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MULTIFACETED MEMORIES: ORAL HISTORY OF CUBAN CITIZENS ON FOOD, JUSTICE, AND FUTURE IMAGINARIES

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

Comrade and political activist Assata Shakur, who has found refuge and home on the island of Cuba, starts her autobiography with the affirmation below (2014, 2).

I believe in living.
I believe in the spectrum
of Beta days and Gamma people.
I believe in sunshine.
In windmills and waterfalls,
tricycles and rocking chairs.
And I believe that seeds grow into sprouts.
And sprouts grow into trees.
I believe in the magic of the hands.
And in the wisdom of the eyes.
I believe in the rain and tears.
And in the blood of infinity.

I believe in life.
And i have seen the death parade
march through the torso of the earth,
sculpting mud bodies in its path.
I have seen the destruction of the daylight,
and seen bloodthirsty maggots
prayed to and saluted.

I have seen the kind become the blind
and the blind become the bind
in one easy lesson.
I have walked on cut glass.
I have eaten crow and blunder bread
and breathed the stench of indifference.

I have been locked by the lawless.
Handcuffed by the haters.
Gagged by the greedy.
And, if i know anything at all,
It's that a wall is just a wall
and nothing more at all.
It can be broken down.

I believe in living.
I believe in birth.
I believe in the sweat of love
and in the fire of truth.

And i believe that a lost shop,
steered by the tired, seasick sailors,
can still be guided home to port.

I, like Assata, believe in living. I believe in birth, the sweat of love, and the fire of truth. But, as her affirmation entails, there is no existence of life without death, joy without pain, and love without heartbreak. Unlike Assata, who sought refuge on the island, this summer, I sought to find a form of truth on that same island. What I found, or what found me, is written in the very words Assata wrote thirty-five years ago. As you will soon find out, much of what I discovered in Cuba were stories of "the death parade" of people suffering a situation and fighting a fight that is no longer theirs anymore. I found people "eating crow and blunder bread" while still believing in the magic of "seeds that grow into sprouts and sprouts grow into trees." I leave you here to discover, to read the words of the people I was so graciously able to entangle my life with, to build memories together under the sunshine, and experience many "Beta days with Gamma people."

My entanglement with Cuba started at a very young age. Images, stories, and experiences of Cubans and with Cubans surrounded me for as long as I can remember. I was born on an island ninety miles (145 kilometers) from Cuba, so close that I heard stories of Cubans accessing the same F.M. radio waves I listened to on my drive to elementary school (Depalma 2021, 25). Cuban people and culture surrounded me. After English, Cuban-Spanish was the language that filled my ears. I went to the Cuban restaurant every Monday night and would go to the *bodega* to get *buchi* (Cuban espresso) and a Cuban mix sandwich after school on Wednesdays. I even witnessed Cuban migrants landing on the shore of our beaches after journeying across the 90 miles, yelling, "¡*Viva America y viva Cuba!*"

The presence of Cuban culture and history through food, music, and language was a norm for me–part of my everyday life–to the point I was not conscious when growing up, of how unique and special their presence has been on the island. Cubans began coming to Key West during the Ten Years' War between 1868 and 1878. Key West attracted Cubans with middle and working-class backgrounds who worked in the various cigar factories built during this period. By the mid-1870s, Key West had forty-five cigar factories, and Cubans were the majority of the Key West population. Throughout time, Key West has maintained its strong ties to Cuba with revolutionaries organizing in cigar factories, Key West-based schools financed by the Cuban government, and even Key West having many Cuban mayors (Harper 1996). Over time, as I

witnessed as a child, there has been an overwhelming increase in forced migration to the United States, furthering this complicated relationship between these two nations. On my recent visit home, I continued to see the implications of the U.S. embargo and the Cuban financial crisis, with multiple boats filled with migrants arriving daily on our beaches; the relationship continues to lie very deep, affirming and repeating the history that started many years ago.

The Cubans in Key West have found a home away from home through networks, community building, and, most prominently: food. Jeffrey Pilcher (2017, 91) writes about the power of food to create "cultural exchanges" and form "mutual aid societies." This reality, which I grew up experiencing, started me on this research journey one year ago. I began to analyze my memories of Cuba and rethink all my interactions at once. I delved into U.S.-Cuban relations and became fascinated by the dynamics I had always passively observed. This fascination led me to collect memories about their migration and food habits from Cubans in Key West in December 2021. One interviewee, Alejandro Pasquale, who fled Cuba right after the triumph of the revolution, and settled in New Jersey for most of his life told me:

> The first time [I came to Key West] in 1973, I smelled my childhood here… because [the] smell of the Florida Keys is the same as Northern Cuba, and it has to do with the fact we have the same vegetation, really, the pollen on the trees affects a lot when you breathe, the smell of it, the feeling of it and of course the salt water, the salinity, smells just like my childhood, so I loved it here.[1]

Smell is a powerful tool to recall memories (Willander 2006), and this experience Alejandro had is not unique; Cubans continue to settle as close as possible to their homeland while still remaining distant. They love their home, the smell of the air, and the vegetation, but for many reasons, they cannot be there fully. One way Cubans have brought their home to Key West and other places of migration is through their food. On the tiny island, we have more than five Cuban restaurants filled with Cubans trying to find a piece of home.

When I asked Alejandro if he could speak to me about food, he swiftly dismissed me and confessed he knew nothing about this topic, yet as time went on, he shared many beautiful insights. This exchange and relationship I formed with Alejandro planted many seeds in my

[1] Interview with Alejandro Pasquale, January 6th, 2022, Key West, FL

head. The first was the universality that food has to connect people, initiate conversation, and build relationships; Alejandro had no formal expertise in food studies and yet we were able to speak for many hours about the subject. The ability that everyone on the planet has to say something about food makes people instantly feel confident that they have something to say and that there is space for their words and experiences. The second thing that Alejandro highlighted was food's solid power in communicating and evoking history, identity, belonging, and even nationhood. He stated:

> I'll tell you something very funny here in Key West. In the late 1800s, the Cubans came and settled here. To this day, there are many people, like your friend[2], there are many people who are descendants of them, many of them do not speak Spanish, but they all eat black beans and *arroz*, and they drink *cafecito*, so definitely the food is stronger than the language, maybe you go to the Conch[3] house here in Key West, maybe they do not speak Spanish, but black beans are there, over yellow rice, white rice, whatever, but the beans are there and the *cafecito* they brew it throughout the day, those two Cuban things are very strong.[4]

This reflection propelled me into a fascination with discovering Cuba. As I reflected on my past experiences, I started to ask many questions and find answers through reading Cuban literature, political theory, and history books, interacting more with Cuban culture instead of only Cuban-American culture. With all these truths in mind, I realized how much this process needed to continue in the lived experience. I had so many ideas from Cubans who had left Cuba but none from those who were there; it became abundantly clear to me how much I needed to shift my imaginaries, expectations, and evaluation of Cuban society through *being with and speaking to* Cubans.

After I had performed my field research in Key West, I returned to my University in Italy and started my search to figure out how to get to Cuba. I met with the Latin American officer at Slow Food and asked for contacts in Cuba to see if I could go there to research with them. They quickly advised against this due to my status as a U.S. citizen and the strict visa policies. Therefore, I searched for other paths and found a field studies program titled "Cuba Field Program: Reconceiving Citizenship, Race, Gender, Environment, Urban Infrastructure, and

[2] My friend Bella Rettenwander was with me during the interview. Her grandmother is of Cuban descent.
[3] A term used for someone born in Key West.
[4] Ibidem

Neoliberalism" hosted by the New School based in New York City and Casa de las Américas in Havana, Cuba, from May to August 2022. This program allowed me to attend over forty lectures, one-on-one mentorship from Cuban intellectuals and professionals, and on-site visits to community organizations, farms, schools, and more. In addition to daily lectures and site visits, I conducted the research that culminated in this thesis.

From my experience working on oral histories with Cubans in Key West, I set out to build a similar project with Cubans in Cuba. This process started with reviewing previous literature and analyzing proper methods (both detailed below) for Cuba's situation. I had known from the past interviews and news that there had been mass protests related, in part, to food shortages less than one year before when I would go to Havana on July 11th, 2021. These were the first and biggest protests in the country in many decades. With this in mind, I knew that food would be a sensitive topic of conversation. At the same time, due to the rapidly changing situation, I felt this research could be a vital source to add to the literature.

The topic of food in Cuba to many Cubans I spoke to seemed laughable. "You are researching food in Cuba? There is none," was a sentence I heard more times than I could count. Nevertheless, access to food that aligns with one's cultural needs is an essential part of the survival of a society. Food is culture, and through the pathways of production, preparation, and consumption, "food takes shape as a decisive element of human identity" (Montanari 2006, xii), but in the absence of this choice, how does one see themselves? How does one identify?

Since food is one of the essential things to a society's functioning, it is one of the most powerful tools of control. Therefore I knew that the implications of food being controlled (through the state-run food distribution system: *la libreta*) and reduced access to food, in general, had enormous implications for Cuban society. I, therefore, sought to discover how these shortages manifested and were experienced in Cuba today and what Cubans had to say about this situation. The obvious method to answer these questions was to speak to people and collect their stories. I took my experience with Alejandro above and approached my research with this perspective: to use food as a tool to connect, build relationships, and discover my curiosities around more

controversial topics. I took advantage of my seemingly mundane topic and got profound answers. Below is the methodology and process of embarking on these interviews.

1.2 Methodology

> Every old man that dies is a library that burns.
> *-African Proverb*
>
> "History should not merely comfort; it should provide a challenge and understanding which helps toward change…a history is required which leads to action: not to confirm, but to change the world" (Thompson 2016).

This section of the thesis analyzes the methodology for my fieldwork. The best methodology to answer my questions was to follow an oral history methodology which holds different values around orality and memory. Although I knew I wanted to collect people's stories, I did not want this piece to be a pure recollection of words or facts. I did not set out on a "pursuit of fact-finding research on remote problems," but instead a journey to use said facts to "entangle" myself "with wider interpretations of contemporary issues" (Thompson 2016, 25). My hope for this section is to show how I intentionally used the works and experiences of past historians for my methods, not only to collect but interpret deeply the words I collected. The first part of the methodology (1.2.1) will contain the theoretical methods used during and after being in Cuba. In contrast, the second part (1.2.2) will explain the specific logistics of navigating Cuba and some research drawbacks. Finally, I will summarize the writing process and chapter structure.

Before I lay this out, though, I will explain how I approached the research process in general and why I decided to add the theory here in the way I added it. I have decided to provide a general overview of the specific pieces I read before embarking on my fieldwork to give the reader a chance to experience my process chronologically the way I experienced it, to allow you to envelop yourself in the process; for you to become a subject within the intersubjectivity. Before starting my interviews, I explain the theory I read and had in mind so that the reader keeps the ideas in mind before they meet my interviewees themselves. This is essential because the way I have approached the research has also influenced how I, and now you, see memory and will

continue to see memory as each interpretation and experience changes the way I interpret the same sources and experiences, each adding on to the next. Therefore the entire process, although not entirely linear, is more of a meshwork of information, including theory, fieldwork, theory, and reinterpretation, over and over again.

1.2.1 *Theoretical methods*

For decades, non-Cuban media outlets promoting anti-communist propaganda in the West fill people's minds with stories about the island, whereas, in Cuba, the news is also controlled by the government and the elite; seldom can we find a place where there is the broadcasting of the Cuban voices themselves. The oral history methodology is a way to counter these hidden narratives. "The most distinctive contribution of oral history has been to include within the historical record the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who may otherwise have been 'hidden from history'" (Perks & Thomson 2016, ix). If history has not already been written, it will be created, generally by those in power, to benefit those in power. For this reason, I chose an oral history because "it makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In doing so, oral history has radical implications for the social message of history as a whole" (Thompson 2016, 28). Cubans are not inherently "the underclasses," "the unprivileged," or "the defeated;" this is where many would place Cubans in the hierarchy of the world due to the governments' choices to disconnect from the global capitalist order. Therefore, I chose a practice of history and research where there was "an active human relationship" as a source. I attempted to not just "make history" but to "empower individuals or social groups through the process of remembering and re-interpreting the past, with an emphasis on the value of the process as much as a historical product" (Perks & Thomson 2016, x). With previous experience on the subject of Cuba and with Cuban people, I was aware going into this process that the amount Cubans and the Cuban narrative have been in ways' hidden from history' and seen as the 'underclasses'; therefore, this was the first reason for this methodology in the Cuban context.

With this knowledge and perspective, I could start to create my interviews. Much discussion in the field has to do with the fact that the interviewer has the power to create the interview, choose

the subject and the questions, and guide it to a certain way (Thompson 2016, 28). While this could be true, the process ended up differently. The first reason for this is that it was challenging to find people to interview; therefore, I would speak to anyone who would talk to me. This unexpected reality created an unintended methodology of randomness that helped to reduce bias in my potential intentional choices of interviews. The second reason is that I kept the interview as open as possible through an interview grid. Before heading to Cuba, I worked with my academic advisor to devise an interview structure or "grid of questions," focused on five broad themes that I felt would give space for my interviewees to speak freely. These were: food access, connections between food identity, tradition, and the past, connections between socialism and food, and lastly, how people imagined the future concerning food. Many questions connected these themes, including how do you access food in an average week? Where do you go? What do you do? And how do you feel about it? From here, I was curious about the different identities at play in Cuban society and the intersections of these identities related to food. I was curious whether their identities (race, gender, age) affected what and how they ate, what types of foods they ate, and why? who was buying these foods, who was cooking, and why? The next question followed themes related to socialism. As explained in detail in Chapter 3, after the revolution's triumph, food, agriculture, and land access were all highly prioritized policies and continue to be pillars of Cuban society. In recent times though, these systems have diminished in effectiveness, yet the ideological ties and memories remain. I was curious to ask what was the connection between food and socialism, for them, and how they felt about socialism in relation to food. Lastly, my goal was to project my interviewees into the future to learn something about the present. I was curious about the imaginaries of their lives and their food system. After I had this structure, I conducted two "trial" interviews in English, where I tested out the questions and got formal and informal feedback on if questions were too obvious, did not make sense, or were too sensitive. After this, the structure shifted a bit to split the section about identity in half and therefore create two separate categories, one still trying to get at the idea of identity without being so explicit therefore asking about food habits and another question about the past. Therefore, through more passive questions such as, what are your food habits in your house? I was able to touch on different dynamics of identity-related to gender, race, age, and religion (shown in Chapter 4) without explicitly asking about race and gender, two potentially

contentious topics. I was also advised to ask a question about the word *resolver*[5] in relation to food, which will not be included in this thesis.[6] The other questions remained the same.

I stuck to these questions and structure until around the fifth interview when I became interested in the idea of hope, community, and perseverance. When this happened, I added the last question, how do you maintain hope? After this point, I stuck strictly to these themes. However, there were moments when people did not want to answer some questions explicitly, or there was a suspicious energy I could feel that held me back from asking everything. In these cases, I tended to omit the questions about socialism to ensure the interviewee felt safe. Additionally, I added questions based on their expertise or organization affiliation in some cases as the interview went on.

The last part of the interview, performed by seventeen of the twenty-three interviewees, was a drawing exercise. I asked them if they would draw their ideal future food system or future in general, whichever they felt more attached to. For the first three interviews, I used the word *dibujar* [draw] when asking them to do this. I quickly found out this word was confusing for people and was something they associated with words more than images. Therefore during the fourth interview, I changed the word to *diseñar* [to design]. *Diseñar* was a lot clearer for people that they should draw images. Although there was still some confusion and pushback initially, they could all perform the task well. Due to the lack of materials in Cuba, it was impossible to find paper to draw on, a situation I did not anticipate. Therefore, you will see all drawings are on

[5] *Resolver* in English means to solve, resolve, or sort out, but in contemporary Cuba, this word has taken on a special meaning. In my experience, it describes a unique, unspoken energy and dedication to overcome anything at any cost. The word recalls the side of people that is innovative, supportive, and persevering when solving problems. Whether it's finding what they need on the black market or searching for non-state or "illegal" sources of income, a Cuban who embodies *resolver* does what they need, within the bounds of what is socially acceptable, to survive. As Mulet explains, "The difficulties the Cubans deal with on a daily basis have led to the particular art of fixing/managing things or situations termed *resolver* (to solve) which is at the center of each and every description of quotidian experiences. Since the Revolution, the Cuban people have been doomed with permanent "resolver," mostly outside or beyond the law, in the face of an insufficiently coherent system that produces constant economic impasses. On the one hand, this system is the result of utopian voluntarism, and on the other hand, it is the outcome of the state's pragmatism and its attempts to solve (resolver) the obstacles that it has caused. The creativity of the governed extends so far as to entail redesigning the island's economic and social system from its foundations." (Mulet 2016).

[6] I ended up asking the majority of my interviewees' this question and many of them replied similarly, although each reply needs to be problematized for each person and will be used for future research findings. It has been omitted due to potential repetition in the field and in this piece.

blank pages I ripped out of books I had brought with me or notebook pages friends sacrificed to me.

Each part of my interview method, both the grid and the drawings, were essential for my piece as I have chosen. With the help and support of my advisor Gabriele Proglio, I embarked on a project to produce a piece in the spirit of decolonizing universities (Boaventura de Sousa 2017). In the process of decolonization, we call for a bottom-up approach to research that prioritizes global justice instead of the reproduction of knowledge for the capitalist gain of researchers themselves. In order to do this, I committed myself to the "process of mirroring" or "relating to the subjectivity and positionalities adopted in the course of fieldwork," which included the decision to "listen rather than to ask," and "to stay connected rather than to extract private memories" (Proglio 2021, 12).

When embarking on the pursuit of 'delocalizing my centrality,' the process of understanding my subjectivity and the intersubjectivity that was to be created with my interviewees was essential. Therefore, once I had this foundation of the interview grid and drawing exercise decided, I needed to analyze not just who but how the interviews were going to take place. These choices needed to be highly critical, with a deep understanding of the implications of my actions, which started with understanding my subjectivity and the role I played during the interviews. Previous theories informed this understanding of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Below Lynn Abrams explains:

> Oral history theory is now founded on this idea of there being two subjectivities at an interview, interacting to produce an effect called intersubjectivity which is apparent in the narrator's words. Subjectivity refers to the constituents of an individual's sense of self, his or her identity informed and shaped by experience, perception, language and culture… Intersubjectivity in the context of oral history refers to the relationship between the interviewee and the interviewer or, in other words, the interpersonal dynamics of the interview situation and the process by which the participants cooperate to create a shared narrative. The interviewer by word, deed and gesture in the interview solicits a narrative from the narrator; a different interviewer would solicit different words, perhaps even a very different story or version of it. So there are two elements here which are entwined in a three-way conversation (the interviewee with him/herself, with the interviewer and with culture) consisting of, first, the process by which the subject, the interviewee, constructs a version of the self drawing upon discursive formulations or recognizable public identities

> available to him or her, and second the subjectivities present in the oral history interview that facilitate the construction of a memory story (Abrams, 2010).

Because of my strong history with Cuba, which influenced me greatly as a subject, each of these facts about me holds a place in my mind as a memory. This memory resurfaced and entered the present as I was inhabiting these spaces in Cuba and interacting with Cubans. This lens of intersubjectivity and recognizing what my presence in these spaces brings up in people was a critical part of the decolonizing methods I adopted since "intersubjectivity reveals a scholarly path that enables an engagement with critical thought as well as with the tales of respondents that change the perspective that frames the investigation and that of the researcher" (Proglio 2021, 11).

I, when observed by Cubans, was a foreign white woman. Depending on the day and the situation, I was also either a white woman from the United States or a white woman from Italy; although both the West, they are not nationalities perceived the same. Because of the complicated relationship between Cuba and the U.S., there were many times in Cuba I decided to hide my nationality. To play on the safe side, sometimes to the question of, "*De donde eres*? [where are you from?], I would simply state, "*yo vivo in Italia.* [I live in Italy.]" These were the identities that were the first things, although simplistic, important when interviewees interacted with me in the first minutes we met. Although I had little prior experience in this specific methodology when I performed interviews, I did have something that helped me deeply: an understanding of human relationships (Thompson 2016, 30) and deep empathy for my subjects and their words. Inspired by my advisor, Gabriele Proglio, my priority always lied in people, relationship building, and empathy. Through this, I was able to be "led to unforeseen horizons of memory, which entails feeling the estrangement resulting from the loss of reference points within a dialogue with another voice" (Proglio 2021, 14).

By approaching these interviews with empathy and relationship building at the forefront, each interview I conducted had a natural ease of understanding, even if I was not a native Spanish speaker. I was told before going to Cuba that if I were not fluent in Spanish, it would not be good to conduct an oral history, but this thesis, this recollection, highlights another way of

approaching oral history without having fluency in words; listening to people's stories, conditions, and emotions, through words, but also many non-verbal things. Due to the fact I decided to employ a methodology coined by anthropologist Hanna Garth in Cuba called "deep hanging out" (Garth 2020, 23), some of the language barriers were melted away; I dedicated myself to be in the space with people and to see what resulted from these interactions. In turn, we created something bigger together, something beyond words. In the introduction to some of my interviewees (chapter 2), I describe this "something" as *energy*; this energy was the combination of everything that took place when someone spoke. The energy is the experience of the person, recognizing how words were being said, their tone of voice, whether or not they were tearing up or crying, their body language, the faces they made at me, their availability or openness or show me their life, their homes, introduce me to their friends, and feed me with the bit of food they had. I reflected on this after an interview on July 11th. I stated:

> I feel a very peaceful and like calm and welcoming energy that I, I do not want to say is coming from me, but it just really feels like many people can feel my intentions, and they even say that to me, they say, "you are very peaceful, I can feel your good intentions," and that is also really powerful because I am grateful that that comes across.

All these things were a form of communication and added to a large percentage of what was felt during these experiences. These non-verbal forms of communication are essential aspects to consider in all interactions, but especially important in Cuba, where some people fear repercussions for their literal words. This fear was more palpable in some than others, sometimes even said in their words, but what is essential to realize is how much more I was able to experience in the presence of people, in looking into their eyes and telling them that they were safe with my body language, my commitment, my nodding, my smile, my tears, permitting them to do the same with me. More than this, built into the methodology of the oral history was a building of trust that I hoped would result in a bond. I used the shared connection and knowledge of food to understand their lives, a seemingly simple topic that quickly became deep. I was open in the sense that I never asked questions with assumptions; I never, even if I had heard some of the same facts many times (about what Cubans like to eat, for example), gave off an energy that that information was irrelevant because, in fact, it is not. The repetition of stories or memories is a confirmation of the collective memory of Cubans in general, the stories they share, and the

words they say. This process of enveloping myself in the interview and into the experience led to also a very intense experience, one that will be reflected on further when discussing specific situations and interviews. This experience of mine during the interview was documented by interviewing myself almost every day after an eventful interview, day, or interaction. These reflections allowed me to not only express myself and process in moments but also go back to these feelings and reflect on how things changed over time or also things that happened during interviews that cannot be heard through the recording, like the journey there, facial expressions, or epiphanies in the field. These reflections tended to look something like this which you will find throughout the paper:

> In general, though, right now, everyone kind of has a feeling of like defeatism. Like, we're trying to ask a lot of questions and do a lot of things, and like, it's really hard to get answers in this country like, like, even about simple things like how do you take the bus well you just take the bus, you know, you just buy a ticket, and it's like, what is going on in this country? Like, everyone is just, I think, a bit exhausted from all these questions that they're having. And, you know, I don't know if that's the halfway mark vibe, but that's for sure what people are feeling right now.

Until now, you have not read any of my interviewees' words for a reason. Below you will find a guide to how I will display my interviewee's words and the reasons behind them. In addition, you will also find a theoretical guide as to how I have interpreted the interviews in general and how I will analyze them throughout the piece.

1.2.1.1 Displayed

Some scholars have highlighted the problematic nature of the collection of stories and the removal of one's self for interpretation (Thompson 2016, 30). By this, I mean in the literature, debates about the ethics of collecting oral history and, subsequently, how to display your interviewees' words and experiences. Therefore, this section will touch on my process of deciding how to display my interviewee's words and what this means for the broader interpretation of their stories. The first thing to remember is that "Oral sources are *oral* sources" (Portelli 2016, 33). This is to say that although what I have done is take these words and created them into a written piece, this is not without care. I am aware that a "transcript turns aural objects into visual ones, which inevitably implies changes and interpretation" (Portelli 2016, 33).

Therefore, because it is essential to understand that behind these words was the aural source, there are different ways these words are displayed to reference *how* people were speaking. One of these ways that you will find is my interviewee's speech word for word. Therefore, repetitions of words, statements, or even stuttering will be displayed in the original language in which it was spoken. If it is in Spanish, it will first display the original Spanish words in *italics* and the English translation in [brackets.] In addition, since volume, tone, and rhythm of speech "carry implicipt meaning" (Portelli 2016, 34). These aspect of speech, for example pauses, can imply many different or hidden meanings in what is not being said; maybe something was difficult to say because it was emotionally charged, or they feared the implications of what was being said (Portelli 2016, 35). When applicable, I will show this with punctuation like exclamation points or capitalized letters.

On the topic of speech, it should be stated that my interviewees were not speaking to me in the way they would speak to their families or friends for many reasons, but mostly to do with me not being a native Spanish speaker and not being Cuban. While Cubans do not have a specific dialect, their accent when speaking is strong. Like all countries, they have different ways they have interpreted their language (Spanish) and shifted it to make it their own. This means there are not only things I would not be able to catch, but things that were never said in the first place due to my subjectivity of being non-Cuban and a non-native Spanish speaker. Additionally, another part of language is hand gestures or noises. Living in Italy, I understand how much can be said without words, which happened to me a lot in interviews in Cuba. People would use certain hand gestures, look at me in particular ways, or make noises to imply certain things. All of these, when available, will try to be communicated with words in (parentheses) next to the oral transcript.

My name will be marked with M:, and the first letter of the interviewee's first name will be displayed the same. This is used throughout the text with the expectation of one interview where all our names start with M, in which I will display their name. Below is an example of the use of punctuation, capitalization, and parenthesis to interpret the text:

> Example: N: *Llevamos dos meses que no nos dan comida* (crying) *y tenemos que seguir callando. ¿Hasta cuando? ¿Hasta cuándo?* (sniffles) *Entonces.* [We have not had any

> food for two months (crying), and we have to keep quiet. Until when? Until when? (sniffles) So… (pause)]

1.2.1.2 Interpreted

It is essential that the words of my interviewees are interpreted with a lens that lies in the field of both oral history and memory studies. As stated before, the method of interviewing was a method of giving space and voice to the interviewee and my presence impacted this experience. We created an interview together, one not able to happen without the other. When I left my interviewees, though, it was in my hands, as a historian, to interpret and communicate where these interviews, narratives, and memories fit into history. As the historian and writer of this piece, I have taken the words and created material to be published, which ultimately means the power lies in my hands (Portelli 2016, 35). With this being said, I would like to provide a guide on how I expect my sources to be interpreted and read, not just literally (as stated above) but also on which theoretical lens you should employ when reading them.

The first doubt I would like to discuss is the topic of credibility. Through this research, there have been some who have questioned the credibility of information from stories. Some say that memory is faulty, or that people lie. I want to end this narrative here and acknowledge that this piece is about something bigger than "facts." Oral histories tell us "less about events" and more " about their meaning." Although, this is not to say that oral history holds "no factual validity," but rather, they shed a "new light on an expert area of the daily life of the non-hegemonic classes" (Portelli 2016, 36). Therefore,

> Oral sources are credible but with a different credibility. The importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it, as imagination, symbolism and desire emerge. Therefore there are no false oral sources. Once we have checked their factual credibility with all the established criteria of philological criticism and factual verification which are required by all types of sources anyway, the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that "wrong "statements are still psychologically "true" and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts (Portelli 2016, 37).

The idea of credibility or reading into the omission of "facts" is highly relevant to Cuba as a site due to the regime and the circumstances Cubans are under every day. At many points in this

thesis, I explain situations in which I could tell that people were saying certain things to avoid saying something else, and in these spaces is something essential to recognize and make light of.

The second topic I would like to discuss is the "framework of collective memory" and what an individual's words mean for Cubans society. This framework proposes that when one recalls a memory from the past, this is the "combination of individual recollections of many members of the same society." This process can manifest itself in different ways; it is a flow from one to the other. Both "the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group," as well as "the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories," (Halbwachs 1992, 39). In the process of recalling memories from my interviewees, I was able to experience them placing themselves "in the perspective of this group." I hear them recall the "totality of thoughts" that was "common to [their] group" whom they "were in relation to" (Halbwachs 1992, 52).

Additionally the practice of recalling memory is not just closely related to "one's group," in reference to the broader society, but also related to one's family or kinship (Halbwachs 1992, 54). In Cuba, these two things, the line between family and society, easily blurs due to both the Cuban comportment, but also the circumstances they are under, which manifests in a solidarity that extends outside of their immediate kin. There are unspoken community rules, ways of being, and support that makes it so one cannot survive without this, just as much as the support from the traditional family model one might have. Dalila stated to me:

> D: *El concepto de solidaridad que tienen los cubanos es algo que no nos dio La Revolución, siempre, siempre existió. Preocuparse por el de al lado, por el otro. Si tú no tienes, yo te doy, desde medicina, que está tan escasa y tan difícil. Ella me dice Mami, es lo que nos queda, pero fulanito está con fiebre, hay que dárselo porque nosotros estamos bien ahora y uno previsor dice: ay y si mañana uno de los míos está enfermo, bueno, ya veremos como resolvemos, tú das la medicina. Entonces, esa condición, esa manera de ser, te da esperanza de que todo no esta perdido, la gente no ha perdido esa sensibilidad por el otro y eso me ayuda a pensar en que es posible un mundo diferente.* [The concept of solidarity that Cubans have is something that the Revolution did not give us, it always, always existed. Worrying about the one next to you, about the other. If you don't have it, I give it to you, starting with medicine, which is so scarce and so difficult…So, that

> condition, that way of being, gives you hope that all is not lost, people have not lost that sensitivity for the other and that helps me to think that a different world is possible.][7]

While I use the theory of Halbwachs to confer what my interviewee's words mean for the broader society, it is also necessary to understand the material reasons that make Cubans "united." Additionally, the Revolution brought egalitarianism that extended to phrases or ways to see circumstances. This has resulted in my interviewees repeating phrases or ways of being that further confirmed or aligned with the ideas of collective memory theory. Therefore, through both the theory and the material and historical reasoning of Cuba specifically, I would like it to be held that when one interviewee's memories and stories are being shared, they likely resonate beyond them and even beyond Cuba.

1.2.2 *Logistical Methods:*

In this section, I will explain factually how I went about contacting interviewees as well as specific difficulties I faced in the field as well as my processes when returning from Havana.

1.2.2.1 La bola

My friend who dropped me off at the airport to fly to Havana told me I seemed weirdly calm. I remember thinking the same thing; I was extraordinarily calm and thrilled about getting on the plane and traveling across the ocean. I remember looking out the window, seeing the palm trees, and shedding a couple of tears. My first hypothesis of why I felt this sense of calm was that I had an odd feeling I was returning home. In many ways, I was returning to familiarity in my upbringing; I felt the words of Alejandro, I would smell the air and feel at home.

This familiarity with Cubans and Cuba as a concept made me feel like I could understand what I would experience. Not just from my hometown, I had also spent the past six months intensely absorbing information about Cuba through books, lectures, movies, and music. I had understood the politics and history of the embargo and, subsequently, the consequences and horrors of Cuba being blockaded. Nevertheless, some of me still held these realities as beautiful. There was a part of me that, like many tourists, romanticized Cuba, romanticized the society "stuck in time,"; a place that upheld "real socialism." I could not help but think I was going to experience for the

[7] Interview with Dalila, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

first time true socialism, which would be the utopia described in the books about urban gardens everywhere, an abundance of hope, and true equity in everyone's hearts and minds.

These realities faded pretty soon, though, when I spoke to people, and they expressed how they would never choose to have a car that is 50 years old. It became abundantly clear (and logical) that most Cubans, if they had the choice, would love to have a reliable transportation source to work every day that did not have to run on gas from the black market. If they had the choice, most Cubans would love to walk into a grocery store and choose what they ate that day; to not be anxious about potentially not finding food or having to leave work early to wait in a line. As these realities became more evident to me, though, the magic never really disappeared. There is real magic in Cuba. When you breathe in the salt air, hear music at every street corner, a random person offers you a *cafecito,* and watch children playing baseball; all these realities exist in the same place, the same day, in the same people.

The second reason I hypothesize I was calm before embarking on my journey was that I knew I was meant to be there. In Cuban slang, to ask your friends, "what's up?" you say, "*oye que bola?" Bola* means "ball" in English, but in Cuba, something more like "gossip" or "the word on this street." The origin of this saying was explained to me because gossip rolls through the street like a ball from one person to the next, a motion that makes sense in Cuba. The flow of life, connections, of getting to know one person to another. This flow or rolling of a ball is how I landed in Cuba. The unspoken ease was more than logistics. There was energy pulling me to discover, be critical, ask questions, and listen. Just like how I got to Cuba, a rolling ball is how I describe how I found people to interview. This is not to say that all of my interviewees knew each other and referred me to the next (snowball sampling), but the process felt like I was a ball rolling and discovering from one to the next, each one was smoother than the next. As explained above, at the beginning of the process, I was still trying to discover which questions made sense and what I wanted to ask people. As my first two interviews were in English, it was easier for me to have a trial about what questions made sense and how people reacted to these questions. Additionally, as some themes or answers started to be repeated, I added questions based on that in the beginning. In general, this flow happened after my fourth interview.

The methodology of finding people to speak to was more random. Given my positionality as a U.S. citizen and my lack of Spanish fluency, I experienced interpersonal barriers, like suspicion or fear. Additionally (explain in research drawbacks), there were external barriers to finding people to interview like lack of transportation, summer rainstorms, COVID, dengue, and lack of internet or phone service that made the statistics of finding people to interview for a more extended period of time very difficult.

With that being said, very soon after I got there, my strategy became to reach out to as many people as possible. I started to email all Slow Food contacts and anyone who had ever been to Cuba to see if there were people I could speak to. From there, I started to post on many Cuban Facebook pages, some about food, the environment, and even the College of Agricultural at the University of Havana, about my project and if I could meet with some people to ask them some questions. From this starting point, I also met people through chance, either during site visits from the program or everyday life events at cafes, bars, or events in Havana. Of the roughly 200 people I messaged or connected with online and 200 people I interacted with during my time there, twenty three turned into formal oral histories with people I got to know well. Some interviews took place in their homes, others at cafes, and some in public spaces like parks or *el malecón* (Havana's historic seawall sidewalk). The process was lengthy, and the success rate was low, but given the circumstances, I am grateful for what was able to happen.

1.2.2.2 Research drawbacks

The reflection shown above in section 1.2.1, highlights the general fatigue experienced from just *living* in Cuba in 2022 as an outsider: shortages, heat, mosquitos, and cat-calling, but also the confusion of not being a local in a place where most things are done or understood informally, through the community. This is not to say that Cubans have it easier than outsiders; quite the opposite. All of us had the money to buy the small amount of food that was available and, most importantly, leave if something went wrong. On the other hand, it is necessary to explain some of the difficulties I had during this research process. Due to the situation that Cubans are in with the embargo, but also restrictions for their government, there are generally ways to get around restrictions in order to survive, and most of these things you must find out by living them. It took us a lot of time to understand certain ways to navigate society, like taking the bus or standing in

line correctly. But more than the knowledge of how to physically move around, was the ability to get a foot in the door socially to have access to speak to people.

In addition to this reality, I lost a lot of time from being ill. I got two bacterial infections from water that made me lose a week and a half, and I also tested positive for COVID, where I had to be kept inside for ten days. Lastly, toward the end of my time in Havana, walking down *el malecón,* my friend and I were violently robbed. This incident left us with two different feelings, the side of us that knew how safe we had felt and continued to feel in Cuba due to the low amount of crime, as well as a bitter, fearful, and disappointed feeling.

In addition to my casualties, we were in Cuba during the rainy season, which meant torrential downpours every afternoon that held you back from getting to places and many cases of dengue that lost me the ability to interview more people due to participant unavailability. Another result of the summer weather were supply shortages due to the heat (and lack of transport), and consequently price increases. This was a necessary perspective to keep in mind as a researcher focusing on food access. I got the chance to interview sociologist, Rafael Hernandez, where he stated:

> We are in a particularly critical situation, and now, in the summer, that situation is getting worse…The products that have affordable prices, they're products that are being harvested right now. What's being harvested right now has relatively average prices, but as soon as it stops going past harvest time, the prices go back up, and that's what the market does. But it's a market that doesn't have enough supply.[8]

As will be explained in Chapter 3, another significant barrier to my research was the ongoing economic crisis in Cuba, which had many subsequent consequences. On top of this, the war in Ukraine has raised gas prices around the world and hit Cuba additionally hard; this meant that transportation of not just food but people to get food or get to work to earn money for food was being affected. Additionally, it has to be acknowledged that I was in Havana, the capital city. There is a massive difference in how food is experienced in the city versus the countryside. My interviewees explained there was generally more abundance and variety of food in the countryside due to simply being closer to the production. An interviewee explained to me:

[8] Interview with Rafael Hernandez, June 22nd, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> A: *Qué facilidades hay? Por ejemplo, personas como yo que viven porque tienen familia a las afueras de La Habana es mucho más fácil encontrar comida porque, por ejemplo, el cerdo es mucho más barato. No es que sea más barato, es que se puede conseguir más. ¿Entiendes? ¿Aquí, por ejemplo, en La Habana, dice Voy a comprar dos libras de cerdo y es difícil conseguirlo en otros lugares, no? Ok. ¿Me entiendes?... Viñales es otro mundo…. Porque, aver, Viñales al ser más pequeño, tiene quizás un poco más de facilidad a la hora de, de encontrar las cosas.* [What facilities are there? For example, people like me who live because they have families on the outskirts of Havana, it is much easier to find food because, for example, pork is much cheaper. It's not that it's cheaper, it's that you can get more. Do you understand? Here, for example, in Havana, you say I'm going to buy two pounds of pork and it's difficult to get it in other places, right? Ok. Do you understand me? Viñales is another world.... Because Viñales, being smaller, is perhaps a little easier when it comes to finding things.][9]

These factors culminate in a time of mass migration discussed in Chapter 6, which was also a barrier to research. In a section of Havana province, across the bay, is a small municipality or borough of Havana called Regla. In Regla, there is the third largest sanctuary in the country. We went on a field trip to tour the I remember when we went there, they had said that they were getting the most traffic they had ever seen in the sanctuary in these months because many people were coming to ask for safety for their journey escaping Cuba. Many of my younger friends explained the emptiness they felt in the city. One Saturday night, I was sitting on *el malecón* listening to music when a man approached me and asked if I wanted to hang out. Suspicious at first, I agreed. We sat on the boardwalk and talked. He told me that just a year ago, he would look on the boardwalk and feel the presence of so many more people, and now these people are gone. He told me that he picks up his phone to call his friends he grew up with to catch up, and none of them are still there. I remember this man, Alejandro, said something compelling. He told me that his relationship with Cuba is like a relationship where a boy keeps cheating on a girl and coming back to her and telling her he will change. She forgives him many times, until one day she does not believe him anymore and must leave. He said, "I am that girl."

[9] Interview with Anton, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

1.2.2.3 La Bola Fuera de Cuba

When I returned from Havana the ball continued to flow. I processed and reflected for one month without looking at my interviews. After this, I started cataloging and organizing them for transcription and translation. Because I did not catch every word in the interview, transcribing and translating these words was even more powerful. This resulted in a reliving of my interviews, relearning what was happening to me in the past, and adding that experience to my present self. All of my interviews were entered into a software called *Sonix*. They were transcribed automatically, each of which was between 80-90% accurate. From here, I had two students from my University, who are Cuban, relisten to the interviews on the software and correct any misspelled words, wrong punctuation, or Cuban-specific lingo that the software missed. As a native tongue English speaker, I thought it essential I had the interviewees read in my native language to be able to grasp some of the nuances of what was said to me. Therefore, I used the translator, *DeepL Translator,* to translate Spanish into English which I then printed and read side by side with the original interview while listening to the recording in order to hear things such as background noises, the pauses, the laughs, and the sniffles, in order to transport me to the moment. During this process, I *changed* my understanding of what was said originally. I not only understood their memory differently, but I also changed the memory I had of how I understood their memory. On the other hand, the transcription most of the time also reconfirmed the idea I had during the interview, emphasizing the power of the energy I had felt in certain moments.

