Instead of localizing emotions in specific bodies, Ahmed considers how emotions circulate between bodies as to (re)produce distinctions between "self" and "others," making and shaping "bodies as forms of action, which also involves orientations towards others" (2004, 4). Repetition of particular signs, which acquire emotional value in circulation, designates which bodies belong to the national 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) and which ones are abjected by it. Emotions in circulation constitute political subjectivities by shaping the way we are moved and oriented towards others, objects, or the world (Ahmed 2004, 95). Ahmed develops, drawing on Marx and Freud, the concept of "affective economies." For Ahmed, signs acquire emotional value through circulation and repetition: "affect does not reside in an object or sign but is an *effect* of the circulation between objects and signs. Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become" (2004, 45, my emphasis). Emotions for Ahmed, as affects for Mankekar, are "the very flesh of time" through them the past might "stick" to particular bodies, objects, signs and/or open up futures (2004, 202).

As I have detailed in the previous section, artists in Cuba, particularly during moments of crises and transitions such as the 90s, played a central role in re/constituting hegemony as a living social process. The 'structures of feelings' of the 90s are captured by changes in aesthetic conventions such as the appearance in the works of artist of emergent models of subjectivity that were previously excluded from the imagined revolutionary community. During the crises of the 90s, in the wake of hurricanes and other 'disasters,' the work of cultural producers is central in capturing the role of affects and temporality in processes of re/constitution of the Cuban nation state and its heterogenous subjects. During the hardest moments of the Special Period, in the wake of hurricane Irma, or in the wake of Covid-19, artists at the Concoction affectively re/mediate the breaking down of State's infrastructures, the here/not here (fort-da) of *bread*, *electricity*, or *medicines,* 'object' which constitutes nodes in the circulation of 'affective states,' by

remediating for those lacking objects through the enacted performance while opening "good enough" spaces to reconstitute a political illusion in the midst of disillusionment (Winnicott 1973). This dissertation explores these projects of artistic, affective remediation as they have taken place in and around the provincial city of Santa Clara.

Santa Clara

Santa Clara is the capital city of the Cuban Province of Villa Clara located in the center of the Island at approximately 172 miles from Havana, at 3 hours by car or 4-5 by bus. It is the 5th most populated city of the country, with a total population of nearly 250,000 inhabitants. Compared to Havana, the urban metropolitan center, Santa Clara is often regarded as a small peripheral town surrounded by (even more peripheral) rural communities. Esperanza, my Cuban mom, who proudly self-identified as a lesbian revolutionary *guajira* (peasant) was born in 1963 in a rural community 11 miles from Santa Clara. In her perspective, Havana was a cosmopolitan materialistic city where the true soul of Cubania (Cubanness) had been lost. She still perceived Santa Clara as being a city quite different from the countryside where she lived and loved living. Conversely, most of the urban dwellers of the Capital consider that Havana is "the real Cuba" and that the rest of the island is *solo paisaje* (just scenery) or a field of *marabú*[7] (Frederik 2012, 1; Garth 2020, 20). Most of the stories told about Cuba are from the perspective of urban Havaneros and the vast majority of the research conducted by anthropologists has also been located in Havana (Weinreb 2009; Brotherton 2012; Fernandes 2006; Allen 2011; Stout 2014; Bodenheimer 2015) or Santiago de Cuba (Garth 2020; Wirtz 2014; Pertierra 2011; Bodenheimer 2015). The only anthropological research conducted in the Province of Villa Clara has been Laurie Frederik's work on rural theatre, on which I draw extensively in this dissertation (2005, 2012). My research project was originally intended to be a comparative study of three different

[7] An extremely invasive weed that grows in abandoned fields

cultural and artistic institutions in Santa Clara and Havana. In conducted preliminary fieldwork in both localities during in 2016 and 2017. During my year-long fieldwork (2018-2019), the growing difficulty in transportation, due to the shortages of fuel, the affective relationship with *El Mejunje* and the veiled expression of disappointment on Silverio's face when I suggested the idea of leaving (at a certain point) for Havana, made me decide to focus on Santa Clara and the Concoction. Silverio's way of doing theatre (see chapter 2) is deeply tied to the desire to unsettle the geographies of production and consumption of 'art and culture.' While a lot of work in anthropology has focused on the two main Cuban urban centers, Havana and Santiago de Cuba, the voices and experiences of Cuba's 'peripheries' have been way less at the center of academic attention and scholarly production. My dissertation attempts to fill this lack in geography, by re-centering the "province" and the role of artists within it in re/mediating and updating the Cuban Revolution.

Santa Clara's two most venerated figures are Marta Abreu and Ernesto Che Guevara. Marta Abreu (1845-1909) is considered "the Benefactress of the City" for her philanthropic donations to construct many of its buildings and infrastructure (e.g., the *Teatro La Caridad,* several schools, Santa Clara electrical power plant and Train Station) and her support to the Cuban Independence War against Spain. Ernesto Che Guevara led in Santa Clara the Battle of the Armored Train on the 28 of December 1958, which is remembered as the last battle of the Cuban Revolution. Guevara and his troops mobilized the tractors of the school of Agronomy at the university to raise the rails of the railway in order to derail a train that was carrying weapons and soldiers of Batista's army. Within 12 hours of Che Guevara's victory at Santa Clara, Batista fled the island and the 26th of July movement took Havana the following 1st of January 1959. Cloe, Maga's mother, had a vivid childhood memory of the day of the decisive battle, as of subsequently meeting in person Ernesto Che Guevara. The battle happened only a few blocks away from her current house, where today there is a reconstruction of the derailment of the train. The city also hosts Che Guevara's mausoleum that houses the remnants of Guevara and 16

other revolutionaries who fought with him in Bolivia. Most Santa Clareños still hold a very dear memory of Ernesto Che Guevara, and here more than in any other place of the Island, I came to be interpolated with affection as Argentinean because of El Che.

Parque Vidal, the central square of the city, is the site for the daily encounter of elders, youth, and children. The square hosts frequent concerts at night and other cultural activities for kids during the day. *Trovadores* and rappers often gather in the square to improvise performances. The square also hosts hundreds of birds that sleep on the trees of Parque Vidal. They leave at dawn for the countryside and return at sunset while delivering the most incredible polyphonic refrains. The Concoction is a few blocks away from Parque Vidal. With time, it has come to be recognized as the second main attraction of the city after the Mausoleum of Ernesto Che Guevara.

Figure 1. 1: Map of Santa Clara in Cuba

Image taken from google

The Concoction

Figure 1. 2: The Concoction

The Concoction was founded in 1984 by an heterogenous group of artists and audiences, led by Silverio, a queer[8] charismatic theatre actor and director, born in 1948 in a rural community in the Province of Villa Clara. As he tells in his own autobiography, he was born by chance into

[8] The term *queer* was not employed by Silverio or the older generation of Concoctioners. The Concoction is often characterized in national and international media as a LGBT cultural center. Yet, some among the youngest generation of Concoctioners employ the acronym LGBTQ+ in their social media. *Gay, lesbiana y lesbiano, bisexual, hombre y mujer trans, (pájaros y muchas pajaritas)* were terms employed by my research participants to self-identify or identify other's sexual orientations and gender identities. Silverio self-identified as gay. Here, and throughout the dissertation, I employ the term 'queer' to refer to Silverio, the Concoction, and the subjectivities therein cultivated through revolutionary art. Queer scholars have stressed how the meaning of queer exceeds non-normative sexual orientations. In the words of Jose Esteban Muñoz, the term queer insists "on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz 2009, 1). It is oriented by political urgency and "feeling Revolutionary" that is "feeling our current situation is not enough" and requires us to open spaces to practice forms of "educated hope" by enacting a collective otherwise through forms of affective and cohesive sociality (Duggan and Muñoz 2009, 278; see also Muñoz et al. 2005 in Amin 2016, 175). Naisargi Dave, in *Queer Activism in India*, has similarly stressed the connection between "queer activism" and "the search for, and the cultivation of, ethics" (2012, 6). Following Foucault's distinction between ethics and morality, Dave sees ethics as a praxis of "self-fashioning" that entails "problematization, invention and creative relational practice" rather than conformity to already established moral norms (2012, 7, 8; see also Zigon 2007, 2021). I use the term 'queer,' as an etic term that captures the emic forms of 'educated hope' and collective otherwise cultivated at the Concoction. As I introduce in this paragraph, *El Mejunje*, as suggested by the name, is a cultural center oriented by the principles of '*strange* mixing.' It emerged in the political urgency of the Cuban Special Period of the 90s, 'queering' revolutionary ideology by problematizing multiple forms of marginalization and exclusion within the cultural politics of the Revolution, including (but not limited to) its hyper masculine heteronormative canons. The Concoction (*Mejunje*) was design as a cultural home for the cultivation of an ethics of inclusion and mixing of a strange mixture of diversities (based on sexual orientation, gender, race, age, socio-economic status, aesthetic preferences, religious or political affiliation, etc.). In the words of Silverio: "the Concoction was not born as the place of/for gay or lesbians, the LGBT community is one of several marginalized groups which had found a home in the cultural center. We have always tried to be polemic, to be different, to revolutionize ourselves as to be ahead of what was coming."

a family of peasants surviving the misery of pre-revolutionary rural life. Thanks to the new possibilities opened by the Revolution's cultural politics, he developed a passion for theater. He was also, since early age, acclaimed by many as a visionary, "engaged in politics that were ahead of his times" (interview with Esperanza). Silverio was able to summon the possibilities disclosed by the crises of the 90s by opening a cultural center on the ruins of the abandoned Oriental Hotel which became the home for the artistic expression and encounter between an unconventional mixture of different artists and audiences. The Concoction was designed as a space for the inclusion of those categories of people who were excluded and marginalized at the time within the cultural politics of the Revolution. LGBT and HIV-positive people, ex-prisoners, unconventional artists, and disaffiliated young people are just a few among the many examples of stigmatized vulnerable groups that have found a home at El Mejunje. For example, Roberto, a 55-year-old white HIV-positive Santa Clareño, has been working as a technician of sound for the cultural center for the last 25 years. Armando, a straight 50-year-old Black[9] Santa Clareño who does one of the hardest and most valuable works at the Concoction, cleaning the public bathrooms, has been in prison in his youth for selling drugs. The same is true for Crespo, a 40-year-old HIV-positive Black Cuban, who self-identifies as 'el animal' (the mascot) of the cultural

[9] As detailed by Hanna Garth, skin color, rather than biological descent, is an emic category of identity in Cuba. Cubans self-identify, and are differentiated by the State, according to three different colors: *blanco* (white), *negro* (black), *mestizo/mulato* (mixed). Skin color intersects with class and other emic categories of identification/differentiation (such as *nivel de cultura*, level of culture) to reproduce racialized and racializing forms of social stratification (2020, 21, 35). Garth reports that scholars in Santiago associated *nivel de cultura* with level of formal education and a series of markers of "distinction" and "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1984, 1985, 1996) such us liking and consuming classical literature, listening to symphony, knowing famous Cuban theatre, and drinking and eating fine things such as "champagne, caviar, olives, and capers" when those items were still available in Cuba (2020, 35). Silverio did not hold a high 'level of culture' under those criteria. He did not have any university title, nor had done any formal training in theatre and self-identified as a *campesino empirico* (a farmer trained through experience, see chapter two). Yet, he gained authority and recognition within the Cuban theatrical landscape, particularly after the 90s, for cultivating forms of revolutionary theatre that attempted to 'queer' some of those signs of "distinction" in active dialogue with marginal communities (within and outside of) the city of Santa Clara (see chapter two, and chapter three). *Campesinos* and ex-prisoners are examples of marginalized audiences with whom the Theatre Company of the Concoction has been developing its theatre performances. The audiences, rather than 'uneducated,' are considered endowed with equal forms of cultural capital. For the play *Después de la Z*, a play centered on inmates, Armando was asked to watch the rehearsals and to provide feed-back as a cultural expert. He enjoyed watching it and provide useful comments on how to make the performance of the actors stronger. He told me in one of our interviews that the play had well captured the toxic masculinity he had experienced in prison. While working at the Concoction for many years, Armando had changed his own prejudices grounded on hyper masculine heteronormative models of masculinity.

center. He often says, with deep emotion, that Silverio is the father he never had and the Concoction his home. You can find Crespo at the Concoction, listening to music from his big stereo. He introduces the cultural center and its reach weekly artistic program to visitants and tourists from early morning to late at night from Monday to Sunday. The cultural center is a space for the artistic expression of a vast range of Santa Clara's citizens. Its intense weekly program, that runs from Monday to Sunday, spans from performances of old traditional *trovadores* to those of Santa Clara's young rappers and rockers, from the shows of drag queens *transformistas* to spectacles of clowns for kids and families. In order to make sure that everyone can have access to the cultural center, the price of the ticket for the weekly performances was kept very low, ranging from 2 to 5 CUP (Pesos Cubanos).

Figure 1. 3: The Concoction's weekly artistic program

Every week Caramelo, one of the actors of the Theatre Company of the Concoction and one of the best clowns of Santa Clara took care of handwriting the artistic billboard of the weekly activities of the cultural center. The billboard on the right lists the activities staged in the open patio of the cultural center, on the left the billboard lists the activities staged in the Sala Margarita Casallas. Photo taken by the author.

In the open patio of the cultural center, on Mondays, two *peñas* (musical gatherings) regularly took place. At 6PM for the peña *Arráncame la vida,*[10] Maga, my Cuban sister, and

[10] Take my life

Eduardo, a 50-year-old Black musician, sang boleros for an audience of very affectionate elder women. At 8 PM for *Extraños en la noche,*[11] Mariela, a very famous 70-year-old pianist, together with a jazz trio and her daughter Marlen performed a mixture of songs, from international classics such as *Strangers in the night* to Cuban classics like *Ámame como soy.*[12] This *peña* gathered a mixed audience of youth and elders, regular frequenters and passing tourists. It was an open performance since members from the audience were invited to take the microphone as well and join the stage with their voices. Sometimes, members from the audience joined the stage uninvited. Angelo, a 60-year-old rocker well-known in Santa Clara as 'the Father of *Frikis,*[13]' a regular frequenter of the Concoction, would often grab the microphone from Marlen's hands to perform his own distinctive growling vocals with an aftertaste of rum. Tuesdays was rock and roll's day. At 10PM a motley crowd of 20- to 60-year-old fans of the genre would gather to listen to the Santa Clara's rock band or bands who were coming from other Provinces of the Island. Wednesday was the day of disco dancing, which mainly gathered the youth of Santa Clara. Thursday was the day of La Trovuntivitis, a collective of *trovadores* born out of improvised performances in the bar of the Concoction in 1997. Since then, the group had been performing at the Concoction, *la casa* (the home), as they define it in one of their songs. That group gathered the biggest intergenerational audience. It was not unusual to see people seated on the floor or climbing on the trees for their trova performances. In this case as well, many young trovadores who did not formally belong to the group would also join the performance to add their voices to the chorus (as I also did on a few occasions). On Fridays, the *Fakires,* a group of traditional folk Cuban musicians born in Santa Clara in the 60s, whose members had renewed and changed over time, would play in the open patio. The group was also one of the first to start performing in the cultural center. As Silverio would remark with pride, the band, that had a 50 to 70-year-old loyal

[11] Strangers in the night

[12] Love me as I am

[13] The *Frikis* is a Cuban punk subculture that originated in the 1980s

audience, had also become appealing to the new generations. The latter would generally come to attend the electronic disco night which followed to the Fakires' performance. While waiting for the electronic music to start, they had learnt to love and appreciate older traditional genres of Cuban music. Saturday was the day of *Filin*, when Maga would perform together with Z. C., a recognized 70s-year-old singer of the genre. Finally, on Sunday mornings the Concoction hosted a spectacle of clowns for the kids (and parents) of Santa Clara. In the afternoon an heterogenous crowd would gather in the patio to dance son and rumba, and during the night the very famous show of *transformistas* took place, attracting a massive audience.

In the Sala Margarita Casallas, a small Theatre room adjacent to the open patio, another rich set of cultural activities took place every week. This included the plays of the Theatre Company of the Concoction and other Theatre Companies of the city, the concerts of local trovadores who did not belong to the Trovuntivitis, concerts of famous artists who came as special guests from Havana or other provinces of the Island, and the projection of international films and television series to promote awareness against homophobia and racism. Among the films screened for these series many of them were recent North American productions such as *Kings*, *Get Out*, *American History X*, *BlacKkKlansman*, *Pose*, and *When We Rise.*

Outside of the scheduled performances, Concoctioners[14] would gather in the cultural space to play *domino,* chat, listen to music, or share coffee, beer or rum in one of the three bars of the center[15].

[14] *Mejunjeros*, Concoctioners, was the name given to anyone who regularly frequented or had frequented the Concoction (among artists, audiences, or workers, etc.) There are many *Mejunjeros* around the world at the moment who are persons who frequented the cultural center and then left the Island but still conserve a dear memory of the cultural space and feel a sense of belonging to that community. I consider myself one of them too. There is a Facebook group titled '*Mejunjeros ausentes… (y presentes)*' 'Absent (and present) Concoctioners' with more than 1000 members.

[15] One of the bars, the oldest one is owned by the cultural institutions. The other two bars have been rented to *cuentapropistas* (private entrepreneurs/ self-employed).

Figure 1. 4: Ciclo contra la homofobia

On the right the poster promoting the cycle against homophobia on the door of the Concoction. On the left the poster promoting the activities for the XII International day against homophobia on the 17th of May 2019. The latter is also the national day of *el campesino* (farmer). Photo taken by the author.

The Concoction functioned in its everyday as a site of encounter between very different audiences, generations, values, and sexual orientations. In the everyday exposure to others a sense of community as a 'being-in-common," not a "common being" had emerged over time. In the works of Jean Luc Nancy, this is a form of political community that does not seek to coalesce particular and different identities into a common singular being but rather acknowledges plurality and difference while striving for a "being-in-common" which emerges out of a process of sharing and mutual exposure to the singularity of others (1991, 2000).

An example of how the Concoction was functioning as a space to generate this form of community was given to me by Kike, a 40-year-old rocker and bohemian Cuban Jew, who self-identified as an anarchic Marxist and regularly frequented the Concoction. He made a living from tourists, for whom he would procure hotels, restaurants, or other services in the city. We were together one night at the Concoction's Tuesday's *Rockoteca.* A gay couple was kissing right in front of us. El Kike commented on it as follows:

Look at that, this is a sign of how times are changing and of how this place had

> been able to produce that cultural change. We would have never seen this ten years ago during a rock concert. Gays and rockers had their own separate spaces, and there was no chance that they would share in those spaces. Now, there might be someone of my generation, in their 40s-50s, that still does not like or disapproves of gays kissing but that's it. He knows that if he does or says anything inappropriate about them that would be wrong and against the ethics of this place. The same happened last night, there was a couple of lesbians kissing and a couple of chamaquitos (little kids) who were observing commented on it. One of them said something disrespectful and the other one immediately responded: "eso es fula" (that is shady). Look, my dream is that when someone from the generation of my son goes to their parents to tell them that they have found a partner, the parents would respond: "That's great, is your partner a man or a woman?"

Aguila, a 70-year-old Black Professor of History and Philosophy who has been participating in the Concoction since its foundation, one Sunday afternoon gave me a long list of mottos which condensed for him the essence of the cultural center and its "neo-existentialist Marxist philosophy:"

> There are four states of matter gas, solid, liquid, and *Mejunjoso*, which is the mixture of everything, it is the fourth dimension.
>
> Here we say, Together and scrambled. This is the Concoction.
>
> Here there are possibilities for everything, including for failing.
>
> The Concoction is a laboratory for advanced social thinking.
>
> The Concoction cannot be duplicated. You could bring some of these ideas somewhere else, but this place is singularly unique. It cannot be replicated.

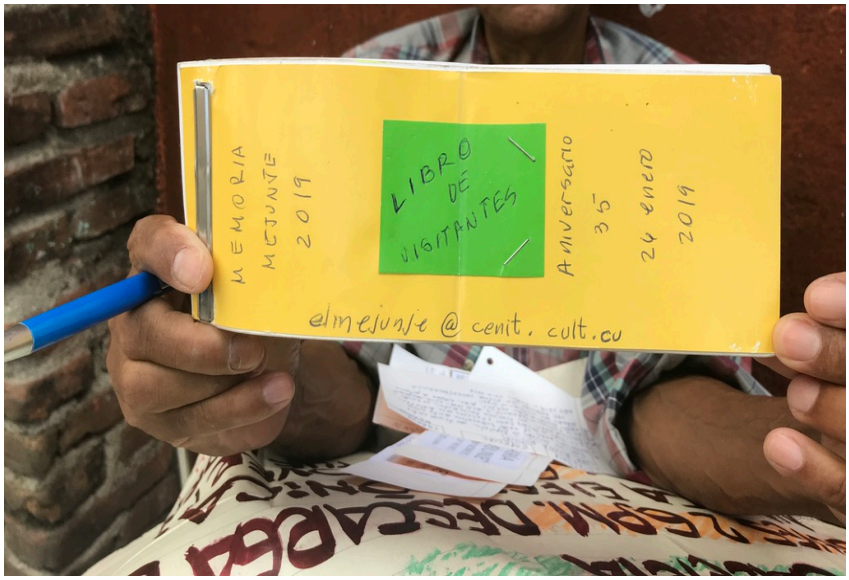

Figure 1. 5: The book of Concoction's visitors

Photo taken by the author

Aguila was devoting himself to collect an archive of the Concoction's visitors. He would solicit comments and opinions from any new visitor of the cultural center in small yellow notebooks (his distinctive color as he told me). He was planning to organize all the notebooks in a big collection to be archived in the Library Marti of Santa Clara.

Figure 1. 6: Silverio on the 17th of May

Silverio celebrating the International Day Against Homophobia and the national day of *el campesino* in Parque Vidal
photo taken by the author

Methodology

I used several methods of data collection. The first, and primary method, I used in my fieldwork was the tried and true ethnographic method of participant-observation. I observed and participated in the everyday activities of the Concoction. This included from a minimum of two regular performances per day from Monday to Sunday to a maximum of an entire day of concerts and spectacles during annual festivals such as El Longina, The Festival of Trova in December. I participated in the weekly staff meeting between Silverio, the artists, and other workers at the Concoction (i.e., clerk of the ticket office, cleaning personnel, bars' employees). I also hung out in the Concoction with its most assiduous frequenters in the mornings when, aside from the Sunday's clown show for family and kids, no other event was scheduled to take place. I followed the Theatre Company of the Concoction across different towns in the Province of Villa Clara with the two cultural projects "*Yo me incluyo*[16]" and "*Las Carpas de Silverio.*[17]" The first one, *Yo me incluyo*, featured the two most famous *transformistas* of the Concoction along with short performances portraying nonnormative sexual characters to promote awareness against homophobia. The second one entailed camping within different communities for two days to bring a variety of spectacles for the inhabitants of those villages. During the year, we brought these cultural projects to approximately 20 different communities and returned to some of them, like Emilio Cordoba, with different spectacles on multiple occasions. I followed the artists of the Concoction in their performances in other venues of the city, both public and private, such as the UNEAC (the Union for Artists older than 35), the Asociación Hermanos Saiz (the Union for Artists older than 35), the *Museo de Artes Decorativas*, the Caridad Theatre, and private bars and restaurants of the city. I also followed some of the artists in their interaction with other State-run bureaucratic institutions, such as *La Empresa de la música* and *El Centro Pronvincial de Artes Escénicas*

[16] I include myself

[17] Silverio's tents

which were in charge of artists' payments (musicians and theater actors respectively). I also participated in the rehearsals of many of the new Theatre's play developed by the artists of the Concoction. For one of them, I served in the technical team, which include participating in multiple rehearsals and live performances. The play, *Después de la Z*[18], was the first play directed by Yoany, a 38-year-old white artist and member of the Theatre Company of the Concoction. I was in charge of projecting the pre-recorded videos which complemented the acted performance. After a few months of deep hanging out at the Concoction I came to be recognized as and feel myself to be one more Concoctioner. Silverio ritualized my inclusion as one more member of the community by giving me as a gift the t-shirt of the cultural center in May 2019.

I also participated in the intimate life of Esperanza and Maga, my fictive queer family. They were the first ones to introduce me to the rhythms of the Concoction, where Maga performed regularly since 2001, and to the City of the Santa Clara. I tried to deeply immerse myself in the everyday life of ordinary Cubans living in Santa Clara. I spent a lot of time in waiting lines, "struggling" to find food in the markets and shops where they generally go or buying medicines and paying the electricity bill for Esperanza. Although in a much more limited manner, I also participated in cultural events realized in artistic venues and cultural institutions in Havana. Chapter three contains an example of one of such events at the *Sociedad Jose Marti*.
A second method I employed was audio and video recordings of live performances. As a supplementary documentation method to fieldnotes and 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) gathered through participant-observation, I audio and video recorded the artistic performances realized by the artist of the Concoction, within and outside the cultural center.

The third method I relied on was semi-structured and person-center interviews. I conducted person-centered interviews with Silverio, Esperanza and Maga which entailed

[18] After Z. The play tells the story of the relationship of care established between two inmates in a temporary center of detention. One of them tries to protect the other, who has a developmental delay, from the abuses and violence inflicted on him by the other *macho* inmates.

multiple open-ended interviews with each one of them. In the case of Esperanza and Maga I also audio recorded some of the naturally occurring everyday interactions and conversations at Cloe's house, Maga's mother, where we shared many meals and morning coffees. I conducted approximately 45 semi-structured interviews with the regular artists of the Concoction, other regular workers at the cultural center (such as the clerk of the ticket office, the cleaning personnel, the bars' employees), the regular frequenters of the cultural center, and one Spanish 'tourist' who had been returning to visit the cultural center over the last 15 years. I also conducted many, many more informal non-recorded conversations with dozens of people among the audience of the cultural center, from passing tourists to more regular frequenters.

The final method I employed consisted of collection and analysis of public cultural media, from vernacular newspapers (such as *Granma*, *Vanguardia*, and *Juventud Rebelde*) to the local television to social media. I collected over two hundred newspaper stories through my fieldwork and kept collecting them after I left the Island. These were useful sources to learn about local events and political issues, such as the constitutional update which was amply covered in local newspaper and whose debates were amply covered on the national television from August to December. Cultural media were also fundamental in analyzing and understanding local representations of the State along the official ideology of the Revolution. The work of the Connections' artists was also often re/mediated through local newspapers and television. Finally, social media, particularly Facebook, which Cubans could access on their phones for the first time in September 2018, has now become an endless source of 'data.' As will emerge from this dissertation I have been keeping in touch with the Concoction and many of my Cubans friends therein through social media (Facebook, Facebook messenger and WhatsApp).

Chapter overview

In Chapter One, I stress how waiting is an embodied ubiquitous practice in Cuban social life, central to the constitution of kinship and broader social networks. Since the 90s, it is also central to the affective and temporal experience of the post-Soviet socialist state in the lives of ordinary Cubans: from the struggle (*lucha*) of acquiring a decent meal (Garth 2020) or other consumer goods (Weinreb 2009; Pertierra 2011), to that of acquiring medicines in a two-tiered medical system (Brotherton 2012), to the re/mediation of that waiting and "everyday struggle" in the work of artists (Fernandes 2006; Frederik 2012). In this chapter I focus on the affective, semiotic, ethical, and governmental dimensions of waiting in order to draw out resonances between the lived experience of ordinary Cubans and the status of the national Revolutionary project within shifting political and economic arrangements, after the fall of the Soviet Union and in the current Socialist Update.

In Chapter Two, I trace a small genealogy of Revolutionary Theatre in Cuba, from Theatre of Escrambray to Communitarian Theatre as to foreground how Silverio, the gay charismatic leader of the Concoction, embodied and enacted the virtues of a cultivated *Hombre Novisimo* within changing traditions of Revolutionary Theatre in time. Theatre of Escambray attempted to unsettle the colonial (and neo-colonial) geographies of production and consumption of art. Recognized artists from the urban center of Havana travelled to the Escambray mountains in the Santa Clara Province to give voice to a previously unrepresented population, the *guajiro* (peasant). Silverio, who was born in 1948 in a rural community of Santa Clara, cultivated his passion for Theatre partially in light of this revolutionary project. Communitarian Theatre, born out of the radical economic crises of the 90s, made of lack and marginality the distinctive features of its art, by offering spectacles for peripheral communities at

zero cost and in the absence of the most elemental resources. After the 90s, Silverio gained progressively public recognition as an exemplary figure as he embodied and enacted through his artistic projects the virtues of a queer *Hombre Novisimo* who blurred the boundaries between rural/urban, queer/straight, peasant/artist. At an historical moment when shortages, and thus waiting, became central to the lived experience of Cubans, Silverio rather than dwelling in waiting (as a deferral of possibilities in the present) was able to summon those possibilities by inspiring processual participation in social actions that opened spaces, such as the Concoction, to rethink the cultural politics of the Revolution on more inclusive bases.

In Chapter Three I focus on Silverio's play, *The Cuban Decameron*. The idea for the play was born as a result of the action of solidarity The Concoction carried out towards the rural community of Emilio Cordoba in the wake of Hurricane Irma. In this chapter, I argue that the intensification of hurricanes in the Caribbean unveils the long histories of asymmetric interconnection which shape our unevenly shared modernity while rendering visible the localized practices, "affective states," and discourse which performatively re/constitute "the" Cuban nation-state, its national economy and its culture (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017; Gupta 1995, 2012; Appel 2017, 2019; Butler 2010). If post-Maria Puerto Rico tell us the story of "disaster capitalism" as lived in the Caribbean, I suggest post-Irma Cuba tells us how disaster socialism is lived in Cuba. Emilio Cordoba was showcased through multiple local Cuban mediums as an example of socialist recovery in the wake of hurricanes. As I describe in this chapter, the reconstruction of the community, at once material and imaginative, was achieved through the joint collaboration between local officials of the State, the community, and Silverio's Theatre Company. The hurricane, rather than being framed in a disastrous capitalist story of infrastructural break-down, governmental disavowal, lack of repair, and private responsibility, became the setting for stories that celebrated socialist governmentality after the 90s and the growing role of local communities in conjunction with the State in remediating the breaking-down of State's infrastructures. Extending Simone's concept of 'people as infrastructure,' I

propose to look at artists themselves as providing for an 'infrastructure:' a complex combination of persons, objects, spaces and practices providing for an 'affective platform' reproducing life in (and outside) of the city (2004).

In Chapter Four I focus on another form of mediation, a documentary. The documentary, *Puro Sentimiento*, Pure feeling, portrays the love relationship between Esperanza and Maga, my fictive Cuban queer kinship, my Cuban mom and sister respectively. Feminist and queer theorist have stress how intimate feelings are "public feelings," since politics and history "manifest themselves (in everyday life) at the level of lived affective experience" (Cvetkovich 2011, 461). In this chapter, I evoke how scenes of intimacy are imbued with 'public feelings,' and how in turn public atmospheres remediate intimate feelings. I look at the process of production of the documentary (rather than the final product which still has to be released) to foreground the centrality of non-normative kinship relationships (in-between the documentaries, Maga, Esperanza and me) and the feelings shared, circulated, and re/mediated through it.

In Chapter Five I focus on how Covid-19 was mediated and remediated in Cuba. I show how the sovereignty of the Cuban nation state was re/constituted and challenged in the wake of the virus. The successful response to the first wave of the pandemic and the state-run project to produce a national vaccine worked to reassert the sovereignty of the nation-state. Yet, the latter was contested and challenged in the wake of the second wave of the virus which intertwined with (and exponentiated) the economic and political problems of the Island. As I detail in chapter one, the post-Fidel socialist update during 2018-2019 was affectively experienced as a return of the haunting ghosts of the 90s (Derrida 1994, Gordon 2008). Before the pandemic arrived, the "conjunctural crises" brought about by the recrudescence of the USA embargo, the crisis in Venezuela, and the right-turn in Latin America, had already put the Cuban economy, highly dependent on exportations of food and other basic goods, under high stress. The arrival of the pandemic in 2020 and the consequent closure of borders to tourism, one of the country's main sources of hard currency, exacerbated the economic crisis. Shortages and thus waiting lines

intensified during the pandemic while the virus affectively resignified those waiting lines as sites of possible deadly contagion and growing inequality. As some had to stand in line exposing themselves to the virus, others could afford to procure essential goods otherwise or had access to the new Tiendas en MLC (*Moneda Libremente Convertible*, Free Convertible Currency) thanks to remittances from family or friends abroad (Salas 2020). The enhanced experience of struggle and waiting for basic goods, the drastic inflation brought about by the currency update, and the increase in prices of public services brought about on July 11, 2021 the biggest massive public protests in Cuba since 1994. Artists played central roles in re/mediating the response to the virus and in circulating diverging patriotic feelings and related visions for the future of the Island. Through the Concoction's response to the first and second wave of the pandemic, I conclude by suggesting that through the open political community enacted within the cultural center processual participation in new forms of action are taking place which open spaces to once again rethink the cultural politics of the Revolution on ever more inclusive and equal bases.

Ever Onward: Waiting and Updating in Post-Soviet Cuba

> The social fabric is composed of a chronography of power, where individuals' and social groups' senses of time and possibility are shaped by a differential economy, limited or expanded by the ways and means that they find themselves in and out of time. (Sharma 2014, 8)

Introduction

The relationship with my Cuban queer family began and developed while waiting. I met the women who became my Cuban mom and my Cuban sister while waiting to be received by Rosalia, one of the representatives of the Uneac, the Cuban Union for artists older than 35 in 2016 in Havana. Esperanza, my soon-to-be Cuban mom, was the romantic partner and amateur manager of Maga, a regular singer at The Concoction of Santa Clara. They had travelled together to Havana from Santa Clara since Maga had been invited to perform at El Barbaran, an old and prestigious piano bar in Havana where Rosalia was organizing a *peña* cultural (a musical encounter). Esperanza approached me while we were waiting. In the conversation that ensued, I shared with her my project of studying the role of artists and cultural institutions in updating Cuban socialism (*actualización del modelo socialista*). Esperanza responded enthusiastically:

> You have to come to visit Santa Clara, and The Concoction, our cultural and artistic home. And you have to meet Silverio, our leader. Come now, before you leave. If you do, I know you will have a reason to return back.

I went to Santa Clara before leaving Cuba after my first two months of preliminary fieldwork, returned back the following summer, and returned again for the subsequent 13 months of research.

In the course of the year-long fieldwork from August 2018 to September 2019, as Cubans discussed and voted a New Constitution updating socialism, they also experienced an intensification of the "arrhythmic waiting" for goods and services which shaped their temporal

experience of lived post-Soviet socialism in Cuba (Verdery 1996). The flour for bread disappeared in Santa Clara in December. Between March and May, oil and chicken disappeared too. The shortage of fuel started in May in Santa Clara and climaxed in September when it reached Havana. All major activities in the country were shut down for two weeks while the country was waiting for a boat of oil coming from Venezuela. The new president, Miguel Diaz Canel, during his speech at the round table, incited Cubans, as Fidel had done in the 90s, to endure in "the struggle" (*la lucha*) since the country found itself in a difficult "*coyuntura*" (conjuncture, situation) (Diaz-Canel, Granma, 09/11/2019 and 09/27/2019).[19]

With Esperanza and Maga, during my yearlong stay in Santa Clara, I waited to buy food at la Ferolana, the State's grocery shop. We waited to buy bread, cooking oil, and chicken wherever they momentarily appeared ("*estado o particular,"* at "state or private" stores) during their shortages. Esperanza suggested to make *casabe* from *yuka* (bread cassava flour), like she had during the Special Period of the 90s, and we ended up cooking fat with pork lard as a makeup solution for oil, a preparation which also involved its waiting. I accompanied Maga in her waiting, after several months of delay, to get paid by La *Empresa de la musica*, the provincial State enterprise who was in charge of artists' payments. Sometimes Esperanza asked me to wait for her to buy medicines or pay the electricity bill. We waited together very long hours at the 200-bus stop. The 200-bus connected Santa Clara to a small rural community where Esperanza lived, 17 km away from Santa Clara's city center. In May 2019, when the Cuban "conjunctural" energy crisis started to become visible in the province, only two buses per day were left on schedule—during the lucky days. With the shortages of fuel, the arrhythmic waiting which shaped the rhythms of everyday life in Santa Clara was enhanced. Santa Clara's houses had cisterns to be

[19] "Presidente de Cuba anuncia medidas para la coyuntura energética del país," Granma, 09/11/2019. http://www.granma.cu/cuba/2019-09-11/en-vivo-presidente-de-cuba-anuncia-medidas-para-la-coyuntura-energetica-del-pais-video-11-09-2019-15-09-41

"Sin miedo a la coyuntura," Granma, 09/27/ 2019. http://www.granma.cu/discursos-de-diaz-canel/2019-09-27/sin-miedo-a-la-coyuntura-27-09-2019-23-09-41

filled up during the few hours in which water was publicly distributed. With the shortages of fuel, the public pumps that distributed water to fill the cisterns were activated only once per week in most neighborhoods and for only a few hours. There was not a set schedule for when water would be distributed. It was a matter of patient, vigilant, waiting for its arrival. A little stream of water running through the sidewalks of one's residence's block was the sign that the public pump had been activated. It was thus not unusual to escape working activities, after a call from a neighbor on the watch, to return home to refill the water tank or to delegate the task to family or friends. The consumption of electricity was also reduced and regulated, as all houses experienced 3-4 hours of blackouts daily. Many regular concerts and spectacles, including Maga's, had to be cancelled or rescheduled.

