Beans and Roses

Everyday Economies and Morality in Contemporary Havana, Cuba

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Para Gabriel

Contents

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1
Introduction

The woman at the only cash register in the small hard-currency[1] food store suddenly hits the wrong button and has to go and get someone with the knowledge and authorization to fix the problem. The queue stops moving completely and a store employee takes position at the door to prevent further shoppers from crowding the small room.

The mood instantly turns to unhappy and resigned. There are deep sighs as people put their groceries on close-by shelves (shopping carts are seldom used as people shop for small quantities of goods and often just hold them in their hands) and stand in more relaxed poses, preparing to wait. Someone goes to get something they just remembered they need. Someone else returns something they really cannot afford. People start looking at each other's groceries, ask about prices and maybe decide to swap chicken thighs for ground meat…

As usual I just try to disconnect and not participate. I'm so fed up with these things that happen all the time here that my only strategy for maintaining my mental health is to engage in some sort of meditation. I turn off and try to distance myself from this place. Everything people do to interact with me is irritating. Not the best thing to do as an anthropologist in the field, I know.

The woman behind me starts talking, seemingly to nobody in particular:

"The kitchen really makes you go crazy! Yesterday I made chicken stew and got some of that good sauce left over. Now I'll buy some hot dogs to go with the sauce. Yes! Because the kitchen really makes you go crazy! You can't throw anything away. My husband sometimes sees a jar and says: 'What's this?' And I tell him: 'Leave that right there because I might use it tomorrow!' …And the person who has no convertible cents has a really, really hard time. Very hard."

[1] During fieldwork in 2006 there were two currencies in Cuba: the Cuban Peso (MN) and the Convertible Peso (CUC) with an exchange rate of 1CUC = 24 MN. CUC had hard currency value. For more about this see chapters two and four.

The young woman standing behind her in the queue giggles nervously: "My granny has to drink milk because of something with her stomach…I don't really know what it is…And in the bodega[2] they don't give us any milk so we have to buy it in the [hard currency] store. She cannot be without her milk".

Another woman in the queue wonders aloud why they don't plead medical reasons to get a special diet of rationed subsidized milk[3] but never gets an answer. The woman initiating the conversation in the first place just keeps up her monologue: "I still have the cents because my husband keeps working but when he retires I don't know what we'll do. The thing is everything is so expensive. Nobody seems to notice but salaries are so low and prices so high."

Another woman decides to join in: "And the few cents that they raise the salaries with, they just take right back with the raised prices for food."

Nobody seems to listen to her and the initial monologue keeps going: "Prices for the Panda[4] TV-sets are a lack of respect! 4000 pesos? Luckily my husband got one from his workplace because otherwise…"

The problem with the cash register is fixed and the queue starts moving again. The momentary community created by the forced waiting is over and we all pay for our goods and go home.

***

I laugh when I read this entry in my field diary now, almost five years after the events occurred. I laugh remembering my irritation and home sickness towards the end of my fieldwork, but principally I laugh because it illustrates so clearly that the issues I focus on in this dissertation, everyday economies and moral negotiations, were ever present during my time in the field. I might, at times, have tried to distance myself mentally, but these issues were everywhere and, at least for me, impossible to ignore. The mixture of irritation and curiosity that I felt also reminds me of how my interest in economic anthropology started.

[2] *Bodega* = state store for rationed goods. More about this in chapter two and four.

[3] As will be dealt with in chapter two one can get special rations for medical reasons. See appendix 1 for a list of subsidized medical diets.

[4] A Chinese brand of television which were assembled in Cuban factories. These televisions were part of the Electric Revolution where electric appliances were sold at subsidized prices in 2006 (see appendix 1).

As a university student in Havana in 2000, the thing that bothered me most was navigating the murky waters that flooded all situations where economy and interpersonal relations intersected. The insecurities and moral dilemmas in the informal market, the complex web of rights and obligations in households and families, the balance of friendship in the face of inequality, the subtleties of different forms of transactions - trading, giving, sharing, bartering - and their different meanings: charity, community, condescension, respect, gratitude, superiority, love, exploitation. I could go on. While my initial concern was my position as a wealthy foreigner in relation to Cubans (I remember having nightmares where my face was replaced with a dollar-sign) I quickly became less self-centered and started focusing on what I called, in my under-graduate thesis (Padrón Hernández, 2003) "the household economy". Much has happened since then, but the seeds for the present research were planted then and there.

This dissertation primarily builds on anthropological fieldwork carried out in Havana over a period of eight months in 2006 – the same year Fidel Castro was announced too ill to continue as the Maximum Leader of the country. In retrospect then, it emerges as an image of the last months of an important phase of the Cuban revolutionary process: the time between the reforms implemented to deal with the economic crisis of the 1990s[5] and the ones being implemented at the time of writing by the new leader, Raúl Castro, in order to "rationalize" the state economy.

In this context of change, the overarching theme of this dissertation deals with how morality is articulated in economic life. The importance of this theme in conversations and interactions dealing with everyday economies in Havana is striking. How should one act in the informal economy? What happens when priorities have to be decided in the face of scarcity? What are the obligations of the state to its citizens? Or, for that matter, of a son towards his mother? Why is it shameful to express hunger? Is the T-shirt offered as a friendly gift, a condescending act of charity or a blatant admission of "ulterior motives"? What can be expected in life? What is just and fair and what is not?

The answers to these questions shed new light on much bigger issues: the negotiation of meaning and morality in the face of rapid change, and ultimately the question that has occupied theoretical writings in economic

[5] With the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba was hit by a deep economic crisis called the Special Period.

anthropology for such a long time, the nature of human beings: are we primarily rational or moral, social or cultural?

The title I have chosen, "Beans and Roses", is a play on words of the famous poem by James Oppenheimer, "Bread and Roses", which deals with women's struggle in labor unions in early twentieth century USA. Bread is a powerful symbol for food in Europe and the US, and the Cuban equivalent is beans (and rice). Oppenheimer's phrase relates to my main theoretical point: economic aspects of life (beans) cannot be considered separately from other aspects (roses). But it also has to do with a personal political standpoint which, as will be developed in chapter three, my interlocutors helped me reach; when evaluating living standard or talking about poverty we should not limit ourselves to "basic needs" but must always take into consideration what is considered to be good in life. We should all be able to have both beans *and* roses.

Morality and economy

At least in its substantivist vein, economic anthropology evolved, in large part, as a critique of conventional economics. More specifically, the assumptions made in conventional economics that regard people as maximizing individuals have long been challenged by economic anthropology, which instead puts forward a view of individuals as primarily social, cultural and moral beings. Since Polanyi, economic anthropologists have shown, time and again, the "embeddedness" of economy and the impossibility of separating economy from culture and society.

As argued by anthropologists Richard Wilk and Lisa Cliggett, the study of "other" economies have, at least since Marcel Mauss, been used to formulate a critique of modern capitalism:

> Anthropologists' fascination with gifts and gift exchange is an attempt to argue with utilitarianism and to say that in other societies, goods are socially (Sahlins) or morally (Mauss) positive, but in capitalist societies commodities dehumanize people and reduce all social relations to markets and money. Gifts and gift economies are attractive because many people hope systems exist that are not purely self-interested and capital-based. (Wilk & Cliggett, 2007, pp. 171-172)

This point is, as we will see, especially important to have in mind in a study of socialist Cuba. The contrast of morality and economy put forth in the

above quote is, in fact, a central folk model in Western culture. Calculation, profit-seeking, selfishness, trade, commodities, modernity and capitalism are contrasted with feelings, solidarity, altruism, sharing, gifts, tradition and pre/non-capitalism. An abbreviation of this would be the contrast of money and love or, to use less value-laden terms, interest and affect. These contrasting pairs are not only seen as incompatible but also mutually corrupting. Personal feelings are, for example, as corrupting for business (nepotism!) as commoditization is for intimacy (prostitution!). Sociologist Viviana Zelizer (2005, p. 22) has called this the account of "separate spheres and hostile worlds".

The notion of "separate spheres and hostile worlds" is not only fundamental for Western culture at large but has also shaped scholarly work and theory-making in studies of economy and society[6]. As expressed by Wilk and Ciggett (2007, p. 190) it is extremely difficult to think outside powerful folk models like these. The normative, moral and political dimensions mentioned in the quote above further complicate the issue. Browne (2009, p. 9) writes:

> As anthropologists with at least a generation of practice at exploding false dichotomies, we are surprisingly complicit with our binary regard of morality in the economy. Perhaps this implicit polarization occurs because our personal moral commitments are at stake, commitments that may run deeper than our professional identities.

While it might seem sad to undermine economic anthropology's critical potential by "exploding" (as Browne puts it) the dichotomy of money/love, interest/affect, profit/solidarity, it is absolutely necessary to do so in order to examine how interest and affect are negotiated in the everyday. Because, as is often the case in polarized debates, critical ambition has sometimes led economic anthropology to be as unfair to the complexities of the world as the conventional economic theory it sought to correct. *Emphasizing morality to the point of forgetting calculation is just as bad as doing the opposite.*

I am far from the first person to point this out. Several authors have used ethnography to demonstrate the culture-specific nature of the dichotomies and ideals in question. In a classic article, Parry (1989) subverts traditional dichotomies by talking about evil, dangerous ritual gifts, and good, safe commodities in India. Miller (2001a) does something similar in a European setting when he talks about calculative gift-giving and affective provisioning

[6] For a detailed critique of how this notion has shaped economic anthropology see Bloch & Parry (1989), Browne (2009), Gudeman (2001), Humphrey & Hugh-Jones (1992), Medick & Warren Sabean (1984).

in London. Miller shows that when buying gifts explicit calculations were made as concrete relationships were translated into gifts with an appropriate price-tag. When buying groceries, women, on the other hand, often expressed their intimate knowledge of and care for different family members by adapting their purchases to diets, tastes, needs and wants.

My ethnographic material is tricky in at least two aspects. Firstly, the emic notions of my interlocutors in this case coincide with the dichotomies and ideals I want to question. Ideals of love free from economic interests, and views of calculation as cynical, of money as cold and impersonal, and of solidarity as better than self-interest, were very much present among the people I spoke to. However, I strongly argue that much is won in the analysis if we look at exactly how and why interest and affect are negotiated rather than departing from an assumption of the "separateness and hostility" of the two. I therefore aim to focus on these everyday negotiations.

"When people participate in different economic systems at the same time", Browne writes, (2009, p. 14) "when profound economic change is occurring, there are unusual opportunities to glimpse how those moral convictions that are anchored to economic habits get drawn into question." I suggest that this would make Cuba, with its segmented market, dual economy and recent reforms, an ideal site to explore negotiations of economy and morality.

Secondly, the critical potential and the lure of personal political and moral commitments might be especially strong when studying socialist Cuba – an example *par excellence* of a political and economic "other" in a world of hegemonic capitalism. The possibilities for broad strokes and quick explanatory models are infinite and the need to "explode" yet another series of dichotomies arise. Below I will expand on anthropologist Alexei Yurchak's critique of "binary socialism" which has informed my analysis.

Binary Socialism

Alexei Yurchak (2005) argues that much scholarly work on socialist countries has been based on problematic assumptions. In his studies of the everyday life of young adults during the 1970s and 1980s in the Soviet Union, his explicit aim was to question these. The assumptions he chose to begin with are the following: "socialism was 'bad' and 'immoral' or had been experienced as such by Soviet people before the changes of perestroika, and, further, the collapse of Soviet socialism was predicated on this badness and

immorality" (Yurchak, 2005, p. 5). Without ever denying the presence of oppression, censure, lying, theft and informing on others, Yurchak questions the focus and insistence on these issues in the study of socialist countries:

> What tends to get lost in the binary accounts is the crucial and seemingly paradoxical fact that, for great numbers of Soviet citizens, many of the fundamental values, ideals, and realities of socialist life (such as equality, community, selflessness, altruism, friendship, ethical relations, safety, education, work, creativity, and concern for the future) were of genuine importance, despite the fact that many of their everyday practices routinely transgressed, reinterpreted, or refused certain norms and rules represented in the official ideology of the socialist state. (Yurchak, 2005, p. 8)

One of the dichotomies most effectively dismantled in Yurchak's study is support/resistance. Instead of routinely reading young people's love of Western music, clothes etc. as resistance, he looks at the complexities and contradictions in everyday life and state-citizen relations in Soviet during the 1980s. The picture that emerges is one where the Soviet state does not have the monopoly to define socialism and where "resistance" becomes too narrow and limiting when analyzing the relationship between the people and the state. An interest in foreign culture could be seen as bourgeois decadence and resistance or, quite the contrary, as the fulfillment of the communist ideal of internationalism. Obscure art groups, study-groups where young people discussed poetry and went camping, the knowledge of English and the popularity of rock were all enabled by the Soviet state. Young university students active in communist organizations discussed rock and politics and found Uriah Heap to be more representative of what socialism meant to them than was state-sponsored Soviet pop.

Just as I believe the deconstruction of the dichotomy economy/morality to be necessary in order to understand *how* morality is articulated in economic life, I also consider the deconstruction of the dichotomy socialism/capitalism fundamental to understanding everyday life both in Cuba and beyond. In everyday life, the relationship between solidarity and socialism is as complex as that between private profit and capitalism. Binary models like these might have a place in scholarly work as good tools to think with, but they also obstruct our understanding. It is my conviction that anthropology is particularly well suited to shrug off the use of models as methodological tools and look precisely at the complexities of everyday realities lived in specific places at specific times.

Carollee Bengelsdorf (2009) talks about a shift in the study of Cuba within the social sciences, which has gone from using "broad strokes" and talking about formal institutions (The Economy, The State and Fidel) to studies – like the present one – based on fieldwork and focusing on how people in Cuba actually live. The use of ethnographic methods and a focus on everyday life opens up for more complex studies going beyond binary accounts to attend to the "messiness" of human life everywhere. This certainly fills a void also mentioned by D. J. Fernández:

> Informal social practices, the interactions among individuals in everyday life, and their political import have been neglected or rendered invisible. The resulting portrait of what constitutes the social and, by implication, the political has been rigid, inhuman, and much more "rational institutional" than what is true in the day-to-day experience of Cubans. (Fernández, 2000, pp. vii-viii)

The interest in everyday life and the use of ethnographic methods might facilitate non-binary accounts but does not automatically lead to such a position. Below I will discuss a couple of examples of studies focusing on everyday economies in Cuba, some of which reproduce, and others which challenge, notions of binary socialism.

Research in Cuba using ethnographic methods and focusing on everyday economies began with the life-histories recorded by anthropologist Oscar Lewis and his team in Havana in the early 1960s (Butterworth, 1980; Lewis, Lewis, & Rigdon, 1977a, 1977b, 1978). They deal with, among many other things, the changes in the lives and economies of poor women and men, brought about by the socialist revolution of 1959. Probably inspired by Lewis's stay in the country, at least two life-histories of poor women in Havana were written by the Cuban ethnographers Jorge Calderón Gonzalez (Calderón González & Loy Hierro, 1970) and Aida García Alonso (García Alonso, 1968). Given the method of life-histories presented in first-person narratives, these are fascinating reads and serve as a good historical background to my research. The lack of analysis and any connection to theory-making, however, limits their reach since they give no clues as to how we can understand economic life in Cuba. The fact that Oscar Lewis himself died before the volumes were completed further limits our access to the conclusions he might have drawn from his study

Besides these initial studies, anthropologist Mona Rosendahl's monograph about everyday life in a small town she calls Limones during the 1980s (Rosendahl, 1997) was, for a long time, the only one using ethnographic

methods and dealing with economic life. Of particular importance to the present study is Rosendahl's chapter on reciprocity and household economy (Rosendahl, 1997, pp. 28-50). Descriptions of the rationed market and household budgets, as well as the practices of consumption, serve as historical testaments to how things worked before the economic crisis of the 1990s. The author's analysis of reciprocity deals with aspects of everyday economies which I have analyzed in terms of morality and economy: gift-giving, hospitality, mutual help, etc. Rosendahl looks at social and economic *aspects* of different relationships and the significance of being able to master ongoing reciprocity in order to be seen as a good (cultured) person and maintain social relationships. Ideology is another area of inquiry which is examined both at the level of the discourse of state representatives *and* the many ways in which it is experienced in everyday life. What the author calls the "emic view of socialism" is teased out by analyzing how socialism coexists with other, in part contradictory, conceptions. Socialism is then, not treated as a given ideology formulated by authorities (or even assumed by the author) but as an ongoing conversation between people in a specific time and place, a conversation that sometimes contradicts itself.

A similar analysis was done by political scientist Katherine Gordy (2006) who has written about consumption in the hard currency economy and popular ideological responses to the economic changes made after the economic crisis of the 1990s. Like Rosendahl, Gordy focuses on ideology in the broad sense of the word. She reveals the complex and contradictory nature of values, expectations and ideological standpoints which defies many simplifications of socialism versus capitalism. Socialism, she argues, is not only defined in official rhetoric but in popular discourse as well, and the outcome of recent reforms cannot be put down to something as simple as socialism slowly but inevitably transitioning towards capitalism. Consumerism has no intrinsic ideological meaning, just as socialism cannot be defined conclusively. In that sense both Rosendahl's and Gordy's studies share many features with Yurchak (2005) and offer an alternative to binary accounts of life, and ideology, in socialist countries.

The contradictions and tensions analyzed by Gordy are often treated as new, post-1990s, phenomena resulting in a crisis of values leading people to practice a double moral standard. One scholar talking about a crisis of values, where emerging inequalities and a new neoliberal ethos conflict with "old" socialist values of solidarity and equality, is anthropologist Amy L. Porter

(2008). She begins by defining citizenship as based on the right to own[7] and explores the linkages between citizenship and consumption in contemporary Havana. She argues that most Cubans experience inequalities in their access to consumption. These inequalities are twofold; first those between foreigners and nationals where some spaces for consumption are reserved for the former; and second those between Cubans with different access to hard currency. This reality of unequal access to consumption has to do with emerging differences in society that clash with official egalitarian rhetoric. The inability to consume, concludes Porter, leads to feelings of second-hand citizenship and a crisis of values.

Kathy Powell also sees a crisis of values in contemporary Cuba. In her article on solidarity and the informal economy (Powell, 2008) the author looks at how the entrepreneurial spirit needed to succeed in this economy both rests upon and threatens solidarity. Her analysis successfully illuminates the mixed feelings surrounding the abilities necessary to succeed in the informal market and also serves to highlight the ideal of materially disinterested love where calculation and self-interest are seen as contrary to intimacy and solidarity. While I have analyzed this as everyday negotiations and "relational work", Powell, like Porter above, analyzes this in relation to ideology and neoliberalism, talking about a crisis of values and complex resistances both to the Cuban state and to global capitalism.

Elise Andaya (2009) does something similar in her study of physicians in Havana. She analyzes their relationship with both the state and patients in terms of a gift economy permeated by reciprocity. Through a careful historical analysis of the political rhetoric surrounding medical training, the ethos of the gift emerges as central to the social status of doctor in Cuba and their position as symbols of the Revolution. In relation to the state, their training is the first gift to be reciprocated through selfless work helping others. Andaya argues that this vision of doctors as having a moral obligation to help others made gifts and favors the only possible means for patients to reciprocate. Gifts became the way to show gratitude for services performed as well as to strategically invest in valuable social relations and distinguishing themselves from other patients to secure privileged treatment. This economy of gifts and favors was permeated by a discourse of friendship and mutual help where overt expectations on reciprocity and interested calculations certainly existed but were silenced. Like Powell, Andaya sheds

[7] A strange definition, I would say, in the context of a country where private property has been circumscribed by the state for the sake of equality.

light on the negotiations around the ideal of disinterested love which she frames as threatened by the changing economic and political situation. What Porter, Powell and Andaya do is affirm Yurchak's claim that, for many people in the Soviet Union as well as in Cuba, socialist values such as equality and selflessness were and are of great personal importance.

The crisis-of-values-narrative certainly holds more than a grain of truth. Great changes have occurred in Cuba since the fall of the Soviet Union and, more recently, with the change of leader. And as always when changes occur, people engage in negotiations to make sense of them and create a new moral community. At the same time, it is important to remember that many of the contradictions that people struggle with in contemporary Cuba have a long history, dating back to before the 1990s, and they therefore might not always be explained *only* as old socialist values meeting new capitalist/neoliberal ones.

According to my understanding of Yurchak's critique, it urges us not to fall prey to our assumptions about what socialism is or how life was or is lived in countries called socialist. He effectively points at how the tale of binary socialism is an attractive one that seduces us with its simplicity and neat oppositions. Binary accounts, he says, are often made at other times or places than those analyzed. Tales about "old" socialist values are, I believe, often based on assumptions rather than on an actual analysis of Cuban policy and political rhetoric in the past.

Gordy shows how many of the contradictions (between market mechanisms and a commitment to social justice, for example) were not new to the Special Period and, further, how problematic the "straight empirical narratives" (from old socialism to new capitalism) so prevalent in texts about Cuba can be:

> Indeed, Cuban socialist ideology had gone through many permutations before the 1990s even as basic principles of socioeconomic equality, inclusive nationalism, and unified leadership remained key. It was not as if there existed a clear and unchanging definition of Cuban socialist ideology that was forced for the first time to adjust to historical conditions.
>
> The severity of the economic freefall in the 1990s did, however, bring these long-standing tensions into high relief. At the same time, the straight empirical narrative of this freefall threatened not just to erase Cuban history before 1991 but also to obscure the fact that while the crisis may have limited Cuba's choices, it did not do away with them completely, particularly at the level of ideology. (Gordy, 2006, p. 391)

As mentioned briefly earlier, I have instead chosen to talk about negotiations of solidarity versus maximization (for example in the realm of gift-giving) as "relational work" which is performed not only when there is a "crisis of values" but in all societies where there is an ideal of love as separate from material interests. In this way, the everyday economies of contemporary people in Havana are lifted from the question of socialism versus capitalism to a question which transcends such divisions. I see this not as a better option than the one chosen by the above authors but as a different one that can add to our understanding and provide new insights.

Since Rosendahl's study (1997), the only published anthropological monograph focusing on economic life in Cuba is Amelia Weinreb Rosenberg's book about daily life among what she calls "unsatisfied citizen-consumers" in Havana (Weinreb Rosenberg, 2009). It deals with issues of consumption, income-generating activities and social stratification, thus paralleling the present study in respect to several of the themes dealt with. Weinreb Rosenberg, however, explicitly distances herself from Yurchak's critique, which, the author argues (Weinreb Rosenberg, 2009, pp. 33-34), might be appealing intellectually and after socialism has vanished. However, in practice, she argues, the dichotomies must be used to understand contemporary Cuba. The result of her position is, for example, a vision of migration and informal income-generating activities as popular resistance against the state. When encountering an "Afro-Cuban" household that "initially appears state-faithful and peso-poor" (Weinreb Rosenberg, 2009, p. 113) she is *surprised* to find a mix of state employment and informal work, of transnational love-affairs and relative wealth. She interprets all these things as resistance which should not be present in a household she has labeled "state-faithful". Instead of permitting this surprise to deconstruct her pre-suppositions, the author argues that these contradictions must be a sign of the "*doble moral*" (double moral standard) which characterizes contemporary Cubans (Weinreb Rosenberg, 2009, p. 113)[8]. The title itself, *Cuba in the Shadow of Change: Daily Life in the Twilight of the Revolution* presents a "straight empirical narrative" where the shadows of change grow longer as the "old" socialist sun is setting and Cuba waits for the "new" capitalist sunrise.

[8] According to Yurchak (2005, pp. 16-18) this points at another binary model which is common in studies of life in socialist countries - that between a static and unitary 'true' inner core in people which they can 'hide' or 'reveal' and which can come into conflict with practice.

While Weinreb Rosenberg's analysis certainly captures part of a complex reality, I have, as already mentioned, chosen to illuminate another part portraying everyday life as rather ordinary, devoid of socialist exotica in ironic contradiction with capitalist modernity but full of moral negotiations dealing less with socialism/capitalism and more with emic notions of right and wrong. This does not make the negotiations less political but it does make them impossible to fit into a pre-cut mold of how socialist *or* capitalist subjectivities are assumed to think and behave. In refraining from making easy, politicized readings of everyday life in Cuba, I try to re-politicize a higher level of analysis where binary accounts (of socialism/capitalism, economy/morality and development/poverty) would have us believe the world to be far simpler than it is, with far less political options than there are.

Since part of the problem is, as mentioned above, that much is being written outside of or after socialism, I have made a point of including research by Cuban scholars in my study. Even though, to my knowledge, no Cuban scholars interested in everyday economies use ethnographic methods (other than, in some cases, interviews) there are several interesting and highly relevant studies. A large body of work deals with changes brought about by the crisis – mostly in the area of demography and family (Álvarez Suárez, 2004; Chávez Negrín, 2000; Díaz Tenorio, 2000), and in terms of new social, gender, and racial inequalities (Añé Aguiloche, 2005; M. Espina Prieto, 2003, 2004, 2006; M. Espina Prieto et al., 2005; R. Espina Prieto & Rodríguez Ruiz, 2006; Pérez Izquierdo, 2003a, 2003b). An interesting study based on interviews with private entrepreneurs is provided by Victoria Pérez Izquierdo, Fabien Oberto Calderón and Mayelín González Rodriguez (2004). Viviana Togores and Anicia García (2004) have written about the segmented market for daily consumption and the dual economy of two currencies, while María del Carmen Zabala Argüelles (2008, 2010a, 2010b) has published extensively on poverty in Cuba.

Fieldwork

The bulk of the ethnographic material on which this dissertation is based was gathered over a period of eight months in 2006 and a return visit of one month in 2008. Prior to that, I had lived in Havana as a university student on two different occasions for a total of eighteen months[9]. During this time I was enrolled as an Art History student in a group consisting mostly of Cubans. Since I am married to a Cuban man, I also became part of a Cuban family as

[9] I have, in other words, been living in Havana for a little over two years between 2000 and 2008.

an in-law – something I will have reason to come back to later. Since my stipend as a student did not allow me to live in the hostel reserved for exchange students, I always lived under "informal" arrangements at the peoples' homes: sometimes renting a room in an apartment and other times living with my mother-in-law.

During this time my personal background helped me to gain a foothold in Cuban society; my parents are from Spain, and more precisely from the Canary Islands. Besides speaking fluent Spanish in a dialect very similar to the Cuban one and having a Hispanic name, I also had shared "roots" with many Cubans who are descendants of migrants from the Canary Islands. N. T. Fernandez (2010, pp. 9-10) writes about being of Spanish descent as a good middle ground: one is neither as foreign as other foreigners nor as complicated as being a Cuban living abroad[10] (see also Alcázar Campos, 2010, pp. 97-99).

My knowledge of the field – gained during previous stays – gave me a solid base on which to conduct fieldwork. I not only knew the local version of Spanish and the practicalities of living in Havana, but I was also part of a social network, sharing a five year long history with some people. Having a general knowledge of the field also allowed me to ask informed questions and, importantly, to know when and to whom they could be posed. For the comparatively short period of nine months I was, in other words, able to conduct intensive fieldwork.

Being part of a family shaped my material status in several ways. On the more negative side it limited my scope as it made it impossible to be "neutral" in the social networks in which my family moved. It meant, for example, that it was assumed that I would take their side in conflicts arising between neighbors, making fieldwork in the neighborhoods where they lived complicated. Most of the potentially negative consequences of being part of a family in the field, such as the time consuming task of fulfilling obligations, were, however, avoided by establishing a separate place of residence. During most of my fieldwork I therefore chose to live with friends instead of with in-laws.

[10] Cuba's post-1959 history of migration is fraught with complicated emotions. Migration was politicized for a long time, and leaving the country was seen as desertion. Contact between many of those who left and those who stayed was made virtually impossible, breaking up many families. This has changed for the better but the issue is still saturated with politics and deep emotions.

On a more positive note, the experience of being part of a Cuban family has of course enriched my knowledge of life in Havana and created an area of shared experience and complicity with the people I talked to. Sharing information about family life, especially the negative sides of it, with outsiders is morally questionable in Cuba. Being able to share in return, or make references to personal experiences, created a space where sensitive issues could be dealt with without feelings of disloyalty. My own feelings of disloyalty and my sense of privacy have been difficult to deal with. I have tried, but not really succeeded, to exclude my family from the following pages. At some points they are mentioned and at some others they are disguised behind a fictive name for the sake of privacy and security.

Writing about everyday economies often prompts questions about my interlocutor's "social class". The question is tricky and many aspects of it will be dealt with in detail in subsequent chapters. First and foremost I contacted people through personal connections. My interlocutors are, in other words, those whom I knew or got to know that wanted to participate in the study.

All of my contacts lived in Havana. Most lived in *barrios* close to the center of town, while others lived further out. Some barrios, such as Vedado, were considered "nice" while others, such as Alamar and Guanabacoa, had a bad reputation. All lived in apartments or very small houses and, as is the norm in Cuba, they owned[11] their living quarters. Only a handful rented informally. When looking at the education level, there were PhDs as well as those who had never finished compulsory schooling and everything in between. Some had travelled extensively, while others had never left Havana. They lived in all kinds of households: alone, in nuclear households or in extended three-generation households. In terms of personal characteristics, I made no conscious selection based on gender or age but given my own gender and age there is a certain over-representation of women and people in their twenties as well as middle-aged women - the mothers of my friends.

I did not collect data on their self-identification in terms of skin-color or "race" and it was not something that emerged as being important during interviews and conversations. At the same time however, as will be dealt with in subsequent chapters, several studies of race and racial inequalities in Cuba

[11] In 2006, 'ownership' of a dwelling meant having a legal document for the property, enabling you to leave it as inheritance and giving you the right to swap it for some other dwelling. It did not include the right to sell. For more about housing and ownership see Coyula & Hamberg (2003).

make it clear that race certainly has an impact when it comes to everyday economies and specifically when it comes to class and social stratification. In relation to my firsthand ethnographic material, I have highlighted other aspects which, together with 'race', gender and geography make up social stratification: education, income-generating activities, currency etc.

Continuing the description of my interlocutors, there were atheists as well as proselytizing Christians; those loyal to the Party as well as those openly against everything having to do with the government. Most, of course, occupied some middle ground. Here my general knowledge of the field helped me see the relevance of politics as well as religion in the views expressed by some people, in the decisions they made and the actions they took.

The way they made a living is as much an empirical question for this dissertation to straighten out as it is a necessary part of introducing the people it deals with. To make a long story short, three income-generating activities feature as the prominent ones: formal salaried work for the state, informal salaried work for a private entrepreneur, and informal entrepreneurship. This meant that the people that feature in this study had comparatively low economic capital. They lacked large stable remittances and had no formalized private businesses operating in hard currency – the two strategies potentially leading to a high income. A few of those earning a state salary had bonuses paid out in hard currency but these were mostly low, around 10 CUC. None occupied a high position within the political hierarchy or the emerging business economy and none worked in the tourist industry. They all earned the bulk of their income in soft currency. To summarize, they could be said to have *a low to moderate level of economic capital but very varied levels of cultural capital and personal characteristics*. Chapter three will take a closer look at their own evaluations of their living standard. Like most other people in the world, they saw themselves as "normal people" and thus "ordinary Cubans".

The principal method used during fieldwork was participant observation recorded in extensive field notes. I spent time with people, participated in conversations, asked and answered questions, eaves-dropped, watched television, socialized, helped with child-care or grocery-shopping, moved about the city, went to concerts. I also took care of my housework, not paying anyone else to do so; I cooked, cleaned, bought provisions, washed, shared gossip on where to find tooth brushes or yoghurt. In order to gather more

systematic data I devised a form to collect information on household budgets (see Appendix 2). These were distributed to twenty households of which fifteen returned them after two or four weeks. Based on the information in each form, an interview focused on issues regarding the household economy was conducted. In order to reach new households and avoid ethical complications I asked one of my friends, Miguel, to help me with this part of the research as a field-assistant. While this turned out to be a good way of generating data, it only represents a very small part of the material gathered and the fifteen households participating in this part of the research are only a fraction of the people I spoke to.

It is important to note that I never used any recording device. This means that all quotations are taken from my notes of what I remembered people to have said. More detailed notes were taken during interviews while certain observations and quotations were scribbled in my agenda during the day. These were, as soon as possible, written out from memory to my field diary or in interview transcripts. Quotes are, therefore, never *verbatim.*

In a controlled society like Cuba, questions of security for me and my interlocutors were always very present both during fieldwork and writing. All material was kept on encrypted, secured hard drives and real names were never used. Physical notes were destroyed. In the text I have taken care not to leave any possibility that might permit the identification of my contacts. Neither I, nor, to my knowledge, the people I conducted fieldwork among were ever subjected to any investigations or controls.

Outline of the thesis

This introduction is followed by a background chapter with a brief historical overview and more detailed descriptions of the history and current shape of the market for labor as well as consumer goods, of the issue of inequality and equality, and of families and households in Havana.

Then follows chapter three, which talks about living standard and which deals with experiences of economic stress, as well as how people evaluated their economic situation in life. As will become apparent, these evaluations can never be neutral descriptions but are always done in a cultural and political context. Importantly, they did not conform to conventional tales of poverty and deprivation but served to construct morality and personhood.

Chapter four is about consumption. Here I will return to the market for consumer goods introduced in chapter two. This time however I will pay attention to the ways in which the people I spoke to, as consumers, negotiated rights and obligations towards the state in state markets as well as towards each other in the informal (or black) market. I will also show how difference and distinction was created in the dual economy.

The issue of income-generating activities will be dealt with in chapter five. Here the focus lies on state employment, informal employment in the private sector, and private informal entrepreneurship. Of particularly importance here is how these different activities are used, combined, compared and viewed. State employment emerge as an asset that can potentially generate much more than a salary. Central to my analysis are the moral negotiations in which people engage in order to find ways to make a living that are "good" – in every sense of the word: that generate enough income, that make use of skills and that do not come into conflict with their moral convictions.

In chapter six, the notion of interest and affect (or money and love) as separate and opposing is deconstructed by looking at exchanges and transactions in intimate relationships. By looking at how men's assets are mobilized by women (mothers and wives/girlfriends) I show how interest and affect are dealt with in terms of rights and obligations in kinship relations. When looking at the relationships between health personnel and their patients, or that between friends or recently dating couples, however, we will see that issues of intention become crucial and an ideal of disinterestedness is presented.

Chapter seven offers some conclusions and focuses on how morality is articulated in everyday economic life.

2
Setting the Scene

Elena

I only met Elena once. Marta, a friend of mine, told me she knew a person who wanted to participate in my study so I asked her to set a date for an interview.

As we approached the house on the outskirts of Havana where Elena and her elderly mother live, Marta points quickly at it and whispers: "There it is. Do you see the state it is in? It is practically falling down on them! Poor things…only this week several pieces of concrete have fallen down from the ceiling." High up near the ceiling big cracks run across the concrete walls and the roof above the little front porch looks as if it is going to fall down any minute. It seems, however, that the house was very nice when first built – maybe sometime during the 1940s or 1950s. It is a medium size, one-story house surrounded by a small but very lush garden. We enter the small gate and, instead of approaching the front door, we walk around the side of the house to a patio at the back. The patio is full of beautiful potted plants and Elena, a woman in her forties, is washing clothes in a sink.

She turns around when we enter the patio and excuses herself while drying her hands on a cloth. We introduce ourselves and she invites us to sit down on some metal chairs while she goes inside to get us glasses of ice-cold water. After some small talk, Marta announces that she has some errands to run, leaving Miguel and I to conduct the interview.

Elena tells me the house she lives in used to belong to her elderly mother, but now that her mother is over eighty years old, Elena and her siblings agreed to put it in Elena's name. Her mother requires continuous care since she has severe ulcers on her legs, and as Elena is the one caring for he it is considered only right that she inherit the house.

On several occasions during the interview Elena mentions the state of the house as one of her biggest problems. She would like to swap it for something

smaller and in better shape but claims that her mother won't even talk about it. Fixing it would mean a lot of work and money – money that Elena does not have. She explains that, because it was constructed with sea sand, the roof is cracking and will have to be replaced completely. This is, in fact, what Elena mentions when asked about her wishes for the future: "What I would like is to secure a roof[12] and some sort of commodity for my old age."

Elena has been working as a clinical laboratory technician for twenty years. She works from 7am to 3pm Monday to Friday in addition to two to three nightshifts a week, and one weekend per month. Her monthly salary is 360 MN and, apart from occasional gifts from her husband – who stays with her intermittently – she has no other monetary income. Together with her mother's pension the household has a stable monthly income of 524 MN. The month she participated in my study her husband gave her 15 CUC, a far from insignificant sum which amounts to Elena's whole monthly salary[13].

I ask Elena whether she receives any benefits as a worker in public health. None, she replies: "There have been moments when they have talked about implementing some sort of stimuli and we get all excited but in the end there is nothing. But, how shall I put it… Cubans try to have friends. One tries to get along well with people and to help each other out. I, for example, try to maintain friendship with the nurses in sterilization so that they'll help me get hold of bandages for my mother's legs." Elena also mentions that she receives presents from patients wanting her to take extra care with, and give priority to, their samples in the hospital laboratory. In the past month she received lunches, bars of soap, and panties[14] – all of them attractive CUC-goods.

Even though her low salary and lack of material incentives are big problems for Elena she has other motivations for staying in her job. She likes it and finds it fun and important: "We work for the love of it, as they say, and that is why I have continued." She takes great pride in her job and in being a working woman.

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[12] The word *techo*, roof, is often used in Havana as a synecdoche meaning housing. In this case the word takes on a double meaning since it is the state of the actual roof that is threatening Elena's housing.

[13] The per capita income for that month was 442 MN.

[14] For more about the practice of giving gifts to health workers see chapter five and six as well as Andaya (2009). Since they are only sold in CUC and highly necessary, underwear is, in my experience, a common gift to health workers – despite the implications such a gift can have in, for example, Europe. Again, Andaya (2009, p. 361) can be consulted for another example of underwear as a 'normal' gift to a physician.

*Elena does not label herself as poor but she says that she does feel economic insecurity from time to time. When asked to evaluate her current situation in life the answer is rather negative: "*Ay m'ija*! There are days when one feels very depressed. There are times that are better off and other times that are tighter. But we are surviving. I suppose that in lots of your interviews you find people that are depressed solely because of the situation we [Cubans] are going through…"*

Pedro and Maybel

When I saw Pedro and Maybel again during my fieldwork in 2006 it had been little more than three years since we had last met. At that time both were studying at the university and only a couple of weeks before I left they had told me that Maybel was pregnant. I remember that Pedro's constant complaints about having to live at his mother's apartment intensified with the good news…

In 2006, their daughter Cornelia was already two and a half years old, went to day-care, and liked to watch cartoons. Maybel, in her mid-twenties, had just returned to her studies after two years of maternity leave, while Pedro, in his mid-thirties, had dropped out definitively to work as a freelance designer. He had also inherited his grandmother's apartment in Western Havana where they now lived.

The second part of my fieldwork that year coincided with the end of the summer holidays so Maybel was often at home during the days, while Pedro was out on errands related to his design projects. I used to arrive around midday while Maybel was watching TV-series from Europe or the US which, along with movies and music, were widely pirated from hard disk to hard disk among computer-owners in Havana. Normally we just sat, chatting the morning away, until it was time to collect little Cornelia from the day-care center a few blocks away, and Maybel had to start with the household chores. Sometimes Maybel's mother or brother were there visiting. Pedro's mother, who lived in the same block, also dropped by from time to time, announcing the subsidized items that had arrived at the store or asking whether they were out of coffee. The conversations moved easily from fashion and soap operas to philosophy and the sufferings during the economic crisis of the 1990s.

Pedro and Maybel were doing well. They had a computer and a DVD-player and their daughter had toys, clothes, shoes and plenty of food – even red

meat. Maybel studied and her only income was the monthly scholarship of 60 MN for university students with children. Pedro had a very irregular income based on projects he participated in as a designer. One month he could earn much more than the average Cuban worker and be paid in CUC, while the next two months he could be without any income whatsoever. Their household economy was instead completely based on leasing out a car and a telephone extension.

Pedro's father worked for the government and was given a car – an old Moscovich. Since he was on a long assignment abroad at the time, he had given permission for Pedro to rent the car to an acquaintance for 90 CUC per month. They had also provided a neighbor with an extension of their phone for which they charged 10 CUC per month. These 100 CUC were the bulk of their household economy[15], a very big income when compared with that of many other families in Havana. Leasing out material assets like this is, of course, illegal and they risk fines and confiscations. Since leasing out a car and a phone extension is by no means time-consuming, it not only gave them the money but also the time to dedicate themselves to things that really interested them – university studies and freelance design work – without worrying too much about these being rather unprofitable activities. For young parents – I would say – this is a rare luxury anywhere in the world.