This process of *reliving* was not just through the translation and relistening of interviews randomly. I relived my time in Cuba completely. In chronological order, I attempted to remember the journey and go through the experience of this country. Small things had slipped my mind until I relistened to them and laughed at my nativity. I looked at photos and watched videos from each day, listened to my reflections in chronological order, and read the interviews as they happened. This was a beautiful part of the process as I sat in the library at my University, so physically far from the site and yet emotionally close to my new friends, I shed tears of gratitude, joy, and pain once again. While relistening to the words, I highlighted for the different topics I knew could culminate into chapters, a different color for each theme. Through this I was able to organized this thesis in a way that followed the interviews' temporality. My chapters flow from

the present to the past, and then the future, with some of each sprinkled to remind us of the flow and nonlinear aspect of time. Therefore, the thesis will start in Chapter 2 with the stories and biographies of my interviewees. In Chapter 3, I will give a brief historical recollection to complement my interviewees' stories and the logistical recount of the food access in Cuba today (2022). Chapter 4 will consist of an analysis of traditions related to identity and food habits. Chapter 5 will analyze my interviewees' relationship with socialism. Chapter 6 will extend these thoughts on socialism to speak specifically about generational gaps and I end the thesis in Chapter 7 with moments of joy, hope, and love.

1.3 Conclusion: La Verdad

As explained at the beginning of this section, I set out to go to Cuba to find "the truth." As my intentions were questioned by interviewees (as seen in 2.9), I continued to admit I was there to "understand the truth." What happened ended up being a bit different; I discovered many truths, about myself, about people, about Cuba, about socialism, and most importantly, about the world. This process of understanding many truths took a while to accept. There were many moments of frustration, confusion, and why I could not understand and could not get a straight answer. Now though, I realize that whether or not the truth was found is not the question to ask anymore, but simply uplifting the truth my interviewees were telling me; giving each word the credibility it deserved. This was not always an easy process, I would be pulled in different directions every day, even from one hour to the next. One interviewee even expressed to me: "*Todo el que te dice lo contrario a lo que yo te dije te está mintiendo. Tú lo sabes.* (sniffles) *Te está mintiendo. Porque esa es mi realidad. esa es mi realidad. Desgraciadamente.* [Anyone who tells you the opposite of what I told you is lying. You know that. (sniffles) They're lying to you. Because that's my reality, that's my reality, unfortunately.]"[10]

When Neoma said the words, "Anyone who tells you the opposite of what I told you is lying," I walked away from her house thinking I had found all the answers. Only the next day, when someone told me something different did I take the step back to realize neither one is right nor wrong, but instead exactly what Neoma says: "their reality." So, while I held their words with the most value, I could not hold them in the same way I was used to holding other pieces of

[10] Interview with Neoma, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

information. Sometimes with much pain, I had to ignore some words throughout my experience in order to hear every story and recognize it as *their* reality. I was able to ingest words with a critical lens and use what I observed myself in society to formulate my own ideas from a mixture of it all.

I will end with one last thought about the words my interviewees shared with me. At the end of this interview, I asked Neoma if I could use her words in my thesis, and she stated: "*Utilizaba para bien.* [Use it for good.]" Her words recalled a TED talk I grew up watching called "The Danger of Single Story" by Chimamanda Adichie. She says:

> It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is an Igbo word that I think about whenever I think about the world's power structures, and it is "nkali." It's a noun that loosely translates to "to be greater than another." Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power…. power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. The Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti writes that if you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story and to start with, "secondly." Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story…I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar. Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity…I would like to end with this thought: That when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise (Adichie 2009).

Within every corner of this work lies a great privilege I hold that I was able to go to Cuba, observe, use the money I brought with me to live well, and leave to write a piece that could shape the eyes of those reading about a country that is not mine. I confess now that the burden I bear feels big. To express and tell the stories of the people I met in a way that represents them, represents Cuba, and represents my time there has been a difficult and troublesome task. From the beginning of this research, I knew I needed to be in Cuba to breathe the air and share space

with my interviewees. I felt the words of Adichie when she says, "I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person." The unfortunate part one must remember, though, is that I have have not engaged with all of the stories of Cuba let alone my interviewees. I was in this space for a specific period of time, with a specific set of people, and hearing specific stories from their lives. For these reasons, I ask you, the reader, to realize that while I have the power now, you have the power too. I have been given the possibility to use my power and to use people's words, to share people's lives with you, but you have the power to read people's stories and reshare people's stories as well. Do what my interviewee asks and use them for good. I want to highlight that the power we hold has the "ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person." Instead, I ask you to take the words of the stories I have collected and use them to "empower and to humanize," not to "dispossess and malign." I ask you to read between the lines, feel the words in your being, transport yourself into the stories, and together we can "regain a kind of paradise" Cubans and the world deserves.

CHAPTER 2: BIOGRAPHIES

Below you will find short stories and biographies about the twenty-four people who shared their stories with me. In the stories you will find, not just what they had said during the interview but a recollection deeper than this. The interviewees are introduced in the order I met them, to follow the theme of chronology for the reader. In the beginning, you will see a title representing the interview's essence for me; an experience or what they represented to me as a being. Due to many reasons, none of my interviewees' names will be used. I have replaced all real names with pseudonyms, and little information will be included that could identify them. The replacement of names is due to several reasons, one being simply a matter of safety. Some people spoke to me about very delicate topics that they entrusted me with and, while encouraging me to use their words, said things such as: "*Puedes usar mis palabras, okay, pero cuídame. Si yo tengo una madre que mantener.* [You can use my words, okay, but protect me, I have a mother to care for.]"[11] The second reason is to emphasize the concept of "collective memory" further. These stories people tell me are not just their stories; each subjectivity is representative of a larger context of those people with the same positionality. Therefore I ask you, the reader, to move from the person to the subjectivity. Remember when his or her memory is shared with me, it is because someone shared those memories before with him or her; they are an individual memory as well as part of a society.

Some interviews were joint interviews done with either two friends or couples, in this case I kept their biography together. Out of the twenty-four, eleven were men and thirteen women, sixteen were white, five were black, and three were mulatto, aged from nineteen to eighty-one, with an average age of fifty-one. Seventeen were born in Havana, and seven were from other provinces around the island. Two interviews were conducted fully in English; the rest were in Spanish and some Italian and English. They were all conducted between June 5th, 2022, and July 21st, 2022, with a 12-day break in the middle when I tested positive for COVID-19. In addition to these personal interviews that I instigated, I also participated in seventeen other site visits/meetings with activists, farmers, and educators in different neighborhoods in and outside Havana. This included going to two informal settlements to speak to communities, a meeting with ANAP

[11] Interview with Neoma, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

(National Association of Small Farmers), meeting with *Asociación Cubana de Técnicos Agrícolas y Forestales* [Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forest Technicians] or ACTAF and a chance to participate in weekly tutoring with children organized by a local community organization called AKOKAN.

These details of my time in Cuba are to say three things. While this thesis is a culmination of many of my interviewee's words, not all of their words are included, and yet they are there in a passive way. All of their words influenced my writing, my processing, my thoughts, and how I decided to write this thesis. Secondly, not included in this are the words, stories, and processing of my classmates whom I was in Cuba with. Each of the eighteen other students was essential in processing my experiences with interviewees and life in Cuba. As each of us was researching different topics such as urban infrastructure, LGBT+ rights, or international relations, we would come home and share what we discovered over dinner, what confused us about society, and how we imagined solutions for the future. These conversations were crucial to formulate my understanding of the entire situation in Cuba. Consequently, I experienced much more and met many more people in Cuba than could be included in these biographies or this thesis. Where there is a concrete remembrance of where a thought came from, I will say it, but let this now serve as an acknowledgment that most of my thoughts and memories were influenced by the activities I participated in outside of my research and the experience of simply living and "deeply hanging out."

2.1 Supermarket Surrealism

I got in contact with Sandro randomly through a friend of a friend. I remember the exact moment, my first experience of the causality of Cuban society, and realizing the indispensability of having connections on the island. I happened to be explaining to an ex-student at an event that I was going to Cuba, and she told me she had a classmate there now and gave me his contact information. When I landed in Havana, I texted him to see if he would meet, not knowing how the experience would go. This was a theme throughout the two months with every interview, the uncertainty of who you would be talking to, what they would say, and how they would perceive you. Looking back, this was the perfect first interview; comfortable because we came from the same foundational understanding of each other, both going to the same university, knowing life

in Italy, and being young, there was an instant ease in speaking to each other which I was grateful for the first interview. Sandro also brought his wife to the interview, who was a physicist. It was nice because she added insights about her personal experience, adding to the informality, like three friends meeting for a Sunday coffee. We met at the coffee shop across from my house, Sandro insisted on making it convenient for me, and we just started to catch up. We chatted for a while before I started recording.

Sandro is a 25-year-old white man born in Havana and left for the first time to attend school in Italy at the University of Gastronomic Sciences, where he received his bachelor's degree in 2016. After graduating, he worked for a few years in Italy before returning to Havana, where he was forcibly kept due to visa issues entering the U.S. He is from, by Cuban standards, a very well-off family since his brother lives in Florida and can send money abroad, a practice widespread these days. Sandro had told me that he wanted to go to school in the U.S. at FIU (in Miami), where his brother lives, but things are being held up because of Cuban bureaucracy. He spends much time waiting for seemingly simple things to be processed and done. Outside of the interview Sandro and his wife were giving me advice on my interviews, how to move forward and go about speaking to people. They were both very open with me, although in hushed tones and in English, they spoke to me about the July 11th protests outside of the interview. His wife told me that she signed a petition from *Archipelago*, one of the most active organizations inciting the protests. A few days later, she got a visit from the police, where she had to lie and say she did not know what the petition was for. You could feel their exhaustion and disbelief in recounting the story; they seemed more than ready to leave their country and not look back.

Sandro had said something important to me before the interview started that I remembered very well. He told me that when he left Cuba for the first time, people would say to him that it was so "nice" or "sweet" (in a patronizing way) that Cubans did not have the internet. He remembered feeling frustrated by that. He said, "No, it's not nice; we want the internet. Why don't we deserve to have it?" This was one of the first moments in Cuba I stopped to question my own romanticization of Cuban society; the old cars, the disconnections, the nostalgic way to see their struggle. I took a step back and asked myself to start listening to what people were saying

without my prescribed idea of what life is like there. Sandro reflected on his experience of leaving Cuba for the first time. He said,

> S: People like to say, like ah, it's like the first thing, (pause) it's really embarrassing, but the first thing you do is, as a Cuban, when you travel, and you just enter a supermarket, you started taking pictures of everything. It's so surreal, that you can enter a place that has everything that you can think of that you can buy that, you know? And it's just like, my God, this is, this is something else. I did it! When I, when I first traveled, I entered one, and it's impactful. I say it's embarrassing, because now you look back and say like, that makes no sense. But it made sense at that point, It was a surreal experience.[12]

Before this recounting, I saw us as being similar. We are similar in age and went to the same school; I thought I could imagine what he went through moving to a new country, but this was very insightful and a powerful memory that will stay with me.

2.2 Diplomat to Dueño

I met Homero at a food design fair where he was promoting his new restaurant in downtown Havana. His restaurant was centered around an ancient practice of making bread out of cassava called *casabe*. He is a tall, mulatto man, born in Havana in 1968. Before opening this restaurant in April 2022, he was a diplomat for twenty-six years in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, twice in Japan. His last mission was being the ambassador of Cuba in Vietnam from 2015-2017. He had said, "after finishing there [in Vietnam], I was going to become 50 years old, you see, and I thought, I want to do something else."[13] He explained that with the new laws around private business happening in Cuba, he and his family thought, "we can do something different…from a personal and family point of view, we wanted to find another kind of life, another kind of prosperity."[14] Homero was one of my second interviewees and also spoke in English, which was comfortable for me, but potentially did not allow him to express himself fully.

Before opening the restaurant, he said he did not have an interest in food other than that he "loved eating, but nothing else." He stated, "you know….Cubans they love to eat too, and for myself I cook at home and I love cooking, but not special interest as a business."[15] I found

[12] Interview with Sandro, June 5th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[13] Interview with Homero, June 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[14] Ibidem
[15] Ibidem

Homero to be very formal, you could tell he was watching what he was saying, and it made sense due to his background. He asked me a couple of times during the interview, "is it okay?" wondering if what he said was correct or the answer I was looking for, although I told him that I was just interested in his story. He was very kind to me, letting me try their food and showing me the business that they had created. In my reflections, I stated our interview lacked a connection and felt very scripted.[16] It made me realize the necessity of the person trusting me and feeling comfortable to speak their truth, but also find the rhythm of interviewing since it was only my second interview and I did not quite know how to relax and pay attention to ask the appropriate or more complex questions.

2.3 Dios Sabe

The experience of interviewing Neoma was my first powerful experience in the oral history process; it was the point that things shifted for my project. This was when I felt and understood the power of trust building and relationship creation in the absence of words but in energy; the potential of two humans to create not just care but love within moments. Neoma was the first person that I felt told me her truth, that I felt her fear, her joy, her aspirations, and her story. Neoma and I got connected randomly, similar to all my other interviews; I put my feelers out into the world and got a reply. She told me to come to her house one afternoon after work. This day was also interesting because I could feel myself shifting in energy concerning the rest of society and space; the romanticizing of certain situations was fading. You hear this when comparing the reflection on June 7th, 2022, where I stated, "I took a taxi to um … her mother's house, and the taxi driver Rolando was really funny, and kind of gave me a lot of life, speaking to a Cuban, trying to speak to him about things, it was kind of like my first trial in just speaking, so that was really nice,"[17] to the reflection I had on the day of this interview: "I basically I took a taxi to this neighborhood called Marianao, and the taxi was, of course, overpriced I mean I am sick and tired of these fucking taxi drivers, but that's beside the point…"[18]

In this taxi, I remember the driver warning me about the neighborhood. Being warned by taxis about entering poorer, more black neighborhoods in Havana was something that happened often

[16] Mallory Cerkleski reflection, June 8th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[17] Mallory Cerkleski Reflection from June 7th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[18] Mallory Cerkleski Reflection from June 15th, 2022, Havana Cuba

to us. He told me *cuidado cuidado*, (be careful, be careful), and I listened. I was a young, foreign woman, alone in a place I had no idea where I was; I could not even point on a map if I was given one. This caution stayed with me for a bit but slowly melted away when I was greeted by an elderly woman and her friend at the gate. She asked me why I was there and I told her to meet someone, she let me come inside and sat me down in front of a fan. This ended up being a common practice, people putting fans in front of me to protect my non-Cuban blood from the heat. This older woman was speaking to me, not only in Cuban Spanish but very mumbled, which I had no chance of ever understanding. I nodded politely, *si si si gracias, si, gracias,* never sure of what I agreed to.

Shortly after, Neoma arrived very frantically and late due to the unreliable transport system, which I had no clue of the severity at the time. I was calm in my waiting, though. She came in and made herself some food, the mother asked me something, and of course, I continued with my *si si gracias*. Neoma asked me a question, and I finally understood they had asked me if I had eaten. I changed my response to "no" and she quickly yelled at her mother, "*Pobrecita, ella no entendió, debe estar muriendo de hambre* [Poor girl, she did not understand, she must be starving.]" I was not starving, but I gave in and allowed them to feed me a little rice, beans, chicken, and plantains.

Over lunch, Neoma started to ask me what I was doing, I introduced myself (as much as possible), and eventually, we sat down to record the interview. Neoma is a doctor of science and a professor at the University of Havana. She is a mathematician by training but a specialist in food preservation. She is fifty-five years old and has lived in Havana her whole life. She lives in her grandmother's house taking care of her partially blind mother - the woman who had greeted me. In the end, I realized that her mom was mumbling that to me earlier by showing me her glasses; pieces started to make sense. Neoma has children and grandchildren who live in the east of the country, but that is the only family she has left alive. Neoma was brave in her interview. Before we started recording, she told me, "*mira, antes de grabar*... [look, before you record…]", and she placed her hands over her wrists like handcuffs. I took a deep breath and continued. This interview ended up very emotional; in the end, we were both left crying.

N: *Entienden? Y esa es la realidad de nosotros los cubanos* (crying) *Desgraciadamente. (crying)* (Name removed) *me llamó y me dije "Cuidado con lo que dice." pero no diré mentira. Dios sabe que yo no te he dicho mentira. Pero no me voy a callar.* (taps fingernails on the table) *No más.* [Do you understand? And that is the reality of us Cubans. (crying) Unfortunately. (crying) (Name removed) called me and said to me, "Be careful what you say," but I will not tell a lie. God knows I have not told you a lie. But I will not shut up. (taps fingernails on the table) No more.]

M: *Gracias.* [Thank you.]

N: *Por nada. Utilizaba para bien.* (I start crying a lot) *Es todo Mi niña. Ya... Si tú lloras, me vas a desbaratar Y yo no quiero... Decirte que he aguantado porque no quiero llorar. Ya. Puedes luchar por un mundo mejor, yo no, ya estoy viejo* (crying, sniffling) *Ok? Es lo que me tocó* (we both laugh and cry at the same time). [No problem. Use it for good… (silence) (I start crying a lot) It's all my love. Yeah... If you cry, you're gonna mess me up And I don't want to... I tell you that I've held on because I don't want to cry. Ya. You can fight for a better world I can't, I'm old now (crying, sniffling) Ok? It's what I got. (we both laugh and cry at the same time)...]

M: *Si.* [Yes.]

N: *Vivimos de hipocresía, vivimos con miedo. Es una* (breathes in) *patraña. "Oye, cuidado con lo que tú dices. No vayas a decir nada." ¿Por qué?* [We live in hypocrisy, we live in fear. It's a (breathes in) hoax. "Hey, watch what you say. Don't go saying anything." Why?][19]

Halfway through our interview, the same woman that was with Neoma's mom when I first arrived, walked through the gate, and Neoma told me to shut off the recording. She became quiet, placed her finger on her tongue, and said, "*chismosa, chismosa*. [gossiper, gossiper.]" I was perplexed at that moment, but I understood exactly what was happening over time. In Cuba, there is something called the CDR (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution), described as "the eyes and ears of the Revolution." I was told each neighborhood block generally has one committee member who is meant to report anything that is seen as counterrevolutionary. I had learned about this group before this incident and slowly realized that this woman was the neighborhood member of this committee and came over to understand who I was and make sure Neoma was not doing anything counterrevolutionary.

[19] Interview with Neoma, June 15th, Havana, Cuba

Neoma's interview reminded me of two important things: the first I mentioned above, which was the power of energy; how much Neoma and I understood about and felt for each other so quickly and without saying much. This was something easy to do with many Cubans. Neoma represented Cuban hospitality and solidarity, and she treated me with this. The second thing being with Neoma reminded me of was the environment I was entering; a severe and tense situation. In this, I needed to internalize the fact that some people could not afford to tell me the straight truth of what they were experiencing, and I would have to interpret people's words with much more intention and care in order to understand what they were trying to say in the absence of words.

2.4 No Olviden

I met Nalda the day after Neoma. My experience with Nalda and her community drastically shifted my energy, just as I had experienced only twenty-four hours prior. As I had gotten used to by this point, the taxi driver warned me about where I was going to; thirty minutes out of the comfortable confines of my neighborhood Vedado, technically an "illegal settlement," which in Cuba, I later found out is called *llega y pon* (arrive and put). As we got closer to Nalda's house, the taxi refused to drive on the road the map was taking us to. I stepped out of the car and began to walk to where I was told to be. With no street signs or numbers on the houses, I resorted to a very Cuban way of existing, simple yet, consistently effective: I asked the people on the street, and they took me directly to her house. Nalda invited me into her home, where I was very unexpectedly greeted by twelve children aged nine to thirteen from the neighborhood. They gave me speeches about Cuba and its mission of curing the earth and curing people. I soon understood that Nalda, with the help of other community members, ran a project centered around food and energy sovereignty which included an after-school program for youth and teenagers on various topics related to sustainability, food production, and much more. They started the project in 2010 illegally, and it was approved to exist in 2014. Nalda confided in me about their faith; they are a Christian family (which I had not heard of until then). She said:

> N: *No nos aprueban* (Christians)*, pero aun asi se han nucleado alrededor nuestro treinta y cinco familias, que tratamos de buscar soberanía, no solo alimentaria, sino energética, y no, no queremos seguir recibiendo el agua, tampoco queremos poder producir recolectar el agua, tener nuestros pozos, o sea, desconectarnos totalmente del sistema estatal. Trabajamos en eso.* [they do not approve of us (Christians), but even so, thirty-five families have gathered around us, we are trying to seek sovereignty, not only

> food sovereignty, but also energy sovereignty, and no, we do not want to continue receiving water, we want to be able to produce, collect water, have our own wells, that is, to disconnect ourselves completely from the state system. We are working on that.][20]

Nalda was a black, Christian woman living in an illegal settlement with no family abroad to send her remittances, and yet she was one of the most positive and forward-thinking people I had met. Being the first lower-class black woman I interviewed, she allowed me to start thinking about the dynamics and intersections of gender and race in Cuba that I had only started to discover through books and lectures. While Cuba is a heavily integrated society with a history of trying to erase all racial and gender differences during the Revolution, inequality still exists and was shown when I visited this neighborhood (explained in Chapter 4). Nalda had an aura around her of love that allowed her to have faith in the future, but without being naive. She spoke of the issues and frustrations very clearly but did not let these thoughts bring her to any other conclusion than why she was working and fighting for her community to survive. She was clear that she and her family did not speak about politics. She expressed she had no place to speak of them; I respected this wish and asked little directly about socialism or the government. Through their actions, though, I observed they were consciously disconnecting; in some ways, forgetting the promises of socialism and creating for themselves what they needed instead of relying on the government. In this, they did not outwardly blame the government with words but simply stated what they were doing and why and said a lot in their silence.

In a reflection on the morning after this interview, I stated that you could see and hear that Nalda was sad, but sad because youth were leaving the country and few were doing things to change or build community as she was. In general, Nalda, her family (except for her son), and her community members kept their faith and hoped more than in my previous interactions. They were convinced that regardless of their situation, they may not have access to wealth, but they were going to take it into their hands to be self-sufficient, which would save them. It was a micro-community solution that was inspiring to see. I also found it interesting that while there was this fresh, hopeful energy, I also realized it was the first people who spoke about God and got their faith from religion. When I left Nalda's house the second time, she texted me: "*Espero*

[20] Interview with Nalda, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

que no olviden esta negra que les aprecia ["I hope you do not forget this black woman who appreciates you.]" I told her I would never.

2.5 La Veterinaria que Hace las Colas

Silvana came in during my interview with Nalda. She sat on the couch quietly, listened and then started speaking. Shortly after, I asked her if she wanted to be interviewed too. What I had not understood at that moment was that Nalda had invited many people, a part of her community, to speak to me. This was not without some skepticism on my part; I was simultaneously very grateful to listen to people's stories but had felt this tension in the air that everyone knew others were listening to others' words. This was the first moment I was reminded of the theory that, "in some situations, observers can act as censors," (Slim and Thompson 2016, 145) which continues to happen to participants in this household (see 2.9). Even during Silvana's interview, Nalda interrupted urging her to speak about different things than what she was saying:

> N: *Quiero que hables de la iglesia.* [I want you to speak about the church.]
>
> S: *Pero ella me está pidiendo otra cosa* [but she is asking me for something else.][21]

Silvana was a fifty-eight year-old white woman who was very calm and soft-spoken. She had a sweet energy to her. She told me that she was a cleaner in the church and took care of children, relatives, nephews, and nieces whose parents were at work. She is a trained veterinarian, but said that, " *Si me llegan los medicamentos, la puedo ejercer.*" [If the medicines reach me, I can practice.] In this, one can also hear the hinting at the blockade[22] shifting the professions they can practice (also heard in Neoma's description in Chapter 5). Out of everyone, Silvana was the most devout person I spoke to. She believed deeply in God's power and that he would bring the necessary change to Cuba.

2.6 Me voy de revoluciones

Like Silvana, Verita sat in on the previous interview and then joined in. She was the oldest person I had spoken to up until that point and one of the few who clearly remembered

[21] Interview with Silvana, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[22] Explained deeply below, the blockade refers to the trade embargo on Cuba by the U.S.

capitalism in Cuba. When she started speaking, I could barely hear her; Nalda chimed in again and said, "*habla bajito, habla muy bajito*. [she speaks softly, very softly.]" I was grateful it was not just me. Verita also had a lovely energy; she was seventy-five years old and retired. She told me she was from a different province, Villa Clara, but she has lived in Havana since recently. She told me she has good neighbors where she lives now, and her son works; he is a baker. Verita was also very devout to God but believed less in the power of God to change everything; she spoke a lot about before the Revolution and the change she saw sixty years ago. I had a tough time understanding her and only after the transcription and reading her words, had I realized how powerful what she was saying to me was. Nevertheless, I remember feeling her dedication to her people, spending her days and time at the project helping her community. She said:

> V: *Pero hay mucha murmuración y mucho descontento. Pero imagínate, no se puede perder la esperanza. La esperanza es lo último que se pierde. Yo estoy aquí en el proyecto ayudando a la hermana, todo lo que pueda ayudarla yo la ayudo. También para conectar, para tener mi mente ocupada porque si no, ya tú sabes. Me voy de revoluciones y así un futuro mejor. Para Cuba, para todo el mundo.* [But there is much murmuring and much discontent. But imagine, you can not lose hope. Hope is the last thing you lose. I am here in the project helping the sister, everything that can help her I help her. Also to connect, to keep my mind occupied because if not, you know. I go to revolutions and thus a better future. For Cuba, for the entire world.][23]

Verita was the first person to say this phrase to me, which became a theme and a turning point in my interviews. After Verita had said this, I started asking people about *la esperanza* [the hope] and what people did daily to keep it. This will be discussed in Chapter 7.

2.7 No Soy Muy de Tener Mucho

Telma was next in line in the interview chain of the day. I had met her earlier with the children I was introduced to since she is their teacher, and she prepared their presentation for me. She was funny, had lively energy, was more upbeat than the previous two women, and was very playful. She was an older white woman who was born in 1960, "*No llegaba al año de triunfar la Revolución*. [Not even a year after the triumph of the Revolution.]" She was also from the countryside in Villa Clara, where Verita was from; she thought a lot about food because she

[23] Interview with Verita, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

had diabetes and her husband had hypertension. She was a retired teacher, but now worked taking care of her family. She explained that after the Revolution, all of her family progressed and could go to school. She says:

> T: *Nosotros procedemos de una familia muy pobre. Mi papá…nos crió con mucha dedicación…Todos progresamos…Estoy muy agradecida de todos los procesos que han ocurrido en Cuba, porque no sé si será por la la formación que tuve, pero soy agradecida y agradezco lo que tengo hoy, lo que tengo, ya sea mucho o sea poco, porque en realidad no soy muy de tener mucho, me conformo con lo normal y me siento agradecido.* [We come from a very poor family. My father… raised us with a lot of dedication…. We all make progress… I am very grateful for all the processes that have taken place in Cuba, because I don't know if it was because of the training I had, but I am grateful and I appreciate what I have today, what I have, whether it is a lot or a little, because in reality I don't I am not very fond of having a lot, I am satisfied with what is normal and I feel grateful.][24]

Telma's story is a standard narrative among older Cubans that will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 6 when discussing generations. Those who lived before the Revolution or close to the triumph speak about their memories of capitalism and compare them to the problems they experience today. The event of the Revolution changed everything for them and brought them all their opportunities. This is a powerful memory and a strong value that many older people hold, and not for no reason. Like Telma says, their material conditions were changed, but the words in bold above were expressed to me frequently. People made a point to say that because they had experienced the inequality and lack during capitalism, they had grown used to not having access to much. It was something they expressed contentment with. It is crucial, though, to consider that this was the opposite attitude from, for instance, Neoma (shown above), who was suffering from this lack and did not hide this feeling. Many other people I met were very disappointed with the lack of supply in their country and did not feel satisfied with having little. This is not to say one person is telling a lie or not, but to remember the different narratives at play about the same material condition. One person can feel deeply offended by it, while another expresses feeling grateful and fulfilled because they are "not very fond of having a lot."

[24] Interview with Telma, June 15th, 2022, Havana Cuba

2.8 Salir de Viaje, ir por la Calle, y ir para la Playa

Geraldo Sr. was Nalda's husband, a very tall and thin, older black man. He was fifty-nine years old, born and raised in Havana, and retired. Geraldo Sr. was the person to greet me in the house, the one who, like in Neoma's house, took the fan and placed it in my direction, making sure I was comfortable in the house. He offered me something to drink, although I declined since I was already suffering a bacterial infection from contaminated water.

It was not until our interview that I got to ask him questions about himself. He was a dedicated supporter of his wife, Nalda, and very quiet and helpful wherever needed. Geraldo was the first man I interviewed, and he allowed me to reflect a lot about my positionality and subjectivity as a woman in Cuba. While the literature stated gender could be an inhibiting factor (Slim and Thompson 2016, 145), I could not have known what the experience of interviewing men would be like before executing it myself. As mentioned in the research drawbacks, catcalling was endemic in Cuba, something you could not walk on the street and not experience. Although it is something that happens to female-presenting people around the world, in Cuba, it was so bad that it started to take a toll on all our experiences, influencing the way we lived in space and interacted with everyone. This is reflected in a piece described by Slim and Thompson (2016) that commented on interviewing amidst fear, which, unfortunately, I felt at many moments.

At first, I tried to ignore this reality until male-presenting people on our trip overheard some of us speaking about it, and they asked, "what are you talking about? I've never noticed that." This was powerful to me because it was so hidden from them. This reality shifted how I could participate in interviews with men. Interviewing Geraldro Sr. in his house with his family around, I realized this was the only way I could interview older men I was unfamiliar with; this meant that there would always be a potential for "censoring of information." Although it does not mean the interview was not valid, the interpersonal dynamics, as well as ease between me and the female interviewees, is something to note. From here, you will realize that unless the male interviewees were my age or we had a previous experience together, all the men interviewed were in the presence of their wives. This aspect of gender roles and dynamics will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

2.9 Immaginate yo en tu Pais

The last interview in Nalda's house was with Nalda and Geraldo Sr.'s son. This interview had the least amount of words spoken, yet much was said. Geraldo's body language was very dismissive at first. His mother, Nalda, insisted I interview him, so he sat down–everything felt very forced. I told him in broken Spanish that if he did not want to do the interview, he did not have to, yet he said he wanted to. Geraldo Jr. was a young black man, 30 years old, and an intensive care specialist. His son was running around the house, and he was half taking care of him and half engaging in the interview. It seemed to me like he did not want to speak, not just with his body language (tense and frustrated), but he was also practically whispering; I could not hear one word. I came to find out this was all for a reason. He spoke to me very briefly and very timidly out loud until I was trying to finish the interview, and he shifted his energy. The complete transcription is below.

M: *quieres, quieres compartir otra cosa?* [do you, do you want to share something else?]
G: *sobre que?* [about what?]
M: *todos, en general* [everything, in general.]

Geraldo took my phone[25]

G: *Ya me has entrevistado, ahora déjame entrevistarte a ti. ¿de dónde eres? ¿cuántos años tienes? ¿qué haces en cuba?* [You already interviewed me, now let me interview you. Where are you from? How old are you? What are you doing in cuba?]
M: I from the U.S., but I live in Italy, I am twenty-four and I am here to understand the truth.
G: *Vinistes desde tan lejos sola solo para saber la verdad.* [You came so far alone just to know the truth.]
M: *Si.* [Yes.]
G: *¿No tienes miedo?* [Aren't you scared?]
M: *¿Por qué?* [Why?]
G: *No se como explicarte immaginate yo en tu pais, llego a tu casa y te ago estas preguntas no te pones a pensar?* [I don't know how to explain it to you, imagine me in your country, I come to your house and I ask you these questions you don't stop to think?]
M: *¿Por qué?* (Why?)
G: *Necesitas encontrarte conmigo fuera de aquí para que te diga por qué, no puedo decirte estas cosas aquí pero puedo ayudarte sólo que no aquí.* [You need to meet me

[25] Screenshots of some of his typed words can be found in the appendix row #62-64

out of here for me to tell you why, i can't tell you these things here but i can help you just not here.]

I agreed and asked him to add his number to my phone

G: *Eres muy inteligente y se que lo sabes por eso contestas mis preguntas vinstes a entrevistarme y quedates entrevistada.* [You are very intelligent and I know you know it that's why you answer my questions you came to interview me and stay interviewed.]

He was very skeptical and explained that if we met again, he would tell me the truth; he could not say it here because of his family. This interaction was a confirmation of the censoring that observers of interviews can create. In the end, I never met up with him because he sent me uncomfortable messages, further confirming I could not simply do what I wanted as a female researcher.

Regardless, this interaction made me think a lot about why young people might seem more fearful of the government and yet more willing to speak out than older people. We thought that they have had access to social media for a more significant portion of their lives; therefore, they can access more information. Potentially, they had more friends and knew more stories of people being targeted because they stood up to the government more than the older people, like Sandro's wife. It was a small example, but something we heard from many of our friends; people going missing or being targeted for speaking out. Ultimately, I will never know what Geraldo Jr. wanted to tell me, but this interaction was still very impactful. He made me question what people were telling me in the presence of others, and also, he was the first young person I had spoken to with palpable fear for their lives. This was a theme in the rest of my interviews with young people, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

2.10 Cocinera para el Mundo Informal

I had met Desirada a couple of weeks prior at a site visit in her neighborhood (Los Pocitos) on the outskirts of Havana, where she was the co-founder and coordinator of the AKOKAN community project. She is the heritage manager there as her academic background is in managing and preserving cultural and historical heritage. She got to know this community during her Ph.D. research there. Before that, for fifteen years she was an actress in a street theater group. She said, "*Me dio herramientas para poder trabajar en y para públicos*. [It gave

me the tools to be able to work in and for audiences.]"[26] Additionally, she runs a catering business called Café Oddara, which I had eaten at weeks before. She uses the cafe to finance community projects, some of which are the fifty-eight *patios* [urban gardens]. Desirada told me that throughout her whole life, she was the one who cooked at parties and special events. She is self-taught through curiosity and passion. She told me,

> D: *¿Por qué cocinar? Ya te digo, siempre me ha gustado. Por, no sé, a lo mejor esa es esa parte. Yo la disfruto mucho porque es como la alquimia vas mezclando sabores, olores, vas elaborando un producto que satisface, que es vital, que es básico. Sin él no podemos vivir. Y eso es como, como la base del ser humano. Tienes que alimentarte tienes alimentarte bien. Eso me apasiono, me llama mucho la atención.* [Why cooking? I tell you, I've always liked it, for, I don't know, maybe that's that part. I enjoy it a lot because it's like alchemy, you're mixing flavors, smells, you're making a product that satisfies, that is vital, that is basic. We can't live without it. And that's like, like the basis of the human being. You have to feed yourself, you have to feed yourself well. I'm very passionate about that, it's very appealing to me.][27]

I remember the first time I met Desirada because she had an intense energy and was very dedicated to the community. She explained how determined she was to wake up every day to do her work. Some days, she says, she imagines locking herself in a grave and never getting out, but after a few seconds she thinks of those relying on her, her community, the children she tutors, and everyone that looks forward to seeing her every day, so she takes a breath and she continues. I felt this in her; the dedication, tiredness, and struggle that she later brings up in her life were all there.

2.11 La Campesina Corajuda

Vinita was also a resident of Los Pocitios. Desirada introduced me to Vinita some weeks after our interview when I was volunteering at the AKOKAN community center. I remember meeting Vinita clearly because she had a beautiful home garden where she raised pigs and bees and an extensive fruit orchard and vegetable garden. We knocked on her door to see if we could walk around, and she brought out fresh mamey juice for us. Outside of her house, she and Desirada were chatting about getting milk for their kids, which was a typical conversation. I heard many women talking about getting their children milk and how they would figure it out the following

[26] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[27] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

week. This interaction, community members discussing and brainstorming solutions to their problems, happened often around me and was their backbone for survival. After speaking outside her house for a bit, I asked if she would mind being interviewed. She quickly agreed and invited me inside. I was pleased to be in her house; she had loving and caring energy. Vinita was fifty two years-old and a *campesina* [farmer]; she has her home plot and space in a cooperative. She told me she is originally from a humble peasant family from Santiago de Cuba (in the East), from the Sierra Maestra, but she moved and has lived in Havana since 1998. Vinita was a powerful example of the hope that can be had when you have power over your food system. As a farmer, she felt calm by the fact that she had access to an abundance of food, and she created that for herself; if she had nothing else, at least she would have food. Through her actions she wanted to inspire other people to gain that autonomy and power themselves through growing their food as well.

2.12 El que Piensa en Ser y el que Piensa en Tener

I got in contact with Duaro through searching their organization online which was a community organization that used gardening as a form of therapy for people with disabilities. Duaro and his wife, Lily, lived across the bay in a section of Havana called Guanabacoa, far from the central city. Guanabacoa is one of the oldest municipalities located in the east of Havana. It is a colonial township that is famous for its Afro-Cuban history. This was the first time I had been to this side of the city. When I made my way there, I took a taxi, it was raining, and I needed clarification on where I was meant to be, although I was used to this type of energy entering interviews. I contacted Duaro and told him I was there. Eventually, I found their house, accessed by walking up a steep green staircase into what seemed to be an attic or a treehouse. Lily greeted me and asked me to sit down; Duaro soon came out and was very stern with me, very suspicious of why I was there and what I wanted. I tried to explain to him slowly what I was doing, how I found his name, and what I would ask them. After asking me many questions about myself, he began to lighten up. Lily offered me coffee; a must when entering a Cuban household (even if it is something they have difficulty getting their hands on these days). I accepted. She sat down next to me and joined in discussing their lives and what they do. Her energy was very loving and warm. She assured me many times by saying, "*Tranquila, no te preocupes, solo estamos tratando de ver cómo podemos ayudarte*. [Calm down, don't worry. We are just trying to see how we can

help you.]" She showed me a small porch where she kept her bees, and her cat who she picked up and asked me to give it cuddles.[28]

After a little while, they took me out to their project grounds. At that point, I understood they run a community project that focuses on spreading awareness and education about sustainability, agroecology, the environment, and more through supporting and empowering people with mental and physical disabilities. Where they brought me was their *patio*, a beautiful space with vegetables, fruits, and medicinal plants, along with worm compost and their germination greenhouse. They toured me around the garden, showing me the new baby kittens that were just born. I remember this space as an abundant paradise within the city, and as they spoke to me, I felt their passion and love for what they do. Duaro was a strong man, as I felt from when I first met him, he was hard-headed and independent but also very loving, and profound-he seemed to have a critical and profound way of approaching life. He was a dedicated socialist and loved Cuba deeply, maybe more than anyone I had met. He truly embodied the idea that life was supposed to be lived with and for others. He told me:

> *D: ...Porque además no me gusta que me hagan las cosas, me gusta hacerlas yo y si tengo que arreglar una pared, más que vengan y me hagan la pared, me gusta yo aprender a hacer la pared y hacerla con mis manos, porque me gusta hacer. Hay quién le gusta tener y a mí me gusta ser y para ser hay que hacer. Cuando te hace cosa, te siente una mayor responsabilidad con el fruto de su esfuerzo. Por eso, es que tratamos a los niños de educarle, que cuiden la naturaleza sembrando una planta, regando una planta para que mañana no le caiga palo a la planta. Son dos visiones diferentes de la vida, el que piensa en ser y el que piensa en tener. El que piensa en ser tiene la posibilidad de buscar el camino de la felicidad. El que piensa en tener nunca va a ser feliz, o que mientras más tiene, más fiel. Ese es el mundo consumista que nosotros aborrecemos. Nosotros tenemos, pensamos en la conservación de los bienes naturales para legar a las futuras generaciones en el que se pueda respirar y se puede vivir en armonía, por la fraternidad.* [...Because I don't like to have things done for me, I like to do them myself and if I have to fix a wall, rather than having them come and do the wall for me, I like to learn how to do the wall and do it with my own hands, because I like *to do.* Some people like to have and I like to be and to be you have to do. When you do something, you feel a greater responsibility with the fruit of your effort. That is why we try to educate the children to take care of nature by sowing a plant, watering a plant so that tomorrow the plant will not be hit by a stick. They are two different visions of life, the one who thinks of being and the one who thinks of having. The one who thinks about being has the possibility to look for the path to happiness. The one

[28] See photo in appendix row #45

> who thinks about having will never be happy, or that the more he has, the more faithful he is. That is the consumerist world that we detest. We have, we think of the conservation of natural goods to bequeath to future generations in which we can breathe and live in harmony, through fraternity.][29]

Duaro and I had an interesting interview because, for a good reason, he was skeptical about me being from the U.S. and the first person that showed it. As a proud and passionate Cuban, he spoke a lot about the *el bloqueo*, and regardless of how much I agreed with him, he made it clear to me the injustices the U.S. places on Cuba and the rest of the world. At the end of our interview, though, he fulfilled his duty of defending his country enough to say:

> D: *Podemos tener diferencias, no importa, porque nosotros somos hermanos aún en las diferencias, porque las diferencias no pueden.. Nosotros buscamos lo que une en las diferencias, no sé si la tengamos, pero buscamos que haya algo que nos una y entonces, en, en lugar de pensar en lo que nos divide, pensamos en las cosas bonitas que nos unen. Ese es el valor que nosotros le damos a la amistad.* [We may have differences, it does not matter, because we are brothers even in the differences, because differences cannot... We look for what unites in the differences, I don't know if we have it, but we look for something that unites us and then, instead of thinking about what divides us, we think about the beautiful things that unite us. That is the value we give to friendship.][30]

In general, though, I experienced something with Duaro that some of my friends also experienced with prominent organizers in Cuba. Since they had been interviewed many times, they did not always listen deeply to your questions, this resulted in many repetitions of things Duaro wanted to say, without engaging with the topics I proposed. Regardless, Duaro expressed himself in the way he desired and flowed eloquently with his words, and gave me essential insights about their reality in Cuba today.