Learning how to inhabit a multiplicity of arrhythmic times of delivery of goods and services, existing in the 'fort-da'[20] (gone-there) of needed objects, was among the first embodied aspects of "Cubanidad" [21] Esperanza wanted to socialize me into as a *yuma* (foreigner).

> Mira hija, … aquí las cosas se pierden" "Pay attention, daughter … here things just get lost…so when you find them you should buy as much as you can…when and if you can.

> If you want to travel to Havana with the *guagua nacionál* (national bus company) you better go to the bus stop at least three weeks early if you want to find a place. Be ready to wait for at least three hours… la Maga has a friend that works there. It is always good to have a friend. He can also *resolverte* un pasaje (figure out a ticket) when none are left.

[20] In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud (1963) analyses the game his 18-month-old grandson is playing. The kid would through an object away from him while exclaiming Oh (*Fort*, gone) and ask the mother to retrieve the object for him while exclaiming Ah (*Da*, there). Freud interprets the game as a way to transform and control the negative feelings experienced by the kid for the lack of control on the presence and absence of his caregivers (the providers of food, security, protection, etc.,). I use Freud's expression as to evoke how Cubans, after the 90s, similarly experience the delivery of good and services by the patriarchal State as marked by the arrhythmic absence and presence of needed objects (food, electricity, medicines, etc.). The 'space of play' allows the kid, in Freud's analysis, to overcome his negative feelings. I similarly suggest that art constitutes an intermediary 'good enough' space of play that allows to reconstitute a political illusion in the midst of disillusionment (Winnicott 1973).

[21] I rely on Garth's definition of Cubanidad as the "general condition of being Cuban" or the "Cuban sense of identity linked to place and the nation-state" (Garth 2020, 174)

> I really need you to go to buy a very important medicine for me. Someone told me that they will be delivering it tomorrow, it has been lost for a long time. Yet, both Maga and I will be at my house in the community, and you know how bad the transport is. If you could do me the favor to go to buy it for me… You should mark the line in the central pharmacy in Maceo very early in the morning. Then you should also mark the line in the pharmacy near The Concoction. Just to make sure you get to it before it gets lost (*se pierde*) in the line.

"Waiting" is an embodied practice in Cuba, central to the constitution of kinship and broader social networks. Since the 90s, it is also central to the affective and temporal experience of the post-Soviet socialist state in the lives of ordinary Cubans: from the struggle (*lucha*) of acquiring a decent meal (Garth 2020) or other consumer goods (Weinreb 2009; Pertierra 2011), to that of acquiring medicines in a two-tiered medical system (Brotherton 2012), to the re/mediation of that waiting and "everyday struggle" in the work of artists (Fernandes 2006; Frederik 2012). In a collected volume on ethnographies of waiting, Janeja and Bandak define the politics of waiting as "the structural and institutional conditions that compel people to wait" (2018, 3). An example is Javier Auyero's ethnography on poor citizens seeking State's welfare programs in Argentina. He stressed how 'waiting' is central to the reproduction of politics of subordination. Waiting is a powerful 'technique of governance' which solicits particular forms of subjectivation transforming poor waiting citizens into "patients of the State" (2012). On the other hand, the poetics of waiting refers to the existential and phenomenological affordances of being placed in uncertain temporal intervals. People waiting may deal with it differently: "waiting may both foster innovation and creativity or destroy the people waiting," evoking affects as diverse as doubt, resignation, boredom, despair, joy, or hope (Janeja and Bandak 2018, 3-5).

In this chapter, I focus on the politics and the poetics of waiting in Cuba to capture the updates of Cuban socialism in time (Janeja and Bandak 2018). I trace the relationship between "epochs" in the updates of Cuban socialism (the Special Period of the 90s; the latest Socialist Update) and the embodied, felt experience of waiting in and 'waiting out' the crises of an increasingly faltering Revolutionary State.

Waiting in Socialist and Post-socialist Romania

In *What Was Socialism, And What Comes Next?*, Katherine Verdery (1996) stressed how socialist time in socialist Romania was not structured around linear time like in capitalism. Early capitalism reoriented the rhythms of the body and working day, transforming the experience of time as cyclical in the agrarian order into a linear progression of measurable units in the industrial society. Contrarily, in socialist Romania, an 'etatization of time' occurred. Time, rather than becoming a central means of appropriation of worker's surplus value by the capitalists, was seized by the State as "the medium for producing not profits but subjection, for immobilizing persons in the Party's grip" (1996, 57). The experience of time of the new socialist man was marked by "economy of shortages." As a result of the centralized state's planning, factories would receive the necessary raw materials intermittently and as a consequence the production stopped frequently. Time was thus arrhythmically structured and "flattened out in an experience of endless waiting" (Ibid). As workers, Romanian's time was spent between idleness and frantic activity; while as consumers, Romanian's time was sized in waiting lines. Most of the non-working hours were spent in breadlines and "unending lines for chicken scraps" (Dragon Vociu 2009 in O'Neill 2014, 12). Romanians in the 80's just "waited indefinitely" being part of their everyday life to wake up at dawn to receive the delivery of food by the state around 3-4-5 or 6 pm. Entire families took turns in the lines and most of everyday sociality was tied to idle waiting (O' Neill 2014, 12). Two decades after the fall of Communism in Romania, O' Neill (2014) stressed how 'boredom' had become the everyday affect among the waiting poor, unemployed, homeless lower classes. Lines in Romania ended in 1989, when the new government after Nicolae Ceausescu sought to liberalize the closed Romanian economy by reincorporating it into the global market. As a result, shelves for the first time appeared permanently stocked with an ample variety of items. Consumption became the symbol of the economic "transition" as

socialist billboards and monuments were substituted by Nescafe advertisements and shopping centers. Distinctions between and among classes came to be marked by consuming practices. Yet, the anticipation of a future of abundance in the model of the new consumer citizens of Moscow or East Berlin soon gave way in Romania to a renewed sense of "endless waiting" (O'Neill 2014, 15; Verdery 1996). While the rise of Western-style consumption fueled the desire for a European standard of living, the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008 rendered a growing number of citizens unemployed and homeless in a context where most governmental protections had disappeared. Many of the inhabitants of the city lost their substantive access to it, as patterns of inclusion were increasingly mapped into patterns of consumption. Bucharest's outcasts found themselves consuming less than they had in the darkest moments of communism. They did not remember the idle waiting of socialist time as being boring, they remembered that experience of waiting as pleasurable. Idleness and waiting in communist-era Romania were collectively shared. Stuck in lines, Romanians entertain themselves with friends, they engaged in talk and games while drinking alcohol. Even if the lines moved slowly, they still moved, each passing moment bringing the citizens closer to what they need. Waiting was constitutive of the collective as all citizens were dependent on the State's arrhythmic efforts of caring for them and form relationships of solidarity with one other in so doing; while boredom was the everyday affect which imbued the experience of post-Soviet idle waiting of the emerging lower classes (2014, 14).

Waiting in post-Soviet socialist Cuba

While waiting lines disappeared in post-Soviet Romania, they became the quintessential experience of the Cuban Special Period in Times of Peace which followed the Fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1990. In 1972 Cuba had joined the Soviet Bloc's Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON or CMEA). While the 70s and 80s are remembered by Cubans as the

golden years of economic abundance, the 90s represent the years of deepest economic scarcity. The plethora of export products coming from other countries of the Soviet Bloc, that had previously enriched Cuban shelves and homes, disappeared all at once. The Island was highly dependent on the Soviet Bloc for its trading: 85% of the country's import-export was with countries belonging to CMEA, 70% of which with the USSR alone (Gordy 2015, 166-67). Cubans' bread was made entirely with wheat grown in Soviets countries, which also provided 65% of powdered milk, 50% of fertilizers, and 40% of rice on the Island. Sugar constituted 77% of Cuba's exports and was acquired by Soviet countries in exchange for petroleum at fixed and favorable prices (Gordy 2015, 167). Cuba's agricultural system was mechanized and highly dependent on petroleum to run the machines which drastically impacted domestic production (Garth 2020, 77). The dissolution of the Soviet bloc and the tightening of the United States' economic sanctions against the Island caused the country to face an unprecedentedly harsh economic crisis.[22] As a consequence, a variety of new practices and customs emerged in Cuba, as documented in many epic tales of survival during the Special Period: riding bicycles instead of cars, enduring constant and extended blackouts (*alumbrones*),[23] raising pigs in bathtubs, spending more than 15 hours per week in lines for food, making bread with cassava flour (*casabe*), or having dinner with shaved ice with sugar water (Hernandez-Reguant et al. 2009, 1-3; Garth 2020, 78). In such a perilous situation, the socialist government lead by Fidel Castro had to restructure "the" national economy (Appel 2019)[24] in an attempt to attract foreign investment and

[22] The Torricelli and the Helms-Burton Acts were passed in 1992 and 1996, respectively. The Torricelli of 1992 mandated that every ship disembarking in Cuba is subject to a six-month ban from US ports. This gives rise to heavy surcharges to an island whose trade depends basically on sea transport. The Helms-Burton Acts 1996, mandated that everyone who invests in property that Cuba nationalized in 1959 is bound to see their assets frozen in the United State (Lamrani 2012, 18)

[23] *Apagones* is the Spanish word for *Black-outs*. During the Special Period of the 90's blackouts became the norm rather than the exception to the rule. Cubans, with creativity and irony renamed the few hours in the day with electric power "*Alumbrones*" ~ *Light-outs*

[24] Following Hannah Appel, here I bracket the determinative article of "the" economy as to stress that national economies (understood as something delimited and singular which success can be measured by a series of statistical indexes such as GDP) are not naturally given entities but are rather produced as singular and comparable entities by erasing the histories of empires out of which they emerged, and the radical inequalities produced by it (2017, 2)

currency.[25]

A rhetorical commitment to nationalism and socialism, stressed by the reappearance of old revolutionary mottos such as Guevara's "*Hasta la Victoria, siempre*" ("Ever onward to victory") or Fidel's "*Patria* o *muerte, Venceremos!*" ("Homeland or death, we will win!") was accompanied by the implementation of market mechanism in designated areas of the economy. The centralized socialist planning of the internal market and traditional export activities was combined with a series of liberalizing reforms: introducing organic agriculture and diversifying its production to increase self-sufficiency, promoting new industries such as tourism and biotechnology, inviting foreign investment through joint-ventures with foreign companies, encouraging remittances from the Cuban diaspora, and legalizing self-employment in tourist-oriented activities such as small restaurants (*paladares)* and renting rooms for tourists (*casa particular*) (Fernandes 2006, 35; Tankha 2018, 110; Gordy 2015, 171). These economic reforms were accompanied by a change in monetary policies. Cuba introduced the partial circulation of USA dollars within its national economy. In 1994, the country established a national double currency system, introducing the CUC (peso convertible). The value of the CUC was pegged 1:1 to the United States dollar.[26] The CUP (Cuban peso) could be exchanged at a fixed rate vi-a-vis the CUC.[27] For over two decades the formal access and use of these two currencies regulated different types of economic relations (marked by different spaces, products, and forms of exchange, etc.). The "capitalist" CUC was tied to the global market, used for foreign investment, in foreign-national joint ventures in the tourist industry (tourist's hotels, restaurants, taxis) and in

[25] As Tankha remarks, drawing on Fernando Ortiz's famous work Cuban Counterpoint (1940), an historically contingent cultural process of negotiating, contesting and reconstituting counterpoints through economic practice is embedded in Cuba's constant struggles to assert "sovereignty" in its confrontations with a capitalist global economy (2017, forthcoming).

[26] It has maintained more or less this value consistently until its abolition the 1st of January of 2021.

[27] Since the early 2000s the rates have been 24 CUP to 1 CUC (sell) and 25 CUP to 1 CUC (buy). Yet, for state bookkeeping purposes, and in all state-owned enterprises, both pesos were valued at a 1:1 rate.

"dollar stores" or "shopping" (officially called TRDs *Tienda para la recuperación de Divisas*).[28] On the other hand, the "socialist" CUP was tied to the socialist state and its citizens. It was mainly used to acquire products and staples sold in *bodegas* (subsidized ration shops), local markets and other state services (i.e., for fruit, vegetables, rice, eggs, coffee, electricity, gas, local taxis, medicine and other 'non-luxury' products) (Tankha 2018, 109-111). The CUC and CUP were also differently employed to compensate Cubans for their work according to an "inverted pyramid" (Monreal 2002; Henken 2000). The "morally inferior" low skilled workers in tourism received higher salaries in CUC while the "morally superior" high skilled professionals (i.e professor, doctors, layers, employees in state enterprises) received lower salaries in CUP, creating an inverted relation between moral and economic rewards (Tankha 2018, 114). The *double system* of money circulation articulated a systemic contradiction between the state's market oriented economic reforms (what is economically profitable) and the official socialist political ideology (what is morally desirable). For example, during the post-Soviet socialist period substantial disparities emerged between the state's rhetoric on the universal provision of basic human needs and the actual lived experience of its citizens. The dual economy had a significant impact in increasing economic inequalities shaped by gender and race due to the differential access that citizens had to foreign currency which contrasted with the revolutionary ideal of equality of all Cubans (Hernandez-Reguant et al 2009; Fernandes 2006; Brotherton 2012, 32, 196; Allen 2011 119-121; Garth 2020, 33-35).

While during the 2000s Cuba partially recovered from the extreme hardship of the Special Period —in part thanks to cooperation with Venezuela, which began providing Cuba with oil in exchange for medical, educational, and technical services—Cubans never fully recovered the quality of life of the Soviet era. Cubans, across generations, still maintain a haunting memory of the 90s, as a moment in history which marks a felt distinction between a

[28] CUC and dollars were accepted interchangeably until the Bush administration in 2004 increased the economic embargo placed on the Island by limiting USA remittances. As a result, the CUC became the only official currency recognized in the "capitalist" sphere.

"before" and an "after" in time (Garth 2020, 77; see also Frederik 2012, 171-174). The "after" of the Post-Soviet socialist era is a time of growing uncertainties and waiting. Anthropologists working in post-Soviet socialist Cuba in the 90s, 2000s, and early 2010s have consistently pointed out how shortages of goods and services shaped the everyday life of ordinary Cubans (Frederik 2012; Porter 2008; Brotherton 2008, 2012; Weinreb 2009; Pertierra 2011; Garth 2020). Waiting and struggling for food, medicines, transport, electricity, or other scarce goods and services "was one of the common characteristics of lived experience under state socialism" (Frederik 2012, 171). Laurie Frederik stressed how during her fieldwork between 1997 and 2009, theatre plays contained recurrent thematic scenes centered on waiting. They often depicted waiting at bus stops and lack of transport in humorous ways. Yet, Frederik did not realize the hard-core reality of being in the midst of that waiting until she started working among rural theatre artists in the Province of Santa Clara (2012, 92-99). Waiting was a central practice of everyday life, constitutive of social relations and the lived experience of the post-Soviet socialist state, as well as an experience of passive waiting out until the end of the Special Period, waiting for the ultimate "victory" promised by the Revolution, for "the arrival of Cuba's long-awaited Godot" (2012, 171).

During my fieldwork conducted a couple of decades later in the same region, waiting was still as relevant in the lived, embodied experiences of my research participants and in their imaginations. In one of my conversations with Carmen, the first actress to join the Theatre Company of the Concoction, she envisioned doing a play entirely centered on "waiting."

> So much time is spent waiting and so many things can happen…One can even end up falling in love… it happened to me once when I spent an entire day in line to buy a gas canister.

She had just finished the rehearsal of Yisel, a puppet's play for children re-enacting the French Giselle. The play was about to premier at The Concoction in front of the Committee of Arts for Santa Clara as the graduation exam of her 17-year-old daughter, Desire, who had also recently

joined the Theatre Company. Carmen kept elaborating on the idea for the play on 'waiting' by drawing on her lived experience:

> Sometimes, you meet a friend, or a friend of a friend, and you start chatting, and while waiting in the lines you get to know who died and who was born…." Oh, but you are the grandson of doña Nely? She died? When? I am so sorry…How is your mother doing?" Oh! your sister has given birth? Please give her my regards (…) "There is also an ongoing social commentary that goes on in the lines, what goods have disappeared, which ones have reappeared again. Did they deliver the antibiotic? It's a month that is not arriving…*No es fácil*. It's not easy.

Carmen moved into discussing how 'waiting' impacted her own work as an artist. Finding the materials for the scenography and costumes was always a struggle. Also, much of her creative time had to be spent in the struggle (*lucha*) to acquire food or other basic commodities. Despite these difficulties, Carmen was thankful to be an artist in Cuba, where she could live exclusively by doing theatre. Many of her friends in Argentina or Mexico had to take up a second job in order to survive as puppeteers:

> *Aquí, envés que en un segundo trabajo, el tiempo se te va en las colas.*
> [Here, instead of in a second job, time goes by in lines]

She ended this statement with a smile and made her way back home to cook a meal for her family.

While buying a ticket at the national bus company with my Cuban ID as a temporary resident or while acquiring food and medicines with or for Esperanza, I came to experience myself how much time went by in the lines. The average 'waiting time' could be so long (5-7 hours) that waiting in lines in Cuba would involve the following ritual. Once arrived in front of an established *cola* (line), you would ask loudly: "*Quien es el ultimo?"* "Who is the last one?" Sometimes you had to repeat the question several times until finding the person who had arrived last. The last in line would tell you the two people who preceded her; you needed to memorize these in case she left the line. Then, it was time for you to take your place as the last in line and to introduce newcomers to those who preceded you. Once you established your place in the line, you would not have to maintain it by physically standing there the whole time. You were able to

sit in the shade, or walk around, or return back home to eat, or temporarily leave to go run some other errand or even mark your place in another line. The mutual recognition among those who were waiting with you (before and after) was enough to keep your place in the line. While waiting, I also often ended up conversing and making friendship with those waiting with me, as Carmen had observed. The affects circulating in the lines were rarely boredom. While waiting, people would share their feelings of disappointment, use humor to comment on the everyday struggle, and entertain each other in conversations about life, death, love, and much else. An alternative to waiting was to send someone to wait in your place, either someone you paid or someone who you would reciprocate through another favor. Waiting with or for Esperanza and Maga was one of the ways in which I was able to reciprocate within my fictive family. The everyday ways of acquiring basic goods and services were deeply embedded in a "moral economy" of relationships of obligation, of reciprocations in time of gifts and favors among a circuit of associates (Thompson 1971, Scott 1977, Carrier 2018). As I elaborate in the following section, another way to avoid waiting, was to have an *enchufe* (a connection), which was regarded as a legitimate ethical praxis in the line's *struggle (lucha)*. Brotherton refers to the latter with the term *sociolismo* (instead of *socialismo*) to indicate that after the 90s socialist governmentality was increasingly tied to a complex network of social relations with *socios* (partners: from acquaintances, to friends, partners, co-workers, etc.) in what Ledeneva described as an "economy of favours" (Brotherton 2012, 7, 31; see also Garth 2020, 112, 122). The progressive withdrawal of the welfare socialist state as universal provider in the 90s went hand in hand with an intensification of the role of community and social relations in maintaining social welfare (Garth 2020, 19).

"La lucha" and changes in governmentality in the Post-Soviet socialist era

No es fácil
It's not easy

Aquí lo fácil se vuelve difícil, y lo difícil se vuelve imposible
Here, what's easy becomes difficult, and what's difficult becomes impossible

In a multidisciplinary collection of essays on waiting, Ghassan Hage distinguishes between the phenomenological experience of actively waiting for something (or someone) and that of passively 'waiting out' for a given undesirable situation to end (2009). He observes how, in many languages, well-being is generally equated with a sense of mobility. In Lebanon for example, you would ask how someone is doing with the common expression: "'how is the *state* of your being?" to which the common reply literally means: "the state of my being is *walking*" (2009, 98, my emphasis). Yet, Hage also observes how the structures of feelings around well-being are changing. In the face of growing global precarity and uncertainty, people react by 'waiting out' the crises, embodying the "heroism of the stuck" (2009, 100). Rather than heroism being associated with mobility, it is now being associated with stuckness and the capability to endure stuckness while 'waiting out' the difficult situation and waiting for it to end.

Drawing on the works of Badiou and Sartre, Hage stresses how queuing has been identified as a central symbol of the social order by philosophers and social scientists alike. The queue is a site of subjectification where governmentality is exercised through the self-government of the individuals in the line. For Sartre this is true insofar as the line keeps moving, even if slowly, working as a medium for regulating access to resources. For Badiou, once the line stops working, it triggers a social crisis and a crisis of governmentality transforming the people waiting from a series of autonomous individuals into a fused group or collective. Hage notes that Sartre and Badiou still conceptualize crisis as "an unusual state of affairs which brings about upheaval, a rethinking of the social order (i.e., the modality of waiting) and the formation of a

revolutionary force (no more waiting!)" (2009, 104; see also Vigh 2008). Contrary to this optimistic vision of crises and their potential, Hage remarks that in a world where crises are not isolated events but are rather increasingly normalized in their contemporary repetition (geopolitical crises, humanitarian crisis, environmental crises, energetic crises, financial crises, moral crises, etc.) "*enduring the crisis* becomes the normal mode of being a good citizen and the more one is capable of enduring a crisis the more of a good citizen one is." (2009, 104, my emphasis)[29]

In this section, I situate Hage's reflections on waiting, governmentality, and shifting structure of feelings around notions of 'heroism' and good citizenship in Cuba's waiting lines after the Special Period of the 90s. As I have described in the previous section, during this time the centralized socialist state still maintained a central role in the distribution of socialist entitlements (basic needs and services). Yet, the provisioning of those goods and services was increasingly marked by 'lack,' 'insufficiency,' and 'arrhythmic waiting.' While the Revolutionary leadership made appeals to historical slogans of "struggle" and "sacrifice"—epitomized in the figures of anti-colonial political thinkers such as Jose Marti, and anti-imperialist revolutionaries such as Che Guevara or Fidel—those same slogans of heroic '*lucha*' ('struggle') were often reemployed in everyday speech to index newly emerging forms of socialist subjectivity. As Hanna Garth has remarked, '*la lucha*' captures the shifts in ethics, politics, and practices within socialist governmentality that emerged as a result of the crises of the 90s and persist today (2020, 18-19).

[29] This reversal of the meaning of crises from *an unusual state* triggering change into a *permanent state of affairs* is also stressed by Roitman (2013) in her book *Anti-Crises*. Roitman observes how presidents like Obama in their speech have echoed the way social scientists have characterized history as moving through crises, and moments of crises as marking the breaking down of normative structures while disclosing possibilities for thinking, feeling, and acting otherwise. Contrarily, crises, in their contemporary multiplication -geopolitical crises, humanitarian crisis, environmental crises, energy crises, financial crises, moral crises etc.- have become the privileged qualifier of the contemporary condition. They have come to signify *a protracted historical and experiential condition*, an *ongoing state of affairs*, rather than being the signifier for a critical and decisive moment in time which bears the possibility for change (2013, 2-16). Roitman takes crises not as a state of affairs to be observed (either unusual or permanent) but as an observation about history itself (from a blind spot) that generates meanings — meanings that are the product of particular ideological vantage points, which allow us to foreground some aspects while concealing others and are open to contestation (2013, 39).

In Cuba the most common way to greet each other is "*que volá asere?"* ("What's up my friend?") to which the common response is "*Aqui, en la luchita*" or "*Aqui, luchando*" ("I am here, in the struggle," "I am struggling"). The term "la lucha" is one of the most important idiomatic terms, or *cubanismos*, that rose to prominence in everyday talk during the 90s and took on new meanings in the post-Soviet socialist era. The notions of "*Lucha y sacrificio*" (struggle and sacrifice) were employed by Jose Marti during Cuba's struggle for independence from Spain in the nineteenth century. Marti stressed the importance of unity and self-sacrifice for the well-being of the homeland over individual self-interest. The 26th of July Movement employed Jose Marti's notions of "struggle and sacrifice" in the revolutionary fight for independence from North America's imperialist power. During the Special Period of the 90s, the image and dictums of Jose Marti were amply invoked on billboards and public media so as to remind Cubans of the duty of "struggle and sacrifice" for the good of the homeland (Perez 2009, 16). The word "struggle" (*la lucha*) was euphemistically reemployed by ordinary Cubans with a double meaning as a form of indirect critique of the failures of the post-Soviet socialist state in adequately providing for its citizens. Greeting each other *en la lucha* (in the struggle) became an affectively charged speech act that used sarcasm and irony as to index the "new ways and means" of living and accessing income, goods, and services of ordinary Cubans (locally termed *cubano de a pie,* Cuban on foot) (Weinreb 2009). As disappointed "citizen-consumers" of the post-Soviet socialist State, Cubans often engaged in what they perceive to be a "*doble moral"* (dual morality): publicly upholding the values of the Revolution (moral state's code) while often 'suspending' those values by privately engaging in a series of illegal activities in order to *conseguir* (to find), *resolver* (to figure out), and *inventar* (to invent) solutions to face the struggle (*la lucha*) of everyday life (Weinreb 2009, 65-82; Brotherton 2012, 141-142; Garth 2019, 2020; Tankha 2018 118-119). In the words of Amelia Weinreb, the everyday "*lucha"* evoked "the illicit, the contraband, the clever manipulation of state systems, and the adjustment to shortages" (Weinreb 2009, 67). It entailed navigating formal and

informal economies to access basic needs (from food to medicine) in the face of a faltering post-Soviet socialist welfare state (Brotherton 2008; Garth 2020).

In the course of one of our interviews, Manuel, a 35-year-old Black musician assiduous frequenter of the Concoction, and doctorand at the University of Santa Clara, gave me a detailed explanation of '*la lucha,'* and its relationship with the State, illegality and legitimacy (what is considered to be rightful ethical-moral action). He had just finished narrating to me in detail the "bureaucratic odyssey" he had had to undergo to be certified as a professional musician[30] affiliated with the *Empresa de la música*.[31] It had been a battle with red tape, over 6 years of presenting documents and waiting for letters of approval to build up his proceedings. It entailed navigating multiple State institutions, from the *Empresa de la Música* in Santa Clara to the AHS (the Union for artists younger than 35) in Havana. Part of the difficulty, uncertainty, and waiting involved in obtaining his certification as musician was due to Manuel's positionality:

> I am a *guajirito* (peasant) that comes from the middle of nowhere, from the mountains, I do not have many contacts in Santa Clara or anywhere else…Also, I do not engage in those games of becoming friend of X to…and even being friend of X, I do not necessarily take advantage of it…like I was really friend with the old director of the *Empresa de la Música*…he came for many years to our peña (musical concert) but I never took advantage of that…So well, it is six years since I went for the first time to the *Empresa de la Música* to open my artistic proceedings and I have only now completed it…six years I have been in that struggle (…)

In this context, he used the term 'struggle,' as my research participants often did, to characterize

[30] Manuel had not formally trained in any musical school. He had learnt to play the guitar with a countryside teacher when he was young and had kept practicing and composing songs along his life. He had studied philosophy at the University of Santa Clara and now was teaching as a professor while completing a doctorate on Ifa' s philosophy (the divinatory system used in the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería). In his first years of university, he had founded, together with a group of fellow musician university students, a *peña* (encounter of music improvisation) at the University. The *peña* was still active every Friday in the patio of the AHS of Santa Clara. Only two of the original founders were still participating in it. The rest of the original members had emigrated and were now living abroad. New members had joined the *peña* over time and a new generation of university students *trovadores* was keeping it alive.

[31] In order to be paid for their performances, in both state and privately-owned venues, artists in Cuba have to be affiliated with a recognized institution. *La Empresa de la musica* is one of those institutions, a State-owned company who is formally in charge of the promotion of musicians but whose main work is to function as the designated intermediary in managing artist's payments. The Music enterprise receives the money from the venues contracting the artists and later proceeds to their payment.

an activity which is arduous, time-consuming, and of uncertain outcomes (see also Pertierra 2011, 75). I followed up by asking him to elaborate more on the concept of 'struggle.'

> For us la lucha (the struggle) is something normal. It is a very ample concept which involves a lot of different situations and that broadly refers to the everyday ways of doing (quehacer cuotidiano) employed by Cubans to getting through their lives despite the odds (*tirar, estoy tirando*).
>
> For example, '*luchando*' can be to steal something from the shop where you are working; or for example when a product in shortage arrives to the store where you are working to call a couple of friends with money that will buy 50 litros of cooking oil and will give you 5 CUC in return or might involve buying 20 breads at 1 CUP from the state to resell it for 2 CUP while giving a small bribe to the state's bread seller. This are all examples of the la lucha (the struggle). La lucha is to make ends meet in life …but illegally. So, for example there are certain levels of bribery in the chains of distribution of public goods. Or certain instances of "I help you if you help me, let's help each other's here." And people end up living in the line which divides the legal from the illegal, in the struggle, because of shortages and deprivations. Shortages bring corruption at the small and big scale level.
>
> In my perspective, there are some aspects of 'the struggle' that are more innocent than others. They are all practices which are illegal, yet some of them are way less harmful to the social than others, and they are considered legitimate. For me la lucha equals stealing, and stealing does not seem good to me, from the most small and permissible acts, the least dangerous to the social good to…because at the end I do not hold the belief that the State is my enemy. While there are many Cubans who believe that the State is their enemy. They stand in solidarity with the ordinary Cubans who engage in la lucha rather than with the director who does it, because they consider that the director who does it, is not like them. The director of a factory stops being 'the people.' For example, to explain to you the issue of the *tracatanes* (someone who adulates or make presents to a superior to gain their favour),'[32] (…) Clearly, the chief of Government of Santa Clara does not live like the ox driver of a small rural community in the Province of Villa Clara. The governor has to be available for other things and he cannot leave the meetings to go to the market to find food for his kids. So, there are people (*tracatanes*) who will bring him food, the most precious part of the pig they have killed at home for example, and this so as to enter into a relation to get favors in return. It is a blessing when a friend you have made at school, later becomes the director of a factory or comes to occupy a governmental position. Since you have a previous relationship of trust, you can always go and ask them for a favor. "*Compadre,* I have a problem with…I do not know…the legal papers for the

[32] Here Manuel expanded on the notion of people: "This opens a long possible discussion on the endless dichotomy between the people (el pueblo) and the State and its representatives. At the end in all the political discourses of here and there, there are the same concepts: "freedom, democracy, the people." If you look at Fidel's speeches when the 26th of July Movement took power, he lists 6 fundamental points for which they are fighting…food, housing, education, health…and one of the six is "the people." He defines who is the people, and in his definition, he also does not include the state's representatives among the people, because he understands that was a challenge… "The state's representatives should be the people, we will fight for state's representatives to be part of the people, to come from the people, feel like the people, and live like the people".

home." And he can send you to X or Y to solve your problem…and since you are sent by the Director of the Province, they will let you in and solve your problem…so if you have the right *enchufe* (plug, contact) you can skip the line. The other common way is to pay the state's functionary. Because unfortunately that is another way to get a paperwork done quickly, to bribe the state's employee to have your request to be moved at the top of the list. That is another way to skip the line, and it happens a lot, from the biggest to the most innocuous ways of skipping the line… for example in the line for the bus (*guagua*). If you know the guy who is selling the tickets at the terminal you can easily skip the line. And it happens with things like …I do not know…getting a flight to go abroad.

So, la lucha, is considered not legal, it is against the norms, yet it is considered legitimate. Some of these practices, for us Cubans, are legitimate, are part of the struggle (la lucha). And even those who are affected by you doing so, they also often see those practices as legitimate. For example, it happened to me as I went to Santiago de Cuba to perform at the festival. I arrived to the terminal with the outmost tranquility, there was a creepy line, immense, gigantic. And I go to speak with the lady who is controlling the line, letting a small number of people at the time to pass to the office to buy the tickets. I approach the lady and I tell her: "Look, I am coming to see miss X, and I come sent by Y at the Music Enterprise. She goes to get the ticket's seller and I explain to her that I am a musician that came from Santa Clara to play for the festival, that I am sent by Y at the *Empresa de la Musica*, that I am missing the ticket to return back home…" And she just gave me the ticket. And I left the office with my ticket in hand, passing in front of all the people who were waiting in the line. And no one says anything, because they see it as a 'legitimate' thing to do.… they could protest…but they are not bothered by it because they see it as something legitimate. Not legal, but yes, legitimate…They might think: "He was lucky, well, in another moment I will be lucky, at the bus stop of my own town, or when I have a connection…" This is not an example that captures the phenomenon in its entirety, but it is for you to have an idea…There is also another figure who is very relevant to the Cuban idiosyncrasy that is the figure of *el chivato*. El *chivato* is essentially a snitch that report illegal activities to the Security of the State. So, since the lifestyle of the ordinary, and not so ordinary, Cubans, is to live in the line between legality and illegality, because this is how we live in reality, we are all more or less inhabiting that line in-between, people protect themselves against the *chivato* because at a certain moment in the day, or at a certain moment in the week, we all end up doing something that is outside of legality. And it is because of the very dynamics of life we are in. When your salaries are not enough, and you have to buy overpriced you are recurrently trapped in circuits of illegality. Those who buy in excess to resell commit a hoarding crime, but those who buy from them also commit a crime. I have received a fine for inappropriate acquisition, because I bought something illegally. And the moral distrust of the *chivato* is related to the concept of the struggle, and the struggle as I told you is generally to steal, to steal from the state more specifically. The dynamics of life themselves creates the feeling in many Cubans that the State is their enemy and that you have to hide from the State to do certain things.

In the explanation of Manuel, 'la lucha' was tied to the way Cubans felt and imagined the State and the 'public good,' and to a change in what are considered to be practices of good citizenship. La lucha was entangled in histories of "corruption" of the smallest and the biggest scale: from the most innocuous and legitimate tactics of ordinary Cubans (*Cubano de a pie*) that are *luchando la vida* (struggling for life)—trying to get by despite the odds, buying or selling goods in the black market, or skipping waiting lines thanks to networks of personal relationships—to the bigger levels of corruption of lower or higher representatives of the State.

Rather than taking 'corruption' as a dysfunctional aspect of the state, Akhil Gupta has invited anthropologists to take corruption, and narratives about corruption, as a lens to render visible the affective practices and meanings which constitute the state and its others—what is not the state (e.g., citizens, communities, civil society, political society, etc.)—in particular sociocultural contexts and historical conjunctures (1995; 2012, 78, 107; Muir and Gupta 2018; see also Tidey 2021). Manuel identifies the 'other' to the state in the notion of 'the people,' stressing how the majority of Cubans (with whom he does not fully identify) has come to perceive the state, and its representatives, as opposed to or different from 'the people.' As Manuel explained to me:

> If you look at Fidel's speeches when the 26th of July Movement took power, he lists 6 fundamental points for which they are fighting…food, housing, education, health…and one of the six is "the people."