***

The stories of Elena, and Pedro and Maybel, set the scene for this study. The picture that emerges is complex: there is soft as well as hard currency, the leasing out of a telephone line and an old car amounting to almost seven times the salary of a laboratory technician, houses are swapped instead of sold, university studies are free of charge, day-care is cheap, and health personnel considers friends in important places to be a work benefit, along with their salary.

This chapter provides the necessary background to begin understanding all these complexities. I will start with a brief historical outline and then move on to look more closely at the history and contemporary situation of the segmented market for everyday consumption as well as labor, the situation of equality and inequality, and finally, families and households.

[15] Providing a monthly base of 800 MN per capita.

Historical Overview[16]

As the biggest island of the Antilles and with a strategic position as a first port and "the key to the New World" Cuba's colonial history has been shaped by European interests. Spanish colonialism, beginning in 1492, all but eradicated the Ciboney and Arawak inhabitants through warfare, the introduction of new diseases, and slavery. Attacking Cuba became part of challenging the Spanish control of the New World, and France, the Netherlands, and Britain, all tried to occupy the island at various points in time.

The British occupation starting 1762 was short, less than a year, but had particularly profound implications. Amongst other things, it meant the start of large-scale slave trade to Cuba from Africa and the liberalization of trade. Both of these changes led to the consolidation of Cuba as a plantation-economy specializing in sugar and tobacco, once the island had returned to Spanish control.

The first war seeking independence from Spain was fought between 1868 and 1878 and failed. The years that followed were marked by a gradual abolition of slavery and an economic depression as beet sugar replaced cane sugar on the European market. Cuba grew increasingly dependent on the United States as one of the few buyers of cane sugar and as a growing foreign investor.

The second war of independence was fought between 1895 and 1898. In the last year of the war, the United States intervened on behalf of the Cubans. Independence from Spain was immediately followed by a US military occupation beginning in 1899 and ending in 1902, with the acceptance of the Platt Amendment which consolidated US control over Cuba. The establishment of a US military base at Guantánamo, and the right to intervene to maintain an "adequate" government, were both parts of this amendment[17].

While "independence" meant that the US consolidated their influence in Cuban politics, economy and culture, this influence was not entirely new. There had already been considerable flows of people, goods, and money between the two countries decades before, and these intensified now. Many Americans bought land and founded companies in Cuba. Members from the Cuban upper classes sent their children to study in the US. American tourism

[16] This section is largely based on Pérez (2006) and Gott (2004).

[17] The full text of the amendment can be found in Gott (2004, pp. 327-328, Appendix B)

to Cuba boomed during abolition, and many working-class Cubans migrated to the US to work for a few years and earn money to build houses or start businesses in Cuba. Havana was a modern city, but also a city with huge class disparities and sharp divisions between whites and "people of color".

In 1933, there was a civil-military coup against president Machado who had decided to remain in power even after his mandate ended. The experimental government that took power under Machado was the first one without US sanction and only remained in power for 100 days. During these days, women obtained the right to vote, land tenure was reformed, and worker's rights were expanded. However, tensions between civilians and the army grew, and in 1934, Fulgencio Batista, who was the head of the army, was backed by the US in forcing a change of government. After an initial period of revolutionary resistance and violent repression, economic and political stability was achieved. Even though Batista did not formally become president until 1940, when he was elected he effectively ruled the country through "puppet presidents and shadow governments" (Pérez, 2006, p. 211). In 1944 Batista failed to be re-elected, and two consecutive presidents continued Cuba's version of rather violent and corrupt democracy.

In 1952, Batista returned from the US where he had been living since losing the elections and promptly seized power by a swift military coup. The elections held in 1954 were boycotted by all other candidates and Batista, unsurprisingly, won. Economically these were hard times in Cuba with a high level of inflation, extended poverty, and organized crime. Living conditions were hard, both for workers and the middle-class. Revolutionary resistance was as insistent as state repression and included both urban movements and guerillas in the countryside. The 26th of July Movement headed by Fidel Castro, which fought in the mountains of Sierra Maestra became the leading group in the anti-Batista struggle. Besides wanting to overthrow Batista the 26th of July movement was nationalist and anti-imperialist, seeking true independence and autonomy. It was also inspired by humanist visions of social justice, especially the writings of Cuban intellectual José Martí. Resistance grew and Batista eventually lost even US support. In Cuban historiography it is said that the Revolution triumphed on January 1st 1959. Cuban scholars talk about the Revolution with a capital R, not as an isolated historical event, but as an ongoing process starting in 1959 and continuing to this day.

Pérez (2006, p. 242) estimates that 1500 decrees, laws, and edicts were enacted in the first nine months of 1959, and many more soon followed. Land reform, efforts to improve literacy, free education and health care, nationalization of foreign-owned companies, the list goes on and on. In Havana, some of the most notable reforms were those related to housing (see Coyula & Hamberg, 2003, pp. 18-19). Only a couple of months after the revolution, evictions were stopped and rents were dramatically lowered. Over time people either became owners of their homes or permanent leaseholders. According to Coyula & Hamberg (2003, p. 18): "By the late 1990s, more than 85% of Cuban households are homeowners, paying little or nothing for their units except for maintenance, repair and utilities." When moving into newly constructed housing, tenants paid initial installments to the state and were then in possession of their living quarters but without the right to sell them as there is no housing market[18]. Housing was, at the time of fieldwork, instead swapped, inherited, or given by the state. Besides those related to housing, initial reforms also included a lowering of telephone and utility bills, rationing and subsidizing of food, as well as rises in wages, and a policy of full employment. Private beaches and clubs were opened to the public and racial segregation was eliminated.

US-Cuban relations deteriorated as US property was nationalized and new trading partners were sought in the Soviet Bloc. In 1961, the Revolution was proclaimed socialist and ties with communist countries in Eastern Europe grew stronger. The US imposed an embargo, making Cuba highly dependent on trade with, and support from, the Soviet Bloc. PCC, the Cuban Communist Party, became the only party; freedom of speech was restricted and all media became state media.

While many saw their living conditions ameliorating with the Revolution, others lost their property and could not find a new life within the emerging society. Emigration, especially to the US and Miami, was high, and Cuban exiles organized resistance from abroad. But foreign, as well as internal resistance, was met with repression and has, to this day, failed.

Economic dependency on the Soviet Union meant that, when it disintegrated in 1989, the Cuban economy was hit very hard. The resulting economic crisis is called *período especial en tiempo de paz*, Special Period in Times of Peace, or just *período especial*, Special Period. While previous generations of Cubans talked about their lives in terms of before and after the Revolution,

[18] As this is being written new reforms are taking place that will permit owners to sell their property.

the middle-aged people I talked to spoke in terms of before and after the Special Period. Beginning in 1991 and peaking in 1994, this was a time characterized by severe and widespread shortages. Clothes, hygienic products, electricity, transportation, shoes, water, medicine, paper and, above all, food, were scarce.

Reforms were implemented in order to deal with the crisis. Joint ventures were permitted, state farms were converted to cooperatives, the holding of hard currency was legalized, and private micro enterprises were permitted, to only name a few. Towards the end of the decade, the Special Period was over.

It is in this post-Special Period Cuba that the present study is situated. In 2006, Fidel Castro was still in power, the PCC was the only party, freedom of speech was restricted, there were two currencies, media was state controlled, the US embargo was in place, the state was virtually the only employer and Chinese buses made public transportation better than it had been in many years.

With this brief historical overview as a backdrop, and in order to create a background for the rest of the study, I will now turn to the history of the segmented market. This will allow us to look more closely at the parts of the post-1959 history of Cuba which are most relevant to the present study.

The Segmented Market

The development of the segmented market[19] provides a good background to the present research. On the one hand, the segmented market works as the objective framework within which the practices and negotiations dealt with in the study are carried out. It is, for example, in order to have access to the segmented market that income-generation activities are devised. On the other hand, the segmented market in 2006 was the direct product of local, as well as global, political and economic processes. In explaining the how and why of this market, the modern history of Cuba and its relation to the rest of the world can be effectively traced.

As seen in the table below, one can talk about seven different markets for consumer goods in Havana in 2006. All, with the exception of number six

[19] I use the word market in its broad meaning referring to situations and relations of trade. When referring to physical market places where people go to shop (such as farmers' markets) this will be indicated.

(formal private businesses operating in CUC), were necessary for households to have access to in order to satisfy their basic needs.

Table 2.1 The different markets for consumer goods

	Formal			Informal
	State-owned		Private	
	Rationed	Un-rationed		
MN	1	2	3	4
CUC		5	6	7

The first division is that between the formal and the informal market. The formal market for consumer goods is made up of state-owned and private businesses, where the former is divided in to markets for rationed and un-rationed goods. Then there is the division between the two currencies which runs through all markets except the rationed one. MN stands for *Moneda Nacional*, national currency, and is the "normal" soft currency Cuban peso which most state salaries are paid in. CUC stands for *Peso Cubano Convertible*, the Cuban convertible peso with hard currency value that substituted the American dollar in 2004. At the time of fieldwork the exchange rate was 24 MN to 1 CUC.

In everyday life people handled, adapted to, and moved in and out of these realities seemingly without much effort. At the same time, some of this effortlessness came from the fact that people had the categories and differences between them perfectly clear. I am, in other words, not alone in the use of dichotomies – state vs. private, CUC vs. MN, rationed vs. un-rationed, legal vs. illegal – as a way to make the market understandable and meaningful. In Havana, people use these terms; they compare one category with another and know how one is supposed to act and what one can reasonably expect in the different contexts. But, as will become apparent, boundaries are fuzzy. Different markets can, for example, cohabit in the same physical location, such as when informal trade is conducted in a state-run farmers' market. The same person at the same counter can act both as a clerk in a *bodega* for rationed goods and as an informal seller. The dichotomies are thus, analytical, and used both emically and etically in order to understand the segmented market.

Por la libreta: Rationed Goods at Subsidized Prices

The market for *subsidized rationed goods* (number 1 in table 2.1) has a long history in Cuba starting in March 1962 when it was introduced in order to preserve social equality in the face of shortages of basic foodstuffs (Benjamin, Collins, & Scott, 1984, p. 22; Brundenius, 1981, p. 69). It was, at the time, meant as a temporary measure until production could meet demand but, in 2006, it was still an important market for consumption. The basic principle has always been the same: each household gets a ration booklet called *la libreta de abastecimiento,* or simply, *la libreta*, which gives the members the right to buy a certain amount of a series of goods at subsidized prices in state shops called *bodegas*. The amounts and products included in the ration have, however, varied greatly in the years since the booklets were first issued, and generally the quota included fewer products in 2006 than before the Special Period[20]. Togores & García (2004, p. 271) estimate that the ration in 2004 was half of that sold in 1989. Cloth, clothes, shoes, and children's toys, are examples of products that used to be included in the ration but that by 2006 were only sold in un-rationed markets. The changes in the ration during my fieldwork included introducing new products, like milk chocolate; increasing the quality and price of some products, like coffee; and introducing "additional quotas" of rice, beans, and eggs[21]. It is important to note that the fact that a product is included in the ration does not mean that it is only available for purchase in this market. Almost all products in the ration can be found in un-rationed markets, the essential difference being price. Prices for rationed goods are subsidized and thus very low[22], so much so that many of my interlocutors talked about the state giving (not selling) them rationed goods and often didn't even bother to remember how much they paid for these items. According to my calculation, households spent approximately 20 MN per person per month in the rationed market.

The Cuban state has, at least in theory, given universal access to the ration of goods at subsidized prices meaning that everybody – regardless of income – was entitled to it[23]. This has been criticized by social scientists (see for example Benjamin, et al., 1984, pp. 81-85; Fabienke, 2001, p. 126; Togores

[20] For goods included in the ration at different points in time see Benjamin et al. (1984, p. 35); Brundenius (1981, p. 158); Pérez-López (1994, p. 45); Rosendahl (1997, p. 30); Solberg (1996, pp. 183-184) and Togores & Garcia (2004, p. 269).

[21] Instead of selling 6lbs. of rice per person per month at 0.20 MN per lb. the new ration included 5lbs. at 0.2 MN *and* 2 additional lbs. at 0.9 MN per lb.

[22] See table 2.2 for prices.

[23] Note, however, that rations are not the same all over Cuba. This text only deals with rationing in Havana where the quotas were higher than in the rest of the country (Togores & García, 2004, p. 293, note 13).

& García, 2004, p. 288) as a waste of state resources, a critique that, in 2008, after the completion of my fieldwork, reached all levels of Cuban political life. In a speech pronounced on February 24th 2008, Raúl Castro described the ration of subsidized goods as "irrational and unsustainable" given the economic situation of Cuba (Castro, 2008a). In another speech dated July 11th 2008, the elimination of "excesses of subsidies" was mentioned as one of four premises necessary for salaries to reflect performance, this being an explicit goal of the government (Castro, 2008b)[24]. This last speech was followed by an intense public debate in Granma's[25] weekly section, "Letters to the editorial board", starting in late July and ebbing in late November, where arguments both for and against the elimination of the *libreta* were voiced (see for example González Hernández, 2009; Leyva Medina, 2009; Rondón Velázquez, 2009). As this is being written, the 6th Party Congress held in April 2011 has approved the gradual elimination of the *libreta* in its current form.

In 2006, the rationed market was, however, alive and certainly provided important goods at very low prices. At the same time, it was, for various reasons, impossible for people in Havana to rely entirely, or even mostly, on purchases made there. To begin with, subsidized goods were rationed and the amount of goods available was therefore restricted. Only very few, if any, of the products came in rations that covered household needs, and when more of a certain product was needed, the household members had to look for it in other markets – at higher prices. According to Lam (quoted in Togores & García, 2004, pp. 259-260) the ration only covered 43.1% of the caloric requirements of adults (14-64 years). Añé Aguiloche (2005, p. 12, Table 4) presents a table of the nutritional quality of the quota of rationed foodstuffs and argues that it covers about 53% of the nutritional recommendations. My interlocutors often said that, while the rice and the sugar might be enough for a month, the quotas of animal protein were a joke that only gave a handful of meals. The reverse was, of course, also true: some might never use their monthly ration of some products. Brown sugar, lentils, and split peas, were examples of unpopular products. Unused goods from the subsidized market often entered the informal market or were given or bartered, making up for the rigidity of the rationing system and, at the same time, reinforcing social relations of reciprocity and sharing.

[24] Cuban sociologist Espina Prieto (2010) mentions the "economic unsustainability of the social sector" – how social spending is not backed up by national economic performance – as one of six fundamental problems in contemporary Cuba.

[25] The official newspaper of the Central Committee.

Another limitation concerned the products themselves. The contents of the ration has, as already mentioned, varied greatly since first introduced, but the times when a household found everything they needed at subsidized prices were long since gone, if they had ever existed at all. In 2006, the offer was very limited and many essential products were not included in the ration. Clothing has already been mentioned and other examples are meat (beef and pork) and most vegetables. When returning to Havana in 2008, the layout of the ration booklet had changed and several people joked to me that it had been done so that people would not see the printed text edited in the 1960s when many more products were included.

As a way to adapt the ration to the needs of the person, rations have, since the beginning, varied with age and health status. Children, pregnant women, and the old, were entitled to special foods, as were persons with certain health problems. In spite of this, household needs could not be covered by the ration, neither in terms of products available nor in terms of the amounts. Table 2.2 shows the products that, in theory, were included in the ration.

The fact that one was entitled to the ration shown in table 2.2 did, however, not mean that it was always available for purchase. Things often failed to turn up at the *bodega* and people had to manage without that product or acquire it some other way. Sometimes one month's lack of, say, fish, was compensated with a double ration the following month, or substituted with some other product, for example chicken. Frequently, however, no compensation was made and there were constant disparities between official rations and what people actually got. Some products, like rice, beans, sugar, and coffee, were more reliable in this aspect than for example fish, chicken, soap, and oil. But in general there was no way of telling *if* a product was going to be available a certain month.

Table 2.2: Products included in the 2006 official ration[26]

Product	Price[27]	Ration
Rice	0.20	5 lbs. per person per month
Additional rice	0.90	2 lbs. per person per month
Beans	0.40	10 oz. per person per month
White sugar	0.15	3 lbs. per person per month
Brown sugar	0.10	2 lbs. per person per month
Oil	0.40	½ lb. per person per month
Bathing soap	0.25	1 bar per person every two months
Washing soap	0.20	1 bar per person every two months
Coffee	5.00	1 package per person per month
Tooth paste	0.65	1 tube per household every two months
Chocolate powder without sugar	8.00	1 package of one or the other per person per month
Chocolate powder with sugar	12.00	
Salt	0.35	1 kilo per household every two months
Bread	0.05	1 bun per person per day
Fish	0.35	1 lb. every two or three months
Chicken	0.70	1 lb. per person per month
Minced soy[28]	0.35	¾ lb. per person per month
Jamonada[29]	1.60	½ lb. every three or four months
Matches	0.05	1 box per person per month
Liquid detergent	3.60	1 liter every four months
Pasta		Once or twice a year
Chicken sausages	1.40	1 package of 5 sausages every 6 months
Eggs	0.15	5 per person per month
Additional eggs	0.90	5 per person per month
Crackers		1 kg per household every two months
Special rations according to age (or birth year)		
Strong cigarettes	2.00	3 boxes per month per person born before 1955
Light cigarettes	2.50	1 box per month per person born before 1955
Cigars	1.00	2 per month per person born before 1955
Cerelac (Lactosoi)	1.60	1 package per month and person of over 64 years
Milk	1.00	1 liter (to be diluted with 1 liter of water) every two days to children between 0 and 7 years
Puréed fruit	0.25	14 jars per month to children between 0 and 2 years
Soy yogurt	1.00	To children between 7 and 13 years

[26] See appendix 1 for medical diets and electric appliances sold during "the Energy Revolution" of 2006. The dates were told to my field assistant by a clerk in a *bodega.* Some dates are rather unspecific ("every three or four months") and probably based on his or her experience rather than on any official statement.

[27] Prices in MN and per unit.

[28] Surrogate for minced meat.

[29] Surrogate for ham.

Table 2.3: Rationed products bought at subsidized prices in 2006[1]

Every month: Rice: 7lbs, Beans: amount not specified, Sugar: 5 lbs., Coffee: 1 package, Bread: 1 bun per day, *Productos cárnicos* (Animal protein): amount or type not specified, Eggs: 10, Gas[2]: amount not specified

	Pota-toes	Pasta	Fish	Salt* (kg)	Oil (lb.)	Bathing soap (bar)	Washing soap (bar)	Tooth paste* (tube)	Cigars**	Cig.** (pack.)	Light cig.** (pack.)	Kero-sene[3]	Matches* (box)
J			X		0.5	1			2	3		X	1
F				1	0.5					3		X	1.3
M	X		X	1	0.5	1	1	1	2	3	1	X	
A	X			1	0.5					3		X	2
M			X		0.5	1	1	1	2	4		X	1
J			X	1	0.5			1	2	3	1	X	
J			X	1	0.5					3	1	X	1
A				1	0.5	1		1		5	1	X	2
S			X	1	0.5	1		1		3	1	X	1
O		X	X	2	0.5			1		3	1	X	1
N		X	X	2	0.5			1		4			1
D			X			1			2	3		X	1.3

* = Household ration ** = Only included in the ration to persons born before 1955. X = Amount not specified

[1] If not otherwise stated, rations are indicated per person.

[2] Gas to stoves was sold in containers to households lacking gas-plumbing from the street.

[3] While kerosene stoves were fairly common in 2000 when I first visited Havana, they have, since then, been substituted by gas stoves due to the high risk of accidents. In Havana, kerosene was in 2006 mainly used to administer light during long power-cuts in the hurricane season.

Table 2.3 shows products bought by a particular household in 2006. The information was obtained by looking at an old ration-book and indicates only the products actually bought. Some products may have been available for purchase but – for several reasons – not bought. Note also that some products that appear to have come regularly every month might in fact have come in double or triple rations every two or three months. The household was comprised of an elderly married couple and their adult son. In addition to the products in table 2.3 the household also got to buy an electric rice-cooker and two fluorescent tubes as part of the "Energy Revolution" of 2006 – a state-run campaign aimed at coming to terms with deficits in the electric supply by, amongst other measures, modernizing Cuban households' electric appliances.

When asked about which products available at subsidized prices were most important, people often answered the ones that seemed to come regularly every month: rice, sugar, beans, coffee, eggs, and – for households with children – milk. As for chicken and fish, they were important and attractive goods but, since the ration was never enough to cover household needs, they were seldom included when mentioning the most important products. Along with many other products included in the ration, they were rarely counted on for planning the household economy but rather regarded as a very welcome bonus.

Another limitation of the market for subsidized goods was that products had to be bought at a certain time, i.e. when they were available in the *bodega*. This was especially so for products requiring refrigeration. Due to insufficient possibilities for proper storage, these goods had to be bought within a few days of arrival. These also happened to be the most attractive goods (milk, chicken, fish, etc.) and the informal sale of these in the bodega contributed to the need to be there in time: if late, your ration might well be sold informally to someone else. There was thus no guarantee that desired products would be available when one needed them, and purchases had to be adapted to the irregular workings of the distribution system.

Even though products might arrive once a month there was no telling when, during the month, the product would arrive. This made it hard for households to plan their purchases, and the question of when something arrived at the *bodega* was constant in daily gossip in the *barrios*. One of the newspapers actually published information regarding the sale of rationed goods, but the

people I spoke to invariably mentioned gossiping among neighbors as their source of information regarding this, highlighting the importance of social networks in the *barrio* for a functioning household economy.

Finally, a big limitation was that ration booklets were connected to housing units and not to individuals. While almost everybody had somewhere to live it was fairly common for people not to be inscribed in the booklet of the housing unit where they resided. As the location of the booklet determined in which *bodega* one had to buy the ration, this meant travelling across the city and some people that never got their rations. One reason for this was that having one's name in the booklet connected to a certain housing unit could, according to some people, give that person a right to co-own the house. People living in illegally rented apartments were typical cases of people who were not inscribed in the place of residence, but it could also be the case of someone living with distant or affinal relatives.

Due to the above mentioned limitations in terms of quantity, offer, reliability, and access, households were obliged to turn to other, un-subsidized markets in order to cover their wants and needs. As seen in table 2.1, the un-rationed markets display a high level of diversity. Compared to the rationed market, prices in these markets were, of course, higher and the selection of goods on offer much better.

Por la libre: Un-rationed Goods

Since 1962 when the rationed market started, there have been, during most periods in time, less regulated markets as complements. In the early 1970s,[30] the state began selling un-rationed products in what was called "the parallel market". The same *bodegas* that sold rationed foods also sold some products *por la libre*, i.e. un-rationed, and there were state-run open-air markets for agricultural products, as well as supermarkets in central Havana, that sold imported "luxuries". With the Special Period, imports declined sharply and the parallel market all but disappeared in 1989 and only came back, in a different form, with the reforms of 1994. Cristina, a skilled state employee approaching sixty, remembers how it used to be before the Special Period:

> Cristina: There used to be a thing called *El Mercadito* in Old Havana, where the Computer Palace is now. It was a store with several floors and they had one floor for meats, one for cheeses, and so on. My husband used to go every Sunday to shop. We

[30] There seems to be some confusion on the exact year here. Togores & García (2004, p. 293, note 16) say 1971, while Pérez-López (1994, p. 47) mentions 1973.

> bought cream cheese and I always had the drawer in the refrigerator full of it. You know the juices they now sell in cans? Well, we used to have the refrigerator full of those for our daughters. And every week we bought two crates of soda with two different flavors: orange, malt, lemon, cola… We used to drink lots of soda! And meats of all kinds. We never lacked food! And all that in Cuban money [MN]! With our two salaries we bought all that.
> Maria: Times were different then!
> Cristina: Yes, they were. And there were apples and marmalades of those fruits… What are they called?
> Maria: Plums?[31]
> Cristina: Exactly! And there was milk…

In 2006, *state-run establishments selling un-rationed goods in MN* (number 2 in table 2.1) included stores and open-air markets for agricultural products, *agros*. The choice was wider than in the rationed market, and prices were somewhere in-between the rationed ones and the ones in the private market. For households whose economies were based on legal salaries in MN, this was, along with the rationed and the informal market, the most important source of food and other necessities.

Of the *legal private establishments in MN* (number 3 in table 2.1), the most important one in 2006 was the private *agro,* which has a historic predecessor in the *Mercados Libres Campesinos* (Farmers' Markets, henceforth called MLCs) of the 1980s. The MLCs opened in 1980 and rapidly became a popular complement to the rationed market. Prices were many times higher, but here could be found fruits and vegetables that were impossible to find elsewhere. It also became an experiment in private entrepreneurship that clashed with the official socialist economy and in 1986 they were closed down[32]. In 1994, as part of the reforms dealing with the special period, the MLCs re-emerged as private *agros*.

The private *agros* of 2006 had a wider selection of agricultural products as well as higher prices, compared to the state-run variant. Private sellers not belonging to an *agro* could also be important sources of certain goods such as prepared food and snacks, shoes and other leather products, ornaments, kitchen utensils, and used books. Regular stores were, however, never

[31] For me to be able to accurately guess what fruit she remembers here is a clear indication of how memories and narratives of the Special Period are often collective; I had heard almost the same story containing almost the same elements many, many times.
[32] For more about MLCs see Benjamin et al. (1984, pp. 57-77).

privately owned, and these kinds of businesses always took place in open-air markets, small kiosks, or at the home of the seller.

En la calle: The Informal Market

In the literature, several terms are used for what I call the informal market/economy. Pérez-López distinguishes between three different concepts: the informal economy in developing market economies; the underground economy in developed market economies; and the second economy in planned economies (Pérez-López, 1994, pp. 7-8). The differentiations are made in relation to both legal structures and macroeconomics: informal and underground transactions are those that are outside the law, while the second economy includes everything outside the planned economy – illegal as well as legal ones. The issue is further complicated since the term "informal economy" is used by Cuban scholars (see for example M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 236) to denote what Pérez-López calls "second economy": everything outside the planned economy.

This distinction might be useful for studying ideology and the interrelation of planned and private economies in socialist countries, but the term "second economy" has been criticized by both Fabienke (2001, p. 108) and Rosendahl (2001, p. 87) for being too all-embracing when studying contemporary Cuba. According to Rosendahl, this is especially the case when focusing on everyday economies:

> From the point of view of the household […] the concept second economy is less relevant. Households engage in economic transactions they feel necessary and their principal interest is the reproduction of the social unit. For most people, the concrete difference is between legal and illegal economic activities, since illegal transactions are more risky and can be considered morally questionable. (Rosendahl, 2001, p. 87)

Following Rosendahl, I consider the crucial aspect here to be the fact that a large part of the economy is conducted without formalization and state control through permits, licenses, and fees. As I will show in chapter 4, this creates a void where rights, obligations, and expectations, have to be negotiated in the everyday encounters in this economy since they are not given by laws and institutions. I need, then, a term that captures the unregulated, unlicensed, informal character of this economy – legal private businesses should not be included[33].

[33] Note, however, that Henken (2002), for example, has shown that legal private entrepreneurs operate within a legal framework that is so strict that they more often than not straddle the gap between the formal and

Fabienke has chosen to use the term shadow economy (Fabienke, 2001, p. 111), which is widely used in literature on planned economies to denote illegal activities. Rosendahl uses various terms: black market (mirroring the emic *mercado negro*), illegal economy, and second economy.

Some of these terms – 'the black market', 'the shadow economy' or 'the illegal market' – carry overtones that are too dramatic to capture the everyday, ordinary feel of this economy in Havana. 'Unlicensed' or 'unregulated' would capture the nature of this part of the economy in a good way, but are, on the other hand, difficult to understand or grasp. For these reasons, and despite considerable confusion around the term, I have therefore chosen to use 'the informal economy/market'.

The *informal economy* (number 4 and 7 in table 2.1), then, exists in most societies and is shaped by the formal economy; the needs and wants of the population; and the laws and the repression by the police. The importance of the informal economy in Cuba has varied heavily with time, reflecting the legal, political, and economic situation of the country. In the 1980s, before the Special Period, people in Havana used both the un-rationed and the informal market to complement the ration, but, as the crisis deepened, the un-rationed market disappeared, the ration shrunk, and the legal options for consumption became extremely narrow. The informal market thus became one of the principal sources for consumer goods and, according to Togores & García (2004, p. 273), sales in this market surpassed sales in the official economy as the crisis peaked. The reforms of the mid-1990s in many ways dealt with this problem and contributed to a contraction of the informal market as the state expanded the non-rationed options for consumption, legalized the holding of dollars for Cubans, and opened possibilities for a private market.

However, in 2006, the informal economy continued to be important and all the households I got to know during my repeated stays in Havana had frequent contacts with the informal economy. While not everybody entered it as sellers, they certainly did so as buyers, leading me to conclude that managing a household economy was impossible without entering this huge sector of the urban economy. This is, of course, a market that is very difficult to describe in any summarized way. People bought and sold all kinds of

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informal economy: buying raw materials informally, employing informally, carrying out activities not included in their license etc.

services and products in both currencies and in virtually any way possible: knocking on doors, in the streets, in private homes and in the (legal) workplace, just to name a few.

The lack of regulations meant both advantages and disadvantages for consumers. While it certainly lowered prices and diversified supply, all my interlocutors could tell stories about being cheated in the informal market. With frequent stories about the perils involved, the question is why did people continue to turn to these unregulated exchanges? The direct answer to my explicit questions about this was nearly always the same: because of need. People considered that they had no choice and gave various reasons for this. As I will show, these were mainly related to prices and availability as compared to the formal market.

In Havana, everything that could be bought in the stores had two prices, one *en la tienda* (in the store) and one *en la calle* (in the street). The former referred to the price in legal establishments, while the latter referred to the informal market. In those cases where the product is available legally, the price in the street compared to the one in the store is often lower and/or in MN instead of CUC. One of the households in my study, for example, bought honey on a regular basis from a seller that visited the neighborhood knocking on doors at least once a month. The month they participated in my study, they bought 1.5 liters for 25 MN. If they had turned to the formal economy instead, they would have had to spend an estimated 6 CUC (144 MN) to be able to consume the same amount of honey, since it is only sold legally in CUC stores.

Besides lower prices and/or prices in a more available currency, another reason for people to engage in informal transactions was the fact that some things were scarce or unavailable in the stores and *agros*. Meat – other than chicken, pork, and mutton – was an example of one of the most valued goods that was very difficult to get hold of in the formal market. Fish, seafood, and dairy products such as cheese, milk and yoghurt, as well as workmen doing repair work such as electricians, plumbers and painters, were other examples. Here, availability was the issue – not money – and prices could be rather high.

The informal economy and its manifestations are of course heavily shaped by context, and points to the ways in which the formal market fails or the ways in which people try to escape the costs of "being legal". Taxes, legislation,

the availability of formal jobs, the relationship between salaries and prices, state control, the availability of products in stores, as well as local tastes, preferences, and needs, all lead to making sense of the informal economy and shape the peculiarities of said economy in different contexts. The illegal trading of beef in Havana is a good example of how food preferences and legal structures combine to shape the informal market in particular ways.

Beef was by far the most valued food in Havana, so much so that the word *carne*, meat, did not refer to poultry or processed meat like sausages. *Carne* was red meat and amongst the red meats, beef was king. Pork and mutton were more common, and venison, alligator, or tortoise-meat, could occasionally be found in the informal market, but beef was what people longed for and spoke about. Eating beef was used as a measure of wealth and associated with traveling or migrating. It was considered a strong, healthy food that gave lots of energy and good blood. In Brundenius' tables of food consumption in the years 1963 to 1970, beef exceeds both pork, chicken, and eggs in kg/year (Brundenius, 1981, pp. 187-188). Furthermore, Deere cites a national survey conducted in 1987 where beef was listed as the preferred meat (Deere, 1992, p. 44). Beef thus seems to have been the preferred meat in the diet of Cubans for quite some time. Nevertheless, when I did fieldwork, it was largely absent from the tables of most Cubans.

The slaughter of cows and the selling of beef was a strict state monopoly and illegal slaughter was punishable by imprisonment. Beef was not part of the ration of subsidized goods and was never sold in the *agro*. Small packages of minced beef could occasionally be found in CUC-stores at high prices, and in a few very large CUC compartment stores, cuts of beef could be sold at more than 10 CUC per kilo. What little beef the country produced was probably consumed in the tourist industry. Hardly any Cubans could afford the formal prices and instead, the most common way to get hold of beef was in the informal market. The high demand and the risks involved in selling beef kept prices high and the difficulty in getting hold of beef required a high almost mafia-like level of organization by the suppliers and sellers. This is a good example of how culture and local context can shape the informal market in complex and sometimes unexpected ways.

Pesos cubanos and *Pesos convertibles*: The Dual Economy

Table 2.1 is divided so that all markets except the subsidized one appear in two versions, each operating in its own currency. Like many former colonies,

Cuba has a long history of multiple currencies. Until 1914, when the first national currency was issued, Cubans used money printed in Spain, England, the United States, or even France (García Molina, 2005, p. 9, note 6; Le Riverend, 1967, pp. 182-184). After 1959, the holding of hard currency was prohibited for nationals and, until the 1980s, the only currency in circulation was the Cuban peso. In the 1980s, when tourism increased and hard-currency stores for foreigners opened, Cubans started using USD informally in order to have access to said stores. The importance of the USD was, however, still relatively small – at least compared to the role it would play during the 1990s. With the Special Period two things happened that eventually led to the legalization of the holding of USD for Cubans. First, the state became in desperate need of hard currency for imports and, second, more and more USD found its way in to the hands of Cubans. The principal sources of this money were tourism and informal remittances from relatives abroad trying to help in times of crisis[34]. Since there were no legal ways for Cubans to use USD, a significant informal market in this currency surged and inflation soared with one USD being worth more than 100 MN. As one of the most important reforms implemented in order to come to terms with the crisis, the holding of USD was legalized in 1993, and the stores formerly only catering to foreigners were expanded and opened up for Cubans. One of the biggest chains was called *Tiendas de Recuperación de Divisas* (Stores for the Collection of Foreign Currency) making the objective of all CUC stores explicit: to channel hard currency from the hands of Cubans to the public treasury. In order to do so, prices in these stores were high with an added mark-up that functioned as a sales tax. There seems to be no agreement in the literature as to the size of this "tax" and numbers range from 240 percent (Fabienke, 2001, p. 106) to 130 percent (Togores & García, 2004, p. 284). Regardless of the exact number, the mark-up was, and still is, very high, with the justification that it is a redistributive measure.

According to Felipe, a man in his forties, living alone and making a living by informally renting out a room to tourists, the legalization of the holding of hard currency for Cubans was surrounded with many speculations, fears, and hopes:

> Felipe: The question about what will happen when Fidel dies makes me think about when the dollar was legalized. There was a lot of talking then too: if it would happen, when and

[34] For a discussion of the history and political dimensions of remittances to Cuba as well as how local norms and values shape and are shaped by remittances see Eckstein (2009).

what would happen. One or two years before the legalization I became involved in the black market that had surfaced.

Maria: How? How did it work?

Felipe: The dollar-stores were like the ones now but fewer of course and they were only open to foreigners. We [Cubans] couldn't even own dollars. What people did then was that they got hold of dollars in one way or the other and then asked a foreigner to buy a bunch of stuff in the store – usually jeans, T-shirts, hygienic products and things like that – and then they sold it expensively in pesos [MN]. That money was then changed on the black market for dollars that were used to buy more stuff. For me it all started when a friend asked if he could put a box of dollar-goods at my place since he didn't have space at his. I said yes. The guy wanted to give me money but since we were friends I refused to accept it. It all started with me asking around if someone wanted to buy these things from my friend, then I started selling and got part of the profit and then one day I decided to start buying things to sell on my own account. I discovered that I had a capacity for it and I really made a lot of money.

Maria: When you changed pesos for dollars, did you do that through a foreigner?

Felipe: No, no, you did that on the black market. It might sound complicated and it is if you don't have contacts. But if you know where to turn and have good contacts with foreigners and with people that change illegally then it was actually an easy way to earn lots of money.

Maria: And then when the legalization came?

Felipe: Right. I thought that the whole population would be shocked. I don't know…that something would happen. Imagine, it was like having access to a whole different world. People said that it was a world of color and that we lived in a gray world. I thought people would lose their minds when they got access to such a strong currency and to that market. But it was almost scary how quickly everybody adapted. That is why I sometimes think nothing at all will happen when Fidel dies. People here adapt real quick.

A year later, in 1994, a third currency – the Cuban convertible peso (CUC) – was introduced in order to better control the liquidity. This currency was equivalent to the USD within Cuba and, in 2004, it substituted the USD completely as Cuban establishments stopped accepting payments in USD. A state employee in her fifties explains the circumstances around this change:

I think it's good. People used to differentiate between dollars and convertible pesos. The green ones [USD] were kind of nicer and sometimes they didn't want the convertible pesos. One almost had to feel ashamed for having convertible pesos. Now it's better because now there's only one of them. […] The reason that they took away the dollar was to get more control. Before, many used to bring in money [from abroad] and saved it in cash. When they took away the dollar these people had to change the bills they had. The state also increased the charges for changing so they made a lot of money when everybody had to change what they had. There is an anecdote about an elderly couple,

> country folks, who came to the bank in a horse-cart. The woman had a suitcase *full* of bills. They had *millions* saved in cash!

In 2006, there were two currencies in circulation and there were state-owned supermarkets, taxis, bakeries, restaurants, stores etc. operating in either MN or CUC. While the two economies were not completely separated, CUC was more universal than MN since things sold in MN could often be bought in the equivalent in CUC while the reverse was not true – things sold in CUC could never be bought in the equivalent in MN.

In banks and exchange bureaus one CUC was worth 25 MN if buying MN and 24 MN if buying CUC. If buying a service or product sold in MN, and paying with the equivalent in CUC, the issue was more complex. If you paid in *bills* one CUC would be worth 23 or 24 MN depending on the seller and her or his access to change. If, however, you made this type of transaction using CUC-*coins* one CUC would be worth 20 MN since this made it easy to calculate the equivalent of CUC-*centavos* in MN. A 5 CUC-*centavos* coin was thus used to pay 1 MN.

Concluding the history and description of the market for consumer goods I will now turn to the labor market with which it shares its history.

The Labor Market

When people devised and combined income-generating activities in Havana in 2006, they did so in a labor market that was more diverse than it had ever been since 1959. The Revolution brought rapid changes in the employment structure of which the most notable one was that workers moved from other income-generating activities to state employment. While 8.8% of the labor-force were state employees in 1953, this number had augmented to 87.5% by 1970 (M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 232, Table 7.2) and reached 94.1% in 1988 (M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 236, Table 7.4).

With the reforms of the Special Period, new forms of ownership of the means of production were created, and old ones expanded or changed. The employment structure now centered around four forms of ownership: state, mixed (joint ventures between the state and a foreign company), private, and cooperative. Within these four categories there were sub-divisions, for example between the traditional and emergent state sector, or between private

farmers and non-farmers which differ in the conditions of work and in the forms of remuneration[35].

This meant that the trend was slightly reversed and the number of state-employees had declined to 81.8%[36] in 2006. The other 18.2% worked either at agricultural cooperatives or in the private market as farmers or entrepreneurs. In Havana (where few worked in agriculture), the state was virtually the only legal employer. Even those few people who worked for companies that were partly foreign-owned were employed through a state-run entity that paid them their official salary only or mostly in MN. The big CUC-part of these workers' salaries – which did permit some of them to live well solely on their employment – was often an informal salary paid by the foreign part of the company in order to motivate their workers. One woman I spoke to, in her thirties and expecting her second child, received 300 CUC per month in informal salary from the joint venture she worked at. This was a considerable income permitting her to live a good life. When on maternity leave, her pay was, however, calculated on her official salary in MN which meant she had to live on what she could save before taking her leave.

While this study will not provide any first-hand data either on employees in joint ventures or owners of legal private businesses, called *cuentapropistas* in Cuba, the latter subject deserves a short note based on secondary sources. This is especially important since I will deal with informal employees who often have *cuentapropistas* as their employers.