2.13 De Roma a l'Habana

The day I met Alvaro, I remember feeling joyful. We met at a University visit set up between our programs to get a chance to mingle with younger Cubans. I felt excited because he was one of the first very young people I got the chance to interview. We immediately connected because he had previously lived in Rome, so we could speak in Italian and English, which gave me some

[29] Interview with Duaro, June 29th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[30] Interview with Duaro, June 29th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

relief from the Italo-Español I was trying to speak. Alvaro was a 19-year-old boy from Havana in his second year at the University of International Relations. Both of his parents were diplomats abroad, and he told me he was swamped both studying and caring for his grandparents whom he was left to live with. It was easy to speak to Alvaro because he was young, and we understood each other through this. Alvaro was a believer in the system; he was one of the first young people I met that was very optimistic about the future of Cuba. Whether this had to do with his goals of being a diplomat or not, I am not sure, but he stated:

> A: *Yo soy de las persona, yo soy relativamente optimista, yo pienso en un futuro la situación vaya mejorando poco a poco, se encuentran nuevos mecanismos para abastecerse, para com... Para el comercio, etcétera, y yo pienso que si se dan las situaciones, la ... si se da una, un contexto favorable, yo creo que realmente podríamos mejorar mucho y ya, incluso ahora, en un tiempo que, se puede decir, es digamos que de crisis, de crisis es una palabra muy grande, se sigue intentando mejorar poco a poco y yo pienso que si se mantiene eso, si se mantiene el el primer intento del sistema que es el bienestar de todo el mundo, yo pienso que si se puede llegar a algo muy positivo.*[I am one of those people… I am relatively optimistic, I think that in the future the situation will improve little by little, we will find new mechanisms for supply, for tra... For trade, etc. and I think that if the situations, if there is a favorable context, I think that we could really improve a lot and even now, even in a time that, we can say, is a crisis, crisis is a very big word, we are still trying to improve little by little and I think that if we maintain that, if we maintain the first attempt of the system, which is the welfare of everyone, I think that we can achieve something very positive.][31]

His statements were curated as a politician and only sometimes could his views be read through facial expressions or laughter. Regardless, the dynamic of our interview remained open and free and I was able to regain some energy after the previous tense interview settings.

2.14 La Manifestadora

The night I met Maricela was pretty magical. A couple of us in my group decided to go to the local jazz club around the corner from our house to meet some friends; one of these friends was Julio (whom I will introduce later). Julio invited his friend Maricela and we immediately connected. Maricela was a tall, thin, mulatto woman with a beautiful smile, one that made you feel immediately calm when she looked at you. We spent the night talking about our lives, the promises of socialism, and joy. A couple of days later, I met with Maricela for our interview.

[31] Interview with Alvaro, June 30th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

Maricela was unique in that, while both Maricela and Julio were disappointed in their country and situation, she maintained a faith in her life beyond the material reality.

Maricela was a 22-year-old student studying Spanish literature, although, like most Cubans, she also has other jobs. She is a Spanish literature teacher, a hostess, and an assistant art director for music videos. Maricela lives with her parents; due to the high cost and low income, she expressed that she had no choice. Maricela was one of the first friends I had that practiced the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería, in which she explained to me the god and goddess she worships and gives thanks to. Outside of her formal practice of Santería, Maricela was just a faithful person in general, like me, she believed in the power of the universe in which we spent a lot of time discussing. Maricela told me that ever since she was a child if she believed that she could achieve what she wanted, she would, and she has kept that practice to this day. She states:

> M: I actually manifested, like, you and (I laughed) yeah... I was at home, like, I have to meet new people. I need that, please. And then Julio was like "Hey, I have these new friends. Can you come over?" And I'm like, "Yes!!Yes!! (very enthusiastic)…Here, it is so difficult to manifest like money and stuff like that because you don't see it, you just struggle and struggle and struggle and it's difficult to set up the mood. So it's kind of hard.[32]

After our interview, I continued to spend time with Maricela, and we formed a close bond. She is one of the people whose words stuck firmly in my head, and although not all are included in the text, they flow throughout with equal weight.

2.15 La Apicultora y la Militante

Mirana and Maria were two women that reinvigorated my energy halfway through my trip. The two older women were the first people I interviewed after being isolated in the *casa particular* with COVID. The trip's mood was down; everyone felt somewhat defeated by everything that was going on, COVID, dengue, the heat, being harassed on the street, and the list goes on. This day I felt extra defeated and tired from post-COVID symptoms, but I promised I would meet Mirana, a woman who replied to my countless Facebook posts and invited me to her house for an interview.

[32] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

I tried to get a taxi, but they told me they would charge me 500 pesos for a 10-minute ride (which should be max 50 pesos). While this was something I accepted at the beginning of our journey, it became unbearable over time, so I refused. I asked my friends who had VPNs to order me a Nave (Cuban ride-sharing app) that was sometimes finicky; this day turned out to be one of those days. After using five different phones to call the Nave, I gave up; I thought it was not meant to be that I met Mirana, until a miracle happened, and The Nave pulled up. The driver took me to her apartment; he even helped me find it to ensure I was okay. Mirana lived in a tall apartment complex that had no street number or way to enter. After a bit, she came down to greet me and brought me up to her apartment. In her apartment was her friend, Marquesa, waiting to chat. Mirana and Marquesa are not from Havana; Mirana was a 77-year-old woman from Manzanillo in Granma. She told me that she was forced into the world of food and started cooking when she was seven years old because her mom got sick and there was no one to cook. She says:

> M: *Porque en Cuba los hombres generalmente son, eran muy machistas. Y entonces un hombre cocinar? No. se prohibido. Si había una mujer en la casa, el hombre no cocinaba. Pero la mujer era mi mamá y se enfermó. ¿Quién quedó? Yo que tenía siete años y me dijo "usted va a empezar a cocinar hoy!" Y dije sí.* [Because in Cuba men generally are, were very macho. And then a man cook? No. It was forbidden. If there was a woman in the house, the man didn't cook. But the woman was my mother and she got sick. Who was left? I was seven years old and she told me "you are going to start cooking today!" And I said yes…][33]

These gender roles, discussed in Chapter 4, ended up being a common theme among interviewees. Mirana then explained that she had volunteered for the coffee harvest in Baracoa when she was sixteen years old, and there, the cook got sick, and since she and her friend, Conchita, were the oldest in the group, they became the cooks. She says this was her first strong experience with cooking. In college, Mirana studied agronomy in a program called "Fidel's Plan." In 1970, she went to Camagüey (another province) to participate in the 10 million ton sugar harvest (commonly known as *la zafra*). She started working in her first beekeeping job when she graduated from university. Mirana, to this day, is passionate about beekeeping as she showed me her hive on her apartment balcony.[34] She later got married, had two kids, and transferred the cooking skills she gained to take care of her family.

[33] Interview with Mirana, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[34] See image in appendix #46-47

Marquesa was from Santa Clara but had been in Havana since 1972 and therefore told me she identifies as a *habanera* (someone from Havana). Marquesa was in the military; she never went to school because she said she did not like to study. After the military, she worked at the hospital until she retired. Marquesa talked down about herself; she did not feel confident that she had anything valid to say, however, Mirana interrupted and told me that was not true. Marquesa has kept and keeps her house running in a united and organized manner; for that, they can all live. I appreciated the dynamic between Marquesa and Mirana because you could feel their love and support for each other. It was valuable to hear what one person had to say about themselves as well as what someone who loves them said about them; this added a new perspective.

2.16 Ma il Cambio Existeró

I met Anton on a trip I took to the beach one day. He was a twenty six year-old tour guide from Viñales, a small mountain town three hours outside Havana. Every day, Anton takes tourists on trips to the beach and the mountains. We immediately bonded because he spoke Italian, and so we could chat on the car ride. The intriguing part of this experience with Anton was that when we were in the car, we were with four other people from the U.S. and one Australian who had no idea what was happening in Cuba. Of course, these are the people he deals with daily, tourists who come to Cuba to drink a mojito and ride in an old car–but it frustrated me a lot. One woman started complaining about how she could not find bottled water and why her credit card did not work; I turned to her and asked, "do you know what the embargo is?" They were shocked to understand what it was, and Anton and the driver had much to say about it. They disliked the government and the driver, more than Anton, and felt the embargo was an easy way to cover these things up. I was intrigued by their passion and asked Anton if he would engage in a more formal interview with me.

Weeks later, after I recovered from COVID, I met Anton on *el malecón* to watch the sunset and chat. He had a very hyper personality, yet he made you feel safe and calm. We had a pleasant interview, and he answered the questions well, but I could tell he was holding back because he was being recorded. It took a lot for him to agree to the interview, and I knew he was hesitant to speak about some things. At the end of the interview, he switched to speaking Italian with me; he asked, "*Va bene.. ti piaciuto?"* [okay… you liked it?] Asking this question, similar to Homero,

was something I felt people asked me in interviews when they felt I was looking for specific information, or they did say everything they truly *wanted* to say; my instincts ended up being correct. As he watched the people walking by, he went on to say in broken Italian:

> A: *Allora l'unica cosa… ricorda che, non lo so perché vuoi l'intervista, ma il mio lavoro serve un po, Quindi se, forse posso avere qualche problema, qualche cosa e quindi il mio lavoro, se verò afectato? Si dice? Ma... Quindi queste cose che te ho detto sono la realitá prima e secondo sono il mio pentimento, il mio pensieri. Non è. Allora non è questione di parlare cose che non sono vera, é questione di parlare la verità dal tuo viso, è così. Adesso Cuba... C'è un problema grande perché è una crisi grande, brutta veramente, dobbiamo dirlo, ma il cambio existeró. cambio si farà. Non lo so domani, dopodomani, tra cinque, dieci anni, ma il cambio si farà. Forse quando questo cambio arriva, io starò fuera di Cuba, ma veramente ritornerò per vedere quello cambio per vedere la mia famiglia più felice veramente.* [Then the only thing, remember that, I don't know why you want the interview, but my work serves a little.... So if..... Maybe I can have some problem, some thing… and so my job, if I will be affected? Do you say this? But... So these things I told you are the reality first and second are my (wrong word), my thoughts.... It's not…. Then it's not a matter of speaking things that are not true, it's a matter of speaking the truth from your face, it's like this. Now Cuba... There is a big problem because it is a big crisis, bad, really, we have to say it, but the change exists, the change will happen. I don't know tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, in five, ten years, but the change will happen. Maybe when this change comes, I will stay outside of Cuba, but really I will come back to see that change, to see my family happier really.][35]

These things Anton said stuck with me; they made me feel similar to what Neoma had said. I remembered that the words people spoke were chosen for a reason; to protect themselves. How he spoke to me, as an interviewer recording him, was much different than when he spoke to me in the taxi, as a tourist. He completely shifted his perspective and blamed the problems first on the embargo. As he says, though, this is one version of the truth, his truth at that moment, but we must consider this when analyzing the words of all of my interviewees.

[35] Interview with Anton, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

Fig 2.1 Camilo's drawing, July 11th, 2022, Vedado, Havana, Cuba

2.17 Una Persona que me Está Escuchando

I met Camilo in the same post that allowed me to meet Mirana and Marquesa. After reading his comment on my post, I messaged him on Facebook and asked if he lived in Havana and if he would want to meet. After a few days of messaging back and forth, he met me in my neighborhood in the park. Carlo's energy and demeanor can be understood well by the drawing he made for me (left). He described his drawing as *el triunfo* [the triumph]; every day, he was determined to make his dreams come true, and one day he will be triumphant.

Camilo was a twenty-five year-old black man who studied agronomy and recently graduated as an agricultural engineer. Currently, he is getting his Masters's degree in Plant Health and is part of a research institute studying people's habits around food and agriculture, but he wants to start his project. Camilo did not quite understand why I wanted to meet with him, but he started speaking immediately as I sat down; therefore, I missed some of the first things he was saying and, after a bit, asked to record him. Camilo seemed reserved and formal. He was initially using the formal *usted* with me but slowly started to say *tu* by the end of the time.

Our interview was less structured than the others, but for this reason, it felt more genuine; we were just two people interested in similar things, chatting. Camilo was one of the most passionate and dedicated young people I met. He spoke to me a lot about overcoming obstacles and fighting for what you want to create in the world. He dreams of owning land and producing a specific breed of cow called Creole. He spoke to me a lot about the ideas that young people in Cuba have and how he wants to see them put into reality; that change can come about this way. He states:

> C: *Estas cosas quizás varias personas la piensan o la, pero no la concretan. Yo las pienso y ya yo lo quiero realizar y voy a luchar por eso, pero, porque a veces se dificultan un poco las cosas hacerlo, pero todo se da con el primer paso y si las ganas están, por qué*

> *no se puede hacer? Y yo por eso es que voy a emprender y voy a hacer lo posible por hacerlo y mientras más personas uno comunique, quiere decir, que compartan la idea, porque yo ya he hablado con varias personas, me dicen eso está bueno, sigue para adelante, es decir de que se puede hacer y no es una idea descabellada, es una idea buena.* [Perhaps many people think about these things, but they don't realize them. I think about it and I want to do it and I am going to fight for it, but, because sometimes it is a little difficult to do it, but everything is done with the first step and if the desire is there, why can't it be done? And that is why I am going to undertake and I am going to do my best to do it and the more people one communicates, that is to say, that share the idea, because I have already talked to several people, they tell me that it is good, go ahead, that is to say that it can be done and it is not a crazy idea, it is a good idea.][36]

In addition to this, toward the end of the interview, Camilo expressed something I had felt from other people, but never had heard in words. When speaking about how we met he states:

> C: *Yo seguía, le comenté de la publicación de usted y mira, estoy hablando, a lo mejor lo podría dejar, pero mira, lo hice, hice un comentario y a lo mejor esta misma conversación me ha dado más motivación a yo seguir. Es una persona que me está escuchando y que la idea que yo tengo no está descabellada.* [I was following… I commented on your publication and look, I am talking, maybe I could leave it, but look, I did it, I made a comment and maybe this same conversation has given me more motivation to continue. It is a person who is listening to me and the idea that I have is not far-fetched. It is an important thing, it is something that can be done.][37]

During my time in Cuba, this dynamic shown above sometimes came off as gratitude from them to me. Many people thanked me for speaking to them and listening, even to the point of being in tears. Part of me felt this dynamic is problematic; I hypothesized maybe they felt their words counted more because they were speaking to an outsider. On the other hand though, I felt people were just happy to be heard, to be listened to, and to feel like their voice was worth something. I felt this from Camilo to the point where, even as it started raining, he did not want to stop speaking to me. Camilo's energy was something that I spoke to many of my Cuban friends my age and a topic I will touch on in chapter 6. This energy was the energy of innovation, of wanting to change things, and the necessity of believing in your ideas and visions in a place that is sometimes very content to say in the past. He is someone I think about often for that reason; someone I hope keeps his fire and spark for change, and his words can materialize and make the difference he wants to see.

[36] Interview with Camilo, July 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[37] Interview with Camilo, July 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

2.18 El Hijo de un Granjero de Arroz

Osvaldo and I met at a small cafe in my neighborhood, Vedado, for a coffee. Osvaldo is an entrepreneur as well as an architect and professor in Havana. He is a young white man in his 30s who was born and raised in the countryside but is now passionate about turning the city into a thriving, green, and edible space. He has made it his life goal to, through entrepreneurship and education, spread the message about urban agriculture in Cuba. He has a small business producing microgreens and is looking to expand it with time. He is passionate about his project and holds firm to his values of uplifting Cuba despite the issues they are facing. Osvaldo and I had a reasonably professional interview; therefore, we only got a little into the oral history grid. Regardless, he shared valuable information and allowed me to understand the existing projects in Cuba today around his field and urban agriculture.

2.19 Los Abuelos

Dalila and I met through a friend I went to university with. My friend had come to Cuba for an exchange program in 2018 that Dalila organized to bring youth from around the world to live in Havana and learn about Cuba in all aspects-music, food, culture, and dance. Dalila invited me to her house, and the adventure started like many others: no house numbers. I asked a woman on the street where Dalila lived, and she pointed me in the right direction. When I came in, she and her husband, Silvero, invited me in to sit.

Dalila was a seventy year-old white woman who took much pride in the work she organized. She expressed that she was giving these students a genuine Cuban experience, living with host families and understanding the realities of Cuban life. Although I had received the contact of Dalila and was mainly speaking with her, her husband would chime in every once in a while until I asked him to sit down and have a joint interview. Both of them lived through the revolution, Silvero being eleven years old and Dalila being seven years old, and therefore felt strongly about the progress that had been made in their lifetimes. At the end of this interview, I started crying when Dalila spoke to me. While, something compelling had happened that sparked this (see section 7.4.2); the experience in their house, meeting their children and grandchildren, and being welcomed like family reminded me of why I was in Cuba. This was the day after I was robbed, which resulted in me being incredibly on edge and nervous about being alone, but these

two gave me the strength I needed. I left their house and decided to walk to my following interview in the rain. I remember going through the streets, feeling the humid air on my skin, listening to the music at every corner, and observing the people gathering, talking, and creating community–I felt alive again.

2.20 Helado y Colibríes

Solana was an eighty two year-old white woman born and raised in Havana who lived in a relatively wealthy part of Havana. I got her contact through her granddaughter, who graciously invited me to her house to talk. The day before I interviewed Solana, I got a hummingbird tattooed on my arm to represent a bird shared between my home and Cuba. During my interview with Solana, we sat outside on her porch, and hummingbirds flew around us. She told me they were her favorite bird. I felt calm for this reason and also because of Solana's demeanor. She was lovely, and you could tell she had this unspoken strength. She described herself as a traditional housewife in the sense that she married her husband at nineteen years old in 1959, and was happy with this role of caring for her family. She explained the value the woman added to the household regarding food and managing the house. After the interview, Solana told me many stories about how her family left her when she was young to move to the U.S. and how she decided to stay here alone with her husband. She did not want to leave her home and sacrificed the potential comfort that migrating would bring her to stay in Cuba with her husband.

2.21 Debe Ser que Va a Haber Algo Bonito

Clara is Solana's daughter and was my very last formal interview in Cuba. Clara was very calm and loving, I felt safe speaking to her, but she did not speak too much. She got to the point of the question and was clear about how she felt.

She was a sixty year-old upper-class white woman born and raised in Havana. She was an accountant in a foreign branch and expressed that their family had higher than average incomes because her husband also worked in the foreign sector. While Clara did not believe that socialism existed in Cuba at the moment, she strongly supported the idea and explained to me that we must maintain high hope for the future. In response to the question, "how do you maintain hope for the future?" She told me:

C: *Alta… Alta. Tiene que ser muy bueno. ¿No? Para eso estamos en este mundo y es corto, a mí me queda menos, a ustedes un poco más, pero tendremos. Yo creo que las personas tienen que ser razonables y se repartan lo que tienen y seguro. Si no se acabó el mundo. Si no hay un acuerdo, una cosa bonita, una paz y una repartición equitativa de los bienes, no va a existir la tierra. Los que se están fajando ya se mueren, nos morimos todos y no, no puede ser eso. Debe ser que va a haber algo bonito. Probablemente que podemos llamar socialismo o un nombre que no moleste, pero que la esencia sea esa, que todo el mundo tenga bastante parecido según su esfuerzo que es lo que está escrito. Yo leí mucha economía política de socialismo, porque es mi carrera y lo que está escrito es maravilloso, es maravilloso. Lo que pasa que no veo todavía, pero llegaremos o no existiremos como planeta, dos caminos hay.* [High... High. It has to be very good, doesn't it? That's what we are in this world for and it's short, I have less left, you have a little more, but we will have. I believe that people have to be reasonable and share what they have and for sure. If not, the world will end. If there is not an agreement, a nice thing, a peace and an equitable distribution of goods, the earth will not exist. Those who are fighting are already dying, we are all dying, and no, it cannot be that. It must be that there is going to be something beautiful. Probably we can call it socialism or a name that does not bother us, but that the essence is that, that everybody has something similar according to their effort, which is what is written. I read a lot about the political economy of socialism, because it is my career and what is written is wonderful, it is wonderful. What happens that I do not see yet, but we will arrive or we will not exist as a planet, there are two ways.][38]

2.22 Spagetti en la Calle

Julio never gave me a formal oral history, yet he was maybe the person I learned from the most. My friends and I met Julio very randomly one night after an event. We were all hungry and went to the only restaurant open. Julio greeted us and told us they were closed but that he would make us some spaghetti and let us eat on the street. After he brought us our food, we started talking. Since then we became good friends and saw each other often.

Julio was a twenty three year-old white man from Havana. Although he went to university and worked as a math teacher, he decided to quit working in the service industry to try and make enough money to leave Cuba, a common practice nowadays. Julio was actively and passionately opposed to socialism and the Cuban government, and he made that very clear. Julio believed there was no blockade; the only blockage was the Cuban government; capitalism was the answer to all the issues his country was facing. Although we had incredibly opposing views of the world,

[38] Interview with Clara, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

I still have a soft spot in my heart for Julio. Somehow we were similar, born at the same time, 90 miles apart, and yet from such distant worlds. A sentiment I heard a lot in Cuba was the idea that if one sits down or stops, one dies; the trick to continuing the struggle is never to stop; *that* was Julio, to continue in pain; they had hope that one day the pain would go away. I showed him pictures of my life in Italy, traveling and going around. We had gotten to a photo of Venice, and he started laughing. He said:

> J: We got a big rain in a month ago. All of houses was full of water that was madness and even the Malecón was injured, you know, it's crazy like a natural disaster, you know, and you know what we were saying?
> M: It's like Venice? (I laugh a lot).
> J: We say, what is that? Venice? Where's my boat please? We can make jokes about our worst situations. I love that from us. We are dying but we are joking.[39]

There is a broader narrative in Cuban that Julio's words reflect well. Many discourses about Cuba speak about the unique, Cuban ability to "resist" and "adapt." This has been written in much literature, (Garth 2022; Rabasa 2022; Davidson & Krull 2011; Funes 2002; Plonska 2020; Yaffee 2020), Cuban songs or phrases, and daily narratives from people everyday. This is because this narrative is based on actual reality. My interviewees confirmed when saying things such as, "*Nos adaptamos a cualquier situación.* [We adapt to any situation.]", or above when Julio makes light of their situation by emphasizing their ability to laugh amongst the pain. The point I will make here, though, is to not conflate their *ability* to adapt with justifying the conditions that make them have to adapt. Whether or not one blames the situation on the government or the blockade (or a mixture of both), Cubans should not have to deal with the daily struggles they have "adapted" to.

Therefore, while much literature or narratives around uplifting and highlighting Cuban adaptability are necessary to be heard, they tend to cover up the situations Cuban people find themselves in, which are: genuine, material suffering. Like everything I found in Cuba, this genuine suffering, or "dying," as Julio puts it, tends to be coupled with authentic joy, very real "joking," that I will build on in Chapter 7. While I felt this narrative of "joking" or "adapting" was still alive and spoken about, for example, by Julio himself, most of the time, people's

[39] Interview with Julio, July 1st, 2023, Havana, Cuba

energies leaned more towards the reality of "dying." People were tired when I spoke to them; you could feel the tiredness in everyone's voice, which has resulted in material consequences, starting with Julio just last week texting me that he got his passport and was ready to leave.

What you will now find below are more stories from my interviewees. I will not claim to be an expert on Cuba, or have direct opinions about what is going on in Cuba, I have become an expert in my interviewees words they have shared with me. Now, you too, have gotten a taste of the different subjects I had the pleasure of spending time and speaking with, creating a story of our own. I touched on some ways my identity and my being interacted with my interviewees' identities. I spoke about my presentation as a female and how this shaped how people interacted with me in both negative and positive ways. The negative was my inability to connect or interact deeply with older male subjects, and the positive was the opposite experience with females; the ability to create deep, quick, and trust-filled bonds with all the women I spoke to. Secondly, we touched on my identity as someone born in the United States; interactions with me sometimes started as tense and led quickly into conversations about policy. On the other hand, my being outside of these strict factual identities, such as my presence, gestures, and visible empathy, created deep relationships with the people described above. Each person, sometimes miles apart in opinions, still connected in some way, not just through being Cuban, but through speaking to me; I held each of my interviewees' memories inside me, influencing the next, all the way up until these words. I hold inside of me Passerini's words when she states, "the subject is shaped through the relationship with the other." My "memory is conceived of as a relationship between present and past, silence and speech, the individual and the collective, and thus as a narrative made up of individual and collective forms of forgetting" (Passerini 2017, 8). While the memory of this time comes and goes, the process is not over; since I left Cuba, I have spoken to at least ten of my interviewees consistently, being updated on their life and updating them on mine. This is the beauty of oral history, though the process is never complete. As much as my interviewees have become subjects of my life, I have become of theirs, a never-ending, continuously updated process.

CHAPTER 3: FOOD ACCESS BETWEEN HISTORY AND MEMORY

3.1 "The Island that Repeats Itself": History of Cuba

> Change recurs with such frequency in Cuba that it assumes the appearance of a changeless condition… 'the island that repeats itself,' a place in which 'every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails a difference.' The novelty of change was normal. But the changes that repeated themselves were necessarily different, if only because the historical circumstances of change were different…change begot change: new economic forms, new political possibilities, new social relationships, and inevitably new tensions and new contradictions. And more change followed: revolution and insurrection, emancipation and migration, war and peace, intervention and independence. The twentieth century witnessed epochal national transformations: from colony to republic, from dictatorship to democracy–and vice versa–from capitalism to socialism… Not since the early 1960s were existing value systems subject to as much pressure as they were during the 1990s, when a belief system unable to sustain faith in the political order upon which it rested could no longer plausibly command moral credibility (Pérez 2008, xi).

During our first lecture in Cuba, our professor made us take a test on Cuban history to gauge the extent of our knowledge. Reading through the questions and answers, most responses were clear. Ultimately we discovered that although we had just taken a class on Cuban history over the previous four months,[40] we did not know the correct answers. Our professor told us: "Cuban history is never logical; common sense is not enough to understand and interpret Cuban history, which is a complex process and sometimes even paradoxical" (Hernandez, 2022). This complexity is not without reason, however. As shown in the quote above by Pérez, Cuba goes through changes, unlike other nations. Cuba has gone "from colony to republic, from dictatorship to democracy–and vice versa–from capitalism to socialism." As said by scholar Helen Yaffe:

> For 60 years, Cuba has defied expectations and flouted the rules. It is a country of contradictions: a poor country with world-leading human development indicators; a small island that mobilizes the world's largest international humanitarian assistance; a weak and dependent economy that has survived economic crisis and the United States blockade; anachronistic but innovative; formally ostracized, but with millions of ardent defenders around the world (Yaffe 2020, 3).

[40] A prerequisite for the trip was to attend and participate in a class by the New School about Cuban history from January-May 2022; I attended lectures online.

In this section, I attempt to lay out some basic Cuban history. This is not a thorough historical recount but rather a place to emphasize relevant background information about the themes and topics my interviewees discuss.

3.1.1 *Pre-Revolution*

Like many countries in South and Latin America, the island of Cuba was colonized by Spanish settlers in 1492. During this time, a brutal and all too familiar story of mass genocide of the indigenous people unfolded. As a result, very little indigenous knowledge or culture remains in Cuba today. Subsequently, the Spanish took over and implemented large sugar plantations worked by enslaved people from Africa. Agricultural historians Reinaldo Funes Monzote and Alex Martin, in *From Rainforest to Cane Field: An Environmental History since 1492*, eloquently detail this transformation of the island that turned Cuba into the sugar monoculture many know it to be. Despite these massive sugarcane operations, small farmers dominated the food production system until the late nineteenth century (Botella-Rodríguez 2021, 250). Many different independence movements emerged, none of which were successful until the War of Independence in 1898, led by the national hero José Martí. Following this war, a three-year U.S. military occupation of Cuba formally ended in 1902 when the island nation gained full independence. In this time of occupation, as many as 250 foreign investors further drove sugar expansion in the country, and "from 1899 to 1934 small and medium farms dropped from 60,711 to 38,180; almost 40 percent of Cubans lost their land in thirty years while [the] population had increased more than two million" (Botella-Rodríguez 2021, 250).

There was also considerable political corruption during this period, culminating in the on-and-off rule of the U.S.-backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista, between 1940 and 1959. Large amounts of foreign investments further increased political corruption. These factors led to significantly high racial and socioeconomic inequality rates in Cuba. Foreign investments in Cuba, mainly by U.S. companies, meant one thing: extraction. This movement of resources from Cuba to the U.S. resulted in a massive loss for Cuba. Additionally, the government was not on the people's side: money was spent irresponsibly and in the interest of those in power. This resulted in a highly unequal society and a violent and tense environment. Mark Kurlansky writes about this period stating:

> Foreigners remember the Havana of that time as a kind of romantic brothel where beautiful people dressed elegantly and listened to great music in famous nightclubs. But Habaneros remember it as a place of terror where innocent, even heroic, people were beaten, dragged through the streets, and murdered in daylight and at night. In truth, Havana, a city long famous for 'fun,' is laced with reminders of a tragic and impassioned history (Kurlansky 2018, 12).

To many of my older interviewees, the memory of the Havana described above remains burned into their minds; their memories of this have not faded, and you will hear this throughout the piece.

3.1.2 *El punto de inflexión*

> *Revolution means to understand each moment in history; it means changing everything that ought to be changed; it means full equality and freedom; it means being treated and treating others like human beings; it means achieving emancipation by ourselves and through our own efforts; it means challenging powerful dominant forces from within and without our social and national contexts; it means defending the values we believe in at the cost of any sacrifice; it means modesty, selflessness, altruism, solidarity, and heroism; it means fighting with audacity, intelligence, and realism; it means to never tell a lie or violate ethical principles; it is a profound conviction that there is no force in the world that can crush the power of truth and ideas. Revolution means unity; it is independence, it means fighting for our dreams of justice for Cuba and for the world, which is the foundation of our patriotism, our socialism, and our internationalism*" (Castro 2000).

The Revolution, which is literally and figuratively written all over Cuba, was one of the most significant turning points on and off the island. The Cuban Revolution, one of the most important revolutions in Latin America, inspired people worldwide to fight for equality. This process started when Cubans, fed up with this unequal and corrupt system shown above, started to organize a way out of the chaos. Among these were the Castro brothers, Fidel and Raúl, who had been studying the nation's inequality by traveling and speaking to the people. They joined forces, gathered people for the self-organized revolutionary army, and started their armed revolt in the Sierra Maestra mountains on July 26, 1953. During a brief exile in Mexico after the first unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Battista, Fidel met and created plans with other

revolutionaries, including Ernesto "Che" Guevara, on how to overthrow, once and for all, the corrupted dictator, ultimately being successful on January 1, 1959. At its core, the Cuban Revolution was a fight for Cuba and Cuban peasants to become sovereign in all senses of the word, including but not limited to self-reliance in food production, majority reliance on the local economy, and an uplifting of the public good including free access to healthcare and education for Cuban citizens.

Aquí pensaban seguir, Tragando y tragando tierra
Sin sospechar que en la sierra, Se alumbraba el porvenir
Y seguir de modo cruel, La costumbre del delito
Hacer de Cuba un garito, Y en eso llegó Fidel.

Here they wanted to continue, swallowing and swallowing land,
not suspecting that in the Sierra , the future was shining
And continuing in a cruel way, the custom of crime
to turn Cuba into a gambling den, and then Fidel arrived.

-Song, *Y en eso llegó Fidel* by Carlos Puebla, 1962

Hay gente llena de histeria gritando con voz extraña
Que primero está la caña que el hombre con su miseria
Mientras se mantenga en pie la injusticia que esto encierra
Y haya un guajiro sin tierra latifundios para que
Que se mantengan en paz la reacción y sus fusiles
Porque aunque lluevan raíles la reforma agraria va
Que ya la ley del embudo no está en el cañaveral
Que ya no hay guardia rural que ahora tenemos barbudos.

There are people full of hysteria shouting with a strange voice
that the cane comes first than the man with his misery
As long as the injustice that this entails remains standing
And there is a peasant without land latifundia so that
Let the reaction and their rifles remain in peace,
because even if it rains rails, the agrarian reform is going
That the law of the funnel is no longer in the cane field
That there is no longer a rural guard that now we have bearded men

-Song, *Todo por la Reforma Agraria* by Carlos Puebla, 1962

To the left are two revolutionary songs written by Carlos Pueblas, both singing about pillars of the Revolution. The first song speaks to this period before the Revolution in which there was deep inequality and the "swallowing" of the land. Fidel is, in many ways, seen as the hero of the nation, as the song states, "Fidel arrived" and changed many things. One of these things was land redistribution to the peasants through two agrarian reform laws. This means that in this period, Cuba expropriated many U.S.-owned properties, most notably the United Fruit Company, and redistributed them to Cubans (Botella-Rodríguez 2021, 252). These agrarian reforms were transformational for many's lives, allowing them to own property and provide a living for themselves. This is expressed in the second song shown to the left, where Puebla references the injustice that was taking place under Battista and, in the end, gives thanks to Fidel by saying, "now we have bearded men," referencing the iconic beard of the revolutionaries, even a symbol that people still use, putting their hands on their chin and stroking an invisible beard to speak about Fidel.

In the meantime, due to these reforms and other ties Cuba was cutting with the U.S., a series of policies escalated the severing of diplomatic relations in 1961. While others argue differently, this was the start of the formal U.S. embargo on Cuba, still in place after more than 60 years. Some would call the embargo *el bloqueo* or blockade. Dauro explains below:

> D: *Cuba tiene muchos desafíos. El primer desafío que tiene Cuba es luchar contra el bloqueo de los Estados Unidos contra Cuba. Que es la causa fundamental de todos los problemas de carácter económico y social en el país. Sin el bloqueo, sin producir nada más en Cuba obtendríamos ganancias. Porque el simple hecho de que los buques que pisen puerto cubano, puedan ir a Estados Unidos..ya eso representa un gasto menor en fletes que Cuba tiene que pagar.---Es decir, sin Cuba producir más, el simple hecho del levantamiento del bloqueo va a permitir ingresos adicionales a la economía cubana para enfrentar los graves problemas que hay en nuestro país acumulado de años de bloqueo.*[Cuba has many challenges. The first challenge Cuba has is to fight against the U.S. blockade against Cuba. Which is the fundamental cause of all the economic and social problems in the country. Without the blockade, without producing anything else in Cuba, we would obtain profits. Because the simple fact that the ships that set foot in a Cuban port can go to the United States... that already represents a lower freight cost that Cuba has to pay…In other words, without Cuba producing more, the simple fact of lifting of the blockade will allow additional income to the Cuban economy to face the serious problems in our country accumulated from years of blockade.][41]

The U.S. embargo is called "a blockade" (*el bloqueo)* because generally, an embargo would be a ban on trade between two countries, but the United States has made it so it is much stronger than that, which leads to almost a complete blockage of all trade (hence *bloqueo*). Essentially, the blockade prohibits selling or exporting nearly all material goods and intellectual property produced by U.S. citizens and corporations to Cuba. Therefore, you must imagine that with the U.S. being one of the biggest superpowers, they have their "hands" on almost every tangible and intangible item in the world. In addition, Cuba cannot even receive funding from the World Bank, IMF, or other potential funds lenders, which would be an essential step in rebooting the Cuban economy. My main professor always ended on the same point when we asked questions about improving anything like infrastructure, healthcare, or education: *rubbing his thumb, index, and middle finger together* "Money. There is *no* money." This will continue to be a massive topic among my interviews; the blockade is something you cannot go a day, let alone an

[41] Interview with Duaro, June 29th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

hour, not thinking about, simply because it has affected every single thing you look at or try to do on the island.

Returning to the period, the blockade was initiated in the 1960s, this period was also known for implementing other revolutionary ideals such as education and healthcare. In 1961 the government launched the *Campaña Nacional de Alfabetización*, a literacy campaign that sent young urban youth to the rural countryside to teach many rural people to read and write — an empowering act not only for those participating but a complete shift in the country's revolutionary energy. Some elders I met in Cuba spoke of this time as if it was the moment they became adults. Although they were only fourteen or fifteen at the time, the responsibility of teaching allowed them to see the power of the Revolution.

A year later, in 1962, another pillar of the Revolution was enacted, the institution of *la libreta. La libreta* is the rationing booklet every Cuban gets at birth, connected to the *bodega* (small grocery store) near their residency. The booklet allows Cubans to buy staples like bread, rice, beans, oil, coffee, and sugar at a highly subsidized price. At the time of its creation, *la libreta* rationed a long list of items in high quantities. However, over time and to this day, the list and amounts have dwindled, and the supplies don't meet the daily consumption requirements of Cubans today, as will be explained by my interviewees.

Following the Warsaw Pact in 1968, Castro declared support for the Eastern Bloc. This political decision led to an intense provisioning dependence on the Soviet Union, which was exporting all essential imports, ranging from petroleum to food, to Cuba. Throughout this time, food and other resources were generally in abundance. Many older Cubans I spoke to remember this period and reference growing up eating apples from Romania and canned meat with Russian labels. During this period, Cuba aided many nations, mainly in Africa, in fighting for independence from their colonizers. The war that most people I was around were speaking about was the Cuban intervention in Angola. Many soldiers were shipped overseas to aid the Angolans in this fight, and it is a defining moment in the lives of many still alive in Cuba today. The difficulties around resources started to be felt in the late 80s, and one can only assume how devastating it was for Cuba when the Soviet Union fell in 1991. This crisis is referred to as "*El Período especial en*

tiempos de paz" [The Special Period in the Time of Peace]. However, it was hardly peaceful, a time when the island was essentially paralyzed due to a lack of supply of everything from petroleum to food which led to Cubans losing an average of 20 pounds each (Guanche & Santana 2021). The negative impact this had on the island was emphasized by the fact that the U.S. embargo remained in place. Two of my interviewees, Dauro and Dalila, explain:

> D: *Pero cuando se derrumbó el campo socialista estuvimos sometidos a un doble bloqueo. Al bloqueo de Estados Unidos y al bloqueo que la vida misma nos impuso cuando Cuba perdió el 85% de su fuente de financiamiento, materias primas y perdió el 85% de las exportaciones de Cuba a esas naciones que trajo como consecuencia un estancamiento de la economía cubana. Y un desbarajuste total. Vuelvo a hacerlo por debajo del Producto Interno Bruto. Y Cuba pudo con sus propios recursos y sus propios esfuerzos, revertir esto. Un país de cero que se levante. Eso es como un moribundo. Que vuelva, que resucite y Cuba lo logró.* [But when the socialist camp collapsed we were subjected to a double blockade. To the blockade of the United States and to the blockade that life itself imposed on us when Cuba lost 85% of its source of financing, raw materials and lost 85% of Cuba's exports to those nations, which resulted in the stagnation of the Cuban economy. And a total disruption. Again, below the Gross Domestic Product. And Cuba was able, with its own resources and its own efforts, to reverse this. A country from zero that rises. That is like a dying man. Let it come back, let it resurrect. And Cuba did it.][42]

> D: *Bueno, nosotros tuvimos un progreso sensible hasta la década de los 90. En la década de los 90 se reconoce ese período como período especial. Que de especial no tuvo nada, fue un periodo triste, un periodo doloroso y de problemas económicos reconocidos, había un déficit, el campo socialista en aquel momento quebró, todos los países que tenían convenios con Cuba cerraron su contrato, Estados Unidos aprovecha la oportunidad para arreciar más el bloqueo y entonces había problemas de combustible, no había transporte, no había transporte, no es que ay pasaba una guagua y al cabo de la hora pasaba otra, no, no había y bueno las familias que por ejemplo, en mi caso.* [Well, we had sensible progress up until the 1990s. In the 1990s that period is recognized as a Special Period. It was a sad period, a painful period with recognized economic problems, there was a deficit, the socialist camp at that time went bankrupt, all the countries that had agreements with Cuba closed their contracts, the United States took the opportunity to tighten the blockade and then there were fuel problems, there was no transportation, there was no transportation, it was not that a bus would pass and after an hour another one would pass, no, there was no transportation and well the families, for example, in my case, there was no transportation.][43]

[42] Interview with Duaro, June 29th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[43] Interview with Dalila, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

Further effects and results of the Special Period concerning food and agriculture will be detailed below. This period continued to test Cubans and as Dalila hints to when she says, "the United States took the opportunity to tighten the blockade," the situation was worsened when the U.S. strengthened the embargo in 1996 with the Helms-Burton Act. This act made it even more difficult for foreign companies to do business with Cuba as well as making it so if a product, item, idea, or entity is related to or owned by 10 percent or more of a U.S. company, it is automatically blocked from entering or being used in Cuba, including cargo, technology, and even donations. This "total disruption," as Duaro states, forced the Cuban government to loosen the laws around private business. From here, there were small changes in the economy resulting in free-farmers markets and laws around specific private business in order to get the economy running again.