Fidel grounded his political discourse in a form of national populism: it was a "Revolution of the people, by the people and for the people" (1961 in Castro 2011). And for that Revolution, Cubans had to be ready "to struggle and sacrifice," "*Patria o muerte!*" "Homeland or Death!" The sacrifice for the Revolution was compensated in the first three decades (1959-1989) with radical social changes that delivered to 'the people' the revolutionary promises in the form of housing, food, education and health. Since the early 1960s, Cuban leaders envisioned teachers, artists, and physicians as soldiers in Cuba's historic battle towards national development and freedom from

imperialist dependence (Chomsky et. al 2003; Fagen 1969; Moore 2006; Brotherton 2008). Through its populist programs, the Revolution was quite successful in producing "subjectivities of entitlement" (Allen 2011; Brotherton 2008) affectively bound to the socialist State as universal provider of human security in the form of free healthcare, education, subsidized foods, housing, and cultural venues for the artistic expression of the human condition (as envisioned by Ernesto Che Guevara).[33] The Special Period of the 90s partially undermined the bases of this legitimacy as lack and waiting increasingly structured the Revolutionary State's apparatuses of provisioning of socialist entitlements. The phrase "*no es fácil*" ("it's not easy") has become a common Cuban refrain since the 90s to express disappointment towards 'the struggle' of everyday life, from enduring blackouts to finding food or medicines. As Holbraad has remarked, Cubans' repeated expressions of discontent expressed through idiomatic phrases such as "*no es fácil*" or "*la lucha*" should not be interpreted as a form of disaffiliation with revolutionary socialism, rather the opposite. It is precisely the attachment to the promises of the Revolution that helps explain the affective disappointment towards its ailing state in the post-Soviet Period (2014, 367). The 90s produced a crisis of governmentality as the delivery of goods and services from the socialist welfare state became scarce and increasingly structured by waiting. The socialist state kept delivering goods and services, but now less of them, more slowly and intermittently. In the example employed by Ghassan Hage (via Sartre and Badiou), it is only when lines stop delivering goods and services that a transformation happens in the self-government of the waiting subjects: converting a series of individuals into a fused mass or collective, a Revolutionary force bound by "No more waiting!" In Cuba, when the crises of the 90s happened, the waiting subjects were in great part already a revolutionary force, who had struggled and sacrificed for a Revolution of the people. They had also benefited for decades (from 1959 to 1989) from the achievements brought about by Revolutionary socialism, in terms of increased equality and well-being of the

[33] In *Man and Socialism*, Che Guevara envisioned a society of "new man," holding the virtuous of an idealized masculine citizen poised to confront the emasculating powers of U.S. imperialism through discipline, strong work ethics, and the expression of one's own human condition through *"culture and art*" (Chomsky et. Al 2003: 370-374).

population. The 90s radically reconfigured the lived experience of Revolutionary socialism in Cuba which translated into a shift in the practices of ethical self-government in waiting lines captured by the emic concept of '*la lucha*.' Within 'la lucha', as Hanna Garth has remarked, Cubans often draw a distinction between practices that belong to "*luchando la vida*" ("struggling for life"), which are less harmful to the social and thus considered legitimate, and practices that are not considered legitimate since directed at "getting ahead." This points to the fact that the "socialist ethics of egalitarianism" are still central in orienting Cuban's understanding of which social practices are considered to be good or bad (2020, 129). The 'struggle' reflects how socialist governmentality was 'updated' after the crises of the 90s. The lucha of ordinary Cubans was often understood as "filling in the gaps between the state's rhetoric of universal provisioning and social welfare and its inability to actually provide for these services" (Brotherton 2012, 185). The crises of governmentality of the Revolutionary socialist state without dismantling 'social welfare' as a project, went hand in hand with an intensification of the role of community, kinship, and social relations, in maintaining social welfare (Garth 2020, 19).[34]

[34] Gal and Kligman (2000) have stressed the similarities existing between the biopolitical projects of Eastern socialist states and Western welfare states. Both bound their citizens to the state through the centralized management of the substantive provision of the population. They granted full employment, relatively high wages, free healthcare, education, subsidize foods and rents, etc. Both were faced during late capitalism with a crisis of the state's run model of economic equality and social citizenship. Socialist and welfare states alike were faced with the necessity to restructure their state-sponsored provisioning systems towards a partial withdrawal of the centralized state in favor of free markets, municipal and local governments, and/or non-governmental institutions. They were both faced with the challenge of reconstituting the affective relationship with their citizens on different grounds than those afforded by a paternalistic state system of universal provisioning (Ibid: 63-67). Yet, if as ideal-types socialist and welfare states can be compared along their respective processes of liberalization, in reality welfare states (and socialist states alike) are extremely diverse in institutional structures and infrastructures, kinship ideologies, gender relations, moral commitments to citizenship, demographic patterns, etc. These factors profoundly shape the way liberalizing reforms are pursued and implemented. For example, during the "neoliberal transition" in the United States the family was pathologized as morally sick and was constructed as the source of all social problems and thus charged with the responsibility for their solution. Contrarily, the family was not pathologized in Swedish public debates and in East Central Europe was regarded as a source of moral continuity with the past vis-à-vis the corruption and instability of the post-socialist state (Ibid: 69). As I have stressed in this section something very similar happened in Cuba, where extended kinship networks and local communities became central actors in sustaining socialist welfare.

Ethnographic interlude: Waiting, Working

L*a chopping* (store that sold in CUC), near the *casa particular* (private home) where I first stayed in Havana in 2016 in the high-end residential neighborhood of El Vedado, always had a waiting line of at least 15 people. Customers were made to wait outside, in the heat, and only few consumers were allowed inside to enjoy the air conditioning. While waiting people often commented or complained among each other: "Look at this line, and look inside, there is almost no one. They keep us waiting here in the heat. *Que país*…" The products sold inside were few and shelves were often empty. It was thus not unusual to have to walk several miles to the next store to find the product you were looking for. Juan, a 50-year-old white engineer and head of my *casa particular*, explained to me that the price of the breakfast he sold to tourists (5 CUC) was justified by the '*waiting time*' spent to procure the ingredients. Cooking and preparing were not labor intensive. In less than 20 minutes he could clean and cut mango and guayaba, slice the bread, and prepare an egg omelet. Yet, finding the ingredients would take him a lot of time. Juan had recently left his state paid job at a telecommunications company where he had worked for 20 years. Frustrations with the lack of possibilities for growth offered by the company and his low salary (50 CUC per month) had led him to turn to the growing private business of *la casa particular* (private home). He was renting three rooms in the house where he lived with his second wife, Graciela, and her child. The house was owned by an aunt who had migrated to New York City. She had received it after divorcing one of the most acclaimed Cuban film directors, Tomas Gutierrez-Alea, the author of classics such as "*Memories of Underdevelopment*" and "*Strawberries and Chocolate*."

Juan and the aunt had entered into a 'family business.' He had transformed himself in an *amo de casa* (househusband), as he would often remark with irony during our conversations while he was sweeping the patio. His days now were spent making beds, cleaning rooms, and preparing

breakfasts for tourists. The profits from renting the rooms (25 CUC per day per room), advertised through Airbnb, were divided equally between Juan (the houseworker) and the aunt abroad (the house owner). The aunt would send him his part of the revenues through Western Union (since the USA embargo on remittances had been lifted under Obama). Juan told me that his highest profits were derived precisely from the breakfasts offered to tourists, money he did not have to share with anyone, thus implying he had properly transformed the '*waiting time'* in CUP into price and profit in CUC.

During my first temporary stay in 2016, Graciela, Juan's wife, was still working for the state as an accountant in the National Bank. When I returned in 2017, she also had left her job and was helping Juan with the housekeeping activities. She did so regretfully. She had loved her work, and those hours outside of the house. Yet, she had quit her state-paid work to have more time to take care of her son, who was 13 and had a developmental delay. Previously Graciela's mom had taken care of Eusebio but now he had started a school for kids with special needs that was far from home. She had to pick him up from school and accompany him to do physical activity and to frequent appointments with doctors. It was also a struggle to keep up with finding medicines. They were free but not always available. She told me this as she was cooking the meal for the family dinner: fried chicken with *arroz moro* (white rice and black beans) *y un plátano frito* (a fried plantain). Graciela was the first who shared with me the document in newsprint containing the 2016 directives on the post-Fidel political and economic update. The document was titled *Conceptualization of the Economic and Social Model of Socialist Development. National Plan of Economic Development Until 2030: Project for a National Vision*."[35] She gave it to me while remarking that the document was more valuable to me than it was for her. For her, the plan belonged to a series of updates with merely performative rather than constative meaning, having been formally discussed while not being discussed at all (Yurchak 2005).

[35] "Conceptualización del Modelo Económico y Social Cubano de Desarrollo Socialista. Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Económico hasta 2030: Propuesta de Visión de la Nación"

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Copelia, the national chain of ice-cream built by Fidel Castro in every city of the country always had an *extremely* long line. Copelia sold ice-cream at subsidized prices in *moneda nacional* (5 CUP for 6 scoops of ice-cream). It was a symbol of the revolutionary attempt to make ice-cream accessible to everyone. The flavors offered were often limited, 4-6 flavors in Havana and 2-3 in the province of Santa Clara. Often only one flavor was available and Copelia closed many times over my stay in Santa Clara due to shortages in milk. At the same time, in correspondence with the 60th year of the Revolution, and the year of its constitutional update, all Copelia in the country were made objects of infrastructural renovation, provided with new fancy tables, visual screens for playing games, and restored pavements.

The first time I embraced the lines of Copelia was with Camilo, a 27-year-old Black[36]

[36] Jose Marti, in *Our Americas*, critiqued the biological bases of the concept of 'race,' advocating for eliminating this culturally constructed category as meaningful in the struggles for Independence. Marti's writing can be interpreted as a liberating antiracist critique striving for an independent post-colonial Cuba oriented by 'raceless' principles of social equality. Camilo and Manuel would align with this interpretation of Marti's writing, given the affective sacrality the national hero holds in their sense of Cubania. Yet, as Jafari Allen has stressed, Marti's erasure of 'race' as a meaningful category of identification should also be problematized since it prevented 'race' from becoming a potential terrain of social struggle (2011, 51-52). Marti's erasure of 'race' worked as to conceal and render unspeakable racialized forms of oppression that remained alive in the Republic (or neo-colonial period) and in different form in the post-Revolutionary socialist period, intensifying along its updates in time, after the Special Period of the 90s and in the current Update.
During the Republican Period (1902-1959), Marti's erasure of race as a meaningful biological category was employed to promote a whitening ideology of *mestizaje*, or racial mixture, that while formally including Afro-Cubans in the newborn nation, acknowledging their sacrifice in the War of Independence from Spain, kept in place the "European Creole (structurally white)" racialized plantation forms of colonial domination which structured the colonial period (Allen 2011, 52; see also Garth 2020, 34; Benitez-Rojo 1997, 26). During the Republican Period, Black Cubans had little to no access to education, health, high paid jobs, and leisure activities (Garth 2020, 34).
The leadership of the 26th of July movement was composed by an anti-imperialist white middle-class, who was able to succeed thanks to the support, struggle and sacrifice of many Black Cubans. The 1959 Revolution greatly improved the position of Black Cubans on the Island by granting them access to education, health, qualified jobs, and leisure activities (Allen 2011, 61; Garth 2020, 34; Moore 2006). At the same time, the Revolutionary leadership also erased 'race' as a meaningful category of identification and terrain of social struggle in favor of propagandas for national socialist unity. Fidel combined Marti's erasure of 'race' from notions of Cubania with a socialist ideology that claimed that changes in the material conditions of production would automatically translate in the resolution of other forms of social oppression produced by capitalism (based on gender or race) (Garth 2020, 34). This was evident in propagandas such as "*Negro no…Ciudadanos!"* that were circulated early on by the Revolution (Benson 2016, 2 in Garth 2020, 34). Many Black Cubans suffer from what Carlos Moore has termed the "Gracias Fidel" syndrome (Moore 1988, 44; see also Allen 2011, 88; Garth 2020, 35). According to the anti-racist Black Cuban scholar, the oppression and marginalization of Afro-Cubans previous to the Revolution was so dramatic that the changes introduced by the Revolution provoked in Black Cubans more gratitude and loyalty towards Fidel than they should have felt, becoming blind to persisting forms of racism and prejudice on the Island.
During the Special Period of the 90s the State asked Black Cubans to sustain the Revolution at times of crises by

Cuban born in Santa Clara in El Condado, one of the poorest neighborhoods of the city. He had moved to Havana 8 years prior to study in the school of the Communist party, for which he had served as the national vice-president for the youth. He was currently working at the *Sociedad cultural Jose Marti* under the leadership of Rene Gonzales. Copelia, a central symbol of the Revolution, was among Camilo's favorite places. Camilo would bring to Copelia every international delegation who came to visit the Society Jose Marti from abroad. He did the same with me, as we were meeting each other again in September 2018, a year after our first encounter at the Concoction in Santa Clara. With 5 pesos en *moneda nacional* (national currency) you could eat an ice-cream *ensalada* (salad), consisting of 5 big scoops of ice-cream and 5 cookies. As we took our position in the long line, I commented that I had been hesitant to eat an ice-cream at Copelia because of the long waiting.

> "The line might get shorter when it rains…?" I inquired. He laughed.
>
> "No, it does not get shorter, not even then, people just wait in line over there" ((pointing to a nearby covered ceiling))

He then told me that when he was young, he thought Copelia was an international chain that you could find everywhere:

> Once a group of delegates came from Spain and I kept telling them:
> "Do you like Copelia? I love Copelia…" Copelia here, and Copelia there (…)
>
> Finally, they had the courage to ask me: "But Camilo, what is Copelia?"

We both laughed. While slowly moving in the lines, Camilo and I started discussing the negative political conjuncture in Latin America, with Macri in Argentina, and Bolsonaro gaining power in Brazil. Camilo had recently travelled to Brazil sent by the Society Jose Marti. There, he had

persevering in their socialist orientations while showing resilience towards shortages, waiting and lack (Allen 2011, 4). At the same time, socio-economic inequalities based on race were exacerbated after the 90s since Blacks had less access to hard currency through remittances from family abroad or through access to the tourist market in CUC (Brotherton 2012, 32, 196; Allen 2011 119-121; Garth 2020, 33-35).

participated in a strike for the first time. In his experience, the strike was not an organized political movement of protest that would lead to real change:

> Maybe it is because I am Cuban, and I see things differently, but I feel that in those countries they are failing to create revolutionary consciousness.

For Camilo, revolutionary consciousness was produced through the work of good leaders. The youth was often disaffiliated from revolutionary politics and the goal, he thought, was to find ways to motivate them. As we moved a couple of steps further ahead in the line, Camilo started giving me an example of what good leadership looked like:

> For example, I was recently given the responsibility of leading a project for doing a mural in a marginal neighborhood of Havana. At work, many discouraged me from pursuing the project, since finding the painting and the volunteers would have been a struggle. I told them to have faith that both of them would appear. Claro que… I had to call a thousand times to get the painting delivered. I was the first to show up at the place at 7 in the morning, even though the volunteers wouldn't arrive until 9am. I was the last one to eat lunch and I would always wait until everyone had eaten to do so. If the food had finished, I would simply skip lunch. That is the type of leader, truly committed with the people, who is recognized by Cubans. Fidel was like that, he was always with and for the people, he was always there present.

Camilo loved his work, and he did so in line with Che Guevara's revolutionary ideal according to which work had to be morally, rather than economically, rewarding. Yet, like everyone else, he was struggling to survive out of his state paid salary. As a public employee he made the equivalent of 25 dollars per month (600 CUP). He lived in El Cotorro, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana, to pay for a cheaper rent (300 CUP) and had a long commute of two hours by bus to come to work every day. Despite a frugal life, he could often not make it through the end of the month: "I often have dinner at Copelia, I love ice-cream and with 5 pesos Cubanos I can have dinner with a big ice-cream salad."

To keep up with the moral value of his vocation while solving its economic problems he was considering going abroad to get a master's degree or collaborating in some other

international project in cultural institutions. While committing to a valuable activity, he could also save the money to return back home and buy a home in Havana. He made sure to clarify with me that he did not want to permanently leave the Island: "*Yo amo a mi país.*" "I love my country." Yet, like many other Cubans, he saw the possibility of going abroad for a 'temporary mission' as the only feasible to save enough money to buy a house back home.[37] Camilo was reticent to find other solutions, like joining the more lucrative market for tourists. I inquired if he would have been willing to work two days a week for a bar or a restaurant. In a couple of days working there, he could easily earn his current monthly salary. But for Camilo that was not a good enough moral option. To double his salary in CUP, later that year he took up a second job in the national television station. Camilo and I kept conversing while moving in line, now surrounded by the sound of reggaetón. A group of 5 adolescents, who preceded us in the line, had being joined by a 6th friend who had brought a gigantic stereo to entertain the group with music and dancing while waiting. Camilo commented with a smile:

> Those are sent from the family abroad. The other day on la *guagua* (the bus) there were three stereos playing contemporaneously three different music. I spent one hour and a half like that. *¡Para volverse locos!* (It will drive you crazy)

After two hours of deep conversation while hanging out in Copelia's line, we finally sat down at a shared table to eat our ice-cream salad. We kept conversing over the ice-cream, which we consumed very quickly with extreme joy, then walked together to his bus stop.

***

On the 1st of January 2021, the double system of monetary circulation in Cuba was officially updated. The CUC was eliminated without getting rid of the duality which shapes the Cuban economy since the 90s. Rather the opposite, in the midst of the pandemic crises, new stores in MLC (*Moneda libremente convertible*) were opened in all the major cities of the country

[37] The markets for selling and buying cars and houses were legalized in 2011.

where Cubans can buy goods with an electronic card that can be charged exclusively from abroad with euros or dollars. The salaries and prices in *moneda nacional* were 'nominally' increased as to mind the gap between the value of the CUC and CUP. While state's salaries were increased by 5 times, many of the prices of state's subsidized products were increased by 6 times. The price of the ice-cream salad at Copelia increased from 5 pesos to 30 pesos in Havana and was set at 20 in Santa Clara. Among the plethora of Facebook posts circulating critical, ironic commentaries on the updated prices, a recognized *trovador* (musician of trova) in Havana suggested doing an ice-cream strike to reduce Copelia's prices. Many commented in response in sympathy with irony, that the ice-cream strike was "*una huelga de colas*," "a strike of waiting lines."

Camilo wrote to me two weeks later, via messenger:
"*Oye amiga!!! ¡Ya tienes una casita en el Cotorro cuando vengas para Cuba!*[38]"

"Did you buy the house?" I asked.
"Yes, I am paying monthly from my salary, but will be mine."

The socialist "update": from the guidelines to the New Constitution

After Fidel's sickness in 2006, Raul Castro was delegated power temporarily and assumed it officially in 2008. One of Raul's first actions once in power was to address the "internal" problems faced by the Island. He shifted the blame for the failures of the economy, which had never fully recovered since the 90s, on Cuba's own policies rather than exclusively on 'external factors' (i.e., the US embargo). Among the central problems to be addressed was low internal productivity, an excessively centralized state apparatus, and an 'unsustainable' welfare system of provisioning (LeoGrande 2017, 354). The socialist model of development had to be "updated." The "update" of the socialist model of development started formally in November 2010 with the

[38] "Hey, my friend, "You have a house in El Cotorro (peripheral neighborhood in Havana) when you come to Cuba.

release of the draft blueprint for updating the Cuban economy—*the Guidelines of the Social and Economic Policy of the Party and the Revolution*—that was approved during the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba the following April 2011 after having been discussed at the grassroots level for three months.[39] Raul Castro opened his speech at the Sixth Congress, drawing attention to the significance of the date, 16th of April 2011, the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of the socialist character of the Revolution by Fidel Castro in 1961. At the dawn of the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Fidel had proclaimed:

> This is what they cannot forgive us…that we have made a Socialist Revolution right under the nose of the United States (…) Comrades, workers and farmers, this is the Socialist and democratic Revolution of the people, by the people and for the people. And for this Revolution of the people, by the people and for the people, we are willing to give our lives (Fidel 1961 in Castro 2011).[40]

After evoking the historical moment when socialism had been embraced by the Revolution, Raul moved into addressing its necessary 'update' contained in the Guidelines. Among the most important changes was the formal introduction and recognition of the "non-state sector" as a permanent and dynamic part of the economy. We have to "untie the knots holding back the development of the productive forces," starting by updating excessively centralized state regulations:

> Our entrepreneurs settled themselves comfortably safe and quiet <u>to wait</u> and developed an allergy to the risks involved in making decisions, that is, in being right or wrong. This mentality characterized by inertia should definitely be removed. (Castro 2011, my emphasis)

[39] According to the official mediums, The Guidelines had been discussed for three months, with the participation of 8, 913,838 people in more than 163 thousand meetings in the grassroots cells of the Communist Party and among not party members in meetings at their work, study centers or community. The revised version of the Guidelines was discussed and approved during the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (Castro 2011; LeoGrande 2017).

[40] Raul Castro, 04/16/2011, "Central Report To The 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba," CubaDebate. (http://en.cubadebate.cu/opinions/2011/04/16/central-report-6th-congress-communist-party-cuba/)

The potentiation of the non-state sector had to go hand in hand with the withdrawal of the State in its role as universal provider of basic needs to all the population. The State could no longer afford to sustain its system of universal subsidized provisioning, and the *Guidelines* introduced as a goal the future removal of the ration book. In response to the many comments and concerns expressed towards this measure, Raul Castro emphasized that the leadership would never implement the change before making sure that "*productivity*" and "*labor efficiency*" had increased "in order to guarantee stable levels of production and supplies of basic goods and services accessible to all citizens but no longer subsidized" (Ibid). In order for this to happen, prices and wages also had to be 'updated.' The guidelines introduced as a future goal the reunification of the double system of national currency established in the 90s to solve the problem of Cuba's "reversed pyramid," "the mismatch between salaries and the ranking or importance of the work performed," and the vast difference between state and private's wages (Ibid.).

Raul stressed how this series of 'liberalizing' reforms were fundamental to the very survival of socialism and ought not be conflated with the neoliberal "shock therapies"[41] and the structural adjustment plans imposed by the IMF:

> In Cuba, under socialism, there will never be space for "shock therapies" that go against the neediest, who have traditionally been the staunchest supporters of the Revolution; as opposed to the packages of measures frequently applied on orders of the International Monetary Fund and other international economic organizations to the detriment of the Third World peoples and, lately enforced in the highly developed nations where students' and workers' demonstrations are violently suppressed. The Revolution will not leave any Cuban helpless. The social welfare system is being reorganized to ensure a rational and deferential support to those who really need it. Instead of massively subsidizing products as we do now, we shall gradually provide for those people lacking other support. The growth of the non-public sector of the economy, far from an alleged privatization of the social property is to become an active element facilitating the construction of socialism (…). This, on the other hand, will make it easier for the

[41] The term 'shock therapies" is employed by Naomi Klein (2007) in her analysis of how forms of neoliberal governmentality are implemented in the wake of disasters. I will address Klein in dialogue with Yarimar Bonilla (2019) on the concept of 'disaster capitalism' and 'shock therapies' in chapter three. Here the term 'shock therapies' is employed by Raul Castro during his opening speech at the 6th Congress of the Communist party as to specifically distinguish the socialist 'update' from capitalist 'updates.'

> State to continue ensuring healthcare and education services free of charge and on equal footing to all of the people and their adequate protection through the Social Welfare System (Castro 2011).

The release and discussion of the Guidelines, with its project of reconfiguring the State's role in the economy, were coupled with a series of reforms that eased many of the restrictions previously imposed by the State in people's everyday life. In 2008 for example, Raul legalized the sale of computers, DVD players, and personal cell phones, and eliminated a rule that forbid Cubans from staying in tourist hotels or renting cars. In 2011, the private markets of real estate and automobile were authorized allowing Cuban citizens to buy and sell houses and cars between each other. That same year, the process for obtaining licenses for private entrepreneurial activities was eased and simplified and the national banks started offering loans to entrepreneurs, small farmer producers, and persons needing funds to fix up their homes. In 2013, the government eliminated the *tarjeta blanca*, the exit permit required when Cubans wanted to travel abroad. In 2014, Obama and Raul Castro declare their intent to move towards reestablishing a relationship between the two countries by loosening the embargo, eliminating limits on remittances, reestablishing embassies, and facilitating and promoting touristic travel from the USA to Cuba. In 2015 the first public wi-fi spots opened in the country and Cubans were able to connect from their personal devices from public squares rather than exclusively from workplaces, schools, or research centers[42] (Garth 2020, 169-170; Peters 2012, LeoGrande 2017, 354).

At the *Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba*, held on April 19 of 2016, Raul presented a summary of the performance of the national economy over the previous five-year period, 2011-2016. The non-state sector of the economy had expanded substantially as state employment had reduced from 81.2% in 2010 to 70.8% in 2015. Private self-employment in

[42] In August 2018 Cubans got access to internet on their phones being able to buy data packages from Etecsa, the State's own telecommunication company.

tourism have expanded with an increase of over 14,000 rooms for rent in CUC (Castro 2016).[43] Tourism and the export of medical services contributed more than half of the hard currency earnings of the country. On the contrary, the growth rate of agricultural production had been scarce and insufficient, and the country relied on approximately two billion dollars of food imports. The results confirmed the importance and necessity to "keep diversifying our sources of income, in order to never again depend on a single market or product, and to develop mutually beneficial trade and cooperation relations with all countries" (Castro 2016). The principle contained in the Guidelines had converged in a new document which was approved during the VII Congress: The *Conceptualization of the Cuban Socio-Economic Model of Socialist Development plan through 2030.*[44] Presenting it to the delegates, Raul Castro described it as outlining "the theoretical bases and essential characteristics of the social and economic model which we aspire to create through this updating process" (Castro 2016). The document began by situating 'the update' in Cuba's socialist history. Cuba had achieved important economic and social developmental goals in the Soviet period thanks to the solidarity of the USSR. Then in the 90s, the Fall of the Soviet bloc, the recrudescence of the embargo, and the rise of US hegemony in a global neoliberal economy had left the Island to face a difficult 'conjuncture'. As a result, during that Special Period, the social and economic model of development had been radically restructured without renouncing the principles and achievements of socialism thanks to the heroic resistance of the Cuban people (Conceptualization, 2016, paragraph 18-25). The updates introduced in the Special Period had helped to face the conjunctural crisis. At the same time, during the post-Soviet period some structural problems, typical of underdeveloped economies, had intensified: the unbalance

[43] Raul Castro, 04/19/2016, "El desarrollo de la economía nacional, junto a la lucha por la paz, constituyen las misiones del Partido," Granma, 04/20/2016. (http://www.granma.cu/septimo-congreso-del-pcc/2016-04-20/discurso-del-general-de-ejercito-raul-castro-ruz-en-la-clausura-del-7mo-congreso-del-partido-20-04-2016-00-04-19)

[44] Conceptualización del Modelo Económico y Social Cubano de Desarrollo Socialista. Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Económico hasta 2030: Propuesta de Visión de la Nación, Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba-PCC, 2016 (https://siteal.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sit_accion_files/siteal_cuba_0368.pdf)

between the need and the availability of foreign capital, inadequate supplies of goods and services due to low productivity (especially in the agricultural sector), decaying infrastructure and obsolete technology due to inadequate investment, excessive dependence from non-renewable forms of energy and growing risks of environmental damage, growing social and economic inequality arising from the dual currency system, increasing limitations in the access to basic needs and services, and low wages that had cause a migration of qualified workers to less qualified professions or abroad (Ibid, paragraph 28-29). To face these structural problems, the Conceptualization proposed to update the socialist model of development by introducing new forms of property and labor (private, cooperative, and mix) along with the State which would still keep control of the fundamental means of production.[45]

In 2018 Miguel Diaz-Canel was appointed the leader of the country, the first non-Castro to hold this position since 1959. That same year, 2018, the reforms introduced by Guidelines and Conceptualization were included in a New Constitution, which reaffirmed the socialist character of the Cuban state while introducing many updates to its economic, political and social organization.[46] While confirming the paramount principles of a socialist economy and central economic planning the New Constitution gave formal juridical recognition to the role of the market, foreign investment, and private property as one of a range of types of property existing in the Cuban economy (private, cooperative, mixed, public). While preserving the one system party, the Constitution introduced the new figures of the President and the Prime Minister. The President, age 35min-60max, is elected by the National Assembly for a 5-year mandate period with only one possible reelection. The Constitution contained a revised definition of marriage as the union between 'two persons' rather than 'man and woman,' so as to include non-normative

[45] Unlike the Guidelines adopted at the Sixth social research Party Congress, the Conceptualization was not substantially discussed at the grassroots level prior to the Party Congress. The lack of public discussion prior to the Congress produced complaints by party members about the undemocratic character of having delegates approve plans for Cuba's future that the public had not even seen. The uproar was serious enough that Granma published an editorial trying to explain the lack of discussion (LeoGrande 2017, 356).

couples. Among the other relevant updates was the introduction of the 'habeas corpus' that protects citizens from the abuse from public authorities.

The process of approval extended from August 13, 2018 to February 24, 2019—respectively, the date of the birthday of Fidel Castro and the date of the beginning of the Cuban Independence War of Jose Marti in 1895 (also the same day in which the previous constitution had been approved in 1976).[47] In between these symbolically and affectively charged dates, Cubans citizens were called to first discuss the preliminary text of the New Constitution at the grassroots cells of the Communist Party and among non-party members in meetings at their workplaces, study centers, or communities of residence over three months. The millions of comments and opinions collected from citizens were integrated into a new revised constitutional document that was put up for approval by national referendum on February 24, 2019. Official mediums such as newspapers, television, and billboards inscribed the socialist update, epitomized by the approval of a New Constitution in 2018-2019, within a 'revolutionary continuum' binding together the Cuban Independence wars from Spain, the 26th of July Movement's Revolution of 1959, and the post-Fidel socialist update in a narrative continuum of "struggle" to assert national sovereignty in confrontation with a global capitalist economy.[48]

As stressed by Reid-Henry the use of history to justify struggles over geography is not unusual. During the Special Period of the 90s (as during the post-Fidel socialist update) the Cuban State "has used the *experience* of its struggles over geography in the past (and in particular its struggle for independence from various colonial relationships), as a resource in its struggle over the geography of transition in the present" (2007, 447).

[47]The dates of beginning and end of the process of approval of the New constitution are an instantiation of the "revolutionary continuum" that is employed in official mediums to inscribe the socialist revolution in the long durée of wars for independence for national sovereignty.

[48] Cuban claims to post-colonial political sovereignty are embedded in a history of economic dependency which have placed Cuba and Caribbean "Islands" more broadly in a peripheral position since the birth of capitalist modernity (Trouillot 1992; Bonilla 2015).

As Cubans voted for a New Constitution reasserting the socialist orientation of the country, they also experienced an intensification of "arrhythmic endless waiting" (Verdery 1996, 47) for many goods and services exposing the contradictions of the State's project of national sovereignty and egalitarian distribution. The beginning of 2019 was marked by an acute balance of payments crises, which affected the link with Cuba's main trading partners resulting in recurrent shortages of all kinds (from flour, to oil and chicken, to toothpaste, to antibiotics, to fuel). Cuba moved from one energetic dependency to another: form reliance on the USSR to reliance on Hugo Chavez's Bolivarian Socialist Venezuela. With the crises in Venezuela, oil shipments to Cuba began diminishing consistently and then dramatically dropped in 2019. Two of Cuba's main export industries (sugar and nickel) were negatively affected by setbacks in productivity and a decline in the world market prices. Moreover, the Island was severely affected by the aggressive policies of Donald Trump, who strengthened the embargo, severely limited remittances, forbid touristic travel from the USA to Cuba, and reactivated the Helms-Burton Act preventing foreign investments on the Island. Finally, the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil led to the end of Cuba-Brazilian cooperation (Torres Perez and Brundenius 2020, 178-179).

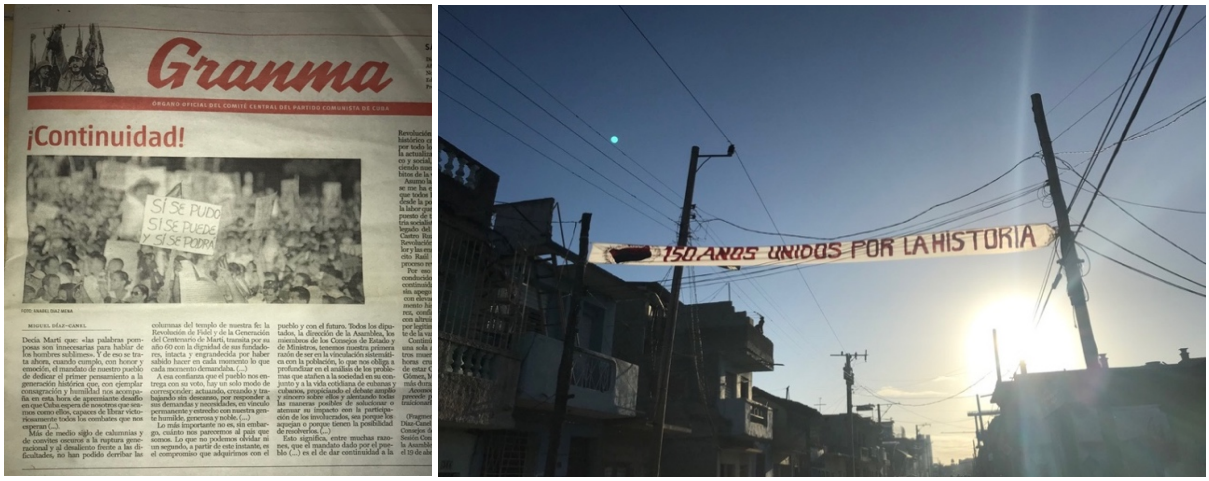

Figure 2. 1: Continuidad! 150 years united for history

On the left a publication on Granma about the new Constitution titled: "Continuity!" The sign in the image says: "Si se Pudo; Si se Puede; Si se Podrá" "Yes, we could; Yes, we can; Yes, we will be able to!" On the right, one of the many banners hanged on the streets of Santa in occasion of the Constitutional Referendum. It says "150 year united for history"

Figure 2. 2: Constitutional Reform: banner on a house' s door

Photo taken by the author

Figure 2. 3: Vanguardia's visual commentaries

These visual commentaries were published on Vanguardia**,** the newspaper of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party in Villa Clara. The image on the left, published in early February 2019, is representative of the government campaign to promoting the approval of the New Constitution during the National Referendum on the 24th of February 2019. The image in the middle portrays the referendum's result. The constitution was approved by an 80% of the population, with 10% of NO and a 10% of abstentions. The last image on the right, was published during April 2019, while the new socialist constitution was entering into validity while Donald Trump reactivated the Helms-Burton Act, Title III. The latter allows for Cuban Americans and US citizens claiming to have lost their assets on Cuba after Fidel Castro's Revolution to bring before federal courts the foreign companies that operate on the properties confiscated from them on the island. The reactivation of the Helms-Burton Act, Title III was one among many of Trump's foreign policies tailored at increasing the economic embargo place on the Island, as part of his punitive measures against it for allegedly providing military aid to President Maduro in Venezuela (its socialist allay).

Figure 2. 4: Re/mediating waiting lines and the temporality of the Update

These images were shared with me in March by Yordanis, a 35-year-old musician who plays at the Concoction. He had just finished composing a critical song on the government and its bureaucracies. He told me he was also dedicating himself to photography and show me the pictures on his phone. The image on the right makes direct reference to waiting lines and the shortages of oil and chicken: "Missing staff? Oil and chicken." The image on the left, upsets the temporality of the socialist update provided by official mediums (linking the Cuban wars for independence, the 1959 Revolution and the socialist update). In Yordanis' temporalization he connects 1959, 1989, and 2019, respectively the year 26th of July movement Revolution, the Fall of the Soviet Bloc and the current socialist update. "30 years is nothing" says the blurb on top of the image.