Businesses run by *cuentapropistas* are very small and heavily regulated within a legal framework that has always been restrictive[37] "in order to prevent the values of entrepreneurship from contaminating those values and practices fostered by socialism" (Gordy, 2006, p. 395). Taxes and fees are high, there are no retail stores, only *cuentapropistas* selling food can have employees (and then only co-resident family-members), inspections are experienced as hostile (Pérez Izquierdo, et al., 2004, pp. 21, 23-24), the range of occupations that are permitted is limited, and only 22% of applications for a license are granted (Pérez Izquierdo, et al., 2004, p. 10). Thus, legalizing a

[35] For more about the labor market see Fabienke (2001) and for an evaluation of the working conditions in the state, mixed and cooperative sectors see Martín Romero (2003).

[36] My calculation based on ONE (2008, Table 7.2).

[37] See Ritter (1998) for a series of limitations imposed on *cuentapropistas* by the state; and Henken (2002) as well as Pérez Izquierdo et.al. (2004) for descriptions of the legal framework, and a closer look at *cuentapropistas'* own perceptions of things. Note, however, that changes are being made to the private market as this is being written.

business is not something easily done, and only a very small part of the population in Havana made a living in this way.

Estimates of the percentage of *cuentapropistas* vary from 4% of the national work-force, according to Pérez Izquierdo et.al. (2004, p. 42), to 3-15% according to Fabienke (2001, p. 110)[38]. Pérez Izquierdo et.al. refers to the official number of license-holders, as does the lower number presented by Fabienke, while the higher number presented by the latter refers to an estimation of people actually working within this sector and includes 2-4 "assistants" to each license-holder. These "assistants" (that according to the estimate outnumber license-holders) are included in my study since, as already mentioned, several of my interlocutors were informally employed by *cuentapropistas.*

The informal economy is, of course, not restricted to informal employees. Even more important as an income-generating activity is informal entrepreneurship. The history of this market mirrors that of the informal market for consumption dealt with above. For many people in Havana, the informal market offers an alternative to state employment or a way to supplement low salaries. There is every kind of business being done in this market: from the occasional petty-trade to more complex, organized chains of production and distribution of goods or services. A more detailed description and analysis will be done in chapters four and five.

Just like the markets for consumer goods, one should keep in mind that the boundaries between different parts of the labor market are fuzzy. The same person and/or household may use income-generating activities from various sectors of the economy and, as we will see in chapter five, a formal workplace can be used by the employee as a good place to conduct informal business. These categories are thus analytical and do not correspond in any clear-cut way with given physical places or groups of households or persons.

The post-1959 history of the markets for both consumer goods and labor is a succession of reforms that often have direct implications for equality and inequality in Cuba. This is the issue to which I will turn now.

[38] While Fabienke explicitly excludes private farmers from her estimate, Pérez Izquierdo et.al. probably do so too since their general definition of *cuentapropista* seems to exclude these.

Equality and Inequality

Social justice was a priority of the Cuban Revolution from the onset, and several of the reforms in the market for consumer goods, as well as the labor market mentioned above, targeted the huge social inequalities that were part of Cuban society in the 1950s[39]. Cuban sociologist Espina Prieto analyzes the years between 1959 and 1975 as a period of fundamental class changes:

> The extension of the state sector, increase in levels of employment, diversification of professional alternatives and the massive increase of general, technical and professional education operated as driving forces of this mobility." (M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 232).

The result was not only increased class mobility, but a radical reduction of income and consumption inequality as the majority of people became state employees and the rationed market was created. According to Espina Prieto (2004, pp. 233-235), this situation was stabilized and maintained during the next period between 1976 and 1988.

Efforts were also made to universalize access to cultural capital: a huge literacy campaign aimed at the whole population, free education, possibilities for workers to study and undergo specialized training, campaigns to make people formalize their unions by marriage, subsidies of cultural products (entry-fees to museums as well as tickets to the cinema, concerts and ballet) are examples of just some of these efforts. In many ways, however, I would say that what was valued was still the cultural capital of the (former) middle-class: higher education, art, etc.

Even though income- and consumption inequality diminished radically, society never became equal in the sense that *no* differences existed. In her study of ideology in Cuba in the 1980s, Rosendahl (1997, pp. 100-101) found that equity was more important than equality (see also Haddad, 2003, p. 57). A just society which gives equal opportunities to, and guarantees the subsistence of all, was the goal, not a society where everybody gets the same[40]. Material incentives were recognized as important at the time, and, as

[39] For a historical overview dealing, amongst other things, with class from colonial times and onwards see Pérez (2006). For a description of rural conditions as well as a brief sketch of urban social classes in 1946 see Nelson (1950). For an account of class in the period 1898-1958 see Ibarra (1998). For accounts of the changes in the lives of the urban poor after 1959 see García Alonso (1968); Calderón González & Loy Hierro (1970); Lewis, Lewis & Rigdon (1977a, 1977b, 1978) as well as Butterworth (1980).

[40] The emphasis in Cuban politics has, however, shifted over time and there has been an ongoing discussion in Cuban politics about moral and material incentives, equality and equity etc.

formulated by the first secretary in the town studied by Rosendahl: "The doctor can never be the same and never get the same as, for example, a cowhand" (quoted in Rosendahl, 1997, p. 100). In the words of Andaya (2009, pp. 358-359): "Prior to the crisis, physicians, engineers, and university professors represented the apex of socialism's social and economic hierarchy […]."

This was reflected in the General Salary Reform of 1983 which established a difference of 4.5 to 1 between the maximum and minimum state salary (M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 219). While this might seem to be a negligible difference, in a contemporary global comparison it shows that a certain level of low income inequality was always present and even desirable. Cuban sociological studies of that time differentiate between three "sociostructural components" described as being typical of socialism: intellectual, manual, and agricultural workers (see for example Díaz Tenorio, 2000, p. 6; M. Espina Prieto, 2003, p. 21). The important thing was for the state to control and monitor the basis of this difference so that it was in accordance with its definition of justice. Distinction had to be a result of salaried work for the state, studies, competence and political work – in short, of contributions to society and to the state. Higher education thus led to an increase in salary, and leadership positions led to certain privileges[41]. At the same time, a legal framework was created where things such as houses and cars could not be bought, and hard currency could not be used. The power to distribute economic capital was thus firmly in the hands of the state, guaranteeing its definition of justice. In the words of Togores & García (2004, p. 248):

> The only differences in inequality permitted were those that resulted from differences in work. Other factors that could contribute to differentiated access, such as remittances from abroad were limited as a matter of policy, at least in the legal, official economy, so as to ensure equality.

The Revolution thus meant changes not only in the degree of social stratification but in the basis for this difference. On the one hand, it did so by redefining the ways for access to economic capital: contributions to society, political commitment, higher education and work for the state[42] were paths to

[41] Note that according to Rosendahl (1997, p. 100) intermediate political positions did not lead to a life of luxury.

[42] Note, however, that one of the biggest problems of that time, according to several authors, was the failure to properly connect *productivity* with material rewards. See for example Martín Romero (2003).

distinction, and equality of opportunities was sought. On the other hand, it tried to universalize access to cultural capital.

While these changes profoundly transformed social stratification, there were also continuities. Hierarchies were, in many cases, hard to change and, in Butterworth's study, slum-dwellers that were relocated to modern apartments were still frowned upon by their new neighbors: "I don't know anything about the people down there. I get sick every time I go to the store and see their scandalous behavior and hear their foul language" (cited in Butterworth, 1980, p. 28). There were also continued differences in the habitus and life-styles of different groups. For example, in her comparison of occupational categories, Withers Osmond (1991) found significant differences in the attitudes towards work, family, and gender, between female factory workers and professional women. Studies of gender (see for example López Vigil, 1998; Rosendahl, 1997) and 'race' (de la Fuente, 2001; R. Espina Prieto & Rodríguez Ruiz, 2006) come to similar conclusions: inequalities diminished radically, but there was also much continuity.

With the Special Period and the reforms implemented in order to come to terms with the crisis came new changes in social stratification. The economic crisis meant that the state was unable to maintain previous levels of social spending, and households had to rely more on the incomes of their members. At the same time, state salaries became less important than other incomes and access to CUC was now crucial.

In her characterization of the new and more complex society emerging after the Special Period, Espina Prieto (2003, pp. 23-29; 2004, pp. 219-220; 2006, pp. 14-15; 2010) mentions various factors. First and foremost, there is a re-stratification where income inequalities grow and new groups emerge: the poor, socially vulnerable and/or marginal, as well as the "small urban middle class" (M. Espina Prieto, 2006, p. 14, my translation) or "worker elite" (M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 219). Another aspect is that the sources of income and their relative importance have changed as incomes unrelated to state employment (for example remittances and informal work) are the ones generating the highest incomes. Last but not least, Espina Prieto argues that the connections between income inequality and other factors of social stratification such as gender, "race", and place of residence, have grown.

Several authors (López Vigil, 1998; Pearson, 1997; Pérez Izquierdo, 2003a; Pertierra, 2008; Toro-Morn, Roschelle, & Facio, 2002) argue that the impact

of the Special Period was gendered. The crisis meant cuts in electricity and water, lack of gas for stoves, and scarcities of food and hygienic products. More time had to be spent working in the home and, due to the unequal distribution of responsibilities for household work, there was a decrease in women's participation in other areas of life: salaried work, political work etc[43].

Studies on race come to similar conclusions: those aspects of racial inequality that the Revolution failed to deal with gained new and increased significance as a consequence of the Special Period. Several authors point to the fact that non-white Cubans have less access to CUC since they are discriminated against in the tourist industry, have fewer relatives living abroad, and have less valuable physical assets such as large houses in attractive areas (Blue, 2007; de la Fuente, 2001; R. Espina Prieto & Rodríguez Ruiz, 2006; Fernandez, 2010; Sawyer, 2006; Zabala Argüelles, 2008).

When it comes to territoriality, increased differences in the economic development and living standard have been found between provinces (M. Espina Prieto, 2004, pp. 227-229) as well as between different *barrios* in the city of Havana (M. Espina Prieto, et al., 2005, pp. 15-17; Fernandez, 2010, pp. 80-106). In the words of Espina Prieto (2004, p. 217), "[…] the interconnected effect of the crisis on Cuba and the ensuing reforms following the collapse of the Soviet Union have interrupted the logic of systematically extending social equality."

In Havana in 2006, it was clear that some had more money than others, and differences in living standard could be quite big as a result of this. It was also clear that wealth was largely unconnected to formal salaries. Ana, a state employee in her fifties, living with her sickly adolescent son and her elderly parents in a suburb of Havana, commented on it in this way:

> Ana: Today there are more differences. When you visit other houses you'll notice. In this neighborhood people used to be more or less equal. All were humble people, workers, and all had their Russian refrigerator, their Russian TV…all that. But when they were going to give the electric appliances[44] I went to make the census for the CDR[45]. I went to all houses and saw that there are many, many differences. There are those that have

[43] This is, however, a contested issue. See Lundgren (2011, p. 35) for a discussion.

[44] She refers to the selling of subsidized household appliances during the Energy Revolution of 2006 .

[45] CDR = Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, neighborhood-based groups connected to the Party fulfilling many different functions, from gathering information about people living in the *barrio* to organizing parties.

> everything modern and many appliances and there are those that have had the same things and the same furniture for many years. There are big differences among people now.
> Maria: But why is that? Because people receive remittances?
> Ana: Yes, it could be that or that they work with tourism or something like that…

When speaking about rich people, my interlocutors often mentioned those that received remittances, the owners of successful formal or informal businesses operating in CUC, and those with access to said currency via their workplaces. The latter category is often specified not as those receiving part of their formal salary in CUC (as these are often small sums of around 10 CUC per month) but rather those receiving tips, as in the above quote, or those working in joint ventures earning a large informal salary in CUC.

As argued above, the basis for fair distinction prior to the Special Period was state control over the distribution of economic capital. With crisis and reforms, the ability of the state to control and monitor social stratification according to its definition of justice was severely weakened. Direct access to economic capital unrelated to formal work and independent of the state now competed with the legal structure that tried to impede a social stratification based solely on monetary income. In 2006, cars, mobile phones, and houses, could still not be legally bought but only earned through work for the state[46]. Other laws, mentioned above, tried to impede the creation of a Cuban economic middle-class by placing restrictions on private entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, a new basis for distinction, a new route for access to superior economic capital, had emerged, and unequal access to CUC had a fundamental effect on living standards.

Families and Households

Economy lies at the very heart of the definition of households as units where people share a living as well as crucial economic activities of (re)production and consumption. The range of different household compositions that I encountered during fieldwork was broad: from single-person households, through nuclear family ones, to extended three- or four-generation households. However, the overwhelming majority of my informants lived in households where the members were family. Kinship is, in other words, crucial when talking about households. But it is important to keep the two concepts apart; while households are about residence and economy, family is about kinship and the quality of social relations.

[46] Note that these restrictions on consumption have lessened since Raúl Castro came to power.

In Havana, family ideology is strong. "To me the family is everything. The most important thing I have in life is the family", as one middle-aged divorced woman with three adult children told me. It is generally held that when everything else fails, you can always count on your family to love, support, and help you. Cuban demographer Maria Elena Benítez Pérez gives voice to this same ideal in her scholarly writings:

> As a group [the family] refers to a specific set of persons of different sex and age, interconnected by consanguine, legal or consensual ties whose relations are characterized by *intimacy, solidarity and duration*. […] In the documents produced by the United Nations […] the family is usually conceptualized as a natural social institution, based on ties of kinship derived from matrimony, descent or adoption and constituted – in its original or nuclear form – by the; usually, although not necessarily; married parents, and their offspring, the sons and daughters, united by family ties reinforced by *love and mutual respect*. (Benítez Pérez, 2003, pp. 28-29 my emphasis)

Besides insinuations of a nuclear-family norm, this quote defines and describes families as units characterized by intimacy, solidarity, durability, love, and mutual respect. This is in accordance with emic notions of family, and a middle-aged single woman with two adult children characterized relations between family members as follows: "Love, respect, mutual help, communication…" In practice, of course, families in Havana, as well as in the rest of the world, might contain both intimacy and hostility, solidarity and deceit, duration and rupture, love and conflict and, lastly, respect as well as abuse. The above ideal is, however, precisely what shapes the expectations most people hold in relation to their family members and the rights and obligations which, as we will see in chapter six, structure the economy and morality of the household. *Ser familia*, being family, has to do with social obligations and expectations. In order to "be family" one must live up to these expectations and act in certain ways within the group. In the gap between genetic kinship and the practice of "being family", there is, then, some space for negotiation. Many times my interlocutors included non-kin (or pets) in what they considered to be their family, or excluded persons that were clearly kin.

One middle-aged woman gave me a typical answer to the question of what people she included in her family: her three adult children (two sons and one daughter), her daughters-in-law, her granddaughter, her husband, and her parents-in-law. Her parents were not included since they were dead and her sisters were not included since they had emigrated, had little contact with her

and had a history of conflicts between them. Her daughter's married lover was also definitely not included. Since she lived only with her daughter, the family unit became much larger than the residential unit and included individuals living in four different households, two of which were located outside Havana: one abroad (one son with his wife) and another in a town close to Havana (her husband and parents-in-law). All members are either consanguine or affinal kin to the woman but not all kin are included: because of the quality of the personal relationships, her sisters and her daughter's partner are not considered as part of her family.

In these kinds of negotiations, a matrifocal, or mother-centered, ideal of kinship could often be discerned. Matrifocality is a very problematic term (for critique see Blackwood, 2005a, 2005b; Fog Olwig, 1981; González, 1970; Parks Monagan, 1985; Yanagisako, 1977) and conventional definitions typically have to do with the absence of men in the household. I have chosen to examine the long discussion surrounding the term to arrive at a definition more suited to the focus of the present research.

Published in 1956, RT Smith's book *The Negro Family in British Guiana* introduced the expression "matrifocal family", a term which he subsequently developed and redefined many times. In his early texts, matrifocality was a gradual process related to a household's "developmental cycle". Women with small children could not engage in income-generating activities and thus depended on a husband or lover to provide, but this changed as sons grew up and began to earn:

> It is at this stage that one begins to see more clearly the underlying pattern of relationships within the domestic group; whereas the woman had previously been the focus of affective ties she now becomes the center of an economic and decision-making coalition with her children. This increasing "matrifocal" quality is seen whether the husband-father is present or not […] matrifocality is a property of the internal relations of male- as well as female-headed households. (Smith, 1996, p. 42)

Matrifocality thus has to do with "the underlying pattern of relationships within the domestic group", it is a "quality" and a "property of the internal relations of households" that has nothing to do with whether men are present or not.

Yanagisako proposes something similar as a solution to one of the big problems in the discussion on matrifocality – the underlying ideal of the nuclear household. Matrifocality is, in many ways, a term borne from the

surprised gaze of Western middle-class researchers when encountering other ways to form families and households. The result is, many times, a focus on what these "other" households lack:

> Further attempts at a more adequate understanding of female centrality require that we avoid the temptation to harp on what is absent in kinship in urban industrial societies and that we instead investigate the *pressures* present in these kinship systems at both the social and cultural levels. (Yanagisako, 1977, p. 218, my emphasis)

Building on these ideas[47], my definition of matrifocality is a strong cultural ideal that accentuates the life-long ties between a mother and her offspring. This creates normative expectations, "pressures" as Yanagisako puts it, on the members of a family. In this way, it certainly influences with whom people live but the definition *per se* does not have to do with residency and is not, as has been the case in some scholarly work, a synonym to "women-headed households".

In chapter six, we will see how this ideal shapes moral economic negotiations within the family. Here, however, it is sufficient to say that motherhood is a crucial element of womanhood but also that, at least ideally, it is often as *mothers* and *daughters* that women can expect the most in terms of loyalty – both given and taken – and as *sons* that men can expect the same.

Mother-love is, in fact, often contrasted to father-love or love between partners, creating an image of the first as unconditional, stable, and safe, while the latter are seen as more volatile and insecure in their conditionality. The absence (complete or partial) of a father in his offspring's life is, for example, viewed as a much lesser tragedy than the absence of a mother. Separations and divorces are common, and certainly seen as regrettable but normal. As an extension of this, maternal kin such as maternal aunts and uncles, maternal siblings and, especially, maternal grand-mothers are often also considered close.

This strong family morality and its matrifocal nature affect household composition in the sense that households often form around women. Besides family ideology, another very significant aspect shaping household composition is the availability (or not) of housing.

[47] See also Pertierra (2008) and González (1970).

In Havana, like in most capital cities, there is a severe housing shortage. Due to the economic problems of the country, there have been limited possibilities to build new and repair old housing stock. Another problem is that there is no market for houses and apartments[48]. A property cannot be bought or sold, only swapped, and the renting of dwellings is extremely restricted as it only operates in the private (formal and informal) economy[49]. There are, for example, no state-owned rentals that might provide more flexibility in the search for a dwelling. New possessions are either inherited or given to a person by the state, often as a reward or a privilege connected to an employment.

Before the Special Period in particular, and in 2006 to a lesser extent, there was the possibility to obtain a dwelling through a *microbrigada*, where professional and unprofessional construction-workers built their own buildings with materials given by the state. After finishing the construction of their building and maybe working on other buildings as well, they were given proprietary rights of their apartment. This could take many years and, like all other construction-projects, it has been negatively affected by the adverse economic situation since the Special Period. I know of no young person being part of a new such project or even imagining it as a future possibility to get a dwelling.

Above I mentioned the possibility of swapping houses. While a legal swap means changing one or two properties for another (or one property for two others), there is an informal dimension to this market in order to make it more flexible. A family needing a bigger dwelling might, for example, have a hard time finding someone that is willing to change to a smaller one. Factors such as location might help but, as can be imagined, it is often hard to find a good match and many times the solution is putting "money above" (*dinero por encima*). A dwelling worth more, in the eyes of the ones making the swap, might be changed for one worth less *plus* a certain sum of money. Money can also be used to buy out a co-proprietor. A couple going through divorce might, for example, not find someone with two apartments, which suit each of the ex-spouses. Here one of the ex-spouses might agree to sign over the property to the other one if presented with an adequate sum of

[48] This is, as already mentioned, changing at the time of writing.

[49] I only knew of one household renting their dwelling legally and they had to pay a high monthly rent since more than half of it was informal (i.e. in order to lower the taxes, the rent accounted for by the owner viz. the state was only a small part of the actual rent). The only reason they could afford it was that one of the two people living there had a job at a foreign-owned entity with a considerable salary in CUC.

money. In these cases, everything will look legal in the paperwork, while the monetary dimension of the swaps is completely informal.

Buying a property from scratch, i.e. without a previous property, is harder since the paperwork must be falsified, and this costs money. It is, however, the only solution for people without the possibility to inherit a dwelling, and unable or unwilling to live with their parents or other family members. Needless to say the risks are huge since both money and dwelling might be lost if the illegal transaction is discovered.

For people wanting to establish an independent household, the housing situation is often mentioned as their biggest problem in life and a constant source of frustration[50]. Together with economic stress, this was a common way to explain the high rates of divorce/separation, especially since there are very few real possibilities to ever get what is so desperately wanted and needed – an independent dwelling. Legal possibilities are limited and informal ones require sums of CUC that are practically impossible to save up on a salary and even on the income of most informal businesses. Large remittances or periods of work abroad are often the only possibilities that are even imaginable and they are most often close to impossible. When I asked young people with plans to migrate why they wanted to leave the country, they often talked about migration as the *only* possibility to become independent and start a household of their own.

Given all this, ownership of a dwelling is a highly valued asset, and one way to get access to a house is of course through one's spouse. Matrimony or consensual union might in fact also lead to regular possession of a house, especially in the case of a woman who has a child with a man who owns a house. Couples might co-own a dwelling and, in case of separation, swap it for two dwellings. But even if no formal co-ownership exists, a woman with a child by a house-owning man is said to have a right to the house in the case of separation[51]. Many women have thus gotten their houses through a separation with a man (with whom they had children) that owned a house and a subsequent swap where the house was changed for two. It might be for this

[50] For more about housing and how it affects interpersonal relations see Lundgren (2011, pp. 68-71) as well as Hamilton (2009).

[51] I don't know to what extent this is stipulated in the law but since women often are responsible for children after a divorce the opposite would mean that the father puts his own child on the street and this is considered very bad indeed. See also Lundgren (2011, p. 69) for an anecdote/urban legend about a man losing multiple houses to women he had children with.

reason that many of the dwellings where my interlocutors lived were owned by one of the (older) women in the household.

I have heard many, more or less complicated, stories about how people got their house or apartment. One woman told me the following story. At the time of the conversation, she lived in a house together with her elderly parents, brother, sister, adult son and teenage nephew (her sister's son). She and her son lived in a semi-independent room in the front of the house. Before moving there she had lived with her husband in his house. After a couple of years they decided to separate but he refused to swap the house. She had to move back in with her parents, who lived in a small apartment at the time, and she slept in the living room while her little son slept with his grandparents:

> At night I lay down and cried and cried because I didn't know what to do. [My ex-husband] simply didn't want to split the house and I couldn't do anything[52]. After some years his mother contacted me and said that she couldn't live knowing that her grandson didn't even have a roof so she had gotten hold of a small room for me. It was really a small apartment which she had divided in two. One part was for my son – because it was for him rather than for me – and the other part was for the ex-wife of her other son. She had, in other words, gotten a small room for each grandson. It was a small place and very far from central Havana. My parents lived in a small apartment that was more modern than this house [where they now live]. It was located here, on the same street. After some time…well there were several factors: this house came up for a swap, my son wanted to move back and my *concuñi* [the ex-wife of her ex-brother-in-law] offered to buy my part of the apartment for 20,000 MN. I thought long and hard and said: 'What am I doing living so far away from my family? Here, at the end of the world?' And I talked to my parents. I suggested that they swap their apartment for this house that was in rather bad condition but much bigger and had possibilities of being turned into something nice. I tried to have foresight and think about what we could do with time. I would put in my 20,000 *pesos* [for reparations] and this room on the front and the porch would belong to me and my son. So that's how we got here.

Complicated stories like this were the norm rather than the exception and possession of a dwelling often required ingenuity and stamina coupled with sheer luck and coincidence. Needless to say, the housing shortage and lack of a housing market (neither for rentals nor for possessions) led to over-crowded dwellings and extended households with three or more generations living together, like the one described in the example above.

[52] This indicates that there might be no legal way for a divorced/separated mother to claim rights to her ex-partner's house.

It is, however, important to note that extended households are not necessarily seen as a 'problem', or an involuntary situation associated with housing shortage. Culturally there are strong moral obligations for offspring to care for their elderly parents and this, of course, means that extended households might rather be a result of family morality. However, judging by the many young frustrated people I got to know, it appears to be widely held that adults (especially couples with offspring) should have an independent dwelling and should live together with family members from earlier generations only when the latter are unable to care for themselves.

The relationship between an individual and his or her in-laws is, furthermore, viewed as difficult and conflict-ridden, and the desire for nuclear families to establish their own households is expressed by people of all generations. The son of the woman quoted above, a not very religious man in his twenties, had "Genesis 2:24" tattooed on his arm, a reference to the following biblical quote: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall join to his wife: and they shall be one flesh[53]." When asked why, he explained: "Even animals leave their parents and get independent! I think bears leave their parents at two years of age. That is natural! And look at my mother, a fifty year old still living with her mother and father…" Sharing a tiny room with his mother, he was as good an example of this "unnatural" state as his mother.

As economic units, households contain as much joint work, solidarity, pooling of resources, and sharing, as they include inequalities, conflicts, and unequal distributions of resources and responsibilities. These inequalities often have to do with factors such as gender, age, and access to or possession of assets. The division of labor and responsibilities within the household is, for example, clearly gendered (see also Pertierra, 2008). Women generally have more responsibility for work in the house and for childcare than men, while men generally have more responsibilities when it comes to generating material incomes. Since many women in Havana engage in wage-labor or other income-generating activities, this often implies a double or triple workload as few men engage in housework except in what is seen as specifically masculine tasks such as reparations and maintenance, as well as carrying heavy things. When men do engage in other tasks related to the house, this is often formulated in terms of them "helping out" in the house,

[53] Note that the same quotation from the Bible is made reference to by David, a practicing Christian with the same longing for independence, in chapter six.

implying that the responsibility still lies on the woman or women of the household. In order to ease the burden of a double or triple workload, women often share housework and childcare, and this is one of the advantages of extended households with several women.

When it comes to the responsibility to generate incomes, this is something that often falls more heavily to men than to women. There is an ideal of the male bread-winner[54] that is part of a masculine identity but that does not necessarily mean that he has to be the sole provider. In other words, while men often consider income generation as part of their self-image and responsibility, this does not necessarily exclude women in the same household (mothers, wives, daughters) from income generation. Motherhood is, furthermore, not seen as necessarily conflicting with income generation. There is cheap childcare (although the quantity is insufficient) and income generation is seen as a rather important *part* of motherhood since mothers are supposed to provide for their children. This is especially so in the far from uncommon cases of solo-mothering.

When it comes to children's role in the household, it is safe to say that their economic responsibilities are rather limited. Child labor is illegal and there is a free educational system in which nine years of basic schooling are compulsory. These legal realities are rather well reflected in the way my interlocutors viewed children's and adolescents' responsibilities and duties. The children's role in the urban household is simply to go to school and study, and, while they may be solicited to help out at home (especially girls), they generally have no big economic responsibilities. This of course changes with age, and as children become young adults new responsibilities might be put on their shoulders. Particularly in households where there are no adult men, young men might be requested to contribute in a substantial way to the household economy. But even higher education is free and if young adults continue to the pre-university (10^{th} to 12^{th} grade) and then technical school or university, they are often supported financially by their parents until graduation. As university studies might carry on until the student is in his or her mid-twenties it is not unusual for individuals to be maintained by their parents up to that age. Economically speaking, children are expenses, and it is common for people to talk about what a strain it is for a household economy to incorporate children and relate this directly to Cuba's low birth-rate.

[54] See Safa (1995) for more about the ideal of the male breadwinner in Cuba. For a discussion on how men's possibilities to provide influence couplehood in Havana see Lundgren (2011, pp. 62-67).

With legal, free, and non-stigmatized abortion, as well as cheap and easily accessible contraception, there is a space for reproductive planning that is quite unique for Latin America and the Caribbean. This, together with the economic strains, low infant-mortality, and high life-expectancy, has led to a sharp decline in fertility rates, and I would say that it is uncommon for a woman in Havana to have more than three children, while one or two children per woman is the most common scenario.

When it comes to personal access to and ownership of, resources, these, of course, give power in the decision-making and negotiations within the household. Providing an important share to the household budget is often formulated as being the one putting food on the table and gives substantial bargaining power. Dependent members might be controlled and disciplined with reference to the fact that they "eat at my table" and this gives the provider the right to decide or to demand, for example, contributions in terms of labor, obedience of certain rules and more personal space. Possession of the dwelling is another such power. Houses and apartments belong to one or several individuals, and the proprietor(s) is also the one(s) that ultimately makes decisions regarding who can live there. In other words, a person in possession of a house has the power to include or exclude household members and this gives substantial bargaining-power.

In the household economy, food, clothes, and hygienic products, are often mentioned as the biggest expenses. Except for a few years of relatively low monthly installments to the state when taking possession of a dwelling (be it given or inherited) there are no direct housing expenses. Costs for water, gas, and waste-management, are rather low and always in MN, while telephone and, especially, electricity costs have increased and can be an important expenditure for a household. According to my calculations based on the household budgets I collected, the cost for electricity, gas, and water, was between 40 and 50 MN per month per household. Households with a telephone paid approximately 45 MN per month in telephone bills and the monthly expenditure on rationed goods was about 20 MN per person. Other expenses depended heavily on income.

Recent Changes

It is worth noting that Cuban society in general and the framework for everyday economies in particular, are undergoing profound changes as this is

being written. At the Sixth Party Congress held in April 2011, it was agreed to "actualize" the Cuban economy and a set of guidelines for how to do this were approved (PCC, 2011).

Even before the Congress, it was announced that over one million state employees were to be laid off. At the same time, the private economy was to be expanded, opening up possibilities for more people to become entrepreneurs and giving them the option to contract employees.

Other changes suggested in the guidelines approved at the congress are: the gradual abolition of the dual economy; changes to the subsidized rationed market, which will go from being universal to needs-based; and the opening up of a property market. It is still too early to say *how* exactly all this will affect everyday economies, but changes do seem to be under way.

Having given a short historical overview, as well as a more detailed history and description of the conditions under which everyday economies are made – the segmented market for consumer goods, as well as the labor market; the situation of (in)equality and the characteristics of households – I will now move on to look more closely at how people perceived their economic situation in life.

3

Evaluating Living Standard

Teresa is a middle aged woman living with her young adult son in a small room in a house shared with her extended family. She has managed to fit a tiny kitchen in the room and runs a separate household economy from the rest of the family. She works as a saleswoman in an insurance company, earning 600 MN per month plus a bonus of 15-28 CUC[55] if the company does well and if she fulfills her sales-quota. Her son occasionally makes a few CUC through unlicensed activities. When talking about her economic situation her voice is strained with emotion:

"I like my job and it's really the only good thing I have. The only problem is, the salary is not enough. I could get another job making more money but everything is illegal. The job I used to have was good, but illegal – giving Spanish lessons to tourists from the US. I combined it with my normal job and loved it, but now that this Bush-person [makes a dismissive gesture] changed the laws there are no more students. Now the only extra income I have besides my salary is occasional gifts from friends abroad and former students."

She makes a pause before continuing with an anguished look: "Sometimes you feel like this [puts her hands to her throat and pretends to choke herself]. Dios aprieta pero no ahoga[56]*, as they say. You always solve your problems but you never know how. Someone always helps you but you never know who. The other day, for example, I had no money and a client came by to pay an insurance premium and he paid it in cash. And that never happens. But he paid in cash and left me a 5 CUC tip."*

[55] This makes for a total per capita monthly income of 487-650 MN if the bonus is included.

[56] A popular saying in line with "God won't give you more than you can handle". The literal translation is "God squeezes but doesn't strangle".

"But you didn't know that the day before and that is where the insecurity and stress comes from, right?" I ask her.

She continues speaking as if she didn't hear my question: "Sometimes I really freak out. I freak out. And saving is almost impossible. Here the only people that can save are the ones with a business or those that work for a company [joint venture]. The only thing I can save for is to buy a pair of shoes for my son. Luckily I always have somebody I can ask to lend me some money when I find myself in a rough spot. I have a friend I can ask for 150 or 200 MN which is not much but at least it gets me through a weekend. My father also usually has some money because he is old and likes to have some money tucked away."

***

In this chapter I will show that while the experiences of deep and continuous stress expressed by Teresa above, and by Elena in chapter two, are practically universal amongst my interlocutors; they refused to conform to conventional tales of deprivation and poverty. When dealing with evaluations of the standard or quality of life I encountered two types of refusals: the refusal to be content with 'basic' needs, and the refusal to be labeled 'poor'. Both had to do with creating self-respect and resisting stigmatization and disempowerment. This chapter explores the lived experiences of stress and scarcity as well as the two refusals mentioned above, creating a complex image of the living standard in Havana and how it is lived and evaluated by the people I spoke to.

Living Standard and Poverty

In some ways this chapter is about poverty. But at the same time it is written to show what a problematic term 'poverty' is and to question if it should be used at all. In order to find a neutral starting point from which to begin this questioning I have chosen to use the concept of living standard. During fieldwork this was my way of talking to people about their situation in life without forcing them to do so in terms of a specific discourse: about poverty, about rights, about economy or about something else. It left the issue of what to include in their narratives as open as possible. In this text the concept plays the same role. It allows me to speak about how people compared their situation with that of others, what words they used and what experiences they made reference to when speaking about how they were faring, and the ways

in which they negotiated things such as normality, stress, pride, deprivation and fulfillment in relation to their specific situation in life. However, it does not allow me to ignore and discard the concept of poverty completely. In both scholarly work and politics this is the principal idiom in which living standard is described and, as we will see, while being mostly silenced in Cuba it is there, implicitly, in the ongoing negotiations about how to evaluate life.

Economist Amartya Sen is one of the most influential scholars theorizing poverty and he has made a huge impact on how the issue is dealt with both in research and in policy. It is in many ways thanks to Sen that contemporary definitions of poverty often move beyond crude calculations of income-levels and caloric intake to include non-material aspects, and make room not only for biological survival but also for the avoidance of shame, the fulfillment of self-respect and the specificities of cultural context (Chant, 2006; Sen, 1983; Sida, 2004; Zabala Argüelles, 2010a). The issue of 'poor people's' own views regarding poverty has thus become an important part of poverty-research (Booth, Leach, & Tierney, 1999; Chambers, 1995; Moore, Choudhary, & Singh, 1998).

It is, however, questionable if these complex and culture-specific definitions are actually employed to shape research and interventions or if they serve simply as lip-service in the introductions of documents and texts. According to Chambers (1995, p. 180), "The classic pattern in erudite analysis is to start with a recognition that poverty is much more than income or consumption but then to allow what has been measured to take over and dominate." Nevertheless, it would be futile for me to make the case for a move beyond biological "basic" needs to a wider perspective including people's own definitions of a normal life – this has already been done. What *is* surprisingly absent in studies on living standard is an analysis of power and a critical look at the act of defining somebody as poor. "The 'poor'", writes Wratten (1995, p. 16), "are labeled as poor by outsiders, not according to their own criteria."

In critical poverty studies, the question posed is typically: "How do those people whom we label 'poor' view themselves?"(Moore, et al., 1998, p. 3). Even though this question theoretically leaves open the possibility of emic resistance to a poverty discourse, texts of this type seldom question *if* the people in question view themselves as poor. The issue of the political dimension of the discourse of poverty – "What is it we do when we define someone as poor? What consequences does it have? What relations of power

do we make use of and create? What does it *mean* to be defined or define oneself as poor?" – is even more absent in this kind of literature.

Anthropologist Arturo Escobar (1995, pp. 30, 53-54) and post-development scholar Majid Rahnema (1992) have pointed out how the discourse of poverty has been used to consolidate the unequal relations between the modern developed parts of the world and the "Third World". The whole development discourse, argues Escobar, builds on a tale of difference between reformers and those about to be reformed and, at the same time, of similarity within the categories. What is it that erases the differences between "a squatter in Mexico City, a Nepalese peasant and a Tuareg nomad" so that they can be seen as a distinct category different from the west and in need of (the same kind of) development? Escobar writes:

> Development assumes a teleology to the extent that it proposes that the "natives" will sooner or later be reformed; at the same time, however, it reproduces endlessly the separation between reformers and those to be reformed by keeping alive the premise of the Third World as different and inferior, as having *a limited humanity* in relation to the accomplished European. […] The signifiers of "poverty", "illiteracy," "hunger," and so forth have already achieved a fixity as signifieds of "underdevelopment" which seems impossible to sunder. (Escobar, 1995, pp. 53-54, my emphasis)

Sociologist Lynne Haney (2000, 2002) has shown how this same discourse has been used in relation to the states in transition from socialism to capitalism with devastating effects for the newly labeled "poor". The author looks at the changes brought about in Hungary as welfare programs went from being universal to needs-based. The latter, it was (and is) argued by the IMF and other counseling entities, is far more rational and humane as the state's resources are channeled to the needy who can then be helped in a better way than before[57]. Through the ethnographic material gathered by Haney in welfare offices, however, another picture emerges. In the needs-based welfare program, new differences are created between the needy and the not-needy. The category of 'poor' becomes relevant and, far from being more humane, this leads to stigmatization and de-humanization. Welfare workers despise their clients and talk about their looks, behavior and smell in considerably derogatory ways (see for example Haney, 2002, p. 201).

[57] Some of the reforms made (or hinted at) by Raúl Castro – for example, the possible elimination of the universal subsidized rationing system – certainly point to a similar development in Cuba.

What these authors do is politicize the concept of poverty and show it to be a normative concept used in a specific relation of power and inequality. Poverty, as a label, is involved in processes of othering, de-humanizing and discrimination. While poverty is always a political term, I argue that it might be even more so in the case of Cuba. As a socialist country, Cuba represents a political and economic model which is counter-hegemonic in the contemporary international context and thus constantly defended, as well as attacked, with highly symbolic, ideological and emotional stakes. This goes for scholars, policy-makers, journalists and activists. It also colors the narratives of the people I spoke to. Rather than being straight-out descriptions of "objective" economic conditions, such as level of income, evaluations of living standard were sometimes influenced by a political stance.

Somebody that, according to the numbers, had a better household economy might evaluate themselves as poor, while someone with less income might consider him/herself as having a living standard somewhere "in the middle". The political dimension in these evaluations took on a special importance since they were made with me – a foreigner – as interlocutor. I sometimes found that people with a critical stance towards the Cuban government expected me to aim at "revealing" the truths of how bad Cubans lived, more in line with a foreign journalist searching for juicy details, and they also tended to make more negative evaluations as a way to critique the political system. Those that were supportive of the Revolution, on the other hand, tended to make more positive evaluations, underlining the ways in which the government – despite working in the context of a poor marginalized country – tried their best. Here, the fact of me being a foreigner was important in the sense that many supporters view critique as an internal affair that, while necessary for the better management of internal questions, should not be revealed to outsiders.

When it comes to Cuban scholars, several authors (Añé Aguiloche, 2005, p. 2; M. Espina Prieto, 2004, pp. 209, 223; Zabala Argüelles, 2010a, pp. 81-82) point out that poverty disappeared from the agenda of Cuban researchers as a consensus was formed on the success of the Revolution in guaranteeing basic needs and establishing social justice. But as living conditions worsened for large groups of the population during and after the Special Period, the issue has been subject to a certain revival. However, most Cuban and many non-Cuban scholars seem to agree that the term poverty, if applicable at all to the Cuban case, must be used with certain reservations since conditions in Cuba are vastly different from the rest of the region in terms of state-guaranteed

social security. Chávez Negrín (2000, p. 15, my translation) sums up his position, which is representative[58]of this thinking, as follows, "[in Cuba], despite the crisis, there is no extreme poverty even though there are people facing serious difficulties in satisfying very important needs (principally, I would argue, food-stuffs, housing and transportation)".