Since then, Fidel Castro stepped down, and his brother Raul took over in 2008. During Raúl's time in office, he made many more economic reforms, trying to further decentralize the economy and boost productivity. This included the resolution of the existing *Los Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social del Partido y la Revloución*' [The Economic and Social Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution] during the sixth congress of the communist party of Cuba on April 18, 2011 (Communist Party of Cuba 2010). Within these guidelines, the party introduced a new mixed economy to Cuba, which was previously primarily run by the state. This meant "massive state worker lay-offs (up to 40%); serious cuts in social spending; the expansion of the private sector in the form of small businesses; a comprehensive agricultural reform; a new tax code; and the legalization of the sale/purchase of private homes and cars by individuals" (Hansing 2017, 3).

Additionally, in 2013, the much-criticized Cuban exit visa was eliminated, allowing Cubans to travel more easily. Shortly after, the U.S. started trying to build a new relationship with Cuba. This included a meeting with President Obama and Castro on December 17, 2014. This started a long process of new policies and reforms to improve relations. This included the embassy reopening, discussions about migration, and programs to promote exchanges which opened up travel opportunities and mass U.S. tourism into Cuba. All of these efforts were quickly ruined when the 2016 elections took place. President Donald Trump not only reversed many of these

reforms but even added more strict sanctions that did not exist before, which heavily affected the ability for Cubans to send remittances as well as blocking Americans (even for educational exchanges) from traveling to Cuba and vise versa due to the shutting down of the U.S. embassy in 2017. This reduced the number of tourist dollars entering the country, which significantly hurt the economy (CFR Editors, 2022).

Raúl Castro led the country until 2018, when Miguel Diaz-Canal took the presidency. This was a huge shift for the country that the Castros had led since the Revolution's triumph. When I was in Havana, I had the opportunity to meet President Diaz-Canal[44] in a question and answer session in the *Palacio de la Revolución* (Plaza of the Revolution). I asked a question I had been curious about since my time there, which was what it felt like to take on this role as a non-Castro after they had ruled the nation for so long. Diaz-Canal looked at me and smiled; this was the only question that had been asked of him about his feelings; he took a deep breath and said to me that "It was scary to take on the role of two giants knowing that you are not a giant yourself." He has taken on this leadership in a time of great transition and change, and he said that when he is in the face of a significant problem that must be solved, he sits down and asks himself, *"¿Qué haría Fidel?*[what would Fidel do?]" (Canal Caribe 2022).

Since Diaz-Canal has taken over, COVID-19 hit Cuba hard in terms of a blow to the tourist industry again after the Trump sanctions. However, in a very Cuban way, they pushed through this struggle and produced five of their vaccines. The result was Cuba being one of the most vaccinated countries in Latin America and, at a time, the world (Holder 2020). Of course, this was not without struggle for materials to administer vaccines like syringes, which many were blocked from entering. During this period, the government made another significant change with the *Tarea Ordenamiento* on November 24, 2020, which called to abolish the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) and establish a new devalued official exchange rate for the Cuban Peso (CUP). Also, within this, they set out to reform prices, wages, and pensions, none of which has been fully successful so far and they still today face an economic crisis with high inflation (Parrondo 2021).

[44] See appendix row #34

My interviewees spoke about this new policy a lot, and you will encounter the conversation about currency and inflation in the second half of this chapter. As mentioned briefly in the introduction, another thing that took place as I was heading to Cuba was the Russian invasion of Ukraine. My professor would remind us of something essential to remember: "What hits the metropole hits the colony ten times harder." Therefore while this raised gas and petroleum prices everywhere in the world, the gas shortages were tremendous in Havana during this time. Therefore, many buses were not running, and all transport was affected, including trucks bringing food from the countryside to the city. The lack of gas affected everything at every level. Due to a lack of gas, there was no way for the trucks to drive around to spray for mosquitos, and therefore there were massive increases in dengue rates. Supply for food decreased not just because of transport, but the small number of imports they could receive were at increased prices, and the food produced in the country also decreased because there needed to be gas to operate on farm machines. All of these factors combined created the perfect storm for a complicated research setting; my interviewees' situation was challenging; no matter who you were, you felt the combination of burdens during this time.

Now that there is a general understanding of the past and the present, we can set the stage with the first part of the oral history, which focuses on how these events play out in the daily life of a Cuban trying to procure the food they need.

3.2 Present Day: Food Access

A combination of these external and internal forces has drastically affected the Cuban food system I found in 2022. Everything from the decreased fertilizer supply to gas and food imports led to rapidly rising food prices, supply, and general ability to purchase food due to the currency shift. Therefore, at both levels of access, physically and economically, Cubans were in a difficult situation. One interviewee stated:

> C: *Ahora mismo es la situación más complicada que ha tenido Cuba en los últimos 60 años, que son los años que yo tengo. A lo mejor fue mucho peor antes, pero yo no lo viví. De que yo nací hasta aqui es lo peor que ha sucedido en la vida.* [Right now it is the most complicated situation Cuba has had in the last 60 years, which is how old I am.

> Maybe it was much worse before, but I didn't live through it. From the time I was born until now it is the worst thing that has happened in my life.][45]

This is essential to recognize also thinking about the context of Cuba when I was there, the crisis state that many people were in, that surrounded them also impacted the way they were seeing their lives. Portelli states: "Changes which may have subsequently taken place and the narrator‘s personal subjective consciousness or in their socioeconomic standing, may affect, if not the 'coloring of the story'" (Portelli 2016, 38). This is not to say that what my interviewees were stating about the time was wrong, but just that they were in a state of stress; therefore, emotions were high, and people were tired; these can be heard through the words and explanations of my interviewees.

Therefore with this background and perspective, I started each interview with an open and factual question. It was simple in the sense that it was factual, but without having to explicitly ask it, the question about logistics of finding food easily became political. Therefore answers were not necessarily straightforward or easy which resulted in many replies filled with both stress, shame, and strong emotions. The question I posed was: "*Cuéntame cómo obtienes comida en una semana normal. ¿A dónde vas? ¿Cómo es la experiencia? ¿Cómo te sientes acerca de esta experiencia?* [Tell me about how you get food in a typical week. Where do you go? What is the experience like? How do you feel about the experience?]"

When my interviewees were asked about food access, the topics that people repeated the most were: *logistics* (where people went and what they bought), *barriers to access* (including the physical and financial struggles), and lastly, their *feelings* around these realities. I conclude this section with reflections about the *concept of adequacy* and how when people express the logistical scavenger hunt they go on for food, they go beyond what is needed to physically function (i.e., the caloric necessities of sustenance), but also discuss items needed to maintain their humanity, their culture, and their ability to have a fulfilling life.

[45] Interview with Clara, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

3.2.1 *Logistics*

The first answer I would get to this question stated logistics. For the reader to understand what it is logistically like to find where your daily meals will come from, I will explain each step my interviewees laid out. This process for me to understand was more complex since I could see, visit, interact, and understand through experience the different ways one could acquire food. When possible, I will place photos of items or places people talked about in order for the reader to picture themselves with the interviewees. Based on the way my interviewees sectioned off the different avenues to find food, I have created a section for each. These are: *la libreta* (the rationing card), *agromercados* (state or private), growing for themselves/exchanging in the community, black market, *Moneda Libremente Convertibile* (MLC) stores, or online grocers.[46]

3.2.1.1 La libreta

Although Cuba is not the only country that has implemented a food rationing card, it is unique in how it is managed and how long it has stayed in place. Although *la libreta* has been deemed economically unsustainable for the government, it is a staple of the socialist backbone. The idea of discontinuation has been brought to congressional meetings, yet due to this aspect, *la libreta* has stayed. Rafael Hernandez said to me:

> *Libreta* is not very rational, economically speaking, but when libreta was submitted to people's opinion, most people didn't want the libreta to be eliminated. When the *reordinamiento*, the economical social guidelines draft was discussed in 2011, there was one chapter, one article, about avoiding the *libreta*, step by step. Most people didn't like that, even people that have enough money to have everything that is sold, that is available through the rational card. Even those people who have higher income, don't want to renounce the *libreta*, to the subsidized rice to the subsidized beans to small amount of cooking oil, to what is the *libreta* now. The *libreta*, is not really rational because it is not economically very convenient or efficient to sell subsidized things like that, instead of subsidizing poor people. The rational idea, with a socialist mindset would be, if we have a certain amount of Cubans or Cuban families that don't have enough money to buy in the market, to supply them with subsidized products, subsidize *them* not subsidize rice and beans. As a matter of fact, the *libreta* debates were number one: because most people don't want to have either eliminated, number two: because it is symbolic of the idea of equality, the idea of egalitarianism. The government's decision was to keep it and to have it step by step fading away, but this is not exactly happening so far. So I am sure that many people that don't need to have subsidized prices could tomorrow start with that

[46] No section will be provided for this as only one interviewee explained this to me, but it is still relevant as a potential place people are accessing food.

> option but of course, right now the situation is very difficult. So this is not the moment to eliminate the *libreta*, this is a particularly bad moment to do it.[47]

Hernandez touches on an essential idea above, which is the symbolic meaning of *la libreta,* the fact that *libreta* is connected to values of egalitarianism and debates about equity versus equality that many speak about concerning the Cuban Revolution. Posted around Havana I found a poster discussing the transition the government is wanting to make from egalitarianism to justice. This image[48] was a way that the government was explaining the new processes of the Revolution. At the beginning of the Revolution, socialism in Cuba meant *igualidad,* equality, or egalitarianism, which is something people held deeply because of the words stated in the beginning of this chapter by Fidel. He says that "full equality," lies at the heart of the Revolution, but equality or egalitarianism in Cuba are not producing the type of results that one would want concerning true equity and justice, therefore, with time there might be great changes to this once essential pillar of the Cuban Revolution.

[47] Interview with Rafael Hernandez, June 22nd, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[48] See appendix row #57

Below you will find descriptions and photos of the functioning of *la libreta* today.

Fig. 3.1 Cover of Rationing Booklet (*la libreta)*

Generally, when my interviewees would start to speak about *la libreta,* interviewees would pull out their book and show it to me. Many of them would warn me to be very careful not to mess it up or lose it.

Shown in figure 3.1 you can see that *la libreta* is simply a paper booklet that most keep in a plastic cover to protect it. When you open it (figure 3.2) you will see the household names (last names blocked for anonymity), ages, and other characteristics like sex. Then in figure 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5, you will see what it looks like for the basic items such as *pan diaro* [daily bread], or pantry items such as *arroz* [rice], *granos* [grains], *aceite* [oil], *azúcar* [sugar], sal [salt], etc. For some, each day is marked off, for others just the monthly consumption allowance. Dalila explained it well, she said:

Fig. 3.2 Identifying page of Rationing Booklet (*la libreta)* showing from left names, date of birth, age, sex, and height

Fig. 3.3 Rationing Booklet (*la libreta)* showing from the left: fish, eggs, yogurt, and bread

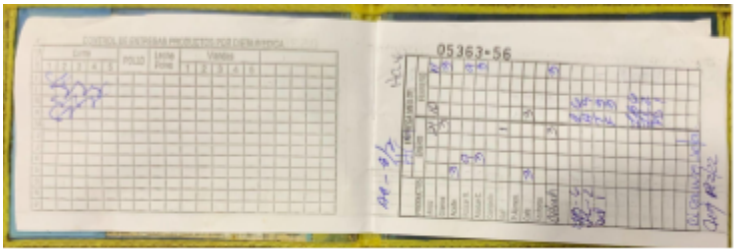

Fig. 3.4 Rationing Booklet (*la libreta)* showing from left items for medical diets and staple products on the right

Fig. 3.5 Rationing Booklet (*la libreta)* staple products continued

D: *Bueno, sí, en Cuba hay una garantía de un poquito de alimentos que vienen por una libreta normada…Antes era la comida del mes. Después se fue reduciendo por los problemas que sabemos se ha ido reduciendo y hoy en día es un poquito de comida, arroz, frijoles, azúcar blanca, azúcar parda, café. Los niños a partir de que nacen hasta los siete años leche, compota, compota hasta los dos años… El pan diario, un pancito diario, huevo cada quince días, una vez al mes. Ahora hay una vez al mes cinco huevos por persona….Si es por mes, por ejemplo, aquí Enero, Febrero y tiene arroz, frijoles, aceite, azúcar, eso son libras, azúcar parda. Bueno, la compota a él no le dan* (talking about her husband's libreta)*, sal y el café. Entonces jabón de baño, jabón*

> *de lavar por mes enero, febrero, marzo, abril, mayo, junio y así y julio, que fue el último mes. Ahora, a principios de agosto, podemos ir a coger esos mandados…Entonces aqui atras apuntan el pan. ¿Ves? que le dan un pan y aquí el huevo* (referring to fig. 3.3) *y así*...[Well, yes, in Cuba there is a guarantee of a little bit of food that comes through a standardized booklet….Before, it was the food for the month. Later it was reduced due to the problems we know about and today it is a little bit of food, rice, beans, white sugar, brown sugar, and coffee. Children from the time they are born until they are seven years old milk, jam, jam until they are two years old… daily bread, one little bread daily, eggs, every fifteen days, once a month. Now there's once a month five eggs per person….If it is by month, for example here January, February, and it has rice, beans, oil, sugar, that is pounds, brown sugar. Well, he doesn't get jam (talking about her husband's libreta), then salt, and coffee. Then bath soap, washing soap by month January, February, March, April, May, June, and so on, and July, which was the last month. Now, at the beginning of August, we can go and get those errands…Then back here they give you the bread, you see, they give you a loaf of bread and here the egg (referring to fig. 3.3), and so on…][49]

Through Dalila's explanation of both the process of receiving and the content of *la libreta*, she also explained that "*antes era la comida del mes*, [before, it was the food for the month.]" Here she recalls the memory of "before," most likely speaking about before the Special Period or even before the pandemic, she refers to a time when there were not so many shortages as compared to today. In addition to the general shortages, one interviewee informed me that after the pandemic, they even used the rationing card for regular shops, not just the *bodega*. Sandro told me:

> S: So the amount of available stuff for a normal day it's been reduced. So now you actually need to If you need your libreta, not just for the bodega, but for the regular shop that previously, you could go and see what's there and you can buy a package of chicken and maybe some pork or whatever. Now it is controlled by *libreta,* like you go there this time of the month, and you get, you, you can buy one pack of chicken thighs, and you get one bottle of oil.[50]

This reflects something that Hernandez stated was going to happen soon, which was the "step by step fading away" of *la libreta,* although, as he also stated, this is a challenging time for that to happen; all of my interviewees feel this.

[49] Interview with Dalila, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[50] Interview with Sandro, June 5th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

3.2.1.2 Agromercados (agros)

Fig. 3.6 Price list from an *agromercado* in Vedado, Havana on June 12th, 2022

Fig. 3.7 Price list from *agromercado* in Vedado, Havana, June 12th, 2022

In Cuba, there are different types of agromercados, and you can tell when you enter them based on what is available, the quality of the products, and the prices of the items. Above you see two different price lists, the left being a public, subsidized market and the right being a private market. This is shown by a price comparison, at the market on the left, mango was five pesos per pound and on the right it was double at ten pesos per pound. The main markets where people go range from free agricultural markets with fixed maximum prices, selling stands and *placitas* of agricultural production cooperatives (CPAs) or youth labor army (EJTs). Although there are some price restrictions on some of these markets, they still are not affordable for everyone to access the things they need. Dalila explains:

> D: *Entonces, para poder completar ese, esa alimentación* (referring to *la libreta*)*, que ya te digo,es muy reducida hay que comprarlo en los mercados, que es mucho más costoso…Esta libreta te ampara alimentos que son, los precios son ínfimos, centavos y vas al mercado y entonces tienes que comprar el arroz complementario, frijoles, viandas, frutas que cada día ha ido en aumento el precio. Hay un mercadito aquí en la esquina, hay un mercado un poco más alante. Un aguacate, por ejemplo, te puede costar veinticinco o treinta pesos, un mango treinta o cuarenta pesos para hacer un jugo y así los precios. Entonces, para garantizar una semana…el salario no compensa ese gasto.* [So, in order to be able to complete that , that food (referring to *la libreta*), which I'm telling you, it's very small, you have to buy it in the markets, which is much more

> expensive…This booklet covers foods that are, the prices are very low, pennies and you go to the market and then you have to buy the complementary rice, beans, root vegetables, fruits that every day have been increasing in price. There is a little market here on the corner, there is a market a little further ahead. An avocado, for example, can cost you twenty-five or thirty pesos, a mango thirty or forty pesos to make a juice and so on. So, to guarantee a week…the salary does not compensate that expense.][51]

Homero also expressed that even if he was someone who did have access to money (unlike the interviewee before), many times, you just couldn't find what you needed at the *agros*. Homero states:

> H: It's it's a much complex challenge, because I mean there's a low source of supply, there is not sometimes diversity is the food, for example…this morning, I went around Vedado and here in Old Havana tried to find eggplant, no eggplant two weeks ago, you can find easily today and yesterday, no eggplant. And things like that you see, it's very common, that one specific type of food disappears. and you don't know the reason. It's been most of the time the link to the production, at some point the production chain collapses for a reason that we don't know. But that's something that happens very commonly.[52]

This aspect goes back to the point made in the introduction about seasonality and the availability of the summer of fresh produce due to the heat and transportation issues and will be further discussed in the section about supply (3.2.2.3).

3.2.1.3 Patios/Urban Farming

A couple of my interviewees were passionate about disconnecting themselves from these volatile price spikes and food shortages through the growing of their own food. When people discuss this, they always mention the importance of community sharing and bartering with others who grew, so that they could get the necessary variety they needed and wanted in their diets. Below is an interview with Nalda, who, before the interview, gave me a tour of her *patio* or backyard garden. She states:

> N: *Como ves, esto* (showing me a mango) *también se produce en los patios, no en mi patio, pero como somos treinta y cinco familias unidas. Esto* (talking about the juice she

[51] Interview with Dalila, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[52] Interview with Homero, June 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

gave me) *lo produce Yolanda, otros producen otras cosas. Nos intercambiamos. Ah, "yo tengo mango, mango, ah, yo tengo plátanos, yo en ese momento no tengo, mira plátano." Y así. Y eso nos ayuda a respirar un poquito. Porque la situación alimentaria no es un secreto. Es un poquito difícil para nosotros.* [As you see, this (showing me a mango) is also produced in the yards, not in my backyard, but since we are thirty-five families together, this is produced by Yolanda, others produce other things, (talking to her friends)... We exchange. "Ah, I have mango, mango, ah, I have bananas. I, at that time I don't have, look banana," and so. And that helps us breathe a little bit. Because the food situation is no secret. It's a little bit difficult for us.][53]

This aspect of community support and solidarity which I spoke about in the introduction is expressed in the words above. Her explanation of how she is able to get food for the week through the support from her community and also her communities ability to get access through her. Nalda was very passionate about being able to provide for herself and not rely on the government or the market for her survival. Therefore when I asked her to draw her future food system she designed her ideal *patio,* as shown above. I found her drawing very beautiful, and she has even updated me with time about the progress she is making on the "farm of her desires." Below I have written translations of the labels she wrote.

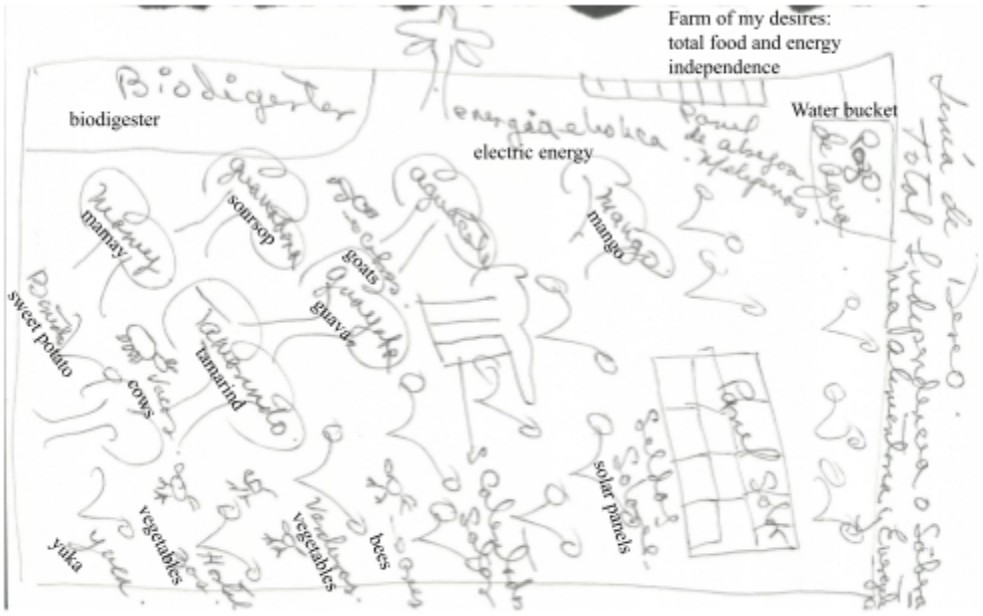

Fig. 3.8 Nalda's ideal food system/future dreams drawing

[53]Interview with Nalda, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

This reflection is an example of the collective memories of support these thirty-five families share together, but also something that was expressed by other people outside and far from this community as well. Vinita explains:

> V: *Me dedico a lo que es la siembra de alimentos como es el plátano, diversidades de alimentos como el plátano, siembro la malanga, frutales, muchos frutales, hortalizas. En la situación que tenemos en el país, con el tema alimento es un poco engorroso por el tema de que nosotros somos los que tenemos el power en la mano con el tema del alimento y habemos muchos que sembramos un poquito más que otros... pero no lo veo tan difícil....Yo me abastezco, yo me autoabastezco, porque crio. En la familia campesina hay quien no cría y lo que hace es sembrar como tal lo que es la vianda: arroz, frijoles y es como hacer un intercambio entre campesinos, aquel mató un puerco y le vendió la mitad a este y hacen cambios. Yo me autoabastezco con mi pedacito, con mis frutales el año entero, y si tengo tema con el plato fuerte, maté un puerco o maté una gallina y me autoabastezco. A un vecino, le di un pedacito a este y al otro, comparto eso, no vendo la carne para yo consumir, no la vendo, yo crio para comer.... Con el tema de la Covid... pongo mi ejemplo, a mí me obligó a sembrar un poquito más. Este pedacito yo no lo sembraba, era el frutal, nada más, al año. Y de la Covid para acá dije: en cualquier pedacito meto una mata y hemos incentivado a muchas mujeres a reflexionar con el tema alimento de sembrar tu pedacito, de compartir con el vecino, de intercambiar experiencias... Entonces la Covid enseñó a mucha gente hoy a tener todo sembrado y a compartir además…Por lo menos entre nosotras los patios hacemos eso.*[I dedicate myself to planting food such as plantains, different types of food such as plantains, I plant malanga, fruit trees, many fruit trees, vegetables. In the situation we have in the country, with the food issue it is a little cumbersome because we are the ones who have the power in our hands with the food issue and there are many of us who sow a little more than others…so I do not see this issue as so difficult....I supply myself, I am self-sufficient, because I raise my own. In the peasant family there are those who do not raise and what they do is to sow as such what is the vianda: rice, beans and it is like making an exchange between peasants, that one killed a pig and sold half to this one and they make exchanges… To a neighbor, I gave a little piece to this one and to the other one, I share that, I do not sell the meat to consume, I do not sell it, I raise it to eat..... With the Covid issue…I give my example, it forced me to plant a little more. I didn't plant this little bit, it was just this fruit tree for the year. And from Covid I said: in any little piece I put a plant and we have encouraged many women to reflect on the food issue of sowing your little piece, of sharing with your neighbor, of exchanging experiences…So Covid has taught many people today to have everything planted and to share… At least among us patios we do that.][54]

Vinita's reflection is vital in adding to the theme of growing and sharing food and experiences, but also the conversation of how the food shortages and situations are felt from the city to the

[54] Interview with Vinita, June 22nd, 2022, Havana, Cuba

countryside which brings up an essential point about how research is representative of Havana, and less the rest of Cuba. While you read voices from Havana, they highlight the essentiality of how the food crisis is felt in the city versus the countryside. This is due to the fact that some of my interviewees have dedicated themselves to the merging of the two, bringing the country into the city through urban agriculture. These people represent a more general phenomenon of the ability to have autonomy over the food you consume, which most people in the city could not feel. They were much more at ease, and even express what Vinita says: "*pero no lo veo tan difícil* [so I do not see this issue as so difficult.]" This intermingling of the rural and the urban through agriculture is a large topic of conversation within literature related to food in Cuba, and one I was interested to discover. Much literature emphasizes what happened after the Special Period: a drastic and rapid shift to a self-sufficient food and agricultural system. In *A Growing Culture*, Roark describes this situation as follows:

> With no access to chemical inputs and food imports, Cuba had to shift to local food production, and fast. The cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all, export driven approach of Green Revolution technologies no longer worked in conjunction with local realities. Because Cuba found itself largely cut off from the outside world's new methods and technologies, Cuban agriculture was in desperate need of local innovation, developed by blending farmer knowledge with ecological agriculture (Roark 2017).

Because Cubans were forced to transition to self-sufficiency, many authors, notably Miguel Altieri (2011), Peter M. Rosset and Valentín Val (2019), and Fernando Funes (2002), have suggested that this period serves as a lesson globally on how a food system can transition to becoming more self-sufficient and economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. Scholars writing about Cuba have applied different viewpoints and approaches for analyzing this intense period, with one approach oriented toward agricultural science and another more focused on the social impact of the post-1990s agroecological revolution. While this was a period of struggle that should not be romanticized, these authors suggest that Cuba's transition in the nineties illustrates the possibility of overcoming the capitalist exploitation model, to promote multifaceted well-being. Reflecting on this time, Mario Reinaldo Machado (2017, 7) observed: "In Cuba, the transition from industrial agriculture towards agroecology since the Special Period of the early 1990s has provided both an incredible example for alternative, sustainable food systems elsewhere as well as its own suite of challenges and struggles."

During this time, it became necessary for Cuba to shift from a primarily industrial agricultural system to a fully agroecological and diverse one. Therefore, the scholars offer a model of achieving this shift. For instance, the government highly incentivized urban farming, not just family houses but also state buildings and empty city lots. The government also funded research and centers to produce fully organic fertilizers and pesticides and promoted a zero-fossil fuel way of farming using ox-driven plows. A comprehensive review of lessons learned during the Special Period and on Cuban agriculture, in general, is presented in a multi-authored work edited by Funes, Garcia, Bourque, Pérez, and Rosset titled *Sustainable Agriculture and Resistance: Transforming Food Production in Cuba* (2002), which analyzes Cuban agriculture before and after 1990, compiling what can be learned from small farmers about livestock management, soil, urban agriculture, cooperative ownership, and more. Rosset points to the uniqueness of the lessons, noting that:

> …contemporary Cuba turned conventional wisdom completely on its head. We are told that small countries cannot feed themselves; that they need imports to cover the deficiency of their local agriculture. Yet Cuba has taken enormous strides toward self-reliance since it lost its key trade relations (Rosset 2002, xviii).

Many more scholars have built on the conversations of agroecology as well as highlighting the immense potential of this movement for increasing levels of food sovereignty and security for Cuban farmers and for the broader Cuban population (Altieri 2011; Gürcan 2014; Lucantoni 2020; Machado 2017; Naylor 2019; Clausen 2015; Trauger 2017; Benítez 2020). While much of this work described above has been done in rural settings, there has been an immense and ongoing process of urbanization initiated after the Revolution, which is still underway. As seventy-five percent of Cubans live in urban areas (Clouse 2014, 45), part of this transition during the Special Period was a massive burgeoning of urban agriculture in different forms throughout Cuban cities, but mainly in Havana, as displayed by many of my interviewees. Urban and agroecological production was the obvious solution due to the fact that it firstly reduced the need for transportation, and agroecological farming removed the need for imported chemicals (Koont 2007, 312).

Outside of my interviewees, I met and was mentored by two fathers of these movements, scholar and father-son duo Fernando and Reinaldo Fuñes. Through them, I toured many urban farms and

met many *campesinos* dedicated to growing food through agroecological methods. Some of the photos of these farms you can find in the appendix. While these visits were very insightful, and I was grateful to the farmers for sharing their time, still, when you walk around Havana, you can tell that many of these former sites from the 90s are no longer providing the food in the ways they once were, due to the lack of supplies and hence decrease the ability to work the land. Therefore, as Vinita pointed out, COVID created a micro shock similar to the Special Period, or some may say just an extension of the ongoing Special Period, that might boost or bring back these urban agriculture projects. This revival of urban production was also a dream expressed deeply by Osvaldo. When he drew his future, he imagined Havana as an "edible green city." See his image below.

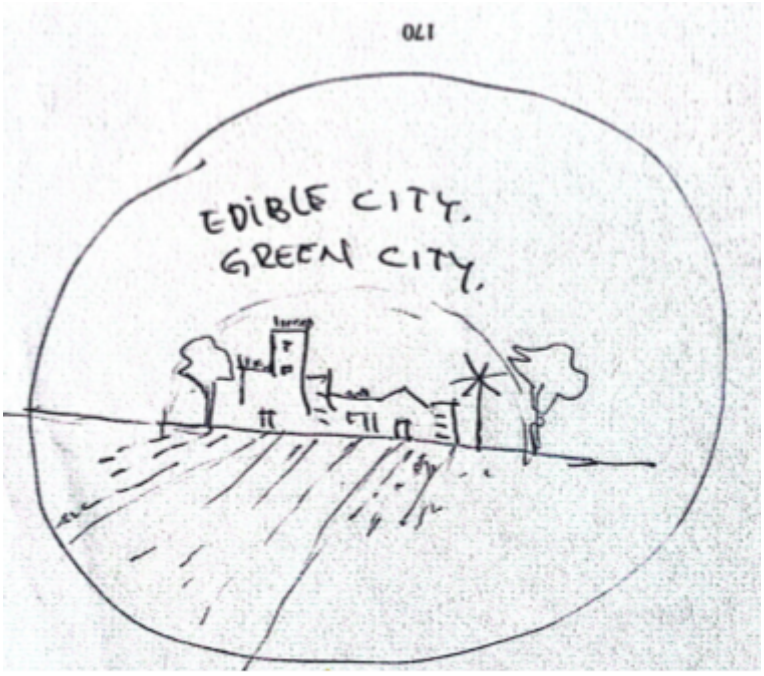

Fig. 3.9 Osvaldo's drawing of his ideal future food system

3.2.1.4 El Mercado Negro: The Black Market

It is said on the streets of Havana that if you need anything, you can find it on the black market. There is even a website called *Revolico* that makes it simple to find things you need or sell items. There are different ways things get onto the black market in terms of food, though, some people go door to door selling things[55], use their networks for advertising, or simply sell slyly on the

[55] Interview with Homero, June 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

street. I was told that everything on the black market is extremely overpriced due to the many channels it takes to get there, additionally leading to a lot of corruption in the system. For instance, it is common that state employees in a *libreta bodega,* a worker will over weigh rice with their finger on the scale and then hide that amount for themselves to sell up-charged on the black market. Sandro and Anton explain below:

> S: What it actually creates is that there's, it creates a lot of corruption around the process. For example, the same people that works in the shop, can arrange to buy whatever comes even before it comes to the shop, they buy at the normal price, and because there is nowhere you can find it, you resell it on the black market for 300, 500 [pesos] it's just not a little bit higher is like two, three, four times the price. You buy a bottle of oil for 500 pesos, like I just bought one yesterday, and it costs like fifty [pesos] on the market, it's like, 500% increase in price.[56]

> A: *Fuera de eso* (referring to *la libreta* and agromercados)*, tienes que comprar la comida en el mercado negro, está bastante caro. Los huevos, por ejemplo, dos docenas de huevos son mil pesos o 10 euros, que cuando vas a revisar con el salario de una persona que sea bueno son [5000 pesos], osea 10 docenas de huevos al mes que no te alcanza tampoco, entiendes? Entonces casi todo se busca por el mercado negro.* [Other than that (referring to *la libreta* and agromercados), you have to buy food on the black market, it is quite expensive. Eggs, for example, two dozen eggs are a thousand pesos or 10 euros, which, when you go to check with the salary of a person who is good, is [5000 pesos], that is 10 dozen eggs a month that is not enough either, you understand? So almost everything is sought through the black market.][57]

The black market, though, is how people have to survive. I had been told before I started this project that the black market could be something people might be hesitant to speak to me about because it is illegal, but almost every one of my interviewees talked about their need to buy things illegally. I hypothesized that because of the crisis, most people have come to the point that they cannot eat without buying things on the black market and therefore have given up this need to try and hide. It has now fallen within the bounds of what is socially acceptable to do because it is a matter of survival.

[56] Interview with Sandro, June 5th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[57] Interview with Anton, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

3.2.1.5 Moneda Libremente Convertibile (MLC)

Fig. 3.10 Beans in the MLC store in Vedado, Havana, Cuba, on June 12th, 2022

Fig. 3.11 Canned food in the MLC store in Vedado, Havana, Cuba, on June 12th, 2022

With the *tarea ordinamento* and phasing out of the CUC (Cuban Convertible Peso), there has been a fairly new way for the government to try and access foreign currency instead of ending up on the black market. Moneda Libremente Convertibile (MLC) is, in essence, a foreign currency, but it is a bank card that must be loaded with dollars or euros, to be used in these stores. Most of these stores are well stocked and have the items people need, since there is only a small percentage of the population who has access to MLC (those with family abroad). If you are someone, like many of my interviewees, who gets paid in the national currency, you cannot access these stores. Generally, one MLC is equal to one USD, and everything in these stores is priced very high, sometimes higher than things would be in the U.S. or Europe due to the embargo. When speaking about MLC, some of my interviewees connected the condition of these stores and their inability to access them to the embargo and Trump sanctions, mainly because the sanctions reduced the ability of families abroad to send money, which also meant a reduction in access to these places. Duaro explains below:

> D: *Y lo otro es comprar en el mercado de moneda libremente convertible (MLC), como se conoce, donde también no hay de todo, no hay de todo porque la situación económica del país no te da posibilidades para que ni en esas tiendas las personas puedan comprar todo lo que necesitan. Para nadie es un secreto todo eso que padecemos y sufrimos con las consecuencias criminales de las 243 medidas de Trump y del bloqueo que durante*

sesenta años ha golpeado a la economía cubana y a la vida de cada uno de los ciudadanos cubanos. Vivos o muertos. Porque lo que está muerto hoy sufrieron las consecuencias, las penurias, las necesidades, las restricciones, las calamidades, la miseria, los sufrimientos que hoy padecemos. Hoy no podemos.[The other thing is to buy in the freely convertible currency market, MLC, as it is known, where there is not everything, there is not everything because the economic situation of the country does not allow people to buy everything they need, not even in those stores. For nobody is a secret all that we suffer and suffer with the criminal consequences of the 243 measures of Trump and the blockade that for sixty years has hit the Cuban economy and the life of each of the Cuban citizens. Alive or dead. Because what is dead today suffered the consequences, the hardships, the needs, the restrictions, the calamities, the misery, and the sufferings that we suffer today. Today we cannot.][58]

Many of my interviewees were disappointed that some of the only places in the country to buy food were selling it in a currency they would never have access to. This is also an issue connected to race since money coming into Cuba, or remittances, are racialized. Most of those in the Cuban diaspora identify as white; therefore, black Cuban families, on average, receive half the amount of remittances than white Cubans (Steur 2022). While this will be further discussed in the next chapter, it is expressed by Nalda below when I asked how she gets food in an average week.

N: (in the background you hear her grandson playing) (she gives me a face) (I laugh) (pause) *Eso es muy difícil. Fíjate, ahora mismo. La situación de la comida es que tu recibes por la cuota. Un poco de arroz, una libra de azúcar para todo un mes. Pero no hay otro lugar donde comprar el azúcar porque nadie aquí cobra divisa. Todo está en unas tiendas que hay que pagarlo en moneda americana o en euros. ¿Quién de este pueblo tiene eso? Nadie… Nadie.* (pause) *Entonces en las otras tiendas te venden el pollo que viene una vez al mes para que las personas se fajen entre ellas. Gana el más fuerte y no alcanza para todo el mundo… No hay aceite, no hay azúcar, no hay jabón, no hay leche. Es lo que dal patio... nada mas…No hay donde buscarlo, porque aunque tú trabajes no cobras en la moneda en que vendes los alimentos.* [(in the background is her grandson playing) (she gives me a face) (I laugh) (pause) That is very difficult. Look, right now, the food situation is that you get from the ration. A little rice, a pound of sugar for a whole month. But there is no other place to buy sugar because no one here collects currency. Everything is in some stores that you have to pay for it in American currency or in euros. Who in this town has that? Nobody. Nobody. (pause) So in the other stores they sell you the chicken that comes once a month for people to fight each other. The strongest person wins and it's not enough for everybody. Today I don't have a drop of oil and they must be like that too. There is no oil, no sugar, no soap, no milk. It's what you get in the

[58] Interview with Duaro, June 29th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> yard, nothing else. There's nowhere to look for it, because even if you work you don't get paid in the currency you sell the food.][59]

Nalda points out two essential things; one has to do with the topic of race above. When she says, *"¿Quién de este pueblo tiene eso? Nadie. Nadie.* [who in this town has this? Nobody. Nobody.]" She refers to her predominantly black neighborhood with mostly illegal settlements from people who migrated from the East of Cuba, which demographically has a higher percentage of black people. The second thing Nalda points out is the importance of economic access to food and the number of barriers she lists. She explains that the first step would be to have the amount of money to buy the high-priced food, the second step would be to have that money in the proper currency to access the food, and the third step would be to have the time to go out and search for it. Her explanation is representative of the many levels and barriers needed to overcome this crisis. This leads us to the subsequent discussion, which is explicitly related to barriers to access.

3.2.2 *Barriers*

While people were explaining the logistics of accessing food, their line of storytelling would generally go to the barriers of access to certain places, as explained when people spoke about MLC. Other barriers arose, though many people dedicated much time to express their frustrations on specific things. These included *las colas* [lines], supply, and price. These categories are explained in this order, because they were the way that people experienced and communicated them. Interviewees would say if you have the time to wait *in line*, then you pray not just for the *supply* but also that you can *afford* it.