Figure 2. 5: Granma's re/mediation of the loss of oil and chicken

This image was published on Granma in March, during the pick of the shortages of oil and chicken. The bandage which covers the mouth of the character says "Solutions to the problems" suggesting that rather than complain and critique about the shortages people should be finding and proposing solutions as to how to solve them.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to draw out the affective, semiotic, ethical, and governmental dimensions of waiting—a nearly ubiquitous practice in Cuban social life—in order to establish resonances between the lived experience of ordinary Cubans and the status of the national Revolutionary project within shifting political and economic arrangements, after the fall of the Soviet Union ad in the current socialist update. Waiting registers, the apparent suspension of temporal progress and productivity but also the opportunity for egalitarian sociality that, in the former Soviet bloc, has steadily been eroded by new modes of market consumption. Without waiting, I would never have met my Cuban mom and Cuban sister. These relationships, my most important in Cuba, were nurtured through waiting, both because of the time we spent together in lines to purchase food or medicine and because of the forms of reciprocity (waiting in line on behalf of another) that were enabled and necessitated by frequent bureaucratic hoops and persistent shortages. The Soviet Union's demise and subsequent changes in Cuba's trading patterns during the "Special Period" brought frequent shortages of goods and services, and thus more waiting in Cuba. As I have shown in discussing *la lucha*, some Cubans decide not to wait, instead engaging in minor short-cuts in lines (at a bus stop) or in bureaucratic processes, leveraging social connections (like the *enchufe*, the plug, the contact) to speed things along. The ordinary ethics of la lucha mark unsteady relationships to lines of legality and legitimacy, largely depending on positionality. As Manuel told me, legitimacy is more secure so long as engaging in la lucha amounts only to getting through life as an ordinary person rather than getting ahead (getting greedy, seeking advancement) (see also Garth 2020, 129).

After the Soviet collapse and the 90s "Special Period," the ascension of Raul Castro to leadership brought about many changes (always framed within the project of maintaining the principles and achievements of the Revolution), including the liberalization and privatization of much economic activity and the project of drastic reduction of the State's apparatus of universal

provisioning of socialist entitlements, such as *La libreta de abastecimiento*. Now, in his 2010 Guidelines for updating the policies of the Party and the Revolution, Raul Castro also took a stand against waiting, in particular the risk-averse inertia of Cuba's entrepreneurs who apparently waited too long to make decisions. Through the two ethnographic vignettes that I provided, I attempted to evoke how people waiting deal with it differently as they differently seize the possibilities opened by the update of Cuban socialism. Juan exploited the contradictions of Cuba's political economy and especially the monetary duality of CUC versus CUP to turn waiting into profit, embracing the success of the entrepreneurial growth of private homes for tourists (both features of the updated political economy). On the other side, Camilo, one of the Revolutionary youths with the deepest commitment to Revolutionary principles, deeply enjoyed the shared waiting lines of Copelia and preferred to take a second job in the public sector rather seeking opportunities in the growing private sphere.

Official mediums inscribed the current update in a narrative of endless struggle to assert sovereignty and self-sacrifice for the good of the collective, asking people the find solutions for making up to the absence of oil and chicken rather than complaining about it (see figure 5 on previous page). While artists like Silverio (as we will see in chapter 2 and 3) enact this type of response by remediating lack through his works of art, some underground artists like Yordanis through social media directly rethinking the temporality of the socialist update by critiquing its enhanced waiting lines (see image 4 previous page).

As I will further elaborate in the conclusion chapter, with the Covid-19 pandemic lines and shortages intensified while being resignified as sites of deadly contagion. The pandemic exponentiated the hauntings from the past started with the "conjunctural crises" of 2018-2019. Cuba is traversing the deepest economic crises since the 90s. The State has responded with updates in the monetary system to obtain hard currency remindful of those taken during the Special Period. The new shops in MLC are a new instantiation (with virtual currencies) of the 90s' *Tienda Para la recuperacíon de divisas*. Compare to the 90s these shops not only contain electro

domestics or other fancy products, they also have basic products such as oil, frozen chicken, or toothpaste that are unavailable anywhere else. The intensified struggle for consumption of ordinary Cubans and the differences between those who have and have not to wait to have access to basic goods and services (shaped by gender and race) have brought to the biggest protests in Cuba since 1994.

Silverio and Revolutionary Theatre: nomad and minoritarian ways of doing theatre.

> It is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirling, gravitations, dances or leaps which directly touch the mind. This is the idea of a man of the theatre, the idea of a director before its time. (Deleuze 1994, 8)

> Theatre is real movement, and it extracts real movement from all the arts it employs. This movement, the essence and the interiority of movement, is not opposition, not mediation, but repetition. (Deleuze 1994, 10)

> When Marx also criticizes the abstract false movement or mediation of the Hegelians, he finds himself drawn to an idea, which he indicates rather than develops, an essentially 'theatrical' idea: to the extent that history is theatre, then repetition along with the 'tragic' and the 'comic' within repetition, forms a condition of movement under which the 'actors' produce something effectively new in history. (Deleuze 1994, 10)

Introduction

Figure 3. 1: Silverio's tents

Play Juan Quínquín, Taguayabon, August 2019. Photo taken by the author.

Yanina: How did your relationship with theatre start? How did you train?

Silverio: I did not formally train anywhere; I have formed myself through practice…no school or other type of formal education. Everything I did, I did it *empirically*.[49] Well, as a countryside kid, I had a radio, the radio had an indispensable role in my life, and with the Revolution there were a lot of different programs. 'El Oriente' was the radio that most impacted me. I heard about the Theatre of the Escambray and other things that fostered my interest with theatre. Apart from that, there were books. I began reading. The best gift that you could give me was a book. The radio I hardly listen to it nowadays anymore, but yes, the books have accompanied me all my life. They have been a great source of knowledge. When I was in elementary school as a student, since I was always interested in that, I started staging some of the material that came in the sixth-grade books or some poems that could be transformed into a drama. When that was…one only could design its own costume with crepe paper and some colors…there was not much more. Later on, when I was in elementary school as a teacher, I started organizing and directing theatre plays with the kids. Elementary school was a way to cultivate theater, when I still did not know it, had not even seen a theatre play. No theatre would come where I lived, what would come sometimes was a Circus. From there derives my passion for the Circus. There were not many 'attractions' where I was born, I was there in a world with little perspectives. So elementary school was a way to start. Later, I assisted to a play by Teatro Escambray. The Escambray Theatre of that period was magical for me…. to be able to see one of those plays in its natural medium, …there….in the Escambray itself, in the hills… and there I started to work as an amateur with rural theater until I arrived at professional theatre. But well, I do not have any university titles, I have nothing, not an MA, nor PhD, nor a post-doc…Yet I believe that all of that knowledge I had acquired it from life. The school of life, of everyday learning, by DOING…

Figure 3. 2: Performing two elderly guajiras

Silverio (on the right) with Caramelo (on the left) performing two elderly peasant women in the play "Las Cabañuelas". Silverio's tents in Bermejal, July 2019 (photo taken by the author)

[49] *empirico:* was locally used as an adjective to describe expertise acquired by means of everyday life experience rather than formal education

From February to September 2019, I followed the Theatre Company of The Concoction in the project "Las carpas de Silverio," or "Silverio's tents." Silverio's project was to bring two days of performances and spectacles to the least served communities of the Province of Villa Clara. I served as one of the group's porters. The Provincial Government sent a school bus, which we would load with 7 big Chinese camping tents (donated to Silverio by the Communist Party of Villa Clara), a long red carpet, the scenography (chairs, tables, stairs, the scene's backdrop, etc…), paintings from Silverio's personal collection of Santa Clara's artists, the audio and lighting equipment, the actors' scene dresses, personal luggage, and more. Then, we would travel for 2 or 3 hours to reach the community to which Silverio was bringing his "itinerant circus." The Theatre Company of The Concoction camped for two days within different communities, from Emilio Cordoba, a rural community surrounding a defunct sugar mill, to Cordobanal, a community of campesinos in the Escambray mountains. For Silverio, the project of an itinerant circus was intimately tied to his childhood. He was born in 1948 in a rural community in the Province of Santa Clara where nothing was offered as cultural entertainment aside from an itinerant circus that sometimes visited the community. Silverio was ten years old in December 1958, when Ernesto Che Guevara led the battle against the bulletproof train at Santa Clara. This historical event is remembered as the decisive battle which enabled the victory of the Cuban Revolution with the final takeover of Havana in January 1959. Silverio's artistic projects were partially cultivated in light of that victory, which gave him access in childhood to books and Revolutionary Theater.

The 26th of July movement's Revolution inscribed its revolutionary project in the pedagogical and political philosophy of the anti-colonial fighter and thinker Jose Marti. Even in the most remote locales of the Island you could find erected an icon of the Cuban national hero accompanied by his dictum: "*Ser culto es el único modo de ser libre*" ("To be cultivated is the only way

to be free"). This famous adage comes from an essay on rural education titled "*Maestros ambulantes*" ("Wandering Teachers") written by Marti in 1884 in New York. In the essay, Marti advocated for "wandering teachers" that would distribute education through the countryside, as opposed to the centralized education of Europeanized urban metropolis. He criticized disembodied notions of 'culture' and 'cultivation' by relating them back to the collective activities of cultivating the land and to a form of pedagogical nomadism which would enter in dialogue with the rural audiences. He envisioned the most marginal peasants and workers in the exercise of self-study—a rediscovery of peripheral modernities (Lomas 2009, 129). After taking power in 1959, the Revolutionary government attempted to unsettle the previous geographies of production and consumption of 'art and culture.' Contemporary artistic projects serving peripheral communities in the countryside, such as Silverio's tents, trace their genealogy to the 1961 Literacy campaign and Teatro Escambray which brought to the campesinos the possibility to read, write, and participate into artistic production (see also Frederik 2012, 54).

In this chapter, I trace the role theatre played in the cultural politics of the Revolution: from the early revolutionary period of Theatre Escambray to Communitarian Theatre in the Special Period of the 90's. Scholars working in post-Soviet Cuba have stressed the emergence of new models of revolutionary subjectivity through the work of artist: the *hombre novísimo (Even Newer Man)* (Frederik 2005, 2012) and the queer revolutionary (Fernandes 2006, 53-61; Stout 2014, 43; Allen 2011). The *hombre novísimo* was an "urban man with campesino morals and campesino soul; still communist in his humility and loyalty to the nation but less aligned with a political party and more cognizant of a general *martiano* (Jose Marti centered) philosophy of patriotism and of the Latin American struggle against imperialist domination" (Frederik 2012, 14). Homosexuality was highly stigmatized in the cultural politics of the early Revolution but became central in the 90s in the promotion of post-Soviet revolutionary culture.[50] Challenging

[50] Homosexuality became a central theme in the film industry of this time – as epitomized in classics such as *Strawberry and Chocolate* by Gutierrez Alea.

previous notions of hyper masculinity, new models of queer revolutionary subjectivity emerged in the works of artists and cultural producers reflecting the need for more inclusive revolutionary politics (Ibid: 53-61; Stout 2014, 43; Allen 2011). Having lived through changing traditions in Revolutionary Theatre, from Theatre Escambray to Communitarian Theatre, Silverio gained progressive recognition and authority for his ability to open spaces for new forms of doing theatre. As I show in this chapter, the charismatic leader of The Concoction and its Theatre Company embodies and enacts the virtues of a queer *hombre novísimo* (Frederik 2005, 2012; MacIntyre 1984; Mattingly 2012; Laidlaw 2014).

Theatre of the Escambray and the New Theater

The transition from colonial Cuba to an independent (neocolonial) Republic to the Revolution of the 26th of July movement was mediated through different ideologies and practices of artistic production. In the ideology of the Revolution, 'art and culture' had to be made a citizen's entitlement, the venue through which new revolutionary consciousness was to be formed. Rather than an index of distinction reproducing social privilege, as it had been in the colonial period and early republic, art had to become the 'quotidian bread' of the masses for transforming themselves into the New Man for a new socialist society as envisioned by Ernesto Che Guevara.[51]

As such, the first programs of the Revolution were designed to reconcile the enormous differences between rural and urban social formations on the Island. According to Fagen (1969), the 1961 wide literacy campaign—which sent teachers and secondary students to the interior of the country to teach peasants (*guajiros*) to read and write—was one of the Revolution's biggest

[51] In "Man and Socialism," Che Guevara envisioned a society of "new man"— an idealized masculine citizen poised to confront the emasculating powers of U.S. imperialism through liberated labor, a strong ethics of sacrifice for the good of the collective, "and the expression of one's own human condition through culture and art" (Chomsky et. Al 2003, 372).

political achievements, raising the national literacy rate from 60% to 96% (1969, 34). The illiterate peasants discovered the empowering act of reading through the words of the heroes of the Revolution and were thus socialized into revolutionary ideology. At the same time, the urban teachers learnt about peasant's culture, recognizing and revaluing the expertise of the peasant as central to Cuban national identity (Ibid; Frederik 2012, 54).

New centers of music, film, theater, and literary production were established all over the Island with the goal to give access to the people to those forms of enjoyment and "cultivation" that were previously reserved only to the elites (Moore 2006; Chomsky et al. 2003). One of the most interesting cultural programs of the 1960's –the Amateurs' movement– was a utopian attempt to involve as many citizens as possible in the production of art. The party trained more than three thousand art educators in Habana that were sent across the island to the most remote communities to foster grassroots artistic expression (Moore 2006, 85-86). The distinguishing feature of revolutionary theatre was its explicit intent to listen to the voices of ordinary Cubans to incorporate them in the plots of the plays. The plays were meant to act out the difficulties of the transition to socialism while providing guidance on how to achieve revolutionary ideology.

In 1968, in response to the death of Ernesto Che Guevara, Teatro Escambray was born and soon became the symbol of the ideological reversal from bourgeois theatre to revolutionary new theatre (Frederik 2012, 58-59). A group of highly reputable actors and playwrights in Havana, leaded by Sergio Corrieri, ventured into the mountain region of Escambray in the province of Santa Clara to represent a previously unrepresented population, the *guajiro,* 'the peasant,' or as it was renamed under the revolution, *el campesino*, the farmer. Their method of artistic production privileged the audience and creating a dialogue with them rather than producing a finished dramatic product and text. The theatre company lived from one to three months with each community in the Escambray, moving from one community to the other, bringing alive social drama as a tool to develop a dialogue with the rural audiences (Frederik 2012, 63-64). The most famous play that resulted from Teatro Escambray, *La vitrina (The*

Showcase, 1971), engaged with the lived experiences of the postrevolutionary Agrarian Land Reform and staged the ethical contradictions that arose when long-standing rural traditions conflicted with the new rules about land property rights. The play tells the story of Ana and Pancho, a couple of campesinos who join the collective farm, at first welcoming the new practice of *arrendamiento*. Yet, after Pancho's death, a conflict arises for Ana between the traditional practice of burying the body on the land and the new rules of arrendamiento that required the body to be buried in the cemetery (Ibid). Through plays such as this one, Teatro Escambray attempted to incorporate the experiences of the peasants of the region into the national script.

Teatro del Escambray called its new method Teatro Nuevo, aligning itself with the ideology of Guevara's New Man, and inspiring the development of other groups of New Theatre adopting similar methodologies. The 'product' of their art was an alive text, a play, that together with the creative process itself was a living enactment of a revolutionary drama. Teatro Nuevo and the new practices of revolutionary theatre represented an utopian model of the early revolution itself -*a movement* to bring art to the most marginalized rural populations of the country and to include the voices from those 'margins' as active authors, playwrights of the new socialist nation (Frederik 2012, 64-66).

By 1984 Teatro Escambray had lost its initial revolutionary impetus. Sergio Corrieri, the original director, left Manicaragua to return to work in Havana and the group changed its investigatory and creative methods (Ibid, 82). Rural audiences became a passive recipient of theatrical final products rather than being actively involved in their creation, and performances became mere entertainment rather than dialogic scenes of social transformation. The topics of relevance in 1968 were also not the same as in 1988, the new generation of campesinos who grew up under socialism did not share the same concerns and conflicts of their parents. Teatro Escambray shifted its focus away from the campesino to other social issues and populations: youth, schooling, alcoholism, workplace dynamics, etc. (Ibid, 91).

Teatro Comunitario and the Special Period of the 90s

During the 90's, the ideal of Theatre Escambray was revived by a new kind of theatre: *Teatro Comunitario* (Communitarian Theater). The motto of this new theatrical movement was: "*Theatre in the community, for the community, and by the community!!!*" Like the New Theatre, Teatro Comunitario groups took their performances to marginal communities with otherwise little access to it. They relied on ethnographic methods of investigation to inspire their artistic production, bringing local residents into the drama as consultants or actors. Indeed, Teatro Comunitario actualized the ideal of Teatro Nuevo in a radically changed geopolitical situation marked by extreme lack of resources and more frequent shortages. The end of the Soviet Bloc, or the Special Period in Time of Peace as called by Fidel Castro, inaugurated a long history of improvising and creating under 'war conditions' in the absence of any 'real' war. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the crises of the Revolutionary State as universal provider for the needs of the citizen, reinforced the importance of local communities and social relations in addressing local issues and reconstituting social welfare (Garth 2020, 19). In response to the crises, artists either quit for other things or persevered and embraced the difficult times to promote a new type of revolutionary theatre. The theatrical movements developed in this period under the name Communitarian Theater responded to the extreme economic scarcity of the period with an ethos of struggle, sacrifice, and selflessness for the sake of the community. Being able to make art at extremely reduced budgets while lacking most elementary resources from bread to cloths, from fuel to electricity, became the emblem of the new revolutionary form of doing theatre (Frederik 2012, 83; Interview Silverio).

The representation of 'the peasant' that emerged in the dramas of Teatro Comunitario groups working in rural communities also changed from that which had defined the early revolutionary phase. Teatro Escambray sought to form revolutionary consciousness and staged the struggle of the peasants to embrace a 'modern' socialist life and to be "educated" and

"enculturated" as Cuban citizens. Teatro Comunitario, rather than showcasing the 'modernization' of the farmer, portrayed the unique identity of the *campesino* and wanted to preserve, protect, and rescue their rural 'traditions.' This movement was interested in capturing the *pura cepa* of Cubania, "the noble inner core of the Cuban soul, still optimistic about the future of their struggling society" (Frederik 2012, 82). Laurie A. Frederik has delineated two main genres through which the noble campesino was represented in the Teatro Comunitario period: *poetic phantasy*, which staged old Cuban traditional rural stories with new interpretive twists by use of allegory (form of romantic nostalgia); and *folk rusticity*, which portrayed the farmer in their rawness and bloody cockfights celebrating those scenes with humor and sarcasm (form of comic nostalgia) (Frederik 2012, 85).

If Teatro Escambray aligned its project with Guevara's ideal of the New Man, Teatro Comunitario groups inscribed their project in the ideal of a new revolutionary subjectivity: The Hombre Novisimo, or the Even Newer Man. In the words of Laurie Frederik: "the Hombre Novisimo was a campesino in essence—in his humility, work ethic, and loyalty to the revolutionary value. But he was also educated, progressive, and *culto*. In the end he was not really a noble campesino anymore; nor was he an urban Habanero" (2012, 173).

Queering socialism in the arts of the 90s

During the vulnerable times of the Special Period, when the Revolution's political-economic affective foundations collapsed, artistic public spheres acquired a central role in reconstituting revolutionary culture. Sujatha Fernandes (2006), in her study of Cuban cultural producers during the 90s, argues that the state was able to maintain hegemony thanks to its ability to incorporate oppositional ideals and values generated within artistic public spheres. Artistic and cultural institutions became spaces for the negotiation of a new cultural model of state's hegemony and revolutionary subjectivity: rappers offered a venue of expression for the

increasingly frustrated black youth in Cuba; visual artists were central in articulating the "structure of feeling" (Williams 1978) of the time through public improvised performances; and films provided a medium for discussion and negotiation of themes previously ignored by the official discourse.

Homosexuality, in particular, which previously lay outside the boundaries of the cultural politics of the Revolution, became central in the promotion of a post-Soviet revolutionary culture. Nonnormative sexualities, that were previously considered taboo, appeared in performing and visual arts, theater, literature, film, and even the most conservative medium of state-run television (Stout 2014, 42-48). The most iconic example in the film industry is the feature-length drama *Strawberry and Chocolate* (Fresa y Chocolate) by Gutierrez Alea, produced in 1994 by the Institute of Cuban Art and Cinematographic Industry (ICAIC). Strawberry and Chocolate portrays the difficult friendship between David, a macho revolutionary who studies at the University of Havana and belongs to the Communist Party, and Diego, an effeminate gay intellectual who is critical of the government's attitude towards the homosexual community and its limited and censored conceptualization of revolutionary culture. Diego is finally forced to leave the Island as he is officially blacklisted for his homosexuality. The film was a critique of the cultural politics of the early revolutionary government and advocated for the inclusion of patriotic intellectual queers. It inaugurated a trend in several other film productions portrayed queer protagonists such as *Lista de Espera* (2000), *Suite Habana* (2003), and *Barrio Cuba* (2005) (Stout 2014, 44).

The representation of queer characters in theatre was even more radical than in films, as theatre reached smaller audiences in more intimate spaces. For example, Carlos Diaz's *Teatro El Publico* in Havana used a form of comedic sarcasm to question traditional gender roles and political authority. Diaz's *Las Viejas putas* (The Old Sluts) staged a horny lesbian grandmother, a transvestite nephew, a *jinetera*, and a promiscuous bisexual alien. The actors, both males and females, cycled through each of these roles, performatively enacting gender fluidity (Ibid, 44;

Butler 1988). Along with the emergence of the cultivated campesino (i.e., the hombre novisimo) as a central figure in rural Communitarian Theatre, characters with non-normative sexual orientations or gender identities acquired visibility on the stage in urban settings, challenging previous notions of hyper-masculine revolutionary subjectivity and expressing the need for an inclusive cultural politics (Hernandez-Reguant et al 2009).

Silverio and Theatre: a queer hombre novisimo

Silverio awakes very early in the morning at the singing of the rooster, one of many animals he lives with in his house in Santa Clara. Then, Silverio likes staying in bed while engaging in the work of imagination. He orients his mind in anticipation of the future while envisioning how to renovate the artistic program of The Concoction. He also returns in memory to the past, to the things that were in his natal house, to the families who lived in his rural community.

Seated at the shadow of the Framboyán in the patio of the Concoction for one of our interviews, Silverio told me he had awoken that morning at 4:30 am to a recurrent dream and had stayed in bed until 8 am engaging in the work of the imagination between past and future. He had to go that day with the Theatre Company of The Concoction to Manajanagua, a little town 60 miles away from Santa Clara, with the project "*Yo me incluyo*" ("*I include myself*"). This project featured the two most famous *transformistas* of the Concoction, along with short performances portraying non normative sexual characters to create awareness against homophobia.[52]

Silverio had awoken to a recurrent dream he had very often. In the dream, he is on the

[52] When we reached Managajagua that day with the show "*Yo me incluyo,*" we found an unexpected audience of mainly kids. Silverio quickly reorganized the performances of the actors to correspond with the unexpected audience. Caramelo, Pedro, and Carmen performed as clowns rather than doing their sketches on sexual diversity and inclusion, and only towards the end of the show, Estrella, one of the most famous *transformistas* of El Mejunje, entered the stage for her sensual dance with *El Putón Verbenero.*

road from his rural community to Manajanagua where they used to buy groceries in his childhood. Silverio's grandmother lived there. He remembered going to Manajanagua the 6th of January of 1959, when the triumph of the 26th of July movement was celebrated with the public distribution of toys for kids. He was 10 then, and only kids younger than 10 would get toys from the Revolution. His brother had received a toy, but he had not. Nonetheless, the people of Manajanagua had collected the money between themselves to buy him a tractor. In the dream, he tries to reach Manajanagua through the same road he would take in childhood. Yet, he can't do it. A dam has been built preventing him from crossing and reaching Manajanagua again through his childhood's road.

The construction of the dam of Minerva, built by the Revolution to increase the provision of electric power, sparked many contradictions in the everyday life of the peasants who were living in that area and had inspired one of Silverio's first plays*, La tierra* (*The Land*). In the play, Silverio had tried to give voice to the drama faced by the campesinos that were uprooted by the dam's construction. The play captured their uncertainties and conflicts about leaving the land and how they have come to accept moving for the good of the social collective. Many had decided to leave the countryside and were relocated to Santa Clara, getting access to new houses with electricity, running water, and electric appliances. Others decided to stay and rebuilt their houses in the hills over the dam, often in places unconnected to electric power.

Silverio's second play, *Obscurantism,* had dramatized the same contradictions between 'modernization' and 'tradition' by engaging with the gift of modern medicine brought about by the Revolution as it displaced the practice of *curanderos* prevalent in the rural communities. Maybe those contradictions were still worked out in his unconscious through that recurrent dream. The Revolution had uprooted el campesino and his traditions. Yet, it had also brought electricity, writing, and theatre, and had opened the road to queering *el machismo del campo* (sexism of the countryside). At that time, Silverio had also written *Let's go to plant Tobacco,* a rural play portraying the life of the campesinos who worked in the fields of Tobacco which have had a lot of success

among the audiences of campesinos during rural festivals. The influence of Teatro Escambray was very relevant at that stage of his initial play writing:

> Theatre of the Escambray was utopia, and was that, was the utopia! (.) It is not like that anymore, but at that time of my youth it was. It had those big actors, like Sergio Corrieri, Rosana Perez, or Ilda Hernandez, who left the city of Havana, left the most prestigious Theatre Companies, they left everything to go to that adventure in the Escambray. Those actors did most of their professional lives there, and they were able to achieve fame from there. Parallel to the Escambray, the New Theater was born, that was a new way of doing theatre…That, like everything else does, disappeared at a certain moment in time. And this is precisely what the New Theatre was about: To leave classic theatre to do another type of theatre!

Silverio's artistic projects had also changed in time, queering 'classic' standards to find new ways and places for doing theatre within and outside of the city, always attempting to develop the plays in resonance with the communities he was working within at different moments in time.

At the dawn of the Special Period of the 90s, Silverio organized a theatre spectacle in his own home in Santa Clara. The show was called *Nadie* ("Nobody") and was inspired by a collection of poems by Rafael Acidie, who was at first a revolutionary poet but then was considered a dissident for his critiques of Fidel and Raul Castro. The show took place in each room of Silverio's house. The 12 spectators were invited to move from one room to another accompanied by changes in music and light. The last room was the kitchen where everyone would sit at a big table to have a cup of concoction of herbs and share a piece of bread.[53] During the Special Period bread was extremely scarce. Yet, Silverio had found a place where they prepared a loaf for him to be shared with the public during the play. The audience of the show had changed in time as had their reactions to the show. The older generation of Santa Clara's inhabitants were very reluctant and full of distrust at first while entering Silverio's home. They

[53] The name of the cultural institution founded by Silverio, The Concoction, takes its name because of this concoction of herbs he used to prepare during the first artistic gatherings. It also evoked the strange mixture of people that Silverio was able to gather.

often thought it was a "religious sect" of some sort. But they would gain confidence over the show and remain longer after it had ended. This despite the last scene of the performance suggesting their exit by lightning the door with "La vie en rose" playing on the background. The younger audience of university students were more daring. They sat on Silverio's bed, which for the show was adorned with a cascade of rose of petals. The spectacle at Silverio's home was the last stop in the nomadic trajectory behind the founding of The Concoction.

The story of the Concoction begins in 1984 at Theatre El Guiñol in Santa Clara, a theatre traditionally devoted to puppet's plays for kids. Together with Margarita Casallas, the director of the theatre at the time, Silverio initiated a series of unconventional gatherings for artistic improvisation that would run for the entire night. The "cabaret" atmosphere brought about by Silverio's nights was regarded by the Provincial Director of Culture as inadequate for a Theatre traditionally devoted to kids. The heterogenous group of artists led by Silverio had to move their gatherings first behind the Theatre of Charity and then again into the Library's courtyard of Santa Clara. Finally, due to ongoing critiques, Silverio decided to hold the gathering in his own home since no other public space seemed appropriate to host it. "For my friends, I am at home," wrote Silverio in a banner appended at the entrance of the Library. The spectacle at Silverio's home with *Nadie* run for almost two years from 1989. The Concoction found its current dwelling in 1991. Silverio, together with the first generation of Concoctioners, opened a new cultural space on the ruins of the abandoned Oriental Hotel.

Silverio returned to perform *Nadie* in 1998 for his 50th birthday. This time the setting for the performance was not his home in Santa Clara, but rather rural house he had been born in, or better, the place where that natal house had once been, now occupied by a *marabú* field.[54] Silverio framed the event for the guests as "an adventure in the countryside." Sixty guests participated in the event, including the Provincial Director of Culture. They all reached the stage for the

[54] An extremely invasive weed that grows in abandoned fields.

spectacle in tractor, Silverio carrying a huge bed for reconstructing the house's scenography.

Silverio's Concoction was designed since its foundation as a cultural space to provide a home for all the marginals, promoting diversity and inclusions through the arts, particularly for those individuals and communities that had been previously excluded by the Revolutionary government. *Transformistas* and the LGBT community, rockers, critical intellectuals and writers found a home at The Concoction, together with groups of Cuban traditional music and trovadores (musicians of trova). At first, only a big open patio surrounded by the Oriental Hotel's ruins was transformed into a stage for the artistic performances and gatherings of the heterogenous group of artists.

Figure 3. 3: The Concoction's patio

Photos taken by the author

Figure 3. 4: *Transformistas'* show in the patio of the Concoction

With time, The Concoction expanded to include a covered space adjacent to the open patio where a small theatre room was built and named *Sala Margarita Casallas* in honor of the director of Theatre El Guiñol who had first hosted Silverio's artistic gatherings. Together with the Concoction, Silverio also founded a homonymous theatre company that performed in the new cultural center and in rural communities in the Escambray.

At first, the plays that the Theater Company of the Concoction would perform for the rural communities were different than those performed in Santa Clara. Yet, Silverio soon realized that the rural plays destined for the Escambray had also an incredible success among Santa Clara's public and began performing them in the Sala Margarita Casallas. Many of the plays Silverio developed at this time were adaptations of classics of the Cuban rural literature such as *Juan Pampiro Timbereta* and *Juan Quin Quin en pueblo Mocho* by Samuel Feijóo or *La Odilea* by Francisco Chofre. Samuel Feijóo is a famous Santa Clara writer whose novels are centered on Cuban peasant. For example, Juan Quin Quin is a smart farmer in pre-revolutionary Cuba who does not shrink from anything in his struggle for life. With his friend Jachero and his beloved Teresa, he faces different adventures and engages in a plethora of activities –from coffee planting, to circus performing, to bullfighting– in his attempts to repay his debt to a rich landlord. *La Odilea* by Francisco Chofre is a parodic readaptation to the Cuban reality of the Greek epic, the Odyssey. Odileo, instead of the Greek hero Odysseus, is an astute Cuban guajiro.

Figure 3. 5: *Las cabañuelas*

The Theatre Company of El Mejunje performing *Las Cabañuelas* in la Sala Margarita Casallas.
Photo taken by the author.

Silverio's rural plays combined aspects of both genres of representation of the peasant identified by Laurie Frederik as distinctive of Communitarian Theatre of the 90s: *poetic phantasy,* which staged old Cuban traditional rural stories with new interpretive twists, and *folk rusticity,* which portrayed the farmer in bloody cockfights, milking the cow, or riding horses, while celebrating those scenes with humor (2012, 85). While the first phase of Silverio's play writing was influenced by Teatro Escambray and its goal of staging the lived contradictions of the modernization of the farmer, the plays he directed after the 90s were in line with Teatro Comunitario's attempts to portray the unique identity of the *campesino* and wanted to preserve and protect their rural 'traditions:'

> You have to study and understand the rural imagination. For example, the meaning that the mother has in those contexts. It is a sacred figure. People always have an image of the Mother. Even after her death, the mother keeps living in the farmer's unconscious. It often appears to them as a ghostly figure dressed in white. The rural imagination is often in white: white ghosts, white horses, people dressed in white. There is kind of a racist issue there… everything is imagined white apart from death who is always black. I was raised and nurtured in that culture, which is extremely rich. I have strong life memories of it. There is so much richness in the rural oral tradition of narrative, in the farmer's humanity and humility, in their customs, in the wakes…in my house we would do wakes for the deceased…the dances, we would organize balls to collect money. I lived those things and I try to convey it to people who have not necessarily lived it. There is an attempt in my plays to keep that alive by applying a little of anthropology to maintain that culture. We try to keep alive what has not died yet, nothing that has already died can be rescued. Traditions survive in time through generational encounters, through the passage of those experiences in between generations, that keeps traditions ALIVE. Once there is a break in that passage between generations, traditions are lost, because those who will come would have access only to a caricature of what once was because they can't feel it anymore. There are traditions that have been kept alive, like el repentismo (rural poems in ten-line stanza). You can see rural programs in the television where there are kids doing decimas repentistas. You can see the young together with elders and there you can see generational continuity. So, that is the challenge: to keep alive that oral traditions!

Some of Silverio's plays also exceeded the goal of keeping rural traditions alive and along with scenes celebrating rural life also contained critiques of aspects of 'rural culture', such as machismo (sexism), which also reflected generational changes. For example, *Las Cabañuelas* is a feminist rural play that had been in the repertoire of the Company for 25 years. The actors performing the main characters changed over time, a new generation born in the 80s and 90s substituting an elder one, who had trained with Theatre Escambray, like Carmen. The play also changed in time, Silverio told me: "*It has become more and more feminist… You can appreciate it in the song that closes the play.*" The song, Bebe's *Malo eres* (You are bad), accompanied Pura's resolution

in the final scene of the play. Pura, a guajira in an abusive patriarchal relation, decides finally to leave her husband, as well as the nicer male lover who has been courting her, claiming her independence from men as a free woman. The plays in their repetitions in time across different generations of actors reflected the changes occurring across different generations of guajiros as well:

> Nowadays there is not such a stark difference between the city and the countryside. There are many farmers who now hold university titles. They have television, radio, mobile phones. There is no rural community without electricity. Even those who are lost in the middle of the mountains have solar panels. They dress in the same way that people dress in towns. Sometimes they dress even better, because some farmers have more economic possibilities than villagers. Yet, beyond all that…there is still a farmer. So that is what we attempt to capture, how the peasant dresses, speak, thinks, and acts in reality. So even if you are performing the same play for 25 years, like Las Cabañuelas, you have to adapt it and change it in time to reflect those changes.

In order to capture the changing soul of the guajiro the actors had to spend time with the farmers, they had to learn through anthropological "rural excursions" how peasants felt, talked, and behaved in real life in order to avoid reproducing in their performance common stereotypes about the peasant's present in the popular imaginary, such as that peasants are backwards, ignorant, uneducated, speak and lived radically differently than urban dwellers.

For his 70th birthday, the 22nd of September 2018, Silverio with a group of elder and younger members of the Concoction embraced the adventure of escalating to the highest point in Cuba, El Pico Turquino in the Sierra Maestra mountains. A bust of José Martí was placed on the pique in occasion of the centenary of the national hero's birth in 1953.[55] In the documentary realized for the occasion, Silverio was immortalized encountering the sublime while paying tribute to the bust of the national hero carrying three flags: the Cuban national flag, the 26th of July movement's flag and the LGBT pride flag.

[55] Martí's effigy was brought on the pique by an expedition to which participated Dr. Manuel Sanchez Silveira, president of the National Institute for Archeology at the time. His daughter, Celia Sanchez, a feminist icon of the Cuban revolution, followed his father in the expedition. In 1958, Celia Sanchez returned to visit the bust together with Fidel, Raul, Camilo and other famous members of the 26th of July Movement.

Through his life 'doings' Silverio progressively gained national recognition as an exemplary and virtuous public figure. The entirety of his bedroom's walls and shelves is covered by tokens of appreciation for the mark Silverio has left in the cultural life of Santa Clara and beyond. Wearing a distinctive guajiro's hat, the 26th of January 2019, in occasion of the 35th birthday of the Concoction, Silverio received the city shield. The 15th of July 2019, during the 330th anniversary of the foundation of the city of Santa Clara, Silverio was awarded by the new Cuban president, Miguel Diaz Canel, the title of "*Hijo ilustre de la ciudad de Santa Clara*" (Illustrious son of the City of Santa Clara). The president and Silverio planted together a Tamarind tree, which symbolizes the foundation of the city, in the Tamarind forest which surrounds one of the main sculptures honouring the memory of Ernesto Che Guevara. Silverio, through his life trajectory and artistic "grounded projects" (Williams 2011) embodied and enacted the Martian moral virtues of the 'wandering teacher,' a queer *hombre novisimo*, an educated, progressive, and *cultivated* campesino; neither fully a campesino anymore, nor an urban Habanero. Rather, "a theatre director before its times" who moving between 'rural' and 'urban' settings exercised a form of pedagogical nomadism attempting to enter in dialogue and give voice to marginals communities within and outside of the city of Santa Clara (Deleuze 1994, 8).