This way of framing poverty, or 'extreme poverty', as something located outside of Cuba was also present in the narratives of the people I spoke to. When making evaluations regarding living standard, they often took a comparative stance using notions about how other people live as a measuring stick. Processes of globalization and access to information on the life of other people are important here. Comparative evaluations often resulted in a position in the middle and a standard answer was: "there are those that are better off but also those that are worse off", both when comparisons were made on a local and on a global level. Weinreb Rosenberg (2009, p. 5) found similar evaluations in her study of the "unsatisfied citizen-consumers" in Havana, and so did Añé Aguiloche (2005, p. 18) in her study of what she calls "poor people" in the same city. When it came to global comparisons, references were often made to the lack of first-hand information. The following quotes are taken from two different interviews where I asked people if they considered themselves to be poor. The first respondent is Elena, the laboratory technician introduced in chapter two. The second is a middle-aged woman living in a large extended household with informal incomes:

> [I think I'm in the middle], there are many rich people but how many poor people isn't there? At least on TV here they show many poor people from other parts of the world.
>
> Well…no…I would say that we are poor people that are rich [*somos pobres ricos*]…I manage [*vivo desahogada*]. I have enough for clothes, food and shoes. Judging from what I see on television – which might be all lies, I wouldn't know since I have never traveled – there are people in the world that are much poorer.

The quotes are almost identical and typical of how my interlocutors described their position as "in the middle". They also point to the politics of my question, making reference to the Cuban state's interest in showing poor people on national TV. Finally, they make an important point – very few of

[58] See also Álvarez Suárez (2004, p. 315); Añé Aguiloche (2005, pp. 4, 19); Espina Prieto et al. (2005, pp. 16-17); Pérez Izquierdo (2003b, p. 16); Ramirez (2005, pp. 147-148); Uriarte (2005, pp. 110-111); Vázquez Penelas (2005, pp. 107-108) and Zabala Argüelles (2010a, pp. 89-90; 2010b, pp. 111-112).

the people I spoke to considered themselves to be poor. As I will show below, they did not do this with reference to Cuban exceptionalism and state-guaranteed social justice, as the scholars mentioned above, but with reference to themselves as capable and worthy human beings.

Economic Stress

Stories of economic stress, of the hardships of everyday life, and of a general feeling of living a life that was lacking and not *normal* pervaded my fieldwork. Problems related to housing, economy, transportation, bureaucracy and work were often considered jointly, and there were many ways to express the hardship of everyday material life in Cuba: *"aqui uno pasa mucho trabajo", "hay que luchar mucho", "todo es un problema"* etc. In these expressions daily life is characterized as hard work, struggle and problems, and even if one can find oneself in a good position regarding one aspect of life (such as money) another one might be hard (such as housing). A young man living by himself and getting by on a minimum-salary state job and some irregular unlicensed activities talked about several different sources of stress in his daily life:

> I feel much stress for various reasons. It stresses me to have something I have to pay: the telephone or electricity bill for example. […] Now that I don't have a fridge I also feel a lot of stress because I have to cook on a daily basis and cannot store food. I also had a leak from the apartment above in my kitchen and the worst part was that it was water from the toilet, sewage that dripped onto my kitchen counter. The whole kitchen got stained and there was a terrible stench. I managed to fix it but it really made me insane! Another thing that stresses me is not having running water. As things are now, I have water now and then…lack of water and filthiness make me crazy! Lack of money and the responsibility for the economy of the household also makes me feel a lot of stress.

Getting food on the table was frequently talked about as an example of a daily struggle where one constantly thought about how to get the next meal. "It is hard to sit down to eat seeing your parents' worried faces thinking about how to put food on the table tomorrow" as a young woman about to finish her university studies put it. When talking about this, many emphasized that the stress they feel is not exactly related to *if* they were going to solve their most pressing needs but rather *how*. It is not a question of starving but one of never having a ready and/or stable solution. When asked if she feels economic insecurity, a skilled worker with a state employment answered:

> Yes. But what I feel is more stress than insecurity because there is always somebody that saves you. You can always ask a friend or family member for money. But I can feel stress: 'And now what will I buy? What will I cook?' There comes a time in the month when money is short and then what I do is cut down somewhat on the food.

"Nobody starves here" was a phrase that was constantly repeated in interviews and conversations. Below I will come back to the symbolic meanings of hunger, but here it can be seen as another way to frame that the insecurity felt was not so much related to actually getting by but to what the solution would be this month, week, or day. It was, in other words, not a matter of life or death, but of never finding a once-and-for-all solution.

In chapter two, Elena described her situation in life in the following manner: "There are times that are better off and other times that are tighter." The exact phrase is "*Hay rachas más desahogadas y otras más apretadas.*" The first adjective, *desahogado*, is literally the negation of *ahogado* which means drowned or choked and has many other meanings. "Better off" or "less stressful" are options in this context but the literal meaning gives, I think, a feeling for how economic stress is experienced: as if one is unable to breathe. The second adjective, *apretado*, means tight, clenched, or pressed. This gives another hint at how economic stress is felt: as if one is being squeezed. The saying, "*Dios aprieta pero no ahoga"* (lit. God squeezes but doesn't strangle), used by Teresa in the introduction to this chapter, was another expression used several times in interviews to describe life as hard and full of struggles. It also reproduces the above metaphors used to talk about how stress is felt as a tightness that impedes breathing.

The hardness and stress of everyday life is, according to my interlocutors, almost impossible to avoid completely and they consider this almost generalized state of stress to be a big problem. It is used to explain a variety of negative phenomena, both on a personal and on a societal level. On a personal level, it is directly connected to health problems through notions about the psychosomatic effects of negative feelings. Problems related to the heart, and those that can be labeled as related to *nervios*[59] (i.e. nerves), in particular, are often considered to be products of stress or strong emotions. Weight-loss, headaches, abnormal blood-pressure, insanity, heart attacks and cerebral hemorrhage are, for example, often used when talking about the dangers of stress. Besides stress related to every-day life, these health-

[59] For much more about 'nerves', its links to hunger and the medicalization of deprivation in Brazil see Scheper-Hughes (1992, pp. 167-215)

problems are also seen as related to strong emotions such as the death or migration of a relative, falling in love, or suffering heart-break. On a social level, this stress is expressed in the problematic behavior of people towards each other: aggressiveness, rudeness, dishonesty and general lack of respect. As seen in chapter two, divorces are also often explained in relation to economic stress and the impossibility for many couples to have an independent living-arrangement.

A common theme of conversation is the horrors of public transport: lack of time-tables, infrequency of buses, crowdedness, deteriorated and mal-functioning buses, heat, groping, stench, people passing out, fights, verbal encounters, frustration, and broken eyeglasses. When making a visit I was often greeted with a question about how the journey went, especially if known to be long and complicated. Incidents of impoliteness or violence (verbal or physical) were then often explained with reference to the stress of everyday life: "The thing is that people have so many problems in their lives that they end up giving way to their frustrations on the buses and start to treat everybody badly."

Since stress is considered to be so dangerous, both physically and socially, and since there seem to be no ready once-and-for-all solutions to the problems that cause it, it is important to find ways to cope. Coping mechanisms are manifold[60] but two were recurrent during fieldwork: an active attitude of "not worrying", and the use of psychopharmacological drugs.

The most important coping mechanism mentioned in conversations and interviews was an attitude of *no coger lucha*, i.e. not to bother, not worrying and getting all worked up. This attitude is also noted by Zabala Argüelles (2010a, p. 141) in her study of "poor families" in Havana. When it is not within your power to solve the problem, the solution seems to be to simply let it go and not worry. This might be as hard as it is important since it is so connected to health and – ultimately – survival. The following is an answer to a question about economic insecurity or stress. The person speaking was a middle-aged woman living with her partner, two children (one adult and one in school) and a pre-school grandchild. Income-generating activities in the

[60] Note that income-generating activities are to be dealt with in chapter five – here, what concerns us are the ways in which people tried to cope with the stress they actually felt in order to prevent the negative consequences of it.

household were very flexible and changed often. At the time of the interview, incomes stemmed from entrepreneurship and employment – both informal:

> No. I don't feel insecurity or stress because *no cogo lucha*. I don't get worked up or live in stress (*no me atormento ni vivo en el estrés*). Sometimes I get up in the morning without money and without food but I know I will lay down with money and food. I used to think a lot about what to cook tomorrow but then I thought: 'and if I have everything figured out for tomorrow and I die today then nobody will know my solution to tomorrow's problems so what's it good for?'. The thing is, you cannot stress because then you'll go crazy! For me it caused a lot of headaches. And the problem always is going to bed with a full stomach because falling asleep hungry is very ugly. Here, nobody dies of hunger because everybody *inventan*[61]. All 11 million Cubans spend their lives *inventando*. And the thing is, you can always *inventar* in order to get what you want. You can sell something…*inventar*!

This woman recounted her experience of scarcity: getting up in the morning without money and food; the possible consequences of letting this lead to stress – insanity and headaches; the futility of making plans – they must always be short-term day-to-day solutions anyway; and about her way of coping with this, to simply not worry and to have faith in her own ability to make ends meet through inventiveness[62]. Her talk about the close possibility of death should, in my opinion, be interpreted as a way of expressing a short-term view of life and a way to not only cope but also enjoy life in the day-to-day. If the important moment is here and now, one can enjoy it even though the future may be highly insecure materially. Making plans, saving money or making long-term investments, are thus less important than finding short-term solutions to daily problems, enjoying what one has when one has it and cultivating an ability to improvise and take advantage of the situations that emerge in the everyday.

Another way to cope with stress is through the use of psychopharmacological drugs. The use of tranquilizers, barbiturates and anti-depressants is widespread, especially amongst middle-aged women. The most common medicaments are diazepam (i.e. valium), meprobamate, nitrazepam and chlordiazepoxide. These are often self-medicated and are thus not part of a treatment supervised by a physician, but rather used as a ready solution to feelings of anxiety, stress, sadness and hopelessness. Besides being available for purchase on the informal market, they are also shared between neighbors

[61] The literal translation of the verb *inventar* is to invent. For more about the uses of the expression in Havana see chapter five.

[62] See Rosendahl (1994, p. 92) for a quotation expressing the same attitude.

and relatives in cases of need and are often taken daily and in combination with each other in a *coctelito* (cocktail). When doing fieldwork in 2006 there was a campaign on national TV against self-medication. The program *La dosis exacta* (The Exact Dose) featured a prominent pharmacologist informing about the dangers of self-medication (not only with psychopharmacological drugs), and an animated humoristic spot shown between programs featured a person taking a *coctelito* that resulted in the distortion of his face. There is, in other words, a consciousness among the Cuban authorities of this widespread and undoubtedly dangerous practice.

The above paints a picture of everyday economic life as a never ending struggle to make ends meet that is deeply stressful. It is within this context of stress and deprivation that the two refusals mentioned above – the refusal to talk about "basic" needs and the refusal to be labeled "poor" – are made.

Refusing to be Content with the Basic

While I did use the term "basic needs" during fieldwork, it became more and more obvious that people I talked to resisted it and demanded that their life be lifted from the basic to "the normal". My interlocutors did not see a life where their basic needs were (barely) fulfilled as good or even normal, especially not if the fulfillment of these needs was never guaranteed and thus required constant preoccupation and struggle. It was seen and lived as a meager life where people did not feel well and where one muddles through rather than lives in the full sense of the word. They were not content with such a life and strove for, dreamed of, demanded, and longed for more. In conversations about basic needs people therefore often explicitly included necessities that they knew had nothing to do with what was habitually considered basic. The following quotes are two different answers to the question of what basic necessities are. A single woman in her fifties, living by herself and working as an unskilled state employee, answered as follows: "Food. Having a balanced diet. But I really consider everything to be important: the TV, the blender, the fridge. All those minimal things are also necessary." A woman in her thirties, living in an extended household and working as a highly skilled state employee, answered: "Food, water, hygiene and electricity. […] And other things that are less basic but that are necessities nevertheless, for example the TV for relaxation. […] And music and literature."

The definition of what is necessary and what is not is highly political since it sets the limits of what one can reasonably expect and demand in life and, in the case of Havana, how these expectations can be formulated in relation to the state[63]. The refusal to contend with "basic" needs – which are interpreted as needs connected to the biological body – are, then, a way to carve out a space in which to articulate expectations and want. It is an effort to demand a life beyond mere survival where "the normal" can be fulfilled.

In the narratives of my interlocutors, most necessities could be included in three broad categories: housing, cleanliness, and food. Note that these are three material aspects of life that are as important as they are hard to satisfy for the people in my study. Access to health care and education were, for example, seldom mentioned, while I am certain that Cubans in general do see these as necessary. The only difference between the necessities that *are* mentioned and those that are not is that the former are needs they have to struggle to fulfill while the latter are more or less readily accessible. The same goes for individual narratives: when talking about needs, people often parted from their particular needs at the moment and generalized them as needs that anyone would have in their situation. People without a home of their own, for example, emphasized the universal need of a dwelling. This indicates that the things considered necessary vary with the material conditions of the people involved, so that, in conditions of partial scarcity, the needs that are guaranteed might not be as present in people's narratives about living standard as the needs that are harder to fulfill.

The three categories - housing, cleanliness and food - are broad and, in line with the two quotes above, the important issue here is normality, not the covering of basic biological needs. Housing means access to a dwelling, *un techo* (a roof), but is talked about as a *functional* dwelling including specific aspects of housing that are lacking in the life of the person making the statement. References might be made to the condition of the house, arguing that being able to make repairs is a necessity in life; with reference to legal status, arguing that it is necessary to have the stability and security of formalized living conditions (in Havana this means possession of a dwelling); with reference to crowdedness, arguing that physical space and/or privacy is a necessity; or with reference to commodity, arguing that running water, electricity, furniture and some appliances (such as a refrigerator or a fan) are needs that must be fulfilled.

[63] For more about moral negotiations in relation to and expectations towards the state see chapter four.

Cleanliness refers to the necessity of having a clean house as well as a clean and presentable body. Cleaning, washing and doing the dishes are related to the hygiene of the house and demands access to water, detergents and cleaning equipment such as brooms and cloths as well as the possibility to replace old and tattered towels and sheets. In her study of women and households in Santiago de Cuba, Pertierra (2008, p. 763) mentions "the physical state and cleanliness of their house" as being one of the most important sources of status for adult women, intimately connected to morality through notions such as respectability. Personal cleanliness is, I would say, considered a vital necessity and moves beyond simply being clean to being well-kept, or *arreglada/o.* Difficulties in maintaining a presentable and well-kept body is the source of much concern and feelings of degradation. The following is an excerpt from my field-diary reproducing an over-heard conversation between two older men:

> "I become like another person if I don't bathe every day. I can't sleep and feel terrible. I don't know *what* occupation a man has if he works and doesn't even earn 25 *kilos* a day to buy a bar of soap!"
> "Yes…there are even bars of soap for 20 *kilos*…"
> "Exactly! *Muchaho*! *Si el aseo es lo más lindo que hay*! (Man, hygiene is the most beautiful/important thing there is!)"
> The conversation continues, now about the beggars in Old Havana who earn a lot of money [since they beg from tourists they earn in CUC] but *still* look filthy…

Cleanliness is viewed as one of the most "beautiful" and important parts of life, and scarcity, when it comes to this area, is physically lived as a dirty, foul smelling, and ugly appearance. Soap, deodorant, razors, as well as nice clothes and shoes, are seen as necessities, as well as, for women, hair and nail care products (such as shampoo, hair dye and nail-polish) and some make-up. The importance for both women and men of being *arreglada/o* is not to be underestimated as it is acutely connected to being a complete and worthy person[64]. In order to illustrate the hard times people in Havana are going through economically, a middle aged man living in an extended household and running a successful informal business made references to the practice of dressing up:

> In this country you work to eat…twenty or thirty years ago people dressed up on weekends. They had special, nicer clothes they used when going out but that does not

[64] For more about the production of beauty in Havana see Lundgren (2011, pp. 119-138).

> exist any more. People just put on the same t-shirt every day of the week. Not even clothes are important anymore. Only food.

Indeed, food is invariably seen as the most important necessity and is the area where most anxieties are placed. Many of the people I spoke to occasionally found themselves in situations where they had to prioritize between the three areas of need (for example between paying the electricity bill, buying shampoo or a couple of eggs) and they invariably pointed out that they prioritized food, especially children's food (see also Zabala Argüelles, 2010a, p. 135).

Just as with the other categories, food as a necessity was not seen only in terms of the amount of nutrients necessary to survive and many people explicitly stated that they were talking about a varied, balanced and tasty diet including milk, meat and other valued items. At one point during fieldwork I told two women – Marta a housewife in her forties and Anelis a university student in her twenties – about a response I had gotten during an open lecture in Sweden. Several people (none of them Cuban) in the audience had expressed the opinion that people in Havana tended to complain a lot and be rather spoiled and that young people's aspirations to migrate were rooted in a superficial materialism. They leave their country, these people said, "only" in order to be able to go shopping. Both women looked hurt and upset:

> Maria: I just thought: "It's so easy to be against consumerism while living in Sweden…"
> Anelis: Yeah, because it's about being able have some goals in life and feel that – with hard work and sacrifices – that it [the fulfillment of goals] is possible, right?
> Marta: And not just that. The thing is that we're talking about basic necessities that cannot be fulfilled here. Being able to have a piece of beef…
> Maria: Yeah…
> Anelis: Yeah because here that is very difficult to do. It's like someone already made your choices. I would like to be able to say: "Today I'm going to eat this!" And then be able to do it!
> Marta: It's about being able to have what one likes and what one needs.
> Maria: Not just what the store has to offer that day.

'Basic' needs are here stretched to include what one *likes* and the mention of beef is not a coincidence – as seen in chapter two, it is the most valued foodstuff in Havana. In my analysis I am, then, not (only) talking about enough nutrients to sustain the body but about good, tasty food. As noted by Rosendahl (1997, p. 173) in relation to the food shortages during the Special Period, "Eating two meals, preferably of viandas, rice and beans, and meat or

fish, freshly cooked in lard, was seen not only as a physical but a 'cultural' necessity; it was part of being a real Cuban." [65] The unfulfillment of this necessity – not eating well or enough and feeling hungry – is thus not only a question of physical ill-being but, especially if extended in time, has a moral and existential dimension that is lived through cultural notions of what it means to *be* hungry. This is what informs the second and last refusal: that of labeling oneself as poor.

Refusing Poverty

Before examining the links between poverty, hunger, and shame, I will look at two studies of the auto-perception of people in Havana belonging to households with a low per capita income. Zabala Argüelles' study was conducted in late 1993 as the Special Period peaked. The households studied lived under extremely severe conditions: a per capita income of less than 50 MN, presence of children with problems in school *and* sub-standard living-conditions (see Zabala Argüelles, 2010a, pp. 94-97). Even if most of her research subjects considered themselves to be poor, a small part of the sample – notably those with a family member with employment – did not.

Añé Aguiloche has made a national study of people's views regarding the situation of Cubans in general and their own personal situation, in particular in the years 2001 to 2003. Part of her material is statistical and divided according to income deciles[66]. When asked about the national population as a whole the answer "not poor" was the one generating highest percentage amongst respondents living in Havana (Añé Aguiloche, 2005, p. 15, table 5)[67]. When considering their own situation, the questions were not general but asked in relation to income, food and housing respectively. In relation to food and housing, most respondents chose the category "not poor". (Añé Aguiloche, 2005, pp. 16, 17, tables 6.2 and 6.3). As seen in the following table the picture is different when asked about income poverty.

[65] See also Solberg (1996), especially pages 50-56, for more about food and hunger during the special period, as well as Añé Aguiloche (2005, p. 14) for a mention of the links between identity and food in Cuba.

[66] The statistical material was collected as part of a national census: "Encuesta sobre la situación Económica de los Hogares" published in 2001 by ONE, the National Statistical Office.

[67] In decile 1 the difference was relatively small between those considering the population poor (29.9%) and those considering it non-poor (35.7%).

	How do You consider Your living standard in terms of income? Percent		
	Poor	**Almost poor**	**Not poor**
Decile 1	52.5	19.8	27.7
Decile 2	46.0	27.9	26.1
City of Havana	33.8	25.2	41.0

(Añé Aguiloche, 2005, p. 16, table 6.1)

Here respondents' answers coincide with the method used to identify them. Deciles are defined in relation to income[68] and the answers seem to reflect this. Yet, it should be noted that 27.7% of the people with the lowest incomes do not consider themselves to be income-poor. In the qualitative part of the same study (using another sample), interviews revealed that two thirds of that sample did *not* identify themselves as poor (Añé Aguiloche, 2005, p. 18).

My interlocutors seem to share the perspective of many Cuban scholars and Añé Agiloches' respondents, as most of them are skeptical about applying the term 'poverty' to themselves, and relate their skepticism to a comparative global situation where there are people who are worse off. However, while Cuban scholars point to the Cuban state as the cause of this exceptionalism – partly because they use a comparative macro perspective and partly because of a political commitment – the people I spoke to instead pointed to themselves. Their perspective was personalized and, if they refused the term poor, it was because they saw themselves as capable of tending to their own and their families' well-being. They were proud of their ability to make a living and refused the helplessness, vulnerability and failure of a denomination such as "poor". The symbolic force of hunger and food informed this refusal.

In Havana, the meaning of hunger can easily slip from being a feeling indicating the need to eat to an existential state of being which is made explicit in the accusation of *ser un/a muerto/a de hambre.* The literal meaning is hard to capture in English, but it is about being starved to death. What it really implies, however, is that one's actions are motivated by hunger – i.e. by a search for material gains where food is the most basic one. As an expression, it is used not only to talk about situations where people display hunger, but also where they prioritize material gains over other things – such as pride and morality. Food here stands for the biological needs of the body

[68] The text does not expand on the issue of how the deciles look. Are incomes, for example, defined as state salaries? What per capita income does decile 1 and 2 have?

and thus for the most elemental and, in a sense, vulgar aspect of materiality. This is illustrated in the following anecdote told by a woman working in an establishment serving food to personnel with high positions within a ministry:

> Today a man offered me the ice-cream we served as dessert – he didn't want it for some reason. I declined but my sister accepted it and ate it right in front of him: "It's just that it's so delicious and they don't give us anything…" That's so embarrassing! Right there in front of him! Sure, I can accept it if they offer me something but I store it away and eat it when they have left. Really, I like my sister a lot but I have to admit she is a *muerta de hambre*.

Food and materiality in general might be a pleasure, but only as long as it is not so scarce as to control your actions. Just as with lack of cleanliness, but even more so, hunger is lived as a question of degradation and of losing humanity (see Lundgren, 2011, p. 129). Pertierra argues that women in Santiago (Cuba's second largest city) achieved not only respectability but identity and self-worth through their capacity to manage the household. Important for the proper managing of the household is the "physical state and cleanliness of [the] house, and the quality and consistency of [women's] food provision" (Pertierra, 2008, p. 763). In the division of household work the preparation of food often falls to women. Given the centrality of food and the scarcities experienced by most, this is an important task and the skill of making tasty food every day is something to be proud of. Besides preparing food, the serving of food is also central. In most households, the person preparing the meal also serves it and carries the plates to the other household members. This is a task of care and intimate knowledge of the members of a household. Individual tastes and preferences are taken into consideration, as well as a sense of justice as scarce resources are distributed. Handling food in the household is, in many ways, a daily ritual of care work based on intimate knowledge of household members and performed principally by women.

Rosendahl also stresses the importance of food and the capacity to enjoy good, proper, well-cooked food two times a day as crucial for feelings of self-worth and humanity. A common explanation for vagrancy, and very short workdays amongst workers in agriculture, was that, due to long trajectories between the home and the fields, many choose to stay at home after lunch. The worker's union tried to solve the issue through many different measures, none of which included suggesting that they brought food with them to the fields. "For the workers in agriculture", Rosendahl (1994, p.

85) writes, “the mere thought of not eating warm, recently cooked lunch was comparable to living like animals. It was unthinkable.”

This is one of the reasons why accounts of scarcity and of material deprivation often include assurances like: “here nobody dies of hunger”, “I have never gone to bed without eating something” or, at least, “my children have never gone to bed with an empty stomach”, and also why my interlocutors resist defining themselves as poor. Food and the ability to fill one’s own, and/or one’s children’s stomachs, had the symbolic power to maintain pride, respect and, ultimately, humanity. Being called or calling oneself poor was to imply hunger, and had the potential of stigmatizing and hurting people to the point where the term was impossible to use in relation to oneself with self-respect. One arena that encapsulates the anxieties surrounding food and hunger is hospitality.

People in Havana often described Cubans in general as hospitable and as placing special pride in offering all guests something to drink – strong, sweet coffee, a soft-drink, or at the very least ice-cold water, the latter often with an excuse of not having anything else to offer. While beverages are offered to any guest visiting the house and can be readily accepted even by strangers, food is more complicated. Sahlins even treats food as a special case in his general discussion on exchange:

> Staple foodstuffs cannot always be handled just like anything else. Socially they are not quite like anything else. Food is life-giving, urgent, ordinarily symbolic of hearth and home, if not mother. By comparison with other stuff, food is more readily, or more necessarily, shared [...]. (Sahlins, 1974, p. 215)

In Havana, generally speaking, one does not sit down to eat in a house without inviting everyone present to join. If there are people present whom the hosts cannot or do not want to invite, they just wait for them to leave. If already eating when a guest enters the house, the hosts always invite that person to join with the question *“¿Gusta?”* (Would you like?), to which the guest answers: *“¡No, que aproveche!”* (No, enjoy your meal!). Failing to say either of the two phrases is very impolite. A host that doesn’t offer the guest food is stingy, but a guest who accepts the offer is equally rude and will be considered *descarada/o*, shameless (lit. lacking face).

During one of my stays in Cuba before my fieldwork, I got to talk to a middle-aged housewife who told me a funny story. A young backpacker from

Europe was staying at a neighbor's house during his brief stay in Havana and had become friends with her son. The two young men often sat in her living-room listening to music and talking. At first she was glad to offer him food since he was her son's friend, but after a couple of days she simply couldn't. Food was not abundant and the young backpacker seemed unable or unwilling to contribute with anything to the household economy, despite, it might be added, her assumptions about his material wealth given his foreign status. Some days she managed to wait until he had gone in order to serve the plates, but at other times she couldn't and had to offer him food. The strange thing was that instead of politely declining the offer he readily accepted! One day, she told me, she had gotten fed up with him "eating up all her food" and decided to tell him so in a subtle way so as not to seem impolite. At lunchtime he still sat on the living-room sofa and she started speaking about how she lacked appetite: "I'm not hungry at all. In fact, I think I won't make any lunch today. Some milk and a piece of toast or two will have to do…" Instead of getting her hints, the young man happily replied, "Just what I was craving!"

The woman told this story with humor, laughing at the young foreigner's answer and finishing off with: "*¡Oye, que descarado ese chiquito!*" (Hey, what a shameless young man!). The humor lies in part in the image of an adult person behaving so contrary to custom and polite etiquette, but also in the fact that he was a foreigner who, according to Cuban prejudices, should be not only wealthy and decidedly non-hungry, but also overtly polite. Solberg writes about the anxieties surrounding hospitality and how local patterns of sociality changed in Baracoa, a small town in eastern Cuba during the Special Period[69]:

> Meals are sacred in the sense that it is impolite to visit at those times. Guests must be invited to eat if the family is eating. This creates a very uncomfortable situation for everybody when nobody has anything extra. Rather to the contrary, the scarce resources are divided amongst the family members with a heavy hand. Baracoans are, as already mentioned, known for their hospitability. In the special period greed is a necessary virtue, nobody has anything to share and even less to be generous with. This makes most people ashamed and they try to avoid shameful situations even if the scarcity is rather evenly distributed. (Solberg, 1996, p. 53)

Lack of food and shame are, then, intimately related. Not being able to invite visitors to eat is as shameful as eating at someone else's place, as both imply

[69] See also Rosendahl (1994) for more about hospitality, food and shame.

that one lacks food and, in the end, that one is hungry – a shameful state of being. Since hunger lies at the core of the idea of poverty, the two concepts can hardly be separated. I therefore argue that the symbolic force of food and hunger in Havana is an important aspect of the refusal of the label ‘poor’.

4

Expectations and Differences in Everyday Consumption

Excerpt from field diary:

2006-01-29

Yesterday after breakfast, Barbara[70] *and I decided to go to* el agro *to buy groceries. On the way we passed two* bodegas *where you can get the subsidized products you are entitled to in your ration booklet. Since Barbara doesn't have a booklet*[71] *and it is extremely expensive to buy (and difficult to find) un-rationed sugar*[72]*, she tried to buy sugar illegally in both* bodegas*. The first one was almost empty of people. Barbara called to the man in charge, leaned across the counter and asked – whispering in a secretive way – if he could sell her some sugar. He refused and Barbara stomped out to the bakery for rationed bread next door where she knows the man in charge and gets to buy bread even without the booklet. She complained to him about her troubles buying sugar and he accompanied her back to the* bodega*. This time I stayed outside since these matters are more easily resolved without a witnessing foreigner. After a while, Barbara emerged from the* bodega *without sugar: "He told me they expected a visit from the Party so he couldn't sell anything".*

We continued towards el agro *and entered the second* bodega *where Barbara once again tried to buy sugar without success. This time the explanation of*

[70] Barbara and I knew each other well. She was in her late forties at the time, lived by herself and received regular remittances.

[71] Barbara did not own a house and lived in an illegally rented apartment. Her landlady refused to inscribe her in the booklet connected to the apartment.

[72] This is so since, as seen in chapter two, the ration is fairly large and often enough to cover household needs. Sugar is therefore not a common or highly desired product in the un-rationed markets.

the man in charge was that, since it was the end of the month, everything was counted and nothing could be sold until the next delivery came at the beginning of next month. We crossed the road to a CUC-kiosk and bought a scouring-cloth and two washing-soaps. Barbara showed me the packages of un-rationed white sugar on the shelf. It looked around 2lbs and cost 2 CUC[73].

The street we were aimed for is a rather commercial one, with two big agros*, three CUC-stores, and several stands selling things on the sidewalks. We arrived at the first* agro *and Barbara explained: "This is the expensive private one, and further down the street is the state-run agro that is cheaper. Prices there are almost half of those at the private* agro*." We decided to continue to the cheap* agro *first and then go to the expensive one to buy the things we couldn't find in the first one.*

The state-run agro *is a large fenced area with two entrances. Inside the fenced area are several stationary stands made of concrete where they sell agricultural products. Yesterday they had guava, tomato, rice, taro, lettuce, kidney beans, radish, grated coconut, onion, chard, parsley, vinegar… Many of the stands were almost empty and the products were of rather bad quality and didn't look too tempting where they were laid out on the counters. It was late in the morning and early shoppers had already bought the best fruits and vegetables.*

*Prepared food is sold in kiosks along the perimeter of the area: sandwiches, coffee and juice. In one such place they sell bread with thin slices of beef and there was a long queue of hungry shoppers. In one corner of the area are stands with pet animals (such as birds and fishes), plants and spices. Here is also a barber, a shoe-repairer and a locksmith. In another corner is a stand selling things for the house: electrical plug sockets, clothes-pegs, taps, coat-hangers, etc. In a shed, products normally only sold in CUC-stores are sold for the equivalent in MN. There was a long line of people outside, and a guard stood at the door storing people's bags as they entered. Next to the guard there was a board advertising which meat-products were available. Yesterday the only thing on the board was a text telling customers: "*No hay carne*", there is no meat.*

[73] If converted to MN the price becomes 24 MN/lb to be compared with the subsidized price for rationed white sugar: 0.15 MN/lb.

The weather was pleasant. It is winter and according to local standards it was not hot. It was, nevertheless, sunny and I preferred the shade. There were sufficient people at the market to generate queues where attractive goods were sold, but at the same time it was not too crowded.

While we approached a stand to buy some bean sprouts we passed a woman who murmured: "Cumin, cumin, whole and powdered cumin…" She stood with the little bags of spices wrapped in a white plastic shopping-bag and evidently sold without license. Barbara asked to have a look at the bags of cumin in order to test the quality. The cumin-seller was nervous and her eyes darted from side to side. At one point she pretended to look at the products sold in the stand next to her and, in general, tried – maybe a little bit too hard – to hide the fact that she was selling illegally. Barbara took her time examining the tiny bags of cumin and this obviously irritated the woman. As a man in military uniform approached the stand next to us, the sales-woman's fear increased and she left Barbara poking in her purse looking for coins to pay for the spices. When the man in uniform was through with his shopping and walked away the cumin-seller came back to where Barbara stood. I discovered that there was a woman selling plastic shopping bags a few steps away. She and the cumin-seller seemed to help each other look out for police, military, and other dangers. Finally, Barbara found the coins she needed and gave – rather openly – the money to the cumin-seller who walked away rapidly as soon as the transaction was over. It all reminded me strongly of drug dealing.

Just as we approached a stand, they poured out new fresh tomatoes in one of the boxes next to the cashier. The queue grew rapidly behind us. We had lots of heavy shopping-bags and it was getting crowded so I took all the bags and waited for Barbara in the shade a few steps away. As usual, Barbara took her time examining the tomatoes and the seller let her pick the ones she liked. The queue was getting increasingly restless.

Next to me, the illegal peddling of plastic bags and spices continued. A man in military uniform approached me and asked if I knew anybody selling shopping bags around here. I took a quick look at the woman that stood a few steps away. She didn't react and, as I didn't want to cause her any trouble, I just shrugged, drew down the corners of my mouth and lifted my eyebrows: "I have no idea" in Havana-style body language. The man behind the cashier beside me heard the conversation and pointed at the woman

selling the bags: "It's her". The man turned to her and bought his shopping bags. It can't be easy making bargains in uniform…

Barbara had finished her shopping by now and we exited the area. On the sidewalk a block from the agro *sat an old man with a machete hanging from his belt and a straw hat on his head. He had a box with a few agricultural products on his lap - black beans, garlic, cumin, sweet pepper and onion - which he tried to sell to passers-by. When Barbara stopped and showed interest in his products, he stood up and walked us over to his bike standing in the street. It was loaded with vegetables and we bought black beans, garlic and sweet peppers. He seemed to be selling without a license and obviously wanted us to know, or believe, that he was from the countryside. The machete and the straw hat were almost too much of a cliché. Country-folk,* guajiros*, have a good reputation here in Havana when it comes to doing business. They are said to sell products of high quality and be more honest and, perhaps, a bit naïve compared with the "cunning* habanero*".*

At rickety tables on the sidewalk across the street sat several people selling all kinds of things: from clothes to cookware. These people have licenses and therefore trade is legal. We looked for a filter for Barbara's coffee pot and found one for 2 MN. On our way to the private agro we passed several stands selling snacks and refreshments, these are legal too and there are state- as well as privately-owned ones.

After a short walk we arrived at the private agro*. It is smaller than the state-owned agro, and is fenced with a big roof covering the whole area. There is a broad aisle running from the entrance to the end of the area. On the right side of the aisle fruits and vegetables were on display on the stationary counters, but there is also a stand with flowers and one where things for the household are sold. To the left, just by the entrance, is a butcher's stand where a big pig's head hung from a hook and chunks of pork lay on the counter.*

The agro *was almost empty of shoppers, maybe because of the relatively late hour. The aisle was clean and the vegetables lay in nice organized heaps on the well-stocked counters. It all gave a very neat impression. There was a greater variety here, with products that could not be found in the cheaper agro: cucumber, papaya, big bell peppers, pineapple, beetroot, cassava, sweet potatoes, oranges, bananas and plantains. The tomatoes were perfectly*

ripe and of good quality. Prices were in MN and much higher compared to the state-owned agro. I bought papaya and pineapple.

Then we started walking home. The bags were heavy and we quarreled about which of us should carry the rice. The temperature was rising and the thin plastic handles cut into our palms. Once in a while we stopped in the shade to rest and shift the heavy bags from one hand to the other.

***

This entry in my field diary, narrating the perfectly ordinary workings of grocery-shopping in Havana, illustrates the segmented market for daily consumption which was described in detail in chapter two. Barbara and I shopped in two currencies, CUC for the scouring-cloth and washing-soaps, and MN for the agricultural products. We went to two different *agros*, one owned by the state and the other privately owned. We bought things sold legally and others sold illegally – both markets revealing an astonishing variety in form and content. We encountered rationed products in the *bodega* and un-rationed products outside of it.

This chapter will deal with how people made everyday consumption, or provisioning as Miller prefers to call it (2001a, p. 101), understandable in three areas: the state markets, the informal market, and the dual economy. When discussing the state markets I will look at the different roles played by the state and the expectations people held towards it, while, when discussing the informal market, questions of trust are highly relevant and the expectations are directed towards fellow human beings. In both these markets the focus will be on the ongoing moral negotiations my interlocutors engaged in.

Finally, I will use Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic capital to look at how difference was created and challenged in the dual economy. In an urban context like Havana, and as argued in chapter two, the segmented market is the source for everyday commodities, and it can thus be said to be the objective limits within which economic life is negotiated. It is, for example, in order to have access to this market that income-generating activities are devised, an issue I will come back to in the next chapter. It is also, as will be shown below, one of the crucial arenas where the contemporary differentiated Cuban society is constantly produced and negotiated.

It is important to note that I will look at daily consumption – the way that people in urban settings get hold of food, clothing and other necessary articles – and *not* conspicuous consumption. My discussion will therefore neither deal with the (supposed) conflict between Cuban socialist values and capitalist consumerism (see Gordy, 2006, p. 8) nor with the issue of the morality, or not, of consumption per se (see Miller, 2001b; Wilk, 2001). The moral negotiations I will discuss here revolve around social relations as displayed in relations of exchange – not around daily consumption in and of itself.

Negotiating Rights and Obligations in the State Markets

Everyday consumption in state markets (rationed as well as un-rationed) cultivates negotiations regarding the relationship between the state as provider/seller and its citizens as consumers. Among the people I spoke to, these negotiations had to do with the state's obligations in relation to its citizens, and revolved around two roles the state played in the segmented market: that of provider and that of seller – or, some would say, profiteer.

Since 1959, and until the economic crisis of the 1990s, the role of the state in relation to its citizens as consumers was largely that of provider. As seen in chapter two, there is a long history where the state, through the rationed market, has defined and fulfilled basic needs[74] and, at the same time, guaranteed equality. Further contributing to the cementing of this role has been free social services such as education and healthcare, the housing policy, and the subsidy of services such as electricity and water, as well as the official socialist rhetoric emphasizing social justice through a strong state. In return for this, the state has demanded loyalty, support, time and effort, rather than money. Unsalaried work for the good of the community, political participation in the different party organizations, and general loyalty and commitment are examples of ways in which citizens were expected to reciprocate[75].

[74] Note, however, that the state's definition of basic needs seldom has coincided with its citizens' creating a space for alternative markets such as the parallel market, the *mercados libres campesinos*, the *agros* and the informal market.

[75] For more about the moral and almost puritanical connotations of the Cuban revolution before the Special Period, which emphasized and expected hard work and sacrifices, see Rosendahl (1997, pp. 148-155, 160)

With the economic crisis of the 1990s, it became difficult to maintain previous levels of public spending. Cuts were made – resulting, for example, in smaller rations – but services were mostly maintained. In the absence of the Soviet Union, however, the sources for financing these had to change and, as seen in chapter two, the state turned to the national economy and thus to its citizens. While this might be the rule rather than the exception if compared to other welfare states that finance public spending with taxes it was something new in the Cuban case. Consequently, the relationship between state and citizen changed with the crisis and the reforms that were adopted to deal with it. On the one hand, the state as provider is not as successful as it once was. On the other hand, its role has changed and new demands to contribute monetarily to the public treasury are now placed on its citizens.

As we will see below, these demands clash with the prevailing view among my interlocutors on what the role of the state should be. Again and again people made me understand that the state was failing to live up to the expectations *it had created*. They articulated their relationship with the state in various areas of daily life, but in the segmented market there were two areas that each represented one of the dual roles of the state; in the rationed market, the state was manifested as the provider, while the state market in CUC brought to the fore the state as profiteer. It was thus through their attitudes towards these markets that the people I spoke to made sense of the state and their relation to it as consumers.

By 2006, people in Havana generally regarded the ration of subsidized goods as a right they had as citizens as well as an obligation of the state. The failure to provide adequately via the ration was seen as a failure on behalf of the state in living up to these obligations, leaving my interlocutors with a feeling of not owing anything in return. In interviews I asked people if they bought everything in their ration of subsidized goods, and often the answer was that they did: "They give[76] so little that one has to take it all, even if I don't want or need it. I can always give it away." Or on a more resentful note: "I don't leave anything to the state!"

Many were of the opinion that a withdrawal of the ration-booklet would be disastrous, leading to hunger, chaos and maybe even social upheaval[77].

[76] In chapter two I mentioned the low prices and how people often spoke about the state giving, not selling, the rationed items. Both this quote and the longer one below are examples of that.

[77] At the time of fieldwork the elimination of the rationed market had not yet been publicly debated.