3.2.2.1 Las Colas

People say Cubans are the master of lines; called the *último* system, from the outside, it might look disorganized, but if you ask, "*quién es el último?* [who is last?]" or even "*quién es el penúltimo*? [who is second-to-last?]", everyone knows the answer. The issue of lines has become a serious problem, a barrier to accessing food. One of my interviewees explained this well. She says:

[59] Interview with Nalda, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

N: *Los cárnicos está más difícil en este momento de que sea la proteína, de conseguir la proteína que ir a comprar en tiendas MLC. ¿Por qué? Aunque han puesto por la libreta ir a ciertas, a ciertas tiendas a comprarla, pero yo trabajo, no puedo hacer colas. no puedo no me da tiempo. Y ese es el principal detalle que que que estoy atravesando o comprarla en la calle con con los precios que lo tienen los las personas que revenden la mercancía.*[Meat is harder right now to get the protein, to get the protein than to go to MLC stores. Why? Even though they have put in the ration book, to go to certain, to certain stores, to buy it, but I work, I can't stand in line, I can't, I don't have time. And that's the main thing that I'm going through or buying it on the street with the prices that the people who resell the merchandise have.][60]

Therefore, Neoma expresses the multi-layered issue is that since she has a job in which she does not get paid in USD (or another foreign currency), she does not have the time to wait in line, even for the *libreta bodega* since the lines are so long. Therefore, she is forced to buy things on the black market at extremely high prices that are equivalent to foreign currency, and she is then left with no solution, either spend her whole paycheck on food or not work and not have any paycheck at all. This is expressed by Clara and Desirada below:

C: *Es muy difícil aún cuando tienes solvencia económica…Tiene que ser con grandes filas… O trabajas o haces la fila para obtener un producto.* [It is very difficult even when you have economic solvency… It has to be with long lines… Either you work or you stand in line to get a product.][61]

D: *Pero que, no se, [deseo] que no sea tan complicado el acceso al alimento, que no haya que hacer tantas colas. Por dios, las colas son de días de cola para poder obtener un producto que no te va a satisfacer del todo. Las familias no satisfacen.* [But, I don't know, [I wish] that access to food is not so complicated, that you don't have to wait in line for so long. For God's sake, the lines are days long to get a product that is not going to satisfy you at all. Families are not satisfied.][62]

Silviana explains to me how she pieces together her diet by trying to wait in the lines, she says:

S: *Mientras tenga oportunidad de hacer colas en otros sitios, en otros municipios, yo me esfuerzo, una o dos noches, yo me esfuerzo porque después descanso varias semanas, pero cuando las cosas se dificultan es la misericordia de Dios. Hoy hago un frijol, mañana bato viandas, alguien me regala algo, puede ser un pedacito de pollo o puede ser, no se, un huevo, no se voy, voy balanceando.* [As long as I have the opportunity to wait in line in other places, in other municipalities, I make an effort, one

[60] Interview with Neoma, June 15th, Havana, Cuba
[61] Interview with Clara, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba
[62] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

or two nights, I make an effort because afterwards I rest for several weeks, but when things get difficult it is God's mercy. Today I get a bean, tomorrow I'll get some root vegetables, someone gives me something, it can be a little piece of chicken or it can be, I don't know, an egg, I don't know, I'm going, I'm balancing.][63]

3.2.2.2 Supply: Tenemos que Ser Magos Buscando[64]

The standard issue brought up by my interviewees was that even if you had the time to wait in line and had the money to pay for these things (which is the next barrier), there were very few things available. Desirada explains an essential point in speaking about supply. She says:

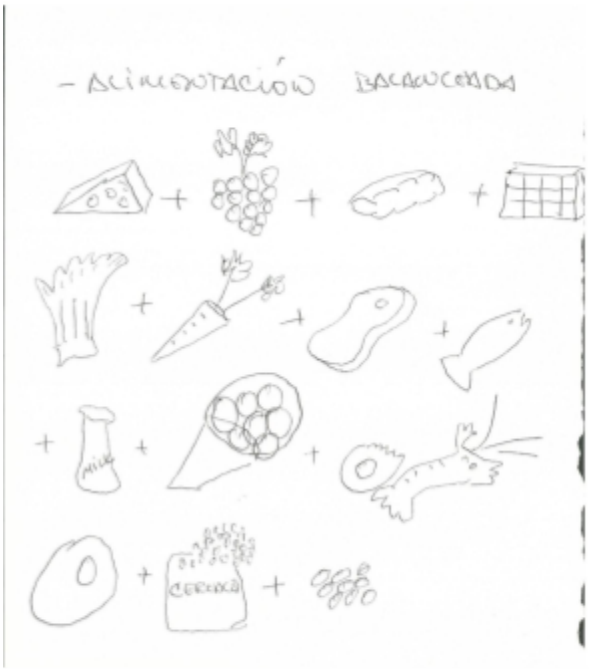

Fig. 3.12 Desirada's drawing of her ideal future

D: *¿Cuán difícil es encontrar los suministros? En estos momentos es bastante complicado, porque no hay comida... No hay comida. Y sobre todo para buscar algo saludable. Por ejemplo, en la carne y pescado, eso tiene que ser en el mercado negro. Los pescadores (que eso es ilegal) pero bueno, es uno de los caminos que tenemos los cubanos. Porque lo otro es la tiendas MLC no siempre hay el producto que buscas. No hay variedad. ¿Entonces tendria que ser en el mercado negro donde se encuentran. si, es difícil, es difícil, porque no siempre llegas al punto.* [How difficult is it to find supplies? Right now it's quite complicated, because there's no food... There is no food. And especially to look for something healthy. For example, in meat and fish, that has to be on the black market. The fishermen (which is illegal) but well, it is one of the ways we Cubans have. Because the other thing is that the MLC stores don't always have the product you are looking for, there is no variety. So it would have to be on the black market where you find them. yes, it's difficult, it's difficult, because you don't always get to the point.][65]

Desirada emphasizes her words by repeating twice "*no hay comida.* [there is no food.]" and "*es difícil.* [it's difficult.]" She also speaks a lot about variety and the desire she has to have many things. When I asked Desirada to draw her future food system, this was the piece she emphasized the most. Above you can see her drawing. She took the time to draw every item of food she desired. The first thing she drew on her paper was cheese. Earlier in the interview she had told

[63] Interview with Silvana, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[64] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[65] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

me, "*Con queso, que haya queso. Pero si no hay caso en ningún lado! Que haya queso caramba!* [With cheese, let there be cheese. But there is no cheese anywhere! Let there be cheese!][66] Sandro adds onto this below:

> S: Food is a big, big, big problem that we have, and that people actively complain of. It's low availability of food on a regular basis, not having the capacity of just waking up and saying, I want to have this for lunch. It's, it's a huge deal. You don't, you don't really have strict control on how your diet looks throughout the week, you kind of just swing it day by day when you can….Well, people always have something that they can eat, even if it's not too much, maybe it doesn't complement the whole nutritional diet that you need. But you have something you don't just starve, it's just like the variety that gets complicated.[67]

Both Sandro and Desirada point out something that will be expanded on in the conclusions of this chapter which is the idea of a "decent meal." Scholar Hanna Garth in her most recent book *Food in Cuba* (2020) explores this aspect in depth. She states:

> When a food that is seen as a central part of a Cuban meal is unavailable or inaccessible, even if there are other foods available, many of my study participants reported that they did not feel satisfied. Thus, they experience the food system as scarce and think of themselves as living within a food shortage. This form of food scarcity has received little attention from scholars of food security (Garth 2020, 46).

Many of my interviewees expressed this concern that although you might be able to find *something,* not being able to have a choice in your diet and spending much time searching for these things is a massive blow to your humanity and can make you feel like you do not have control over your life. Additionally, this lack of supply is further complicated by the supply being unequally distributed across the city and country, generally favoring the more affluent, whiter neighborhoods. Before in the quote about lines, when Sandro said, " If you, actually, not in these neighborhoods, but if you go if it goes to some very specific places you will see the shortages." He was speaking about the neighborhood I lived in when he said "not in these neighborhoods," which was one of the richest and whitest neighborhoods in Havana, where you saw less of these issues. Silvana explains below as someone who makes her way around the city to wait in lines.

[66] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[67] Interview with Sandro, June 5th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

S: *Lo que he visto es que en otros municipios, no este, en otros municipios hay más oferta, entregan más cantidad de mercancías y somos la misma nación. Entonces, si no hay o si hay escasez, no se puede dar más en un municipio que en otro, tiene que ser justo.* [What I have seen is that in other municipalities, not this one, in other municipalities there is more supply, they deliver more quantity of goods and we are the same nation. So, if there is not or if there is shortage, you cannot give more in one municipality than in another, it has to be fair.][68]

3.2.2.3 Prices, currency, & inflation

One of the most discussed and explained topics among people in relation to barriers was price. If we consider that people have the time, wait in line, and there happens to be food, we are left with the last barrier being the price and form of payment. Interviewees generally explained to me in detail what and how they were used to paying for before and after the pandemic and the abolishment of the CUC. Below Geraldo explains:

G: *Y además es con dinero que no percibo. Es con dolares y yo no recibo dólares. Yo no cobro dólares. ¿No?* [And besides, it is with money that I do not receive. It is with dollars and I do not receive dollars. I don't receive dollars, right?]

Even if people were considered to have a higher and the correct income, the prices were so high it was not even close to being sustainable to them either. Those who did have this privilege, tended to acknowledge it because it was self-evident what it was like to live with and without money in Cuba today. Both Sandro and Alvaro were among people who had more access to goods financially and physically, but still, both stated similar things:

A: *Lo más difícil suelen suelen ser los precios porque realmente los revendedores te venden a un precio mucho mayor del que, del que podrías conseguir las cosas por una vía más lineal, por decirlo así.* [The most difficult thing is usually the prices because the resellers sell you at a much higher price than you could get things in a more linear way, so to speak][69]

S: It is it just ... prices become so inflated during this pandemic times. What's affordable or not, may have changed a lot. Like I said, I'm kind of a weird example, because I have access to a little more money than the normal people do. But I would say that with a

[68] ibid
[69] Interview with Alvaro, June 30th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> normal state job salary with the prices that are currently right now most of the stuff are quite luxuries, you need to handpick how your diet is going to look.[70]

Some of my interviewees emphasize things that they want and cannot have at the prices they are at. Homero explains how prices have changed overtime in relation to pork and pineapples and Dalila compares oil to her salary.

> H: So it's a very challenging process to get the food. And also you'll see, in Cuba how we have severe problem of inflation, so prices are going up. We don't know how long this is going to continue but for example pork meat. I mean, three years ago, one pound of pork meat was from between twenty-five to forty pesos now today 300 pesos for a pound of pork meat….One one pineapple, one single pineapple on the street it's fifty, sixty, seventy pesos, before with five pesos you could buy one pineapple.[71]

> D: *Por ejemplo, yo estoy jubilada, a mi me dan 2000 porque tengo una jubilación alta, 2400, mi esposo tiene 1300 y una botella de aceite te cuesta 700 pesos.* [For example, I'm retired, I get 2000 because I have a high retirement, 2400, my husband has 1300 and a bottle of oil costs you 700 pesos.][72]

This pressure of prices and inflation caused by rapid changes with the pandemic and the currency shift was very stressful and worrying for most of my interviewees. This is also compounded by the fact that they were so rapid. There needs to be more time to adapt and to figure out how to survive these conditions. Neoma emphasizes this below:

> N*: En el año, en el año 2019, que todavía ese año aparecían las cosas del reordenamiento que fue en el 2020. A partir de ahí empezaron a subir los precios. Precios desorbitantes, precios que son insostenibles para la población. Mallory: Sí,* Neoma*: Insostenible porque un trabajador no puede pagar un paquete de leche en 1.000 $. Si no puede. Yo no puedo pagar un paquete de pechuga de pollo de dos kilos en 1.800 $. Y tuve que pagarlo. Porque si no, no le daba de comer a mi vieja (her mother). Entonces eso es cosas que. Que van pasando. Esta nueva, este problema que se da a partir del 2020 es donde hemos tenido que, que, que, que adaptarnos a sobrevivir, porque ya no es vivir, sino sobrevivir en esta situación. Sí ha habido un cambio brusco, brusco, brusco en todos los sentidos.* [In the year, in the year 2019, which still that year the things of the reordering appeared, which was in 2020. From then on, prices started to rise. Exorbitant prices, prices that are unsustainable for the population. Unsustainable because a worker cannot pay a pack of milk at $1,000. You can't. I can't afford a two-kilo package

[70] Interview with Sandro, June 5th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[71] Interview with Homero, June 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[72] Interview with Dalila, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> of chicken breast at $1,800. And I had to pay for it. Because otherwise I wouldn't feed my old lady (her mother). So that's things that, that are happening. This new, this problem that is happening from 2020 onwards is where we have had to, that, that, that, that we have had to adapt to survive, because it is no longer living, but surviving in this situation. Yes, there has been an abrupt, abrupt, abrupt change in all senses.][73]

When she says "*un cambio brusco, brusco, brusco en todos los sentidos.* [there has been an abrupt, abrupt, abrupt change in all senses.]", she emphasizes the rapid and constant change that I spoke about at the beginning of the chapter about the state that Cuba has been in for a while. Additionally, when she speaks about providing for her mother, these price increases did not just affect themselves but also the people that relied on them for sustenance; her statement includes the extensions of herself out to her family and her community.

Neoma also expresses something that I heard a lot from my interviewees: "it is no longer living, but surviving in this situation." This aspect of survival (*sobravivendo*) is a standard narrative about Cubans because of the difficult situation they are in (Angel, González, Puerto, Suárez, López, Álvarez, & Thiemann 2020). Nalda echoes this sentiment when she states that without support from each other, "*no sobrevivimos. Hoy estamos sobreviviendo. El pueblo de Cuba sobrevive, no vive, sobrevive.* [We do not survive. Today we are surviving. The people of Cuba are surviving, not living, surviving.]" Nalda continues to update me on her life and said the same thing when I texted her recently to ask how she was.[74]

3.2.3 *Sentimientos*

In the question that addressed food access in a logistical sense, I always asked my interviewees, "*Cómo te sientes acerca de esta experiencia?*" This question brought up different answers, some closely related to people's identity, related to gender, or different body ailments related to food, which were generally linked to age. Although these are two themes that will be fleshed out in the next chapter related to traditions, I wanted to keep them here because it is important to display the answers as they were connected to specific questions to show the associations with certain words or phrases that sparked specific memories or sentiments. While it might seem there is a repetition, one must keep in mind similar themes are spoken about in different ways; in this

[73]Interview with Neoma, June 15th, Havana, Cuba
[74] See appendix row #67

section, gender and health are discussed in relation to *feelings* that were brought up when thinking about finding food. In the next chapter, we speak more closely to gender roles and health concerns related to *habits*. Below I will explore these responses.

3.2.3.1 Gender

The concept of gender and roles in Cuba is intriguing. Through revolutionary equitable policy, many women could move up in society in a way they could never have. They could go to school and get jobs that were previously never offered to them. This shifted many of the realities around gender roles within the household and created more conversations about whose role was which. Much of this liberation shifted during the Special Period when there were mass shortages of work and food that brought the women back into the household and made them more strict about how food was being used. There was a saying I heard a lot that stated a man uses an onion to make one meal while a woman uses an onion to make meals for the week. Since the Special Period, this reality has stayed in place. Anton reflects on this below:

> A: *Mayormente el hombre casi siempre es el que trabaja. Pero nadie se pone a pensar en el trabajo de una mujer que es la que tiene que estar en las colas, la que tiene que estar aguantando. Pero porque si el hombre sencillamente se va a trabajar en la mañana, regresa tarde en la noche, pero la mujer es la que tiene que estar ahí, que si hay pollo en algún lugar, tiene que ir para allá a hacer cola, si hay pan, si hay huevos, lo que sea. La mujer casi siempre es quien está apoyando, quien está llevando la casa. El hombre lleva un poco más dinero y tal, pero la mujer es quien está mayormente. A eso súmale que cuando llega después de la cola tiene que ponerse a trabajar en la casa, tiene que ponerse a cocinar, a limpiar y es bastante complicado.* [Mostly the man is almost always the one who works. But nobody thinks about the work of a woman who has to be in the lines, who has to put up with it. But because if the man simply goes to work in the morning, he comes back late at night, but the woman is the one who has to be there, if there is chicken somewhere, she has to go there to wait in line, if there is bread, if there are eggs, whatever. The woman is almost always the one who is supporting, who is running the house. The man brings a little more money and so on, but the woman is the one who is mostly there. Add to that the fact that when she arrives after the line she has to start working in the house, she has to start cooking, cleaning, and it's quite complicated.][75]

[75] Interview with Anton, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

Additionally, it was expressed by some of my older interviewees the stress they feel to provide for their household in the way that society expects of them based on their gender. Dalila and Geraldo Sr. explain below.

> D: *Bueno eso es frustrante y para las mujeres que tenemos la responsabilidad de poner la comida en la mesa, pues es más frustrante en el sentido de que uno tiene ansiedades…*[Well that is frustrating and for the women who have the responsibility of putting food on the table, it is more frustrating in the sense that one has anxieties…][76]

Dalila expressed this concern that is brought up by Anton of providing the physical food, while Geraldo Sr. expresses the financial aspect. He states:

> G: *Es difícil. Soy el padre de familia y me cuesta mucho trabajo mantenerla porque hay que cubrir muchas necesidades.* [It is difficult. I am the father of the family and it is very hard for me to support it because there are many needs to cover.][77]

Both Dalila and Geraldo felt that they could not live up to the roles society has placed on them which has created a tense and anxious environment.

3.2.3.2 Health

Another concern brought up when asked about feelings was related to health concerns, also directly related to the lack of medicine in the country due to the embargo. I felt from my interviewees that they wanted to take power into the hands of their health, and this power could have been in the form of food to cure ailments. While many of my interviewees were able to grow a lot of these herbs and healing foods (seen above), it did not always fully satisfy the need for healthful and healing food in their bodies and the bodies of their loved ones. Dalila speaks about this theme:

> D: *No alcanza* (her salary) *para una caja de pollos. Y entonces, si te hace falta hacer una sopa porque tienes un problema de estómago o un jugo, tú dices: bueno, ¿cuánto me cuesta una fruta bomba, cuánto me cuesta un mango, cuánto? Es triste, es preocupante, nos llena de ansiedad. Y quién dice la comida dice la medicina? Porque si tú necesitas medicinas, nosotros por la edad que tenemos necesitamos medicamento sistemático, porque tenemos enfermedades crónicas como es la hipertensión, en el caso de el problemas prostáticos, en el caso de mi hija se opero de tiroides, no tiene tiroides,*

[76] Interview with Dalila, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[77] Interview with Geraldo Sr., June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> *necesita las hormonas que tiene que tomar diariamente y ese es un medicamento que debe estar en farmacias a nuestro alcance y no está porque el bloqueo también ha impedido la entrada de materia prima para la fabricación de muchas de esas medicinas que se fabricaban aquí y también la entrada del medicamento que se podía comprar fácilmente en cualquier parte. ¿Entonces, cómo uno se va a sentir? Preocupado, tenso…*
> [It's (her salary) not enough for a box of chickens. And then, if you need to make a soup because you have a stomach problem or a juice, you say: well, how much does a fruit bomb cost me, how much does a mango cost me, how much? It is sad, it is worrying, it fills us with anxiety. And who says food says medicine…? Because if you need medicine, we because of the age that we have we need systematic medicine, because we have chronic diseases like hypertension, in the case of him prostate problems, in the case of my daughter she had thyroid surgery, she doesn't have thyroid, She needs the hormones that she has to take daily and this is a medicine that should be in pharmacies within our reach and it is not there because the blockade has also prevented the entry of raw material for the manufacture of many of these medicines that were manufactured here and also the entry of the medicine that could be easily purchased anywhere. So how is one going to feel? Worried, tense.]

Not only do you hear the concern about this tangible need for medicine and food to act as medicine, but the worry and tension that Dalila expresses also wears on people's bodies. This constant stress expressed by all of my interviewees to find food is not a healthy state to be in and is a considerable concern for the general well-being of the health of society at large.

3.2.4 *"The Decent Meal": Adequacy*

Supply and variety are some of the most prominent themes of this chapter, but the extension of the lack of supply is the feeling connected to this reality. This feeling of having autonomy, being able to provide for yourself, and having a basic level of choice all fall into the concept of adequacy. Garth (2020) states:

> What I have found is that there are multiple dimensions of what is meant by enough and sufficient that matter deeply to people. If food security, subsistence, and sustenance are about access to sufficient nutrients and mere survival, then I propose that the framework of adequacy can account for what is necessary beyond basic nutrition, prompting us to ask not whether a food system sustains life, but whether it sustains a particular kind of living. That is, whether a food system adequately supplies what we need for the social, cultural, and personal dimensions of a good life (Garth 2020, 5).

To my interviewees, the concept of adequacy was expressed in not just finding any calories to consume, but being able to find the food they *wanted*. This *want or desire* was expressed in

different ways, three of the most critical being *la merienda, el dulcito, y comida soludabile* [the snack, a little sweet, and healthy food.]

3.2.4.1 La Merienda

Adding onto the theory of adequacy, I analyze here the desire for snacks. This desire is simply the ability to eat outside the confines of what is required or necessary to survive, but rather eat when one desires to. Maricela expresses the want to come home and be able to choose a snack when she is hungry. She says:

> M: *Es frustrante. Porque muchas veces en la casa tenemos la comida básica, pero para las comidas, como la cena y el almuerzo. Pero las comidas, las meriendas, etcétera no tenemos nada. No tenemos. No podemos comprar queso o mayonesa, o tal vez la tenemos escondida o tenemos una sola cosa. No es cuestión de que podamos hacer un sándwich con jamón, queso, etcétera, no. Tenemos queso por una semana, ya después, la próxima semana tenemos que comprar un jamón y así.* [It's frustrating. Because many times in the house we have the basic food, but for meals, like dinner and lunch. But meals, snacks, etcetera we don't have anything. We don't have any. We can't buy cheese or mayonnaise, or maybe we have it stashed away or we have one thing. It's not a matter of we can make a sandwich with ham, cheese, etcetera, no. We have cheese for a week, then after that we have cheese. We have cheese for a week, and then next week we have to buy a ham and so on.][78]

The way Maricela expresses her desire to have all the ingredients to make a sandwich allows one to understand the many layers related to food availability, access, and transformation. Regardless if one item is available, one desires it to be consumed with the other items to be deemed sufficient. This was explained to me by my host mom who said even if she could get beans, she would never eat them without onions and garlic. Like many cultures around the world, Cubans value the way they cook their beans *as a dish*, not just the calories that the foods contain on their own. Maricela expresses this well; she does not feel satisfied with the access she has because she cannot create something she deems of value to consume or have access to food outside the bare minimum.

This concern around snacks was often expressed a lot by mothers. Even during my interview with Desirada, her mother had called her to ask if she could give her daughter the milk for a

[78] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

snack, and Desirada had to tell her no because it was the only milk she had for the next day's breakfast. Desirada states:

> D: *Yo veo que ahora yo paso mucho trabajo para conseguirle la merienda de la escuela. Y eso es un golpea mucho… Es un fenómeno. Es algo muy muy incómodo para las madres cubanas cómo trabajar el tema de la alimentación con los niños.* [I see that now I spend a lot of work to get them a snack from school. And that's a big blow…. It's a phenomenon. It is something very very uncomfortable for Cuban mothers how to work the issue of food with children.][79]

3.2.4.2 El Dulcito

On the same line of thinking, many interviewees expressed to me their desire to consume or gift something special; something outside of survival. When asked about what Neoma wanted to change in the future her first answer was a response of adequacy. She says:

> N*: Poder tener las cosas básicas resuelta poderle comprar galletitas y caramelos a mis dos nietas tengo dos nietas que lloran por un caramelo que no me puedo comprar, que le gustan las galletitas y no lo pueden comer...* [To be able to have the basic things solved, to be able to buy cookies and candy for my two granddaughters, I have two granddaughters that cry for candy that I can't buy, that they like cookies and they can't eat it][80]

This guilt is also felt by Desirada when she looks at her children and remembers her childhood. She recognizes that this is not the way to feed her children all the time and yet still emphasizes the desire for choice and luxury in her food system, which she does not have now.

> D: *A mi me golpean mucho por lo de las niñas y las confituras para niños, lo que es galletas, lo que son los caramelos. Yo no soy de darle muchos azúcares, pero si es necesario algunas galletas que sean pueden ser saladas que no las hay ahora. En mi infancia había todo tipo de variedad de galletas, de bombones, de caramelos, de goma, de todo… Recuerdo como fue mi infancia a nivel de golosinas, a nivel de esta parte. Y veo ahora que o estan muy caras, muy caras, muy caras porque las personas la quieren la tiendas en MLC y las revenden y cuando vas a las tiendas en MLC no lo encuentras.* [I get hit a lot by the girls and the jams for children, what is cookies, what is candy. I am not one to give a lot of sugars, but if it is necessary to have some cookies, they can be salty, which are not available now. In my childhood there were all kinds of variety of cookies, chocolates, candies, gum, everything… I remember what my childhood was like in terms

[79] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[80] Interview with Neoma, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> of candy, in terms of this part. And I see now that either they are very expensive. They are very expensive, very expensive because people want them in the stores in MLC and they resell them and when you go to the stores in MLC you can't find them.][81]

3.2.4.3 Comida Soludabile

The last aspect of adequacy was the ability to have healthy food in terms of ingredients and how these foods are raised/grown. Mirana expresses her fears of food coming from the U.S. that is contaminated with pesticides.

> M: *Eso es tremendo porque no te matan de hambre pero te matan de enfermedad, que es peor. Y ese es un gran miedo. Y no hay solución. Un plato de comida a veces no es la solución al hambre porque si ese plato de comida te va enfermar y te va a matar, mira, preferible que no lo comas y te comas otra cosa.* [That's tremendous because they don't starve you but they kill you with disease, which is worse. And that's a big fear. And there's no solution. A plate of food sometimes is not the solution to hunger because if that plate of food is going to make you sick and it's going to kill you, look, you might as well not eat it and eat something else.][82]

Desirada expresses similar concerns, but around nutrition in general. This was something that I heard a lot that the Cuban diet was based heavily on fried foods, but since that was a high source of calories it was not seen as a large concern for everyone since the main concern was just trying to find something to eat. As someone who studied and cared deeply about nutrition, she was worried about this.

> D: *Yo me siento muy mal. Muy mal, porque no puede ser tan difícil buscar la comida. Debe, debe estar de alguna manera. Por un lado estoy satisfecha en el sentido de que tengo patios con los que puedo contar. Pero por otro lado veo la realidad. Esa soy yo, personalmente, vivo con mi trabajo, tengo esa posibilidad. La realidad de las personas que me rodean, que es muy complicado que las ofertas gastronómicas que hay que brinda el Estado, es decir las ofertas de alimentos son muy pobres porque es pollo, picadillo y perritos, se basa en eso y yo no considero que sea una alimentación sana.* [I feel very bad. Very bad, because it can't be that hard to look for food. It must, it must be somehow. On the one hand, I am satisfied in the sense that I have yards that I can count on. But on the other hand, I see the reality. That's me, personally, I live with my work I have that possibility. The reality of the people around me, that it is very complicated that the gastronomic offers that, that the State provides, that is to say that the food offers are

[81] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[82] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

very poor because it is chicken, picadillo[83] and hot dogs, it is based on that and I do not consider that to be a healthy diet.][84]

These three aspects discussed in terms of snacks, sweets, and healthy food are essential to food access but need to be consistently recognized in discussions related to food security. I want to add to this discussion by using my interviewees' words to express how essential these different categories are in people feeling human, cared for, and respected enough to then participate in the rest of their lives.

3.3 Conclusion

The feeling that I received from a majority of people when I asked them the first question of the oral history was desperation. Neoma states:

> N: *A ver, con esta experiencia. ¿Cómo me siento? Bueno, creo que como estamos todos los cubanos: desesperados, porque el salario no alcanza, el salario no alcanza. Sé que hay miles de cosas que están pasando producto del bloqueo, pero que lo sufrimos nosotros los cubanos. En este momento hay escasez. Como tú sabes. No hay pollo, no hay, no hay, no hay, no hay, no hay nada. Debido al bloqueo y a que Cuba no es lo suficientemente capaz de garantizar esa agricultura sostenible que tanto deseamos. Ya eso es lo que hay, pero no me siento bien. Como no creo que nadie se pueda sentir bien. Es algo bien triste.* [Let's see, with this experience, how do I feel? Well, I think the way all Cubans feel: desperate, because the salary is not enough, the salary is not enough. I know that there are thousands of things that are happening as a result of the blockade, but we Cubans are suffering. At the moment there are shortages. As you know…There is no chicken, there is no chicken, there is no chicken, there is no chicken, there is no chicken, there is nothing. Because of the blockade and because Cuba is not capable enough to guarantee that sustainable agriculture that we want so much…That's the way it is, but I don't feel good about it. I don't think anyone can feel good. It is very sad.][85]

When one lives in a world with so many barriers against you, at some point, lose faith or give up- that was for sure the energy that I was left with after hearing Neoma above, but then after all of this, one must still feel hope and faith. No matter how much people expressed their struggles,

[83] A dish made with ground meat, tomatoes, and sometimes raisins, olives, and other ingredients that vary by region or household.
[84] Interview with Mirana, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[85] Interview with Neoma, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

they always found a way to explain to me the different ways they overcame or would overcome these challenges and what they were going to do tomorrow. This isn't to say that it erases these struggles but adds a different and new dimension to the conversation around how people express their situation, past memories, and hope for the future. Within each story of the present though is a memory of the past. To express what they were experiencing in the present day, either actively, or passively was a comparison to the past. For those who were older it seemed a comparison to more difficult times, but to those who were younger, they knew that what they were experiencing was the most difficult it had been in their lives. These memories and ways of being can all be understood in the historical context first laid out, each interviewing a part of the past somehow, either through stories from their family, a passing of memory, or personal experiences. From this starting point of the present, we move to a question that combines equally the present and the past, as depending on the person, the question projected them into one or the other, or a combination of both. I will end this with a reminder though that the words you read above were in fact small pieces of the bigger story that throughout this piece I hope to build on, with one wall built, another to come.

CHAPTER 4: TRADITIONS: IDENTITY AND CUISINE

The following chapter will be an explanation of the process of inquiry around the intersections between traditions or habits and food, as well as the analysis of responses to this inquiry. Since the questions remained open, my participants touched on many topics which have been categorized in two general directions, first touching on the most dominant and factual reply around *cuisine/consumption* and then the more analytical responses related to *identities*.

As explained in the logistical methods, I stated that when starting this research, one of my main research questions had to do with the role of gender and race in Cuban society and how these two identities were reflected in the food system, which resulted in a research question centered on if one's identity affected access to food. When I asked this question to Sandro, during one of the two trial interviews, his answer was:

> S: No, I don't think so. No I think that the main the main aspect that governs how your diet looks like, it's basically your your economic income, doesn't matter what race, beliefs you have, basically, more or less the same, the same kinds of food.[86]

What is interesting about this answer is that he fails to recognize how one's gender or race in Cuba might affect their socioeconomic status or "income". After hearing similar answers to Sandro's from friends, I realized I needed to shift how I approached the sensitive topic of identity. The more I understood the history and dynamics around identities such as race and gender in relation to the Revolution, it became clear how sensitive the topic was. This sensitivity around race and gender can be for many reasons, including privilege, fear, indoctrination, or a combination of all.

As stated in Chapter 3, before the Revolution, there was a massive inequality in Cuba; therefore, the Revolution created much change for many people still alive today, but over the last forty years, the inequality has increased again. In the '80s, at the height of the Revolution, academic studies placed Cuba with a GINI coefficient (a measurement of inequality) between 0.22 and 0.25. In contrast, in 2019, it was up to .40, which is considered an unequal society (Everleny 2019). To put it in context, it is still less than the U.S. (.49), but a considerable increase in less

[86] Interview with Sandro, June 5th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

than 40 years. Regardless, there is a general narrative that the Revolution removed inequality from Cuban society, so the attempt to acknowledge this could be seen as counterrevolutionary. The words of Fidel "within the Revolution everything; against the Revolution, nothing" (Castro, 1961) run through everyone's mind daily as they balance this thin line. One either feels genuinely grateful for the Revolution and for how much it changed their lives, they fear that admitting to unequal practices could put them in danger, they hold identities that make them blind to the situation or a combination of them all. These factors made for complicated navigation of these topics.

Due to these reflections and conversations and a discussion with my advisor, I decided to broaden the question and see what answers came from it. From then on the question became *¿Cuáles son los hábitos alimentarios en tu familia, cuáles son tus tradiciones?* [what are the food habits in your family? what are your traditions?] Generally, I would start by asking these first two questions, and if people were confused or did not understand, I would prod them by saying, "*¿Qué comes y cuándo? ¿Quién cocina, quién compra la comida?* [what do you eat and when? Who cooks, who buys the food?]" Below are the responses.

4.1: Cuisine and Consumption Patterns

> *La patria es un plato de comida. Yo como mi país todos los días.* [The nation is a plate of food. I eat my country every day.] Eliseo Alberto, (Pérez 2020, 5)

When my interviewees were asked about habits and traditions, immediate and dominant replies related specifically to consumption patterns concerning cuisine. In this section, I will attempt to explain the formation of Cuban cuisine and how my interviewees expressed the value of certain foods and habits around these foods.

The defining of a "national cuisine," has proven to be an essential step in forming a national identity. This quest has been a successful route taken by many to invent the idea of uniqueness and separation, to the point that the conflation of nationalism and food is a complex narrative to escape. In our lives, one may speak colloquially about "Italian food" or "Indian food," as if these

nations are monoliths and stuck in time; as if the outside world, migration, weather patterns, or individual preferences do not influence food consumption; as if these borders were not forced and created ever so recently. These "food-related choices instill and reinforce an abstract, reflexive, yet particular image of what the nation is and what its boundaries are" (Ranta and Ichijo 2016, 8). This invention of the nation is further weakened when one analyzes how the nation is "made up of a variety of groups and people who at times promote competing perceptions and images of what the nation is based on gender class and ethnicity among others" (Ranta and Ichijo 2016, 8). Coupled with conversations around nationhood, discourses around traditional food and the invention of tradition are intertwined in this topic. Taking from Hobsbawm & Ranger (2019), I suggest we hold these two complex realities at the same time. One being that while "these food related events, traditions and rituals might be, invented or constructed; they have in many cases become part of the cultural hegemony of the nation," and therefore; they are meaningful and "they endure" (Ranta and Ichijo 2016, 9). In the case of Cuba, it is a society made up of many different influences, from Africa, Spain, and the U.S., as well as other Caribbean flares. Therefore, the process of cuisine was a tool to further the nationalist fight by Martí and the separatists who heavily pushed narratives of Cubanidad[87], instead of the other identities separately in order to fully remove themselves from the colonizer. Louis A. Pérez, in *Rice in the Time of Sugar*, starts with an explanation of the creation of Cuban cuisine. He states:

> At some point early in the nineteenth century, the proposition of a distinctive Cuban cuisine entered the creole imagination. Identified variously as *la cocina criolla, la comida criolla, and la cocina cubana,* the claim to a discernible national cuisine was itself a facet of a larger process by which the notion of nationhood assumed narrative coherence…The purport of the premise was self-evident: taste for certain dishes and preference for certain preparations to suggest culturally determined dispositions as a function of being Cuban, to corroborate the proposition of a national palate, a cuisine to enact a custom as a source of affinity (Pérez 2020, 1-2).

Therefore, this process was not passive. Cubans intentionally separated themselves from their colonizers, and one way to do that was in the material choices they made around food. "The Cuban… took pleasure in his culinary taste by identifying himself with white rice, various types of beans and strong coffee." Through these choices, the Cuban was able to differentiate "himself

[87] Cubanidad simply means '"the quality of that which is Cuban,' or, in other words, its way of being, its character, its quality, its distinctive condition, its individuation inside of the universal" (Ortiz 2014).

from the Spaniard who remained attached to his chocolate drink and imported chickpeas…the cuisine of *la madre patria* [the mother nation]" (Piña 2006, 51).

However, food, traditions, and practices are ever-changing; they are mobile, and, therefore, not stagnant. As shown in the previous chapter by Nalda, traditions are lost and gained with crises, immigration, or natural disasters. Cuba is, therefore, a special place to tackle these ideas of tradition and, even more important, to collect the memories of the population to understand how it has changed overtime. Below, we now start the conversation around *la comida Cubana,* [Cuban cuisine] and consumption patterns*,* as seen by my interviewees. These thoughts were triggered by part one of the question on habits which was *¿Cuáles son los hábitos alimentarios en tu familia?* [what are the food habits in your family?] and *¿cuáles son tus tradiciones?* [what are your traditions?] The common themes that came out of this were daily norms, rice, regional differences, and celebrations.

4.2.1 *Daily norms*

When speaking about traditions and habits, many interviewees first started with which foods their daily diet needed to consist of. Through this discussion a few sub-themes emerged. The first theme was related to the classic and ideal Cuban plate and the second was related to factors that have altered this plate being: shortages and seasonality. Therefore, the distinction between the two was formed when discussing a situation of reality versus desired reality. This desired reality was a result of a memory recollection of the past; of what one was "used to" or "supposed" to be eating versus what one "has" to eat today.

4.2.1.1 <u>The classic plate</u>

Cuban cuisine today was explained to me as being "made up of ingredients that originate in different corners across the globe;" "a modern cuisine based on the tradition of bringing together local and imported ingredients in particular ways" (Garth 2020, 11). Homero reflects on this below:

> H: I mean Cuban food, it combines the heritage of Spanish, African and some Caribbean food that came through from Haiti. You see, as you know, after the revolution in Haiti,

> many people came to Cuba particularly with the Eastern Part. There's a rather strong influence of that on food too but it's basically a combination of Spanish and African.[88]

With that being said, it was rare that people talked about distinct Spanish or African cuisine, but instead made a point that their diet was Cuban. The Cubans I spoke to stuck strictly to the classic plate of: rice, beans, protein (chicken, pork, beef, and sometimes seafood), and a root vegetable (*viandas*). This can be found in almost every house and restaurant around the island.[89] This pattern of consumption was repeated by many of my interviewees. Homero, Maricela, Telma, Camilo, and Dalila explain below:

> H: I mean for a Cuban: rice and beans. Normally, Cuban food: rice and beans is lunch and dinner or the combination, you know *arroz congri* or *moros y cristianos*,[90] this combination but also the beans [as] a soup... and other than that, is pork...[91]

> M: *Toda familia cubana básicamente lo que come todos los días es arroz, pollo o picadillo, frijoles si tiene en ese momento pero no todos los días y algún vegetal o platanito. Ya, fuera de eso. Eso es lo más, eso es lo típico. Lo que realmente se come casi todos los días. Ya después, si podemos, alternamos con pastas. Pero mayormente es arroz.* [Every Cuban family basically eats every day is rice, chicken or picadillo, beans if they have them at that time but not every day and some vegetable or plantains. Yeah, apart from that, that's the most, that's the typical. What we really eat almost every day. After that, if we can, we alternate with pasta. But mostly it's rice.][92]

> T: *Nosotros no somos de, de mucho, pudiéramos decir de buscar alimentos muy sofisticados. Nosotros, el arroz, los frijoles, vianda, en mi casa si se consume mucha vianda y hortalizas, porque si, si nosotros nos apoyamos en las costumbres de los cubanos, los cubanos estamos acostumbrados a consumir alimentos fundamentalmente…nosotros no somos personas selectivas, ni de estar buscando platos sofisticados, mucho a las costumbres, el congrí, los frijoles, pero esas cosas, nosotros no, ah mucho a los jugos, mucho, sí, el mango, la guayaba, cualquier fruta de estas como la maracuyá…la consumimos todo tipo de frutas.* [We are not very much, shall we say, sophisticated food seekers, we, rice, beans, root vegetables, in my house we eat a lot of root vegetables and vegetables, because yes, if we rely on the customs of Cubans, we Cubans are used to eating basic foods. We are not selective in anything, we are not selective people, we are not looking for sophisticated dishes, much to the customs,

[88] Interview with Homero, June 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[89] See appendix row #37
[90] *Moros y Cristianos* (or *arroz congri*) is a rice dish made with black beans that are cooked together with white rice, spices, and pork fat. This shouldn't be confused with just *arroz con frijoles* (rice with beans) which are separated.
[91] Interview with Homero, June 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[92] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

congrí[93], beans, but those things, we do not, ah many juices, very much, yes, mango, guava, any of these fruits like passion fruit…we consume all kinds of fruits.][94]

C: *Frijoles. Frijoles, arroz, aquí los cubanos consumimos mucho arroz. Arroz es como el 80% de la alimentación del cubano son los granos y en este caso el arroz en abundancia. El arroz, frijoles también consumimos mucho y algo acompañado siempre con algo de proteína siempre.* [Beans. Beans, rice, here Cubans consume a lot of rice. Rice is like 80% of the Cuban diet is grains and in this case rice in abundance. We also eat a lot of rice and beans, and always with some protein.][95]

D: *Bueno ahora que hace tanto calor, el jugo de frutas nos es casi necesario…pero uno trata de dejar para la cena lo más, lo más importante, si hay carne o si hay pescado, o si hay huevos o si hay pollo o lo que haya se deja para la cena… Mi hijo dice que si hay frijoles no hay comida.* [Well, now that it's so hot, fruit juice is almost necessary… but we try to leave the most, the most important thing for dinner, if there is meat or fish, or if there are eggs or if there is chicken or whatever there is, we leave it for dinner… My son says that if there are beans there is no food.][96]

These reflections on the types of cuisine consumed daily reflect a collective construction of Cuban cuisine. Although each of them held different identities, apart from their Cubaness, the uniting factor of the presence of rice, beans, pork, and root vegetables, merged them together. This collectivity allows us to extrapolate an idea about the broader Cuban society, a story, and the memory they all hold together. This collective memory does not just extend to people in Cuba currently but also brings into question the idea of food mobility and how these customs stay within the citizens of nations. Sandro speaks to this:

S: I think we have very traditional regarding to food, we have basically kept the same basic diets for as long as I can remember, and you might think it's a result of shortage and there not being anything else. I mean, yeah, obviously, that polarizes your diet, because if you don't have much variety, you're centered on the same things. But what I found is that actually the Cubans that live in the U.S. now, they go to the same time plates... They don't actually switch their diet much. So that got me thinking that Cubans like what they eat, even if there's nothing else, but they actually enjoy eating what we think it's traditional for us.[97]

[93] See note 89
[94] Interview with Telma, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[95] Interview with Camilo, July 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[96] Interview with Dalila, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[97] Interview with Sandro, June 5th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

This point allows us to hold the reality of shortages reducing the ability to "perform nationality", as we saw previously with Nalda and Dalila, but also recognize that Cuban's diets are very focused on these specific staple foods that might not change even when they migrate and have access to more. Below we discuss the first part of the inquiry related to how shortages have shifted ideal consumption and performances of nationhood.