Figure 3. 6: Silverio on El Pico Turquino for his 70th birthday

Silverio, in the center, wearing the t-shirt of The Concoction on the pique of El Turquino. On the left, Orfeo, the barman in charge of The Concoctions' bar. On the left, Estrella, one of the main *transformistas* of The Concoction.

In the background stands the sculpture of Jose Marti with the dictum:
"*Ser culto es el único modo de ser libre*" "To be cultivated is the only way to be free."
Photograph taken by Marquito, technical of sound and audio of the Concoction.

Figure 3. 7: Silverio receiving the city shield for the 35th birthday of the Concoction

26th of January 2019, photo shared on the Facebook page of the Concoction.

Conclusion

A central movement brought about by the Cuban Revolution was to tie "the royal sciences of the State" with the nomad science of a New Revolutionary Theatre. Theatre of Escambray at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution enacted a new form of doing theatre that attempted to unsettle the previous geographies of production and consumption of "art and culture" between center and periphery, rural and urban context. As I have evoked in this chapter, Silverio gained progressive recognition as a public cultural figure as he was able to exercise a form of pedagogical and artistic nomadism grounded on movement within and outside of the rigid constructs of the city and the cultural politics of the Revolution. The "art of encampment" of Silverio's tents is not the art of the military engineer who subjects space to the metrical rules of reasons, but rather the affective art of a 'theatre director before its time.' The

political theorist Katherine Gordy in *Living Ideology in Cuba: Socialism in Principle and Practice* argues that the Cuban State has been engaging in a constant process of negotiation with its citizens. While often supporters and critiques of Cuba tend to equate revolutionary ideology with the Cuban State, the author proposes to look at revolutionary ideology as something "lived, living and essential to everyday politics" (Gordy 2015, 192). The hegemony of the Revolutionary State, particularly during moments of crises such as the 90s, was maintained partially thanks to the work of artists, such as Silverio, and to the capability of the state to incorporate emerging ideals and values generated within artistic public spheres. Artists in Cuba "occupied a position of middle-men as vehicles of communication between people and state" (Frederik 2012, 18). Particularly at moments of crises and transition such as the 90s, they played central roles in opening dramatic affective 'smooth spaces' which disclosed possibilities for new revolutionary-becomings (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Silverio's Concoction is an example of such spaces. After the 90s, Silverio gained progressively recognition as an exemplary public cultural figure as he embodied and enacted through his life trajectory and artistic "ground projects" (Williams 1982, 2011) the Martian virtues of the 'wandering teacher,' a queer *hombre novisimo*, an educated, progressive, and cultivated campesino neither fully a campesino nor an urban Havanero dedicated to practicing an itinerant theatre in dialogue with marginal communities within and outside of Santa Clara.

Within the ethical turn in anthropology, Foucauldian and neo-Aristotelian traditions of virtue ethics have been one of the three most influential philosophical frameworks employed to conceptualize ethics and morality in particular local contexts (Throop and Mattingly 2018, 478). In this respect, Cheryl Mattingly (2012) has distinguished between post-structural Foucaultian approaches to virtue ethics and first-person neo-Aristotelian approaches. The first approach emphasizes processes of subjectification (or subject formation) through practices and technologies of self-care (*epimeleia heautou*) within particular discursive formations (i.e., social practices, forms of institutional government, expert knowledges, narratives and representations

which constitute specific regimes of truth about the self in relation to himself and others) (Foucault 1988, 2005; Mahamood 2001, 2005; Hirshkind 2006). The second approach foregrounds the first-person perspectives of individuals and how they come to exercise practical judgement in particular life circumstances. Virtue ethicists such as McIntyre (1981), Nussbaum (1999), or Williams (2011) draw on Aristotelian ethics as to emphasize the role of character and virtue, cultivated through the exercise of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) in particular situations, as central to the achievement of a good life in a political community (*eudaimonia*).[56] Aristotelean ethics is fundamentally a theory of action, character is formed in and by practice. Virtuous dispositions and orientations are cultivated and manifested through actions in everyday political and social life. Neo-Aristotelean virtue ethicists, despite their significant differences, share a common "concern for motives and passions in good choice; a concern with character; and a concern for the whole course of an agent's life" (Nussbaum 1999, 163).[57] In this chapter, I have attempted to intertwine a Foucaultian approach with a person-centered virtue ethics approach. I have traced a small genealogy of Revolutionary Theatre and the subjectivities and practices which were cultivated within changing traditions in time, from Theatre Escambray to Communitarian Theatre. I have then described how Silverio's embodied through his artistic life trajectory changing traditions of Revolutionary Theatre in time. Particularly during moments of moral break-down and crises, like the Special Period of the 90s, Silverio's cultivated dispositions manifested in *actions* (Arendt 1998) that created new revolutionary beginnings by opening places such as the Concoction which offered a home for the artistic expression of non-normative social groups or individuals.

[56] This in opposition to the Kantian moral notions of duty and obligation or utilitarian (or consequentialists) frameworks for morality.

[57] Anthropologists who have drawn from this philosophical tradition have argued for locating 'ethics' in the ordinary, taking everyday life as a site of moral striving (Das 2007, 2010, Lambek 2010, Mattingly 2014). Zigon and Laidlaw in different ways have criticize 'ordinary ethics.' Zigon have argued for locating the ethical (as distinct to the moral) in "extraordinary" moments of "moral break-down" when individuals step-out of their embodied moral dispositions, self-reflect on their own actions, and work on themselves as to return back in a changed manner to an unreflective way of being in the world (Zigon 2007, 2010).

The Cuban Decameron: re/mediating hurricane Irma.

Introduction

I arrived in Santa Clara for my second time the 13th of September 2017. I took the first available shared taxi from Havana after Hurricane Irma had hit the capital on September 10th. Esperanza and Maga were waiting for me. Santa Clara had been struck way more harshly than the capital. The countryside in particular had had several losses, many houses had been destroyed, and most of the crops were gone. Esperanza, after picking me up at the bus terminal where the taxis arrived, started detailing the impacts of Irma on her rural community, 17 km away from Santa Clara:

> There is a woman with two kids who has lost her house and the same has happened to La Rubia, that has four kids, and one is sick. The older kid, who was doing the military, has returned back home to help. All the military has been sent back home to help. The women who are alone with kids need to be helped first. We have lost most of the crops, all the aguacate (avocado) and coffee beans are on the ground, you will see, kids are trying to sell the aguacate to help their parents. We should go all together to support the families.

Maga intervened with a tone of doubt in her voice:

> Silverio and the others are going to help to Emilio Cordoba. They say that over there the hurricane made a clean sweep. They are going to bring an electric generator to the people of the community.

Esperanza reflected on what Maga said and then followed up:

> Maga, I understand that, but I will tell Silverio that the truth is that right now I need to be there for my community, he will understand…

We left for Esperanza's rural community.

More than one year later, I was visiting with Silverio the community where (and with whom) the idea for the play of the Cuban Decameron was born. In November 2018, I accompanied the Concoction's Theatre Company to Emilio Cordoba for the first time of many. Emilio Cordoba was a rural town surrounding a defunct sugar mill in the Province of Villa Clara. The community had been severely affected by the passage of hurricane Irma. On my first visit to Emilio Cordoba, Silverio walked with me in the park surrounding the newly built cultural home (*casa de la cultura*) in which the Company was about to perform the feminist rural play, *Las Cabañuelas*. We walked out of the park into the central square. A newly built shopping, a State's bodega, a tienda for run and beer, were disposed in a row on the left side of the square. On the opposite side you could appreciate the still standing ruins of the Sugar mill. We traversed the central square and walked towards the residential road of newly built pink townhouses. I had grown to know Silverio as a man of action rather than of many words. Silverio would hold long silences and it was hard to see him inactive.

> There was nothing in here, this has been entirely reconstructed after the hurricane…

He finally told me as we were returning back to the cultural center for the performance.

> We came here after the hurricane … The hurricane had made a clean sweep. We came here with a *generator*; it was really important for people to charge their phones and to be able to communicate with family. You can imagine also the joy of getting a *bottle of cold water* in the midst of the Caribbean's heat…And that bottle of cold water, you will see it, there is a moment it appears in the play of The Cuban Decameron…

Figure 4. 1: The bottle of iced fresh water on the scene of the Cuban Decameron

The moment in the Decameron when the bottle of iced fresh water is brought into the scene to the group of captive storytellers who are waiting for the end of the hurricane. Silverio enters the scene saying: "Here I bring this to you so that you can have a glass of cold water, with ice included. Nothing like a good glass of icy water. Enjoy it, that the hurricane is still not over." Photo taken by the author.

Having lived through changing traditions in Revolutionary Theatre, from Theatre Escambray to Communitarian Theatre, for Silverio doing theatre entailed building a relationship with a community in time and developing the plot in resonance with that community. In this chapter, I focus on Silverio's penultimate Play, *The Cuban Decameron,* to foreground the role of artists in re/mediating projects of world rebuilding in the wake of disasters. The idea for the Play was born as a result of the relationship established with the community of Emilio Cordoba through the action of solidarity carried by the Concoction's Theatre Company in the aftermaths of the hurricane. In this chapter I argue that the intensification of hurricanes in the Caribbean, while unveiling the long histories of asymmetric colonial interconnection which shape our unevenly shared modernity, also work as to render visible the localized practices, "affective states,"[58] and discourse which performatively re/constitute "the" Cuban nation-state, its national

[58] Growing ethnographic attention has been payed to the "affective states" through which "the State" is "constituted and sustained relationally through the claims, avoidances, and appeals that are made toward it and the emotional registers that these invoke." (Laszczkowski et al. 2017, 1, my emphases). Taking inspiration from Stoler (2007), Laszczkowski and Reeves (2017) stress the centrality of affects in the constitution of the political, in shaping

economy, and its "culture" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Gupta 1995, 2012; Appel 2017, 2019; Butler 2010; Stoler 2007; Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017).

Narratives in Times of Trouble: The power and politics of storytelling

Anthropologist have long been studying the centrality of narrative and storytelling in individual and collective processes of meaning-making in response to extraordinary experiences of suffering –from severe chronic illness, to disability, to war or migration (Mattingly 1998; Ochs and Capps 1997, 2002; Jackson 2002). Stories allows us to bestow order and meaning on events. Storytelling in the words of Michael Jackson is a "vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination" (2002, 15; see also Turner 1982). Narratives are not only useful tools to make sense of our experiences after the fact, actions themselves can be organized in a story-like structure. For example, in her ethnography on occupational therapists, Mattingly argued that they often strived to create a therapeutic emplotment, constructing healing dramas with their patients (1998, 2). Storytelling problematizes the division between private/personal and social/public meanings. Narratives are an aspect of "the subjective in-between" since a multiplicity of private and public interests are interwoven in and through narratives (Jackson 2002, 11). Affects, which stories circulate, have effects in re/constituting the very boundaries between public and private, self and other, citizens and the State. Stories are as important as practices in studying social worlds and social phenomena. For example, Gupta has stressed how we can't understand the phenomena of state corruption aside from the stories and narratives

the subjective experience of state power and in constituting the state itself through everyday affective intensities. Rather than considering the state as a fiction or object of deconstruction, the authors focus on how a range of feelings for and about the state and its agents contribute to making the state itself. (2). "The state effect" (Mitchell 1999) is reproduced not only through the routine of bureaucratic practice but also "through the affective engagements of ordinary citizens and not citizens in relation to state agents" (7).

circulated about it. Analyzing stories of corruption allow us to understand how people imagine the state, or the "affective states" through which the State is constituted along with ideas of good citizenships (2005, 5-7; Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017; Stoler 2007). In this chapter I focus on narratives about hurricanes, and storytelling in the wake of hurricanes, as central to capturing how imaginaries of the State and good citizenship are intersubjectively reconstituted through such events. 'Disasters,' such as hurricanes, render visible the localized practices, "affective states," and discourse (i.e., narrative, representations, and institutions) which performatively re/constitute the Cuban nation-state, its national economy and its "culture."

Culture, cultivation and the hurricane: Storytelling at the Institute Jose Marti

In September 2018, I participated in one of the public talks organized at the Sociedad Cultural Jose Marti[59] in Havana. Jose Rubiera Torres, the most famous Cuban meteorologist and weather reporter was speaking on the topic "Hurricanes and the Cuban Culture."[60] I reached the patio of the Jose Marti Society and set in the midst of its heterogenous public, in front of me a line of high school students in their blue uniforms and behind a group of elderly men and women. As the program began, a presenter announced that this talk was part of a series organized to promote a space for thinking (and feeling) the Cuban revolutionary culture. "Culture not as adornment, but rather culture in all its facets," remarked the presenter. The multifaceted meanings of "culture" shone in *compañero* José Rubiera's talk on meteorology and

[59] The latter is a 'non-governmental' organization founded in 1995, the 20th of October, day of Cuban Culture, in the midst of the Special Period of the 90's. It was founded by the most renowned Cuban intellectuals: Eusebio Leal, the committed charismatic leader and historian in charge of the restoration of the Old Center of Havana, and Abel Prieto, minister of culture during the Special Period of the 90s.' Bearing the name of Jose Marti, the anti-colonial national Cuban hero, the Sociedad cultural has as its intended goal defending the right to true speech, critique, and frank and constructive debate, within and with "the Revolution."

[60] Only in the last 40 years Cuba has been hit by Flora 1973, David 1979, Frederic 1979, Kate 1985, Lily 1996, Georges 1998, Michell 2001, Isidore and Lili 2002, Charley and Ivan 2004, Dennis, Rita and Wilma 2005, Ernesto 2006, Gustav, Ike and Paloma 2008, Sandy 2012, Matthew 2016, and finally Irma 2017 (https://www.dimecuba.com/revista/huracanes-cuba/)

culture, which was preceded by a sequence of performances. A high school student who excelled in playing the guitar was invited to entertain the guests with his music. Then the presenter announced that the talk had sparked so much interest that someone in the neighborhood had come that morning to the Society to leave a hand-written poem that had been originally published on the newspaper Hoy (Today), the 15th of October of 1973, in the wake of Hurricane Flora. La compañera Flora was then invited to recite the poem: "*Brazo a Brazo*" ("Arm in Arm").[61]

> We will rebuild everything that was destroyed,
> and we will make much more.
> Fidel's message in the wake of the hurricane.
> Arm in Arm, if Flora tied us up in wind and water,
> Where she swallowed the child and the root,
> And swallowed the yearling.
> Arm in Arm, don't wait,
> where there was one flower, now a thousand flowers.
> where a sigh, now a motor
> Arm in Arm
> If she destroys, you create
> Arm in Arm
> If Flora caught us in a snare
> Let's get away, Arm in Arm.

Next came a distinguished Professor from the Fernando Ortiz Foundation who presented on the book "Centinelas de huracán" (Sentinels of hurricanes), which celebrated the

[61] Reconstruiremos todo lo destruido y haremos mucho mas.
Comunicado de Fidel a raíz del ciclón.
Brazo a brazo, si Flora nos echo el lazo de viento y agua,
donde se traga el niño y la raíz,
y el añojo se trago
brazo a brazo si Flora nos dio el zarpazo,
por puerta de Caimanera,
donde no esta mi bandera,
brazo a brazo
no demores
donde hubo una flor, mil flores,
donde un suspiro, un motor,
donde un giro mil voleas,
brazo a brazo
si ella destruye tu creas,
si Flora nos echo el lazo
záfemolas brazo a brazo"
Periódico Hoy La Habana 15 de octubre de 1973.

early 20th century development of meteorology in Cuba and the new ability to forecast and prepare for hurricanes. Finally, the special guest, Jose Rubiera, was invited to deliver his talk. He opened by saying: "The notion of hurricanes is part of us, part of our lives, part of our culture. Cubans are cultivated people, and the *culture of hurricanes* is part of that *cultivation*." He traced first the etymology of the word 'hurricane,' coming into Spanish from the Mayan Hura (Center) and Can (Wind). Then he moved into giving only few of the many examples of the way hurricanes had been taken up in the works of famous Cuban anthropologists, such as Fernando Ortiz, and musicians, such as El Trio Matamoro in the 1930s.

At the end of the talk, the heterogenous audience was invited to ask questions or provide comments. A 50-year-old woman started telling the story of her lived experience of hurricane Flora in childhood. Her voiced trembled as she started recounting the many deaths she had witnessed. She had been rescued from the flood with other kids. They had spent 48 hours without any food and then, her voice breaking into joy, she remembered receiving a banana helmet with five plantains sent by *El Comandante Fidel*. Five plantains for five very hungry kids was not a lot but they even hesitated in eating them since the plantains had been sent by… "El Comandante!" The public was moved and laughed out loud in unison, clapping at the story. Her story was followed up by other stories from the public. Finally, a woman in her 40s closed the affective storytelling. She recounted that during hurricane Irma, Rubiera was not on national television as he usually was, announcing the arrival of the hurricane to all Cubans. He was abroad and everyone kept wondering, "Where is Rubiera?" A young meteorologist was taking his place on national television. He was doing a good job, showing that the younger generation of meteorologist were also ready to face the challenge of announcing the arrival of hurricanes. Yet, the day that Rubiera finally reappeared…She described being with her sister and neighbors. They were all eagerly waiting to hear the weather news with the updates on the hurricane. When Rubiera finally reappeared on the screen; there was a huge clamor and ovation "Rubiera has

finally arrived!!!" The public at the Jose Marti clapped as a whole in ovation to the story and to Jose Rubiera present among them.

This encounter at the Society Jose Marti is evocative of the way narratives about hurricanes are shared and circulated within cultural and artistic institutions in Cuba. The Society Jose Marti in Havana was founded in the 90s by a group of renowned intellectuals, among them Abel Prieto, the Minister of Culture during the Special Period of the 90s, and Eusebio Leal, the historian in charge of the restoration of the Old Center of Havana. Bearing the name of Jose Marti, the Society is one example of the cultural institutions founded at that time with the intended goal of producing forms of critique within and with "the Revolution."[62] During the 90s, to sustain national 'affective economies[63]' (Ahmed 2004) in times of economic crises, the government intensified the circulation of the icons and dictums of the national hero Jose Marti, whose statues the Revolution had placed across the geography of the Island with the maxim: "to be cultivated is the only way to be free." Indeed, during the event at the Society, Rubiera invokes the Martian refrain of cultivation in relation to hurricanes: "Cubans are cultivated people, and the *culture of hurricanes* is part of that *cultivation*." Being 'cultivated' into the culture of hurricanes entailed socialization into the multiple representations of such phenomena through Cuban cultural mediums: textual, audiovisual, acoustic and oral. The event itself at the Society Marti was organized as to create an affective sensorium of hurricanes by intertwining different mediums. The sound of the guitar of the distinguished high school student melted into the recitation of "*Arm in Arm*," a poem published in a vernacular newspaper in 1973, which then was revived in the voice of compañera Flora, circulating among the heterogenous public, affective images of endurance, resistance, and collective solidarity in the work of reconstruction in the wake of hurricanes. The stories told by the public circulated the 'affective states' through

[62] http://www.josemarti.cu/instituciones/sociedad-cultural-jose-marti/

[63] For Ahmed, signs acquire emotional value through circulation and repetition: "affect does not reside in an object or sign but is an *effect* of the circulation between objects and signs. Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become" (2004, 45, my emphasis).

which the "Revolutionary State" is imagined and affectively constituted after/with hurricanes. In these stories, specific 'objects' (such as the plantains the first woman received as a starving child), invoke and celebrate Fidel, the leader of the Revolutionary State. In these scenes of encounter those 'objects' triggered affects of joy, gratitude, respect, and reverence towards the Father of the Revolution. The plantains mark an affective shift in the story, as the trembling voice of the storyteller remembering the death, devastation, and deprivation experienced during the hurricane, moves into excitement, joy, and a dash of irony as she recounts how the devotion to "El Comandante" almost prevented the hungry kids from eating the plantains. The final woman makes Rubiera himself the central affective object of her story. Since the 80s, Cubans relationship to hurricanes has been mediated by Jose Rubiera's live forecasting of the storms' arrival on the national radio and television. The storyteller at the Society Jose Marti evokes through her story the affective attachment Cubans like her, in her 40s, have towards Jose Rubiera despite a new generation of meteorologists being ready to face the challenge of mediating the temporality of hurricanes. Through multiple and different forms of mediation, the "we" or "us" of the national imagined community (Anderson 1983) was affectively re/constituted in the wake of hurricanes and through the circulation of narratives about hurricanes in cultural programming like this event.

In the province rather than in the capital, having as leader a queer *campesino* rather than distinguished intellectuals from Havana, Silverio's Concoction is a somewhat different example of the cultural institutions that emerged during the Special Period of the 90s. While in its beginnings it did not hold the favor of the provincial Director of Culture, by the end of the 90s the newborn cultural space has gained national recognition. Abel Prieto, during the VI Congress of the Uneac, declared The Concoction: "One of the living cells of our culture, of those institutions with an extraordinary authentic atmosphere." Through Silverio's life trajectory in the previous chapter, I have contextualized some of the meanings and practices which constitute cultural 'authenticity' in context. Silverio gained recognition as a queer *hombre novisimo*, who

blurred the boundaries between rural and urban enacting the Martian virtues of 'cultivation' through theatrical nomadism within marginal communities.

The work of Disasters

> A Klee painting named '*Angelus Novus'* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (Walter Benjamin 2009, 5).

The storm which propels the angel of history in Benjamin's reflection on Klee's Angelus Novus is a metaphor for modernity which propel us into the 'future' while we are turned backwards to contemplate the pile of debris this historical "progress" is leaving in its passage.[64] Growing attention is devoted within the discipline of anthropology to the Anthropocene, the geological age we live in, started with modern industrialization, characterized by a growing impact of human activities on global ecosystems which has led to an intensification of environmental and climatic disasters (Matthews 2020). Some critics of the concept of the Anthropocene have stressed how the word "Anthropos" (a general human being) in Anthropocene erases the differences in responsibility and vulnerability for the detritus left behind by the storm. As argued by Matthews, we can connect earlier anthropological work that addressed the consequences of capitalism, empire, and settler colonialism in the Caribbean (Mintz 1985; Wolf 1982; Gilroy 2018) to contemporary reflections on the Anthropocene (2020, 69). Europeans "controlled the construction, maintenance, technology and proliferation of the

[64] Anthropologists have problematized "modernization," and "development," as discourses through which the industrialized "West" was able to exercise hegemony and control over projects and processes of change in the postcolonial global world which have been increasingly leaving detritus behind (Ferguson 1994, Escobar 1995).

plantation machines, especially those that produce sugar" which "supplied the infrastructure of Atlantic modernity" sustaining the industrial revolution in Britain (Benitez-Rojo 1997, 33; Gilroy 2018, 5; Mintz 1985). Situated humans then, more than others, are responsible for the Anthropocene, such as those living "in the fossil fuel-powered British Empire or those engaged in the sixteenth-century North Atlantic political economy" (Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016; Malm and Hornborg 2014; Moore 2015 in Matthews 2020, 69). While the countries occupying the center of capitalist extraction have a higher responsibility in the foreseeable intensification of hurricanes in the Caribbean region, it is Caribbean "Islands," such as Cuba, whose landscapes are still marked by sugar mill's ruins, that are more vulnerable to the detritus left behind by the storm.[65] The human made intensification of natural disasters renders visible the long histories of asymmetric interconnection which shape our unevenly shared modernity problematizing an image of the world composed of bounded nation-states (Gupta 1995, 2005, 2012) with a national economy (Appel 2017, 2019) and "culture" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Anthropologists and political theorists alike have long problematized "the state" and "the economy" as pre-given entities and stressed on how singular and monolithic notions of "the state" and "the economy" are performatively reproduced through "state effects" (Mitchell 1998, 2002) or "economic effects" (Appel 2017).[66] The convergence of certain kinds of processes and practices work as to produce the "effect" of an already given and knowable singular "state" or "economy" (Butler 2010, 147). Akhil Gupta problematized characterizations of the state as a homogenous discrete singular entity by stressing the multiple, heterogeneous, often contradictory levels of state administration. The state is better conceptualized as a "translocal institution, emerging from a

[65] Bedour Alagraa in "*The Interminable Catastrophe: Fatal Liberalisms, Plantation Logics, and Black Political Life in the Wake of Disaster*" takes "catastrophes" as a political category (rather than an ecological Event) which conceals and reproduce plantation modes of social relations. For the author, Anthropocene's scholars and discourses on the multiplication of imminent disasters reproduce the interminability, the endless repetition, of catastrophes themselves, and the cruel mathematics of its deaths. Taking 'catastrophes' as political conjunctures rather than mere ecological events affords the possibility for interrupting the racialized plantation logics which are the cause of the traumatic repetition of catastrophes themselves (2020, forthcoming).

[66] Following Appel, "economic effect" and "state effect" are entangled since "there is no economy without the state" (as the *the* in national economy implies*)* (2017, 301)

particular cultural and historical conjuncture, made visible in localized practices" (2012, 77; 104-105). An ethnographic exploration of the state thus requires an analysis of the everyday practices of governments (at the local, regional, national, and transnational level) and an analysis of the discursive construction of the state in public cultures (i.e., the narratives and representations of the state in textual, audiovisual, or oral mediums) (Ibid.). Similarly, Hannah Appel has stressed how national economies (understood as something delimited and singular localized within the borders of the nation-state which success can be measured by a series of statistical indexes such as the GDP) are mid-twentieth-century sociohistorical and geopolitical formations that are performatively reproduced in the present as singular and comparable entities by erasing the histories of empires out of which they emerged and the radical inequalities produced by it (2017, 2019).[67] The intensification of 'disasters' in the Caribbean reveals how long histories of colonial and imperial interconnection shape our unevenly shared modernity. At the same time, disasters render visible the localized practices, "affective states,"[68] and discourse which performatively re/constitute "the" Cuban nation-state, its national economy and its "culture" (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017; Gupta 1995, 2012; Appel 2017, 2019; Butler 2010). The socialist disaster-mitigation apparatus of the Cuban State has long been dealing with the threat of tropical hurricanes and epidemics on the Island, often re-constituting the affective bond with and between its citizens in the felicitous remediation of such events (Salas 2020, 233). The Cuban State's ability to preserve good social indicators, despite economic, environmental, and medical crises, has been central to the maintenance of its sovereignty within the Island and in the broader transnational network of capitalist nation-states, preventing "humanitarian interventions" in the Island (Garth 2020, 12). Since the 90s, the maintenance of social welfare has been increasingly

[67] In Appel's example, "the" Equatorial Guinea's national economy is an artificial abstraction that is reproduced as singular in the wake of oil through national economic conferences, economic theories such as the resource curse, and in dystopic dreams of future personal and collective wellbeing.

[68] Growing ethnographic attention has been paid by anthropologists of the state to the "affective states" through which "the State" is "constituted and sustained relationally through the claims, avoidances, and appeals that are made toward it and the emotional registers that these invoke." (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017, 1, my emphases).

achieved through the collaboration between the State, local communities, and state-sponsored artists in re/mediating the affective relationship between citizens and the State amid the breaking down of the State's infrastructures of provisioning. In the following section I trace a comparison between Puerto Rico's post-Maria and Cuba's post-Irma to argue that such disasters are central to reveal how neoliberal and socialist governmentality are reproduced and challenged in the wake of disaster and what role artists play in reimagining and reconstituting the relationship with the state in these two Caribbean Islands.

Disaster capitalism and Disaster socialism: Puerto Rico and Cuba after Irma and Maria

Interrogating the role disasters play in the actualization of political-economic projects has been central to the work of Naomi Klein (2007, 2018). Klein developed the concept of "disaster capitalism" to describe how neoliberal capitalism, an ideology that she traces to Friedman and the Chicago Boys in the 1970s and 1980s, was actualized in the wake of disastrous events across the world from wars, to market crashes, to hurricane Katrina. Her main argument was that human-made disasters have been used by governments to implement neoliberal policies and 'shock doctrines' towards the radical privatization of the economy while the responsibility for the material and immaterial recovery from the disaster gets left to the private individual. In the wake of Katrina in New Orleans, private contractors made high profits from the work of recovery at the expense of the poorest 'disposable' citizens who were deprived of access to basic needs and services (2007). Thirty-five free market solutions were proposed by the Republican party to solve New Orleans's crises, including closing public housing and public schools in favor of private services along with plans to increase oil drilling. Klein stresses how these policies seek to destroy an already weakened public sphere while further aggravating climate change through exploitative energetic policies (Bonilla 2019, 33).

In her most recent work, *The Battle for Paradise*, Naomi Klein brought her concept to bear on the Caribbean, focusing on the effects of neoliberal recovery measures in exacerbating the humanitarian crises brought about by hurricane Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico (2018). Yarimar Bonilla, during a conference organized to discuss the "aftershocks" of those hurricanes, posed to Naomi Klein the following questions: "What is the particularity of Puerto Rico for thinking about the broader issues of disaster capitalism and the shock doctrine? What role does colonialism play in giving these relationships a particular hue?" (2019, 32).

In her response to those questions, Klein draws a comparison between post-Katrina's New Orleans and post-Maria's Puerto Rico to stress how the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, its unincorporated territory, had rendered the Island more vulnerable to "the infrastructure of crisis exploitation" while at the same time she had witnessed, more than anywhere else, the existence of an "infrastructure of resistance to colonialism." Communities without electricity or running water in the midst of the ongoing disaster had come together to organize themselves politically to resist the implementation of "shock doctrines" (Ibid, 35). Yarimar Bonilla followed up by rephrasing Klein's concepts through a different temporalization of the felt experience of the hurricane. Post-Maria's (neo)liberal policies are "trauma doctrines" rather than "shock doctrines," rooted in "deep-seated colonial traumas" that in the last several years have left Puerto Ricans vulnerable to disasters and accustomed to respond to the disregard of federal and local governments with self-reliance (Bonilla 2019, 37; see also Flaherty 2018). That self-reliance for Puerto Ricans is a form of 'traumatized resilience' opens up questions of sovereignty and how this can be reimagined in the wake of disasters. Self-reliance brings about questions of self-determination particularly when, in the wake of the hurricane, Puerto Rican communities responded by taking responsibility for granting themselves food, water, and sustainable energetic resources for the future while the State implemented austerity measures, dismantled public services, and welcomed foreign stakeholders to the Island in the form of Bitcoiners or "Puertopians" (Bonilla 2019, 38-39). For Bonilla, communities'

resilience in the wake of the hurricane should be as much celebrated as rendered problematic: "I think we want our infrastructure to be resilient. We want our buildings, our electricity systems to withstand shocks, but we don't want our population to be required to withstand repetitive shocks and traumas" (Ibid, 43). The destruction produced by hurricane María in Puerto Rico brought to light colonial forms of structural and infrastructural neglect that before the arrival of the storm were already being challenged through growing activist movements fighting against austerity measures and the Island's debt.

Infrastructures are nation-building technologies that mediate citizen's felt experiences of the State (Ficek 2018, Collier 2011, Harvey and Knox 2015). Puerto Rico's infrastructures, from electric systems to bridges, were built at the beginning of the 20th century and worked to produce modern colonial subjects in a previously agrarian society. During the Cold War, the United States implemented several policies to further modernize and industrialize Puerto Rico and to 'showcase' the island as an example of capitalist development and democracy. The infrastructures built in that period connected the colonial center with its periphery, concealing the difference between them. The 'breaking-down' (Zigon 2007) of those infrastructures, neglected during decades of economic debt crises, and the lack of response by the United States federal government to repair them in the wake of Maria, revealed in an embodied and felt way the subordinated position Puerto Ricans occupied as inferior racialized colonial sub-citizens. Unable to rely on traditional infrastructures to get access to basic needs, people relied on family, community networks, and other material technologies like buckets, cords, or generators to improvise solutions. This change in infrastructural practices in the wake of hurricane Maria, from State's infrastructures to "people as infrastructures" (Simone 2004) radically reshaped the felt and embodied experience of the State for Puerto Ricans (Ficek 2018, 108-114). For Yarimar Bonilla, Puerto Ricans' resilience in the wake of Maria poses questions of self-determination and sovereignty. Communities resilience should lead them to confront and transform their unlivable conditions rather than letting the State off the hook to "open business" on the Island while

thousands were left homeless and displaced: "not a people-powered recovery in the sense of people being left to their own defenses to recover, but rather a recovery that offers justice for those who have experienced these repetitive shocks" (2019, 44). Yarimar Bonilla's position on trauma doctrines, resilience, and recovery post-Maria is captured by a theatre performance she included as a part of the conference. "Ay Maria" is a theatre spectacle realized by a small group of Puerto Rican artists in the wake of the hurricane. The theatre performance captured Puerto Ricans' lived experiences before, during, and after the hurricane. The theatre Company toured for 5 weeks in 78 towns in Puerto Rico and performed among people who had lost their houses, had still not recovered electricity, and were waiting for a free meal (a ham-and-cheese sandwich) and a bottle of water (Ibid. 49-50). The performance portrayed Puerto Ricans' experience of the hurricane: the shortages of batteries, water, canned food, and mosquito repellants, and the multiplication of long waiting lines: for buying a little bag of ice, using the ATM, or acquiring diesel. These lived experiences of infrastructural break-down were juxtaposed with the words of Donald Trump denying the 'disastrous' conditions on the Island (2019, 59-60).[69] The actors also voiced how local governors were enjoying the air conditioning while people whose houses had been repossessed (taken) by the banks and whose rented house have been swept away by the hurricane were struggling to find a shelter (63). Teachers protesting the closing of public schools were arrested as people deprived of home and work started making plans to leave the Island and join the diaspora abroad (68-69). After staging people's struggles before, during, and after the hurricane and the multiple failures of the government to respond to the recurrent 'shocks' suffered by Puerto Ricans, the play closes with the following verses:

> MARISA. Now we can see how badly administered this country is, from the Department of Consumer Affairs to the Department of Housing, Health, and Education. While people were going hungry, the government was signing

[69] MICKEY (TRUMP). Hello, brown people of Puerto Rico. I'm the president of the world. Your governor told me there have been only sixteen deaths. That's not a disaster. The real disaster is the way you're messing with my budget!
MARÍA (SAN JUAN MAYOR YULÍN). Our people are dying!
MICKEY (TRUMP). Shut up, nasty woman. Here, I've brought you extra soft toilet paper to wipe your little butts. (Bonilla et al. 2019, 59- 60)

multimillion-dollar contracts with American companies, and you get to thinking, what has the government ever done for us?

MICKEY. I know what they did, they made a hashtag: #PuertoRicoSeLevanta. But it's been a long time since Puerto Ricans and everyone who lives here, even if they aren't from here … it's been a long time since we've been on our feet. Here, the one who has to stand up is the government.
(Bonilla et al. 2019, 70)

The day after María
All the neighbors woke up
With axes, machetes, and picks
We opened up new roads, new ways.
And we cleared rubble
And we shared food
But to find water
We waited in line, what a line it was!
Now it's clear
Who lifted up our country,
The hardworking people
We're the shit!

Oh María
There are ways
we neighbor
rebuild Puerto Rico.
(Bonilla et al. 2019, 71)

In this chapter, I take up Bonilla's questions to Naomi Klein which I read as challenging the author to think more closely the link between colonialism and 'disaster capitalism' while situating those questions in Cuba: "What is the particularity of Cuba for thinking about the broader issues of disaster capitalism? What role does colonialism play in giving these relationships a particular hue?"

Cuba and Puerto Rico share a common vulnerability to the intensification of hurricanes in the Caribbean region along with a colonial history of plantation extraction for Western capital accumulation. During the Cold War, Cuba and Puerto Rico were 'showcased' as examples of rival models of 'development,' capitalist and socialist respectively, and made objects of infrastructural investment. State infrastructures have been faltering in both of these Caribbean

Islands way before the hurricanes hit in 2017. The breaking-down of those infrastructures in the wake of the hurricanes brings to light how the relationship between citizens and the State is re/mediated, felt, and constituted differently in the two Caribbean Islands. If post-Maria Puerto Rico tell us the story of "disaster capitalism" as lived in the Caribbean, I suggest post-Irma Cuba tells us how *disaster socialism* is lived in Cuba. Emilio Cordoba was showcased through multiple local Cuban mediums as an example of socialist recovery in the wake of hurricanes. As I describe in this chapter, the reconstruction of the community, at once material and imaginative, was achieved through the collaboration between local officials of the State, the community, and Silverio's Theatre Company. The hurricane, rather than being framed in a disastrous capitalist story of infrastructural break-down, governmental disavowal, lack of repair, and private responsibility, became the setting for stories that celebrated socialist governmentality after the 90s and the growing role of local communities in conjunction with the State in remediating the breaking-down of State's infrastructures.