People were quick to add, however, that these negative effects would happen only if the salaries and the prices in the unsubsidized markets stayed the same. However, if salaries increased and/or unsubsidized prices dropped, the removal of the ration booklet was actually regarded as something potentially positive. The following is an answer to a direct question about what would happen if the ration booklet was withdrawn. The interviewee is a middle-aged woman with a state job, living with her elderly mother:

> The way I see it, if that happened, I don't know… Because we are so used to it. I wish it wouldn't happen but that they would give *more* things instead. Oil for example. Because it has been months since they gave oil and that is fundamental in a kitchen. But in another sense it would be better if the selling were un-rationed (*a la libre*) because in that way one could plan more. I don't know, buying several days' groceries at a time.

Attitudes towards the market for subsidized goods were, as seen in the quote, ambiguous. Access to it was vital, given the economic situation, and considered a right of Cuban citizens. At the same time, people wished that it was *not a necessity*, referring to the drawbacks of the market (the inability to plan one's shopping) and the problems of the economy at large (the relation between low salaries and high unsubsidized prices) which caused this dependency.

While the people I spoke to clearly considered the state responsible for the well-being of its citizens, they formulated this as not necessarily being achieved through expansion of the monthly ration. They would, in fact, prefer that it be done by adjusting salaries and prices so that one could get what one needed without a booklet. In other words, the obligation of the state towards its citizens was not the ration *per se*, but the guarantee of a livelihood and a commitment to see to their wants and needs.

If the state acted as provider in the rationed market, its role in the CUC market was the complete opposite. As has already been mentioned, the purpose of the CUC stores was to channel hard currency from the hands of the population back to the state with a high mark-up of about 130-250 percent placed on prices. Conversing about this with a Cuban sociologist, he suggested that it could be called "Operation Robin Hood" since it was about: "Taking from the rich and giving to the poor." By "rich" I suppose he meant people with large incomes in CUC. The mark-up can, then, be viewed as a redistributive measure drawing resources from wealthy consumers to finance public spending. For my interlocutors, however, this dimension was largely unrecognized. They did not consider themselves to be rich and they still had

to shop regularly in the CUC stores. Goods sold in CUC are not luxuries or non-necessary articles that the "poor" need not access. In 2006, the CUC stores sold all kinds of goods with the exception of fresh agricultural products. There were certainly "luxury" goods such as chocolate and foreign brands of clothes, but also absolute necessities such as hygiene products and cooking oil. And many of these goods could only be (legally) bought at these stores. When asked about the most important product sold exclusively in CUC, people, almost without exception, answered hygiene products. Meat, oil, shoes, clothes, and milk were also mentioned as things that were necessary but difficult or impossible to acquire with MN.

Even though the "rich" certainly buy more things in CUC stores than the "poor", all, regardless of how little they earn, must buy some things there. Shopping in CUC stores is not optional, it is not a luxury. The view of holders of CUC as rich is thus problematic given the fact that everybody in Havana needs to access CUC stores. Everybody needs to get CUC, if only to buy some soap, a deodorant, and a bottle of oil.

Another situation where the state acted as a seller seeking profit was, in fact, when selling CUC. The utilization of two different exchange rates – 1 CUC = 25 MN when people bought CUC, and 1 CUC = 24 MN when they sold CUC – is, for example, clearly a way for the state to profit. This practice, which seemed normal to me – banks and states also need incomes after all – was perceived by people as deeply unjust and often talked about as the state stealing from those that were worst off, namely people without incomes in CUC.

These situations in which the state sought monetary income from its citizens contrasted starkly with my interlocutors' views of the good state as a guarantor of livelihoods, sympathetic to the needs of the population. I lost count of the times people pointed out the injustice that milk was only sold in MN as part of the ration to children up to seven years of age while the shelves of the CUC stores were full of expensive milk few people could afford. During fieldwork I sometimes tried to provoke my interlocutors with comments about the state's need of income (especially in hard currency) in order to finance public spending. These comments were often just shrugged at. The state should, it seemed, give and never take. It should not take profit from its citizens – at least not from the ones that had a hard time making a living anyway.

It is clear that the people I talked to put quite high expectations on the state to care for their wants and needs. When the state failed in this, it was seen as a moral breach which, as we will see in subsequent chapters, legitimated people's own trespasses into the informal when devising income-generating activities. From the consumers' perspective, however, the informal market became a site where expectations placed on fellow citizens were negotiated and it is to this that I will turn now.

Trust and Moral Negotiations in the Informal Market

Faced with the absence of regulations which is characteristic of the informal market, consumers are forced to fill the void with norms and rules formulated from a personal moral standpoint. This takes the form of ongoing negotiations concerning what is acceptable behavior in the informal market, what can reasonably be expected when making transactions of this type, how to act as a consumer, and what to do when confronted with unacceptable behavior.

All my interlocutors could tell stories about how they or someone they knew had been cheated in the informal market. Some of these stories took the shape of urban legends grounded in reality more often than not. People told these legends in slightly different versions, always with reference to "a friend's friend" or to the Special Period. Examples of these kinds of narratives were the ones about pizzas with condoms instead of cheese or about human flesh ("from corpses!") sold as minced beef. Other narratives were first-hand stories about paying workmen in advance and never seeing them again or discovering the ring you thought was gold was something entirely different. Many narratives of both kinds were set in the Special Period as a way to express how people redefined – or suspended – morality in the face of extreme need.

But even though cheating in the informal market might have diminished since the economic crisis, it had not been completely eradicated by improved economic conditions, and one type of trick was considered especially bad: selling *comida mala*, bad foodstuffs. Spoiled, contaminated or altered food could risk the buyer's health or – in extreme cases – even their life. Food was also, as mentioned in chapter three, particularly sensitive since it was the biggest preoccupation when it came to making ends meet and was furthermore symbolically important for identity and self-worth.

I heard several stories about powdered milk mixed with plaster or limestone powder, and people were always very judgmental about the kind of people capable of selling this lethal mix. Powdered milk is a very attractive and expensive product since milk is considered to be very healthy. Even though it is consumed by Cubans of all ages, it is especially associated with children for whom it is considered vital for their growth and development. To sell a lethal product to "innocent" children "only" for economic gain was considered utterly immoral. While people could explain and – to at least some degree – understand other scams as consequences of deprivation and need, things like these were condemned as morally corrupt.

But even though everybody agreed on the immorality of selling bad food, there was a complexity in the attitudes towards cheating in the informal market. There is a fine line between simply trying to make the most of transactions, which is the intelligent thing to do, and straight out cheating, which is immoral (but still intelligent). While people considered cheating and a general lack of solidarity as big problems in contemporary Cuban society, they also saw street-smarts and guile as intelligent and typical of people in Havana in comparison to both foreigners and country-folk who were seen as rather naïve – if not stupid.

Comparing the situation in Cuba with other Latin American countries, a man in his twenties said: "The trick[78] in Mexico is trying to beat you and take your wallet but here [in Cuba] it is something else". He points to his head and his eyes become small slits as he says: "*Aqui la mecánica es de otra forma…*" (Here the workings are different…). His last sentence is hard to accurately translate but *mecánica* (lit. mechanics) here refers to the workings of a person looking for material gains in every possible situation and these workings are, according to him, different in Cuba, more indirect than straight-out mugging and more connected with using one's head. In his view, Cuban "trickery" or "evilness" is about deception and cheating which demands brains rather than muscles.

Other expressions that carried with them hints about scams and morally dubious behavior were for example *tener chispa*, *ser avispado* and *estar a la viva*[79]. These were applied to both sellers and consumers and referred to a

[78] His exact word is *la maldad* which literally means 'the evilness' but which is best translated as 'the trick' in this context.

[79] Direct translations are difficult but would be: 'to have spark', 'to be alert' and 'be awake/alive'.

general attitude of intelligent scheming. It was about being street-smart, making successful transactions and avoiding being cheated. Even though this might sound positive, the above expressions carried a slightly negative, or at least bitter, edge. Being street-smart in this sense was about looking at interpersonal relations with material pursuits in mind. It was about buyers mistrusting sellers and assuming that they were looking to take advantage, and about sellers *always* looking for and making use of possibilities for material benefit – even in the cases where moral ideals dictate that one should refrain from doing so. While being the intelligent thing to do (expecting not to be cheated would be stupid) it also stands in contrast with what my interlocutors perceive as the way things should be.

These stories about scams in the informal market advanced the vision of economy and morality as separate and hostile: economic need, it seemed, precluded morality with horrible results. In order to keep on the right side of the fine line between intelligent calculation and immoral cheating, the realm of materiality and profit must never be completely disconnected from the realm of social obligations and morality. Business could not only be just business but should constantly be affected by other preoccupations besides the maximizing of profit. Just like the Kabyle studied by Bourdieu, my interlocutors saw the "calculating intelligence" of the "shady dealer" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 115) as threatening the moral grounds of interpersonal relations free of material pursuits (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 105). This moral anxiety was ever present in Cuban society in 2006 and I will have reason to come back to it both in chapter five in relation to income-generating activities, as well as in chapter six in relation to ideas surrounding interest and affect.

Faced with the risks of being a consumer in the informal market, people acted with caution and employed several strategies in order to minimize these risks. Many of the strategies were efforts at controlling the calculating intelligence of material transactions by creating or utilizing the moral obligations inherent in interpersonal relations. Employing certain flexibility in the use of the term *calle* they often said that, "*Uno no puede comprarle nada a nadie en la calle.*" (One cannot buy anything from anybody in the street). Here "the street" means an unknown person, a stranger, someone you have no reference to whatsoever. Instead people sought to create and maintain trust, *confianza*.

With an established social relation came obligations and it was on these that trust was built. Risks for being cheated diminished with trust – people were

not expected to cheat somebody close to them – and my interlocutors therefore preferred to buy from someone they knew, or at least from someone they knew indirectly. In very close relationships of friendship, love, and, especially, kinship, people were, however, expected to give things for free, not sell. While people didn't always live up to this ideal – selling things to relatives did occur – it was more common for people to find other, more socially distant but still trusted, sellers. Neighbors, colleagues, and acquaintances could possess the perfect blend of trust and social distance to make informal transactions smooth and relatively risk-free.

Different ways to conduct business also inspired different grades of trust. People that sold things on a more regular basis, specializing in one or a few products sold at home or delivered to the buyer's door, were often called *puntos*[80]. They had to have a good reputation and could not risk an angry customer making a scene or informing the police about their illegal activity. Due to this, people put enough trust in them to regard transactions with them as relatively risk free. Transactions made in the seller's house were also considered relatively risk free since that increased the buyers bargaining power if the product was not satisfactory.

Other strategies had little to do with trust, for example the avoidance of certain products. Minced meat, powdered milk and canned food are examples of things that were difficult to know the actual ingredients of and, many attested, should be avoided. Personal hygiene products like shampoo, deodorant, or perfume were difficult too as they could easily be diluted or "homemade" of inferior quality and then bottled and sold as coming straight from the CUC-store.

Despite taking precautions, people were still cheated now and then and had to come up with strategies to deal with that. When no regulations exist, there is nothing like warrants or consumer rights. One cannot go to the police if one has been cheated in the informal market. Instead, it is up to the buyer to convince the seller to set things right if she or he has refused to do it when confronted with the "error". Most of my interlocutors just shrugged when asked about this: "One can't do anything… You will just get yourself in a bigger mess trying to talk to the one that cheated you". In some cases, however, especially when there were large amounts of money involved,

[80] The word has two meanings in Cuban slang. Besides the one touched upon here it can also be used as a derogatory term which has its English equivalent in 'loser'.

people took action, and in the end it all boiled down to violence – verbal or physical.

A woman told[81] me that she had tried to buy her little son new glasses during the Special Period. Since there were no glasses in the stores, she paid a man in the neighborhood to get her a pair illegally: "It was when the dollar cost 120 pesos and I gave the man three dollars – a fortune at the time!" Weeks passed and she heard that the man had cheated others in the neighborhood, taking money in advance without delivering glasses. Finally, she understood that she too had been cheated: "I think it was around 11 pm when I took an iron bar and waited for him on a street corner where I knew he used to hang around. When he came, I threatened him and told him he had two alternatives to a beating: he could either give me the money or the glasses. I remember he got scared and told me I was crazy but I don't remember if he gave me the glasses or the money…" More common than (threats of) physical violence were verbal assaults, like making a scene to intimidate the person but also to expose his or her forgery and thus convince him or her to set things right.

The void created by lack of regulations in the informal market was thus filled with ongoing everyday negotiations about what to expect and how to act accordingly. These were informed by a vision of economy and morality as opposed spheres: the pursuit of profit was seen as morally dubious and had to be controlled by creating social bonds where trust could grow. As consumers in the informal market my interlocutors felt they had to expect being cheated, take the necessary precautions, and be ready to claim what they saw as their rights if the worst should happen.

While negotiations in the state and informal markets share many features – for example the focus on expectations placed on the state and on other people respectively, the vision of maximizing profits as immoral – my analysis of the dual economy is different. Here the focus is on the difference between the two currencies and how people, as consumers, (re)created as well as challenged this difference, while making it meaningful and understandable.

Creating Difference in the Dual Economy

Both MN and CUC had several names. Nicknames for MN were *peso cubano* or *dinero cubano*. The CUC was called *chavito*, *dólar*, *fula*, *CUC*

[81] The truthfulness of the story can, of course, be questioned. However, as an anecdote it is telling in regards to the strategies seen as meaningful if cheated.

(pronounced as an abbreviation or as a word), *divisa* and *peso convertible*. The most common way to speak of both currencies in daily interactions was, however, to say *peso*, without distinction. As the area is of special interest to me, I often had to ask people to clarify what peso they were talking about in interviews and conversations and they often told me with a little smile. The question was no doubt perceived as a bit stupid – these were things you just *knew*!

The distinction was not explicit even on the physical representation of money itself, that is, bills and coins. The front of the CUC-bills clearly stated "*cinco pesos*" (if the bill was for 5 CUC) in large print at the center of the bill. Under that, in smaller print, it said: "*pesos convertibles*". The word *peso*, alone, was thus used on the most visible place on the bills. Even though it could be difficult for tourists to distinguish between the two sorts of bills, there was, at least, a clarification printed on the bill and the distinction was thus explicitly stated. On the coins, however, no such explicit statement was made. To distinguish between CUC and MN coins one had to simply *know* that CUC-coins were made of a heavier, shinier metal. Significantly, the difference was expressed in a far from neutral way: a "better" metal was used for the CUC-coins, thus expressing higher economic value with beauty and weight.

Restaurants, shops and other establishments seldom announced explicitly what currency they operated in and it was hardly ever necessary to do so. If entering a shop with air condition and shelves full of products in brightly colored packages, for example, you could be sure of having to pay in CUC. If there was no air conditioning, and if you had a hard time deciding whether the shelves were half-full or half-empty, you had to pay in MN. If the taxi was an old American car from before the Revolution with a pre-fixed route and a back seat you had to share, you just knew you had to pay in MN. If it was a modern car with taximeter and a chauffeur in uniform who took you (and only you) exactly where you wanted, you were expected to pay in CUC. Tomato paste in hermetically sealed and brightly colored packages was sold in air conditioned stores in CUC. If it was, however, sold in unmarked plastic bottles (once containing soda) in an open-air market or "on the street" (i.e. illegally) the price was in MN.

The lack of explicit verbal statements – in talk as well as in text – concerning which currency one referred to, or which should be used in a given transaction, had to do with what Bourdieu (1990, p. 19) calls "learned

ignorance", which defines the practical mastery of the world possessed by agents with a *habitus* well attuned to their surroundings. Bourdieu (1998, p. 8) describes the *habitus* as "classificatory schemes, principles of classification, principles of vision and division".

These schemes are products of particular histories and conditions of existence. They are tacitly acquired through practice, and provide dispositions for practice attuned to the objective structures that created them. They are, furthermore, internalized and embodied, resulting in "durable dispositions to recognize and comply with the demands immanent in the field" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 58). Asking people to explicitly state which currency they were talking about clearly pointed to the fact that I – as a foreigner – lacked this practical mastery since "[t]he *habitus* makes questions of intention superfluous, not only in the production but also in the deciphering of practices and works." (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 58).

As people handled these two currencies and made the dual economy understandable and meaningful, they interpreted the difference in economic value in cultural terms by inserting this fundamental division in a classified universe of symbolic attributes. And it is thus, states Bourdieu (1998, p. 8), a whole language of difference and distinction emerges.

Through this symbolic language, the things, places, and people associated with CUC are made (24 times) more valuable and desirable than those associated with MN. This was signaled in every possible way: shiny, colorful, clean, cool, well-stocked, hygienic, modern, efficient, beautiful, fast. Every trait that was perceived as nice and good was, more often than not, associated with CUC and, even though everybody had to have access to both currencies in one way or the other, they could be said to divide the reality in Havana in to very distinct categories: things bought in one currency as opposed to the ones bought in the other, establishments accepting either one or the other, people with more access to this currency or that, etc.

The division expressed in this body of categorizations was constantly formulated and reformulated in daily interactions. During one period of my fieldwork I lived together with a Cuban friend in a small house. When moving in, I brought the foodstuffs I had in my previous house, including half a bottle of sunflower cooking oil bought in the CUC-store. My friend, on the other hand, brought things from her parent's place where she had lived, among them a two-liter unmarked plastic bottle of cooking oil. She was

proud of having managed to get hold of the oil cheaply and in MN too. I asked her how she had made the bargain and she said that a relative knew a man who worked in a *bodega* catering rationed goods and he sold the oil to her: "In part it is sad because that means he robs it from the rations. But on the other hand it is the only way for us without access to CUC to get hold of oil."

I was the one doing most of the cooking in the house and decided to use up the half-empty bottle of CUC-oil before opening the full bottle of MN-oil. One day my friend saw me in the kitchen and, pointing at the CUC-bottle, commented: "You shouldn't use that oil to fry in. Save it for salads and take the other oil for frying." I asked her why and she replied: "Well, the oil from the store is nicer… I don't know… The one from the *bodega* is cruder and not as clean."

Foodstuffs sold in MN were not only considered of inferior quality but even potentially dangerous. Lack of refrigeration and unhygienic containers were mentioned as contributing to health hazards connected to foodstuffs sold in MN. A woman in her thirties with two small children explained her preference for tomato paste sold in CUC:

> I like to always buy the paste in the [CUC] store because the kids like to have their food with paste and I simply don't trust the one sold in the street or in the *agro*. If it was for my consumption I might, but not for my kids. Sometimes they sell a very good purée in the *agro*. In big cans for 50 MN with a thick purée. It is very good and one can see that the purée comes from a factory, that it is sealed. But you only see it sporadically. You can never count on finding it.

In the construction of differences associated with the two currencies, there was one dichotomy that was recurrent. While MN was associated with Cuba and Cubans, CUC was associated with foreign places and people – tourists as well as Cuban migrants. Cuban salaries were principally paid in MN while foreigners primarily had access to CUC. The tourist industry with hotels, "nice" restaurants, night clubs and pools, operated entirely in CUC. Remittances received from family and friends abroad were cashed in said currency. Products of internationally known brands were exclusively sold in CUC. Even in the names used for the two currencies, the words "national" and "Cuban" were used to denote MN. This was so even though the two currencies were equally Cuban and neither of them are even officially recognized outside the island.

When MN and all the things, places and people associated with it – including the whole country and its population – was constantly represented with culturally negative traits and, literally, worth a 24th part of those associated with CUC, something happened. In the words of Bourdieu:

> Thus, through the differentiated and differentiating conditionings associated with the different conditions of existence, through the exclusions and inclusions, unions […] and divisions […] which govern the social structure and the structuring force it exerts, through all the hierarchies and classifications inscribed in objects […], in institutions […] or simply in language, and through all the judgments, verdicts, gradings and warnings imposed by the institutions especially designed for this purpose […] or constantly arising from the meetings and interactions of everyday life, the social order is progressively inscribed in people's minds. Social divisions become principles of division, organizing the image of the social world. Objective limits become a sense of limits, a practical anticipation of objective limits acquired by experience of objective limits, a 'sense of one's place' which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded. (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 470-471)

The differences re-produced between the two currencies through these everyday acts of classification were, furthermore, only the tip of the iceberg as it related to a differentiated symbolic universe encompassing the contemporary stratified society in which people lived – the social order, in the words of Bourdieu. But limits are often fuzzy, symbols can be deceiving, and sometimes people act contrarily to their sense of place and resist exclusion. During fieldwork, it was precisely in situations where limits and categories were challenged that the tangle of values and categorizations surrounding the two currencies emerged in all its power and complexity.

One unbearably warm and humid summer day, for example, Yamila and Inti – a young couple – called me from *El Hotel Nacional,* one of the most famous and expensive hotels in Havana, and invited me and my husband to lunch. We immediately cancelled everything we had planned for the day, dressed in what we thought would be proper clothes and went with very high expectations. We were dying to know how our friends had been able to stay at the hotel, normally a privilege of foreigners.

When we arrived, they reminded us that Inti was politically active and told us that he had won a stay in the hotel with his girlfriend as a reward for his political work and commitment. Or rather, he had won the privilege of paying in MN instead of CUC in this particular hotel with a rate of 1:1. They had had to save up enough money (2-3 average monthly salaries, he estimated) to

be able to pay for a couple of nights, had paid it to the organization he had been active in and had gotten a paper with a number of credits with which they could stay and eat at the hotel. There were, however, restrictions. As far as beverages went, only two or three brands of imported beers could be bought with the credit and to have access to the pool the exchange rate was less favorable. The possibility for them to claim conditions equal to the ones applied to the foreigners staying in the hotel was also restricted. They told me they had probably gotten the worst room: small, with cracked tiles in the bathroom, and light bulbs missing in several lamps.

We were all, however, very happy to be there and, for my friends, it was wonderful being able to – for once – invite *us*. And to a really *nice* place too! Since Inti knew of my skeptical stance towards the Cuban government, this was also, I guess, a way of showing me that even ordinary hard-working Cubans such as themselves could have access to the fashionable establishments normally reserved for foreigners with lots of CUC.

We sat down at a table in an outdoor restaurant with a view of the sea and when the waitress approached our table with four menus in her hands she asked whether we were staying at the hotel. Inti nodded and handed her the paper with his remaining credits. She took the paper, turned around without a word and left with the menus still in her hands. After a while she returned without menus and asked, rather impolitely, whether we wanted pork or chicken. We told her we would like the menus and, with a sour face, she went to get them. While handing us the menus she asked what we wanted to drink and when Inti ordered a Heineken she just could not seem to understand until he pronounced it correctly (or rather, in a way she considered correct). After correcting Inti's Dutch she announced that he could not order that brand since he was paying in MN. He insisted and told her he had just had a Heineken in the hotel bar before coming for lunch. She just shook her head: "Foreign beers are not included in the offer to customers in MN." He asked her to get the correct information since she was obviously misinformed, and they started arguing. At last she left and started talking to some other employees at the restaurant. Our table had become silent and it was hard to tell which of us was most embarrassed. Eventually, the waitress returned and told us we could order cans of Heineken but not bottles. "The thing is, we almost never have cans… But today we do have some." Inti could – at last – order his beer.

She treated us extremely impolitely throughout the whole meal and seemed to be doing everything in her power to make us feel inferior, unworthy of her

attention, cheap. She never used polite conjugations of verbs, she never asked us to excuse mistakes made, and she just plain ignored us when we tried to get her attention. Since the menu stated that one could ask for more of the food one ordered without additional cost, Inti asked if that was so for the meat too or just for the starch and sides. Her reply was: "*Eso tú lo sabes, así que no te hagas.*" (You know that so don't play stupid), an answer that is not just impolite but overtly rude.

After ordering, we commented on the behavior of the waitress and Inti just shrugged: "This is the way they treat Cubans paying in MN. They just want us to feel inferior." Yamila added: "This is just to show us she is superior to us since she has more money. In other countries the waiters earn less than the customers they serve but here they don't, at least not when they serve Cubans. This is just a way for her to show that."

I told the anecdote to several people in Havana and it was evident that no one was overly shocked or surprised when hearing about the waitress' behavior, even though they considered it wrong. This, it seems, was just what people expected and the explanations given were never of the sort in line with the waitress having "a bad day". Instead, everybody saw this as an expression and result of social and/or economic conditions. Some said there weren't any economic incentives to treat us well since the waitress knew we would not (or could not) tip her. People also pointed to the fact that it was rather difficult to lose one's job when employed by the state; she knew she wouldn't get fired for treating us bad. One person even said that she probably tried to refuse us the beer since she and the other employees most likely sold the quota of MN-beers in CUC and pocketed the profit.[82]

Other explanations had less to do with money and more to do with inequality and power; as both of my friends in the hotel said, she wanted us to know we were inferior. They, as well as several of the people to whom I talked to about this event, related this to economic position and nationality – which in emic notions is one and the same thing. Her behavior expressed her lack of economic incentives to treat us well. It seemed that good service for most people in Havana indicated an economic *need* to be service-minded and therefore also necessitated an inferior position in relation to the customer. To treat someone well in such a situation was to signal economic and/or social inferiority and dependence. Her rudeness was, then, in part an effort at

[82] This is a good example of a way in which state employees use their employment as an asset in order to earn informal incomes. More about this in chapter five.

positioning herself on an equal or superior position in relation to us. She was a successful worker in the tourist industry who, just as my friend said, earned far more than any Cuban customer paying in MN. Many were of the conviction that she had not understood that I was a foreigner, since they believed that would have changed her behavior completely.

Interestingly, this does not correspond with my own experiences. As a foreigner in Havana I was often treated in a similar (although not as overtly rude) manner as the one described above – an experience I share with many other foreigners I have talked to. The association between service-mindedness and inferiority and the need to position oneself on an equal or superior position was, in fact, as relevant in relation to foreigners as it was between Cubans. The *economic* superiority enjoyed by foreigners in Cuba was thus challenged *socially* to a greater degree than many of my Cuban interlocutors thought. The *belief* that foreigners were treated better was, however, significant and Porter (2008) argues that Cubans experience feelings of "second-hand citizenship" and feel discriminated against in their own country regarding the treatment and rights enjoyed by tourists[83].

My analysis of the above case differs somewhat from my interlocutors' and centers around the fact that we paid in the wrong currency. Beyond economic incentives and personal power-plays, there was the system of classifications underlying not only the dual economy but a differentiated contemporary Cuban society. The *Hotel Nacional* is the epitome of all things associated with CUC. It is a place for relaxing and enjoying oneself, far removed from everyday struggles and preoccupations. It is well known as one of the best hotels in the country and a place where celebrities have stayed. It is expensive, luxurious, beautiful and, at the time, reserved for foreigners as Cubans were not allowed to stay there[84]. The everyday, non-modern, dull, Cuban world of MN had nothing to do with it and, by extension, neither did we. According to Bourdieu (1984, p. 477) classificatory systems are far from neutral but are the site of struggles for power where limits are constantly attacked and defended. The stake in these struggles is symbolic capital, which Bourdieu describes as follows:

> Symbolic capital is an ordinary property (physical strength, wealth, warlike valor, etc.) which, perceived by social agents endowed with the categories of perception and appreciation permitting them to perceive, know and recognize it, becomes symbolically

[83] See also Alcázar Campos (2010, pp. 296-312).

[84] This has changed and those Cubans who can afford it are now allowed in all national hotels.

> efficient, like a veritable *magical power*: a property which, because it responds to socially constituted "collective expectations" and beliefs, exercises a sort of action from a distance, without physical contact. (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 102, emphasis in original)

A crucial aspect of symbolic capital is that it has to be recognized as important, meaningful and valuable both by those who possess it and, importantly, by those who do not (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 242). The symbolic power of a place like the *Hotel Nacional* resides precisely in the fact that so many people are effectively excluded from it: "The prestige of a salon (or a club) depends on the rigor of its exclusions (*one cannot admit a person of low standing without losing in standing*) […]" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 137, my emphasis).

Seen in this way, the behavior of the waitress was a result of our failure to know and keep our place, thereby challenging the symbolic power of the place and everything associated with it. Her actions were a series of condescension strategies that both presupposed a shared knowledge of the classificatory scheme and structure of power within which we acted, *and* enforced this in practice by pointing at the violation done by us (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 472). We attacked the limits and she defended them.

In this chapter I have taken a closer look at the segmented market describing practices in relation to daily consumption. I have also looked at how people made consumption understandable within three areas: the state markets, the informal market and the dual economy of two currencies. In the state markets the state had a dual role as provider and seller (or profiteer). The former found its purest expression in the rationed market while the latter was expressed in the CUC market. In relation to this, consumers engaged in moral negotiations, arguing that the state had an obligation to fulfill the needs of the population. The state's role as seller ran contrary to this obligation and was thus seen as amoral, unjust and wrong.

In the informal market, the void created by the lack of rules and regulations was filled by moral negotiations regarding proper behavior. While the intelligent thing to do in a transaction was to maximize profit, there was a fine line between that and straight out cheating, which was seen as amoral (but still intelligent). In order to keep on the right side of this line, the realm of materiality and profit must never be completely disconnected from the realm of social obligations. Strategies to avoid being cheated revolved around creating trust by establishing a personal relationship between seller and

buyer. At the same time, this relationship could not be too close since people with a close relationship were expected to share – not trade.

In the dual economy, difference was created by translating economic difference in cultural terms. The MN/CUC dichotomy was inserted in a classified symbolic universe infused with an unequal distribution of symbolic capital. While this system of classification effectively executed symbolic violence by "[leading] one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, places and so forth from which one is excluded" (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 470-471), there were situations where the division was challenged and had to be defended.

In the next chapter I will look at income-generating activities. The segmentations dealt with in relation to consumption are, in many ways, the material reality in which income-generating activities must be devised. It is in order to have access to the necessary markets that income is sought. I will also have reason to come back to the issue of difference and inequality as the dual economy is directly related to the deterioration of real wages since the Special Period, and to changes in the relations between occupation, wealth and status.

5
Earning a Living

Celia and Enrique are a married couple in their forties living with Celia's two adolescent children (a son and a daughter) in an apartment in the central part of Havana. Celia's daughter studies at a dance academy and her son is currently out of work. When I ask Celia about her history of work and studies she lights up:

"I work as an inspector of hygiene. At the same time I'm studying for a university degree in epidemiology. I'm in love with my work! I love to study and I've undergone vocational training in childcare, gastronomy, inspection of aqueducts and to be an operator in vector control in the campaigns against the mosquito[85]. I have worked in all these areas and have always loved public health. As I told you, I'm in love with my work and when I get my degree in epidemiology I'm going for my master and then a PhD because I love to study and would like to spend my whole life studying."

"What is it you like most about your job? And what would you like to change?" I ask her.

"What I like the most is the health program", she answers.

"Prevention of health problems?"

"Exactly! That is very beautiful. I love being able to do that. But what I don't like is being an inspector because people don't do what one asks them to. For example, I go to a restaurant and see that they have no washing-up liquid. Then I tell them that the layers of fat won't go away with hot water only, but what they tell me is that the company doesn't give them washing-up liquid. It is the company's fault, not theirs. That it is not my problem! What I want to

[85] Celia refers to the ongoing campaigns to control the mosquitoes that carry the dengue fever.

do is prevent sickness! But it's impossible. Everything is very beautiful in theory, and when you study they teach you that you have to demand that they use washing-up liquid, but on the street it is different and it is the manager who has to buy the detergent with his or her own money. What they do is steal. They sell things that belong to the company and with the money they buy washing-up liquid. And the worst thing is that the company counts on it!"

Enrique tells me he works in pest-control as an exterminator and has currently returned to work after three months leave due to an operation. During his leave he earned 170 MN per month and now that he is back to work he earns 328 MN as a basic salary. Since the dengue epidemic was at its peak at the time of our interview he expected to be mobilized at any time, meaning more work and a salary of 520 MN or maybe even 600 MN per month. Celia earns 360 MN per month.

They assure me they would never survive on their salaries alone and, in order to make a living, they engage in two informal businesses: they sell air-freshener and poison for cockroaches. In order to make the air-freshener they buy half a liter of extract for 100 MN and coloring for 20 MN. Both products are bought from puntos*, people they know who sell informally, specializing in these products. With that, they make approximately 100 half-liter bottles of air-freshener that they sell for 2.50 MN per piece to people they know, who in turn go out on the street and sell the product at 5 MN per bottle. They say they sell two to three batches per month.*

The poison-business, on the other hand, is shared with Enrique's brother, splitting work, costs and profits in half. This is a tricky business since the active ingredient is strictly controlled, expensive and hard to get hold of. It used to be very lucrative and permitted them to live well for some time.

"We were the ones that invented that", Enrique says with pride. "At that time there was a plague of cockroaches in Havana and we were the ones who sold the only poison that really worked. Just imagine, we sold a small bottle for five dollars! We had lots of money and bought a refrigerator, a nice stereo, a beautiful dining-room set… But now the cockroaches are controlled and there are other people doing the same business. The price has dropped and now we sell a small bottle for 5 MN. That is the way it is: a business is profitable for some time. Then inversion prices rise, or vending prices fall, there is more competition, less demand. Or the product that is necessary gets

lost. Then you have to leave the business and look for another. Cubans always have many things… (El Cubano siempre tiene muchas cosas).*"*

They tell me they make the poison by mixing the toxic ingredient with condensed milk. Besides investing in these two ingredients they have to buy the bottles. The milk is bought in the CUC-store while the other two products are bought informally. In the case of the active ingredient, the product itself is controlled and the selling of it is therefore illegal. Just as in the case of the air-freshener they sell the final product in bulk for 5 MN per small bottle to to people that then sell it on the streets for 10 MN.

***

In this chapter, one of the fundamental problems of economic life in Havana will be dealt with: the impossibility of making a living on salaries alone. Celia and Enrique's solution, diversifying their sources of income, is one of the most common. An approximate summary of their household income would look like this[86]:

Celia's salary	360 MN
Enrique's salary	328 MN
Air-freshener	325 MN
Poison	770 MN
Total	**1783 MN**

Legal salaried work is combined with informal businesses of small scale production and wholesale. The informal businesses account for more than half of the household's monetary income. None of their stable incomes are in CUC, and they say they get hold of CUC by changing MN in exchange booths or informally. The per capita monthly income is approximately 446 MN.

My interlocutors principally used three different kinds of income-generating activities: formal salaried work for the state, informal salaried work in a private business, and informal entrepreneurship; my discussion will therefore be limited to these categories. I begin by examining the incentives to work and show that, just as Celia, the overwhelming majority of the people I spoke to felt pride and joy in relation to their income-generating activities. I will also look at how people made use of physical, human, and social assets in order to diversify their income and specifically show how employment was

[86] The incomes from their informal businesses are based on their estimates and my calculations of their profits.

used as an asset which could give rewards other than the salary: formal non-monetary rewards such as hygiene products or access to a car; a position of power over, or control of, information, knowledge, or skills that could generate gifts; access to important social networks; and, last but not least, access to material goods that could be "gotten hold of" and used or sold.

Furthermore I will look at how people evaluate and compare formal with informal work. Formal work is stable and gives access to social security such as pensions, but the remuneration is not enough to make a living. Informal work is both insecure and risky but much more profitable. Lastly, I focus on the ability to *inventar* which is required in order to find solutions to everyday problems, as well as identify and make use of possibilities to generate income. While being a valued ability, it is also surrounded by moral anxieties. As is shown in chapter four, the obligations inherent in social relations were seen as threatened by the pursuit of maximizing profit.

State Salaries and the Cost of Living

I would say that *the* fundamental problem faced by people in Havana for as long as I have been visiting the city is that state salaries are not sufficient to cover household needs[87]. I have completely lost track of how many times I have heard that salaries are "too low", "not enough" or "don't solve my problems" (*no resuelve*) and several authors have made the same observation (see for example M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 224; Fabienke, 2001, p. 125; Gordy, 2006, p. 396; Pearson, 1997, p. 681; Rosendahl, 2001). The reason is not only that formal salaries are low in comparison to prices, but that the majority of Cubans receive their salary only in MN. According to Togores & García:

> State workers have been one [of] the most affected groups in terms of the decline in income and hence access to consumption. […] By 2000, the nominal salary was 234 pesos, a 24 percent increase over the entire crisis period dating from 1989. Even so, the tendency of nominal wages to rise has not been able to offset the deterioration resulting from increases in the consumer price index. Cubans' real wages dropped 37 percent between 1989 and 2000 […], representing a hardship for the majority of the population, who depend on wages as their most important source of income. (Togores & García, 2004, pp. 250-251)

[87] For a historical comparison, see the household budgets from the 1980s when salaries did cover household needs in Rosendahl (1997, pp. 32-35).

Since salaried work alone is not a solution, other strategies must be sought in order to make a living. At the same time, the Cuban economy is structured around salaried work. As seen in chapter two, laws and regulations structuring the labor market create a system where few other options are legally viable. In other words, the alternatives to income-generation through salaried work are more often than not situated within the informal economy. In the words of Espina Prieto:

> The importance of work in general is declining and work in the state sector is not seen as providing high income or welfare. The role of salary as a source of income has weakened. In addition income-earning strategies not associated with employment have increased in importance and the holding of private property has become connected to the availability of monetary income. Finally, illegal strategies constitute an ever-more efficient means of obtaining income. (M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 224)

Table 5:1 shows the employment and monthly salaries of a handful of the state employees I talked to. The numbers were collected in 2006 and can be compared to the *average* monthly salary in state and mixed enterprises given by Zabala Argüelles (2010b, p. 118, Table 3) for that year: 387 MN.

Table 5:1, State salaries

Engineer	650 MN 30 CUC[88]
Dean	745 MN
Custodian	235 MN 10 CUC[89]
University teacher	459 MN
Personnel management	424 MN
Laboratory technician	360 MN
Sanitary inspector	360 MN
Exterminator (pest control)	328 MN
Loading and unloading trucks with CUC-goods	320 MN
Chef in a MN-canteen	250 MN
Preparing school snacks	240 MN
Clerk in a MN-store for used clothes	225 MN[90]

[88] A total of 1379 MN, this person is working in a company undergoing *perfeccionamiento empresarial* which means that it and its employees are privileged in many ways in order to increase production. For more about *perfeccionamiento empresarial* see Fabienke (2001, pp. 112-113).

[89] A total of 475 MN

[90] This was the minimum salary in 2006 (Pérez Izquierdo, 2007, p. 131)

These salaries must, of course, be compared to the cost of living in Havana. This is tricky, however, first and foremost because my own data is mostly qualitative. The quantitative data I did collect is not suitable to use as a base for making statistics or calculations[91]. The figures presented in literature about Cuba are, on the other hand, problematic[92]. Espina Prieto (2004, p. 225) uses a consumption basket costing 170-190 MN per month and person[93]. Togores' numbers are not relevant for this study since her most recent estimate, 156 MN (Togores & García, 2004, p. 261), is the cost for a 1998 *food* basket not containing other essentials such as clothes, hygiene products, or bills (Togores & García, 2004, p. 293, note 15)[94]. Based on my qualitative data I would say that the cost is much higher.

Fernando, a young man in his twenties, told me that he had had a stable state-employment earning 500 MN per month, which exceeds many of the salaries in table 5:1. At the time, he lived with his wife and small son and was the only one generating an income in his household. This meant a per capita income of 167 MN which would be close to the estimates made by Espina Prieto and Togores & García. According to Fernando, however, his salary didn't even last two weeks:

> We decided that my salary [of 500 MN] was for food alone and that all other expenses would have to wait. We changed 250 MN for 10 CUC and with the rest we bought the rationed items and went to the *agro*. Do you know how long the money lasted? Ten days! And the following month not even ten because we had to pay back debts accumulated during the first month. We kept on like that for a couple of months but finally I just couldn't cope with it and I left the job to search for another.

In this narrative, another flaw of most state salaries is mentioned: the fact that they are only paid in MN while, as seen in chapters two and four, the segmented market requires people to acquire CUC in order to meet their needs. The low salaries, combined with the high prices for buying CUC, meant that most people preferred to obtain CUC directly, for example via

[91] This is mainly due to the small sample and the lack of mathematical reliability as people often forgot to note expenses, hid data or only included what they perceived as 'important' expenses. Some figures are, however, fairly reliable since they are based on more or less regular monthly expenses that many were able to fill in. The cost for electricity, gas and water, for example, was between 40 and 50 MN per month. Households with a telephone paid approximately 45 MN per month in telephone bills and the monthly expenditure on rationed goods was about 20 MN per person. Other expenses depended heavily on income.

[92] Zabala Argüelles (2010b, p. 118) mentions the difficulties of calculating the cost of a food basket given the segmented market for consumer goods.