4.2.1.2 Shortages and Seasonality

Although people took the time to tell me their daily diet, this explanation also brought up conversations about what people *would like* to be eating versus what they had access to when I spoke to them. Homero and Camilo reflect on this below:

> H: Unfortunately, we have this kind of problem, which are linked to sometimes to the scarcity of some food, like meat, for example. It is like, you know, for Cubans eating meat became has been for a long time, the symbol of well being the symbol of prosperity.[98]

> C: *Generalmente, antes aquí, la comida de carnes, la carne más aceptada, que más gusta al cubano es la carne de cerdo, pero bueno, ahora está en escasez…*[Generally, in the past, the most accepted meat, the one that Cubans like the most, was pork, but now it is in short supply…]

The presence of food shortages mentioned is not just a caloric loss but a morale loss; "the symbol of prosperity." The idea that you cannot find a tangible item that symbolizes something so crucial as success, and well-being is detrimental to the functioning of society as a whole. The reality of food shortages and morale loss through a dissolvement of traditions relates both to the food not being available in absolute, but also the loss occurred in the process of migration from the country to the city or from the East (Santiago de Cuba) to the capital (Havana). When asked what her traditions are, Vinita comments on this below:

> V: *Bueno, la, eh. El tema alimento en años atrás se ha perdido un poco. Estamos recuperando. Yo no lo he perdido. Muchos lo han perdido. Y hoy se está recuperando. Se está trabajando en base a recuperar lo que es la tradición campesina como es el casabe. Muy importante…No te puedo explicar cuántas tradiciones hemos dejado atrás que hoy se están recuperando, muchas, muchas, muchas que hoy, hoy se están recuperando. Yo*

[98] Interview with Homero, June 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> *nunca las he perdido. Ese es un desayuno exquisito por la mañana, con leche de cabra, como decía de voz, el pan de maíz, aquí en La Habana se llama pan de maíz, pero en Santiago de Cuba se llama pudín de maíz con coco y un alimento muy rico, y yo lo hago.* [Well, the, uh. The food issue in the past years has been lost a little bit. We are recovering. I have not lost it. Many have lost it. And today it is recovering. We are working on the basis of recovering the peasant tradition of cassava. It is very important… I can't tell you how many traditions we have left behind that today are being recovered, many, many, many, many that today, today are being recovered. I have never lost them. That is an exquisite breakfast in the morning, with goat's milk, as I was saying, corn bread, here in Havana it is called cornbread, but in Santiago de Cuba it is called corn pudding with coconut and a very tasty food, and I make it.][99]

Each of the sentiments expressed by Homero, Camilo, and Vinita, at their core, relate the loss of tradition in conjunction with unavailability which is the result of economic crisis. The lack of pork was more obviously connected to import deficiencies and inflation, but also the underpinnings of all migration from the East to the West is economical since the most significant reason people move from Santiago to Havana is to find jobs or better opportunities in the capital city. This topic of traditions being lost because of lack of supply is very essential. The well studied phenomenon (Mintz and Du Bois 2002; Fieldhouse 1995) recognizes the loss of caloric access being closely connected to a subsequent loss of culture more broadly speaking. Although something I will not analyze further here, it is a theme that keeps coming up throughout the piece and I acknowledge the significance and potential for further review.

[99] Interview with Vinita, June 22nd, 2022, Havana, Cuba

4.2.2 *Rice*

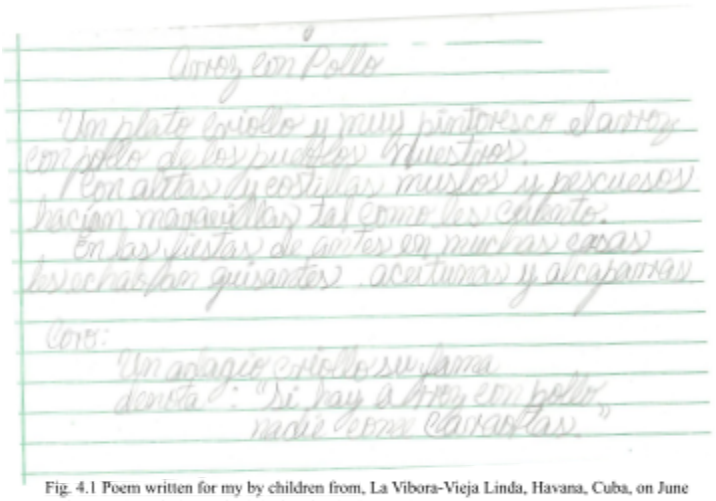

Fig. 4.1 Poem written for my by children from, La Vibora-Vieja Linda, Havana, Cuba, on June 16th, 2022 (translation and original author in footnote)

> It was the rice that did me in. I felt my whole life in every bite, resistant to the tooth, eventually yielding into creaminess. We were neither here nor there, and our dinner tasted exactly the same (Machado 2007).

This poem[100] (left) was written for me by the children I was greeted by at Nalda's house. When I arrived they stood around and read me different pieces they chose to share that reflected their relationship with the food system. Their choice of this poem further symbolized the importance of the dish *arroz con pollo* to Cubans. While I do not wish to extrapolate one ingredient from another and ignore the importance of the dish as a whole, I do start this section with this piece to talk about an essential pillar of the Cuban diet: rice. Although each piece of the Cuban plate should be regarded as essential, the uplifting and borderline worshiping of rice shocked me. I had imagined understanding how essential rice was to the cuisine, growing up consuming Cuban food, however, soon after arriving, I was astonished to discover how much my interviewees adored this small white grain. In all twenty-two interviews the word "rice" or "*arroz*" was mentioned ninety-six times. Rice was everywhere and something everyone spoke about. As Camilo hints above when he stated "rice is 80% of what Cubans eat." Garth observed this as well and stated "even with other foods available as substitutes, [one] does not feel [they] can satisfy [their] hunger without rice… a part of [them] may symbolically die if [they are] unable to access rice or other ingredients that [they view] as quintessential for satiation" (Garth 2020, 48).

[100] Text: *Un plato criollo, y muy pintoresco, el arroz con pollo, de los pueblos nuestros. Con alitas y costillas, muslos y pescuezos, hacían maravillas, tal como les cuento. En las fiestas de antes, en muchas casas, le echaban guisantes, aceitunas y alcaparras…Un adagio criollo, su fama denota: "Sí hay arroz con pollo, nadie come caraotas."* [A creole dish, and very picturesque, rice with chicken, from our towns. With wings and ribs, thighs and necks, they made wonders, as I tell you. In the parties of the past, in many houses, they used to add peas, olives and capers... A Creole adage, its fame denotes: "If there is rice with chicken, nobody eats caraotas.] (Valero 2015).

This reality, though, concerned me because of the vulnerability that the rice supply faced; with both the lack of imports of rice itself, as well as capacities to boost agricultural production, the shortages of rice were at an all time high. This condition though, I realized was not a new, or unique state that I was hearing about. Pérez states:

> The history of the production of the basic staples of the diet of the overwhelming majority of the Cuban people, precisely those products that made up much of la cocina cubana, has been treated as a matter of lesser importance and in the process has overlooked the history of recurring scarcity of food. In fact, hunger is a facet of the Cuban condition (Pérez 2020, 23).

Therefore, although Cuba has and does still produce some rice, they have never produced enough rice to come close to meeting its population's needs.

> For all the vaunted and indeed celebrated centrality of rice in la cocina cubana, it is remarkable indeed to learn that the obligatory dish of the national cuisine —"indispensable on every table"— has depended almost entirely on foreign imports. At no time since the end of the eighteenth century, and through the early twenty-first century, has Cuba attained self-sufficiency in rice production. Between 1945 and 1954, each Cuban consumed an annual average of 110 pounds, 90 pounds of which came from abroad (Pérez 2020, 21-22).

However, the connection and desire for consuming absorbently high amounts of rice was not simply a caloric need. Pérez states, "Rice occupies a very special place in the cosmology of Cuban. Rice is more than a food: it is a way of life, an obligatory presence" (Pérez 2020, 14). Camilo and Silvero confirmed this when comparing their rice consumption to China and Japan.

> S: *Como los chinos, los Cubanos tenemos la costumbre del arroz, si no hay arroz, hay una, hay algo que echamos de menos. El arroz para nosotros es carne.* [Like the Chinese, we Cubans have the custom of rice, if there is no rice, there is one, there is something we miss. Rice for us is meat.][101]

> C: *Somos uno de los países que consume bastante arroz, bastante arroz, porque los chinos lo consumen pero consumen en pequeñas cantidades, es decir, o pueden que consuman en el día varias, pero son tazones y es muy poco. Nosotros comemos un plato completo de arroz, comemos bastante arroz.* [We are one of the countries that consumes a lot of rice, a lot of rice, because the Chinese eat it but they eat it in small quantities, that

[101] Interview with Silvero, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

is to say, they may eat several bowls a day, but they are bowls and it is very little. We eat a full plate of rice, we eat quite a lot of rice.][102]

I was curious to understand how this infatuation came to be and if Cubans could be convinced to shift their diets to contain a local source of carbs. My request could have been assumed though, most interviewees looked at me and said something to the extent of Osvaldo when he stated:

O: *Mira, es algo que tenemos en el ADN* [Look, it's something that we have in our DNA][103]

4.2.3 *Regional Differences*

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the idea of national cuisine could be upheld as a myth when analyzing the many differences in diets among various parts of the island. As briefly shown by Vinita, who is from the East, the traditions change significantly across the island. Therefore, by performing this research in the capital city of Havana, I was not able to discover first hand what these differences looked like, but many of my interviewees brought up this fact. Camilo, Sandro, and Solana share below:

C: *Porque también sus provincias tienen sus hábitos alimenticios y de cultura…Es decir, es como que en la capital tienen unos hábitos de alimentación diferente a los del campo. En el campo a lo mejor son más tradicionales. En la ciudad a lo mejor hay más comida chatarra, más hábitos, allá son un poco más tradicionales.* [Because also your provinces have their eating habits and culture. I mean, it's like in the capital they have different eating habits than in the countryside. In the countryside maybe they're more traditional. In the city maybe there is more junk food, more habits, there they are a little more traditional.][104]

S: *Entonces bueno, pues lo típico de aquí de Cuba hay muchas cosas típicas. Claro, cada provincia tiene un estilo de cocinar distinto, por ejemplo, yo soy de La Habana. Yo nací y me crié en La Habana y tengo el sistema que se usa aquí en La Habana. El arroz congrí que es frijoles negro con arroz, bistec de cerdo, pollo asado, carne asada, todo eso es y los tamales son muy típicos de Cuba en cualquier provincia, pero no se cocinan igual. En La Habana, por ejemplo, el tamal es de maíz, maíz tierno molido con carne de cerdo, se prepara la carne de cerdo, se adoba y al maíz molido se le echa esa carne, después con*

[102] Interview with Camilo, July 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[103] Interview with Olsvaldo, July 14th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[104] Interview with Camilo, July 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

la hoja de del maíz se envuelve el tamal. Nosotros aquí en la hacemos eso, por ejemplo, en Santiago de Cuba que es las provincias orientales, no le llaman tamales…Entonces son comidas muy típicas cubanas, muy típicas. El plátano que nosotros le decimos plátano macho, que es el plátano grande que le llama también plátano vianda. Hay dos tipos de plátano, hay uno que se llama burro, que en las provincias orientales le dicen fongo, pero es el mismo plátano…[So, well, there are many typical things here in Cuba. Of course, each province has a different style of cooking, for example, I am from Havana. I was born and raised in Havana and I have the system used here in Havana. Rice congrí which is black beans with rice, pork steak, roast chicken, grilled meat, all that is and tamales are very typical of Cuba in any province, but they are not cooked the same. In Havana, for example, the tamale is made of corn, tender corn ground with pork meat, the pork meat is prepared, marinated and the ground corn is added to the meat, then the tamale is wrapped with the corn husk. Here in Cuba, for example, in Santiago de Cuba, which is the eastern provinces, they don't call it tamales…So they are very typical Cuban foods, very typical. The plantain that we call plantain macho, which is the big plantain that is also called plantain vianda. There are two types of plantain, there is one called burro, which in the eastern provinces is called fongo, but it is the same plantain.][105]

S: What we think it's traditional for us, what's traditional for us here is not the same as Eastern part of the country, you know, we have very distinct territorial diets. Going from one province to the other. Havana is just, whatever, we are a mix of everything that happens in the rest of the country, but if you go to a coastal coastal town, then they eat a lot of fish, and that's not usual.][106]

These variations in cuisine and tradition were also juxtaposed by the acknowledgement of the uniformity and consistent parts of the diet around the island. Marquesa and Mirana speak to this:

Marquesa: *Lo mismo que todos. Todos comemos frijoles, arroz, maíz, esas cosas…Es una repetición de cosas: frijoles, arroz y esas cosas.* [The same as everyone else. We all eat beans, rice, corn, those things… It is a repetition of things: beans, rice and those things.]

Mirana: *Es una comida monótona, no es diversa.* [It's a monotonous meal, it's not diverse.][*107*]

The first three interviewees, who were all from Havana made a point to explain how much cuisine differs when you leave the city, while Mirana and Marquesa, both from different provinces, did not give much weight to the differences in cuisine from their hometowns to the city. While this is not evidence of the absence of differences, I take this emphasis of "una comida

[105] Interview with Solana, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba
[106] Interview with Sandro, June 5th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[107] Interview with Mirana and Marquesa, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

monótona" as a further confirmation of the indispensability of the Cuban staples of: "rice, beans and those things."

4.2.4 *Celebrations*

¡Ay! por eso mi propuesta es tan peculiar:	Oh! that is why my proposal is so peculiar:
El puerco, Mamífero Nacional.	The pig, National Mammal.
Un monumento le deben dar,	They should give him a monument
El puerco, Mamífero Nacional.	The pig, National Mammal.
La iglesia lo debería santificar,	The church should sanctify it,
El puerco, Mamífero Nacional.	The pig, National Mammal.
Secularum, seculoron, prestigio finisecular,	Secularum, seculoron, end of the century prestige,
El puerco, Mamífero Nacional.	The pig, National Mammal.
Es una propuesta sociocultural,	It is a sociocultural proposal,
El puerco, Mamífero Nacional.	El puerco, Mamífero Nacional.
Como uno más de las familias	As one more of the families
desafiando normas higiénicas	defying hygienic regulations
en bañaderas o balcones,	in bathtubs or balconies,
fueron transfusiones de carteras gélidas.	they were transfused with icy wallets.
Bodas, quince, graduaciones	Weddings, fifteen, graduations
bombeadas por su corazón.	pumped by her heart.
En el mercado agropecuario	In the agricultural market
se comporta como el índice Dow Jones.	it behaves like the Dow Jones index.
¿Quién ha visto un Fin de Año	Who has seen a New Year's Eve
sin esa nube de aromas?	without that cloud of aromas?
Lo mismo en los barrios ricos,	The same in the rich neighborhoods,
en las más humildes lomas.	in the humblest hills.

-Song, *Mamífero Nacional,* Buena Fe, 2011

As stated above by many interviewees, pork is one of the most critical parts of the Cuban diet. The song shown above is representative of this fixation with pigs and pork, calling pork the national mammal (or mascot). While many Cubans would love to have pork daily there are too many issues with supply and availability for this to be their reality. Regardless, one thing that was emphasized to me when discussing traditions specifically was the necessity of pork for celebration as well as different special foods related to these non-daily festivities. For this reason, the distinction between the types of food they ate on a daily basis in contrast to what they needed to perform celebration, as well as what this meant for them resulted in the separation of sections of daily food versus celebratory food that you will find below. Dalila and Silvero explain:

> D: *Ahora en casa, 31 de diciembre, 24 de diciembre, un cumpleaños, no puede faltar el congrí, la carne puerco, los tostones, la yuca con mojo, no va a faltar, la comida preferida…Comidas populares dónde van a comer mucha gente es la caldosa, que es una sopa con mucha viandas, con carne o pedacitos de gordo de puerco. La cabeza del puerco para hacer la comida para todo el vecindario, se hace con leña afuera, con ollas bien grandes, y todo el mundo va con un pozuelito y le echan la caldosa, esa es la comida popular.* [Now at home, December 31, December 24, a birthday, you can't miss the congrí, the pork, the tostones, the yucca with mojo, you can't miss it, the favorite

> food…The favorite food for special parties. Popular foods where a lot of people go to eat is *caldosa*, which is a soup with a lot of viands, with meat or pieces of fat pork. The head of the pig to make the food for the whole neighborhood, is made with firewood outside, with big pots, and everybody goes with a little well and they pour the caldosa, that is the popular food.][108]
>
> S: *Esa es la llave de la comida cubana. Carne de puerco asada.* [That is the key to Cuban food. Roasted pork.][109]

Dalila and Silvero emphasize not just the type of food essential for celebration but also the manner in which it is done: with the community. They point out the use of *la caldosa* as a place where people literally share the tangible creation and consumption, as well as, the use of this food as a medium or tool for the sharing of memories, exchanges, and community building.

Alvaro reflected on this reality as well. He states:

> A: *A ver, realmente la tradición es bastante bastante sencilla. Suele ser por en las grandes comidas de familia que se hacen en eventos, no se cumpleaños, sobre todo en fin de año por lo general tratamos de conseguir un puerco o al menos parte de de un puerco, se hornea, mi abuelo realmente es el cocinero de la familia, el es el que se encarga de esa parte, el hornea, le hace un aliño, a veces lo marina, etc…es más la cosa de ocasiones muy especiales que se hacen comidas de familia, que aparte de la comida en sí es, sabes la cosa de intercambiar, contarnos las cosas, los abuelos que siempre tienen muchas historias que contar, etc, etcétera pero viene siendo esa.* [Let's see, actually the tradition is quite simple. It tends to be for the big family meals that are made for events, I don't know birthdays, especially on New Year's Eve, we usually try to get a pork or at least part of a pork, we bake it, my grandfather is really the cook in the family, he is the one who is in charge of that part, he bakes it, he makes a dressing, sometimes he marinates it, etc., … it is more the thing of very special occasions that we have family meals, that apart from the food itself is, you know, the thing of exchanging, telling each other things, the grandparents always have many stories to tell, etc, etcetera, but that is what it is all about.][110]

[108] Interview with Dalila and Silvero, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[109] Ibidem
[110] Interview with Dalila and Silvero, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

Fig. 4.2 Alvaro's drawing of his ideal food system, June 30th, 2022, Vedado, Havana, Cuba

When Alvaro's interview ended, and he asked to draw his future food system, he had a bit of difficulty. I told him to draw what he imagined, what he dreamed of. He drew the image to the left and stated: *"Ma si, ma dire che proprio quello, c'é, la mia priorità è sempre stata la mia famiglia, cioè....ma quello tutto molto simbolico, c'é*... [But yes, but to say that, like, my priority has always been my family, that is. But that all very symbolic, like.]"

The role of food and food's ability to both provide a space for celebration and subsequently community building is essential in the difference between surviving (*sobravivendo*) to living. Food and celebration create a meaningful life as well as the space for sharing from generation to generation as Alvaro said. Garth states:

> To overcome unpredictable scarcity juxtaposed with a calendric cycle of celebrations characterized by joyful consumption is central to the temporal experience of post-Soviet socialist Cuba… These temporalities cannot be considered without one another, and together they illuminate the ways Cubans navigate changing political terrain (Garth 2019, 812).

The juxtaposition reflected here takes us back to the introduction of this piece. Harking on Shakur's words, we see here the need to uphold beauty amongst the ugly, or "the death." Another way this has been described is a "dual morality." Which manifests in the pressure to uphold socialist values, while also faced with the need to do whatever it takes to get by, sometimes subverting socialist values" (Garth 2019, 812). This aspect of the *doble moral* (dual mortality) is something I experienced with my interviewees and friends; the navigation of struggle and joy at the same time. Therefore, we find joy at the center of these realities. Within a society or people under stressful or chaotic circumstances, food (inside and outside of celebration) becomes one of the few things used to at least escape for a bit, connect with those around you, and forget about *la lucha* for a moment.

4.2 Identities

In explaining logistical barriers to accessing food in Chapter 3, we discussed the underpinnings of identity-based discrimination. Unfortunately in Cuba, what I found was that, "inequality plagues the food distribution system… in formally institutionalized ways and in the daily micro-interactions necessary to acquire food" (Garth 2020, 164). In this section, we build on the second set of replies related to traditions and habits which was how these daily or celebratory consumption normalities intersect with one's identities. The identities touched on the most were related to gender, age, and religion. However, I will also take this time to acknowledge the unspoken-about and relevant aspect of race that I found to be passively present. I will briefly explain each topic's history and background and then show how analyzing these identity politics reveals another aspect of the Cuban food system. How people recount their memories related to food can call attention to the inequality at large. While I have separated these identities in their own sections, it shouldn't be forgotten that each section should remain read with the lens of intersectionality. Therefore, each subject is not, for example simply their gender, but also their race, age, and religion in one, combining to create a complex entity.

4.2.1 *Gender*

The fight for gender equality in Cuba goes back many years, but significant historical dates tend to discuss specific strides made for white women. Therefore, one should remember in the recounting of successes, in the intersections of identities, there were hierarchies of rights received. Regardless, between 1860-1919 there was the first woman attending university, and the divorce act passed and the parental authority act, which started to give more power and authority to women. From 1920-1939, the National Woman's Congresses rose and, in 1934, the right to women's suffrage. From 1940-1959 before the Revolution, there was a stagnation in rights obtained due to the ongoing class and race struggle that intersected this period heavily. When the Revolution triumphed, though, it was said there was a revolution within the revolution, women's fight for full liberation (Leon 2022). This was the start of real change for women; representation in the literacy campaign and the responsibility of teaching and becoming educated boosted empowerment greatly. These strides can be seen in statistics with Cuba's ranking number three worldwide in terms of most female representation in the country's main governing body, or with

the extremely high levels of educated women (Wadley 2015). Despite the significant progress of representation of women in the professional field, due to these being state professions, they do not earn enough (or the correct) salary to be self-sufficient, as expressed by Neoma above. This has resulted in an increase in inequality because the jobs that allow access to foreign currency are largely filled by men, "thereby giving men access to greater financial power" (Wadley 2015). This is due to the shift towards a more privatized economy, which relies more on the tourist industry, subject to this internalized sexism. Therefore, since the access to hard currency increases the ease of survival in Cuba today, this gap is highly problematic. Wadley explains further:

> If women are hired, it is often as a maid or cook, or a similar job that reinforces the traditional gender roles that they already struggle against. Although the private sector offers women some opportunity to start their own business (usually a restaurant), few are able to take advantage without access to the capital necessary to do so. So, even in this new economy, women are being left behind (Wadley 2015).

Additionally, this aspect is further reinforced by the culture of *machismo* (strong or aggressive masculine pride) that is still very much alive and well. Wadley puts words to the personal experience I had:

> As far as power dynamics go, the machismo mentality ensures that men receive the upper hand. All you have to do is walk down the street to see machismo at work. Catcalls, or *piropos*, and other forms of (non-physical) sexual harassment are unavoidable for women, even on a five-minute walk. This culture of machismo is deeply embedded in Cuban society and indicative of deeper, institutionalized gender inequalities as well (Wadley 2015).

This culture was exacerbated during the Special Period, as described in section 3.2.3.1, where inequality increased in times of struggle and stress. This has also manifested in an accumulation of unpaid labor in the household expected of women on top of their now equally accessible formal state jobs. Therefore, when analyzing the Cuban food system and habits related to food,

we can see that "as the Cuban food system [became] increasingly cumbersome for its users, the state's responsibility shifts onto the household, and women overwhelmingly shoulder the burdens of that system" (Garth 2020, 83). Given this specific context of increased inequality and sensitivity to the issue, I was aware of the difficulties that might come when speaking about gender. Therefore, I adopted the lens proposed by Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack (2016, 130) called "listening in stereo." To give an example, I will use an instance during the interview with Solana. When asked about traditional roles, Solana's granddaughter, Alysa, who sat in on the interview, chimed into this question and said:

> A: *En Cuba no existe el machismo de que la mujer tiene que quedarse en la casa por obligación, es como la ama de casa que cocina, limpia y hace de todo y el hombre va a trabajar. No es eso exactamente…La mujer en Cuba, la mujer trabaja y hace todo lo que quiera, pero usualmente es la que manda en la casa.* [In Cuba there is no machismo that women have to stay at home out of obligation, it is like the housewife who cooks, cleans and does everything and the man goes to work. It's not exactly that…The woman in Cuba, the woman works and does everything she wants, but usually she is the boss in the house.][111]

This specific way of speaking was pervasive among people we met, that while "women do whatever they want," they were still "usually in charge of the house." Anderson and Jack state that, "A woman's discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting, perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men's dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience" (Anderson & Jack 2016, 129). This was seen when women would describe their duties in the house and then add that "there was no obligation." Therefore, "listening in stereo," was a tool used to hear the perspectives accurately and to hear each side of what they had to say. I embarked to "receive both the dominant and muted channels," and "carefully understand the relationship between them" (Anderson & Jack 2016, 130). Below are some of my interviewees' replies in relation to gender roles. I employ you to do something similar which would be to "read in stereo," take in what they say while holding both the dominant and the muted channels simultaneously.

[111] Interview with Solana, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

T: *Bueno, generalmente en mi familia los hombres son los que nos abastecen. Yo también compro porque bueno, yo también, en un determinados momentos salgo y compro también viandas. Pero bueno, me acostumbré, como yo trabajaba, mi esposo siempre lo que era la carne y la vianda siempre la buscaba, ahora, en estos momentos nos compartimos porque él trabaja y yo estoy en la casa atendiendo a la familia.* [Well, generally in my family the men are the ones who supply us. I also buy because, well, I also, at certain times I go out and buy groceries. But well, I got used to it, since I used to work, my husband always looked for meat and food, now, at this moment we share because he works and I am at home taking care of the family.][112]

V: *Yo soy la que cocina. Yo soy la que prepara. Busco. A ver, mi primo salió y encontró algo en la tienda, lo compró, normal. No es que sea uno exclusivo. Soy yo la que.. Pero ellos traen cualquier cosa, pero la que cocina… Soy la que llevó el pomo, soy yo.* [I am the one who cooks. I am the one who prepares. I search. Let's see, my cousin went out and found something in the store, bought it, normal. It's not like it's an exclusive one. I'm the one that... But they bring anything, but the one who cooks...I'm the one who carries the burden, it's me.][113]

M: *Mi papá es quien mayormente compra las cosas. Pero muchas veces se encuentran los dos. Tanto mi padre como mi madre. Y cocinamos tanto mi mama como yo. Mi hermano no cocina y mi papa tampoco.* [My dad is the one who mostly buys things. But many times the two of them meet. Both my mom and dad. And both my mom and I cook. My brother doesn't cook and neither does my dad.][114]

The dominant culture is expressed above when interviewees state their roles in the household as facts of the situation, "I am at home taking care of the family," or "I am the one who cooks." At the same time, we see the more muted "channel," when they state things such as, "but well, I got used to it," or "I'm the one who carries the burden." Both of these ways of explaining the situation expressed something more extensive about how they see their role and how they have been placed into it. Additionally, each of them expresses the idea that because of the crisis, the women have also taken on the burden of "searching" or "going out" on the street. While one could argue the crisis state has forced roles to shift in the direction of dissolvement instead of cementing them, it must be recognized that once they get home, they express only the woman performing the labor in the household regarding food resulting in the total labor increased. I heard this when Geraldo Sr. stated:

[112] Interview with Telma, June 15th, 2022, Havana Cuba
[113] Interview with Vinita, June 22nd, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[114] Interview with Mirana, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> G: *Sí, a veces yo cocino. Sí. Cuando puedo, lo hago. Cocino todo lo que esté a mi alcance. Y entre mi esposa y yo, los cocinamos. A veces lo hacemos juntos. Depende.* [Yes, sometimes I cook. Yes. When I can, I do. I cook whatever I can get my hands on. And between me and my wife, we cook them. Sometimes we do it together. It depends.][115]

Geraldo's way of speaking expresses something Garth explains when she says: "Cuban households have progressed so that men and boys help with small tasks of food preparation... However, while these tasks are nice gestures, they do very little to alleviate the burden on women" (Garth 2020, 93). The way that Geraldo says, "sometimes I cook," made me feel it was a situation of the little burden lifted off the women in his household.

It should be noted, though, that while these situations might continue to push gender roles in society, it could be the only way to survive. This is to say that even if people are not happy with it, men do have greater bargaining power and ability to get things on the street and deal with the "outside world." Therefore, in a crisis, people have had to accept this reality because they do not have the energy to push back against it.

I will conclude by revisiting the idea expressed by Solana. In her description of her household duties she expressed her love for cooking, caring for her family, and being the one in charge of the household.[116] This joy and fulfillment is a valid state of being. I acknowledge that "the role of cooking in women's lives and women's role in household cooking has not necessarily been cast aside as oppressive drudgery," since "the act of preparing and serving food to loved ones is part of the 'nurturing arts' which can be a source of empowerment for women" (Garth 2020, 108). The point I would like to make, though, is that, as expressed by my interviewees, "whether or not cooking for the family is experienced as creative and nurturing, regardless of their employment status, Cuban women are still burdened with a full load of domestic responsibilities," (Garth 2020, 108). Additionally, with the increase in crisis, women might be pushed into these roles even more.

[115] Interview with Geraldo Sr., June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[116] Interview with Solana, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

It is clear, though, that the situation is complex. I hypothesize this pattern or juxtaposition between the dominant and muted channels, is simultaneously a collective practice of the oppressed, and yet something deeply related to the constant narratives of equality that the regime and Revolution pushes. As we know from Fidel's words above, to speak about the Revolution being unsuccessful is a thin line; being a revolutionary meant that you accepted progress should be made, but people were sometimes weary of crossing that line (with me) between constructive criticism (leading to progress) and being interpreted as counter revolutionary. Due to the need to survive, one does what they have to do; therefore, these observations should be read as judgments of what is right or wrong; however, simply observations I had about potential contradictions from what I was hearing in the border narrative versus what I was being told in everyday realities and logistics.

4.2.2 *Age*

As briefly spoken about in section 3.2.3.2, concerns around one's health was something that was also expressed when asking about feelings, but in this section, I will speak about the changing of *habits* related to age-induced health concerns, as well as habits changing because of time passing. As people have grown older, they explained the shifting of changing traditions and access. These ideas are heavily related to collective memories and memories that are passed on from generation to generation, which I even witnessed during one of my interviews. When speaking to Nalda, there were two girls, around eleven years old, from the neighborhood listening in. They share a moment below:

> N: *Bueno, nosotros teníamos tradición… Hoy no podemos aplicarnos. Nos gustaba mucho el tamal, los tostones. Pero si no hay aceite* (holds her hands up). *Ya las tradiciones se van perdiendo por supuesto. Hay muchas de ellas.* (Points to the girls) *No conocen algunas cosas que eran tradicionales para nosotros.* [Well, we had tradition… Today we cannot apply ourselves. We used to like tamales and tostones. But if there is no oil (holds her hands up), of course, traditions are being lost. There are many of them. (Points to the girls) They don't know some things that were traditional for us.]
> Girls: *Si, mi abuela me lo decía* (laughs). [Yes, my grandmother used to tell me that (laughs).]

> N: *Ellas…* (referring to the girls) (now asking them) *¿pueden comentarte? ¿cuantas cosas comía tu abuela?... Bastante.* [They (referring to the girls)... (now asking them) can you tell? How many things your grandmother ate?....Quite a lot.][117]

This exchange between Nalda and the neighborhood children is incredibly powerful. She shares a memory with them of a time before they could hold their own conscious memory, and yet they are now aware of this time; that when their grandmother lived, she experienced much more variety and tradition related to food. Therefore, this exists for the girls in the abstract, as something that could happen, but not something that has yet to happen to them. Additionally, Nalda highlights the loss of tradition due to lack of supply. Dalila touches on the same thing referring to what has changed in her first family versus her family now.

> D: *Bueno, actualmente, porque en mi primera familia, en la de mi mamá, teníamos hábitos de desayunar, se desayunaba pan, café con leche, alguna fruta. Después, por las situaciones de escasez y de limitaciones y demás, uno fue perdiendo el hábito del desayuno, uno toma un traguito de café por la mañana y basta, el pan, quizás el pan que te garantizan diario y puedes comerte el pan y el café, eso es el desayuno. Tenemos hábito de almorzar. Nos gusta alrededor de las doce, la una, aunque sea un bocado, aunque sea un bocado más pequeño de lo que podemos hacerlo en la comida.* [Well, actually, because in my first family, in my mother's family, we had breakfast habits, we had bread for breakfast, coffee with milk, some fruit. Afterwards, due to scarcity and limitations and so on, we lost the habit of having breakfast, we had a sip of coffee in the morning and that was enough, the bread, maybe the bread that you are guaranteed every day and you can eat the bread and the coffee, that is breakfast. We have a habit of having lunch. We like around twelve o'clock, one o'clock, even if it's a bite, even if it's a smaller bite than we can do at lunch.][118]

The second topic related to age and habits surrounded the consumption of certain foods and age-related diseases. Therefore, some of my interviewees shifted their consumption habits based on diet-related diseases or prevention. This is important to consider because there is a culture of consuming very fatty and fried foods in *la comida cubana,* but this is not something that all older people can always take part in, and yet they still mention certain foods they would eat or would have eaten if they were not the age they were. Duaro and Solana explain below:

[117] Interview with Nalda, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[118] Interview with Dalila, July 21st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

D: *Bueno, hoy en la familia en primer lugar, nuestros hábitos alimentarios son tener una dieta en sentido general saludable. De consumir hortalizas, vegetales, frutas…Pero, normalmente a mí en particular, lo que más me gusta es comer arroz junto con el arroz, que hayan vegetales y que haya vianda. Nada de carne frita y salsas grasas en exceso, porque me operaron del corazón.* [Well, today in the family, first of all, our eating habits are to have a generally healthy diet. We eat vegetables, fruits, fruits....But normally, what I like the most is to eat rice together with rice, vegetables and root vegetables. No fried meat and fatty sauces in excess, because I had heart surgery.][119]

S: *Bueno, lo que acostumbramos a comer en realidad es pollo, que es muy sano, en distintas fases de su elaboración y sopa también, malanga, puré de malanga, bistec de cerdo en alguna ocasión también y eso es lo que mantenemos así, también por la edad que tenemos… Hay que cuidarse más porque ya el tiene ochenta y cuatro años y yo tengo ochenta y dos, ya uno se cuida para ver lo más que podamos durar.* [Well, what we are used to eating is chicken, which is very healthy, in different phases of its preparation and also soup, taro, taro puree, pork steak on some occasions and that is what we keep that way, also because of the age we have to take more care of ourselves because he is eighty four years old and I am eighty two, we take care of ourselves to see how long we can last.][120]

These two aspects of habit shifting, connected to age, one more closely related to supply shifts over time and one more closely related to the physical body and its needs, are important distinctions when analyzing how diets shift over time. It is necessary to distinguish the needs that are present in terms of people's desires and the well-being of their bodies, not to create a hierarchy but to understand better distinctions around simply surviving versus living.

4.2.3 *Religion*

A couple of weeks into being in Cuba, I noticed something that perplexed me. All around the city, you would see dead chickens that looked to be purposefully killed and plastic bags of rotting fruit placed below trees. Only until I was explained about Santeria rituals, did it all make sense. Santeria is the most popular of the many Afro-Cuban religions practiced in Cuba, with around 70 percent of the population actively practicing.

> Santería is a syncretic religion rooted in the religious practices of the Yoruba people, who were brought as slaves to Cuba from the Congo Basin and West Africa, that incorporates

[119] Interview with Duaro, June 29th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[120] Interview with Solana, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

> elements of Catholicism. In early times, Santería developed and was practiced in secret, as Catholicism was the only religion permitted on the island by the Spanish colonial government. African gods were syncretized with Catholic saints and the religion adopted some Catholic religious practices…Today, Santería religious practices continue to be intermingled with Catholicism, with some interpretations requiring Catholic baptism for full initiation into the faith. Santería practitioners make physical offerings to saints or deities, known as orishas. Orishas typically have a Catholic counterpart. As one example, the Santería orisha Ochún is syncretized with the patron saint of Cuba, la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (Manchin, Perkins, & Bhargava 2021).

As I learned more about this religion and experienced "feeding the Santos," I became intrigued by the connection between this practice and food. At first glance, I felt it to be counterintuitive to leave rotting food on the streets of the city, while much scarcity was being felt. However, as I understood it more, it became apparent the essentiality of people to practice these rituals to maintain their humanity no matter what the circumstances might be. When I met Maricela, she told me:

> M: Okay, so my Ochún, she's like the river queen. Okay. And I have a Ogun that he is the mountain king. Right. So I have to go to the river And just be there and talk to her and be like, Thank you for everything you've done to me. I'm doing great. Just be thankful….If I have honey or something I have to present that to her. Like this, "this honey, is for you because I'm so grateful" and to my dad [Ogun] I have to go to the mountains or I don't know, woods or something, and be like "I'm grateful and I'm doing great. And I hope you care for me."
>
> Mallory: Yeah. When you give offerings, is it always food like honey?
>
> Mey: Yeah, actually, yeah. You can give her, honey. That's like the ultimate gift. But you can give her sweets because shes the youngest of the family of Santos and she likes sweet things and, like, very soft smells and stuff and to Ogun, that is the father, we will give like a couple of chicken and stuff like that... yeah its food overall… Actually, we call that "to feed the Santos."[121]

This conversation related to the role of food in connecting with your spiritual source is a highly relevant field of study (Feeley-Harnik 1995), but this connection to food spiritually is also closely connected to race. Due to the fact that most people who practice these religions are of African descent and therefore black or mulatto, the unequal access to food, as briefly mentioned in section 3.2.1.5 by Nalda, is not just a reduction of access for survival, but also for living out

[121] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

one's spiritual practices. This furthers the conversation of a direct loss of culture unrelated to cuisine, but rather what the material access to food creates in terms of spiritual ceremony. Below I expand on the role of race more broadly in Cuba.

4.2.4 *Race*

As touched on in the section dedicated to a brief Cuban history, Cuba was a slave-based plantation economy since the first enslaved people came to the island around 1780 (Williams 1970), and the population of enslaved people slowly expanded throughout the 19th century. Inspired by the Haitian Revolution, the underpinnings of revolt and a fight for freedom started as early as 1812. When Cuban elites started to desire independence from Spain, they relied on free and enslaved blacks to support the fight. In much of the discourse surrounding independence were notions of Cuba becoming a raceless nation. The father of Cuban independence, José Martí, stated: "race was merely a tool used locally to divide the anticolonial effort and globally by men who invented 'textbook races' to justify expansion and empire" (Levander 2006, 163). In his essay *Our America*, published in 1891, Marti attempted to create a Latin American identity that could be celebrated for its differences. He states such things as "it was imperative to make common cause with the oppressed in order to secure a new system opposed to the ambitions and governing habits of the oppressors," and "whoever foments and spreads antagonism and hatred between the races, sins against humanity" (Martí 1892). During this time, other nations were defining themselves as multiracial, but they did so by relying on the notion of miscegenation. Therefore, their national inclusiveness was the result of sexual and cultural proximity. This vision of unity was tainted, though, by the fact that it was a physical unity that, in many ways, was premised on the agency of Europeans and the passivity of the "other," or black body. In Cuba, on the other hand, this fight for national unity was a joint political action by armed and powerful black, mulatto, and white men all fighting against the colonizer; not whites, not blacks, but Cubans fighting for their nation. Credit can be given to separatists, like José Martí and other intellectuals, for this strategy to declare there were no races. In order to do this, they used nationalist rhetoric to help defeat Spanish claims about the impossibility of Cuban nationhood, and they provided a conceptual framework that black soldiers could use to condemn the racism of Spanish enemies. This was a language to show that transcendence was yet to occur. Therefore

this concept of racelessness emerged around 1895 and pushed them through the fight for nationhood.

These efforts, though, unfortunately, did not result in a raceless society. In 1908, feeling frustrated by the results of their militancy in the parties of the bourgeoisie, a small group of Cuban Afro-descendants, former combatants of the Liberation Army, founded the Independent Color Party (PIC). The program of this party expressed aspirations that transcended the racial question (Guerra 2022). On May 20th, 1912, the main leaders of the PIC organized an armed protest that consisted of going to the rural areas of the eastern region (where they had just fought for Cuban independence years before) and laying down their weapons until their demands were met. The army's response by businessmen and land owners was a massacre. Some historians estimate hundreds were killed, while others say around 3,000 (Guerra 2022).

As time went on, racial and class inequality worsened through the dictatorship. The abolition of this inequality was at the forefront of the 1959 Revolution. When Castro first came into power, the Afro-Cuban population greatly lacked basic necessities and opportunities; therefore, the policy response was to commit to desegregation and outlawing discrimination and give access to medical, social, and education services to everyone. There was also a large increase in Afro-Cuban political and institutional representatives. These reforms positively affected the lives of Afro-Cubans and could be seen in increased life expectancy, matriculation rates, employment, and more. While a great achievement, they were not the answers to everything. Three years into these policies and Castro's rule he declared that the Revolution eliminated racism. This was since from the "Marxist perspective adopted by Castro and the socialist Cuban state, racism [was] rooted in the capitalist economic base" (Garth 2020, 34-35). Therefore, they saw egalitarianism as equivalent to ending racism and connected racism just to the colonial legacies and capitalist elite who had fled after the triumph of the Revolution (Glassman 2011).

This discourse has made discussions about inequalities taboo which bleeds into the hushed conversations around race even today. This mindset proved to be harmful, in any case. For a while, inequality was less easy to recognize. However, with the fall of the Soviet Union and a decrease in resources, as we know, the skeletons started to come out of the closet. The situation

previously discussed in regard to gender, bleeds over into conversations of financial discrepancies according to race. With a decrease in resources came an increase in prices, and the salary from the government no longer cut it to survive in Cuba. People needed to get their hands on hard currency. When this happened, the skeletons were revealed in many ways, most prominently in remittances, tourism, and foreign investment.