In the wake of disasters, the Cuban state still assumes responsibility for the work of recovery (Salas 2020, 233; Garth 2020, 12). Yet, since the 90's, the infrastructures of delivery of the post-Soviet socialist state became increasingly unreliable which went hand in hand with the growing role of communities in sustaining social welfare and its infrastructures of provisioning (see chapter one, Garth 2020, 19). During the Special Period of the 90's food became extremely scarce, '*alumbrones*' marked the few hours of the day when electric light was made available,[70] and almost everyone was left to move by foot or by bicycle due to shortages in oil. As the provision of basic goods and services became unreliable and intermittent, Cubans increasingly relied on what Simone has termed 'people as infrastructure' (2004). Infrastructures are generally understood in physical and material terms as systems of highways, pipes, wires, or cables. Simone has proposed to extend the notion of infrastructure to include the complex

[70] *Apagones* is the Spanish word for *Black-outs*. During the Special Period of the 90's blackouts became the norm rather than the exception to the rule. Cubans, with creativity and irony renamed the few hours in the day with electric power "*Alumbrones*" ~ *Light-outs*

combinations of persons, objects, spaces, and practices that combine to form an infrastructure—"a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city" (Simone 2004, 408). During the 90s, artists in Cuba played a central role in re/mediating the felt and embodied experience of a faltering post-Soviet Revolutionary State. As described in the previous chapter, the theatrical movements developed at the time under the name of Communitarian Theatre, were precisely characterized by their ability to produce art for the community despite the breaking-down of State infrastructures. Extending Simone's definition, artists themselves provided for an 'infrastructure:' a complex combination of persons, objects, spaces and practices providing for an 'affective platform' reproducing life in (and outside) of the city. Silverio's plays are intertwined with practices of material provisioning of particular 'objects' that affectively remediate the breaking-down of State's infrastructures: from sharing bread during the spectacle *Nadie* in his own home in the 90s to bringing electric 'generators' to Emilio Cordoba in the wake of Irma in 2017. "Bread" and "electric generators," food and electric power, are objects which "constitute nodes in the circulation of affects" (Mankekar 2015, 73), here *revolutionary* affects. In the encounter with the audience, these 'objects' evoke the promises of the Revolutionary State, its successes and failures, circulating the "affective states" through which "the Revolution" is imagined and re/constituted. Artists within the tradition of Communitarian Theatre like Silverio, during the hardest moments of the Special Period, as in the wake of hurricanes or other disasters, re/mediate the breaking down of State's infrastructures, the here/not here (fort-da) of bread or electricity, by improvising solutions as to remediate for those lacking objects through the enacted plays while opening "good enough" spaces to reconstitute a political illusion in the midst of disillusionment (Winnicott 1973).

The Cuban Decameron

The Cuban Decameron by René Batista Moreno (2016) and the Odilea by Francisco Chofre (1994) are examples of local Cuban writers modifying the plots of masterpieces of European literature (the Decameron and the Odyssey, respectively) to adapt them to Cuban reality. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, The Cuban Decameron is a "re/territorialization" in Cuba of the medieval play by the Italian Giovanni Bocaccio (1987; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). The latter, also called "The Human Comedy" in opposition to Dante's "Divine Comedy," is considered a literary masterpiece forerunning the Italian Renaissance. In this "revolutionary" text the dominant paradigms of the Middle Age are "not only denied, but made fun of" (Francesco De Sanctis 1968, 290; Branca 1976). Ten bourgeoise, who flew to the countryside escaping from plague-stricken Florence in 1348, engage in 10 days of storytelling. Through a collection of 100 tales, The Decameron represents the late medieval/early modern world by portraying a variety of popular characters and stories from Boccaccio's own time, rather than heroes as in Homer or Virgil. The stories of the novel are characterized by their preposterous, picaresque, and humorous tone and explore new emerging values which upset the medieval moral order. The love stories contained in the text, rather than conforming to Dante's representation of love as a path of transcendence to the Divine, represented love's carnality, sexuality, and lack of conformance to the normative canons of the Church. Priests, nuns, and religious belief become source of comedy throughout the stories told in the play. The theme of "the wheel of Fortune" is also central to the novel that stresses the unpredictability of human life in the face of uncontrollable external forces and events. In the Cuban Decameron, René Batista Moreno substituted Boccacio's bourgeois storytelling protagonists with villagers from his natal province of Villa Clara. By conducting research in the province, the Cuban author acquired live testimonials through which he composed the character and stories contained in the book. The stories contained in the book of René Batista Moreno, together with the action of solidarity of bringing electric generators to Emilio Cordoba in the wake of hurricane Irma, was the base from which Silverio and his actors developed their own enactment of the Cuban Decameron. A

category-5 hurricane became the event—brought about by the wheels of Fortune—to provide the *peripetia* and setting for the play. The characters and stories which appeared in Moreno's book were partially transformed and expanded in Silverio's rendition. Characters such as '*la pajarita'* (a trans woman; lit. small bird) who only appeared in Moreno's book in one of the stories recounted by the protagonists, became a central character and storyteller in Silverio's Decameron, indexing the new types of nonnormative subjectivities who came to the foreground in the arts of the 90s and the stories of the LGBT community who found a home for artistic expression in Silverio's Concoction.

The Play: Silverio's Cuban Decameron

Silverio, dressed in military garb evocative of "El Comandante" Fidel, invites the audience waiting outside to enter into the Theatre. He explains to the public that a category-5 hurricane has hit the Island and that they are about to enter a refuge where a group of people have been in enclosure for over 10 days. He warns the public that the group of refugees have been telling some preposterous stories:

"After 10 days closed here…only Gods know what people end up doing …"

Figure 4. 2: The setting for the Cuban Decameron

The public enters a dark room only illuminated by the flashlights of the refugees. The main objects present on the scene are a bunk bed in the center and a small little radio on the side giving updates on the advancement of the hurricane. Seven characters, three males, three females, and one *pajarita* come up with the idea of telling each other's stories to entertain themselves while waiting for the end of the hurricane.

First Story: A reputable and respectable old widow, who sits every day at the window of her house, tries to seduce a compañero who works in the bank and passes every day in front of her house. She convinces him to enter her home with the excuse to help her in searching for a hidden frog. While the man is searching for the imaginary frog, she displays an array of seductive moves. The story reaches its climax when the lady raises her gown showing an extremely hairy pussy. The story closes with the lady confessing to a priest justifying her 'indecency' with the shortages and lack of money to buy underwear. The priest gives her the money to buy underwear… and he adds "a razor! (...) if you can find it!"

Figure 4. 3: The old widow and the banker

Second story: A vendor tells the story of when she finally realized the dream of all Cubans: "to travel!" She recounts the first time she went to Russia. When she got there, she saw the Red Square in Moscow, and people …who were red as well. She remembered being euphoric as she

bought an infinitude of things: cars, furniture, sweaters and every type of cloths. Finally, she saw a hidden shop. She got closer to discover that the shop sold pingas (dicks), thousands of pingas! She thought to herself: "*How is it that in Russia they sell phalluses and in my shop I do not?*"

She entered that Russian shop and asked for 50 boxes of *pingas*. She returned back home and changed the name of her own shop into: "*Orgasm, Category-5!"* She was even able to pass the harsh controls at the Cuban customs by bribing the customer officer with a gift in pingas. She returned back with phalluses of all types and colors and her shop was invaded by a variety of interested buyers: widows, singles, married couples, and a lot of *pajaritas*.

Figure 4. 4: The vendor

The storytelling is interrupted by the radio announcing that the hurricane it is still traversing the Island while Silverio enters the refuge carrying a bottle of cold water and a couple of loaf of bread. The storytellers acquired a composed attitude in front of Silverio while receiving with enthusiasm the water and food. They wait until Silverio has left the scene to distribute among themselves food and water while resuming the storytelling

***Third story*:** The *pajarita* tells the story of when she was a kid, already aware of what she wanted and what she liked. Yet, her gender orientation did not conform to the norm and were not accepted by her family and by her classmates and professors in school. She had to leave school and go to work in Havana, to clean and iron to earn 4 pesos Cubanos. Back then, the most famous shows of *transformistas* were in Tagua, but she did not have the money to go. She started

to work as a sex worker and with that her life improved. She earned money, graduated from the 12th grade, and could finally accomplish her dream to perform with the *transformistas* of Tagua.

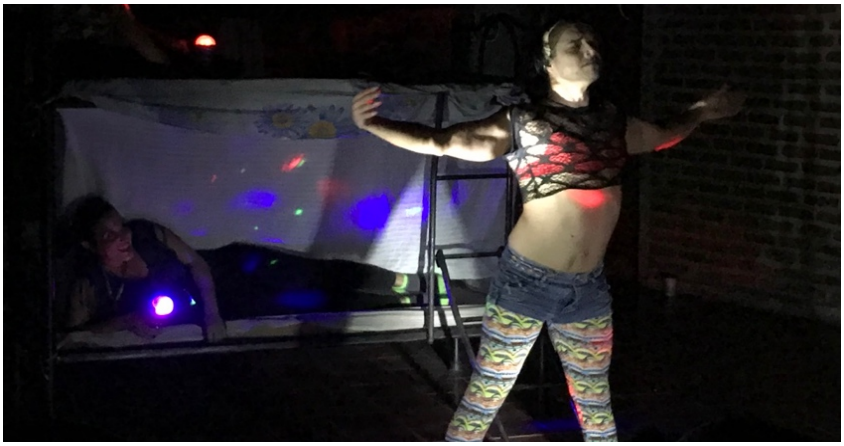

Figure 4. 5: La pajarita

Fourth story: Macho tells the story of how, during the Special Period, to face the economic difficulties of the times he became a renowned *jinetero*:[71] *El macho morrongón*[72]. He recounts that he became famous for his big *morronga* (penis) among females, males, and a lot of pajaritas. One night he sold his sexual favors even to a blond American tourist. He gave him such a huge orgasm that is still remembered as the second greatest defeat of Imperialist powers in Cuba after the Revolution.

Figure 4. 6: El macho

[71] The word *jinetero* derives from the Spanish jinete (jockey). The term is used in Cuba to indicate people who conduct illicit business with foreigners, from sex to idle chatting. Stout has translated the term as "hustler" "which can mean someone who engages in sex work but also refers to those making a living through street smarts and shadow economies." (2014, 26)

[72] Macho (virile man) morrongon (with a big penis)

Fifth story: The guajiro (peasant) tells the story of when he met an elder guajiro who taught him everything about the proper technique to seduce a mare. He proceeds to give a detailed and exhilarating account of how he got to succeed in his first amorous encounter with a mare following the guidance of the elder guajiro.

Figure 4. 7: El guajiro

The Finale:

The radio announces that the hurricane has finally left the Island and that the refugees are free to go outside. Lights are turned back on as to mark the opening of the refuge to the outside world. The music on the background creates an aura of suspense as the astonished faces of the captive storytellers suggest to the public the incredible devastation that the hurricane produced in its passage.

Figure 4. 8: The Finale

Vendor: Look, the things that I had brought here to sell, I will give them to you…since we are left with nothing...

Old widow: Caballeros, I am sure my bus (guagua) will not be passing for a long time. I am here happy to help whoever needs assistance to clean, prepare food, or organize things in their house.

Student: ….me too. I do not know how to do anything, but I will do everything…

White collar worker: I am sure I will need help because the river has flawed my house.

Guajiro: Well… I can find the roofs that have fallen and help reconstructing them again.

Macho: Look, don't worry people, here there is a man for whatever you need!

Silverio: If we get the materials to rebuild, I can help with taking care of the houses of those who are gone to help others with the work of reconstruction.

Pajarita: Listen…at the end, are we not a big family? We will help each other. We will look for the materials for reconstructing the roof, and we will fix the house, we will do a big caldoza (traditional Cuban soup). Look Macho, you can come to my house that I guarantee NOTHING will happen to you… We will go all together, and, on the walk, I will finally tell you my story…

All: Which one?

Pajarita: The one about the "flying phallus" (*pinga voladora*)

All: Ahhhhh! ((collective laughs as the captives leave the scene))

Intermezzo

The Italian Decameron in Medieval times captured the lived and emerging values of the bourgeoisie by circulating 'queer' stories of everyday life that challenged the dominant aesthetic canons of the Catholic Church. It has been considered a 'revolutionary' work of art as it masterfully captured the emergent 'structures of feelings' of its times (Williams 1978). Silverio, through his artistic life trajectory, particularly after the 90s, 'queered' the canons of Revolutionary Socialism. Silverio's Decameron captures the changes in aesthetic conventions of revolutionary art after the 90s. Each one of the stories portrays in humorous ways distinctive aspects of the lived experience of post-Soviet socialism in Cuba: the shortages and lack of money to buy underwear and razors; vendors traveling to Russia to buy merchandise to sell back at home after bribing the Cuban customs officials; jineteros who faced the economic crises by engaging in "illicit" activities such as having sex with American tourists; and transgender characters, such as la pajarita, promoting gender identities excluded in the hyper masculine cultural politics of the early Revolution. Characters such as el *jinetero* or la *pajarita*, represent identities who were object of rampant social criticism during the 90s, as sex workers symbolized a lapse in socialist values (Stout 2014, 2). In Silverio's play and at the Concoction, these 'characters' and the real people who inspired them, found a space within (rather than outside) an increasingly inclusive revolutionary cultural politics. The Decameron is a "human comedy" in the wake of tragedy, the Florentine plague re/territorialized as hurricane Irma in Cuba. The stories of Silverio's play are characterized by their preposterous, picaresque, sexual, humorous tone. They sparked amusement and laughter among the multiple audiences visited by the itinerant Company of the Concoction: from Emilio Cordoba, to Santa Clara, to many other villages in the province of Villa Clara. The public asked enthusiastically for the Cuban Decameron to be performed for three nights in a row in the Province of Bayamo, in the South of the Island, where the Company

traveled in April 2019 for El Festival de la Primavera Teatral (the Spring Festival of Theatre). In its movement across localities, the play circulated 'affective states' through which the relationship between citizens and the socialist state, and between citizens themselves, is imagined and re/constituted in the wake of 'disasters' (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017). Silverio, who impersonates a military man evocative of "El Comandante" Fidel, guides the refugees and the public during the hurricane while providing for material objects of need, including cold water and food. The bottle of cold water in the play indexes the instantiated solidarity between the Theatre Company of the Concoction and Emilio Cordoba in the wake of hurricane Irma, which established the relationship between artists and the rebuilt rural town. The object in the play carries this indexical meaning only when performed in the context of that community. In its circulation among other communities, part of this contextual meaning is lost[73]. Yet, the object in the play still functions as to circulate "affective states" among the public, re/constituting the relationship between citizens and the State as one of paternal provisioning and between citizens themselves as one of solidarity and collaboration.

The hurricane, rather than being framed in a story of disastrous infrastructural break-down, governmental disavowal, lack of repair, and private individual responsibility, becomes the setting for stories that celebrated socialist governmentality after the 90s, the growing role of local communities in conjunction with the State in sustaining social welfare, and the growing role of artists, as mediums between 'people' and the State, in re/constituting revolutionary ideology. The play closes with the emergence of feelings of solidarity between the characters. The experience of enclosure and storytelling transforming an otherwise awkward mixture of different personalities and sexual orientations into a "big family," ready to help each other, "brazo a

[73] Silverio's art is considered an example of 'authentic' Cuban art. The 'authenticity' of his art is grounded in the Martian ideal of artistic nomadism and rediscovery of peripheral modernities. The aesthetic value of Silverio's singular work of art, not unlike what Walter Benjamin (1936) would call the aura of the work (under threat by modernity and mechanical reproduction, or perhaps *re-mediation*), is grounded in changing traditions of Revolutionary theatre, from Escambray to Communitarian Theatre, which made of the embeddedness of plays in their lived social context the distinctive feature of their revolutionary art.

brazo" ("arm in arm"), in the work of reconstruction after the tragic devastation wrought by the hurricane. As I detail in the following section, the play's finale evokes the real story of successful recovery of Emilio Cordoba, the community in relationship with which the play developed.

The story of recovery of Emilio Cordoba through other mediums

> It is possible to defend successfully the hypothesis that without deliveries from the Caribbean womb Western capital accumulation would not have been sufficient to effect a move, within a little more than two centuries, from the so-called Mercantilist Revolution to the Industrial Revolution. In fact, the history of the Caribbean is one of the main strands in the history of capitalism, and vice versa. (Antonio Benitez-Rojo 1997, 5)
>
> Europeans finally controlled the construction, maintenance, technology and proliferation of the plantation machines, especially those that produce sugar. […] The singular feature of this machine is that it produced no fewer than ten million African slaves and thousands of coolies […]. The plantation machines turned out mercantile capitalism, industrial capitalism (see Eric Williams), African underdevelopment (see Walter Rodney), Caribbean population (see Ramiro Guerra, Sugar and Society in the Caribbean); they produce imperialism, wars, colonial blocs, rebellions, repressions, sugar islands, runaway slave settlements, air and naval bases, revolutions of all sorts, and even a "free associated state" next to an "unfree" socialist state. (Antonio Benitez-Rojo 1997, 9, my bracketing of "unfree")

Emilio Cordoba is a small rural town (caserío rural) with a history stretching back almost 200 years. The area was populated around 1860 after the first sugar mill, the Central of Nazabal, was founded in 1844. At the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s the first Marxist associations were founded there, and the site became famous for its intense workers' struggles. These reached a high point in 1933 with the creation of the Soviet of Nazabal. Jesus Menendez, a Black sugar worker at Nazabal, is remembered as one of the most illustrious leaders of workers' struggles in this period. His success against the local oligarchies brought him national recognition. In 1939 he founded the National Federation for Sugar Workers and in 1940 was elected as parliamentary representative for the Communist Party until he was killed in 1948. His son and daughter carried on his legacy, participating in the assault on Moncada's barracks by the 26th of July Movement with Fidel Castro. After the victory of the Revolution in 1959, the sugar

mill was nationalized and renamed Emilio Cordoba. It maintained its production until 1998, when it milled its last harvest. During the restructuring of the Cuban sugar industry in the 2000s the sugar mill was finally dismantled.

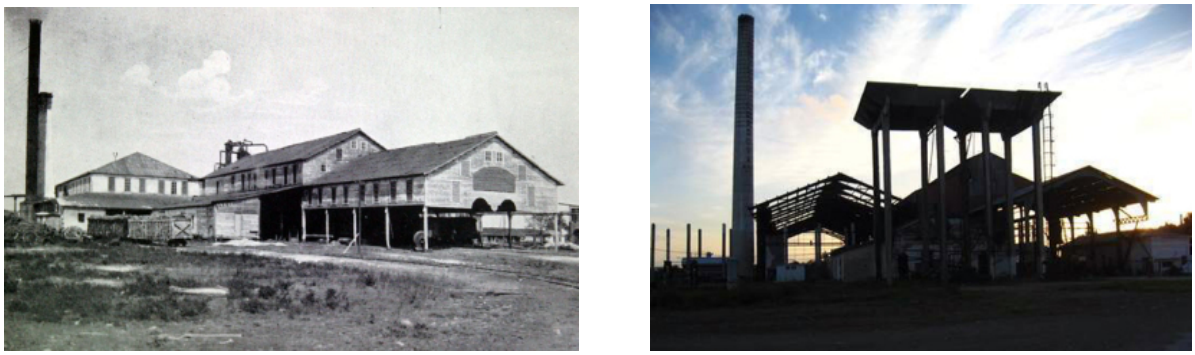

Figure 4. 9: The sugar mill of Nazabal

Sugar mill of Nazabal in 1913 (on the left) and its current ruins after it was closed in 1998 (on the right). Photos published on historia de Cuba[74]

The story of Emilio Cordoba's recovery in the wake of hurricane Irma was celebrated as an example of "disaster socialism" at work through multiple public mediums, from local newspaper and television coverage to a documentary.[75] Less than six months after Irma, Emilio Cordoba was entirely rebuilt with an unprecedented improvement in the living conditions of its inhabitants. Sixty new habitations were reconstructed anew to be more resistant to future hurricanes. Moreover, the village was provided with a new *casa de la cultura* (cultural home) in the central park, new shops for food and other groceries, a barbershop, a cafeteria, a post-office, a health clinic, a funeral home, and even the possibility to connect to internet from the central

[74] https://historiacuba.wordpress.com/category/central-emilio-cordoba/
https://www.ecured.cu/Playa_Emilio_C%C3%B3rdova_(Encrucijada)

[75] "El Sol renace en Emilio Cordoba," Vanguardia, 12/09/2017
http://www.vanguardia.cu/villa-clara/10394-el-sol-renace-en-emilio-cordova

"Mucha voluntad en Emilio Córdoba," Vanguardia, 01/20/2018
http://www.vanguardia.cu/villa-clara/10652-mucha-voluntad-en-emilio-cordova

"Vicepresidente cubano visita comunidad villaclareña de Emilio Córdoba," Radio Cubana, 02/16/2018
http://www.radiocubana.cu/noticias-de-la-radio-cubana/68-noticias-nacionales/21414-vicepresidente-cubano-visita-comunidad-villaclarena-de-emilio-cordoba

square. The work of material infrastructural reconstruction was made possible thanks to the joint effort of the State's local authorities, like the vice-president of the Government of Villa Clara, and the inhabitants of Emilio Cordoba themselves.

The story of community's recovery after the hurricane was so successful that it reached the attention of the highest national authorities. The reconstructed settlement was visited in February 2018 by Ramiro Valdés Menéndez, member of the political bureau of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party. Valdés's visit to the community was accompanied by the public projection of the documentary "*Siempre Amanece*" (Dawn always arrives), produced by the Group for the Communication of Culture of Villa Clara. The documentary's images captured the tragic destructive power of hurricanes along with the power of the community, joint with others in solidarity, to rebuild anew in the wake of such disasters. The Concoction also participated in the live screening of *Siempre Amanece* by adding live performances to the happening. This event was video recorded and aired in Telecubanacán, the Provincial television channel of Villa Clara on February 16th of 2018.[76] The inhabitants interviewed in the television reportage framed the story of their community's recovery as a gift from the Revolution.

> You have to imagine; this is a revolution of a community! Here there was no village before the hurricane. If you had come here before the hurricane you would have been scared of what you saw. Today I have a house because it has been given to me by the Revolution.
> (woman, 40s-50s, carrying a child in her arms)

> This is another gift from the Revolution. As Fidel taught us, we will never be left helpless…the darkest hours of the night are those that precede dawn. Fidel is here today! He is here today in every single work of recovery in this community.
> (man, 40s-50s, local representative of the Communist Party)

[76] "Estrenan documental en comunidad Emilio Córdoba," Telecubanacán, 02/16/2018 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYiCdtV0vr8

The television reportage closed with an evocative story about the Concoction. During the event in Emilio Cordoba, a technical flaw in the reestablished electric system had provoked a blackout. Yet, this had not prevented the Theatre Company of the Concoction from animating the night with its performances. The Company had improvised a solution as it had already done in the wake of Irma, "when the electric infrastructure and the houses were on the ground, yet the solidarity towards the community had already started germinating." (Telecubanacán, 02/16/2018)

Figure 4. 10: The work of reconstruction of Emilio Cordoba

On the right, Tatico, the vice-president of the Government of Villa Clara directing and helping in the labor of reconstruction of Emilio Cordoba (photo by Ramón Barreras Valdés published in Vanguardia 12/09/2017[77]). On the left, the inhabitants of Emilio Cordoba in the labor of reconstruction (pictures taken from Telecubanacán[78]).

[77] Vanguardia 12/09/2017 (http://www.vanguardia.cu/villa-clara/10394-el-sol-renace-en-emilio-cordova)

[78] Telecubanacán, 02/16/2018 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cYiCdtV0vr8)

Figure 4. 11: The houses of Emilio Cordoba before and after the hurricane

The houses of Emilio Cordoba in the aftermath of the hurricane and after the reconstruction (pictures taken from video on Telecubanacán, 02/16/2018).

Figure 4. 12: Revolutionary leaders and affective states

On the left, Emilio Cordoba during the works for reconstruction. In the foreground stands a huge banner with Raul Castro next to whom is written: "Yes, we can. Here was built the new settlement of Emilio Cordoba." On the right, an inhabitant of Emilio Cordoba kissing the image of Fidel Castro during the inauguration of the new settlement. Photos by Ramón Barreras Valdés published in Vanguardia 12/09/2017 published on Vanguardia 01/20/2018[79].

Figure 4. 13: The new house of culture

On the right, the new casa de la cultura. On the left, The Concoction's Theatre Company performing for the kids of Emilio Cordoba outside of the house of culture in May 2019 (photos taken by the author).

[79] Vanguardia 12/09/2017 (http://www.vanguardia.cu/villa-clara/10394-el-sol-renace-en-emilio-cordova) Vanguardia 01/20/2018 (http://www.vanguardia.cu/villa-clara/10652-mucha-voluntad-en-emilio-cordova)

Figure 4. 14: Silverio's tents in Emilio Cordoba

The Concoction bringing two days of performances to Emilio Cordoba in February 2018 as part of the project Silverio's tents (photos taken by the author)

Figure 4. 15: The reciprocation of the gift of cold water

The reciprocation of the gift of cold water. A bucked of iced water is brought to the artists of El Mejunje after the performance (photos taken by the author)

Conclusion: Enacting socialism, re/mediating hurricanes

The intensification of hurricanes in the Caribbean unveils the long histories of asymmetric interconnection which shape our unevenly shared modernity while rendering visible the localized practices, "affective states," and discourse which performatively re/constitute "the" Cuban nation-state, its national economy and its culture (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017; Gupta 1995, 2012; Appel 2017, 2019; Butler 2010). The 'sovereignty' of the Cuban socialist welfare state

within and outside of the island, in the broader translational network of capitalist nation-states, has relied on its capacity to remediate disasters by maintaining good social indicators. The socialist disaster-mitigation apparatus of the Cuban State has long been dealing with the threat of hurricanes and epidemics on the Island, often re-constituting the affective bond with and between its citizens in the felicitous remediation of such events (Salas 2020, 233). Since the 90s, this has been increasingly achieved thanks to the joint collaboration between the State and local communities. Emilio Cordoba was showcased as an example of socialist recovery in the wake of disasters, the local vice president wearing a guajiro hat actively involved in the work of reconstruction with the inhabitants of the community. The community was born anew in the wake of the hurricane, provided with a new house of culture in the center of the town along with houses and all the other needed services and infrastructures. The successful story of Emilio Cordoba was re/mediated through local newspapers, television, documentaries, and through Silverio's play: the Cuban Decameron. In his famous work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson stressed the role mass media, such as newspapers and television, played in the constitution of the imagined national community (1983). Public mediums play a central role not only in the constitution of the nation, and its heterogenous subjects, but of the state itself by circulating the "affective states" through which "the State" and notions of good citizenship are imagined and re/constituted (Laszczkowski and Reeves 2017, Stoler 2007, Gupta 2012). The re/mediation of hurricane Irma circulated affective images of tragic destruction and joyful reconstruction which re/constituted the relationship between citizens and the Revolutionary State as one of paternal provisioning and the relationship between citizens themselves as one of solidarity and collaboration in the work of recovery and rebuilding. From the Society Jose Marti in Havana to the Concoction in Santa Clara, I have evoked the multiplicity of forms of re/mediation of hurricanes through cultural and artistic institutions on the Island. Official mediums such as newspapers and television often reproduce gendered representations by highlighting masculine male figures and revolutionary militaries as protagonists of the work of reconstruction while

women and kids are the grateful vulnerable beneficiaries. Contrarily, Silverio's Cuban Decameron portrays a diversity of characters and sexual orientations indicative of the queering of Revolutionary ideology after the 90s which the Concoction helped in bringing about. At the Concoction as in the play, the experience of mutual exposure and storytelling transforms an heterogenous group of singular individuals into a 'big family,' a real rather than merely imaginative community which is not bound by their 'common being' but rather in the words of Nancy by their 'being-in-common' (1991).

The play *Aih Maria!* portrays the story of 'disaster socialism' at work. The lived experiences of shortages, waiting lines, and blackouts in the wake of the hurricane are juxtaposed with the disavowal of federal and local governments which implement 'shock doctrines,' or in the words of Bonilla 'trauma doctrines,' as to further privatize the economy by closing schools and opening the country to new financial entrepreneurs (Bonilla et al. 2019). *The Cuban Decameron* on the opposite portrays the story of 'disaster socialism' at work. Silverio, in its performance evocative of El comandante Fidel, and in the real action of solidarity carried towards the community, remediate the breaking down of electric infrastructures through improvised generators which bring affective objects of need, such as cold water or the possibility to communicate with families, to the victims of the hurricane. The work of artists such as Silverio, in line with the tradition of Communitarian Theatre, during the hardest moments of the Special Period, as in the wake of hurricanes or other disasters, re/mediate the breaking down of State's infrastructures, the here/not here (fort-da) of bread or electricity, by improvising solutions as to remediate for those lacking objects through the enacted play while opening "good enough" spaces to reconstitute through play, creativity, and imagination an illusion in the midst of tragedy and disillusionment (Winnicott 1973).

"Puro Sentimiento": re/mediating queer intimacies

Figure 5. 1: Shooting the documentary at Cloe's house I

Photo taken by the author

During my year in Santa Clara, I had the opportunity to observe (and participate in) three documentaries about the artists who regularly performed at the Concoction. Artists' re/mediations were often re/mediated by other mediums. The first documentary, *Los viejos*, The elders, was a Cuban-Spanish production portraying the everyday life of an elder generation of Santa Clara's artists, among them was Z. C., a recognized 70s-year-old singer of Filin (Feeling) who performed with Maga at the Concoction on Saturday's *peña*. This first documentary was screened at The Concoction in December 2018. As for the second one, an Argentinean-Cuban production did a documentary on La Trovuntivitis,[80] the collective of *trovadores* that perform at The Concoction every Thursday. The collective was born in 1997 in the Concoction's bar through improvised performances between a small group of musicians. Silverio proposed to the group to hold a peña every Thursday in the patio of the newly opened cultural space on the ruins of the Oriental's hotel. La Trovuntivitis grew in time, in members, in audience, and in fame. The

[80] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQ8BYZP9jBQ

Argentinean-Cuban documentary about the 22-year-old collective of trovadores was screened at the Concoction in January 2019 during El Longina, the annual international festival of trova in Santa Clara.[81] It is an extremely vibrant festival. Guitars and voices gather together, song after song, from early morning to late at night, through concerts across cultural institutions in the city and *descargas espontaneas* (spontaneous musical discharges) in Parque Vidal, after the last scheduled event has ended after midnight. Seated on the ground and on the square's benches, professional musicians and amateurs keep singing and improvising until dawn arrives and the last aphonic voices retreat for few hours of sleep as the flock of birds sleeping on the trees of Parque Vidal awaken the world to their everyday song's refrain.

In the case of the first two documentaries, I participated to their premier-in-context at the Concoction and in the weekly performances of the artists therein portrayed in their cultural home where they gather every week an elder and younger generation of Santa Clara's inhabitants. My participation in the third documentary was more intimate. The documentary, *Puro Sentimiento*, Pure feeling, portrays the love relationship between Esperanza and Maga, my fictive Cuban queer kinship, my Cuban mom and sister respectively. Feminist and queer theorist have stress how intimate feelings are "public feelings," since politics and history "manifest themselves (in everyday life) at the level of lived affective experience" (Cvetkovich 2011, 461). In this chapter, I evoke how scene of intimacy are imbued with 'public feelings,' and how in turn public atmospheres remediate intimate feelings. I look at the process of production of the documentary (rather than the final product which still has to be released) as to foreground the centrality of the non-normative kinship relationships established between the documentaries, Maga, Esperanza and me and the feelings shared, circulated, and re/mediated through it.

[81] The latter festival which spans for 4th days gathers trovadores from across the Island and has increasingly an international participation among performers and audiences, particularly from Argentina. Two famous Argentinean trovadores performed at the festival in 2019 and many Argentinean backpackers join the public. The members of the Trovuntivitis also have strong ties with Argentina. They have travelled multiple times to tournees the country with their songs. Often in groups of two or three while the rest of the collective performs back home.

The documentary and its protagonist

Sol, the 40-year-old director of the documentary, graduated from the ISA (Instituto Superior de Arte) in Havana in 2009 and started the project for her first feature film in 2015 in co-partnership with a friend from the ISA, who now resides in Mexico and is the producer of the documentary. At the beginning Sol wanted to do a documentary on three different singers of Filin (local Feeling) in Santa Clara. The title for the documentary "Puro Sentimiento" "Pure Feeling" is a common idiomatic expression that captures the intimate and passionate way of voicing distinctive of the Filin's genre.[82] Maga had a deep, full-bodied, powerful voice whose timbre she modulated as to convey a vast array of strong emotions. It reminded me of Mercedes Sosa, one of the Latin American singers whose voice I grew up with and whose songs Maga also loved and sang. Maga was the daughter of an Afro-Cuban musician who played in Los Fakires, an acclaimed group of traditional Cuban music of Santa Clara born in the 60s by experimenting with the harmonies of the Feeling and other genres in fashion at the time. Maga's father did not acknowledge the potential of Maga's voice nor her desire to sing. He did not want her to become an artist. Cloe, Maga's mother, who was a schoolteacher, also did not support that idea. She divorced Maga's father because he was excessively absent due to his national and international tours. Maga studied in a professional school for catering. She was in her late twenties, singing while setting the tables of the Hotel America, when Silverio and Esperanza heard her voice for the first time. Maga often told me she was lost during those years, before she found a home at the Concoction and with Esperanza. Silverio and Esperanza fell in love with Maga's voice and temperamental character and supported her in cultivating it. Silverio gave her a home at the Concoction where, since 2001, she became one of the regular singers in the open patio of the

[82] Filin is a Cuban, US–influenced, popular genre in between bolero, trova, and jazz of the late 1940s to the early 1960s. The word filin derives from the English word feeling.

queer cultural space. Esperanza became her art representative, mother, friend and romantic lover. She taught her how to dress and move on the stage, paid for her music classes, worked with her to develop a repertoire, helped her through the bureaucracy of becoming a professionally certified artist, and took care of procuring the gigs. They lived together for over 18 years, from performance to performance, from temporary house to temporary house for a period, until Esperanza built a home for them in her native rural community.

Esperanza proudly self-identified as a lesbian revolutionary guajira: "*Si no quedo en la historia, quedo en la geografía*!"[83] she would add with an ironic smile. She was born in 1963 from the love affair between a *gallego*[84] landowner and a prostitute. She never met her mother and grew up in the house of her uncle. In her 20s she became the mother of 4 kids, two boys and two girls, and raised them in the midst of the Special Period. She had the children with a *guajiro* she did not love, but who was dearly in love with her. She was honest with him about her homosexuality, which he accepted. She kept having love relationships with women while raising the kids with him who was a good father. Maga, as Esperanza told me uncountable times, was THE love of her life. Since the two met in Esperanza's late 30s, they had been deeply intertwined in each other's lives. In their 18 years together, through her performances at the Concoction, in other cultural venues in Santa Clara, Matanzas, and occasionally in Havana, Maga had built an artistic trajectory and had come to be known and well-loved in Santa Clara as "*La diva temperamental*," a temperamental diva with a passionate voice like Elena Burke and other famous singers of romantic boleros in the 60s. Maga had the soul of an endless *quinceañera*, with the deep history of a woman in her mid 40s.

It would take us half an hour at least to walk the few blocks from Cloe's house, Maga's mother, to the Concoction, where Maga performed every Monday and Saturday afternoon. Maga would stop to talk with friends and strangers alike, welcoming everyone *a corazón abierto*, with

[83] If I do not endure in history, I will endure in geography.