[93] She does so with an unspecified reference to Togores.

[94] For even older estimations made during the 1990s see Zabala Argüelles (2010a, pp. 83-84)

informal income-generating activities, instead of changing part of their meager MN salaries. Various authors (for example Domínguez, 2004, p. 32; Fabienke, 2001, pp. 124, 128, note 131; Togores & García, 2004, p. 252) cite numbers regarding the percentage of Cubans with access to CUC (the numbers cited are often around 50%) but since vital consumer goods, at least in Havana, are sold exclusively in CUC I would say that the question is not so much *if* people have access to CUC, but *how* they do. According to Espina Prieto:

> The phenomenon of access to income in foreign exchange is still poorly understood, though it is being studied. Part of the difficulty in measurement and quantification arises from the fact that the amounts and sources of household foreign exchange incomes often derive from informal channels and non-official employment. (M. Espina Prieto, 2004, p. 223)

Returning to the issue of the cost of living, I am unable to suggest a more accurate number than the ones presented by Espina Prieto and Togores, but some general statements can be made based on trends shown in the quantitative data collected through surveys and supported by qualitative data.

My interlocutors considered food, hygiene products, clothes and shoes as their biggest expenses which they struggled to cover. Costs for housing were only mentioned by those few who rented apartments. Education and healthcare were free of charge, and subsidized goods and bills (with the possible exception of electricity) were often regarded as minor expenses. Very few saved money and those who did, did so on a short term basis, in order to do repair work or buy expensive items such as furniture or electric appliances. Investments were hardly possible due to the restrictions posed on private property. Generally, *all the money that entered a household was spent on consumption* and food, in particular, took up most of the household budget.

None of the salaries in table 4:1 would, by itself, suffice to maintain an entire household including dependents. In the cases of the lowest salaries, they do not even suffice to maintain a single-person household. The individual salaries are, in these as well as in most other cases, only *one* of the incomes of the household where they are complemented by pensions, other salaries, informal economic activities, gifts etc. that could be generated by the employee themselves or by some other member of the household. “It is not much, but it is something” as people kept repeating when speaking about their salaries. In other words, far from *constituting* the household income,

each of the above salaries *contributed* to it. And even though they were not sufficient, they were important. Most households in this study have an approximate per capita income of around 500 MN per month.

Before looking at how people solved the problem of low salaries by diversifying their income-generating activities, I will take a closer look at attitudes and non-material motivations when it came to salaried work.

Incentives to Work

Issues regarding incentives to work have quite a history in modern Cuba where the so called Great Debate of the 1960s revolved, to a large extent, around whether incentives should be material or moral[95]. Advocates for material incentives tended to lean more towards the Soviet model and argued that Cuba had to retain capitalist elements in its organization of the socialist economy. This was necessary, they argued, in order to create the right material conditions for communism – especially considering Cuba's state as an underdeveloped country. The other side argued that a socialist consciousness was paramount for creating the conditions for communism. Retaining capitalist elements would be fostering a capitalist mentality that could only be negative in the long run and Latin American dependency theory was used to argue that Soviet "help" would threaten national independence. Intimately linked to the position favoring moral incentives was Guevara's vision of the "new man", largely defined by his or her willingness to work for the good of society rather than for individual gain (see Guevara, 1965). Note that the premises in which the Great Debate was based are in accordance with the account of "separate spheres and hostile worlds" mentioned in the introduction; materiality, individualism and capitalism are contrasted to morality, solidarity and communism.

Salaries and rewards-in-kind are, of course, examples of material incentives. Moral incentives found in literature about Cuba are emulation (i.e. competition within or between workplaces leading to titles and/or material rewards, see Rosendahl (1997, pp. 37-38)), entry into the party, and workplace recognition (Kapica, 2000, p. 137) as well as honorary titles such as "National Vanguard". While I did have the pleasure to get to know a National Vanguard I would say that these types of state-controlled moral

[95] See Mesa-Lago (1972); Kapica (2000, pp. 132-139) and Gordy (2006, pp. 390-391) for more about the Great Debate. Kapica is particularly interesting since he shows how the two positions represent two different visions of *cubanía* that have surfaced in Cuban history since colonial times.

incentives had no great importance in the lives of people in Havana in 2006. As I will discuss shortly, I found that other, more personal non-material incentives were also important even though material motivations had a prominent place in everyday discourse. Many of my interlocutors felt joy, pride, and usefulness in connection to their jobs.

The dichotomy created by the Great Debate is still present both in official discourse and in emic notions about work-ethic. The different changes in Cuban economic policy since the 1960s, introducing or excluding market mechanisms (such as the private agricultural markets introduced 1980, closed down in 1986 and re-opened in 1994), have all made reference to this debate. The dilemma it presents is one of communist ideals that have proven difficult to implement in a socialist reality where materiality is an important part of peoples' lives. The concepts of material and moral incentives are thus related to important issues of ideology and economic policy, and, as we will see in the following anecdote, emic notions associated moral incentives with revolutionary ideals and integration in the Revolution.

During fieldwork I got to know Sonia, a middle-aged woman that had been a housewife for many years. She lived alone, received remittances from one of her children, rarely left the apartment, and always complained about feeling bored, depressed, and lacking meaning in her life. I suggested that she become more active in some way, with a job or some voluntary work for a church since she was a Catholic. It would, I argued, give her a reason to get up in the morning, leave her house, and get to know some people. Since she received remittances she was not dependent on the salary and could choose a comfortable job, or do volunteer work on her own terms. Sonia liked the idea and, through a family member, she got a job as a cleaning lady "in a *nice* office" as she expressed it (i.e. the office of an entity operating in CUC). It was hard work she said, but she liked it and she got to know lots of people. One day she talked about her daughter with some women from the armed forces that were in the office that day: "When I told them that she lived in Europe one of them looked really surprised and asked me why on earth I was working then. I told her I liked to work, to feel necessary, to get out of the house… Can you imagine? To hear that from a person belonging to the military!"

I heard Sonia tell this anecdote to a number of people and it was always told and received as a very funny story. Sonia's decision (clearly formed by her meeting with me and my ideas about the benefits of occupations outside the

house) was in this case met with surprise and seen as rather illogical. Why would a person with access to remittances want to work? But Sonia was equally surprised, as she had not expected to encounter such a reaction from a person belonging to the military. The humor lies in the fact that the armed forces are representatives of the government and are expected by most people to hold revolutionary ideals, while Sonia is very prone, at least amongst friends, to complain and be rather critical of the economic and political situation. In Sonia's story she, as a self-proclaimed non-revolutionary, suddenly saw herself defending moral incentives to work against a representative of the armed forces who, in turn, stressed the material incentives.

In the post-Special Period Havana of 2006, money was as important as ever, as shown in chapter two; rations were small and dependency on other markets high. During fieldwork, the pursuit of income was used as an explanation for a wide range of decisions, plans and projects. So much so that I sometimes got the feeling that material gains were the alleged reason behind almost any kind of decision and other, non-economic, motivations were forgotten. While the reality was far more complex, it was nevertheless clear that, due to the low salaries and the economic stress experienced by most households, money and other material gains were important, and were a frequent subject of everyday conversations and negotiations. In previous chapters we have seen how people often made reference to the economy when explaining everything from low fertility-rates to divorces and sickness.

Going back to a *barrio* I once lived in, my former neighbors kindly filled me in on all the gossip. Among stories of infidelity, robbery, pregnancies, migration, weight-loss and weight-gain, one neighbor told me about a physician and mother of two small children who had left them with their grandmother and gone on an international mission to Venezuela for two years. According to ideals of motherhood in Cuba, in order to maintain her image as a good mother, a woman must have very strong reasons for leaving her children. The explanation given in this case was that leaving the children and going away was the only way this woman could earn some CUC and, on top of that, the privileges extended to *internacionalistas*: furniture, a TV, and maybe even a house. With her ordinary salary in MN she would never be able to buy those things. In this narrative the physician's decision to leave her children for two years becomes an expression of motherly love: she

essentially sacrifices herself in order to provide for her children[96]. Economy and affection, money and love, become one and the same, and the former acts as a primary explanatory device even in the case of what supposedly is altruistic international aid-work.

Another expression of this and one of the features of life in Cuba which is most commented on by foreign observers is what Martín Fernández et.al. (1996, p. 96) have termed *desprofesionalización* (de-professionalization) to talk about highly skilled professionals such as engineers, physicians, or psychologists, taking unskilled jobs, for example in the tourist sector, in pursuit of higher earnings and access to CUC.

Lena, a trained veterinarian in her forties, had had to leave her vocation because of the low salary and start a second career, in gastronomy, with the hope of getting a job in the tourist industry with the possibility of earning tips in CUC. Like many graduates of gastronomy, she ended up doing something else: serving fried chicken in a CUC fast-food joint mainly catering to Cubans. According to Lena, that was the worst job she had ever had. Because of conflicts with her parents she had had to move out and rent an apartment and, since the salary wasn't enough to pay the rent, she had to steal in order to maintain herself:

> That job turned me into a total nervous wreck! I could hardly sleep at night thinking about being discovered by my boss or some inspector. I also felt terrible thinking about the customers I had cheated. Cheating an old lady is a terrible thing to do but I just had to in order to pay the rent.

Luckily she managed to get a new job as a secretary at an embassy where she earned enough to maintain herself. Her dream, however, was to be able to work as a veterinarian again, a profession she truly loved. Lena also had dreams about opening her own clinic: "It has to be illegal, of course, because it is not allowed for veterinarians to open private clinics but I have seen illegal ones that are fully equipped with all the modern equipment. I would love to own one!" Instead, she worked at the embassy, performed sporadically as a veterinarian in the informal market and looked for a job as a nanny or housekeeper abroad in order to work for a year or two and save up money to buy a house on the informal market in Havana and maybe set up an informal clinic there.

[96] For more about motherhood and transnational migration see for example Åkesson, Carling & Dortbohm (2012)

There is no lack of moral incentives to work in Lena's story – she loves her profession – but the low salary and her material needs drive her to put economic gain before personal satisfaction. This is certainly a good example of *desprofesionalización* and Lena is clearly frustrated and sad that she cannot work within her field of study and according to her preferences. At the same time it would be an error to assume that people in Havana have laid aside all non-material incentives and only see work as income-generation.

In fact, the overwhelming majority of my interlocutors felt pride and joy in their work. And a good deal of them also saw what they did as useful and important, whether they are internationally known researchers or informal petty traders, revolutionaries or fierce critics of the government. They saw both good and bad things about their work, ways in which they benefited and ways in which they suffered from it. They all saw the abilities they successfully made use of and felt pride in that.

The reasons for this are, however, different depending largely on the educational capital of the person. The highly educated often saw their employment as part of a career and an identity. Academic studies and the employment these led to were important parts of who these people were. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Raquel, a university teacher and researcher in her thirties:

> Maria: […] how do you evaluate your situation in life right now? That is, how do you feel? How do you see your life in its totality right now?
> Raquel: Well, to tell you the truth I see my situation in life as satisfactory. That is, nothing is easy here but at least it isn't easy for anybody. But I have three children that are well looked after, at least I consider them well looked after. I work with what I love. I have a partner that shares my tastes. Living with someone that views life in the same manner as oneself is very important to me. I feel good, really. But of course I feel stress. Economic stress and work-related stress. Sure. But, in general, I have to say that my life is satisfactory. I see that what many people who migrate do is change spiritual wealth for economic wealth. A friend of mine who is currently abroad is an academic and could have an excellent career but now he is working in a store… I don't say that it is wrong but for me that would be changing something so important for me: my work, for a car and a laptop.

In Raquel's view, the satisfaction of working with something one loves and having an academic career is contrasted with unskilled labor abroad that

certainly gives economic wealth but which, for her, would be reducing her spiritual wealth.

Just like Celia, whom I quoted in the introduction to this chapter, and Elena, the laboratory technician from chapter two, highly skilled workers often claimed to be working "for the love of it", despite low salaries. Their work-ethic stems from personal preference and from their position as highly educated workers with a certain status and self-image. Their work is, so to speak, part of their lifestyle and identity. For these people, *desprofesionalización* meant frustration and loss of pride and they resisted it by prioritizing "spiritual wealth" over "material wealth".

However, as I have already mentioned, feelings of joy and pride connected to income-generating activities was not just a privilege of the highly educated. Those of my interlocutors with jobs that did not require higher education also spoke about their skills with pride and talked about non-material ways in which they benefited from work. Daniel, a valet in a parking lot outside a big CUC department store, spoke with pride about how he used his skills:

> Daniel: I like my job because it keeps me busy, you are active, you deal with people and you don't get bored. I have seen all sorts of things there… One day a car even caught fire! […] I also like the fact that I don't have a lot of responsibility. The only responsibility is being able to pay the tax at the end of the day.
> Maria: Don't you feel the responsibility of guarding the cars? What if something happens while you watch them?
> Daniel: Yes but nothing has ever happened to me. If you pay attention nothing happens and I'm always on the lookout. I even have clients that only park with me because they know I take good care of the cars.

Just like many other unskilled workers he did not, however, see his job as part of his identity and, two years later when I made a re-visit, he had changed his principal income-generating activity three times:

> I had problems in that job [as a valet] and they kicked me out. At the same time the store my wife worked in closed and she was left unemployed. We survived a couple of months selling clothes my father sent me from abroad. Then I worked for the state for a while as a gardener but the salary was too low and I left. I recently found a job for a *cuentapropista*.

Work-histories could be extremely long with frequent changes of workplace – especially for those people with work that did not require education. One middle-aged woman summed up her work history like this: "I'm a housewife

that works in intervals. Sometimes I work three or four months but then I argue with my boss or get bored and leave the job to stay at home until I get bored. Then I work again for a couple of months." Reasons for leaving work can be an upcoming operation, pregnancy, conflicts in the work-place, having to commute, deaths in the family, boredom or low remuneration. Leaving one job was not a big deal, especially if the household had diversified their income-generating activities, and people with this kind of work-history trusted in their ability to find something new.

While this is a sign of not attaching much importance to specific jobs, it is also the root of their feelings of joy and pride in their work. If a job became a problem, or if it simply did not pay off, the person left the job without giving it a second thought. There was, it seems, no reason to stay in a job – be it formal or informal employment or independent – if it didn't feel good or serve the purposes of generating an acceptable income. One should work to live, not live to work. Withers Osmond (1991) found the same differences in attitudes to work between female factory-workers and professional women in Cuba, and the poor families in Havana studied by Zabala Argüelles (2010a, p. 150) during the Special Period saw, according to the author, salaried work only as an obligation and a source of income.

I will now turn to how my interlocutors solved the problem with low state salaries by diversifying their income-generating activities.

Diversification and Assets

The impossibility of relying only on salaried work and the need to diversify income-generating activities is not unique to Cuba, and it is in acknowledgement of this, and in response to conventional poverty analyses, that the so-called "livelihoods approach" has been applied, first to rural and then to urban settings in developing countries.

The proponents of the livelihoods approach take a broad view of economic life, including more than monetary income-levels. Rakodi (2002, p. 3) cites Chambers and Conway: "a livelihood is defined as comprising '…the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living' […]". The unit of analysis is the household, and instead of a negative view looking at what households lack, the focus lies on what they *have* and what they actually *do* to secure their livelihood. Scholars using this approach thus talk about household strategies.

The approach has been criticized in several ways. Wolf (1990) has pointed out that the concept of household strategies obscures intra-household conflict, treats households as rational beings, and fails to give attention to actors' own voices. With specific reference to the Cuban case, Powell urges authors to be cautious and avoid a too enthusiastic celebration of people's ability to make a living by their own means since, "[t]his places much of the responsibility for development on poor communities themselves, and is particularly likely to do so when valorized as a 'cultural characteristic' of *cubanidad* – as indeed many ordinary Cubans do themselves." (Powell, 2008, p. 187).

With this in mind I will borrow a perspective from the livelihoods approach, namely the focus on assets. When my interlocutors diversified their income-generating activities they very consciously made use of the assets available to them. At the same time they considered the *need* to make a living informally a big *problem* that meant stress, insecurity, risk, and moral anxiety.

Within the livelihoods approach assets are commonly classified as financial, natural, physical, human or social (Meikle, 2002, pp. 46-47; Rakodi, 2002, p. 11). I find the first two categories to be less relevant for the purposes of this study. Financial assets such as savings, formal loans, and credits, were not that important in Havana during my fieldwork. People saved very little and formal loans and credits were unavailable for the people I spoke to. Natural assets such as land and water are less significant in urban settings. Furthermore, even though there is a history of urban agriculture in Havana, this was not something practiced by my interlocutors. Physical, human, and social assets were, however, crucial.

Physical assets are infrastructure such as a house or a porch, and equipment such as a car or a video-camera. Examples of how these kinds of assets are used in Havana abound. A house with an extra room in an attractive area is a veritable gold-mine as it can be rented out to nationals or, even more lucrative, foreigners. Olga, a middle-aged woman, lived with her partner, two children and a grand-child in Central Havana and had a big porch protected by a high wall. She earned the most stable part of the household income by renting the porch to three car-owners who paid 10 CUC per person per month to park their cars there. She also let a man who repaired refrigerators have his workshop on the porch. He gave Olga 10 MN for every refrigerator he opened, which in practice meant 10-20 MN per working day. This was a third of the total monthly household income that included her resident daughter's

informal salary of 20 CUC, 400 MN in child support from her grandson's father, 32 CUC as a gift from her non-resident daughter, as well as 14 CUC and 100 MN from other informal incomes (petty trade, etc.). The total monthly household income was, the month she participated in my study, approximately 96 CUC and 850 MN, a per capita income of 631 MN.

Human assets, on the other hand, are expressed in the capacity of people for work and in this are included the education, skills and health-status of the person in question. An example of this would be plumbers, electricians and other craftsmen, as well as hairdressers who have excellent opportunities for relatively lucrative and steady informal work as they have skills that are often sought after.

Social assets are networks of support and reciprocity. An important aspect of this category is mentioned by Meikle (2002, p. 47), namely that information might be included in social assets. Access to information is vital in all aspects of economic life and, when it comes to income generation, it might give access to clients, suppliers and future employers. In Havana, information about what is going on both in the formal and informal market often circulates informally within networks rather than formally through the mass media. Writing about life in a small Cuban town in the 1980s Rosendahl (1997, p. 43) writes: "Every conversation in Palmera starts with a discussion of where one can buy something. The most common form of reciprocity, in which everyone takes part, is the giving, receiving, and repaying of information about the availability of various articles."

Networks are also crucial in that they serve to pool other assets, creating informal businesses involving several network-members. One such example is that of Marta, a woman in her fifties, living with her husband and in-laws on the outskirts of Havana.

Marta gets up early every morning to go to the market and shop for food. While she prepares whatever dish she has decided on that day, her father-in-law, who has lived in the neighborhood for many years and knows lots of people, goes around the neighborhood knocking on doors and taking orders.

By midday Marta is done cooking and packs everything according to the list of orders provided by her father-in-law. They then help each other to deliver the food and by 1 pm they are done and can spend the rest of the evening

doing other things. Besides selling food she also sells detergent, lollipops, scouring-cloths and "other things that turn up (*aparecen*)".

Her income varies a lot but the month that I asked her to document her economic activities was a very successful one indeed. The profit made from her business was 2046 MN[97], a large sum compared to the incomes of the rest of the members of her household. Her in-laws have a joint income of 254 MN per month in pension, while her husband earns a monthly salary of 320 MN loading trucks delivering CUC-goods to stores. This gives a monthly per capita income of 655 MN.

We do not touch the subject directly but both of us insinuate that her husband's job is "very good" since he can "get hold of" (*conseguir*) many things there. It is reasonable to assume that some of the non-food items sold by Marta are given to her by her husband who gets them at his workplace. Martha's cooking skills, her husband's access to valuable goods and her father-in-law's spare time and contacts are, to put it simply, assets that are necessary for Marta's thriving business that generates the bulk of the household economy. The household is the social asset that serves to pull these together.

Note, however, that it goes against emic notions of morality to view interpersonal relations explicitly as an asset when it comes to income-generation. As seen in chapter four, the pursuit of material rewards risks, according to emic moral notions, threatening the obligations inherent in social relations. I will have reason to come back to this in chapter six.

Employment as an Asset

While the category of human assets includes the capacity to work, none of the above categories include employment as a specific asset. González de la Rocha (2001) has criticized what I have termed the livelihoods approach for its failure to acknowledge the importance of salaries and employment as a prerequisite for other income-generating activities:

[97] She had a total income of 2587 MN. The expenditures are hard to calculate since business and household economies mix and the food cooked might be sold as well as consumed by the residents of her household. Since the food sold by Marta during this week were *tamales, croquetas* and *papas rellenas* I have regarded all potatoes, flour, meat, cheese, maize and lard bought as expenditures in Marta's business. This probably gives a high figure for expenditures since at least some of the meat was most likely bought to be consumed by the household.

> Emphasizing survival strategies to the point of losing sight of the limits of these strategies can lead to arguments with extremely dangerous implications. The emphasis on the multiplicity of income sources that was part of the resources-of-poverty model[98] and the data gathered on households' responses to the 1980s crisis [in Latin America] helped to create the impression that the poor would survive even without employment. This view is wrong. Our past analyses did not emphasize enough the real importance of wages coming from the market as the trigger for other activities and therefore the motor of reproduction and could not predict the erosion of other sources of income when wages were absent. (González de la Rocha, 2001, pp. 93-94)

With her fieldwork in urban Mexico in mind, González de la Rocha shows employment to be crucial since the stable and fairly high wages it provides make other income-generating activities possible[99]. In the Cuban context of low wages her critique of the livelihoods approach is still important, but our view must open up to *other* ways to benefit from employment. I would argue that, in Havana, *employment* is seen as an asset that, along with the other assets of the employee and the household, could be used in different ways to make a living. When speaking about an employment and evaluating it, the salary was often much less important than the other opportunities for material gain that it could lead to.

First there were the formal non-monetary rewards for salaried work. Special privileges or rewards in kind connected to employment were common in Cuba in 2006. According to Fabienke (2001, p. 113), around 37% of state and cooperative employees received "motivation payment" either in CUC or in kind in 1997. A shopping-bag with hygiene products and/or other CUC goods was one of the most common rewards in kind and it was highly coveted. Some employments included a snack – a baguette with ham and cheese and a can of soda – and these were also highly valued, especially since they could be sold. Some people made a living passing by work-places that gave snacks to their employees, buying them at 15 MN per piece and then re-selling them. For the worker selling his or her snack this meant 15 MN per work-day, about 300 MN per month, a stable informal income at a very low risk and with a minimal expenditure of time and effort compared to selling the snacks directly in the street.

With certain higher positions came the privilege of a car or motorcycle and, sometimes, even the right to buy gasoline in MN. Besides facilitating daily

[98] What I have called the livelihoods approach.

[99] See Amis (1995) for more about the importance of the labor market in shaping urban poverty.

life in many ways, these could be used as informal taxis or hired out for a weekend, or for a monthly fee. All these privileges could thus either be enjoyed directly by the employee or sold and converted to money. Rather than seeing this money as part of the salary, it was the result of informal income-generating activities conducted parallel to, and thanks to, the employment.

Second, if the employment meant a position of power over or control of important information, knowledge, or skills, it could also generate material benefits such as gifts. Employees of state bureaucracy or the public health sector are good examples of people receiving gifts from clients and patients on a more or less regular basis (see also Andaya, 2009; Rosendahl, 2001, p. 95). In both cases these employees cater to the needs of people in desperate situations of bureaucratic pressure or ill health, and in both cases the clients are willing to give gifts in order to show their gratitude, to establish strategic relations, to skip long waiting hours, or to be taken care of with extra consideration. The following was told to me by a nurse at a waiting room in a polyclinic catering to Cubans:

> When I worked at a gynecological division all the young girls that wanted to do abortions came and no one was allowed to accompany them inside, neither mothers nor boyfriends. You can imagine all they offered me to let them through… Money, food, clothes, shoes…everything! They tore the pockets of my scrub trying to stuff them with things.
>
> One day, for example, a young woman, a *jinetera*[100], came. She had an Italian boyfriend but was pregnant by a Cuban man. She came in the afternoon and wanted an examination but they are only done in the mornings. I explained that and that was when she told me about her situation. She offered me money. Lots of it. But I refused: "Take that away. Are you crazy! I can lose my job and I can't afford that. If I help it's because I want to. Because you are in a difficult situation and deserve help. Not because you give me things." I helped her and the following day she came back with a shopping bag full of food and things: "I know you don't want anything but you were good to me and I want to help you in the same way. Because I just feel like it and don't give a damn (*porque me sale de la papaya*). Not in order to pay anything."
>
> I helped her during the whole pregnancy and was at her side during the delivery. I met the Italian man that, to this day, thinks the child is his. The whole time she bought me and my children things: clothes, shoes, food…

[100] This expression includes people making an informal living off their relations with foreigners. The range of activities is ample, including everything from informal tour guides to dating and sex.

> Finally she migrated to Italy and when she came back to visit she invited me to dinner and brought all kinds of things for my children: toys, clothes, shoes…everything! For me she brought, amongst other things, a bikini that I use to this day. It's very nice, Italian… She said she had chosen to do it because of what I had said that first day: "I noticed that you wouldn't take advantage of me, that you weren't a jerk (*una descarada*). You helped me and I helped you." Then she returned to Italy and I've not heard from her since.

In this narrative the nurse – very carefully portraying herself as helping others without material interests[101] – follows her patient through pregnancy and delivery almost like a private nurse. This is not uncommon for doctors and nurses who can take on patients informally and follow them through their convalescence with home visits. The rewards are, at times, ample and I have even heard stories about doctors inheriting an old person's house for helping them during their last years in life.

Since bribing is strictly forbidden and heavily punished if found out, and since there are emic notions about interpersonal relations as ideally free from economic interests, gifts are given in subtle ways. It is, for example, common for people to hand over the gift after the service has been completed – as in the narrative above – and maybe also at the person's house. The exchange of services for gifts is also more likely to occur between people who know each other, or who at least have an acquaintance in common.

Social relations are, in other words, necessary in order to enter into the economy of favors and gifts. This is the third way in which formal employment is an asset; it gives access to valuable social networks and opens up opportunities to exchange all kinds of material and non-material wealth. The workplace itself could, for example, mean a good market for informal petty trade with stable clients and relative security. Selling coffee or snacks on a daily basis at one's workplace was fairly common, but sales of a more irregular nature could also be conducted at work. As mentioned in chapter four, it was important to find the right balance of trust and social distance in order to conduct safe transactions that did not violate ideals of social obligations. The social distance in the relationship between work colleagues had to be just right in order to create a good relationship for informal transactions.

[101] For more about the moral anxieties surrounding gift-giving and the subtle differences between a gift, a bribe and an offending act of charity in the context of health-workers and their patients see chapter six as well as Andaya (2009)

Last but certainly not least, employment could give access to valuable goods that could be "gotten hold of" by the employee (see Rosendahl, 2001, p. 96). Working as a chef, for example, was considered a very good job since it meant possibilities to take home foodstuffs, principally for the household to consume, but also for selling – food being *the* most sought after product in the informal market. While the state actors certainly consider this as stealing or pilfering of state property, the word *robar* (to steal) was only used by my interlocutors when criticizing state salaries. In that case *robar* was used rhetorically: "when paying low salaries the state forces people to actually steal" – something that, of course, was seen as both hypocritical and immoral.

When speaking about taking things home from work, *llevar* (to take away), or *conseguir*[102] (to get hold of) were the preferred terms. These words lacked the strong moral force of *robar* and instead expressed a necessity - something "everybody" did. When pressing the issue it seemed that the moral breach had already been committed by the state by paying insufficient salaries and thus failing to fulfill its obligation to provide for its citizens. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is in accordance with the view my interlocutors held concerning the obligations of the state. Getting hold of things from one's workplace was just a way to make up for a low salary.

I mentioned above that illegal is not the same as amoral. According to Skitka, perceptions of deservingness are crucial to assessments of justice and fairness so that "people will change their behavior, such as work more or less, if they feel they are being under- or over-benefited" (Skitka, 2009, p. 110) or "steal office supplies if they feel they are not being treated fairly" (Skitka, 2009, p. 106). In the following excerpt from my field-diary, Sara, a skilled state employee in her twenties, tells me about a disturbing phone call from her godmother:

> Sara: She was crying, poor thing…
> Maria: Why?
> Sara: Well you see, she is not working now and neither is her husband and it seems like her knee has been swollen for a couple of days.
> Maria: Oh… How come she lost her job? Did they fire her?

[102] Other authors, for example Weinreb Rosenberg (2009, pp. 72-75) and Rosendahl (1997, p. 43), have analyzed the different meanings given to the word *conseguir*. Here only one of those will be dealt with: the way it is used in relation to "getting hold of" things from workplaces. See also Ledeneva (1998, p. 13) on the Russian word *dostal* used similarly in the Soviet Union.

> Sara: No. The thing is she had been working at a laundry for many years. It was a good job because she could take (*llevarse*) detergent…You know how it is… But then they had to make cuts and she was sent to another laundry too far away from her home. It didn't include transportation and she couldn't leave her little daughter for more than a few hours with her grandmother. So she said no and now she's filling in all the paperwork asking them to give her work closer to where she lives. Her husband also had a good job. He worked in a hotel kitchen but they too had to make reductions and, since he was just substituting for an employee, he was one of the first to go. And that job was good because he worked in a buffet and at the end of the day they got the leftovers to distribute among them. All of them, even the chef. And you know that the most difficult thing here is food.

When Sara talks about these people's employments she classifies them as good, and in both cases she does so in reference to the possibilities they offer to get hold of valuable goods. With small comments like "you know how it is" and "even the chef", the moral dubiousness of the behavior of the people in the story is countered by references to the economic situation and how generalized this practice is.

Sociologist Alena Ledeneva has studied informal exchange in the Soviet Union and lists "people's excuses" (Ledeneva, 1998, pp. 70-71) for engaging in this morally dubious practice. Common sense and references to necessity, shortage, scarcity, and social conventions are the ones that echo Sara's above.

In her study of life during the Cuban Special Period, Solberg notes that people who engaged in illegal practices, such as sales on the informal market or pilfering, were seldom criticized – at least not after the first years of the Special Period:

> The transactions per se are not as problematic as the fact that people **must** buy illegally because the state lets them down; the critique is therefore directed towards the state, not towards sellers on the black market or peasants [who sell their produce informally at high prices]. (Solberg, 1996, p. 160, emphasis in original)

Note, however, that things got more complicated when the goods the employees got hold of were taken more directly from customers rather than from the state. Susana, a middle-aged woman living by herself and looking for work to supplement her small remittances, told me happily that her boyfriend had offered to get her a job at a nearby school-canteen: "I asked him if there was any chance of taking home some chicken or anything and he said yes!" The next time we spoke, her daughter Yanelis was visiting and Susana had broken up with her boyfriend:

> Susana: Let me tell you something to see what you think about it. Yesterday I quarreled with my boyfriend because of something Yanelis said. Remember I told you he offered to get me a job at a school? Well, I told Yanelis about it and she said something that really made me think. "Mommy", she told me, "please don't steal in places where there are children and old people. I think about my daughter [Susana's granddaughter] and imagine somebody taking away what little chicken or the few eggs they give at school…" I thought a lot about that and I believe she's right. I think that's wrong and so I went to his house and told him that. He got mad and told me he cannot be thinking about these things, he lives with his old parents and has to get hold of what he needs and I left him like that, in mid-sentence. I asked him to think about it and tell me the next day.
> Yanelis: I wouldn't be thinking the way I do if it wasn't for my daughter, but just imagining that they take away what little food they give her… If she [Susana] steals at a hotel I don't care because there is lots of food there. And if it's grown-ups it's not the same thing, but children and the old… There are so little resources there and they barely give rice, beans and eggs, a little bit of chicken once a week and that's that. And not all kids can eat at home either. They need what little food they get at school.

In this narrative, stealing things from the workplace is not the problem *per se*. It is stealing food from needy children that is questioned as amoral and contrasted rhetorically with stealing food from rich adult tourists in a context where resources seems to be channeled to the latter. These moral negotiations were not uncommon in the lives of my interlocutors and I even encountered people who argued that, since having a salaried employment according to them meant having to steal, they preferred engaging in an informal business which they regarded as more honest and less morally problematic.

Tania told me that her parents, friends, and neighbors complained about the way she treated her son, a young man in his twenties who was a musician in Havana's underground music scene. He sold his records and musical arrangements informally and in CUC. The fact that she didn't force him to study or work but just let him "sit in front of his computer all day" was talked about in very negative terms. Tania claimed that these people just didn't understand:

> He has his music and once in a while he sells a record or something but people only see him at home all day. For my parents that is hard to understand. But I'm his mother and I don't mind providing for him. And I don't want him to be working and forced to steal, and you know that happens in lots of employment here. Neither do I want him to be working and earning less than he does here – doing what he likes to do.

Most employees, however, regarded their jobs as positive assets and found ways to use these that did not come into conflict with their conscience. In this way the moral standards of the person shaped the income-generating activities which she or he engaged in. By arguing this, I run counter to a trend in accounts of post-Special Period Cuba, where Cubans are described as practicing a double moral standard and "experiencing a dissonance between their personal values and the strategies they employed in order to earn a living informally or illegally" (Weinreb Rosenberg, 2009, p. 6)[103].

My interlocutors often complained about people who did anything for material gain but they never described themselves in that way and the reason they engaged in moral negotiations was not in order to justify their behavior or bitterly point out the ways in which they were forced into hypocrisy but, rather to find good strategies. While complaining about the hardships and scarcities of everyday life and lamenting the need to break laws, thereby exposing themselves to risks, my interlocutors spoke about their specific income-generating activities without shame or guilt. While their strategies might often be illegal, they were not considered amoral. This is in accordance with findings in research about justice that comes to the conclusion that personal moral standards are more important than laws when people assess justice and fairness (Skitka, 2009, p. 103).

I will now take a closer look at these illegal strategies and compare informal work with formal work.

Formal versus Informal Work

There were two ways to earn a living legally, as an employee or as a licensed entrepreneur, and these were mirrored in the informal economy where people generated incomes either as informal employees or as informal entrepreneurs.

Informal employees often worked for formal private entrepreneurs, *cuentapropistas*. The lacked all manner of legal protection and often had an unstable salary that fluctuated from day to day but that was always higher than a state salary. Above I mentioned Daniel, working as a valet in a parking area outside a department store in Havana. He was an informal employee: "My grandmother got me this job in the parking lot. I'm actually working without papers [i.e. informally] because it's my grandfather's business and he

[103] See also Eckstein (2003, pp. 25-26).

kind of has me and some other people there employed but he's the only one who has permission to do it."

Daniel worked together with another employee every other day, from 9:30 to 18:00 or 19:00, signaling to people where and how they should park and looking out for their cars while they do their shopping. At the end of the day he and his co-worker split their earnings. They charged 0.30 MN for the first hour and 0.25 MN for every subsequent hour: "Luckily people usually pay more than that, normally 5 MN but sometimes one or two dollars [CUC]. Sometimes I work alone and then I get to keep all the money." During the two weeks he filled in my form for household incomes and expenses he earned 390 MN and 4.10 CUC.

Table 5:2 merges the legal salaries in table 5:1 with the salaries of some informal employees and the approximate monthly earnings of some informal entrepreneurs. Since informal salaries may vary greatly from day to day, I have included notes to clarify how I calculated the amount included in the table. Note that informal incomes are very high compared to formal ones. The two highest earners are informal entrepreneurs followed by two informal employees. The only state employee that can even compete is a worker in a privileged enterprise, and a janitor earns more than the double salary of the dean.

Table 5:2, Formal and informal incomes

Formal employment	Informal employment	Informal entrepreneurship[104]	Monthly income	Total in MN
		Letting of car and phone line	100 CUC	2400
		Selling of food etc.	2046 MN	2046
	Janitor[105]		327 MN 71 CUC	2031
	Employee in a café[106]		1500 MN	1500
Engineer			650 MN 30 CUC	1379
		Manufacturing poison and air-freshener	1095MN	1095
		Letting of walled patio	300 MN 30 CUC	1020
	Valet[107]		780 MN 8.20 CUC	977
Dean			745 MN	745
	Janitor[108]		20 CUC	480
Custodian			235 MN 10 CUC	475
University teacher			459 MN	459
Personnel manager			424 MN	424
Laboratory technician			360 MN	360
Sanitary inspector			360 MN	360
Pest control			328 MN	328
Loading trucks with CUC-goods			320 MN	320
Chef in a MN-canteen			250 MN	250
Preparing food			240 MN	240
Clerk			225 MN	225

[104] Incomes for this category are based on approximations and calculations of profits.

[105] The janitor reported an income of 180 MN and 39 CUC in 11 workdays. I calculated the median income per day and multiplied by 20 thus calculating with 20 workdays per month. I suspect, however, that he works six days per week making my calculation an underestimation of his monthly income.

[106] The clerk states that he earns 150 MN per working day and has a working week of 2-3days. I calculated the monthly salary if working two and three days per week respectively and arrived at an interval of 1200-1800 MN per month. 1500 is a sum in between these two extremes.

[107] The valet earned 390 MN and 4.10 CUC during the two weeks he filled in my form. I multiplied that amount by two in order to get a monthly income. According to him he usually earns more.

[108] This janitor states that she earns 1 CUC per working day. I have calculated with twenty working days per month.

While working for a *cuentapropista* means more money than working for the state, it has its drawbacks. These are summed up by a young man working as an employee in a private kiosk:

> It is difficult to work for a *cuentapropista*. The good part is you earn lots of money, but the bad part is you have no papers [i.e. work is informal], they demand a lot, they exploit you and they throw you out when they feel like it.

Working as an informal entrepreneur, on the other hand, means more independence but at the same time more responsibility. When asked to compare three types of income-generating activities – formal employment, informal employment and informal entrepreneurship – a middle-aged woman with ample experience of all three answered:

> When you work for the state they never pay you what they should considering the work you do. That is why you have to have something else as collateral, some other source of income, in order to get by. Or steal a lot. When you work independently you are your own boss. I can decide to work in the middle of the night if I see that I will earn something doing it. Or I can refrain from working if I have to do something else that day. You decide for yourself when to work and how much money to earn. With a private boss you earn much more than working for the state. The people I worked for[109] treated me very well and gave me lots of presents. But at the same time they demanded a lot. They could call on a Sunday for me to come urgently to work and I even had a room at their house where I could stay because sometimes they needed me in the middle of the night.

Working for the state definitely had its advantages. Salaries were low but reliable incomes since employment security was relatively high. Formal employment was also the only way to gain access to social security such as a pension and compensation for illness or disability. Last but certainly not least, working for the state was important in freeing oneself of suspicions and accusations from the police and the Party, as well as neighborhood organizations.

There was an anti-loafing law passed in 1971 that apparently fell in to disuse, only to be reactivated in 1990 (Lewis, et al., 1977a, p. 309, note 56; Mesa-Lago, 1972, pp. 93-94; Rosendahl, 1997, p. 116, note 9) and men especially risk being scrutinized if they cannot show that they make a living in some formal way. While women that are neither students nor employees are often seen as housewives and therefore excused, men that are formally idle are, in

[109] She worked as a housekeeper for a man with a high position within the government.

the eyes of the police and the Party, as well as neighborhood organizations, suspicious in various ways[110]. Firstly, it is seen as anti-social to be disassociated from work (or, for young men, study), and it is highly undesirable for the government to begin talking about unemployment. Secondly, it is assumed (often correctly) that if a man doesn't have a legal employment he earns his living illegally.

An anecdote[111] told to me during fieldwork is telling in this respect. According to the narrator, a household of four adults and two children had their brand new TV worth 800 CUC stolen. They called the police who came to take their statement, but during the visit the police found spare-parts for watches and motorcycles that the men in the household used in their informal repair shop. The police started asking questions about the men's work-situation and evidently none of the adults were engaged in formal employment. In the end, the police switched their focus to the victims of the robbery. They had to pay fines for the spare-parts that indicated informal business and were given a couple of months' to get a "real job". They never got their TV back.

Informal income-generating activities were clearly risky in and of themselves since they were subject to state control and repression. In informal sellers' views of their activities, the risk of being caught by the police was constant. No one could say exactly how high the risk was and, from the entrepreneurs' perspective, the law struck randomly. Stories about people being fined or losing employment or housing coexisted with examples of informal businesses going on undisturbed for years. The informal entrepreneurs I met that had been punished had simply been given fines and, as one of my interlocutors put it, "It's just a question of paying the fine and finding some other business. No more than that." All were, however, cautious and tried to minimize risks as much as possible, and the strategies employed by sellers often echoed those used by buyers mentioned in chapter four.