The legacy of remittances goes back far before the Revolution, however. Most Cuban exiles who fled Cuba were wealthy and threatened by the idea of redistribution of wealth. Because of the racial inequality and access to capital before the Revolution, most were also phenotypically white (Hansing 2015, 1). This is further exacerbated by the fact that in 2007 Spain created the 'Historical Memory Law,' which offers citizenship to Spanish descendants (Hansing 2015, 3). This means it is only becoming easier for white Cubans to go abroad and access wealth to send back to their family (Hansing 2015, 4).

If the distribution of remittances was not enough, one of the second ways to get hard currency is from tourists. In tourist-prevalent industries like guides and restaurants, though, there is a front-of-house, back-of-house discrimination that places whiter Cubans at the "front," resulting in them accessing more wealth (Parker 2015). Today, this inequality is slowly being recognized by the government. When I was in Cuba, a new program was referenced a lot, passed in November 2019. This program is called the "*Programa Nacional contra el Racismo y la Discriminación Racial* [National Program against Racism and Racial Discrimination]", which will integrate plans, objectives, and tasks of all sectors of society: economic and social entities, territorial and local administrations, central State administration bodies and civil society organizations (Guerra 2022). I will end with a quote from my professor and activist Zuleica Romay Guerra. Regardless of the efforts being made my the government, she confided in us when she said, "*La alerta realizada por Fidel Castro a los revolucionarios cubanos hace más de sesenta y dos años, mantiene total vigencia* [The alert made by Fidel Castro to the Cuban revolutionaries more than sixty-two years ago, remains fully valid]" (Guerra 2022). The quote she was referencing is below:

> *Quizás el más difícil de todos los problemas que tenemos delante, quizás la más difícil de todas las injusticias de las que han existido en nuestro medio ambiente, sea el problema*

> *que implica para nosotros poner fin a esa injusticia que es la discriminación racial*. [Perhaps the most difficult of all the problems that we face, perhaps the most difficult of all the injustices that have existed in our environment, is the problem that it implies for us to put an end to that injustice that is racial discrimination] (Castro 1959).

4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, we touch on the different responses that my interviewees had to the question of what their food habits and traditions were. While there were overlapping answers, many touched on two main themes, which were surrounding consumption patterns and how one's identity affected these habits or traditions. Essential points interviewees touched on ranged from an explanation of the daily diet and what they considered to be essential for satiation and satisfaction to how they used food to perform and enjoy their life through celebration. These recollections, while seemingly separate from the previous chapter, are simply an extension and addition of what has been previously expressed. In explaining, and examining how one navigates accessing food is simply a modified way to express and communicate the food that they deem essential and important. I say this not to diminish the importance of highlighting the different ways people communicated their priorities, but instead further express the fluidity and ability to extrapolate the necessary linkages and connections of each piece of information. The next chapter focuses on the pervasive discussion of socialism in Cuba today. While a seemingly big jump from cuisine to political theory, what you will find is again an addition onto the same stories and yet a further complexifying of the stories above.

CHAPTER 5: REVOLUTION: SOCIALISM AND *EL BLOQUEO*

Throughout this thesis, the Revolution, socialism, and the blockade have been mentioned many times as these events and themes are highly present in Cuban life. We have also discussed the juxtaposition or dual morality Cubans must live daily to survive. Within the confines of both the revolutionary and socialist government, community expectations (upheld by the CDR) as well as the daily *lucha* or struggle to survive, Cubans navigate carefully between the two. For these reasons, the topic of food became quickly politicized and turned into a conversation about the themes of *la Revolución* (the Revolution), *socialismo* (socialism), and *el bloqueo* (the blockade), three loaded words in Cuba. Until this point, I have spoken about the historical events of the Revolution and the introduction of socialism in the sense of what they brought Cuba logistically, being healthcare, education, *la libreta*, and more, but this section addresses what was the Revolution, the process of Cuba "becoming" socialist and socialism means to Cubans today. In this inquiry, I decided to use food to analyze this question with my interviewees. In the sections below, I will first attempt to explain the process of the Revolution and socialism within Cuba and then delve into what my interviewees called attention to concerning food and *socialismo* in the year 2022. Before either of these explanations, I start this chapter with a story.

On a typical Cuban day, the sun blazing in Old Havana, I sat on a bench in the shade to escape the heat, a practice many Cubans are all too familiar with. After a few minutes a man sat on the bench next to me and we started to converse. We spoke about what I was doing in Havana and as I explained my quest for "the truth," the conversation quickly turned into a discussion about the system in which I live under, capitalism, versus his reality of socialism. Like my friend Julio, he told me that capitalism would solve all the problems in Cuba. I prodded him further, encouraging him to explain which issues exactly would be fixed with capitalism and how he imagined his ideal Cuban society. His answers made me laugh: that everyone has equal access to abundant resources.

This conversation,while on the surface may seem ridiculous, was not an uncommon experience I had, and highlights the incredible importance of how certain words are perceived in Cuba. For some Cubans, words like "revolution" or "socialism" have strong ties to the regime and, more specifically, to the faults in their country regardless if they believed once in the ideology. What

this man on the bench was expressing to me was essential: he desired what socialism promoted in ideology, not what he saw with his eyes; not what he experienced in reality. The distance between terminology and content was typical among my interviewees, highlighting the importance of conceptualizing these words that have been so overused, misunderstood, and hold strong meanings, memories, and trauma for many Cubans. For this reason, it was essential to understand my interviewee's definition of the concept of socialism regardless of how I thought socialism to be in the abstract.

The many interactions I had with Cubans deeply changed my understanding of socialism. When I landed in Cuba, I thought I understood how it would look and see how the ideology was practiced, but what ended up happening was quite the opposite. I left the island confident I did not know what socialism was or what it could look like, but instead simply the version of socialism the Cubans I shared space with had experienced. Therefore, as I spoke to more people, many of whom felt the polar opposite to each other about the Revolution, socialism, and the blockade, my own opinions on the situation both dissolved and started to feel irrelevant. My hope for this section is to simply display my interviewees' words, demeanor, and feelings about such topics and therefore leave my judgment out of it.

5.1 The Evolution of Cuban Socialism

This confusion about what type of socialism I would find when entering the island was not uncommon. Socialism in Cuba has had many phases, which manifests in different opinions of socialism among Cubans in Cuba, generally among the generations, which I will discuss in the next chapter. In this section, I will briefly explain the Revolution and the evolution of socialism in Cuba until today.

After the Revolution's triumph, sociologist Rafael Hernandez called this the "experimental model" of socialism (Hernandez 2022), which lasted from 1960-1970. During this period, the subject of the Revolution was the people. Therefore the social ideology, inspired by José Martí, was a Revolution not "for" but "from" the poor, the humble, and the youth. With the goal of political unity, there was a natural linkage between the struggle for social justice and national

liberation. In addition, there was a strong emphasis on aligning revolutionary forces worldwide to create solidarity, as explained before concerning the Angolan Civil War. Lastly, was the focus on creating a "New Man" (Guevara 1965), as the basis of a socialist society that emphasized education from the people (hence the literacy campaign). Within this period, different forces made the project unsuccessful. Some of them are the blockade, economic mismanagement, nationalizing small businesses, and the failed 10 million ton sugarcane harvest (*la zafra*).

From here, we move into the second phase of socialism, "institutional socialism," from 1971-1989. Through factors such as Soviet-style central planning, a state enterprise system, universal social security, and increased standards of living, the government institutionalized (hence the name) the experiments that took place during the 69's, including the education of the country and the energetic and youthful aspirations. Therefore there was the socialist economy which was egalitarian in the distribution of goods and controlled wages. Additionally, the socialist political model was based on popular power through representative bodies, the Communist Party, and the 1976 Constitution.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Cuban society was defined simultaneously by factors of homogeneity and diversity. Citizens remained homogeneous because they had elements such as *la libreta,* the wage structure, free education, healthcare, housing, and state-controlled media. On the other hand, society was diverse when factoring in different economic incentives around labor (skilled workers/professionals), access to a different form of education, and a high number of professional versus manual laborers.

With issues related to the Cuban socialist model and the embargo, there was the perfect storm of crisis in the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Subsequently, many economic reforms that were needed to revive Cuba shifted the socialist economic model. There were new models of cooperatives and, thus, ownership; free farmers' markets with supply and demand regulated prices rather than by the government; the introduction of self-employment or *cuenta propistas*; foreign currency became legal; and there were new tax and foreign investment policies. Through this time, a different process created less homogeneity and more diversity (i.e., inequality). As stated before, the ration book started not to feed one for the month and wages became not the

only income source. Therefore there was an increase in self-employment, the black market, and remittances as well as a growing unemployment rate, an increase in migration, and a deterioration of cities.

Additionally, the production (sugar) economy was replaced by services (tourism). A declining number of students participating in higher education and inegalitarian access to markets led to 20% of the population being below the poverty line. Subsequently, there was a new social structure and a restratification of Cuban society where seventy-five to ninety-five percent of the labor force was paid in pesos: state industrial, agricultural, administrative workers, professionals and technicians, and small private farmers, while there was the creation of an emerging sector which was five to twenty-five percent of the labor force: private business owners and employees, people working in cooperatives, and foreign capital managers and employees. This emerging sector has led to growing inequality, migration, and disenchanted youth, all topics I will discuss in the forthcoming chapters.

During the time I was there, another transition was taking place. This transition started in 2018, as defined by the switching of power from the Castros to Diaz-Canal and, therefore, a fading of historical leadership. The problems that plague this new transition are a diverse and unequal socioeconomic structure, an emerging political economy (with the update of reforms), and a redefinition of the socialist system as a concept. In 2016 the Communist Party congress decided that the updated socialism was: democratic, sustainable, sovereign & independent, and prosperous. The policies associated with this were to decentralize, expand the non-state sector, and create a new rule of law through legislation. This legislation entailed new laws around the private sector, constitution reform, and the new public media system.

Because of these many transitions and therefore shifting of ways socialism is conceived in the same space, some question the existence of socialism in Cuba today. While I admitted before, the socialism I had found was not what I had expected, I argue that socialism is still alive and well in Cuba due to the centralized state which "still owns the means of production, the vast majority of Cuban property, and maintains a nationalized egalitarian redistribution system" (Garth 2020, 12), despite the downfalls of supply to bolster these systems.

The downfalls present in these systems though move burden from the state to the citizen, making meeting daily needs has become more complex. This has created a situation where Cubans find themselves having to, for either their safety or for their commitment to the state (I will not assume one) remain ideologically, or publicly "socialist," while also having to go against these values and the state to survive, like buying food on the black market. Scholar Martin Holbraad reflects on this below:

> Subjective consciousness and objective sociopolitical transformation are meant to be fused, such that creating the New Society implies, as a direct corollary, also creating the New Man. However, [the] state-sponsored program for the transformation of consciousness is often the object of great distaste, and the most obvious point of people's alienation from the project of the revolution. More than in any other area of daily life, perhaps, it is the relentless and seemingly repetitive "oficialismo" of the media, the political rituals, and other spaces that are officially designated as "political" or "ideological" that are most likely to induce a feeling that the revolution is not "our" project but "theirs….The project of revolution involves a process of "formation" that in some ways runs deeper than questions of "values," "morality," or "consciousness" (Holbraad 2018, 481).

The framing of the Revolution like this is not unconsciously though. As shown with the updating of socialism and the constitutions, the Revolution remains to be framed as a process rather than an event. Holbraad describes this as the "project of revolutionary infrastructure" and the consequences of such:

> One of the immediate consequences of conceiving of the project of revolutionary infrastructure in this verbal, current-like way is that it renders the process inherently incomplete (Holbraad 2018, 491).

This framing though can be challenging to some Cubans in daily life. As expressed by my friend Alejandro in 1.2.2.2 Research Drawbacks, many Cubans are tired of this never-ending process. When I asked Julio about the Revolution, he immediately spoke about the transportation issues in Havana. He said, "Maybe for you it's, whoa, but even for us it's WOAH (yells)…it's getting crazy more and more and more to where? To… what is the endpoint?"[122] Therefore, this revolutionary process has become distant from the people, the very people it was supposed to come from in the beginning. My interviewees tended to express a distant ideological

[122] Interview with Julio, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

understanding of the goals of socialism or the government and have become experts at dancing around the "*oficialismo*," through previously stated explanations of illegal food procurement. Below you find the responses when my interviewees were directly asked about socialism and food.

5.2 Socialism and Food

While the topic of food quickly became politicized without my need to pry further, I was still curious about how my interviewees would interpret the concept and terminology of socialism as it relates to food. Conversations around this were not always easy to have. Few of my interviewees would want to speak when I stated: "*habla de la conexión, para ti, del socialismo y comida* [talk to me about the connected for you of socialism and food.]" The response was sometimes a refusal:

> M: *Sí. habla de la conexión, para ti, del socialismo y comida.* [talk to me about the connection, for you, between food and socialism.]
>
> G: *No, no lo es. No, no tengo que ver con eso.* [No, it's not. No, I have nothing to do with that.][123]

If not refusal, always a smile or a laugh, followed by a deep sigh, generally insinuating the topic's exhaustion. Out of the twenty-four interviews, I only spoke explicitly about socialism in sixteen of them. For those whom I felt comfortable asking, this word for them evoked a reaction that I should have expected. They laughed at the ridiculousness that they could be experiencing socialism. All of my interviewees were educated in socialist schools, they have read the theory at the foundation of Cuban socialism and communism, and they knew that that was not what they were living. They asked themselves, how could socialism exist if they had such a difficult time simply surviving? I interpreted their smiles as recognition that what they were about to say needed to be well thought out and careful; it hinted that we both knew what was about to be divulged as there was an unspoken understanding of the situation. The two categories of replies either related to material food diversity or simply the expression of socialism in theory versus in practice. Below you find reflections on this.

[123] Interview with Geraldo Jr., June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

5.2.1 *El Socialismo Acaba con la Comida*

Mirana and Solana reflected on how they saw socialism in relation to food and cuisine specifically.

> M: *Bueno* (pause) *desgraciadamente, con dolor en el alma, te digo que el socialismo acaba con la comida, con la diversificación de la comida…El socialismo acabó con las vacas, el socialismo acabó con la leche, el socialismo acabó con las gallinas. El socialismo acabó. Vaya, no sé si fue el socialismo, si fue el mal trabajo que se hizo, pero se acabó. El resultado es el mismo.* [Well (pause) unfortunately, with pain in my soul, I tell you that socialism ends with the food, with the diversification of the food… Socialism ended cows, socialism ended milk, socialism ended chickens. Socialism ended.][124]
>
> S: *Aquí si en La Habana se come picadillo en Santiago de Cuba, que es la provincia más oriental, comen picadillo también, porque es una regulación igualitaria para todo el mundo. En eso yo no estoy de acuerdo.* [Here if in Havana they eat picadillo in Santiago de Cuba, which is the easternmost province, they eat picadillo too, because it is an equal regulation for everybody. I don't agree with that, because maybe I can eat it and others can't.][125]

While agreeing that there could be many good parts of socialism, both Mirana and Solana highlighted a repetition of concepts spoken about above around variety and adequacy. In relation to food, socialism didn't make sense to her because one of the most beautiful things related to food had to do with the autonomy of choice, the potential to create and discover new things, yet they felt "socialism ended" that.

5.2.2 *Theory v.s Reality: "Utopia"*

While the interviewees above took the chance to speak about the literal association with socialism and material food. Others expressed their concerns based on ideology. Clara encompassed this sentiment very well in her words and when drawing her ideal future. She states:

[124] Interview with Mirana, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[125] Interview with Solana, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

C: *Para mí el socialismo es una utopía. Cuando haya socialismo un lugar donde todo el mundo tenga de todo, que es lo ideal te podré contar, no lo conozco. Aquí se intentó, pero no, no es verdad, no tenemos de todo ninguno parejo nada. Entonces no sé qué cosa es el socialismo, debe ser algo muy hermoso, pero no lo conocemos.* [For me socialism is a utopia. When there is socialism, a place where everyone has everything, which is the ideal, I will be able to tell you, I don't know it. Here it was tried, but no, it is not true, we do not have everything, none of us have anything. So I don't know what socialism is, it must be something very beautiful, but we don't know it.]

Fig. 5.1 Clara's drawing of her ideal future, July 21st, 2022, Playa, Havana, Cuba

In her future, she imagines "many happy people around the trees, with the full moon singing." She told me that she loved the moon and wanted *paz* [peace], but it was not what she was experiencing. Her drawing was a representation of the ideal, the utopia she knew from the theory of socialism that she read in school. Below, Desirada states a similar sentiment of Clara, using the word *utopia*.

D: *Deja ver que no se como responderte esa pregunta.* (long pause) *A nivel de concepto de socialismo, de lo que queremos que sea el socialismo sería perfecto porque el socialismo es eso, piensa en la sociedad, en la mejora social. Piensa, ese es su como su punto número uno para mejorar, la sociedad…Pero a nivel de pensar en sociedad, sí, es genial, es bonito, pero queda en eso, en una Utopía...* [Let me see, I don't know how to answer that question (long pause). At the level of the concept of socialism, of what we want socialism to be, it would be perfect because socialism is that, it thinks about society, about social improvement. It thinks that is its number one point to improve society...But at the level of thinking in society, yes, it's great, it's beautiful, but it remains just that, in a utopia.][126]

At the beginning of her thought, you can tell Desirada is extremely careful. She says, "Let me see, I don't know how to answer that question (long, long pause)." Her reflection is leveled, logical, and thoughtful, stating the facts and reflects exactly what Clara had drawn; the potential beauty of dancing under the moon in peace, and yet "it remains a utopia."

[126] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

Below, Neoma echoes each of the previous womens statements combining her acceptance of the theory while expressing the result in her material reality. Her response, compared to the others, is much more visibly emotional as she gets upset speaking of these circumstances.

> N: *A ver,* (pause) *cómo decir que* (pause) *el socialismo, el socialismo en teoría es precioso porque. Se habla de una equidad entre todas las personas. En la práctica es donde viene la desigualdades…El socialismo tiene muchas ventajas, como es la tranquilidad. En principio, los principios del socialismo, que fueron la educación y la salud. ¿Qué es lo que está pasando? Tienes hospitales, pero no hay medicina, tienes escuela y están desbaratada. Por ejemplo, no hay un lapicero. Yo soy profesora, no hay [pens] con qué escribir, no hay una hoja. No hay un libro. Al profesor no le dan una computadora, una laptop chiquitica. Si no lo tienes. ¿Entiendes?* (you can tell she's clearly upset by this) *Socialismo. No es fácil. No es fácil porque sí… Yo estudié aquí, pero también estoy pagando y lo he pagado durante toda mi vida, porque el salario que yo devengo no es el que yo me merezco. Yo pienso que que hay cosas que no es bueno y eso está mal. En socialismo está mal. Todos nos podemos ser iguales, porque el que se sacrifica no puede ser igual que ese vago que va por ahí como el vago vendiendo cualquier cosa, tiene más dinero que yo* (pause) *entonces eso está mal en la socialismo.* [Let's see (pause) how do you say (pause) socialism, socialism in theory is precious because it talks about an equity among all people. In practice, is where comes the inequalities…Socialism has many advantages, such as tranquility. In principle, the principles of socialism, which were education and health. But what is happening? You have hospitals, but there's no medicine, you have schools and they're messed up. For example, there's no pencil. I'm a teacher, there's no [pen] to write with, there's no sheets of paper. There's no book. The teacher doesn't get a computer, a tiny laptop. You understand? (you can tell she's clearly upset by this) Socialism. It is not easy. It's not easy just because yes… I studied here, but I'm also paying and I've paid it all my life, because the salary that I earn is not what I deserve...I think that there are things that are not good and that is wrong. In socialism it is wrong. We cannot all be equal, because the one who sacrifices himself cannot be equal to that bum who goes around like a bum selling anything, he has more money than me. I don't have a penny and he has more than me (pause) so that's wrong in socialism.][127]

The examples that Neoma gives juxtapose well the key pillars of welfare policy versus material realities. Without the physical items needed to provide education and healthcare, both fall flat and cannot perform their function. Yet Neoma's answers are filled with strong emotion, as she speaks she is tearing up, distraught at what it has come to, the pro of free education no longer feels worth it to her, she has sacrificed more than she has received and feels she is left empty; a common feeling shared among many Neoma is a reflection of her broader community.

[127] Interview with Neoma, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

5.3 Conclusions: The Blockade

One of the most significant associations with socialism to my interviewees was the blockade. As explained in section 3.1.2, the blockade is Cuba's most prominent barrier to accessing goods. Among conversations I heard, some blamed the existence of their conditions purely on the government, while some blamed it on the blockade. Alternatively, a few blamed it on a combination of both: the government allowing the blockade to happen. Regardless of who is to blame for the shortages, the blockade is present in every Cuban's mind and something my interviewees expressed a great desire to end. When I asked Silvero to draw his ideal future food system, he quickly took the paper and drew the image below.

Fig. 5.2 Silvero's drawing of his ideal future, July 21st, 2022, Marianao, Havana, Cuba

He explains:

S: *Bueno, esta es Cuba. Nuestro futuro está unido a Cuba. Esta es la península de la Florida, territorio norteamericano. Este es un supuesto puente que une ambos lugares y está encerrado en un círculo, en un corazón que sería un puente de amor. Es lo que es,es lo que vislumbro yo en el futuro. No lo viviré quizá, pero, no pierdo la esperanza de que ocurra.* [Well, this is Cuba. Our future is tied to Cuba. This is the Florida peninsula, U.S. territory. This is a so-called bridge linking the two places and it's enclosed in a circle, in a heart that would be a bridge of love. That is what it is, that is what I envision in the future. I won't live it maybe, but, I don't lose hope that it will happen.][128]

Other interviewees, such as Duaro and Lily, also hoped that their future would include the ending of the blockade. They believed that if the blockade fell, they would be able to show the world the power and potential of socialism. In many ways, their desires make sense. Cuba has never been able to live out socialism without interference from the U.S. This desire to gain

[128] Interview with Silvero, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

this form of sovereignty and see what the society could become is a complicated reality to live with. These responses though were given both by interviewees who lived through the Revolution, a response I rarely heard from younger generations.

After giving me the same face as Desirada, a smile I would describe as mischievous, Maricela connects her associations with socialism to the blockade. Her reflections propel us into the next chapter based around discrepancies of generations.

> M: *Aquí se le suele echar la culpa al bloqueo. Como estamos bloqueados, no tenemos suficiente comida o no conseguimos el apoyo que necesitamos para obtener la comida. Pero aquí se produce comida…Entonces es difícil porque sabemos que se está produciendo comida aquí, pero simplemente no la vemos ni en las tiendas ni en ningún lugar. Se suele decir que hay socialismo, pero realmente cuando vives aquí no lo encuentras. No es real.* [Here it's usually blamed on the blockade. Because we're blockaded, we don't have enough food or we don't get the support we need to get the food. But food is produced here. So it's difficult because we know that food is being produced here, but we just don't see it in the stores or anywhere. So it's often said that there is socialism, but really when you live here you don't find it. It's not real.][129]

The question around socialism, out of all of them, was the one I could not speak to everyone about, although those that shared their views spoke their truth about how they experienced this concept in their everyday lives. When Maricela states, "here it's usually blamed on the blockade," she echoes the widespread sentiment of feeling lied to with the narratives around the blockade that I continuously heard the younger generation express. This dynamic between the youth and the older generations will be discussed now.

[129] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

CHAPTER 6: GENERATIONS

Bombo y platillo a los quinientos de la Habana/
Mientras en casa en las cazuelas ya no tienen jama
¿Qué celebramos si la gente anda deprisa?
Cambiando al Che Guevara y a Martí por la divisa. Todo ha cambiado ya no es lo mismo Entre tú y yo hay un abismo Publicidad de un paraíso en Varadero Mientras las madres lloran por sus hijos que se fueron… Somos artistas, somos sensibilidad
La historia verdadera, no la mal contada
Somos la dignidad de un pueblo entero pisoteada
A punta de pistola y de palabras que aún son nada…No más mentiras Mi pueblo pide libertad, no más doctrinas Ya no gritemos patria o muerte sino patria y vida Y empezar a construir lo que soñamos Lo que destruyeron con sus manos…**Que no siga corriendo la sangre Por querer pensar diferente ¿Quién le dijo que Cuba es de ustedes? Si mi Cuba es de toda mi gente** ya se venció tu tiempo, se rompió el silencio (Ya se acabó) ya se acabó la risa y el llanto ya está corriendo (Se acabó) y no tenemos miedo, se acabó el engaño (Ya se acabó) son 62 haciendo daño

Pomp and circumstance 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 scrambling** /Trading Che Guevara and Martí for currency/ Everything has changed; nothing is the same/ Between you and me, there is an abyss /You advertise the paradise of Varadero/ While mothers cry for their children who have perished… 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 still worthless/ No more lies! My people demand freedom! No more doctrines! No longer shall we cry, "Fatherland or death" But "Fatherland and life!" And begin to build what we dreamed of What they destroyed with their hands …**No longer shall flow the blood /Of those who dare to think differently/ Who told you Cuba is yours? Indeed, Cuba is for all my people** /(It's all over now!) It has long been time to break the silence/ (It's all over now!) The laughter has stopped, and the tears are flowing/(It's all over now! And we have no fear; the charade has ended/ It's all over!) We are the 62 years of suffering

-Song, *Patria y Vida,* 2021

The song displayed above, "*Patria y Vida,*" is known for "defining the uprising" (Sayre 2021), of the recent July 11th protests taking place around the island and, subsequently, other places in the world where many Cuban emigres now live. The song's title references an official motto of the Revolution: *patria o muerte* [nationhood or die].[130] Signs implicating this phrase or other mottos attributed to the Revolution persist everywhere in Havana.[131] This song is written by Cubans migrants living in the U.S., but is "sung" silently by many Cubans still on the island; in my experience, the voices of the younger generation.

Younger Cubans I interviewed tended to say things with less fear that could be construed as counter-revolutionary. Others, who lived through the Revolution, or were born during the Revolution, tended to have less extreme, or outwardly views of the government. This chapter will focus on the points in which people revealed opinions about differences in generations as

[130] See appendix row #61
[131] See appendix row #59-60

well as give evidence as to why these gaps might be so profound. These findings were generally disclosed during the third theme/question of the oral history: *¿Qué recuerdas del pasado?* [what do you remember from the past?]. Sometimes needing clarification, interviewees would ask, "*¿en qué terminos?* [in what terms?]", in which I replied: "*cualquier cosa...comida, tu vida* [anything… food, your life]", giving them the ability to speak about what came to their mind.

Depending on the participant's ages, answers varied highly. Therefore, this chapter will first explain how people answered this question based on a timeline, starting with memories of before 1959, moving to the post-revolution and pre-Special Period period, and ending on post-Special Period to the present day. I will separate the memories in this way in pursuance of reflecting the way memories are held in the minds of my interviewees. These dates are burned into their brains so intensely that they have now created a collective narrative to speak about their lives in distinct periods; everything referred to as "before this," or "after that." Undoubtedly this way of compartmentalizing your life is not an uncommon practice, but in this case, all Cubans spoke about their life in this way; accentuating how influential these periods were.

These sections prioritize the display of memories of the past; an unfolding of memories that, in themselves, convey also the difference in temporalities that my interviewees held. I find it essential to go through these memories chronologically to understand how they influence the view of the present, which is in stark contrast to the views of the younger generation, analyzed and displayed in the final section. Much of the memories of the past are filled with much hardship, something I only knew from history books. My intention in explaining my interviewee's views on the past is not to re-traumatize or bring up past wounds but to show what their reflections bring them to say about the current situation in Cuba in 2022.

6.1 Memories of the Past

6.1.1 *Un cuarto de Pollo*

In this section lie thoughts from my older interviewees, all born between 1941-1948 (pre-Revolution). They spoke about how they feel the Revolution transformed their lives, by

giving examples of mentality shifts, but also a shift in material circumstances. Below, Silvero touches on one of the pillars of the Revolution: the literacy campaign.

> S: *¿Pero bueno, qué te puedo decir? Yo nací en el año 48, cuando la revolución triunfó yo tenía once años…las noticias me inquietaron mucho, incluso desde niño me inquietaban las noticias. Le tenía terror a las noticias sobre la guerra, terror. Cuando oía las noticias sobre la guerra en los noticieros, me espantaba soñando que podía haber un día una cosa como esa nos podía tocar y al triunfar la revolución, pues ya fui capaz de identificar cosas…* (his three year-old granddaughter comes into the room) *Llegó la bella, la más linda de todas. Hola. Una amiga, una amiga mía. Entonces yo recuerdo de esa época que en Cuba había unos niveles de analfabetismo, niveles de analfabetismo gigantescos. En Cuba la persona que tenía, que había podido ir a la escuela hasta el quatro grado, era era una eminencia, vaya estoy exagerando un poco, pero bueno, había, había casos de de más estudios, pero los estudios en Cuba estaban destinados a, pero la mayoría del pueblo pues había mucho analfabetismo y el gobierno triunfante dijo no, no, no, no, en Cuba tiene que haber una educación y en un año hizo una campaña y logró que la mayoría del pueblo alcanzara el nivel mínimo de aprender a leer.* [But well, what can I tell you? I was born in 48, when the Revolution triumphed I was eleven years old…the news disturbed me a lot, even as a child I was disturbed by the news. I was terrified of the news about the war, terrified. When I heard the news about the war on the news, I was frightened, dreaming that one day something like that could touch us and when the Revolution triumphed, I was able to identify things (his three year-old granddaughter comes into the room) The beautiful one arrived, the prettiest of them all. Hello, a friend, a friend of mine… So I remember from that time that in Cuba there were some levels of illiteracy, gigantic levels of illiteracy. In Cuba the person who had, who had been able to go to school up to the 4th grade, was an eminence, I am exaggerating a little bit, but well, there were, there were cases of more studies, but the studies in Cuba were destined to, but the majority of the people because there was a lot of illiteracy and the triumphant government said no, no, no, no, no, in Cuba there has to be an education and in one year they made a campaign and managed that the majority of the people reached the minimum level of learning to read.][132]

This reflection and memory of Silvero were shared by many. Older people never missed a chance to explain how different the country was only six decades ago. Elders would comment on the differences they lived through "during capitalism" and "after the revolution" and what these times meant for them in how they live out their lives today. Vertia explains below:

> V: *Yo soy muy planificadora con ese tema* (referring to food)*, el hijo mío no, que me dice que yo soy muy planificadora, que yo ahorro mucho, pero a mí me gusta ahorrar porque yo soy parte del capitalismo, el que vivió parte del capitalismo, yo lo viví y sé que hay que ahorrar. Sí, tengo tres pares de zapatos, como está* (points at her shoes) *la situación*

[132] Interview with Silvero, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

yo no voy a comprar quatro. Mi hijo no es así, pero a mí me gusta que sean así la gente porque es la única manera que vamos a mejorar. Pero mientras despilfarramos y derrochamos el país no avanza, no avanza tanto. Mi ropa la cuido, no está muy buena, pero yo la cuido, los zapatos y no están muy bueno, pero yo los cuido porque hay que ahorrar, yo viví parte del capitalismo, como lo viví… el cubano no sabe lo que es trabajo y tienen de todo ahora…el cubano tiene que abrir los ojos porque yo, yo lo que sí me parece que vamos a tener que llegar como llegaron los chinos, en cada espacio de la calle vamos a tener que sembrar, me parece a mi, yo estoy mirando, de visión larga, yo se lo dije a mi hijo y él se ríe y tú estás loca, pero es así. [I am very planful with this issue (referring to food), not my son, who tells me that I am very planful, that I save a lot, but I like to save because I am part of capitalism, the one who lived part of capitalism, I lived it and I know that you have to save. Yes, I have three pairs of shoes as the situation is (points at her shoes), I am not going to buy four. My son is not like that, but I like people to be like that because it is the only way we are going to improve. But while we squander and waste, the country does not advance, it does not advance… I take care of my clothes, they are not very good, but I take care of them, but I take care of them, my shoes and they are not very good, but I take care of them because I have to save, I lived part of capitalism, as I lived it... the Cuban does not know what work is and they have everything now…the Cuban has to open his eyes because I, what I think is that we are going to have to arrive like the Chinese arrived, in every space on the street we are going to have to sow, it seems to me, I am looking, long-sighted, I told my son and he laughs and you are crazy, but that is how it is.][133]

Verita, a black woman, experienced deep inequality during capitalism which she holds with her. She says, "I am very planful with this issue, not my son, who tells me that I am very planful, that I save a lot, but I like to save because I am part of capitalism." Veritas' explanation reflects a form of trauma that remains present in her mind and body. She holds these as reasons to trust in the Revolution and the government to make things right again because at a time in her life, they did and she feels they will do it again.

After explaining more general changes of mindsets there was also an explanation of specific instances that occurred before the revolution to display contrasts with the present. Below, Silvero tells me a story about soda cans and chicken:

S: *Bueno, una madre muy, muy luchadora, tratando de compartimentar bien todo lo que entraba, todos los alimentos que llegaba a la casa para que todos tuviéramos la posibilidad…Entonces ella era muy, muy meticulosa, muy eh si, teníamos un, si podíamos comprar una caja de refrescos, de botellas de refrescos, ella se encargaba de decir, estos tres ,los ponía en el frigerador, estos tres refrescos son los de hoy, el tuyo, el de tu papá y*

[133] Interview with Verita, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> *el mío, nadie puede tomar más de un refresco en el día y así era con todo. Cuando cogía, y cocinaba el pollo, pues decía este es el cuarto del papá, este es el del niño y este es el mío y era muy, muy riguroso en esos temas.* [Well, a very, very struggling mother, trying to compartmentalize, well, everything that came in, all the food that came into the house so that we all had the possibility. So she was very, very meticulous, very uh yes, we had a, if we could buy a case of soda, of bottles of soda, she would take care of saying, these three, she would put them in the fridge, these three sodas are today's, yours, your dad's and mine, nobody can have more than one soda in a day and that's the way it was with everything. When she would take and cook the chicken, she would say this is my father's fourth, this is the boy's fourth and this is mine and she was very, very rigorous in those matters.][134]

It is clear that those who lived through the Revolution, see it very close in their life; they remember the radical shift of seemingly simple things like having access to more than one soda or more than a quarter of chicken. The fact that they remember these conditions so staunchly reflects a form of collective trauma that they experienced together. Sometimes, though, I felt it was used against the younger generation to speak down to them; that they could not know what any struggle was because they "never experienced capitalism." Below these reflections continue.

6.1.2 *Empezó a Nutrir con el Carne Russa*

After discussions of pre-1959, were explanations of the years between 1960 and 1991. I was told this time in Cuba was "not splendorous," but "prosperous" they had what they needed and were able to live easier. Silvero and Dalila explain below:

> S: *Cuba nunca ha tenido, nunca ha sido esplendorosa, siempre hemos estado sufriendo escaseces, limitaciones. ¿Pero estamos hablando de qué? Del 60, 62, 63 que nos familiarizamos con el campo socialista hasta el año 90 que cayó el campo socialista, tuvimos una época de* [Cuba has never had, has never been splendorous, we have always been suffering shortages, limitations, but we are talking about what? From '60, '62, '63 when we became familiar with the socialist camp until the year '90 when the socialist camp fell, we had a period of.]
>
> D: *Bonanza* [prosperity.]
>
> S: *Si de bondanza, no esplendorosa, pero de bonanza, porque el campo socialista pues un poco que.* [Yes of prosperity, not splendorous, but of prosperity, because the socialist camp was a little bit like that.]

[134] Interview with Silvero, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba

D: E*mpezó a nutrir*. [It started to sustain.]

Desirada remembers this abundance or prosperity as well and compares this time to what is happening now by identifying the different types of food she remembers accessing. Her point below adds to her previous frustrations she expressed being a mother of not being able to provide sweets to her children, discussed in the section on *adequacy* in Chapter 3. She states:

> D: *Mi infancia fue en los 80. En los 80 en Cuba a nivel de la alimentación era buena, no vivíamos lo que vivimos ahora. Había una gran variedad. Tenía acceso a, a muchos productos: a pescado, marisco, a carne, diversidad carnes. no había problemas con esto. En mi casa nunca tuvimos problemas con, de mi infancia, nunca tuve problemas con la alimentación, con la leche*. *En mi infancia había todo tipo de variedad de galletas, de bombones, de caramelos, de goma, de todo…Recuerdo como fue mi infancia a nivel de golosinas, a nivel de esta parte.* [My childhood was in the 80s. In the 80s in Cuba the food was good, we didn't live what we live now. There was a great variety. I had access to many products: fish, seafood, meat, meat; diversity. There were no problems with this. In my house we never had problems with, in my childhood, I never had problems with food, with milk…In my childhood there were all kinds of variety of cookies, chocolates, candies, gum, everything… I remember what my childhood was like in terms of candy, in terms of this part.][135]

Her reflection of her childhood is lined with feelings of guilt that her children will never experience what she had as well as the frustrations of the current system she lives in. When she states, "we didn't live what we live now," she uses her memory of the past, to compare it to the present.

Below, Homero also reflects on foods he remembers from childhood and the different ways of procuring these foods. He says that everything was state-owned and there were no free markets, which was important to him now as a business owner.

> H: When I was a kid, I was born in 1968 So I'm forty-four, uh fifty-four years now. So, when I was a kid there was no free *agromercado* like today everything was state owned and you buy you bought your food with the ration card, but you can say there was, in a way, rather enough supply of certain things with because you know we had a huge support from the Soviet Union…everything would have to be bought through the ration card, but so for example we had apples sometimes from Bulgaria you know, the Soviet Union bought apples with your ration card or we ate the like, dates, dates from Iraq. We bought dates from the market with the ration card. I don't know, canned product from

[135] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> Soviet Union or Bulgaria, Romania things like that, it was quite common to see all that when I was a child so that's something that disappeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it was very common for example there was this canned meat from Russia. So it's very common to see "*carne russa, carne russa*," because we ate a lot of that and also canned fish canned tuna, so that's one basic change. So the disappearance of all that food that came from, from the former socialist countries.[136]

Mirana also remembers these times that Homero spoke of although she was older at the time with children and she has a different view of these products. She states:

> M: *…lo que había era mucha comida rusa, soviética. Melata* (type of syrup) *y leche condensada. O sea, la comida era brutal. No era escasa ni nada de eso. Quizás no era el gusto tradicional, incluso se cambió el gusto tradicional de los cubanos para adaptarse un poco a la cocina rusa, porque empezó a escasear un poco la carne. Pero los soviéticos mandaban carne rusa. La leche de vaca pura también empezó a escasear, tan solo era para los niños. Los soviéticos mandaban leche condensada en abundancia y empezamos a cambiar la leche nuestra por la leche y cosas así, así como hay muchos cambios en nuestra forma de alimentarnos.* [...what there was was a lot of Russian, Soviet food. Melata (type of syrup) and condensed milk. I mean, the food was brutal. It wasn't scarce or anything like that. Maybe it was not the traditional taste, even the traditional taste of the Cubans was changed to adapt a little bit to the Russian cuisine, because meat started to be a little bit scarce. But the Soviets sent Russian meat. Pure cow's milk also became scarce, it was only for children. The Soviets sent condensed milk in abundance and we began to change our milk for milk and things like that, as there are many changes in our way of feeding ourselves.][137]

She emphasizes her distaste for this food by saying, "... the food was brutal. It was not scarce or anything like that." This essential reflection highlights the importance of dignity and tradition in food. Mirana, almost 40 years later, remembers this time because even if there were calories around, they were being fed in a way that did not align with their souls, with their values and ways of seeing food. Homero and Miranda's reflections on *carne russa* transported me back to five months prior, 90 miles away, when I had heard the same story from Alejandro in Key West. He told me:

> A: Then we started to get food from Russia which was horrible, Russian meats, they would open the cans with bugs inside, it was horrible, you learn to live with it, my mom

[136] Interview with Homero, June 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[137] Interview with Mirana, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> would open a can of meat from the Soviet Union, she would wash it with water and do her own seasoning and then serve it, they would smell it very well, sometimes they would try it a day before to make sure no one got sick, it became horrible, the situation became horrible, to this day the quality is horrible.[138]

This process of relistening to the same story, months apart, from people so completely far away from one another, was compelling for me. The memories of these foods stuck so strongly in the minds of people and followed them across the sea and through time.

6.1.3 *Zanahoria en Toda su Fase*

Below, my interviewees below reflect the onset of the Special Period moving to today. Each interview ended with the same conclusion: the Special Period was hard, but the situation now is worse.