[84] Of Spanish descent

open heart, one intense expression of emotion after the other. Sol selected Maga as one of the protagonists for her documentary on Santa Clara's singers of *Filin* in 2015. As she got closer to Maga and got to know Esperanza, she fell in love with the couple and the documentary project changed into a story centered on them and their love relationship. In the words of Sol: "the story of love that tells the documentary is tragic and at the same time endearing. There was no other way for me to become closer and intimate with the protagonists than by trying to understand, handing me over to what was revealing to me. I believe that unveiling, that undressing, that intimacy accompanied by drama, captures the essential spirt of *filin*." (2020, interview)

Growing intimate together in filin

I grew intimate with Esperanza and Maga in time. It is in great part thanks to the *relación de cariño* (loving relationship) with them that my project ended up being situated in Santa Clara, at the Concoction. My queer fictive family was the first to introduce me to Santa Clara's rhythms: from the everyday struggle of multiple waiting lines, to the changing atmospheres of the cyclical celebrations of the city; from the roaring *motonetas* speeding at the Concoction's doors, to the heterogeneous soundscapes of the weekly musical encounters at the cultural center; from the sudden breaking-down of the sky in intense, roaring downpours, to Esperanza's favorite, the singing birds of Parque Vidal, which according to her story had been territorializing the beginning and end of the day, *entre la ciudad y el campo*[85], for over 200 years (Lefebvre 2013)
I met Esperanza and Maga a year after Sol did in 2016, while waiting at the UNEAC in Havana. After visiting them in Santa Clara, I kept in contact with them via email during the year that followed. In one of those emails, they told me enthusiastically about Sol and the documentary she was making about them. Sol spent two months with Esperanza and Maga in Summer 2017, when she shot the most substantial parts of the documentary. I traveled to Cuba the following

[85] Between the city and the countryside

September and spent with Esperanza and Maga the immediate aftermaths of Hurricane Irma. We shared stories, songs, laughs and tears, and small fried fish that we would catch together during an improvised excursion to a nearby pond with some of the families and kids of Esperanza's rural community. In that occasion our fictive kinship was formalized by Esperanza through the following story. Esperanza was as a *gallina* (chicken) with many *pollitos* (chicks). I was *pollito* number 7; Sol was number 6; Maga was number 5, and she occupied an absolute privileged position after Esperanza's 4 biological children. Esperanza's community also came together to help each other in the work of recovery in the wake of the hurricane. Yet, compared to the showcased Emilio Cordoba, it received less material support and media/artistic attention, and its recovery was achieved by relying more heavily on networks of solidarity.

I first met Sol in Havana in August 2018. It was two weeks after landing in Cuba for my year-long temporary residency to conduct fieldwork. Esperanza asked me to go to Sol's house in Centro Havana to get an antibiotic for her one-year-old grandson, the son of Ernesto, her first born son. The antibiotic was not available in Santa Clara at that time and Ernesto's son needed it with urgency. As Esperanza would often remark, your extended social relations, your fictive kinship, were central to *resolver* (resolve, remedy, sort out) those everyday crises. On that occasion, Esperanza called me and Sol, her daughters, asking for our conjoint help. As daughters, we both responded to Esperanzas's call. Sol had an open bottle of the missing antibiotic in the fridge, a leftover from the last illness of her daughter. The antibiotic was also now absent from Havana's pharmacies, and too expensive and difficult to find in the black market. I could bring the nearly-full bottle of the antibiotic. I was about to go to Santa Clara for a few days for the celebrations for la Verbena[86] and the 92nd birthday of the recently deceased

[86] La Verbena is a celebration held every year in Santa Clara on the 12th of August, the day before the birthday of Fidel Castro. La Verbena was originally a religious festival for La Virgen de Santa Clara de Asis. This traditional religious festivity took place discontinuously over the colonial and republic (neocolonial) period. The Revolution suspended the traditional festival for many years as did with any other religious manifestation. In 1989, in correspondence with the 300 years since the foundation of Santa Clara, the government 'revitalize' this tradition and institutionalize the festivity which take place every year at the vigil of the celebrations for the birthday of the Father of the Revolution.

Fidel Castro. I was planning to move permanently to Santa Clara in October after finalizing my permit for temporary residency in Havana. When I met Esperanza at the bus terminal, I was struck by how much weight she had loss since I had last seen her. On our travel to Maga's mother's house in cart, Esperanza started sharing with me how difficult that year had been for her and Maga. Maga's brother had "died of a horrible death." After 19 years fighting against diabetes, his situation got worse. It had started with a problem in the kidneys and then progressively had precipitated elsewhere. Esperanza and Maga had moved to Cloe's house to help Maga's mother to take care of the brother. They cleaned him, assisted him, and fed him. There was a moment, Esperanza told me, when he let himself die. "I am tired of fighting," he told her and stopped eating. Esperanza had lost all appetite as well. "I can't eat any more, I was the one cleaning him during the last days…I can still feel that smell of death approaching." Esperanza's one-year-old grandson had also been close to death. He had been hospitalized for over a month due to several respiratory blocks for an unidentified allergy. He was still recovering at that moment and needed the antibiotic that I was bringing to him. It looked like Esperanza was also not doing well. She had a rash on her arm. I inquired with her about it. "It is the city," she told me "the city kills me. I am missing my ranchito in the community. But I can't leave Maga alone. And Maga can't leave her mom alone right now either."

The celebrations for La Verbena that year were imbued with the thick, warm, moisty air that *presiente*[87] *a la tormenta* (foreshadows the storm). We walked the ghostly streets of calle Gloria, where the Verbena generally took place. Only a small group of people were gathered around the trucks dispensing beer, and a couple more were listening to the band playing on the stage.

Esperanza commented gravely on what she was seeing:

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[87] I use the Spanish word pre*sentir* (presage, foreshadow), related to the word pre*sentimiento* (feeling). They both derive from the Spanish verb: sentir (to sense, to feel), and the prefix pre (before). The Spanish verb highlight the relationship between feelings and temporality. "Presentir la tormenta," to sense ahead the storm, to have a feeling of the approaching storm.

El descontento esta en las calles, disappointment is on the streets (…)

Maga nodded in response:

> This had never been seen before, so few people for La Verbena en calle Gloria.

Cloe, Maga's mother, had observed with some relief the haunted atmosphere of the festivity from the open porch of her house, two blocks away from Calle Gloria. In the previous years, she had to close herself inside the house because people were drinking and celebrating on the streets and even on her porch until late at night.

We returned to Cloe's house to have lunch with her and a cousin who was visiting from Havana. The moisty, warm, heavy air we had been immersed into started lifting as buckets of water poured from the sky. "The sky cries when someone big dies," commented Esperanza, feeling the weather along the approximating birthday of the departed Revolutionary leader. When the rain stopped, we went to the Concoction. At the beginning it was quite empty but progressively people started arriving. We sat on the bench of the open patio with Esperanza, Maga, and Laura, Maga's cousin from Havana. Laura started remembering The Father of the Revolution.

> He was our commander, our leader, our father. With him we felt sheltered and protected and now we are alone, we are orphans. People tell Fidel had been to the future and from there he had seen it all. If you read the things that Fidel told a long time ago, they are more actual than ever. He was a visionary. But we will not forget him. We will never forget him.

More people gathered in the Concoction's patio and the show of *transformistas* presented by M. Toledo started. The colorful and shiny performance of the drag queens was intertwined with commentaries and videos on the New Constitution, the text of which had just been released and whose discussions at the grassroot level had started that day. As Toledo remarqued:

> We will have to vote for this new constitution, so it is important to read it, understand it, and discuss it.

He projected a video of Mariela Castro, the niece of Fidel Castro, advocating in the parliament for the legalization of same sex marriage as contemplated in the Article 68 of the new constitutional text. "We will get married!" exclaimed Esperanza with a big smile looking at Maga, who reciprocated in her enthusiasm. Esperanza felt reinvigorated after the show at the Concoction, which partially compensated from the disappointment she had sensed on the streets. Yet, there was one thing she felt it was missing from the show:

> At midnight, which marked the beginning of Fidel's birthday, we would always sing the Cuban national anthem. I was born the 3rd of November of 1963 and since I have memory, we always song the anthem. This is the first time we have not done it.

The changing atmospheres of the annual celebrations of Fidel's birthday, which two years after his death, did not feel exactly the same, was the first among many instances in which Esperanza voiced a change in feelings in her embodied sense of Cubania and socialism. Maga would often echoed Esperanza's feelings with her own distinctive way of voicing *filin*.[88]

In October, I moved into a private room for rent that Esperanza and Maga had found for me in the house next to Cloe's house, where Esperanza and Maga were living at the time. We would engage in hours-long conversation in the morning, while drinking a cup of coffee (with only a hint of *chicharo*[89]) or a glass of juice of mango or guayaba. We would often eat together lunch or dinner. Due to her high cholesterol and risk for diabetes, Cloe had been given through

[88] In this respect Hanna Garth has argued that the everyday struggle to acquire food and other basic necessities and the temporal experience of "anticipation, inversion, and rejuvenation" of cyclical celebratory events (e.g. Carnaval, to private birthday parties, to street festivals) are co-constitutive of the lived experiences of 'Cubanidad' and socialism in Cuba (2019, 801).

[89] The most famous brands of Cuban coffee (Cubita, Café Serrano, or Café Molido) are not economically accessible for purchase by el *Cubano de a pie*, ordinary Cuban. Good quality coffee is often mixed with other cheaper substitutes. In the case of Cuba this is *chicharo* (pea). I have shared many coffees with Cubans over my stay that in their disappointed exclamations were *'puro chicharo'* (pure pea). For my coffee with Esperanza and Maga I would bring some Cubita that they would mix with a cheaper quality of coffee (which might have had some chicharo).

la Libreta de Abastecimiento[90] a small quota of fish per month. Maga and Esperanza tried to cook it for her in the most succulent ways. Yet, she would often disdain their efforts and insist on eating some fried croquettes, *arroz y frijoles,*[91] cake, or an ice-cream from Copelia. Taking care of Cloe was not an easy task. Maga would fervently complain with Esperanza and me about her mother's whims. Cloe did not allow her to clean the house or flush the floors with water at least every two days, and it was difficult to get her to take a shower. Cloe had become extremely afraid of being left alone in the house, which felt ghostly to her, particularly at night, after the death of her second son. To respond to her mother's feelings, Maga had reduced her performances that year to two regular peñas at the Concoction at 6:00PM on Mondays and Saturdays. She had to find someone else to stay with Cloe in her place in the few occasions when she performed later at night at the Concoction or in another venue of the city. Esperanza stayed at home with Cloe on those occasions. She would ask me to take care of Maga during the performance replacing Esperanza in her role as Maga's *represen-tonta,*[92] as she would say ironically. Maga's brother participated in the labor of care for the mother, but way less substantially than Maga did. Yet, he was highly acknowledged by Cloe for every small gesture of care, unlike Maga, which would deeply upset Esperanza. During the epidemics of dengue in November, I would greet Esperanza, Maga, and Cloe at 7:00 AM on the sidewalk. Then we would wait for the public fumigation of all the houses of the block to be over. I with Maga, half-asleep, would fully awaken only after reentering Cloe's house to put a collective Moka pot on the stove. Esperanza, who was vigilantly awake since 5:00 am, would engage the fumigation's waiting time by voicing her disappointment:

[90] Rationing in Cuba is organized by the government by means of a *Libreta de Abastecimiento* ("Supplies booklet") assigned to every individual. The system establishes the amounts and frequency of subsidized rations each person, according to age and need, is allowed to receive through the system.

[91] Rice and beans

[92] Esperanza was Maga's *representante artística*, Artist Representative. Instead of represen-*tante*, she would say represen-*tonta. Tonta* in Spanish means silly.

> The government is fumigating all the houses and they fine you if they find a source of stagnant water in your home. But THIS puddle, that is months that is here in front of the house, the government is not doing anything about it. **I** am taking care of putting luz brillante (kerosene) in it everyday.

Esperanza's frequent critical remarks towards the government were an expression of her "revolutionary feeling" rather than indicative of disaffiliation with revolutionary politics (see also Holbraad 2014). Despite having suffered from State repression as a lesbian in her youth, Esperanza was deeply attached to the figure of Fidel and the promises of the people's Revolution. She shared with me the story after getting back into Cloe's house. The three of us seated on the bed in Maga's room while taking turns to sip coffee from a shared pink plastic cup.

> There was a time, when I was young, that I had a partner in Havana. The father of my kids was aware of it. I would get paid the salary and I would go for one week to Havana to stay with her. One night we went out, we got a little drunk and when we returned back home, we hang up a banner from our balcony that said: "Las lesbianas también son cubanas." "Lesbians are also Cubans" Well, I do not know, but I think that no more than 10-15 minutes pass by and the policemen knocked at our door. They put both of us under arrest for one week. There was a lot of repression against homosexuals at that time in Cuba, I lived through it. But I am Fidelista. I was, am, and will keep being Fidelist.
>
> "Why?" I inquire.
>
> Because look, when hurricane Flora came, Fidel was there together with the people. Fidel said it was a socialist Revolution "de los humildes, con los humildes y para los humildes" (of the poor, with the poor, and for the poor) and it was true. He was always there with the people. Not like Miguel Diaz Canel who keeps traveling abroad with the first lady, with the best of hairstyles, dresses, and a PURSE from a fancy brand which costs MILLIONS. Fidel never did that. Miguel Diaz Canel has just visited Santa Clara. He only went to visit the dairy industry, and he went to the market the only day it was well furnished. So, he came to the conclusion that everything was fine. Fidel was not like that; he would wear the rubber boots and join the campesinos in the middle of nowhere. It would take a lot for a kid to die of Dengue in the 80s …and look now! It is the biggest Dengue epidemic in Santa Clara since 1881. Since then, we did not have an epidemic of hemorrhagic dengue in this city. There are so many cases that this is not an epidemic anymore, it feels a PANDEMIC. A friend of mine who is a nurse has told me that hospitals are full, that they have put mattresses on the floors, and no one is doing or saying anything, they only published a small article in the newspaper. I got tired of asking that they come to get rid of the puddle. Sometimes for this road passes the Director of the Provincial Party. When I see

> his car, I will do like this ((making sign with her hands to stop)) and I will show him the puddle and tell him he has to send someone to get rid of it, that I am TIRED of putting kerosene every day. [93]

The 'puddle's' struggle was one among many struggles that Esperanza voiced and engaged into during that year. She was a '*luchadora*,' a fighter, as she always remarked after making some very insightful critique on the unjustness of the intensification of the people's everyday struggle. In November, the flour for bread disappeared along with other basic goods. Esperanza took care of waiting for the *Libreta's* milk on behalf of the elders and kids of Cloe's block, sometimes for several hours, sometimes until late in the night, sometimes for days. It made her furious that the elders were waiting for milk and bread while Miguel Diaz-Canel was travelling abroad with the fancy purse of the much-hated first lady. More than anything, Esperanza cared for the struggles of el *campesino*. As food was becoming increasingly scarce in Santa Clara, like in the 90s, the countryside was the safest place to be. Despite the constant remarks through official channels on the need to increase agricultural food production, for Esperanza the State was not incentivizing el campesino to produce. The new fiscal laws published in November on the *Gaceta Oficial* were punishing the farmers unjustly. Esperanza left Cloe's house for a couple of days with the newsprint *Gaceta* in hand. She went by horse to inform the rural families, house by house, while advising them to declare less than they made:

"The truth is more powerful than lies, but sometimes we have to repay the State in kind."

In May, she disappointedly observed the mango stockpile rotting on the grounds of her rural community while expensive imported canned mango pulps were sold in the store in CUC. Esperanza told me she had gone to the Provincial Party to complain about it, carrying photos of

[93] Esperanza, Maga, and I got Dengue that year. I got it in Havana in September, before moving to Santa Clara in October. Esperanza and Maga got it soon after I moved to Santa Clara. None of us was infected with the hemorrhagic type and despite the deep bone pain, fever, and bodily weakness afterwards, we all made it through it. I shared with them the leftover of my box of *duralgina (dipyrona)*, a locally produced antipyretic and analgesic, that I had bought for 2 CUP at the State's pharmacy in Havana but was lacking at that moment in Santa Clara.

the rotten mangos as evidence. The party had sent a truck to collect the mangoes to send them to the Provincial processing industry and had employed the youth of her community to keep harvesting them. That made Esperanza extremely happy, as she told me in multiple occasions, for she felt empty without engaging in those 'revolutionary' struggles.

The growing shortages reminiscent of the Special Period and the emergence of the most intense dengue epidemic since 1981 changed the atmospheres of the cyclical celebration, among the many felt experiences that converged to consolidate a perception that things were going backwards, rather than forward. Seated at the dinner table, Maga, Esperanza, and Cloe often shared their feelings of disappointment towards the ailing state of the Revolution.

> Esperanza: It's a PSYCHOLOGICAL WAR the one we are living through. The poor old lay who was waiting for the milk to be delivered yesterday used my same words, "it's a psychological war the one we are living through." And look that people die for this Revolution, man and women, because a lot of women fought for it too. And for what? *Es PA ATRAS, y PA ATRAS* (backwards and backwards). We lived through some very hard Periods. The Special Period was really hard, but people were happy, we would laugh at our misfortunes, not like now. Fidel appeared daily in the public television or radio to explain to everyone how they had to make *casabe* (cassava bread) in the absence of wheat flour. Fidel would guide on what to do, he would provide the tools to do it and he would set the example. He fostered our wit and creativity. Not like now, you have to be drunk or crazy to survive.
>
> Maga: Oh…yes, yes, OH…All the money collected from the farmer's market on Saturday and Sundays, they say it is for Cultura, to pay the artists of this country. It is 1 CUP per person, and hundreds of people go to the market over the weekend. All that money… and it is since August, not since July…August, September, October, November, December ((while counting with her hands)), SIX MONTHS WITHOUT PAYMENT. *Y que viva la Revolución!* No, no, *y no*… this is not Revolution!
>
> Cloe: What makes me angry is to have worked so hard for this Revolution and get to an elder age and to still be struggling more than ever. For 12 years I served in the *Federación Mujeres Cubanas* and for 26 uninterrupted years I worked in the *escuelas de campo* (field schools). I would go to work there, and I often had to leave my kids with someone else to do it…and look now, these days the elders and those who are sick do not get a little of milk or a bread, *ni un buchito de leche ni un pan.*
>
> Maga: You should tell it to Miguel Diaz Canel…

Cloe: Yes, Yes, I will tell him. I've known him since he was a child since he was born in Santa Clara. We have met during the Party meetings and I am friends with his mom….and look that I was thinking to open again a restaurant (paladar) in our porch like we had for a time. Now, with these new laws, I have to figure out how and if it will be possible…

Esperanza: now for the *cuentaproprista* (self-employed) you have to deposit a percentage of your profits in advance to pay for State's taxes in case something happens to you, or in case you leave the country illegally.

Cloe: That is fine…if it is for paying taxes that is fine, so taxes are granted.

Esperanza: Yes, and taxes in these countries help pay for doctors, education …and the PURSE of the first lady…

Cloe: and we do not have a bread, because of the embargo

Maga: No, it is not the fault of the embargo, it is the fault of …the shameless individual who is governing this country

Esperanza: Yes…but the Revolution has no fault in it.

Maga: No, no, the Revolution no, the ones who have the fault is…the shameless who…after people vote for them, they just entertain themselves going here and there, and who cares about the people. I have there the proof of the months they have not being paying me.

Cloe: *Niñas*, Marti said that our wine is sour, but it's our wine!

Esperanza: Do you want more cucumber salad? ((looking at me)) Apart from that we only have some rice with an improvised *salsita* (sauce). It is a lean period—do you know that you can make bread from rice?

Cloe: Do we have any dessert?

Esperanza: ((with irony)) You are a revolutionary woman, do not complain and drink a glass with water and sugar—don't you see that even the milk for the elders is missing?

Cloe: ((smiling at Esperanza's joke)) What bothers me is to have worked so hard for this Revolution and arrive to an elder age and have to struggle so much.

Curating affects on the scene: from Cloe's house to the birds of Parque Vidal

The photograph which opens this chapter was taken in March 2019, during the filming of what was supposed to be the coda for the documentary.[94] In the picture, Sol was 6 months pregnant with Santiago, her second son. She was trying to gather the images for the documentary's finale before her son was born. After his birth, it would have been extremely difficult for her to participate in the day-long shootings that a documentary requires. She was also feeling anxious about the time that had passed since the filming of the documentary had commenced in Summer 2017. The lives of Esperanza and Maga had changed a great deal in the two years since she had started the project. In the first phase of the production, Esperanza and Maga were living in Esperanza's rural community. After the death of Maga's brother, in March 2018, the couple had moved to live in Maga's mother's house. At the time of shooting the coda of the documentary in March, for which Maga was really excited, Esperanza had moved back to live in her rural *ranchito.* Maga was divided between Cloe's house and Esperanza's house, two women, two loves. She loved the *ranchito* in the community and Esperanza. She also felt strongly her daughterly obligation to take care of Cloe, her mother. Cloe had agreed to allow Sol to shoot part of the images for Maga's documentary in her own home and to briefly appear in one of the scenes. She had done it with some hesitancy, as she generally did not like appearing on the

[94] It conceals many ghosts, ghosts of the past and future, those who are no longer, those who are not yet, one ghostly absent presence *punctuates* me in particular every time I encounter the image after Maga's unexpected departure on the 1st of January of 2020 (Barthes 1980). Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* distinguishes between two elements of a photograph, the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* refers to the historical, social, and cultural meanings of the image. It is the "average affect" evoked by the photograph. The *punctum* is the "element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me (…) an accident which pricks me (but also bruises-me, is poignant to me)." While the studium provokes in the viewer an "unconcerned desire": *I like/I don't like*; the punctum pricks the viewer provoking strong emotional reaction: *I love/I don't love* (1980, 26-27). The book was written shortly after Barthes' mother's death. The second part of the book contains an extended reflection on the relationship between photography and Death. For Barthes the *noema* (the essence) of photography is that captures "what-has-been." The photograph captures a moment in time, immobilizes its referent, testifies that he "was" alive and therefore suggests (but does not necessarily say) that he is no longer, while at the same time immortalizing her in the physical medium (1980, 87). The "that-has-been" of the photograph, which relates directly to death, reveals the ephemeral nature of life and calls us to recognize the singularity of existence.

screen or being photographed. Esperanza did not like being filmed as well. It made her very anxious. Yet, she was happy to do it for Maga. She was also really excited for her documentary. Sol had asked Esperanza to come to Cloe's house to capture a scene of intimacy between the three women. It was the only time I filmed myself,[95] filming the scene of intimacy being filmed, despite having been participating in those intimate interactions for over 6 months.

Action

Esperanza and Maga are seated in Cloe's kitchen. They start discussing what Maga should be singing for her performance at the Concoction and how to renew her repertoire. They complain about the unreliable, arrhythmic payments by the *Empresa de la Musica*. Maga asks Esperanza how they should strategize to get paid for the month.

> Esperanza: Food for today, hunger for tomorrow! Look, daughter, we should start thinking who we could ask for a small loan …given how things are going…
>
> Maga: The lines are worse than ever; they say that few bottles of cooking oil arrived to the Ferolana and it was a massacre.
>
> Esperanza: I told you that something like this would happen

Cloe enters the scene asking about Maga's forthcoming concert at the Art Museum. Esperanza gives her the chair where she was sitting and sits on the ground nearby. Esperanza explains she is taking care of organizing the concert and has called Sergei, the Provincial Director of Culture, to make sure everything is in place. He has reassured her that they will have allocated electricity for the concert. Maga and Esperanza move into talking about the technical problems with the audio, how to better organize for the performance, who will stay with Cloe when Maga is gone.

[95] At other times, with their permission, I sometimes audio recorded our conversations—but the camera was an instrument of mediation quite different (and more intensely felt) than the audio recorder.

Esperanza: I am feeling short of breath (…) the air comes in but it's hard for me to pass it through.

Maga: Are you taking the medicines?[96]

Esperanza: No, then your body gets used to it, and it is a problem when there are shortages. I will not take medicines. Native Americans did not used medicines.

Maga: But you are not Native American, take them for at least one week…

Esperanza: No, I am Cuban…half gallega and half native American. And you better get used to live like Native Americans that given how things are going … I am thinking about all the people that in the 70s and 80's from the countryside came to the city. I think that in 2020 and 2021, all the city will migrate to the countryside. The sparrows have been the first. The sparrow was not a bird of the countryside; it was a bird of the city. They did like this lately: Phew! Phew! (…)
((her hand gesturing, in a series of repetitive outward directed motions, to a taking off, an escape, a departure))
(…) Phew! To the countryside!

Maga: I will be coming this weekend; I will ask my brother if he can stay with my mother…

Cloe agrees to the idea and start conversing with Maga about a neighbor who is having problems with his wife. Esperanza appears more and more tired and worried on the screen.

Figure 5. 2: Shooting the documentary at Cloe's house II

[96] Maga is referring to the medicines for the heart. Esperanza had high pressure and had suffered a small heart attack the previous year.

Sol, who had been carefully observing the images from behind the camera's screen, called for a break. She also had been noticing the worry and exhaustion shadowing Esperanza's face on the screen.

Sol: Let's do the next set of filming in Parque Vidal, at sunset…

Esperanza: *Es la hora de los pajaritos*; It is bird's time!
((with an animated smile))

We walked together towards Parque Vidal at sunset. Birds were flying into the central square, marking with their songs the refrain of the end of the day. The dark cloud enveloping Esperanza started dissipating as we became immersed in that new soundscape. Esperanza and Maga sit on one of the benches of Parque Vidal, eating an ice cream. It had been difficult for Esperanza and Maga during that year to enjoy moments like this, sitting freely in the central square listening to the music of birds followed by Santa Clara's band. When the band started playing, after sunset, Sol felt the moment had come to start shooting again.

Figure 5. 3: Shooting the documentary at Parque Vidal

Esperanza and Maga appeared again on the screen. Wrapped up in the lively atmosphere of Parque Vidal, at night, they are conversing and laughing out loud. At the end of the shooting day, Esperanza was invigorated:

"Thank you, daughters, I was in need of this…this feeling!"

The change in atmosphere, from Cloe's house to the birds of Parque Vidal, had visibly lifted the exhaustion and tiredness afflicting Esperanza earlier that day within the enclosed intimacy of the domestic space so much burden with the public feelings of the everyday struggle. The public atmospheres of the central square with its birds, band, and vibrant public had affectively remediate Esperanza's feelings.

Coda

The documentary was at the *editing* phase by the end of my fieldwork in September 2019. It was supposed to premier in 2020 in Mexico (where one of the producers lives), Havana (where Sol lives), and The Concoction of Santa Clara, the 'artistic and cultural' home of Esperanza and Maga and so many others. Maga's tragic departure, her final bow, on the 1st of January of 2020 due to an unexpected aneurysm and the subsequent arrival of Covid-19 have delayed its completion and release. When and if the documentary will reach the public, Maga will not be there to watch it, nor will she have the possibility to travel for the first time abroad to Mexico, for its premiere, as she had dreamed and hoped to do. Sol would like to gather a new coda for the documentary, which captures Esperanza's life, now that Maga is gone. The Covid-19 pandemic prevented Sol from doing so, just as it prevented me to return to Santa Clara for a couple of weeks, in the spring of 2020, to mourn and remember Maga together with Esperanza. I had already bought the ticket. Esperanza had asked me to bring candles, which were in shortage. We would have brought flowers and candles to the Concoction, to adorn Maga's tomb at the roots of the Framboyán in the open patio where the ashes of Maga had been dispersed. Esperanza had a suitcase full of things and pictures of Maga, and she had asked me to go over it

with her. We were not able to carry out any of those mourning rituals that we had envisioned together. We have been working through Maga's absence at a distance, talking via WhatsApp every two or three weeks. Esperanza tells me she still feels Maga's presence even though she knows she is gone. On what would have been Maga's 47th birthday, the past 2nd of July 2021, she called me in tears, as the powerful singing voice of Maga rang out in the background. As a distant daughter, listening together to Maga's songs through the unstable connection of a WhatsApp call made me feel powerless. I communicated with Sol via WhatsApp on more than one occasion since Maga's death. Esperanza often asks us, her daughters, to give each other updates about her, or to better coordinate how to support her. We never talked much about the documentary. We shared our feelings about Maga's unexpected departure, the feeling of guilt for not having been there when it happened—maybe we could have done something to prevent it? Maybe we would have sensed it ahead of its coming? Maga was so worried about Esperanza and Cloe's health, what about her health? We shared in our feelings of sorrow at her unexpected departure. Maga was so full of life that it is still hard for me to comes to terms with the reality that she is gone, just as it is for Esperanza.

Esperanza called me the day before the 17th of May 2021, the Cuban national day of *el campesino* and the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. She was mourning Maga deeply, and she wanted to do something to remember her. She was planning to go to the Concoction to bring flowers to Maga, but everything was on lock-down due to Covid-19. There would have been no march against homophobia that year. She asked me to share something on social media, to do something to celebrate Maga.

> I trust you; you will know what to do...maybe some of the pictures you took during the Alfombra Roja at the Concoction.

I look through the images I had captured of La Alfombra Roja in December 2018. The event is a reterritorialization of the Hollywood Red Carpet, a long red carpet laid out on the street in front of the Concoction; all queers in Santa Clara are invited to walk along the red carpet while

receiving applause, ovations, and photographs from the audience as if celebrities in Hollywood. Maga and Esperanza were the only lesbian couple to walk the red carpet that year. It had made them extremely proud to do so. We had spent a week planning their appearance. I had given my black jeans to Esperanza, who was missing a good trouser, and I helped Maga do her nails and make-up. I also took pictures and videos of them, as we were leaving Cloe's home and as they were walking the carpet. Now I returned back to those images and looked through them until I found the one that arrests me, stops my heart for a beat, the beat afterwards accelerating its rhythmic motion.

Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* distinguishes between two elements of a photograph, the studium and the punctum. The studium refers to the historical, social, and cultural meanings of the image—to the "average affect" evoked by the photograph. The punctum is the "element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me, an accident which pricks me (but also bruises-me, is poignant to me)." While the studium provokes in the viewer an "unconcerned desire": I like/I don't like; the punctum pricks the viewer provoking strong emotional reaction: I love/I don't love (1980, 26-27). Barthes wrote the book shortly after his mother's death. Through an extended reflection on the relationship between photography and death, Barthes suggests that the *noema* (the essence) of photography is what captures "what-has-been." The photograph captures a moment in time, immobilizes its referent, testifies that she "was" alive and therefore suggests (but does not necessarily say) that she is no longer, while at the same time immortalizing her in the physical medium (1980, 87). The "that-has-been" of the photograph, which relates directly to death, reveals the ephemeral nature of life and calls us to recognize the singularity of existence.

Figure 5. 4: Desfilando en *la Alfombra Roja*

Walking the red Carpet, December 2019, photo taken by the author.

It is the singularity of Maga's smile, her vibrant laugh that I see and hear resounding in my mind as I encounter the image. It is the singularity of the love between Esperanza and Maga which pricks me. I shared the image on Facebook, as Esperanza had requested, together with the video I had taken of them walking the red carpet. Esperanza called me on the 18th:

> Thank you, *hija*, I knew you were not going to let me down. A lot of people have seen your post and they have reached to me

Feeling Esperanza's happiness made me feel happy as well.

Afterwards: Re/mediating Covid-19

As I addressed in chapter one, the post-Fidel socialist update during 2018-2019 was affectively experienced as a return of the haunting ghosts of the 90s (Derrida 1994, Gordon 2008). Before the pandemic arrived, the "conjunctural crises" brought about by the recrudescence of the USA embargo, the crisis in Venezuela, and the right-turn in Latin America, had already put the Cuban economy, highly dependent on exportations of food and other basic goods, under high stress. The arrival of the pandemic in 2020 and the consequent closure of borders to tourism, one of the country's main sources of hard currency, exacerbated the economic crisis. Shortages and thus waiting lines intensified during the pandemic while the virus affectively resignified those waiting lines as sites of possible deadly contagion and growing inequality. As some had to stand in line exposing themselves to the virus, others could afford to procure essential goods otherwise or had access to the new Tiendas en MLC (*Moneda Libremente Convertible*, Free Convertible Currency) thanks to remittances from family or friends abroad (Salas 2020). Since the 90s these differences have been shaped by gender and race as women and Blacks have less access to hard currency (Brotherton 2012, 32, 196; Allen 2011 119-121; Garth 2020, 33-35). The enhanced experience of struggle and waiting for basic goods, the drastic inflation brought about by the currency update, and the increase in prices of public services brought about on July 11, 2021 the biggest massive public protests in Cuba since 1994. As I have argued in chapter three, the 'sovereignty' of the Cuban socialist welfare state, within and outside of the island, has relied on its capacity to mediate and remediate disasters (such as hurricanes and epidemics) while maintaining social welfare (as reflected in excellent social indicators). I have shown, through the story of recovery of Emilio Cordoba in the wake of Irma, how the work of recovery and rebuilding in the wake of the hurricane was achieved through the collaboration between the State, local communities and artists. In this conclusion, I show how the sovereignty of the Cuban nation state was re/constituted and challenged in the wake of Covid-19. The successful response to the first wave

of the pandemic and the state-run project of production of a national vaccine worked to reassert the sovereignty of the nation-state. Yet, the latter was contested and challenged in the wake of the second wave of the virus which intertwined with (and exponentially intensified) the economic and political problems detailed above, exposing the inherent contradictions of the national state project of sovereignty and socialist egalitarian distribution. As I detail in the following paragraphs, artists played central roles in both of these processes, in re/mediating the response to the virus and in circulating diverging patriotic feelings and visions for the future of the Cuban nation-state.

The difficult 'conjuncture' started in 2019 and culminated with the pandemic has manifested the Specters of the 90s and brought to light the dis-juncture between State's rhetoric and the lived experience of Cubans, between Cubans themselves and their different visions for the future of the Island. Through the Concoction's response to the second wave of the pandemic I conclude by suggesting that through the open political community practiced within the cultural center new possibilities for justice[97] might be emerging.