All informal entrepreneurs I talked to did honest business (as opposed to scams). No information was deliberately hidden, and both seller and buyer

[110] Note that women without formal employment often generate incomes informally; my argument here is that cultural notions about gender permit them to be formally unemployed without being suspicious ad they can claim to be housewives – a possibility not open to men. For more about the ways in which informal work is gendered see Pertierra (2008).

[111] The anecdote has the feel of an urban legend since the person who told it to me claimed that the people involved were "friends of a friend". Regardless of the truthfulness of the events, the story is telling since it makes sense in this specific context.

felt they did a good transaction. If the goods sold or the service performed turned out to be bad, this was not the seller's intention and was often compensated in one way or another. The risks they ran were twofold – exposing their business directly to the police or being exposed by somebody. The latter was referred to using the words *chivatear* (to squeal) or *echar a uno pa'lante* (push one forward) and it became even more important for sellers to keep good relations with neighbors are work-colleagues so that nobody 'pushed one forward' because of personal reasons.

In order to hide from the police, many choose to conduct business off the streets: in their home, at the home of the buyer or at one's formal workplace, being some of the more common places. This also had the advantage of creating a stable clientele that was as eager to maintain business as the seller. There was a relationship of mutual gain and dependence and one did not 'push forward' one's informal fish-seller – at least not as long as she sold good fish at good prices. Trust was, in other words, as important to honest sellers as it was to buyers, and the former often said they only sold to known people. Marta, the woman selling home-cooked meals introduced earlier, had a rather restrictive policy when selling:

> [Our customers] know us and trust us not to sell bad products. If something is not to their liking they know where we live and can come and make complaints. I don't sell to just anyone either. People have come to my house asking if I sell *croquetas* and if I don't know them I just tell them I don't – that I can't understand what they are talking about – and that's it. Because I too must be cautious.

Those who combined formal and informal work tried to get the best from two worlds. They looked for a formal employment that demanded as little of their time as possible in order to conduct their informal work undisturbed and without losing the advantages of a state-job. This was, however, not an easy task and, on more than one occasion, people talked to me about their dilemmas in combining different ways to make a living.

Esteban, a young man in his twenties living by himself, called me one day asking for advice. He told me he hadn't been able to call lately since he now had two jobs. Esteban had a state employment working every two days, from 06.30 to 11.00, preparing school snacks, and had recently gotten an informal employment at a private café where he worked 18.00 to 06.00 two to three nights per week. This means a working week of 37 - 45 hours including whole nights and some work-sessions of 16.5 hours with only a half-hour

break[112]. When hearing this I urged him to take care or else he would end up ruining his health. He told me he knew it was an impossible situation and that he eventually would have to choose just one of the jobs. The problem was that he didn't know which one.

The formal employment meant less working hours and more security, not so much when it came to retirement and pension (he was too young to think about that!) but certainly when it came to employment security. They had, in fact, tried to fire him from another employment in that same entity but had failed since he contacted the worker's union. Esteban knew it was difficult for them to kick him out. The informal employment in the café was, on the other hand, completely insecure in that aspect and he could end up in the street any day. The reason he even considered the latter was, of course, money. His formal employment gave him 240 MN per month and the only benefit was the occasional bread and yoghurt given to him by his boss. For moral and religious reasons Esteban did not steal and could thus not benefit informally from his employment, which could have been very lucrative considering the demand and high prices for yoghurt. The informal employment, on the other hand, gave him 150 MN per workday which meant 1200 - 1800 MN per month. Note that this is eight to twelve times his formal monthly salary! It was indeed a difficult dilemma and we talked about it for a long time considering the risks, drawbacks, time and money. He eventually decided to opt for the formal employment and try to find some other informal work or business with fewer working hours. Writing this chapter eight months after our conversation, I got an e-mail in which Esteban told me he had been fired from his formal employment. At the same time, he wrote, he was more convinced than ever of having made the right choice at that moment: even the smallest stable income was, in his opinion, far better than no income at all.

This juggling of pros and cons regarding formal and informal work was something of a constant in some people's lives. What combination one settled for changed through life as one's situation, priorities, limitations and opportunities shifted. One's family situation, health and the health of one's family, the place where one lived, personal interests and desires, changing economic, legal and political conditions and, of course, money, all had to be taken into consideration. Besides these rather pragmatic deliberations and hands-on differences, there were, however, more subtle ones to do with status and cultural capital.

[112] Ex. Monday at 18.00 to Tuesday at 6.00 (informal) then Tuesday 6.30 to 11.00 (formal)

Employment as a Source of Status

> A lunatic tries to enter *Habana Libre* [one of the most well-known hotels in Havana] shouting: "I am a bellboy! I am a bellboy!" The guards drive him away but the next day the man is back: "I am a bellboy!" he repeatedly shouts. The third day, the guards call the police who drive the man to *Mazorra* [a large psychiatric clinic]. That same day his wife gets a phone call: "Good morning, I'm calling to inform you that your husband is in *Mazorra*. I am his psychiatrist." In response to the poor woman's questions, the psychiatrist explains: "I understand that your husband is a brain surgeon at *Hermanos Ameijeiras* [a renowned hospital] and now he seems to be suffering delusions of grandeur. He is convinced that he is a bellboy at *Habana Libre*!"

This joke[113], which I picked up in 2003 in Havana, illustrates the reality that emerged during and after the Special Period, where the social stratification of society changed both in degree and in form. Economic differences grew and access to hard currency became an important factor, changing the basis for access to economic capital so that activities and ways of life that had previously led to economic rewards no longer worked, and new ones emerged. The joke plays with the perceived absurdity of a society where brain surgeons dream (at least in economic terms) of being bellboys. At the same time, I argue that social stratification amounts to more than economic capital. While the salary of a surgeon might be low, the occupation is associated with cultural capital, giving a sort of status difficult to buy with the money earned as a bellboy.

A Cuban sociologist (who prefers to remain anonymous) pointed out to me that receiving remittances is one of the few completely legal ways to "get rich" in Havana today. This, he said, is a sign of a deeply problematic society in which "luck and sheer coincidence" – for example, having a relative or other person outside Cuba who sends you money – are far more important than studies, talent and contributing to society. He pointed in particular to the situation of the youth who found few opportunities to get a good life through their own efforts. "When I graduated", he said, "a university degree gave you a good job and, for a single man like me, it was more than enough to be able to live a good life. You could invite a woman to a nice restaurant… Now that

[113] For slightly different versions of the same joke see López Vigil (1998) and Andaya (2009, p. 365). For more about jokes and irony in contemporary Cuba see Tanuma (2007).

is very difficult, you just cannot afford it. And I tell you, for a young person that is very demoralizing."

The joke above deals with this underlying shift in the basis for the distribution of economic capital and Lena, the veterinarian working as a secretary, is a consequence of it. As seen in table 5:2 it could be far more lucrative to work as an informal janitor than to be a dean. Both Andaya (2009, p. 366) and Haddad (2003, p. 63) quote highly educated interlocutors talking about an inverted social pyramid where the highly educated are at the bottom while the "uneducated and robbers" (quoted in Haddad, 2003, p. 63) are at the top. Porter (2008) talks about a crisis of values and feelings of second-hand citizenship as socialist ideals of equality clash with differentiated access to consumption. Powell's (2008, p. 187) interlocutors expressed an "outraged sense of entitlement, indicating the high expectations people have had of the allocative power of the state in the past". (See also Gordy, 2006; Rosendahl, 2001; Vasquez, 2002)[114].

Access to CUC as a new basis for income- and consumption inequality is certainly striking and highly important. Time and again, scholars point out and explore differences in direct access to CUC through studies of differences in the amount and source of income (M. Espina Prieto, 2003, 2004; Fabienke, 2001; Powell, 2008), or access to consumption (Gordy, 2006; Porter, 2008; Togores & García, 2004). But many authors make the mistake of reducing social stratification only to unequal access to economic capital in the form of hard currency and the possibilities of consumption this gives. According to Espina Prieto (2004, p. 217) this focus on economic differences is, in some measure, justified since:

> Economic inequalities are the most obvious and the ones that are associated in some manner (as causes or effects) with the most varied structural constraints and expressions of heterogeneity and inequality present in a society at a given time and place.

While the new economic inequalities are a striking aspect of post-Special Period Cuba it is, however, not a question about surgeons being suddenly seen as less than bell-boys just because they earn less. If that was the case the above joke would lack a pun. Firstly, I believe that it is absolutely crucial to look at cultural capital – those things that give status but which are not (necessarily) economic: educational level, a name, a certain taste, certain

[114] Note, however, that these feelings of unfairness and disappointment are not translated into political action or explicit demands towards the state.

occupations and *barrios,* having travelled etc. Secondly, it is important to deconstruct the feelings of unfairness connected to the new inequalities. In most texts it is implicitly assumed that doctors *should* earn more than bellboys, that this is the natural state of things since emic notions here coincide with scholars' own views on fair distinction. Instead, I see these feelings of injustice as belonging to certain groups within Cuban society that try to retain a privileged position which has been challenged by profound changes in everyday economic life.

In the context of Havana, I believe that the emic notion of *nivel cultural* (cultural standard or level) is a useful tool for discussing these issues. N.T. Fernandez (2010, p. 134) sees *nivel cultural* as "a common and socially acceptable nomenclature for talking about a host of racially and class-coded traits and behaviors in a society that had officially abolished classes and prohibited discussions of race."[115] The author shows how low cultural level is associated with conflictive behavior, low educational level, lack of decency, and blackness. In popular imagination and narratives, it is illustrated by vivid images of *guapos*, black men of low culture and a specific style (Fernandez, 2010, pp. 96-98) which, the author points out, were impossible to find in real life. She also links cultural level with space, as popular imagination grounds it more firmly in certain barrios in Havana considered to be 'bad'.

Nivel cultural, or just *nivel* or *cultura*, were used by my interlocutors when talking about what I call cultural capital. The expressions were used in different ways; people could *have* or *lack* culture/level/cultural level or they could have *high* or *low* culture/level/cultural level. With the emic perspective of someone distancing themselves from the two positions, higher *nivel* was indicated by *finura*, refinement[116] while lower *nivel* was indicated by *vulgaridad*, vulgarity.

When asking my interlocutors directly about the meaning of *nivel cultural*, they often, at least initially, reduced it to a question of education in a broad sense - formal academic level, as well as 'having manners'. Academic level is, indeed, an important aspect, and what is taught at the university is, in Cuba as well as in the rest of the world, both scientific knowledge and the

[115] See also de la Fuente (2001, pp. 295, 320) for racialized aspects of *nivel cultural*; Lundgren (2011) for how it interacts with notions of sexuality and gender; and Rosendahl (1997, pp. 45-50) for an analysis of how the expression was used in the 1980s when it seemed to have more to do with emic notions of being a good person and behaving properly.

[116] Note that *finura* might sound positive but was often used in a mocking way to point out pretentiousness.

hidden curricula of embodied cultural capital. In everyday interaction, however, *nivel cultural* was used not only in relation to degrees and diplomas but to innumerable attributes, attitudes and practices, and worked as a way to create difference and distinction.

Bourdieu points out that there is no causal relationship between economic and cultural capital. Classed habitus manifested in a certain taste is more important than levels of income when it comes to converting economic capital into cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 375-376). Embodied cultural capital – the habitus of the distinct – is a pre-requisite for knowing how to use money for displays of distinctiveness. As Skeggs notes in relation to the white British working class women she studied: "They can never get it 'right' because they do not have access to the requisite amounts of knowledge and history which would enable them to know what getting it right really means." (Skeggs, 1997, p. 87). Distinction is, then, not *only* about how much money a person has but about *what she does with it* and, importantly for this discussion, *how she gets it*.

Highly skilled workers were conscious of the privileges connected to their employments, which had important symbolic implications of creating difference. When asked if she saw herself as poor, a university-teacher gave the following answer:

> That is very relative. If I compare with other countries then yes, but if I compare within the country and my occupational group, no. The possibilities that my job gives me to travel *makes me different*. And also the access to cultural life: cinema, theaters… That gives quality of life and reduces poverty.

The possibilities her job offered her were not only fun and pleasant in and of themselves, but set her apart, made her different from others. Informal street peddling – an income-generating activity with inexistent cultural capital – was, on the other hand often used discursively by my interlocutors with high levels of cultural capital to position themselves. They claimed to be "useless at selling things" (*no sirvo para vender*) or "not having the gift of selling" (*no tengo el don de vender*) or made more direct references to the unsuitability of a person in their position to engage in these kind of activities, at least on the street.

Cristina was especially explicit in her attitude. Both she and her husband were skilled state employees in their sixties, and supplemented their salaries

by reselling cigarettes and candy to middle-men or acquaintances. The month they filled in my form, this gave them an additional income of 83 MN. When asked why they didn't sell directly on the street instead of going through middle-men, Cristina seemed a bit shocked by my indiscretion: "I work for the government and one has to have some kind of dignity!"[117] Tanuma describes her interlocutors as "university-graduate intellectual workers" that "did not want to earn money from *negocios* (business), which they regarded as unnatural, the same way that the socialist government did." (Tanuma, 2007, p. 58).

Petty trade was also used rhetorically to refer to situations of unmitigated need: "If prices keep going up I will have to sell lollypops/peanuts on the street corner!" was a recurrent expression. Barbara, in her fifties, was both shocked and amused when she told me about meeting the daughter of a former neighbor:

> She married a German man a couple of years ago and actually went to Germany but – imagine! – she returned. Said she couldn't take living with the old man, learning the language and so on. Anyway, today I met her and guess what she was doing… selling lollipops outside the zoo! Yes! Incredible!

Barbara laughed when telling the story in which the apex of upward mobility, migrating to Europe, is juxtaposed with the income-generating activity which stands as the illustration of low status: petty trade in general and selling lollipops in the street in particular.

As already mentioned above however, from the perspective of those engaging in this kind of unskilled, informal work, things looked slightly different. While not preoccupied with status, they certainly saw their income-generation as something requiring skills which they were proud to have but which, at the same time, could get out of control – we will take a closer look at those skills now.

Inventar

Inventar (to invent), and the related terms *resolver* and *luchar* (resolve and struggle respectively), have received attention from various authors (see for example Gordy, 2006; Powell, 2008; Rosendahl, 1997, p. 175; 2001, p. 93;

[117] For a similar story of a physician considering it beyond her dignity to supplement her salary by selling *tamales*, see Andaya (2009, pp. 365-366) .

Weinreb Rosenberg, 2009, pp. 65-82). According to Rosendahl, *inventar* "[…] refers to all activities and transactions in which people used their imagination to find solutions to the lack of food, clothing and other necessities." (Rosendahl, 2001, p. 93). This definition is in accordance with how it was used amongst my interlocutors; it was about finding solutions to specific problems, identifying opportunities to make a living, and having the necessary skills to take them.

Possibilities for material gains could be found unexpectedly and suddenly, and being able to recognize them and carry them through was a much valued trait. During fieldwork – that supposedly would reveal the mystery of how people managed to get by – I could sometimes walk away after a two-hour interview without actually being able to describe how the household made a living. It seemed like some people survived on pure coincidence alone, and I could only repeat the words of one of my interlocutors, "Something always comes up" (*Siempre aparece algo*).

While this was not that common – most had employment and/or businesses for at least a couple of month's at a time, and on which they relied at the time of the interview – it was, as we have already seen, certainly true for most unskilled workers when looking at a more long term perspective. Many people had no stable and reliable solution to their livelihood that survived from one year to the other. This required much of a person's creativity, flexibility and wit.

When asked what skills a person should have in order to *inventar*, most people thought about the abilities necessary to carry out informal petty trade which was the most common way to *inventar*. A middle-aged woman living in an extended household, which generated its income through informal employment and entrepreneurship, answered like this:

> The most important thing is to not be ashamed. Especially if what you do is sell things. That is why I'm very good at selling, because I'm not ashamed. I approach people in the street and offer them what I have for sale without shame. My sons and daughter feel shame: "No Mommy, I'm too ashamed to do that" they tell me. But I don't care and if the police stop me in the street I tell them I sell in order to feed my kids. Let's see what they are going to do about that! [Maria: Has that ever happened to you?] No, they have never caught me selling but if they do, I'll tell them that for sure!

A young man living by himself and combining unskilled work for the state with work in the informal economy answered in a similar manner:

> One must have determination and a lot of willpower. The most difficult thing is not to make a decision. It's not saying: "I'm going to sell popsicles at home or I'm going out to sell CDs in the street." It's having the determination to go through with the decision and not give up. If I sell popsicles at home and I see that nobody buys anything in four days I can't get depressed. I have to do something. Go out in the street and sell CDs or talk with people in the neighborhood so they know about my popsicles. There are no easy businesses except the very illegal ones such as selling drugs or burglary.

Historically, *inventar* has been a very useful ability described in numerous studies of the poor in Havana before and immediately after the Revolution (see for example Butterworth, 1980; Calderón González & Loy Hierro, 1970; García Alonso, 1968; Lewis, et al., 1977a, 1977b, 1978). It is, therefore, not new but has always existed and been more or less important depending on the economic situation faced by people. As the saying in both Spanish and English goes: necessity is the mother of invention (*La necesidad es la madre de la invención*). Rosendahl speaks about the Special Period when the ability to *inventar* was absolutely crucial for the survival of people in Havana:

> In Cuba, external circumstances have been important factors in triggering the economic activities of the special period, but these activities often *reactivated or strengthened already existing relationships, norms and networks*. The informal activities became less important during a time when the standard of living was high and the state could provide; the second economy was a way of supplementing what was received from the planned economy. During the special period, however, when scarcity became 'normal', people turned to the cultural values of reciprocity, patronage, inventing (*inventar*), resolving (*resolviendo*) and trust (*confianza*). […] Flexibility and the skill of seizing the moment, which has always been important in times of scarcity, became a necessity for many Cubans. (Rosendahl, 2001, pp. 100-101, first emphasis mine)

Many visitors to Cuba are amazed by, and celebrate, people's creativity when it comes to finding solutions to everyday problems: making a satellite dish (for receiving US TV-stations) with an aluminum tray, repairing cars without spare parts and, ultimately, surviving without a stable income. Being able to *inventar* is, indeed, an art. It requires creativity, flexibility, determination, wit, guts and intelligence, all seen as positive traits. The expression is related to the ones mentioned in chapter four, *tener chispa, estar a la viva* and *ser avispado*, that also refer to the facility for intelligent calculation and, just like these expressions, *inventar* was surrounded with mixed feelings. On the one hand it was celebrated and seen as typical of *habaneros* (see also Weinreb Rosenberg, 2009, p. 65); on the other hand, the need to *inventar* was born out

of a situation of material scarcity and insecurity where solutions always depend on the possibilities of the moment and where planning is almost impossible. In the words of Solberg[118]:

> The verb *resolver* means to solve a problem or get something – which is often one and the same thing. Other important expressions are *to search* (buscar) and *to invent something* (inventar). Many agree that to be inventive and cunning is characteristic for Cubans as a people. *We always invent something*, they say. But the words people use, the way they say it and the context they use them in often paint a picture of dejection and hopelessness. They point out the stress, grind, struggle to get, cook and eat food. (Solberg, 1996, p. 50, emphasis in original)

Not only that, but, as we saw in the expressions in chapter four, inventing in order to make a living could easily translate as cheating others in the informal market, creating an undercurrent of moral anxieties around the word. In the words of Powell:

> […] the ability to *inventar, resolver, luchar* as part of the daily work of social reproduction – as well as offering opportunities for individual advancement – has become a capacity which is both essential and permeated with anxieties" (Powell, 2008, p. 182).

This is reflected in the many uses of the word. Besides the above connotation, it was also used to describe adulterated products. Coffee-powder diluted with too much toasted and ground yellow peas, was, for example, *un invento*. In this case, the person selling the coffee certainly had invented a way to make more money by diluting the powder but it had been done at the expense of the buyer. The flexibility, intelligence and creativity had been abused. To quote Powell again: "[…] celebrations of the capacity to *inventar, resolver, luchar* overlook the immense strain on the very social relations which underpin this economy of practices." (Powell, 2008, p. 187).

There was, in other words, a fine balance between finding creative solutions to problems of scarcity and maintaining respect for other people, and it could easily tip towards dishonest behavior. The moral aspects of scams have already been dealt with in chapter four and the contradiction between material interests and the ideal of 'disinterested love' will be further dealt with in chapter six.

[118] Note that Solberg's study was made during the special period when economic life was much harder than in 2006.

When negotiating ways to make a living, issues of economy and morality intermingled. A vision of morality and economy as separate and, in many ways, opposed, served to make sense of informal strategies, urging for a moral and social check on the entrepreneurial spirit of *inventar* and profit-seeking. It was also present when devising different income-generating activities and talking about motivations and attitudes towards work. I have advanced an interpretation of these moral negotiations as being geared towards finding ways to make a living that are experienced as 'good' in every sense of the word: giving a decent income, opportunities to make use of, and develop, skills and interests, and being in accordance with people's moral convictions.

Continuing with the focus on negotiations of economy and morality, we will now turn to interpersonal relations and the issue of interest and affect.

6
Interest and Affect

Despite being wary of sociologist Viviana Zelizer's universalist claims (see for example Zelizer, 2005, pp. 31-33), I believe her theories can help us understand contexts where interest and affect are seen as "separate spheres and hostile worlds". Zelizer (2005, pp. 32-35) shows how people in the modern day United States make clear distinctions between different kinds of relationships. These distinctions are made and expressed by using names, symbols, practices and media of exchange. Especially in cases where relationships risk being misinterpreted, great care is taken to define them in a way considered appropriate. It is important for a relationship between a therapist and her client not to be interpreted as that between friends, just like a romantic relationship would suffer greatly if read as prostitution. Zelizer also points out how economic activities (production, consumption and transactions) generally play a crucial part in interpersonal relationships in the US, despite the fact that intimacy and economy are seen as incommensurable and mutually corrupting. Given this preoccupation with defining and communicating the nature of relationships, and the contradiction between ideals and practice Zelizer (2005, p. 35), points to the importance of constant acts of categorization, interpretation, and distinction which she terms "relational work". This work aims at properly defining the content of different relationships but also has the effect of maintaining the ideals of "separate spheres and hostile worlds" and hiding the complex *inseparability* of interest and affect in the everyday.

Bourdieu has a different take on this issue but reaches a similar conclusion. Focusing on the interplay between structure and agency, subjectivity and objectivity, discourse and practice, he uses the moral economy in general and the gift in particular as an example. He takes his point of departure in critique of anthropological theories that discuss gift-giving as an exchange structured by the obligation to reciprocate. This focus on reciprocity, Bourdieu argues, ignores the subjective truth of the people involved, which claims gifts to be

free and disinterested. The truth of the gift, argues Bourdieu, lies beyond fictive oppositions such as "constraint and freedom, individual choice and collective pressure, disinterestedness and self-interest"(Bourdieu, 2000, p. 197). Instead, the gift presents a twofold truth that denies self-interest and calculation on the one hand, and "never excludes awareness of the logic of exchange" (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 191) on the other. It is one of those social aspects that require a shared misrecognition created through both symbolic collective labor (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 112; 2000, p. 192) and through a "taboo of making things explicit" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 96).

In her study of informal exchange in the Soviet Union, which goes under the emic term *blat*, sociologist Alena Ledeneva, inspired by Bourdieu, describes how her interlocutors engaged in a "misrecognition game" (Ledeneva, 1998, pp. 59-72). While respondents were eager to talk about how common *blat* was, they never applied the term to themselves and their exchanges. Instead, they used a discourse of mutual unselfish help where calculation and interest were excluded: "Much ingenuity and energy in disguising self-interest was devoted to the refusal to recognize *blat*" (Ledeneva, 1998, p. 63).
Zelizer's "relational work", Bourdieu's "symbolic labor" and Ledenevas "misrecognition game" all point to a space between ideals about disinterested love on the one hand and the inseparable nature of economy and intimacy, interest and affect, on the other. In this space, agents have to engage, negotiate and work, in order to create meaning and morality.

In my material it is clear that transactions can have manifold meanings. A t-shirt can be a sign of deep emotive bonds and appreciation as well as of disrespect and insult. The question of how to classify it is crucial in rendering meaning, and in this process emic notions of gifts, salaries, help, bribes, charities, presents, payment etc. are used. Consider the following excerpt from my field-diary, relating part of a long conversation over the phone with my field-assistant, Miguel:

> At last I tell him I have talked to several people and come to the conclusion that I will offer him 150 CUC for helping me collect household budgets. He is quiet for a while and then he says, "NO! That is too much!" I ask him what he means and we start a long conversation.
>
> My argument is that he is really doing part of my job, a job that I should do myself (I point out that he has distributed more forms than I have) but that he helps me with since he has more contacts. If he doesn't consider himself to be deserving of the money then I don't deserve my salary either. I say it jokingly and he laughs when he answers that I

> know he didn't mean it that way. He says he doesn't help me for money and that he doesn't want this to enter our friendship. I reply that I *know* he doesn't do it for money – he was the one offering to help me and no one else has done that. My decision to pay him came after we initiated the collaboration. He then wonders what role Ale [my husband and his childhood friend] has played in this and I tell him that I asked Ale if he thought the sum was appropriate and that he had said yes. With a slightly hurt voice he tells me he wonders how much of this money is in fact a 'help' (*una ayuda*) and I say that the help is not so much the money. When I agreed to let him do a job that was really mine, I did it principally because I needed his help, but also in order to help him. Part of this help was economic, but another part was that I knew he had wanted to study sociology but had had to leave his studies in order to earn a living. I wanted to 'help' him by giving him a chance to do something he likes and that he, under other circumstances, might have pursued as a career. I also told him that his friendship and the fact that he has shared the trust people put in him for the benefit of my project is worth much more than money.
>
> After a long conversation he seems to relax and accept the salary, but it is difficult and there is much pride and many taboos in the way. I guess it is like my husband tells me, Miguel doesn't want us to believe that he, like so many others, has a hidden economic agenda when pursuing our friendship, especially since I am a foreigner and Ale has migrated.

For Miguel, as for me, it was important to clearly define what type of transaction the money was: salary, counter-gift or help. It was more than a simple case of defining what terms to use; it was about what the transaction meant to us and what it said about our relationship as friends. The definition of the transaction and the definition of our relationship are, in other words, one and the same thing. Being a highly unequal relationship in many ways, this negotiation was even more difficult and important. My position as a European with greater economic resources was only one of several aspects that put me in a superior position in this negotiation. This inequality was as much a part of the negotiation as everything else since an ideal friendship in both my and Miguel's eyes is an equal one. Throughout the negotiation we both tried, but never succeeded, to compensate for the inequality in order to define our relationship as true friendship.

More specifically, I argued that the money to be transferred was a salary or a counter-gift; I paid him for the time and effort placed in collecting data on household budgets. He was afraid that this was unidirectional 'help', i.e. money given as charity from a childhood friend who had migrated and raised his economic status considerably. In arriving at a joint definition we negotiated our relationship and the intentions behind the transaction. He

stressed his disinterestedness; his intention was not to earn money but to help a friend. He was explicit in his worry that the introduction of money will ruin our friendship. I emphasized the part of the transaction going from him to me: the work he already had and will continue to pour into my project, the value of his contacts, and the trust people have in him. I wanted to show that he gave me as much as, more even, than I gave him – the money was not unidirectional help or charity but an effort on my part to reciprocate. In the end he accepted my version of things but the actual handing over of the money was awkward, and I noticed that it was important for him to tell me that he would use it to buy a computer so that he could keep in touch with his girlfriend living in Mexico; she would pay half the price and he the other half. The money would be doubly invested in a relationship as it gave him both the (rare) possibility to be an economic equal with his girlfriend, and the computer also enabled him to keep in touch with her via e-mail. Knowing him, I believe this was another important way in which to make the transaction 'good'; he used it for an important cause he knew both he and I would approve of. Despite knowing this, his accounting for how he would use the money was uncomfortable for me as it reminded me of my superior position. Through this transaction, I momentarily became someone who had the possibility to sanction his economic decisions.

In the following section, I will look at how the intersection of intimacy and economy is negotiated via *obligations* and *intentions* to arrive at the meaning and morality of transactions. The relationships I deal with here might seem disparate but, according to Zelizar, can all be classified as intimate as they contain the exchange of knowledge which should not be transferred to anybody outside the relationship. I will show that, while the ideal of love as free from material interest is always maintained, different types of relationships are negotiated either in terms of obligations or in terms of intentions.

In the context of contemporary Havana, kinship is a regime where questions of intention are bracketed by ideas of affect as being intrinsic to kinship ties – especially some kinship ties. Disinterest is not an issue, and the question is not of intention but of *rights and obligations*, which are seen as inherent in the relationship. The question is what is to be expected between mothers and sons, long term partners or co-resident kin? In other relationships, including those between health-personnel and their patients, between friends, and in some early phases of couplehood, the focus is more on *intentions*. These are negotiated through a moral discourse of disinterestedness and mutual help.

Did he do it for money or love? Is she using, helping or patronizing me? Taken together, these negotiations define the meaning and significance of transactions and relationships.

Rights and Obligations: Negotiating Kinship and Economy

In this section I will talk about how intimacy and economy are negotiated between kin in terms of rights and obligations. In order to do so I will look at the mobilization of men's assets between and within households. The case of Noelis and Abel, both recent university graduates in their twenties, exemplifies these issues.

When this story starts, Noelis and Abel have been a couple for less than a year. Abel lives with his mother, Gisela, and a younger brother, and Noelis lives in the same neighborhood together with a roommate. Abel will soon embark on his first trip abroad with a scholarship. He is very excited and proud but as the departure-date approaches things between him and his mother grow increasingly tense. Abel has decided to leave his laptop with Noelis and the day before his departure his mother is informed of this. This is Abel's account of what happened:

> She went completely crazy, in front of Noelis and everything. Said I was a terrible son. That if there is someone in this world capable of taking care of my things it is she, who gave me life. That she just won't allow me to leave the computer with Noelis. When I told her I would prefer to take it with me rather than leave it with her she said she wouldn't permit that either. She told me I belong to her and so do all my things. She also threatened to tell my cousin – who gave me the computer and has paid for my flight – what a lousy son I am.

He is devastated by his mother's accusations, and both Noelis and I try to reassure him that he is not a bad son and his mother is being unjust. He agrees. "The first thing I thought when I got the scholarship was that I could save money in order to do repairs on her house." Surely this, he argues, must convince everybody of his filial devotion.

The next day Abel is visibly nervous and worried. Not only is he boarding an international flight for the first time in his life and leaving home for several months, but both he and Noelis are terrified of what his mother will say and do during the day and at the airport. Despite their worries and Abel's

continued insistence on leaving the laptop with Noelis, he leaves without his mother making any big scenes. Noelis tells me that her mother-in-law only makes small comments about Abel spending too much time at Noelis's and, at one point, threatens Noelis with a beating (*una paliza*) for taking him (*llevarselo*).

When visiting Noelis a couple of days after Abel's departure she tells me she has just recieved a visit from his brother. Her mother-in-law had sent her younger son to get the laptop. "I refused and told him I couldn't give away a laptop that wasn't mine without the consent of the owner", Noelis says proudly.

On my return visit to Cuba almost a year later, I catch up with Noelis. She tells me that Abel was in Cuba for the New Year but that, since his scholarship had been renewed, he is currently abroad again. During his absences she has cashed his small remittances and, at his request, given half of it to his mother. She sounds irritated when she tells me that she thinks Gisela writes to Abel telling him how much money Noelis gives her each month so that he can make sure it is the amount that he specified. This is Noelis's account of what happened last time she went there with the money:

> She said: "I suppose you put the rest in the bank, right?" and I told her: "Yeah? Is that what you do?" Yes! Because, what is she thinking? That she can spend her half but I have to save mine for Abel? And "the rest" as if it were big money! No, no, they [mothers] think they are first and foremost…

Abel managed to save up some money from his student stipend during his first trip and used all of it to renovate his mother's house and buy her furniture:

> He didn't even have money to pay the taxi home from the airport – luckily I brought the money he sent me, which I had saved during his absence, and could pay the taxi with that. He brought gifts for his mother, brother, for me and for one or two friends. When he came he opened his suitcase and showed us what he had brought. After just a little while she started asking: "Didn't you bring something for X? And for Tom, Dick and Harry?" and he told her, "Mom, I already showed you the suitcase with everything I brought and since you saw that I didn't bring anything else, why do you ask?" But she just demands more and more and doesn't understand that he does everything he can. Well, he ended up giving his new socks to a cousin, his cap to I-don't-know-who and so on until he didn't have anything for himself. Now his father says he wants Abel to buy him a motorcycle...I don't know what he's thinking! But this time Abel wants to save up for one last stage of t

> repairs on his mother's house, and then, when he has done that, he has done enough for her and her house. After that any savings will be used to get *us* someplace to live.

In this story we can see how Abel, Noelis, and Gisela are involved in rather intense negotiations regarding the rights and obligations of the parties. Negotiations revolve around Abel and his obligation to share his time and material assets (money, gifts and laptop). Gisela clearly defines his obligations as principally directed towards herself as his mother and even advances a vision of Abel himself as *hers*. As his mother, she gave him life and she more or less explicitly sees him as her lifelong possession. Gisela's opinion is that Abel's obligations should be exclusively towards her, but Abel and Noelis seem to interpret things differently. According to them, Abel has obligations both to his mother and to his girlfriend and is more or less free make decisions about his own possessions and how they should be used. Whether Abel and Noelis are in agreement over how this balance should be struck is hard to read from the above, but they seem to agree on their interpretation of Gisela's claims and accusations as unjust, and exaggerated. Interestingly though, these exaggerated claims are seen as rather normal. Mothers, as Noelis puts it, "think they are first and foremost" and whatever you might think about it, that cannot be changed. In my experience, Abel's and Noelis's story is very common.

The story of Tito and his brother Maikel lets us see things from a slightly different angle. When we meet in 2006, it had been five years since we last saw each other and we had a lot of catching up to do. Tito told me he used to have a really good job in the tourist sector and made good money with the tips. Sadly, all the money went to daily expenses for him and his household, consisting of his mother and brother, and he was unable to save or invest anything. He largely blames this on his brother:

> During that time my mother was unemployed. My brother had a good job but spent all his money on himself and his woman. At that time he had this affair with a married woman – with children and everything! – and he really neglected us and didn't contribute to the household. If my brother had helped me I could have bought a new TV, or some furniture, but he didn't and my mother just let him be. I guess she took pity on him[119] even though he is an adult…

[119] Tito's brother has a physical condition that affected his appearance in a way that, according to everybody in the neighborhood, made it virtually impossible for him to ever "get a woman". In this narrative, this is, I believe, the implicit explanation for their mother's "pity" towards her son.

In Tito's narrative a balance must be struck between what a man spends on his girlfriend (and her children) and on his mother/household, and Maikel definitely spent too much on his girlfriend. Ultimately Tito places the responsibility on their mother to put pressure on her errant son and mobilize his feelings of duty and obligation so that resources would be channeled towards their household.

What is being dealt with in the two examples above are Abel's and Maikel's obligations towards their respective mothers on the one hand and their partners on the other. Central to these negotiations are matrifocal notions about kinship and familial duty, as well as gendered notions of couplehood and household economy. Both González and Smith argue that individuals often have simultaneous loyalties to more than one residential group. In the Caribbean societies studied by these authors, matrifocality is combined with a "system of sex-role differentiation which […] allows men to disperse economic resources, but requires that women concentrate them" (Smith, 1996, p. 87). This means that men, in particular, "tend to be placed in positions in which potential conflict between households devolves upon them" (González, 1970, p. 232)[120].

In my interpretation, this is what we see in the above examples. Gisela and Noelis try to mobilize resources, thus establishing their position in Abel's life, while Tito's mother is excused for not doing so with reference to extraordinary circumstances ("I guess she took pity on him"). Abel and Maikel, on the other hand, are in a position to distribute their resources between their mothers and their partners. In the above negotiations, matrifocal definitions of obligations as being first and foremost to the mothers play an important role. This is what made Abel's mother's accusation that he was being a terrible son so devastating. This is what pushed him to dedicate his savings to her, and defend his morality by accentuating his desire and willingness to do so. But matrifocality is also moderated (if not challenged) by both Abel and Maikel in their insistence on directing resources towards their partners. The fact that Abel lets Noelis collect his remittances and then give half of it to his mother is, in this context, a strong signal of his loyalties and is also viewed as such by the two women

[120] While I have stressed the economic aspect of these gendered practices, there are, of course, other dimensions to these conflicts. As pointed out by Lundgren (2011, pp. 51-77), women's fights over men's attention and affection also establishes them as desired men. Attempts to direct men's attentions, for example through jealous control or fights like the ones above, are, according to Lundgren, seen as a token of love and a central aspect of couplehood in Havana, establishing heterosexual male desirability.

in question. This split in a man's obligations is an issue, even within residential units, and the example of David below is telling in this respect.

Normally, I began my interviews by asking with whom the interviewee lived. Sometimes the answer was a quick enumeration of relatives, but at other times the answer was more ambiguous. David, a young man in his early twenties, gave me the following answer "Well…there are many people living in my house but *I* live with my wife and our son." I asked him to explain and he told me that he shared a house with his grandmother, mother, brother, sister, two nephews, wife and son, a total of nine individuals from four generations. His grandmother owned the house where he, his wife and their son had a room of their own. When his wife first moved in they had a joint household economy with his mother, which, in practice, meant that his wife and his mother cooked together. This led to so many arguments that they decided to separate their economies and, at the time of the interview, David and his wife bought and cooked food separately. In conceptualizing households as combining shared residence *and* economy, I would say, as David does, that they thereby established a different household within the confines of the house. Buying, cooking and eating together emerge as fundamental to the creation of a household. He told me that his mother was very angry when he and his wife made that decision, "but now, after some time, we get along better than ever." He is eager to stress that his mother has a good salary and is economically independent and, he adds, "If she needs something, I help her". In other words, even though David and his wife have made the somewhat radical decision to separate their economy from that of David's mother, he does recognize and honor his obligations to her.

We returned to the issue of co-habitation and independence several times during the interview. "Sadly, moving out is impossible" he pointed out, referring to the severe housing shortage in Havana, and the absence of a housing market which makes it extremely difficult to get a place of one's own. When asked to evaluate his situation in life, he mentioned this as being his biggest problem. "Economically I am fine," he said, "and can even afford some luxuries like taking out my wife now and then to drink a soda or something. But when it comes to co-habitation it's not easy, because we are not independent."

With the money his father sends him from Europe every now and then he is now building a small kitchen and a bathroom in connection to his room in order for his nuclear family to become more independent. David is a

Christian and quotes Genesis 2:24, the same Biblical reference used by the (not-so-Christian) man in chapter two: "'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall join to his wife: and they shall be one flesh.' This is the way it should be, this is what is natural!" David told me, not without despair in his voice.

David shows us that households can co-exist within the same residential unit, making conflicting loyalties and economic/moral negotiations particularly complex – and frustrating. Another example is that of my neighbors in a *barrio* I lived in before fieldwork. In a three-bedroom apartment lived Caridad, her three adult sons, two daughters-in-law and three grandchildren. One of the nuclear families in that household, Randy, Diana and their baby, separated their household economy from the rest. Randy complained that his brother – "an adult man perfectly capable of fending for himself" – has taking all their food. To the delighted horror of the gossiping neighborhood this even included the baby's rationed jars of puréed fruit. At first Randy and Diana bought a separate refrigerator and put it in their tiny room. They then proceeded to padlock the fridge and then the room itself. Opinions were split; on the one hand people understood Randy and Diana – Randy's brother had gone too far – on the other hand, family should share and food, especially, should not be denied between kin.

What is being negotiated in the above cases are the material rights and obligations of kin in general. Intense relational work is performed as priorities and hierarchies in different attachments are (re)defined, deeds are measured against expectations and loyalties are communicated via specific transactions. For David it is important to show that he is certainly fulfilling his obligations towards his mother. His struggle for independence for his nuclear family is, in part, a way to split his obligations and communicate his loyalties more clearly to avoid conflicts but also, in part, 'natural' as a way to construct adulthood. At the same time he, just like Abel and Maikel in the previous examples, certainly contests matrifocal expectations provoking initial anger at least from his mother. For Randy it is also important to note that his brother is fully capable of maintaining himself and that what he is protecting with padlocks is his little son's nutrition. He is not avoiding his obligations towards his kin but rather trying to strike a good balance.