> D: *entonces... Luego voy recordando un momento de de miseria, de pobreza a nivel de alimentación en el periodo especial en los 90, que los 90s también fue muy duro a nivel de la alimentación. Se conseguía mejor que ahora. Ahora está peor que en los 90. Ahora sí, esto está crítico, pero en los 90 uno iba al campo y podía conseguir comida. Había un poquito más. Pero igual fue difícil y era un momento en que solamente había col, solamente col que en una casa lo único que hubiera era col...Yo recuerdo de mi pasado momentos de buena alimentación, momentos de muy mala alimentación, de que mi madre tenía que inventar que salir igual que estoy haciendo yo. Otro momento que se estabilizo, 2000 por ahí. Y ahora el desastre total. Si.* [so.... Then I remember a time of misery, of poverty in terms of food during the special period in the 90s, the 90s were also very hard in terms of food. It was better than now. Now it is worse than in the 90s. Now, yes, it is critical, but in the 90s you went to the countryside and you could get food. There was a little more. But it was still difficult and it was a time when there was only cabbage, only cabbage that in a house the only thing there was was cabbage… I remember from my past, moments of good food, moments of very bad food, when my mother had to invent a way to go out, just like I am doing now. Another time that stabilized, 2000 around. And now the total disaster. Yeah.][139]

When Desirada states: "the 90s were also very hard in terms of food. It was better than now. Now it is worse than in the 90s," I was shocked. Up until that point I could not imagine that I was present for a time that was worse than the stories I read in books. Stories of people eating grapefruit skins as steak and raising pigs in their bathtubs. While Desirada was the first to say this to me, she was not the last. Desirada continues and says, "I remember from my past,

[138] Interview with Alejandro Pasquale, January 6th, 2022, Key West, FL
[139] Interview with Desirada, June 20th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

moments of good food, moments of very bad food, when my mother had to invent a way to go out, just like I am doing now." In this you can hear a disappointment in her voice of the repetition of struggle and trauma her mother experienced. She recalls this time and sees herself in her mother who was doing things to survive and provide for her children. Desirada explains, her mother "had to invent a way to go out," this theme of the invention is followed up by Mirana below:

> M: *Terminó el campo socialista y entró automáticamente el período especial. Ahí se había que arreglarse. Había que arreglárselas. Nuestros hijos eran adolescentes. Había que alimentarlos bien. Y no había qué…Y nuestras niñas aprendieron a comer zanahoria en toda su fase porque había mucha zanahoria y hacíamos dulce de zanahoria con sabor a vainilla, con sabor a ani, con sabor a coco. La hacíamos como si fuera dulce de coco. Lo hacíamos como si fuera mermelada. Lo que había lo aprovechamos al máximo, lo diversificamos lo más que podíamos. Eso es, por ejemplo, con la zanahoria. Igual pasaba con el boniato, con la harina, con todo. Fue como una revolución en la cocina cubana, porque hubo que aprender a hacer de todo y con pocos recursos, a diversificar la cocina.* [The socialist camp ended and the special period came in automatically. There we had to make do. You had to make do. Our children were teenagers. We had to feed them well. And there was nothing…And our girls learned to eat carrot in its whole phase because there was a lot of carrot and we would make carrot candy with vanilla flavor, with ani flavor, with coconut flavor. We made it as if it was coconut candy. We made it as if it were jam. What we had, we made the most of it, we diversified it as much as we could. That is, for example, with the carrot. The same happened with sweet potatoes, with flour, with everything. It was like a revolution in Cuban cuisine, because we had to learn to do everything with few resources, to diversify the cuisine.][140]

Mirana felt the same pressure described by Desirada about her mother. She says, "Our children were teenagers. We had to feed them well," reflects not only the trauma of trying to provide for your children in a rough time, but also further perpetuates the discussion of gender roles spoken about previously. Each female interviewee mentioned the burden to provide food in this time on their mother or on themselves as a mother. The image that Mirana describes later of carrots in all forms is so vivid and almost disturbing it seems like a parody, and yet that was the reality. After speaking about the situation of the 90s, like Desirada, many of my interviewees reflected on the current situation that has been impacted by the pandemic and Trump policies that worsened their situation, as discussed in Chapter 3. Geraldo Sr. and Duaro reflect on this below:

[140] Interview with Mirana, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

G: *A ver, la situación estaba menos tensa que ahora. Habían otras, otras posibilidades. Y los productos se adquirían mejor, más fácil. Lo contrario a hoy, hoy es todo lo contrario…Casi cambió a partir de los años 90, 91… Bueno, después de la COVID empeoró más. Empeoró más porque los productos se hacen más difícil, más difícil y es más complicado.* [Let's see, the situation was less tense than now. There were other, other possibilities. And the products were better, easier to acquire. The opposite of today, today it's the opposite…It basically changed from the 90's 91… Well, after COVID it got worse… It got worse because the products become more difficult, more difficult and it's more complicated.][141]

D: *Cuba tuvo una amplia red de organoponicos, donde se vendían ahí mismo, la seca, la lechuga, el rábano, la zanahoria, la remolacha, el tomate y todo tipo de plantas aromáticas para condimentar la comida en la casa. Que todo eso se deprimió durante los últimos años y sobre todo con la pandemia, que constituyó un golpe muy fuerte a la economía cubana, junto con las medidas de reforzamiento del bloqueo que aplicó la administración Trump y que ha provocado una seria situación alimentaria.* [Cuba had a wide network of *organoponicos* where they sold dried lettuce, lettuce, radish, carrots, beets, tomatoes and all kinds of aromatic plants to spice up the food at home. That all that was depressed during the last few years and especially with the pandemic, which constituted a very strong blow to the Cuban economy, together with the measures of reinforcement of the blockade that the Trump administration applied and that has provoked a serious food situation.][142]

Each of these recollections are intertwined with a thread of the present connecting us back to descriptions we found in Chapter 3. The result is with the memories in mind, how they impact the way they see not just the present, but also the future. These people who I spoke to, while older, impact the narratives of the country and fill the minds of the generations to come. Below, I reflect on this transition from memories to future, ending on the consequences of the disconnect.

6.2 A Conversation Between Generations

In this journey of "discovering the truth" of Cuba, which I have already made clear was not found, one of the most challenging things to grapple with was listening to the realities of the younger and the older generations. On the one hand, I had people sharing memories of oppression and despair experienced before the Revolution. They explained to me the tangible changes they saw in their lifetime and how the Revolution affected them and their families to prosper and create new lives through education, healthcare, and the prioritization of welfare and the common good. On the other side, there were the genuine struggles others were sharing with

[141] Interview with Geraldo Sr., June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[142] Interview with Duaro, June 29th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

me relating to not just the lack of supplies to live, but the lack of a vision of their future. The immobility of society and shutting down their ideas left them feeling like they could never grow. This resulted in a feeling of stagnation; a sensation of lack of advancement. Generally, the older generation tended to frame these complaints as "ingratitude" or a lack of understanding on the part of the younger generation. As we heard from Verita, she states: "the Cuban does not know what work is, and they have everything now… the Cuban has to open his eyes." She states that her views of what is going to happen to the country seem "crazy" and "laughable" in the eyes of her son. While on the other hand, the younger generation brought up important points about the lack of functioning of the same systems the older people want them to be grateful for, as well as the fact that older people are less concerned with the future of Cuba due to their age; the result was the unfortunate reality of migration.

6.2.1 *Puede ser millonaria*

In this section you will find the views from those born before 1985 explicitly related to how they see a difference in generations. Above, in Veritas's reflection about before the Revolution, she mentioned a difference in generations in terms of how they see wealth and class. This reflection also makes sense with the growing inequality in their life after the Revolution. As detailed in section 3.1, the interviewees who were born before the Revolution, like Mirana and Verita, have experienced all the ups and downs of the pre-Revolution dictatorship, the increasing inequality, and the drastic increase in inequality in the last years since the Special Period. Therefore, the reflection about youth having a different view of wealth and class stratification was very clear. Marquesa and Mirana reflect on this:

> Marquesa: *Eso sí que tenemos nosotros, que nos ayudamos mucho. Y eso no se ve tanto ahora, pero antes éramos más unidos. La mayoría del tiempo estaba más unida, ahora la gente es un poco egoísta.* [That's what we have, we help each other a lot. And you don't see that so much now, but before we were more united. Most of the time it was more united, now people are a little bit selfish.]
>
> Mirana: *No había clases sociales. Y ahora empiezan a surgir las personas que tienen más recursos económicos. No sé. Por ejemplo. Marquesa puede ser millonaria y yo puedo ser de calle, a mi no me importa, ella sigue siendo Marquesa y yo sigo siendo Mirana para ella, pero no todas las personas son así. Ahora hay muchos jóvenes que piensan*

diferente. El pensamiento de los viejos era así más o menos, como nadie tenía nada, todo era de todos. Y ahora sí comienza la división que hay jóvenes que tienen más posibilidades que otros y tienden a comenzar la separación. [There were no social classes. And now the people who have more economic resources are starting to emerge. I don't know. For example, Marquesa can be a millionaire and I can be on the street, it doesn't matter to me, she's still Marquesa and I'm still Mirana to her, but not all people are like that. Now there are many young people who think differently. The thinking of the old people was more or less like that, since nobody had anything, everything belonged to everybody. And now it does start the division that there are young people who have more possibilities than others and they tend to start the separation.][143]

The reflections of Mirana and Marquesa are essential. When they state, "before we were more united…now people are a little bit selfish," they portray the idea of socialism that I came to Cuba thinking I would find and soon realized did not exist anymore. The idea that since nobody has anything, everything was everyone's encompasses so much of the dreams and problems in one statement. The desire of socialism to exist would be this ideology: that everything was everyones, yet the reality became that this was only created *because* there was nothing, not because they wanted it to be this way. Therefore when people started to accumulate more things, "socialism" was abandoned because it was not engrained in ideology, but rather material circumstances. Silvero adds reflections on this:

S: *Es una carrera de resistencia, no es una velocidad, no, es una resistencia. En los años 90 todo eso* (the Soviet Union) *y las generaciones nuevas no tienen el mismo compromiso. Las nuevas generaciones no tienen, mis hijos no tienen el mismo compromiso que tengo yo, que siento yo, porque no vivieron, no vivieron las cosas duras, entonces dicen. ¿Hasta cuándo, no vamos a quitarlo? Sí, sí, sí para qué esto mejore hay que quitar este gobierno, vamos a quitarlo. Se olvidan de, olvidándose de que este gobierno llegó al poder con las mejores intenciones, hizo cosas muy, muy buenas para la población, trató de beneficiar al pueblo en sentido general, pero ahí va llegando el momento y la situación de que ya no puede hacer, ya está amarrado.O Sea que hay personas que tienen la vista, la vista un poco corta y hay otras personas que son capaces de ver más lejos. Esos son los que no salen a la calle a protestar, los que tienen la vista más larga no salen a la calle, los que tienen la vista corta dicen esta bueno ya, no aguanto más.* [It's a drag race, it's not a speed, no, it's a drag…in the 90s all that (the Soviet Union) was torn down and the new generations don't have the same commitment. The new generations do not have, my children do not have the same commitment that I have, that I feel, because they did not live, they did not live the hard things, so they say. Until when, we are not going to remove it? Yes, yes, yes, yes, for this to improve we have to remove this government, we are going to remove it. They forget, they forget that this government came to power with the best intentions, it did very, very good things for the

[143] Interview with Mirana and Marquesa, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> population, it tried to benefit the people in a general sense, but the time is coming and the situation that it can no longer do, it is already tied up. Or I mean there are people who have eyesight, eyesight a little bit short and there are other people who are able to see farther. Those are the ones that don't go out to the street to protest, the ones that have longer sight don't go out to the street, the ones that have short sight say "this is good enough, I can't take it anymore."][144]

When Silvero says, "the new generations don't have the same commitment," reflections he speaks eloquently and non-emotionally to reflect the reality of why the generations feel so vastly different about what is going on; the mindset of impatience, but this left me feeling perplexed. Did this mean youth did not have a right to be frustrated?

Elderly people in Cuba tended to release themselves from responsibility and instead critique and assign roles to their younger counterparts. Telma says, "*Por eso siempre la frase esa de que hay que se quedó de Fidel, que un mundo mejor es posible, por lo tanto hay que pensar en eso y ustedes, les toca eso y a esto mira, a esta generación.* [That is why Fidel always said that a better world is possible, so we have to think about that and you, it is up to you and to this generation.]"[145] This did not feel to be a productive mindset in the eyes of the youth, they felt offended by this role and hopeless in how to accomplish it amongst the chaos.

6.2.2 *We Were a People of Blind*

Below you find reflections of those born after 1986. Two of my close friends in Havana, Maricela and Julio, confided in me about their perception of the differences between the younger and the old generation. Below is a conversation between Maricela and me.

> Maricela: Actually, it's old people, people who were raised like believing in Revolution stuff and they did see the change from when we were like a colony, and when the Revolution came they saw the change, we got, like hospitals and school. They were like "oh the Revolution is so good" and it was at a time, at that time. So that's why even with the current problems they are like, "no, the Revolution will solve it and stuff" but we just were born, yes, with the Revolution and then good things that we can see that there's problems that can be solved. Just people blame it on the *bloqueo* and it's like, what happens with the inner *bloqueo*? like we have problems we can solve here but the older people just don't want to listen to new ideas... But it's hard here, but young people in

[144] Interview with Silvero, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba
[145] Interview with Telma, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> general… we are like creative, and we have this power inside that we can. we. we want to… explode and then do things and be, ummm I don't know I forgot the word.
>
> Mallory: *En español?*[In Spanish?]
>
> Maricela: *Emprender.* [Learn.]
>
> Mallory: Yeah, learn.
>
> Maricela: Yeah, yeah, and we can't. And it's like so frustrating. There's people like me, yeah, we can see that there is a problem, like I'm not the problem, the problem is the system and my idea is good and I don't let them... like I know that I know that it's not my problem. It's not my idea, it's like their minds are like square, but there are young people that think like, "oh, my idea sucks."[146]

What Maricela displays is the powerful difference between experiencing the Revolution and being spoken to about the Revolution. When one sees with their eyes the potential, they keep faith that those things will happen again, whereas the younger people do not have the privilege of tangible experience to back up their faith or have the "long vision" that Silvero speaks of above. Maricela also touches the theme of exhaustion, burnout, and giving up on yourself when the system is constantly pushing back against you. Maricela mentions youth thinking their ideas are wrong and giving up on their dreams because the fact of everyday life is no longer bearable and confirms their dreams. Julio continues this conversation about the older generations. First, he starts by talking about the students he taught while doing a teacher training program at the University. He told me that everything you do in Cuba has to be done in a "socialist way," even teaching, which is why he quit. He also comments on his transition from working for the system to coming "outside" of it. He says:

> J: They (talking about his past students) are smart people, since the beginning of the 2000s the kids here start to see things... and when the Internet arrive in our country the things turn different to us. You know. Now we can see the world, through a screen, but we can see the world. I see your home yesterday. (I looked at him confused) On your phone, your home? (then I remembered yesterday night I had shown him pictures of Italy), and before, we can't do that. Before only we only we only had um government propaganda, you know, it's kind of blind, we were a people of blind, the older people prefer, mostly they prefer to be blind, you know, they are tired. They are "okay. I don't want new things. I don't want nothing. I don't want to change. I only want a peaceful life. I only want to be easy in my life," you know, tired, they are old people. For example, my

[146] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> father is a fucking communist, my father is a fucking communist, he's blind, but my mom, she was blind. but I opened her eyes, I saved her. I said, mom, "what are you fucking doing? look at this shit, the brutality, look at" and I teach her something about policy. She opened her eyes and I think that's beautiful. When you stop to live in a lie and start to see the reality that you were living your whole life.[147]

Julio states, "the older people prefer... mostly they prefer to be blind, you know, they are tired." These reflections specifically related to on access to the internet and information are very timely. Cubans, only very recently, have access to the internet and, even more recently, mobile internet they can have with them at all times. This has drastically increased access to information and in a way literally removed this state of "blindness" Julio refers to. They now are mobile in Cuba and with the outside world; a highly studied phenomenon (Fernandez 2006; Hoffman 2011; Kalathil 2001).

Nevertheless, what Julio says about his parents is an interesting connecting piece between the older and younger generation. This push and pull within generations who, most of the time, for lack of housing and resources, are all under the same roof, all living with different ideas that sometimes cannot always be said (i.e., the conversation I had with Geraldo Jr. in his parent's house). What both Julio and Maricela reflect is the exhaustion youth have in pushing up against the system. Now we touch on the consequences of this exhaustion.

6.2.3 *No te enamores en Cuba*

A common thing our professor warned us about was not to fall in love when we were in Havana. He told us bluntly that, most likely, no one would fall in love with us, but rather with our citizenship. Mirana said the same thing to me when I was leaving her house, she says, "*Te recomiendo no te enamores en Cuba porque se van a enamorar de la extranjera* [I recommend you not to fall in love with Cuba because they will fall in love with the foreigner.]" While I found this laughable at the time, my recent trip home (December 2022) reminded me of the lengths Cubans would go to escape their country. Cubans were landing on the beach every day, sometimes multiple times a day, packed in small makeshift rafts, overjoyed they survived the journey. I have never experienced such high levels of migration in my life. The consequence of this exhaustion with the system or "disenchantment" of the youth has been increased mass

[147] Interview with Julio, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

migration, which I had felt already in Havana. Sitting on the same boardwalk watching the sunset, Anton told me the exact phrase as previously expressed by Alejandro (section 1.2.2.2):

> A: *Hoy día sí he tenido muchos amigos que han [ido]...porque ha habido mucha, mucha, mucha, mucha, mucha personas que han viajado sobre todo mi edad. Y sí, tengo muchas amistades que lamentablemente ya no están aquí.* [Today I did have a lot of friends that have [left]…because there have been many, many, many, many, many, many, many people that have traveled especially my age. And yes, I have many friendships that unfortunately are no longer here.][148]

These consequences though are a result of pure desperation. Maricela says:

> M: *Antes de la pandemia, yo siempre dije que me encanta mi país, es mi casa… Pero, después de la pandemia, la situación se ha vuelto tan fea, tan insoportable. Que realmente si busco salir de Cuba y vivir en otro lugar, sí. Pero si me dieran a escoger, si realmente la situación no fuera tan difícil, me gustaría quedarme aquí. Porque es mi hogar.* [Before the pandemic. I always said that I love my country it's my home… But after the pandemic, the situation has become so ugly, so unbearable. So really, I'm looking to leave Cuba and live somewhere else, yes. But if I were given the choice, if the situation were not so difficult, I would like to stay here. Because it is my home.][149]

One of the people I keep the most contact with is my friend Julio. Julio texted me on October 7th, 2022:

> **10:07** I wanna go to the government office (specially on this things) to solve my problem in a few days
> **10:07** I HAVE to leave that country so fast as I can.
> **10:07** I can't take it any more.
> **10:07** I'm desperate, hopeless.[150]

Recently on January 20th, 2023 he texted me he finally got his passport. He says:

> **21:53** I'm fine, I'm finally in a job that I feel good.
> **21:54** And of course, I still trying to scape from this beautiful country.[151]

[148] Interview with Anton, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[149] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[150] See appendix row #65 for screenshots
[151] See appendix row #66 for screenshots

Julio and Alejandro (section 1.2.2.2) continue to update me on his progress of leaving. Alejandro informed me he received his visa to Spain and would leave in the next few months. Hearing the progress of my friend's departure from Cuba fills me with both excitement and despair; while I am glad they are taking the steps to living the life they imagine, my heart aches for the island losing such bright souls.

6.3 Conclusions: *En Paz Descanse*

This chapter displays different views, stories, perceptions, and memories from different generations; all stories and opinions valid in their ways. The gap between the Cuban youth and elders is straightforward and continues to get worse with the increase in migration, mostly from youth. Older people are not leaving, and this is affecting the population highly. These sentiments are not without weight; the consequences of migration affect everything, especially the food system. The presence of youth is at the core of the discussions on who will grow food on the island and contribute to creating change for years to come. As Verita says, young people are the ones who are going to have to be farming and growing the food, but the sentiments shared by the elders of youth being lazy were far from the truth. Both Julio and Maricela explained the various routes they took to provide an everyday life for themselves; to be able to buy a drink at a bar or go out with their friends. "Struggling along, day in and day out, has become exhausting… The inability to achieve a decent standard of living spins into a cycle of questioning and renegotiating how people perceive their social position in relation to imagined pasts, an idealized present, and an anticipated future" (Garth 2020, 140). When this struggle becomes too much though, the result is an inability to see the "anticipated future" and the action that follows is a surrendering; the unfortunate and heartbreaking decision to leave their families and their home to discover a new life.

I will end this chapter with one of the most powerful moments I experienced in Cuba. As I explained in the biography section, the first interview I conducted in Spanish with Neoma was an incredibly emotional experience. I felt her pain and suffering inside me when she spoke, ending up in both of us crying. When I asked her to draw her future, she sighed, took the pen, drew, and turned the paper to me. A month and a half later, in the same neighborhood, I sat with Dalila and asked her to draw her future. She was stuck and did not know what to draw, but after a while

Dalila took the pen and paper, drew quickly, and then turned it to me, and I completely broke down.

Fig. 6.1 Neoma's drawing of her future, June 8th, 2022, Marianao, Havana, Cuba

Fig. 6.2 Dalila's drawing of her future, July 22nd, 2022, Mariano, Havana, Cuba

Above are the images they drew; the same grave, the same orientation, even the cross in the same place; what they represent, though, is worlds apart.

Neoma stated:

> N: *En el futuro, aquí en el futuro no lo va a ver nunca. A menos que te vayas de Cuba. ¿Y por qué me tengo que ir de aquí? Porque yo tengo que irme. Porque los cubanos no se van. Los cubanos huyen de Cuba. ¿Para qué? Para no morir de tristeza, de sufrimiento.* (long silence staring) *Eso es lo que.* [In the future, here in the future you're never going to see it. Unless you leave Cuba. And why do I have to leave here? I want to live here…Because I have to leave. Because Cubans don't leave. Cubans flee Cuba. What for? So they don't die of sadness, of suffering. (long silence staring) That's what.]

Dalila stated:

> D: *Yo no tengo futuro… Yo quiero que eso tiene que terminar un día, yo tengo 70 años y entonces quizás yo este en la tumba, pero yo quiero que los que estén a mi alrededor, que son mis hijos, mi esposo a lo mejor o a lo mejor se va conmigo, mis nietos, que todos estén felices, estén con las manos para arriba aplaudiendo y eso implicaría que viven en un país donde se puede ser feliz. Eso es lo que yo espero, aun y cuando yo ya no esté, pero tengan el recuerdo mío grato y que tengan un país que propicia la felicidad de los demás.* [I have no future… I want it to end one day, I am 70 years old and then maybe I will be in the grave, but I want those around me, my children, my husband, maybe or maybe he will leave with me, my grandchildren, I want them all to be happy, to be with their hands up clapping and that would mean that they live in a country where they can be happy. That is what I hope, even if I am no longer here, but they will have a pleasant memory of me and that they will have a country that favors the happiness of others.]

Each of these experiences left me shocked; the similarities of the two drawings, so far apart in time, shocked me, and yet both of them made sense. Neoma's drawing was a direct reflection of the youth, they saw no future in this country, they already imagined their figurative death. Dalila on the other hand, remained positive because she knew literal death was soon to come, and hope was easily kept for her family because it was a figurative matter in her mind, not a reality that she will truly experience. This multiplicity of truths that exist within the same spaces result in much tension, resentment, and anger among the generations, but I do not blame either generation for their state of being. Their truth is deeply valid in all of its meaning and we must feel them all at once, while also acknowledging the tangible consequences for not just the food system of Cuba, but the entire system of the country. A country cannot exist without its citizens and yet it feels as though that process is slowly occurring. Therefore, these gaps in generations, the deaths, both literally and figuratively, at one point must end for the country to prosper, and for the future they imagine to be created. Below we get into this further.

CHAPTER 7: FUTURE HOPES, JOYS, AND LOVE

I end this thesis on evolution, future hopes, and imaginaries but most importantly: joy and love. Up until now, it has been abundantly clear the problematic situation that Cubans have faced in these past years and continue to face up until today, at even more extreme rates than when I was there. In this section, though, I want to focus our attention instead on one side of the *doble moral* [dual morality] which I observed as the sunshine, windmills and waterfalls, tricycles and rocking chairs, and sprouts growing into trees (Shakur 2014, 2). People expressed to me their dreams and hopes for the future as we shared moments of joy and love. Possibly, you can imagine by now that when my interviewees were asked the question "*¿que te gusteria ver en el futuro?* [what would you like to see in your future?]" it was not simply a question about the future but again a reflection on the present. Their future is how they dreamt that their present would change in some way, and therefore, many responses I listened to were repetitions of the problems they were going through then, a listing of struggles they would like to dissipate.

Generally, when I asked this question, like above, it would be clarified with, "*en terminas de?* [in terms of?]" to which I would reply, "*en general* [in general]" to ensure people spoke freely. For those who desired to speak about food, they answered with fairly logical desires that echoed

what has been previously spoken about. Alternatively, some spoke about *un cambio* [a change], something they did not know *how* it would happen, but they knew they needed it.

As stated in the introduction, during my fourth interview, I started asking about hope. This was the one question that many of my interviewees answered with the exact phrase: "hope is the last thing you lose." With this hope, they were able to imagine their futures, futures also filled with both love and joy, which continues to be an aspect of the narrative of Cuba. Through this chapter I hope to hold all of Shakur's words from the beginning; that amongst all the war, imprisonment, and disaster, there is duality in the end; different ways to see the same image, laughter amongst the death.

7.1 Hope for a Change

In Pérez's historical recount of Cuba (2008), he writes about the evolution of the 19th-century, but his words remain to be ever so relevant to Cubans in 2022. "It was not a question of if change could come, or even when it would come: change was necessary, immediately and on the matter Cubans were unanimous. Simply put, things had to change" (Pérez 2008, xi). For five of my interviewees, their answer to what they would like to see in the future was immediate, decisive, and said in the same way, reflecting Pérez's thoughts exactly. They stated:

> A: *Un cambio y sé que va a haber un cambio. Cuba está pasando por una muy mala racha, muy mala racha…Pero sí me gustaría ver cambios y sé que los van a ver con tiempo, porque nadie lo hace de la noche a la mañana, pero sí los van a ver*. [Change and I know there's going to be a change. Cuba is going through a very bad patch, very bad patch… But I would like to see changes and I know that you will see them in time, because nobody does it overnight, but you will see them.][152]
>
> G Jr.:*Un cambio. Una mejoría para mis hijos y si, un cambio general para la familia, que no pase lo que pase yo, entiendes?* [A change. An improvement for my children and yes, a general change for the family, that what I go through doesn't happen, you know?][153]
>
> G Sr.: *Que todo esto cambie.* [That all this changes.][154]

[152] Interview with Anton, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[153] Interview with Geraldo Jr., June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[154] Interview with Geraldo Sr., June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

M: *Yo sueño siempre con el futuro. Yo pienso que sí, que esto cambiará en un momento. Yo todos los años digo va a cambiar esto, va a cambiar esto, va a cambiar esto. Pero siempre me pasa lo de siempre, la decepción cuando llega el fin de año que no ha cambiado nada.* [I always dream about the future. I think that yes, this will change in a moment. Every year I say this is going to change, this is going to change, this is going to change, this is going to change. But I always get the same thing, the disappointment when the end of the year comes that nothing has changed.][155]

N: *Que me gustaría ver en el futuro? Un cambio.* (long pause) *Ya lo que te digo es que hay que cambiar eso. Tienes que cambiar. Quieres cambiar porque… ¿Hasta cuando?* [What would I like to see in the future? A change. (long pause) Yeah, what I'm telling you is you have to change that. You have to change. You want to change because… Until when?][156]

This collective desire for change results in an energy that propels you into the future without much effort leading you to wonder how this hope will be maintained. The second half of the question, therefore, was ¿*Cómo mantienes la esperanza*? [How do you maintain hope?], which was reacted to through a laugh, a shake of the head, or by simply breaking down and crying. Regardless of the reaction, though, this question was responded to most similarly, with at least seven interviewees using the exact phrase.

A: *La esperanza es lo último que se pierde siempre…Siempre, siempre, siempre vas a encontrar esperanza…el cambio sí existe y ese cambio es el que hay que mirar y es el cambio que te ayuda y siempre te va a ayudar en el, para el tema de mantener la esperanza por lo menos.* [Hope is always the last thing to go… You will always, always, always find hope…change does exist and that change is the one you have to look at and it is the change that helps you and will always help you, at least to maintain hope.][157]

C: *Bueno, la esperanza, dicen por ahí, que es lo último que se pierde y tengo que mantenerla porque tengo también el apoyo de mi familia… Hay que persistir, hay que resistir. Es decir, resistir en que tengo que ser más perseverante, no resistir sobre lo que no tiene salida, es decir, buscar si no es por aquí, buscar una solución y en algún momento se dará.* [Well, hope, they say out there, is the last thing you lose and I have to keep it because I have the support of my family… You have to persist, you have to resist. That is to say, to resist in that I have to be more persevering, not to resist about what has no way out, that is to say, to look for a solution if it is not here, and at some point it will come.][158]

[155] Interview with Marquesa, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[156] Interview with Neoma, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[157] Interview with Anton, July 11th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[158] Interview with Camilo, July 12th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

S: *Aqui decimos que lo último que se pierde es la esperanza.* [Here we say that the last thing to lose is hope.][159]

M: *De por sí, yo soy una persona bastante positiva. Suelo tener esperanza en general. Pero es difícil…no puedo vivir con esa preocupación, así que prefiero tener esperanza. Y pensar en que esto va a mejorar de alguna forma. No sé cómo, pero espero que lo haga la verdad. Y realmente tengo una pequeña esperanza de salir del país… Eso no es fácil.* I'm a pretty positive person myself. I tend to be hopeful in general. But it's difficult…I can't live with that worry, so I prefer to have hope. And think that this is going to get better somehow. I don't know how, but I really hope it will. And I really have a little hope of getting out of the country... It's not easy.][160]

V: *No, la esperanza nunca se pierde. Yo tengo esperanza. Si, si, si. No, yo eso no lo pierdo…Estamos unidos. Y yo digo que en la unión está la fuerza*. [No, hope is never lost. I have hope. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. No, I don't lose that… we are united. And I say in unity there is strength.][161]

V: *Pero imagínate, no se puede perder la esperanza. La esperanza es lo último que se pierde.* [But imagine, you cannot lose hope. Hope is the last thing to be lost.][162]

T*: La esperanza es lo último que puede perder una persona. Cuando una persona pierde la esperanza no tiene razón para nada. Entonces, nosotros miramos al futuro y pensamos que el futuro puede ser mejor y si puede ser mejor, hay que seguir teniendo esperanza… La esperanza no se puede perder.* [Hope is the last thing a person can lose. When a person loses hope he has no reason for anything. So, we look to the future and we think that the future can be better and if it can be better, we must continue to have hope… hope cannot be lost.][163]

In these recollections, you can tell that this saying: "hope is the last thing you lose," is a collective motto shared amongst Cubans, a phrase that has been repeated to them repeatedly to keep them able to live their daily lives. Perhaps when one reads these words, it may come off as inspiring, a feeling of relief that they hold hope, yet I must express that when these words were spoken to me, they, many times, felt empty. The repetition and the use of the exact words over and over felt like a manifestation of propaganda instead of the energy of hope. For the sake of my interviewees, I want this not to be correct, but the energy and how these words were spoken to me told me differently. Amongst this hope that was spoken about, though, visual demonstrations of what visions kept this hope alive or what hope looks like when it is lost.

[159] Interview with Silvero, July 21st 2022, Havana, Cuba
[160] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[161] Interview with Vinita, June 22nd, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[162] Interview with Verita, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[163] Interview with Telma, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

7.2 Smize en la Playa

Some of my interviewees when expressing their visions for the future expressed emotional or joyful experiences that they kept in their minds as tangible memories they desired to be created. When Maricela was asked to draw her future she drew the smiling face below and said:

Fig. 7.1 Maricela's drawing of her future, July 1st, 2022, Vedado, Havana, Cuba

"This, (draws) why is that? It's like you can smile and that would be real, but when you're really really happy, we all like smize, you do like this (makes the face of the drawing), that is the way you know that you are really really happy...I'm not unhappy...But if this would get better, I would be much happier. I would be much less worried."[164]

When I asked Geraldo Sr. to draw his future, he was the first person who did not question me or seem confused. He quickly took the pen and drew his ideal scene. Out of everyone, Geraldo Sr.'s drawing embodies who he was, a calm, generous person wanting to see joy in the lives of the people he loved. He told me simply that he dreams in his future to: "*Salir de viaje, ir por la calle, ir para la playa, y estar con toda la familia.* [Going on trips, going on the street, going to the beach, and being with the whole family.]"

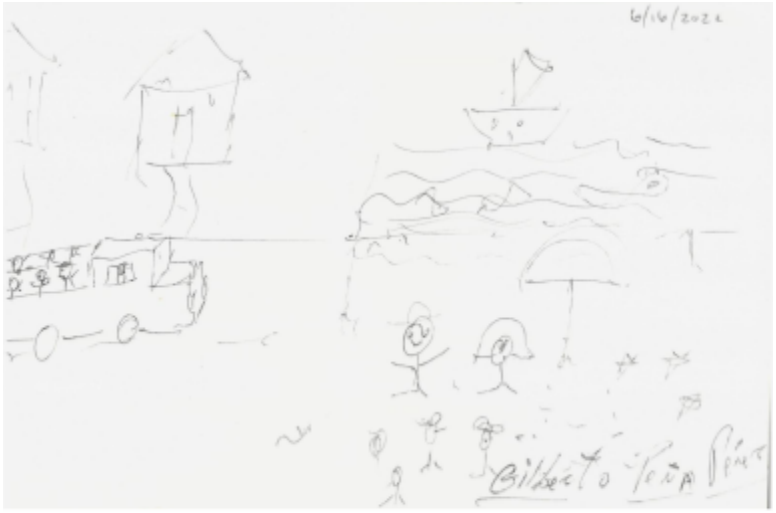

Fig. 7.2 Geraldo Sr.'s drawing of his future, June 16th, 2022, La Vibora-Vieja Linda, Havana, Cuba

Both of these images displayed seemingly simple things; to be able to smile deeply and to go to the beach with their families, yet the mere fact that they took the time to

[164] Interview with Maricela, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

express this as their hope for the future symbolized something so much bigger. I found these drawings to represent the meaning of life, to spend time with people you love, and to be in a state of pure joy. While projected into the future, also an expression of the present since one would not imagine their hopes to be something they already had, both images powerful nonetheless.

7.3 Conclusions

These descriptions and physical manifestations of joy amongst the suffering were not something foreign to me. It was something that I observed and even experienced daily in Cuba, small moments of joy in the sea of chaos. I watched people line up to get their daily ice cream cone[165] directly next to those wondering if they would find anything to eat in the line for the *bodega*. I reflected on observations of stress; fear; frustrations and then peace, joy and love only a few moments later.

> M: There is this insane overwhelming feeling of suffering that you can, it's just tangible in everybody, (pause) no matter who they are (pause) and yeah…and then after that (speaking about Neoma's interview) I walked (laugh) I walked back to AKOKAN and I tutored little baby children and I was just, I don't know, it's just like, it's crazy the resilience in this country like I'm walking through these neighborhoods (starts crying) that are just like, really, really decrepit and really like, as I'm walking, and I'm experiencing what people are telling me which is that people are outside of these *libreta* stores, there's like, hundreds of people outside of these stores just trying to get anything to eat. And there's nothing in these *libreta* stores, there's nothing from the government that's promised, that's what socialism is, it's promised from the government. And like, I'm just watching these people struggle. And then like, I turn the street, and I am listening to this incredible trumpet player…And then I keep walking. And then I get to this house of men. I think they were some part of some Afro-Cuban religion, and they're just like chanting. And there's kids playing and these kids that we were tutoring today just have so much life in them (crying again) and so much joy, and there's boys playing baseball, and there's, they're playing soccer and they're running track. They love, you know, they love each other and when they see each other, they hug each other and they share their fruit with each other. And I don't know, I just, I don't know I just feel awful. I just feel awful about it.[166]

My reflection after meeting Dalila and Silvero expresses a similar experience:

> M: I started walking and I was just like fuck, I can't walk through this neighborhood, I'm not like, I'm just not ready for this anymore, all the cat-calling, all the yelling, all the

[165] See appendix row #38
[166]Mallory Cerkleski reflection, June 15th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

> staring, but eventually, as I was walking it was just like, such a classic Cuban scene, like such a classic Cuban vibe, the kids playing marbles in the streets, and everyone sitting outside and chatting and the music playing and everyone outside the *agro*, and they were having community meetings and talks, and it was just like a really beautiful reminder of the energy of this country.[167]

I experienced moments with my friends like Julio below, sitting under the trees, sharing our lives juxtaposed literally and figuratively to those next to us.

> J: We are now under a tree, you know everything is fine, the life is good. We love each other, Oh, I love you Mal, you love me?
> M: Yeah, of course I love you.
> J: but they are all in the sun.... waiting hours and hours for a for a little piece of transport to their homes to their works.[168]

These daily juxtapositions, or dualities, reminded me of the scene in Assata Shakur's autobiography where she describes discovering she will have a child that was conceived in prison. She sits in her prison cell, imagining her baby's future, feeling both the love and the worry for the future being. She states: "It has always intrigued me how the world can be so beautiful and so ugly at the same time" (Shakur 2014, 124). I was transported back to this scene over and over in Cuba, wondering the exact thing, feeling Shakur's words inside of myself and my interviewees. I would read the affirmation at the beginning of the book over and over again, in awe of the complexities of life. The Cuban people surrounding me have faced "a wall," and every day, they wake up hoping "it can be broken down" (Shakur 2014).

[167]Mallory Cerkleski reflection, June 22nd, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[168] Interview with Julio, July 1st, 2022, Havana, Cuba

8 CONCLUSION

I went into the creation of this piece imagining that I would be able to escape the evils of capitalism that plague the society I grew up in; that the theory I had read would be tangible; that the people who have prioritized justice and the values I believed in, who had sacrificed their comfort for the good of all people, would be experiencing their paradise. I guess I should have known that there was no simple end to this quest though, if the answers had existed would there have already been *the final* revolution?

Above, in the last seven chapters you have read a story, while none of it fiction per say, all curated by me, a recollection of my perception, of my relationship with Cuba and a few Cuban people. These stories you have read have portrayed what the state of the Cuban food system was like during the summer of 2022, through the eyes of twenty-four Cubans living in Havana. While our paths crossed for a brief period, the information that was divulged was valuable. We have understood the ways Cubans are navigating the food system today, how they value this state of being, and what they dream for the future. In all of this, though, you have simply read memories, metaphors, stories from individuals and recollections of the collective. These memories, shaped in time based on the present moment. This piece is, therefore, both a historical recount of the past and a solidification of the present; something I found rather contradictory. I acknowledge here that as Cuba is in a constant state of change and memory fluctuates with circumstances, the piece you're reading now will never be complete; the words you read somehow should not even exist. The point of it all though, was to simply dedicate my time to those who shared their time with me; to give back the hours, to try and teach you with their words. While they gave me permission to share their words with you; I feel an obligation to say it is somewhat unjust, both wrong and right at the same time, and therefore this very piece's existence remains in the same theme of dual morality; the theme of it all.

Food remains an essential part of the existence of the ever changing revolution in Cuba and around the world. As Duaro told me: "*Comida garantiza la propia supervivencia de la Revolución como tal… Hoy la gente trabaja y vive casi para sostener su alimentación. Es muy complejo.* [Food guarantees the very survival of the Revolution as such… Today people work

and live almost to sustain their food. It is very complex.]"[169] In this piece though, more than highlighting the reality and power that food holds in the success or demise of the socialist government and Cuban society in general, I uplift the power that food holds in building relationships; the use of food simply as a tool to reach higher levels of communication and access to information. To open the worlds of two people and create a shared experience placed both in that moment of time and in our memories forever.

My hope in the end though is to keep collecting stories, to spend my life dedicated to, instead of "finding the truth," for myself, aiding those in speaking theirs. In the spirit of this never ending piece, I admit it would not feel right to end this with my words, but rather project you into the future through the words of my new friends. At the end of this all, my hope does not really matter, but instead the collective hope of this project; the collective hope for the world to overcome the struggles Cubans took on 60 years ago. In many of the recounts of their imagined future, Cubans spoke about the world, they saw themselves outside of their country, as their ideals and dreams extended beyond themselves, to include the kinship of the human race. I embody the words of Telma, as I employ you too, extend your mind past your borders, beyond confrontation, be critical of the world, see the complexity of the words and the power of duality.

> *Yo quisiera que en el futuro hubiese paz en el mundo, hubiese los pueblos se llevaran, hubiese amistad, solidaridad, que no existieran esas guerras, esos conflictos, esas agresiones, esas cosas que todos fueron más o menos. Que hubiese una estabilidad en el mundo.* [I would like that in the future there would be peace in the world, that people would get along, that there would be friendship, solidarity, that there would not be those wars, those conflicts, those aggressions, those things that everyone was more or less. That there would be stability in the world.][170]

[169] Interview with Duaro, June 29th, 2022, Havana, Cuba
[170] Interview with Telma, June 16th, 2022, Havana, Cuba

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