The first wave of the pandemic in Cuba

The first cases of Covid-19 in Cuba were reported on March 11th of 2020 when three Italian tourists coming from the Lombardy region tested positive for the virus.
Cuba implemented a lockdown by March 20, closed its borders 4th days later. The closure of

[97] Following Derrida in *Specters of Marx*, the spectral, or ghostly, manifests itself in moments that do not belong to time, as the linking of modalized presents (past present, actual present, future present). The Spectral appears when time is out of joint and it is precisely this temporal dis-junction which opens the space for the realization that "things are not be going well between us" (1994, 26). For Derrida, it is particularly when things are going badly, in the dis-juncture between generations, between particular individuals, or between different national projects that the possibility for ethics in the form of *justice* emerges. He relies on a notion of justice, inspired by Levinas, that has nothing to do with the moral law of the Father, or getting things right, or "the symmetric and synchronic accountability of subjects." Justice refers to the "incalculability of the gift and singularity of the an-economic ex-position to others" (1994, 26).

borders brought an abrupt halt to tourism, one of the country's primary sources of hard currency. At the same time, a revolutionary industry, medicine and biotechnology, became central in sustaining the economy and powering the response to the virus. At home and abroad, post-revolutionary Cuban identity has been bound up with health. On the Island, the early revolutionary period brought an unprecedented improvement in the everyday lives of huge sectors of the population that had been previously deprived of basic health and educational services. Since the early 1960s, Cuban leaders envisioned teachers, artists, and physicians as soldiers in Cuba's historic struggle towards national development and freedom from imperialist dependence (Chomsky et. Al 2003; Fagen 1969; Moore 2006; Brotherton 2008). Cuba's revolutionary government created an integrated national health care system of universal provisioning under the full responsibility of the state with outstanding results in decreasing infant mortality rates, increasing life-expectancy at birth, and detecting and controlling the spread of infectious disease. Moreover, the Cuban government invested intensively in training qualified physicians into a holistic approach to health care attuned to the physical, social, and psychological needs of individuals and their communities. It created a primary health care system that provided each city block and rural community with a family physician-and-nurse team living in the community (Brotherton 2008: 259-263). This led Cuba to having one of the highest physician-per-inhabitant ratios in the world. Moreover, it contributed to creating new kinds of subjectivities "increasingly attuned to their bodily health and physical well-being" (Ibid, 262). Now, Cuba's lockdown entailed the closure of schools and businesses, mandatory masks and physical distancing, testing, massive contact tracing followed by immediate isolation of suspected COVID-19 positive cases. State-run Covid-19 isolation centers were opened in universities, schools, or military centers across the Island. Patients were isolated at each center according to the degree of risk. The most severe cases were redirected to the military centers that were more equipped. Manuel, as many other PhD students and Professors at the University of Santa Clara volunteer to help doctors in the front lines by cleaning, preparing food, and nursing patients at

the newly opened centers for Covid-19 attention. Artists and cultural producers contributed by promoting the #stay-at-home campaign (#quedate-en-casa). Physicians, the highest per-inhabitant worldwide, became heroes in the struggle against Covid-19, on the Island and abroad. Cuba's model of community-based public health care system was praised for its efficient pandemic response as stressed in an article published on the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine or in Medic Review (Ashton 2020; Aguilar Guerra and Reed 2020). In its foreign policies, since the early revolutionary period, Cuba has been characterized by its medical internationalism. In 1960, Cuban doctors were sent to help in the aftermaths of the Chilean earthquake and in 1963, health-care workers were sent to assist the newly independent state of Algeria (Burki 2021). This *ethos* of international solidarity in humanitarian disasters also distinguished the Cuban response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The cruise ship MS Braemar, with 684 mostly British passengers and 5 confirmed COVID-19 cases, was allowed to dock in Havana on March 18,th after one week of being confined at sea having been refused boarding by Curacao, Barbados, Bahamas, Dominican Republic and the United States. On March 21st, a Cuban medical brigade arrived in Lombardy, Italy, that was at the time the epicenter of the pandemic, as to support the local medical personnel facing a huge sanitary crisis. Cuban physicians were celebrated and acclaimed across Italian mediums and with sings and clapping from Italian's balconies. This was the first Cuban medical mission to Europe. By May 21st, Cuban healthcare professionals had gone to 24 countries to help in treating COVID-19 patients. A second brigade was sent to northern Italy and to the European principality Andorra (Yaffe 2020b). Cuba's medical internationalism was not limited to medical personnel but also include the export of nationally produced medicines. Cubans used early on in the treatment of Covid-19 a locally produced pharmakon, the interferon Alfa-2B, a decades old antiviral agent that boosts immune system response and was successfully developed and employed by Cubans during the 1981 outbreak of hemorrhagic dengue fever on the Island, at a time when the national biotechnology industry was starting to develop (Reid-Henry 2007, 2010). The Chinese National

Health Commission employed the Cuban anti-viral drug Interferon Alfa-2B in its fight against the virus, a pharmakon which had been produced in China by the Cuban-Chinese joint venture ChangHeber since 2003 (Yaffe 2020a). According to the journal *Granma,* 45 different countries requested the interferon Alfa-2B to treat Covid-19 (Granma 2020)[98]. Cuba was awarded the highest evaluation for its pandemic response from the Oxford Stringency Index in the mid-May of 2020 (Hale et al. 2020, Wylie 2021, Salas 2020). On May 1, the rates of contagion and mortality for Covid-19 in Cuba were well below rates in the USA, Italy, Spain, France, the UK, Canada and Brazil, among others (see Johns Hopkins Coronavirus resource center[99]). After a total of 2173 confirmed cases and 83 deaths, Cuba reported no Covid-19 deaths throughout the first week of June (Ashton, 2020). By July, as the pandemic was spreading through the Americas causing multiple deaths, Cuba contained the first wave of the virus, with a cumulative fatality toll of 87 (Salas 2020).

Re/mediating the pandemic in the work of the Concoction's artists

The arrival of Covid-19 was probably the first time in his life that Silverio stayed at home. As a man of action, nights, and theatre, in no other place like at The Concoction or with its itinerant Theatre Company does Silverio feel himself at home. Yet, as a public recognized figure, Silverio set the example in the polis by closing the doors of the Concoction before anyone else." We are going home, and we do not know when we will be back," he told to the Concoction's artists, workers, and audiences. Telecubanacán, the Cuban provincial television interviewed Silverio at home.[100] Silverio appeared on the screen:

[98] https://www.granma.cu/cuba-covid-19/2020-03-27/mas-de-45-paises-solicitan-el-interferon-contra-la-covid-19-27-03-2020-01-03-21

[99] https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality

[100] As Esperanza would often remark such is the role of good Cuban charismatic leaders in the moments of crises. That is what Fidel had done during the crises of the 90s. He would appear for one hour daily in the public television or radio to explain to everyone how they had to make *casabe (cassava bread)* in the absence of wheat flour during the

> Here I am… writing a new play, that I am even directing at a distance with an actress. Well, besides that, I am entertaining myself taking care of my animals, reading ((rooster singing in the background and Silverio smiling))
> (…) and re-reading things it was a long time I did not read. I am trying to make the best out of it…for me it is very difficult since I am used to be on the streets. I am used to live the night. But it is not what we are meant to do now. And of course, I am following with fidelity the orientations we have been given.[101]

After the first wave of the virus had been contained, on the 3rd of July 2020, the Sala Margarita Casallas at the Concoction reopened its doors to the audience to host Silverio's new play: *Si puedes tu con Dios hablar*, If you can speak with God. The play was the Theatre Company's first premier post-COVID-19. The theatrical monologue was the result of Silverio's three months of quarantine and was based on the life story of Emélida, one of his neighbors. I was unfortunately unable to watch the play at a distance, so what I know about it is what was promoted and reviewed by local cultural mediums. The play is a *tragicomedy* that, in the words of the cultural promoter of the Concoction: "can make us laugh and meditate on solitude and the power of the imagination in adorning a life that is drying out." It tells the story of an elderly woman who attempts in any possible way to bring back to Earth her dead platonic love while dealing with the bureaucracy of the heavens. The musical background of the play employs the songs of the Mexican Alberto Domínguez Borrás, interpreted in different tempos, as to capture los *estados de animo* (states of the soul) of Emélida in its unfolding. The play also winks to the economic and social problems of the country as perceived from the perspective of the third age. Following the ethos of Communitarian theatre, the spectacle was realized with an extreme lack of resources and almost no economic means. Melissa, the actress, took care of improvising solutions for creating the character's costumes and the scenography. According to Silverio, the

Special Period of the 90s. "Fidel would guide on what to do, he would provide the tools to do it and he would set the example." (Esperanza, during the bread shortages in December 2018, see also chapter one)

[101] "Centro Cultural El Mejunje, en campaña contra la Covid 19," 03/30/2020, Telecubanacán. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQjhQ6jpGvk&fbclid=IwAR3LcdopqKQ4tkFiWcm58fFvcaIsZKtYdo5Est1k1EkWyfRn2scaneFJgEg)

play was the result of a contingency plan. Every time he would write a scene or various ones, he would call Melissa via phone to dictate them to her. Then they would rehearse in the Theatre. In the words of the reviewer of the play for the local newspaper Juventud Revelde: "Silverio, one more time, has given Santa Clara *un personaje popular echo arte* (a popular character made art). He allows people to see themselves reflected on the stage, because he thinks, feels, and lives in the everyday life of his audiences. Silverio does not have to speak with God to create, he speaks with his neighbors, he speaks with the people" (Juventud Rebelde, July 07, 2020)[102]

Figure 6. 1: Rehearsal of *Si puedes tu con dios hablar*

Photo published on Juventud Rebelde

Silverio was not the only one to put himself to work to create "art for the people" in resonance with the pandemic. Several of the artists of the Concoction used their social media to circulate sketches that promoted the stay-at-home campaign. Carmen, for example, posted a series of humorous sketches impersonating Eureka, the character of a humorous *guajira* she developed several years ago in a play for which she won the prestigious national award Caricato. In one of the sketches, Eureka is preparing a *caldoza* (Cuban traditional soup). She asks someone offscreen to pass her the *vianda* (root vegetables) to start cooking it.

[102] http://www.juventudrebelde.cu/cultura/2020-07-07/ramon-silverio-no-habla-con-dios

Eureka: What do you mean there is no vianda? You did not do the line to buy it?
… Oh, yes, of course… ((putting away the cooking pot)).

Look everyone, we can't queue because we need to prevent the spread of the disease. What is there easily accessible on the streets? Croquettes? (…)
Well, then croquettes in the morning and croquettes in the afternoon!

Now it is the moment we have to stay at home for our families. I am also staying here, at home! ((with a big smile))

In another sketch Eureka is talking with his son, telling him that El Chino, his dear friend, has just tested positive to Covid-19. After telling him, Eureka realizes she also might have been exposed to the virus and decides to run to the clinic:

Pay attention, things done promptly and timely might still have a remedy!

Figure 6. 2: Eureka at home

Picture taken from Carmen's videos posted on Facebook

In May 2020, when the lock-down of cultural venues was still in place, three members of the collective of trovadores, La Trovuntivitis, that performs at the Concoction on Thursdays, posted on their social media images of what they define as their "*Concert OnLand*." The "concert"

consisted of joining campesino families to help them with the labor of cultivation, embracing the traditional *guataca* (hoe) to "play the melody of the land and contribute something, during the pandemic, to the harmony of rural, and not so rural, families" (Facebook, La Trovuntivitis). During the summer of 2020, the youngest members of the Theatre Company of the Concoction together with the youngest generation of trovadores participated in the project: *El arte en el pueblo*, Art in the village, organized by the *Asociación Hermanos Saiz* (AHS), the Union for artists younger the 35. They travel across different communities in the province of Santa Clara bringing a spectacle with clowns and songs to bring joy to the families and kids of different towns in the Santa Clara's Province, multiple of which still host remnants of pass sugar mills.

Figure 6. 3: Concierto OnLand and Art in the village

On the left, members of La Trovuntivitis helping in the labor of cultivation. On the right, the youngest group of Santa Clara's artists after their performance in one of the villages of the Province of Santa Clara. Photos published on Facebook.

Vaccine nationalism: La Soberana and Abdala

Historians of medicine Christine Holmberg et al. (2017) have argued that a strong connection exists between national sovereignty and the government's capability to produce its own vaccines. The success or failure of nationally produced vaccines can have profound impacts

in the population's sense of citizenship by solidifying or undermining their feelings of national identity. Rather than being mere 'scientifical' tools, vaccines hold high political value condensing a series of powerful imaginaries bound to modern governmentality, such as a state that cares for the health of its population.[103] Cuba is the only country in Latin American and the Caribbean, and the smallest country worldwide, that produced two successful national vaccine candidates for Covid-19: la Soberana 02 and Abdala. Miguel Diaz Canel emphasized since the beginning of the pandemic the importance of asserting "sovereignty" at this historical conjuncture through a State-run project of national vaccine production (Granma, October 21 2020[104]). This is reflected in the names given to the vaccines, *Soberana,* the Sovereign, and *Abdala*, which is a patriotic poem by Jose Marti dedicated to the homeland.

Campaña para la producción de vacunas Soberana 02 (CUBADEBATE/FACEBOOK)

Figure 6. 4: Covid-19 vaccine campaign

[103] Following Foucault (1978), a new figuration of man emerged in the modern period, an *anthropos* that was defined "at the "finitudes" of life (biology), labor (economic activity), and language (sociocultural existence)" (Collier 2011:17). Along with a new man it also emerged a new form of governmental reason (i.e., biopolitics) "that was concerned with the management of the biological, social, and economic life of its subjects." (Ibid:16). While in monarchical systems the ground of state's legitimacy was attached to the body of the ruler, modern state's legitimacy was grounded on its ability to manage the bodies of the ruled through a systematized "science of the state" tailored at administering the general welfare of its population (Gal and Kligman 2000, 18). Soviet, post-soviet, liberal and neoliberal governments alike can be regarded as distinctive historical formations of biopolitics (i.e., specific mechanism of adjustment between population, production and social welfare).

[104] https://en.granma.cu/cuba/2020-10-21/the-emergence-of-soberana-1-is-not-a-chance-event

Image taken from CubaDebate/Facebook

In January 2021, as the double system of monetary circulation was reconfigured, the banner of the vaccine's campaign was circulated in Cuba Debate, the official forum for discussing national matters. The banner of the campaign stated the intended goal of producing 100 million vaccines (relative to a national population of 11 million). The campaign used the same slogan "*De que van, van!*" "That they will go, they will go!" that Fidel used on the occasion of "La zafra de los 10 millones" in 1970. During that year, under the slogan "Azúcar para Crecer," "Sugar to grow," the government invested all of its resources and canalized the efforts of all of its citizens, including the military, towards the production of 10 million tons of sugar to boost the economy of the Island. In one of the most famous television captures of the campaign, Fidel incited the sugar workers with the slogan: "*De que van, van*!" The 10 million tons were never achieved. The harvest only reached 8.5 million, which still was the largest harvest in Cuban history. Yet, the gap between the target expected goal and the actual achievement was perceived as a huge failure. Announcing the campaign in 1969 in front of the students of Agronomy, Fidel had stated clearly:

> If we reach 9,9 tons, it will prove our great effort very valuable. Yet we should tell in advance that this will still be a failure. We can't be satisfied with half wins. It would be a failure not a victory. Because the 10 million goal has become something more than mere tons, has become something more than the economy, it has become a trial, it has become a question of morality for this country![105] (La Vanguardia, 30 November 2016)[106]

The harvest of the 10s is affectively remembered from every "Cubano de a pie" (Cuban on foot/ordinary Cuban) as one of the biggest revolutionary failures. Not only was the goal

[105] "Si nos quedáramos en 9.999.999 toneladas, sería un gran esfuerzo, muy meritorio y todo lo que quieran. Pero realmente debemos decir de antemano que sería moralmente una derrota. Porque no nos conformamos con triunfos a medias (…) Sería una derrota, no una victoria. Porque es que el problema de los 10 millones se volvió algo más que toneladas, se volvió algo más que economía: ¡Se volvió una prueba, se volvió una cuestión moral para este país!"

[106] https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20161130/412271907267/azucar-cuba-batacazo-fidel-castro-dimision.html

never achieved, but in the process, the agricultural and livestock production of the Island had been destroyed in order to devote most of the productive land to the cultivation of sugar. When the campaign for the Covid-19 vaccine used the same slogan of the sugar harvesting campaign (in the context of growing social discontent for how the socialist "update" was being actualized through the *tarea ordenamiento*[107]) many of my Cuban friends confessed to me they have wondered at first if the slogan had not been designed by a "counter-revolutionary" from Miami as a mocking meme, rather than being the official State's vaccine campaign circulated on Cuba Debate, the platform for discussing Cuban affairs. Framing the Covid-19 campaign in this negatively charged affective repetition was regarded as a political naiveté. Two of the most liked comments responding to the slogan on the Facebook's page of Cuba debate stated this clearly as follows:

> This slogan brings bad luck; the other time was a total failure
>
> You better change that slogan. We do not want this million to be infected by those 10 million that never came at the end.

While the slogan's designer failed in considering the effects on the public of this affective juxtaposition of "sugar" and "biotechnology," the association between the two is historically accurate. Biotechnology was one of the three central industries, together with tourism and sugar, which was charged with the burden of the economic transition in the post-Soviet period. BioCubaFarma is a state-run conglomerate consisting of more than 30 research institutions and manufacturers. One of the first successes of the Cuban national biotechnology industry was to develop in the late 1980s the world's first meningococcal B vaccine. It currently produces eight of the ten vaccines that are routinely used on the Island and sends hundreds of millions of doses

[107] T*area ordenamiento* is the name given to the a series of economic reforms, announced by Miguel Diaz Canel on December 2020, to reorder the economy following the principles previously highlighted in the Guidelines, Conceptualization and New Constitution. Among the reforms introduced by the tarea ordenamiento are the unification of the double currency system, the update of salaries and the gradual elimination of subsidized products.

abroad (Burki 2021). The biotechnology industry became an important source of hard currency, while presenting the country, within and outside of the Island, as a stakeholder in the "new informational economy" (Reid-Henry 2007, 452). The industry was praised and held in high regard as condensing the hopes for a better future: "high-tech, independent and free from the shackles of the sugar-economy that has so encumbered the island in the past. […] Biotechnology promoted a vision of development in which the promises of modernity did indeed look rather more promising than they did with sugar" (Ibid, 449, 451). In *The Magical State*, Fernando Coronil (1997) argues that single-party states with charismatic leaders ground their legitimacy on promises of progress and perpetual improvement. While within the case of states like Venezuela the guarantees of a far better futures are grounded on the abundance of natural resources like oil, in Cuba "such promises are mortgaged against a discourse of possibilism, which holds that the Cuban people can achieve anything with the right guidance and if they put their mind to it" (Reid-Henry 2007, 453). In this respect, the national biotechnology industry holds an absolute privilege place in condensing the promises for a scientific and technologically driven path to development. Thus, it is not surprising that Cuba, despite the difficulties imposed by the recrudesce of the USA embargo, join the "vaccine race," with its echoes of Cold War-era themes, together with superpowers such as the U.S., Russia, or China as to claim its own sovereignty within and outside of the Island. The 'sovereign' vaccine was meant not only to consolidate Cubans feelings of proud national belonging, but also to constitute a valuable export commodity which could attract the much-needed hard currency at a moment of deep economic crises due to the halt of tourism. So far, Cuba has exported its vaccine to its political allays Iran, Venezuela, and Vietnam, and recently also to Nicaragua (Vado 2021[108]). In March, the government disclosed its plan of national vaccination with an intended goal of vaccinating the 70% of the Cuban population with at least one of the three doses of the vaccine by August 2021.

[108] https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/nicaragua-aplicara-vacunas-cubanas-covid-19-menores-edad/6256091.html

As I will develop in a following section, the moment of vaccine roll-out corresponded with the highest moment of Covid-19 contagion, which threw the country into an unprecedent 'sanitarian crises.' The presence of a sovereign national vaccine was coupled with the radical absence of other medical necessities: from the syringes to inject the vaccine, to common medicines such as analgesics, paracetamol, and antibiotics.

"Patria y Vida" "Patria o Muerte por la Vida"

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, during moments of deep economic crises, such as the Special Period of the 90s, state sponsored artists became central in affectively re/mediating the revolutionary project while reconstituting State's hegemony on more inclusive grounds (Stoler 2007; Laszczkowski et al 2017, Williams 1978, Fernandes 2006). For example, Hip-hop acquired a central role in articulating questions of race, gender, generation and the increasing marginalization of Black Cubans. Cuban rappers divided themselves between commercial and underground. The first relied on transnational corporate funding and tailored their product to international markets of western audiences by employing exotics tropes of Afro-Cuban culture and representing consumerism and new "morally reprehensive" professions (such as *jineterismo)* as viable strategies for post-Soviet socialist survival. On the contrary, underground rappers relied on state funding and produced politically committed lyrics tailored to local audiences that made appeals to the state for the social inclusion of young Black Cubans as envisioned in the Cuban state's egalitarian socialist ideology. Underground rap artist affectively re/mediated the relation between disaffiliated Afro-Cuban citizens and the state by channeling their feelings of discontent towards the loss of Black entitlements (Fernandes 2006: 85-134).

During those times of crises and transition, the revolutionary government multiplied the images and dictums of Jose Marti, making appeal to his notions of heroic "struggle" and "sacrifice." As suggested in the lyrics of the national anthem *La Bayamesa*: "to die for the patria is

to live." Cubanidad, as the "Cuban sense of identity linked to place and the nation-state," is deeply entangled with notions of devotion to the homeland, disposition to struggle, and commitment to self-sacrifice (Garth 2020, 174). As Perez Jr. has argued:

> The repeated invocation of struggle and sacrifice on behalf of patria, a call that had as its purpose the promise of redemption and upward mobility, but which 100 years later has become associated with a deepening impoverishment and devastating downward mobility, may well jeopardize an ideal that has been central to the terms of Cuban self-representation. The Special Period had a withering effect on the moral premise of patria. What remains to be seen is the capacity of the proposition of patria to sustain collective esprit and maintain national cohesion. If the defense of patria has become associated in the popular imagination with adversity and insecurity, the very source of the imperative of the collective is placed in peril (Perez Jr, 2009,16-17).

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the economic "conjunctural" crises started in 2019. Shortages and waiting lines multiplied as the country faced the biggest economic crises since the Special Period of the 90s. In this perilous situation, artists within and outside of the Island became central in re/mediating patriotic affects and feelings. A group of Black Cuban artists residents abroad, Yotuel Romero, Descemer Bueno, and the reggaeton duo Gente de Zona, as well as two artists residents in Cuba, Maykel Osorbo and Eliécer "el Funky" Márquez, collaborated on a rap track that was released in February 2021 collecting more than six million views on Youtube. The rap song's title "*Patria y Vida*,"[109] "Homeland and Life," is a bitter play on Fidel's famous phrase: "*Patria o muerte, Venceremos*!" "Homeland or death, we will win." The lyrics of the song and the images of the musical video take direct aim at Cuba's revolutionary government.

> The video starts with the image of Marti on the 1 Cuban peso, that begins burning as the image of George Washington on the 1 Dollar bill starts appearing and occupying half of the screen[110]

[109] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pP9Bto5lOEQ

[110] The choice of images is indexing the double system of monetary circulation.

Figure 6. 5: Marti's image melting into Washington (music video Patria y Vida)

Pomp and grandiosity for the five hundred (years) of Havana
While at home in the pots they no longer have food
What do we celebrate if folks are in a hurry
Trading Che Guevara and Martí for hard currency?

Everything has changed, nothing is the same
Between you and me there is an abyss
Advertising a paradise in Varadero
While mothers cry for their children who've gone abroad

It's over! you five nine [1959], me, double twos [2020]
It's over! Sixty years of stalemate at *domino*
It's over! you five nine, me, double twos
It's over! Sixty years of stalemate at domino

We are artists, we are sensibility
The true story, not the one that's poorly told
We are the dignity of an entire people trampled on
At gunpoint and with words that are worthless

No more lies, my people call for freedom
No more doctrines, we no longer shout
"*Homeland or death*", "*Homeland and life*" instead
And start building what we've dreamed of
What they destroyed with their hands

Stop the bloodshed
For wanting to think differently
Who told you that Cuba is yours?
If my Cuba belongs to all my people

Figure 6. 6: Cuba's flag burning (music video Patria y Vida)

It's over! your time has run out; the silence has been broken
It's over! the laughs are over: and the tears are already running
It's over! and we're not afraid, the deception is over
It's over! it's been sixty-two years doing harm

We live with the uncertainty of the past, stuck
Fifteen friends stood together, ready for our deaths
Still, we raise the flag, despite the repression of our daily lives
Anamelys Ramos, unwavering in her poetry
Omara Ruiz Urquiola, breathing life into us
They broke down our door, desecrated our temple
But the world will know that the San Isidro Movement is still on point!

Figure 6. 7: Movimiento San Isidro (music video Patria y Vida

We're in the same spot, with Security forces boxing us in
These things enrage me
The confusion of your evil revolution has ended
I am Funky Style, and here, you have my signature
You have done enough
There is nothing left for you, and you are sinking
The people are done putting up with it
We are *waiting for a new dawn*

Homeland and life
Homeland and life
Homeland and life
Sixty years of *stalemate at domino*[111]

The two featured Black Cuban artists resident on the Island, Maykel Osorbo and Eliécer "el Funky" Márquez, are central figures of the San Isidro movement. The latter is a group of Cuban artists, journalist, and academics who gathered in September 2018 to protest the release of Decree 349, a law that gives to the Cuban Ministry of Culture the power to control that artists' performances, both in public and private venues, are in accordance with "the cultural

[111] The original lyrics of the song are in Spanish can be found at https://genius.com/Yotuel-patria-y-vida-lyrics

politics of the Revolution." The decree was regarded by many local artists as a return of the repressive politics of the so called *Quinquenio gris, Grey Quinquennium, (1971-1976),* a period of severe state censorship of artistic production on the Island. In November 2020, a member of the movement, the Black rapper Denis Solis, was arrested after live-streaming on social media[112] an interaction with a police officer who had come unannounced to surveil him in his residence. In the video, Solis insults the policeman by calling him "maricon" (gay) and a "coward wrapped in a uniform" and criticizes the Cuban president by repeating "Donald Trump 2020, that is my president! I do not believe in your *verdugo* (executioner); I have no president here."[113] Solis was sentenced to eight months of prison for contempt. The San Isidro movement protested the arrest by locking themselves inside a house in San Isidro who was forcibly entered by the police after 10 days with the formal justification the raid had been carried out for Covid-19 safety reasons. In response, the day after, on the 27 of November, more than three hundred intellectuals, artists, and journalists convened in front of the Ministry of Culture in Havana to protest Solis' detention and to demand the recognition of citizens' rights to free speech. The movement (named 27N) repeated the sit-in in front of the Minister of Culture on January 27, on the vigil of the anniversary for Jose Marti's birthday on the 28. The song "*Patria y vida*" directly refers to this series of artist's protest by incorporating images about them in the music video. It also directly includes two key figures of the San Isidro Movement, Maykel Osorbo and Eliécer "el Funky" Márquez. The song *Patria y Vida* went viral in few days through social media. Cubans within and outside of the Island updated their profiles on Facebook with the competing slogans "*Patria y vida*" or "*Patria y muerte*" against or with the revolutionary government.

Among the over 100 Cuban friends I have on my Facebook profile, almost everyone at a certain point posted some statement or reaction directly referring the song, or meta-commentary

[112] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3v-BPKoob3A

[113] The policemen in the video does not respond to Solis' accusations. He takes pictures and videos of Solis as he is filming him and leaves his home after thanking him.

on the affectively charged political affects that were circulated in response. Each one of the posts, gave rise to an average of 100 comments, from Cubans living within and outside of the Island, in Miami, Argentina, Spain, Mexico, etc. The comments expressed quite radically opposite views on the stakes of the song, the shifting meaning of Cubania and socialism it evoked. It solicited strong emotional responses of hate or love that polarized the public between supporters and not supporters of the Revolution. In response to "*Patria y Vida,*" Raul Torres, a Black musician famous for lyrics aligned with the official ideology of the Revolution, organized together with a group of mainly Black women, a song titled "*Patria o muerte por la vida,*" "*Homeland or death for life*", also circulated on YouTube.

Figure 6. 8: Patria o Muerte por la vida.

Yes, you are wrong one more time
You've stepped on the wrong foot again
You have left naked again
your head on the scaffold

They have lost their face again
The offenders of the people
another violation for money
Today I react, then I furnish

It pays to say our time is up
The one who pays makes profit
The silence is made profitable.
It pays, the imperial shit that makes us silly
It is profitable to lie and confuse people

It is profitable to sing
that you are against poverty
From a satin sofa
You are getting money and vileness

It is profitable to scream
what they want to hear
those who rent your voice
those who incite you to hate

In these times it pays
to throw mud on your homeland
I hope you have funds
To mortgage your time

Because the Revolution
has more than 62 millennia left
Dale agua[114]to this domino
And do not commit fraud
That your savings are growing

You can tell whatever you want about me,
That I am vaccinated
To the machete with Mambisa[115]

Homeland or death, we will live
Homeland or death, we will fight
Homeland or death for life

Homeland or death, we will win!

Black musicians who self-identify as communist, like Manuel at the Concoction, strongly dislike "Patria y Vida" as an example of a 'commodified' imperialist ideological manipulation of Cuba's past, present, and future. Although he shared some of the same feelings that had inspired Raul Torres's response to *Patria y Muerte*, he also felt the song had been composed too quickly, only in four or five days, and recorded in the affective rash of voicing a response from artists who are faithful to the 'revolutionary' project. In the case of Manuel, as with many other of my

[114] "Dar agua" al domino, literally "to give water to the domino" refers to the action of mixing the game chips so that the players can choose with which one they want to play the game.

[115] The term mambises refers to the guerrilla Cuban independence soldiers who fought against Spain in the Ten Years' War (1868–78) and Cuban War of Independence (1895–98). Raul Torres is referring here to one of the vaccine candidates that was called Mambisa. The latter did not reach the phase three trials as Soberana 02 and Abdala did.

research participants, this faithfulness to the Revolution does not entail being in agreement with all the politics of the government. They were all extremely critical for example of how the government had been handling the reunification of the double system of monetary circulation through the *tarea ordenamiento*. Both of the songs employed central national symbols, like the Cuban flag, while presenting radically opposite views of the meanings associated with such symbol and the related notions of Cubania, socialism and "homeland."

The second wave of Covid-19 and the 11th of July

The reopening of borders to tourists in November 2020 brought a second wave of Covid-19 on the Island. This second wave was kept relatively under control until June when the Delta variant entered the Island and the situation made a sharp turn for the worse, seriously aggravating the economic and political problems of the country. Until April 12, 467 people had died of Covid-19 among the country's 87,385 positives cases. On July 12, the number of the deceased had reached 1,579 with 224,914 diagnosed cases (Farber 2021[116]). The province of Matanzas became the epicenter of the new wave of Covid-19 and suffered shortages of doctors, tests, and oxygen and the collapse of hospitals under the increasing number of positive cases. The expansion and multiplication of cases was accompanied by intensified shortages of basic goods, from food to basic medicines (such as antibiotics or analgesics), and recurrent black outs. The very much promised national vaccine had a very slow roll out to the overall population as the country experienced a shortage of syringes. The worsening of the situation in the country brought on July 11 the biggest public protest in the country since the so called *Maleconazo* in 1994, in the midst of the Special Period. In that earlier occasion the protests had been limited to el Malecon

[116] https://inthesetimes.com/article/cuban-revolution-protest-july-united-states

of Havana and were easily solved after Fidel arrived to talk to the group of protesters. The protest of the 11th of July started in San Antonio de los baños, a locality close to Havana, and expanded rapidly through the social media to many other localities. Cubans across the Island, in Havana, Santiago, Santa Clara, Ciego de Avila, Camaguey, Bayamo, Holguin, Cardenas and Guantanamo, took the streets chanting "*Patria y Vida*," "Freedom," "Vaccines." The demonstrators expressed their disappointment for the scarcity of food, medicine and other essential goods, and critiqued President Díaz-Canel by calling him *singao* (asshole). The mass of protesters was extremely heterogeneous in terms of their political affiliations and imaginaries for the future of the Island. They shared a common disappointment towards the government and the situation on the Island, but they were not bounded by a common political project or ideology, and many of my Cuban communist friends joined in the protest. Yet, on national television Miguel Diaz-Canel framed the protesters as "counter-revolutionaries" and call for "revolutionary" citizens to take the streets in defense of the homeland. The protests that were for the most part peaceful turned to violence in many localities, as the protesters faced the State's Security agents, who were sent en masse dressed in civilian clothes. Multiple protesters were arrested, and the government suspended internet connections across the Island in an attempt to control and arrest the protests. A few of my Cuban friends who participated in the protests were arrested, among them: Sol, the director of the documentary, who has been very active in the 27N movement; Francisco, a very committed communist librarian and researcher at the Instituto Juan Marinello of Havana; or Angelo, a well-loved 50-year-old rocker regular at the Concoction. All of them were released from 1 to 4 days after the protests, thanks to the prompt intervention of family and friends both within and outside of the Island, who activated themselves to demand their immediate release. For example, in the case of Angelo, a group of Concoctioners went personally to the detention center where he was being held and successfully obtained his release.

Santa Clara Por La Vida

In late July, cases of Covid-19 in Santa Clara skyrocketed, just as Santa Clara was experiencing drastic shortages of basic medicines such as analgesics and antibiotics. Many of my friends from Santa Clara posted on social media asking for medicines:

> My mother has Covid-19, I need urgently Azithromycin[117]
>
> My kid is sick, anyone has antipyretics or analgesics?
> I am willing to pay whatever for them

In response to the dramatic situation experienced by many Santa Clareños, Yaslen and Liliana, two of the youngest actresses of the Concoction's Theatre Company, started the project *Santa Clara Por La Vida* (Santa Clara for Life). The project soon gathered the support of many other Concoctioners, especially among the youth. Through social media they circulated a solidarity campaign to gather donations of medicines, other toiletry products, and money. The Concoction transformed itself into a center for the collection and redistribution of medicines and other goods in shortage. They received multiple donations from people in Santa Clara and abroad, among the many Concoctioners who reside outside of the Island. The money collected was used to prepare food to be distributed to the elders of Santa Clara in their homes. In October, after almost three months of dedicated activity, the Concoction celebrated the achievements of *Santa Clara por la vida* while starting a new initiative *Adopta un abuelito* ("Adopt a grandpa"). A group of more than 60 young people from Santa Clara participated in the initiative by adopting a grandpa in the city to whom they committed to bringing food, medicine, and company.

[117] Azithromycin is an antibiotic that was used in the treatment of Covid-19 patients

Figure 6. 9: Santa Clara por la vida

On the left, the group of Santa Clara's inhabitants, mainly youth, who participated in the initiative *Adopta un abuelito*. On the right, the banner promoting donations of medicines and toiletry products to be collected at the Concoction and distributed among those who needed it. (images circulated on Facebook)

Figure 6. 10: Facebook's post on the activities of Santa Clara por la Vida

Facebook's posts on the activities realized for the project *Santa Clara por la Vida*. Silverio and many other Concoctioners are preparing food to be distributed to the elders of Santa Clara. The first set of images on the right is accompanied by the text: "Another weekend helping. Thank you to the contribution of people inside and outside of the country (and the action of the Concoction) Santa Clara for life has been able to keep on with its humanist work. The images on the left are accompanied by the text: "We keep fighting"

The young Santa Clareños who participated in the project *Santa Clara por la Vida* were extremely heterogenous in their political affiliations and hopes for the future of Cuba, some of them identifying with the claims of "Patria y vida," some of them with "Patria y muerte por la vida," some with neither. Yaslen and Liliana made clear since the beginning of the project that no ideological affiliation was required to participate. The only requirement was the desire to contribute to the wellness of the city by helping the most vulnerable and those who were in need. Collaborating together to sustain life in Santa Clara was framed as an opportunity to initiate real communication among Santa Clareños on the future that they want, imagine, and are ready to fight for. This was seen as an antidote to the division, hate, and polarization among Cubans then being constituted through other mediums and re/mediations (from the songs Patria y vida and Patria y muerte, to Facebook commentaries, to the discourse employed by Diaz-Canel in response to the protests). The project *Santa Clara por la Vida* was extremely successful in organizing collective action to respond to the sanitarian crises brought about by the second wave of the pandemic. In the wake of Covid-19, as in the wake of hurricane Irma, the work of the Concoction's artists and audiences is grounded in actions which remediated the breaking-down of the State's infrastructures of provisioning. Artist mediate between the faltering State and the people by activating and organizing "people as infrastructures" (Simone 2004). Compared to Irma, the Covid-19 response was led by a new generation of artists, rather than by Silverio, the Concoction's director. It was a project born from youth and directed to and for elders. We can see continuity in this generational passage. The work of the new generation mimics the work of Silverio, the exemplary leader. Silverio's revolutionary art inspired and inspires processual participation in ever-renewing forms of action with and for the community. This revolutionary art is born out of shortages, waiting, and struggling in everyday life, in the Special Period of the 90s as in its return in the current crisis. Yet, revolutionary art is the opposite of waiting, for rather than the deferral of possibility, it entails the summoning of possibility in the present. The revolutionary art of Concoctioners actualizes those possibilities by enacting and practicing a

"being-in-common" that is not "a common being" (Nancy 1991, 29). In the works of Jean Luc Nancy, this is a form of political community that does not seek to coalesce particular and different identities into a common singular being but rather acknowledges plurality and difference while striving for a "being-in-common" (a being-with, or we, which always precedes the I for Nancy) which emerges out of a process of sharing and mutual exposure to the singularity of others (1991, 2000). The cultural space of the Concoction is designed to make communication, interaction, and exposure to the singularity of others possible. It is from the everyday communicative interaction through the arts that happens at the Concoction that a sense of sharing a common bond of citizenship has developed and continues to develop in an ongoing process open to ever new singular beings and generations.

I close with the words of one of the youths who participated in the project Santa Clara por La Vida that I think captures this meaning of political community out of which a Cuba yet-to-come is emerging.

> On Sunday I lived the little piece of Cuba I want. And it was precisely in the celebrations of the closure of the first three month of the project *Santa Clara Por la Vida*. What I have been seeing and feeling in Cuba recently had made me think that we are not prepared to deal with differences. That we have took our shoes off on the road of respecting differences a long time ago and barefoot we did not move any more. But what I lived and experience through this project made me change my mind. On Sunday we were all there to adopt a grandpa, you can't even imagine how different of a crowd we were. There was no disrespect, nor resentment, nor indifference, despite our political, racial, religious or sexual differences. I say without fear of being wrong that *Santa Clara por la Vida* has been the most democratic and civic practice I have ever participated into in my 27th years. And I deeply enjoyed it. A friend that was there told me "I think this is the mini-Cuba we are dreaming off" and I feel the same. I will keep defending and struggling for the following: with respect and inclusion as our flag, *habemus Patria.*
>
> Yaima, 27-year-old, Facebook post, 27 October 2021

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