In all the above cases, rights and obligations of kin are actively negotiated but intentions are not so relevant – at least not between consanguine kin. The discourse and ideal of affection as intrinsic to bonds between consanguine

kin seem to bracket questions of intention. Love of kin is assumed, so to speak, and seen as unconditional and therefore is not often an issue. In other relationships, such as those dealt with below where love is seen as conditional, however, intention moves to center-stage.

Disinterestedness and Calculation: Negotiating Intentions

I will now turn to how intimacy and economy are negotiated in terms of intentions. Specifically I will look at the relationships between health-personnel and their patients, between friends and between partners in early couplehood.

When looking at employment as an asset in chapter five, health personnel were mentioned as one category of workers that regularly received gifts from patients. I showed how these gifts made up a significant part of their household budgets in a context where state salaries were very low and many within health care received no bonuses in hard currency. The moral negotiations that give these exchanges meaning, which were then only mentioned in passing, will now receive the attention they deserve.

In chapter five, I re-told a story about a nurse following a patient through pregnancy and birth. The same nurse also told me and my mother-in-law whom I was accompanying in the waiting-room where we met, about her days working in an ambulance:

> One day we picked up a boy with suspected dengue-fever. His mother went with him in the ambulance and brought a bag full of food that smelled wonderful. The driver and I had missed lunch since we hadn't been able to get to the canteen in time. We started joking: "Do you smell that?" "Oh, you're really a *muerto de hambre*!" and so on. We were always breaking balls like that. The boy's mother started asking us if we got snacks, if the lunch was any good… You know, the sort of questions everybody asks. When we got to the hospital we carried the boy inside and the mother put the bag in my arms: "Thank you so much for helping my son, take this." Oh, it was *so* good! I asked the driver to park as soon as he could and then we sat and ate everything. It was burgers…
>
> Another time we picked up an old lady from the top floor of a building. The driver helped me carry her down and the lady's husband and daughter came along in the ambulance. Normally we only allow one person to accompany the patient but we let the husband ride with us in the front. The daughter asked us where we were going but when we mentioned

> the place she said she insisted on going to [a renowned hospital]. I said we had to follow orders but she insisted and the driver said he would do it and take full responsibility so I agreed. The daughter had a bag full of pizza and pasta that smelled delicious. As usual neither the driver nor I had eaten. They asked us if they gave us snacks and we said they didn't and that we often missed lunch since we were out driving. When we got to the hospital we managed – despite protests from the hospital personnel – to get the lady admitted. The daughter accompanied her mother to the room and the husband put the bag in my arms: "Thanks for the favor. Now eat." He gave us everything: the food, the plastic boxes, everything…it was delicious!
>
> But I have never asked anybody for anything. Never. What I do I do for the joy of helping people and I do it without thinking about material retribution (*desinteresadamente*). If they want to help me it's up to them.

In my field notes I commented on the fact that the stories I heard from ambulance personnel in other contexts had been about gory details and embarrassing situations. In rather sharp contrast to that this nurse's stories were all about food – expensive food connected to hard currency, like burgers, pizza and pasta. It was apparent that this was an important contribution to her economy and a way to get access to food that would otherwise be impossible for her to buy as a single mother with two small children, an elderly mother, and a state salary in MN. It is also obvious that it is important for her to point out that, even though she appreciates the gifts given to her, this is not the reason she takes extra care or bends regulations in order to accommodate patients' preferences. She helps for the joy of helping – and many, apparently, choose to help her in return.

Anthropologist Elise Andaya has studied gift-giving within the health sector in Cuba and argues that while health personnel and their patients were involved in constant exchanges of gifts and favors, these were understood as what she calls the ideology of the gift: "Expectations of overt reciprocity were rarely openly admitted […] and special attention tended to be articulated within the language of help and friendship." (Andaya, 2009, p. 365).

But patients' stories sometimes differ from this discourse about disinterestedness. When leaving the waiting-room where the nurse told us her story, I turned to my mother-in-law and said, "Wow, that woman sure knows how to fish (*pescar)*!" Fishing here is used to talk about calculating efforts to mobilize resources from people. I challenged her version of things and

accused her of being 'interested' in her relationship with others, and also with us. My mother-in-law agreed.

The practice of mutual help in the meeting between professionals and their clients or patients is tricky and must be artfully executed in order not to revert from helping to (ab)using. The balance is especially difficult to achieve if the gift is in the form of money. According to emic notions, money is symbolically linked to the market and to calculation, thus threatening to turn the gift or help into 'crude' payment (see Andaya, 2009, p. 369).

At one point during fieldwork my husband needed urgent dental care and had a very hard time getting an appointment. After another sleepless painful night and some good advice from friends (one of them said, "I would never bribe anybody but, honestly, giving money to health workers is just paying for the work done. Especially considering their salaries are so low"), he just passed the queue outside the clinic and went straight to a dentist. He explained that he needed immediate help and the dentist answered that she was not working but waiting for her instruments to be sterilized. She expected everything to be ready by 11 pm on Monday. "If you take care of me right now I will repay you without delay" Ale said. "No, no. That's not it…" she hesitated and seemed to change her mind: "Well…come along". After asking a colleague to lend her clean tools she did the examination. A wisdom tooth had to be removed and she gave Ale an appointment for the following Wednesday. He gave her 3 CUC on his way out: "Don't worry, I'm a good patient" he assured her.

But when Ale showed up for the appointment the dentist pretended they never agreed to remove it that day. She did another examination and decided that she first had to perform all kinds of treatments – at least five or six visits would be necessary before she could finally remove the tooth causing the problem. "Of course", Ale commented when telling me the what had happened, "she would want payment for each time". Ale let her clean his mouth – the first step of her long treatment – and then left the clinic without giving her anything and without ever returning. "She was angry, of course, but couldn't say anything" he concluded.

In this case the patient suspected the dentist of trying to profit from his predicament and both the treatment and the relationship ended without either of them getting what they sought. What was meant to be mutual help became

a game of nerves – typical of the informal market – of trying not to be used by the other.

The discourse of mutual help seems, in other words, to be crucial in the meeting between health personnel and patients. According to that discourse professionals should help without interest in order to 'deserve' the material help provided by patients. As told by the nurse in chapter five her patient explained why she made contact with her after many years and rewarded her with luxurious imported goods: "I noticed that you wouldn't take advantage of me, that you weren't a jerk (*una descarada*). You helped me and I helped you." Disinterestedness seems, in fact, to be the very thing that is rewarded materially.

When turning from the relationships between health-personnel and their patients to relationships between friends, the issue of intent really moves to center stage. While kinship puts brackets around questions of intent via notions of unquestionable, intrinsic love between kin (especially maternal kin), friendship and early couplehood were relationships where love had to be proven and where the security of inherent obligations was replaced with the more flimsy game of mutuality and conditional love. In the case of couplehood things changed with time and, as we will see below, somewhere along the line romantic ideals of love begin to coexist with economic and practical considerations as dating couples began considering living together. Central to the very definition of this kind of love was its disinterested nature[121], hence the preoccupation with communicating and reading intentions.

This relational labor or work was especially intense if, as Zelizer points out, the relationship ran a considerable risk of being misinterpreted. In my material it is evident that it is in economically unequal relationships that most relational work is needed. In the beginning of this chapter we saw how Miguel was anxious to avoid an interpretation of his friendship with me and my husband as 'interested' given our superior economic status. He was not only hesitant to receive any kind of gift (especially in the form of money) but eager to reciprocate and create as much equality as possible. This same work is performed by Sara when she tells me about her niece's new computer:

> It was a lifelong friend of my sister [the niece's mother], they went to school together and everything, and now he lives in Canada and works in a bank. He came for a visit and they

[121] For more about the ideal of disinterested love in Cuba see Lundgren (2011).

> were talking, and my sister says, "Right now we are saving up for a computer for the girl because, you know, she is going to begin her university studies and she'll need it." But she didn't say it with any kind of interest (*no lo dijo con ningún interés*). It just came up as part of the ongoing conversation. Just as her friend might have said he was saving up for a house or a car, you know? And then, before he left he wrote a couple of checks and told them: "Look, for the girl's computer…"

In her story Sara emphasized the long history of her sister's friendship with the generous émigré. She also stressed his comparative wealth and, importantly, her sister's disinterest. The transaction emerged as a generous gift – not big in comparison to the émigré's supposed wealth (he works in a bank and discusses cars and houses, just as Sara's sister discusses computers) – and part of an ongoing long-term friendship. She presented it as a gift since Sara never asked for it, neither directly nor indirectly; she did not talk about her need for a computer, but of her project of saving up for one. All this taken together defined the transaction as a free gift and the relationship as friendship.

Early couplehood was another area where the ideal of disinterested love was strong and where economic inequalities gave way to anxieties and the need to perform 'relational work'. Adrián, a man in his mid-twenties had initiated a romantic relationship with Sofia, a foreign woman. He described their relationship as 'real' and based on love, not interest, and told me about fighting off annoying insinuations challenging this view from family, friends and strangers.

In order to understand the following narrative I have to explain about commissions. Since it is more or less common for people who engage with tourists to make a living off these contacts, there are practices such as the informal payment of commissions. The most common examples are owners of restaurants or accommodations that pay a commission to the person taking a foreigner to their establishment. For every plate of food ordered at the restaurant (and paid for by the foreigner) this person gets a certain amount of money. Everything is, of course, done informally and without telling the foreigner. This is Adrián's account of how he handled being offered a commission:

> You remember the place we used to rent? When we got there the owner told me the rent is this much and the commission this much. I told her I didn't want any money since Sofia is my girlfriend. The woman told me that didn't matter and I insisted that Sofia is

> my *real* girlfriend and that I couldn't accept any money. The next time she met my mother she told her she had really succeeded in raising me to be a good man.

Adrián was proud when he told me this and it was part of a bigger story about disinterested love that he was anxious to tell in order to fill his relationship and himself with morality and meaning. Just as in the case of Abel discussed earlier in this chapter, the importance of being a good man, and a good son, is also a source of pride. Soap operas and urban legends about love and money abound in Cuba, as in the rest of Latin America, and the following urban legends, told by Adrián, are examples of this:

> Adrián: I heard about a foreign man that had decided he wanted a Cuban wife. He had tried several times but it never worked out. Finally he found a woman and they moved to Germany. The man was very wealthy but he wanted to test his wife. For a year they lived in a trailer on the outskirts of town with very little money. When he saw that his wife stayed by his side the whole year he asked her to pack a bag since they were going to town. There he showed her his true house and all his possessions.
> Maria: Really? That sounds like a soap opera!
> Adrián: Yeah? Well I also heard about an Italian that married a Cuban woman. When they got to Italy it turns out that he really wanted her eyes in order to do a transplant for his daughter. And the woman never saw her husband again.
> Maria: I bet she never saw anybody again…

True love, these urban legends tell us, is measured by its disinterested nature. But calculation can be disguised as love, and relationships are not to be entered into lightly. Focusing on intention is crucial in order not to be abused.

At the same time, couplehood at a later stage is related to a project of building a joint household and in that project, economy is of the essence. This is especially so considering the difficult circumstances faced by my interlocutors both in terms of generating an income and of finding housing. Not taking into consideration the economic assets and possibilities of your partner is therefore often seen as irresponsible. Lundgren shows how ideals of 'true love' and economic considerations are negotiated in families and households in contemporary Havana:

> The tight practical and economic interdependence gave the family not only the practical *possibility* to 'meddle' but also a legitimate *right* to do so. For instance, any new partner's financial situation would affect [the] economy of the whole household. This meant that a couple's relationship ceased to be only a matter of two parties, but could become a family affair. (Lundgren, 2011, p. 70)

As mentioned in chapter two, the expectations placed on the two parties in a heterosexual couple were clearly gendered. In terms of material or monetary contributions, more expectations were placed on men. We saw this earlier when talking about the mobilization of men's assets between and within households. Concerning women's choice of partners the man is, then, often valued in terms of his ability to create and maintain a household. Having a place of one's own or other material wealth and having skills and possibilities to generate income are often commented on explicitly, and are considered to be important elements in evaluating a given candidate.

Roberto, a young man in his mid-twenties, recently graduated from university, told me that he had had a disturbing conversation with Reina, the god-mother of his girlfriend. They started talking and discovered that the house Reina had recently inherited (but not yet moved into) was located close to the neighborhood where Roberto lived with his mother:

> She started asking questions about where one could get hold of important food-stuffs in the vicinity: "Is there anyone selling fish there? And chicken?" She started asking all these questions and I just couldn't answer. My mother is the one making the purchases and I don't know…I simply have no clue about prices and such things…

Reina did not like Roberto's obvious lack of knowledge and interest in prices and bargains and turned to her god-daughter, Roberto's girlfriend, with anxiety: "He doesn't seem like a good man for you! He isn't focused (*puesto pa' las cosas*) and won't be able to provide for you (*resolver tus problemas*)!"

Even *initiating* a romantic relationship puts demands on men's economic assets since courting and dating often demanded that men spend money on women. A taxi-driver once started complaining to me about the high taxes he had to pay to the state. In order to illustrate the hard times he and the whole country were going through he said:

> I don't even remember the last time I could have a mistress! Because even that requires money. You can´t hold a woman in your arms and ignore the fact that she has a torn blouse. No, you have to pay her certain attentions (*tener una atención con ella*) and look after her needs too… Here [in Cuba] people don't have money even to do that anymore!

Couplehood holds some middle ground between kinship, where negotiations concern rights and obligations, and friendship, where disinterested love is

communicated. Between lovers, discourses about disinterestedness are combined with economic considerations. Intentions are ideally disinterested and solely romantic but economic assets, especially men's, are not only necessary in order to perform a proper courtship, they must also be taken into consideration in the responsible choice of a long-time partner. As pointed out by Lundgren (2011) the hard economic situation faced by most in contemporary Havana means that negotiations surrounding couplehood become more complicated, and that family and household members feel not only the possibility, but the need, to take part. Couplehood is, in these circumstances, not only an internal business but something that concerns a much wider set of people: the household and family.

In the case of heterosexual couples, the ideal of disinterested love is thus shaped by gendered expectations of contributions to the household economy. Among the people I spoke to this meant that a women's interest in a man's material assets was less anathema than the opposite scenario[122]. Luz is a good example of a woman seen as rather wealthy since she receives monthly remittances from family abroad. She explains why she has given up on men:

> In my opinion men are divided in to two types: the ones that are *muertos de hambre* and only look for what they can take from you and the ones that have money and therefore think that they can order you around and are womanizers.

According to Luz, the meaning and effect of economic superiority between lovers is gendered. As a relatively wealthy woman she is anxious about being used by less wealthy men, while the wealthy men in her narrative seem to have no such problems, but instead revel in their boosted, virile, bread-winning masculinity by "ordering you around" and being unfaithful.

Morality, Economy and Relations

By engaging in "relational work" and the "symbolic labor of misrecognition" meaning and morality are worked out in the encounters of interest and affect, intimacy and economy. In the case of the mobilization of men's economic assets (time, money, physical labor and material contributions) I showed that gendered expectations shaped these negotiations so that men often found

[122] Ideals surrounding interest and affect are also shaped by other aspects such as social stratification so that the image of the pimp living off 'his' woman/women or the male hustler living off tourist women can be seen as both unmanly and as the very epitome of manliness. For more about the ideal of the pimp in Cuba see Beers (2003).

themselves torn between their obligations to different people and/or households when women mobilized men's assets. Matrifocality, with its emphasis on consanguine ties and inherent unconditional love, permeated these negotiations so that the issue often became men's conflicting loyalties towards their mother and partner. By letting established relations of consanguine or affinal kinship stand as guarantors of 'real love', issues of intention and interest are bracketed, allowing for negotiations to be made in terms of rights and obligations.

When looking at friendship as well as the relationships between health personnel and patients, however, intention and the ideal of love as free from material interest takes center stage. Here negotiations dealt with the intentions of the parties when engaging in relationships and transactions. Anxiety grew from fears of being used for material ends or being seen as someone using others. The discourse that was reproduced was about mutual help and/or disinterest. Reciprocity and interest, while certainly present, were misrecognized and carefully hidden.

Early couplehood occupies a kind of middle ground. While couples somewhere along the way create a space where negotiations can be made in terms of rights and obligations, early couplehood, at least, is largely conceptualized in terms of disinterested love. Much labor is performed in order to separate romantic love from material interests and communicate disinterested intentions in pursuing a relationship. However, since couplehood is often intimately linked with the construction of a joint household and economy, calculation enters the picture. "Love and interest", Rebhun (2007, p. 117) writes, "always find themselves in strange marriage […] because both govern affiliation." Among heterosexual couples expectations are, again, gendered which shapes how the negotiations of this "strange marriage" are made. Courting requires more of men's economic assets than women's, and, in the responsible choice of a partner, women, more than men, are required to take into consideration their partner's possibilities to contribute economically to a future household.

Interest and affect, love (of all kinds) and economy are, in other words, intimately linked and impossible to understand separately. The discourse of "separate spheres and hostile worlds", therefore, requires constant work performed through on-going negotiations, which supply transactions and relations with meaning and morality.

7
Conclusions

> ”First food, then morals” /Bertold Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*
>
> “Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!”/James Oppenheim, *Bread and Roses*

My explicit aim in this text has been to examine how morality is articulated in economic life in contemporary Havana. I have endeavored to do this in a way that attends to the messiness of everyday life in order to counteract binary accounts such as morality/economy and socialism/capitalism.

Life in general and economic life in particular was experienced as tough by my interlocutors. Resources were scarce and there were no ready once-and-for-all solutions to making a living. This resulted in deep and generalized feelings of stress that were seen as dangerous both to people’s health and to society at large. In this context people were reluctant to speak about ‘basic’ needs and shied away from labeling themselves ‘poor’.

Distinguishing between basic and not-so-basic needs is, I argue, an act that effectively limits people’s opportunities to articulate expectations and wants. Often grounded in a biological understanding of human bodies, a ‘basic needs’ discourse condemns some people to biological survival, unconnected to cultural understandings of what is required in order to live a ‘normal life as a full human being. The people I spoke to resisted this limitation and insisted on expecting to live ‘normally’ in accordance to their needs, wants, dreams and desires. I have shown how people placed the responsibility for the fulfillment of a normal life on the state. They did not expect the state to provide for them, but to provide them with the possibility to provide for themselves. The fact that the state failed to live up to these expectations in many ways legitimated, in my interlocutor’s view, their involvement in the informal market and their pilfering of state resources. My interlocutors made

a big distinction between taking things from other people and taking things from the state. By paying salaries that were unable to meet the requirements of a normal life, the state had not only created the necessity to engage in the informal market but had also failed in such a way that it canceled out most people's moral qualms about doing so.

Returning to the reluctance to use the label 'poor', I understand it in a similar way - as the insistence of my interlocutors to transcend the basic/biological and present themselves as full human beings. For the people I spoke to, being poor was to have failed in providing for yourself and those around you. However, they saw themselves as capable, responsible and moral individuals that, despite generalized and constant economic stress, were able to contribute to their household economies. I specifically link the negative implications of the label 'poor' to the symbolic force of food and hunger in Havana. Procuring, cooking, serving and eating 'good' food are activities that are crucial for the making of families and households, for men and women. Good food is recently cooked, tasty, abundant and based on rice and beans. Not being able to eat good food at least once a day is experienced as degrading, humiliating and shameful since food is so intimately connected to identity and morality.

Emic notions of hunger are epitomized in the expression *ser un muerto de hambre* (lit. being a starved person). In this expression, hunger is not only a physiological need for food but a state of being. *Un muerto de hambre* is a person who looks for material gain even in situations and relations where one should not. Being hungry is to be in need and being in need is risky as it threatens to stretch or suspend morality and override pride. This is incompatible with being a full human being and is something my interlocutors tried to distance themselves from.

"Poverty is not," Sahlins writes, "a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people" (Sahlins, 1974, p. 37). And this, I believe, should not necessarily be read as an argument in favor of the 'relative deprivation' approach to poverty where one is always poor in relation to someone that has more resources. Instead it runs deeper, anchoring poverty in sociality and morality. In the case of Havana in 2006, this means that a poverty discourse mobilized feelings of shame and degradation where being poor was seen as failing and being inferior, hungry and less than human. This contention, I argue, points towards the necessarily political implication of applying a poverty discourse in the

case of contemporary Havana. Just as argued by, for example, Escobar, this discourse is used in a specific relation of unequal power which it runs the risk of cementing by dehumanizing those labeled poor. Yet another dimension is added in the case of Cuba since its socialist ambitions are contrary to the neoliberal model which is hegemonic in the post-Soviet world.

This anchoring of poverty in sociality and morality also shows that far from being "separate spheres and hostile worlds" economy and morality inform each other in the evaluations my interlocutors made of their living standard, where the capacity to make a living lies at the core of being a complete human being.

It is not only the capacity for making a living, but also the *way* in which one makes it, that has to do with morality. More specifically I have pointed out how the careful balance between making a living and doing the right thing is negotiated in the informal market. As consumers, people took pains not to be cheated in this unregulated market and were especially afraid of – and morally outraged at – the selling of 'bad food' which could risk the life and health of buyers. When generating an income in the informal economy negotiations were similar. The aim was to do work that was good in all senses of the term: that enabled you to contribute to the household economy *and* was in accordance with your moral convictions.

Because of low state salaries and high prices for consumer goods in the unsubsidized markets, many of the people I spoke to found it impossible to subsist on state salaries alone. When diversifying their income generating activities, many ventured into the informal market where they made use of whatever assets they might have. Within the so called livelihoods approach, described in chapter five, assets are conventionally classified as physical (such as a car, an e-mail account, or a big apartment in an attractive area), human (such as knowledge, skills, or a strong, healthy body) or social (such as networks of support, reciprocity and/or information sharing)[123]. I have pointed out that employment should be added to this list. Employment was crucial for many of the people I spoke to, not so much because of the salary they generated but because of other ways in which they benefitted from work: rewards in kind could be re-sold, gifts from clients could be vital, inclusion in social networks could depend on an employment and access to valuable goods meant they could be "gotten hold of" and used or re-sold. Employment could also mean status, professional fulfillment and security:

[123] Financial and natural assets are also included but are not relevant in relation to my ethnographic material.

employment security, qualification for retirement and pension, and, last but not least, a legitimate income in the eyes of the police and the Party organizations. State employment was, then, far from insignificant despite the meager salaries it generated, and often worked as an asset in and of itself. We should, in other words, not discard state employment and at the same time be careful in singing the praises of the informal market as the former was often crucial.

The focus on assets which I have presented above certainly reproduces the idea of people as rational, calculating individuals. When devising income-generating activities in the informal market, people were, of course, eager to make a profit and carefully calculated the best way to do so. At the same time, the lack of rules and regulations in the informal market was replaced with everyday negotiations and moral anxieties about where to draw the line between intelligent calculation and immoral cheating. I have shown the complexity inherent in attitudes towards cheating in the informal market. Expressions such as *tener chispa, ser avispado, estar a la viva* and *inventar* refer to the ability to make intelligent calculations. It was about being street-smart, creative, flexible, determined and brave – all in order to see and make use of the opportunities for material gain that could appear unexpectedly. It was also about not letting anybody out-smart or take advantage of you. These characteristics were certainly seen as positive and also as typical of *habaneros*, but at the same time they carried a feeling of bitterness and anxiety.

The bitterness came from the fact that the need to have all these abilities sprang from a problematic situation of material scarcity and deep economic stress. Informality was, as mentioned earlier, considered a problem in and of itself. The anxiety had to do with a fear that the entrepreneurial spirit captured in the above expressions goes unchecked by social and moral obligations. As I have already mentioned, there is a fine line between trying to make the most of transactions and straight out cheating. In order to keep to the right side of that line, calculation should never be disconnected from morality and social considerations.

Looking closer at interpersonal relationships and transactions between people, I have used the term “relational work” coined by Zelizer (2005). Relational work is performed in order to accurately define and signal the nature of a specific relationship. Specifically I have looked at how the combination of intimacy and economy was negotiated in a context where

economic transactions and exchanges are crucial to the creation and maintenance of relationships and where there is an ideal of love free from material interest. When it comes to friends, dating couples and health personnel (which according to Zelizer's definition have an intimate relationship with their patients) relational work often boils down to a question of intention. Idioms of free gifts and mutual help are important here and much work is dedicated to showing that intentions are free of economic interest. It is clear that these relationships should not be pursued for the sake of material gain, while at the same time transactions of material goods are of utmost importance in relationships.

The case of dating couples is interesting because the relationship changes with time as new expectations are slowly built within and around the couple. Gendered expectations and responsibilities in relation to the household economy turn the focus from intentions to obligations and rights. Rights and obligations are, in fact, the idioms in which relational work is performed between kin. Emic notions of love as intrinsic to kinship, and especially to the bonds that emanate from mothers to offspring, cancel out negotiations over intentions. Love is assumed and so a space for more explicit demands on the economic resources of kin is opened up through notions of rights and obligations. As Cuban society becomes more differentiated and as contact with people living in other parts of the world (Cuban emigrants as well as visiting tourists) grows, relational work is expanded and intensified. As long as people have as much (or as little) to gain from a relationship, things run rather smoothly but questions of intentions, obligations and rights are never so acute as when the parties in a relationship have vastly different economic circumstances and where one has so much more to win (or lose) than the other.

Morality was, in other words, articulated in economic life when people talked about their standard of living, when they formulated expectations they had of the state as well as the people that surrounded them and, finally, when they devised different income-generating activities. While I have highlighted the importance of economic-rational calculation, I have also emphasized the anxiety provoked by this calculation.

The famous quote from Brecht that opens these conclusions loses, I believe, some of its force in the translation into English. In the original language it is not food that comes first but eating, and not *essen*, eating like a human, but *fressen,* eating like an animal. The 'basic' drive to eat in order to sustain the

biological body is, as already mentioned, seen as dangerous by my interlocutors precisely because it dehumanizes by erasing morality. The ambition to seek economic gains (of which 'food' is a metaphor) must always be checked and considered against how these affect other people (but not, importantly, how it affects the state). While my material shows the impossibility of separating economy and morality, it is clear that my interlocutors adhere, in part, to the folk model of "separate spheres and hostile worlds". Economic interest is seen as hostile to intimacy and morality, but the reverse – the corruption of rationality by personal feelings for example through nepotism – was not as significant for the people I spoke to.

The main points of this thesis therefore take issue with Brecht's quote. In contemporary Havana food/economy does *not* come before morality – and neither does morality come before food/economy; both are equality salient and are, at times, impossible to separate in the first place: "give us bread but give us roses".

Sammanfattning

Avhandlingens syfte är att undersöka hur moral genomsyrar det ekonomiska vardagslivet i Havanna på Kuba. Metoden som använts är antropologiskt fältarbete, främst utfört under 8 månader år 2006 bland låg- och medelinkomsttagare. Den teoretiska ansatsen tar i beaktande komplexiteten i vardagslivet och bryter ner binära oppositioner som moral/ekonomi och socialism/kapitalism.

De personer jag pratade med under mitt fältarbete upplevde sin ekonomiska situation som tuff och svår. Resurserna var knappa och det fanns inga långsiktiga lösningar på hur man skulle få tag på det man behövde och ville ha. Det resulterade i en djup och allmän känsla av ekonomisk stress som upplevdes som ett stort problem. Stressen ansågs vara ett hot både mot den personliga hälsan och mot ett gott samhällsklimat. I detta sammanhang av knapphet och stress var folk allmänt ovilliga att tala om 'grundläggande' nödvändigheter och undvek att kalla sig själva 'fattiga'.

Diskurser om grundläggande behov utgår ofta från en biologisk syn på människokroppen och begränsar vissa människors liv till en biologisk överlevnad utan koppling till kulturella föreställningar om vad som behövs för att leva ett 'normalt' liv som en fullvärdig människa. Personerna jag pratade med motsatte sig sådana begränsningar och insisterade på att vilja leva ett normalt liv i enighet med sina behov, önskemål, drömmar och begär. Ansvaret för uppfyllandet av detta normala liv lade de i hög utsträckning på staten. De förväntande sig inte att staten skulle försörja dem utan att den skulle ge dem möjligheter att försörja sig själva. Att staten misslyckades med detta (bland annat genom allt för låga statliga löner) legitimerade, i mångas ögon, deras involvering i den informella marknaden och deras stöld av statlig egendom. Mina samtalspartners gjorde en stor skillnad mellan att ta saker från staten och att ta saker från andra människor. Eftersom staten betalade

löner som man omöjligt kunde leva ett normalt liv på hade den inte bara skapat behovet av att ta del av den informella markanden utan också misslyckats i sådan grad att det blev moraliskt försvarbart att göra så.

För att återvända till oviljan att kalla sig själv fattig analyserar jag det på ett liknande sätt – som ett försök att gå bortom det grundläggande/biologiska och framställa sig själva som fullvärdiga människor. För de personer jag talade med innebar fattigdom ett misslyckande när det gällde att försörja sig själv och sina närstående. Istället såg de sig själva som kapabla, ansvarstagande och moraliska människor som, trots en generaliserad och konstant ekonomisk stress, lyckades bidra till sina hushållsekonomier. Jag kopplar dessa negativa associationer runt begreppet fattig till den symboliska kraften som mat och hunger hade i Havanna. Att få tag på, laga, servera och äta 'bra' mat var grundläggande handlingar när det gällde att skapa familjer och hushåll, kvinnor och män. Bra mat var nylagad, god, riklig och baserad på ris och bönor. Att inte kunna äta bra mat minst en gång om dagen uppfattades som degraderande, förnedrande och skamligt eftersom mat var så nära kopplat till identitet och moral.

Emiska uppfattningar om hunger kristalliserades i uttrycket *ser un muerto de hambre* (bokstavligen: vara en utsvulten person). I uttrycket är hunger inte bara ett fysiologiskt behov av mat utan ett sätt att vara. *Un muerto de hambre* var en person som sökte materiell vinning även i situationer och relationer där man inte borde. Att vara hungrig var att behöva något och att behöva något var farligt eftersom det riskerade att tänja eller upphäva moral och åsidosätta stolthet. Det blev då oförenligt med att vara en fullvärdig människa och något som de personer jag pratade med försökte distansera sig ifrån.

"Poverty is not," skriver Sahlins, *"a certain small amount of goods, nor is it just a relation between means and ends; above all it is a relation between people"* (Sahlins, 1974, p. 37). Jag menar att citatet inte nödvändigtvis behöver läsas som ett argument för en syn på fattigdom som relativ i meningen att man alltid är fattig i relation till någon som har mer resurser. Istället går det djupare och kopplar fattigdom till socialitet och moral. I Havanna 2006 betydde det att en fattigdomsdiskurs mobiliserade känslor av skam och förnedring. Att vara fattig var att bli sedd som och se sig själv som misslyckad, underlägsen, hungrig och mindre mänsklig. Mitt argument pekar på de politiska implikationerna i att applicera en fattigdomsdiskurs på dagens Havanna. Även Escobar (1995) visar hur en sådan diskurs används i en specifik relation av maktobalans som den riskerer att cementera genom att

avhumanisera de som benämns som fattiga. I fallet Kuba läggs ännu en dimension på detta i och med landets socialistiska ambitioner som går stick i stäv med den nyliberala modell som är hegemonisk i den post-Sovjetiska världen.

Kopplingen mellan fattigdom, socialitet och moral visar också att långt från att vara ”separata sfärer och fientliga världar” (Zelizer, 2005, p. 22) så genomsyrar ekonomi och moral varandra i de värderingar mina samtalspartners gjorde gällande sin levnadsstandard, där förmågan att sörja för sig och de sina är fundamental för att vara en värdig människa.

Inte bara förmågan att försörja sig utan också *hur* man försörjer sig har med moral att göra. Mer specifikt pekar jag på hur man förhandlar kring den svåra balansen mellan att å ena sidan försörja sig och å andra sidan göra rätt i den informella marknaden. Som konsumenter ansträngde sig folk för att inte bli lurade i denna oreglerade marknad och var särskilt rädda för – och arga över – säljandet att ’dålig mat’ som kunde riskera konsumenters hälsa och liv. När folk genererade en inkomst i den informella markanden var förhandlingarna likartade. Målet var att genomföra ett arbete som var gott i ordets alla bemärkelser: som möjliggjorde att bidra till hushållsekonomi *och* som överensstämde med moraliska övertygelser.

På grund av låga statliga löner och höga priser för konsumtionsvaror i de icke-subventionerade marknaderna var det svårt, ibland omöjligt, att leva enbart på statliga löner. När folk diversifierade sina inkomstgenererande aktiviteter gav sig många in på den informella marknaden där de använde resurser de hade till sitt förfogande. Inom vad som brukar kallas ’the livelihoods approach’ (se kapitel 5) klassificeras ofta resurser som fysiska (en bil, ett e-mailkonto eller en stor lägenhet i ett attraktivt område), mänskliga (kunskap, färdigheter eller en stark frisk kropp) eller sociala (nätverk för stöd, utbyte och delande av information)[124]. Jag visar att anställningar borde läggas till denna lista. Anställningar var avgörande för många av de personer jag pratade med, inte så mycket på grund av de löner de gav upphov till utan på grund av andra sätt på vilka de kunde användas: naturaförmåner kunde säljas, gåvor från klienter kunde vara viktiga, deltagande i sociala nätverk kunde vara beroende av anställningar och tillgång till värdefulla varor innebar att man kunde ’få tag’ på dem för eget bruk eller försäljning. Anställningar kunde också innebära status, professionell tillfredsställelse och säkerhet: anställningstrygghet, socialförsäkring och sist men inte minst en legitim sysselsättning i polisens och de olika partiorganisationernas ögon. Statliga anställningar var, med andra ord, lång ifrån oviktiga trots de dåliga

[124] Finansiella resurser och naturresurser brukar också räknas in men är inte relevanta i relation till mitt etnografiska material.

lönerna de gav upphov till och kunde många gånger agera som en resurs i sig själv. Vi ska med andra ord inte avfärda statlig anställning och vara försiktiga när vi hyllar den informella ekonomin.

Detta fokus på resurser reproducerar en syn på människor som rationella kalkylerande individer. När folk utformade sina inkomstgenererande aktiviteter i den informella marknaden var de, så klart, angelägna om att göra vinst och räknade noga ut det bästa sättet att göra så. Samtidigt skapade bristen på lagar och regler ett vakum som fylldes av vardagliga förhandlingar och en moralisk oro över var gränsen borde dras mellan intelligent kalkylerande och omoraliskt lurendrejeri. Jag visar på komplexiteten i synen på bedrägeri i den informella marknaden. Uttryck som *tener chispa, ser avispado, estar a la viva* och *inventar* syftade på förmågan att göra intelligenta beräkningar vilket krävdes av en god entreprenör i den informella marknaden. Det handlade om att vara kreativ, flexibel, modig och beslutsam – allt för att se och dra nytta av möjligheter för materiell vinning som kunde uppstå oväntat. Det hade också att göra med att inte låta någon lura eller utnyttja dig. Alla dessa egenskaper sågs visserligen som positiva och dessutom typiska för havannabor men samtidigt innehöll de en ton av bitterhet och oro.

Bitterheten kom av det faktum att behovet av att ha dessa förmågor i sig hade att göra med en problematisk situation av materiell brist och djup ekonomisk stress. Informalitet sågs, med andra ord, som ett problem i sig. Oron hade att göra med en rädsla för att entreprenörsandan som fångas av de ovanstående uttrycken riskerar att löpa amok utan att begränsas av sociala och moraliska plikter. Som redan nämnts är gränsen hårfin mellan att få ut så mycket som möjligt av en transaktion och att luras. För att hålla sig på rätt sida om denna gräns bör, menade mina samtalspartners, vinstmaximering aldrig helt frånkopplas moraliska och sociala överväganden.

Då jag tittat närmare på mellanmänskliga relationer och transaktioner har jag använt uttrycket relationellt arbete (*relational work*) myntat av Zelizer (2005). Relationellt arbete utförs för att på ett korrekt sätt definiera och kommunicera specifika relationers natur. Mer specifikt tittar jag på hur sammanflätandet av intimitet och ekonomi förhandlas i ett sammanhang där ekonomiska transaktioner och utbyten är nödvändiga för att skapa och upprätthålla relationer och där det samtidigt finns ett ideal att kärlek ska vara fri från materiella intressen. När det kommer till vänner, dejtande par och vårdpersonal (som enligt Zelizers definition har en nära/intim relation till sina

patienter) handlar relationellt arbete i Havanna ofta om intentioner. Berättelser om fria gåvor och ömsesidig hjälp är viktiga här och mycket arbete ägnas åt att definiera och uttrycka intentioner som fria från ekonomiska intressen. Det står klart att dessa relationer inte borde ingås *för att* tjäna någonting materiellt på dem samtidigt som materiellt utbyte är absolut centralt i relationerna.

När det kommer till relativt nyblivna par förändras relationen över tid när nya förväntningar byggs upp inom och runt paret. Könade förväntningar och en könad ansvarsfördelning i relation till hushållsekonomin skiftar med tiden fokus från intentioner till rättigheter och skyldigheter. Rättigheter och skyldigheter är, i själva verket, fokus för det relationella arbetet mellan släktingar. Emiska föreställningar om kärlek som en självklar del av släktskapsband, speciellt banden som löper mellan en mor och hennes barn, förskjuter fokus från intentioner. Kärlek tas för given och ett utrymme för mer explicita krav på släktingars ekonomiska resurser öppnas genom föreställningar om rättigheter och skyldigheter. I och med att det kubanska samhället blir mer och mer differentierat och kontakten med människor som lever i andra delar av världen (kubanska migranter och turister) ökar, intensifieras och expanderar det relationella arbetet. Så länge som människor har lika mycket (eller lite) att tjäna på en relation flyter allt på och frågor om intentioner, rättigheter och krav blir aldrig så tillspetsade och akuta som när parterna i relationen har helt olika ekonomiska förutsättningar och där en har mycket mer att vinna (eller förlora) än den andre.

Moral genomsyrade med andra ord det ekonomiska vardagslivet när människor talade om sin levnadsstandard, när de formulerade sina förväntningar på staten och på varandra och, till sist, när de utformade olika inkomstgenererande aktiviteter. Jag pekar på hur viktigt det kan vara med rationellt ekonomiskt kalkylerande men betonar också den oro som detta kalkylerande ger upphov till.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Special monthly rations

Medical diets	
Medical condition	Product
HIV/AIDS	Eggs
	Milk
	Chicken
Cancer	Beef
Pregnant	Chicken
	Milk
High cholesterol	Fish
	Low-fat milk
Diabetes	Low-fat milk
	Tubers
Ulcer	Milk
	Tubers
Undernourished children	Yellow peas
	Pasta
	Rice
	Chicken
Children intolerant to lactose	Evaporated milk
	Yoghurt

The 'Energy Revolution' of 2006		
Small refrigerator	Households with one or two persons	4536 MN and a functioning old one
Big refrigerator	Households with three or more persons	6000 MN and a functioning old one
Pressure cooker	One per household	350 MN
Electric rice boiler	"	125 MN
Electric hotplate	"	100 MN
Water boiler	"	20 MN
Color television	"	3100 MN or 4000 MN and a functioning old one
Air conditioner	"	3500 or more and a functioning old one

Appendix 2: Form for collecting household budgets[125]

Fondos disponibles cuando empieza a rellenar la planilla: .....MN
.....CUC

Salario o pension

Fecha	Cantidad		Comentarios
	MN	CUC	

Beneficios laborales (por ejemplo jaba de aseo)

Fecha	Cantidad	Producto	Comentario

Impuestos de luz, gas, agua etc...

Fecha	Importe (cuanto tienes que pagar)	Tipo de impuesto (luz, gas...)	Comentario

Remesas

Fecha	Cantidad	Relacion con remitente	Comentario

[125] Tables have been edited to reduce space.

Ingresos extralaborales: ventas de servicios o productos

Fecha	Servicio o producto	Cantidad	Precio	Comentario

Compras en la bodega (mandados)

Fecha	Producto	Cantidad	Gasto total	Comentario

Compras en MN

Fecha	Producto(s)	Gasto total	Comentario (donde: agro, tienda, cuentapropista, particular etc)

Compras en CUC

Fecha	Producto(s)	Gasto total	Comentario (dónde: tienda, cuentapropista, particular...)

Regalos y cambios

Fecha	Producto entregado o regalado	Producto recibido	Cantidad	Comentario (con quien, si es una ocasión especial etc.)

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