

**ENSALADA MIXTA: GEOGRAPHICAL EXPLORATIONS OF
FOOD AND CUBA**

by

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Abstract

The six papers presented in this half-thesis trace my progression through various schools of thought in human geography. It is an “*ensalada mixta*” that presents a mix of approaches and investigative methods related to food studies and Cuba.

The first paper in this collection engages with the concepts of the right to food, food security and its measurement at a macro level. It demonstrates the extent of the world food problem and discusses some of its complex underpinnings. In the second paper, I review the impacts of the Special Period on Cuban food production and examine the urban agriculture program that emerged in response. I show why the Cuban urban agriculture program is often cited as a “best practice” example for other food insecure countries and I present some of the challenges the program faces to ensure its long-term sustainability.

For the third paper, I use a feminist lens to take a closer look at the crisis of social reproduction created by the economic and food crises of the Special Period. In this paper, I also argue that a male bias has been introduced through Cuba’s urban agriculture policies and programs (despite women being the primary participants and beneficiaries of urban agriculture programs elsewhere in the world).

In the fourth paper, I examine how Cuban women navigate and negotiate food crisis situations, such as the one created by the devastating triple hurricanes of 2008. This paper is founded on a three-month period of fieldwork in Havana in the fall of 2008 and shows how—twenty years after the onset of the Special Period—women’s opportunities for gender equality continue to be affected by periodically recurring economic and food crises.

Finally, in the fifth and sixth papers (a case study and project proposal, respectively), I take a historical geographical approach to examine the writings of 19th century travellers to Cuba. I illustrate how their day-to-day experiences with food were used as markers of place and difference, how they contributed to the production of geographical knowledge and the establishment of identities and power relationships between travellers, hosts and audience.

Co-Authorship

Dr. Catherine Krull, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Victoria (formerly Associate Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and Professor of Sociology and Cultural Studies at Queen's University) is co-author of Chapter 5. The paper was published as M. Davidson and C. Krull. 2011. "Adapting to Cuba's Shifting Food Landscapes: Women's Strategies of Resistance." *Cuban Studies* 42:59–77.

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* * * * *

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List of Abbreviations

FAD	Food availability decline
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FMC	Federación de la mujer cubana/Federation of Cuban Women
GREB	General Research Ethics Board
MDG	Millennium development goals
MINAGRI	Ministerio de la Agricultura/Cuban Ministry of Agriculture
MINFAR	Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias/Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces
MINREX	Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba/Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
SAPs	Structural adjustment programs
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WFC	World food crisis

Chapter 1

Introduction and Foreword

When I began the MA program in Geography, I had several objectives in mind, both academic and personal. My primary goal was to explore different approaches and investigative methods used in this discipline. My undergraduate degree in Psychology and work as a statistical analyst at the Canadian Institute for Health Information had given me solid grounding in quantitative methods; however, like the school of Humanism that emerged in reaction to the quantitative revolution in Geography, I felt the reductionism of quantitative statistics sometimes did not capture the complexity and dynamism of the topics I was trying to study. Thus, I chose to pursue a degree in Human Geography for the breadth of the discipline and the opportunities it afforded me to explore different epistemologies in a structured and systematic fashion.

Thematically, my main research goals sprung simply from curiosity and a long standing interest in food systems (and how they are shaped by political, economic and ideological forces). Given the concerns with a “world food crisis” (WFC) at the time when I started the Master’s program (fall 2007), it was a natural extension to ask whether there were countries that were food secure and from which others could draw lessons to weather the seemingly more frequent crises within the global food system. Cuba, a lower income country, was receiving much praise in the popular media for its food programs, and especially, for its urban agriculture program. To learn more about whether there were lessons that could be taken from Cuba to the rest of the world (or at least, to countries that seemed to be suffering the most from the WFC), I needed to learn more about the global food context and the contemporary Cuban food situation. I quickly discovered that the common Cuban saying “*no es fácil*” [it’s not easy / it’s complicated] applied to its food situation and that Cuban food policies were intertwined with other political, social and economic practices—making it challenging to draw easily transferrable lessons for others to implement.

Crucially, I also realized the importance of scale and of questioning *whose reality* was being captured through various measures of food security, as on closer examination, the Cuban food situation presented contradictory stories depending on which scale was being examined.

1.1 Outline and Approaches

The body of work that this presented in this half-thesis traces my progression through various geographical schools of thought and presents a mix of approaches and investigative methods related to food studies and Cuba. For this “*ensalada mixta*,” I have chosen to include six papers that may at first glance seem disparate. Taken as a whole, however, they show my engagement with geography as a discipline and—in keeping with the aims of a Master of Arts thesis project—they demonstrate my capacity to conduct research. In the section that follows, I give a brief overview of the next six chapters and situate each in terms of its aims, approaches and methods to orient the reader to the interrelations between the chapters and the key contributions of each.

Chapters 2 and 3 are descriptive chapters that are positivist in their approach and can be situated within the schools of thought associated with economic and political geography. Through a literature review, in **Chapter 2** I introduce the concept of the right to food, food security and its measurement at a macro level. I then provide an overview of the main theoretical approaches used to explain famines on one hand, and chronic hunger on the other. I show that the roots of under-nutrition are complex, multi-causal and multi-scalar and contribute to our continued inability to tackle the world food problem. In the last section of this chapter, I examine the destabilization of the global food system in 2007 and 2008, its ties to the oil crisis of the same period and consequences for global food security. Ultimately, Chapter 2 shows why there has been a renewed interest in identifying alternative paths to food security for marginalized and/or vulnerable countries and peoples.

In **Chapter 3**, I review the literature published on Cuba's urban agriculture program and examine why the Cuban experience has led it to become a "best practice" example in the literature on the world food problem. I begin with an overview of the food crisis situation that developed in Cuba in the early 1990s, after the dismantlement of the Soviet bloc (a period known as the Cuban Special Period). I then review the establishment of the system of urban agriculture from its grassroots to its more formal and systematic implementation. I highlight the inputs that were necessary for its success and consider the specificities of Cuban urban agriculture which make it difficult to replicate elsewhere. I conclude this chapter by examining some of the challenges to the long-term sustainability of the model of urban agriculture in Cuba.

For my Master's project, I had originally proposed to conduct qualitative interviews with Cuban academics and policy-makers to further elucidate the lessons from Cuba's experience with urban agriculture and the possibilities it created to mitigate the impacts of the WFC. I had planned to solicit their expert opinions and perspectives on two topics: first on the rationale, effectiveness and transferability of the Cuban response to the food shortages of the 1990s to the WFC (both in Cuba and elsewhere); and second, to explore the potential impacts of the current WFC on a country that was just recovering from an internal food crisis. To conduct these interviews, I arranged a period of fieldwork in Havana for the fall of 2008 and obtained permission and letters of support from the Universidad de La Habana (Professor Lourdes Pérez Montalvo of the Faculty of Philosophy and History was my sponsor). The Cuban Embassy in Canada granted me a research visa and the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) at Queen's approved my proposed interview guide and research materials (a copy of these materials is included in Appendices A.1 to A.6). Unfortunately, two days before my planned arrival on island, Cuba suffered the first of a series of category 4 hurricanes, which was quickly followed by a second devastating hurricane a week later.

Damages from the hurricanes were still being assessed when the airport reopened and I finally arrived in Cuba a few days later. I was aware that my research plans would need to be flexible while things returned to normal. I was taken aback, however, when a colleague at the Universidad de La Habana told me it would be difficult for us to schedule interviews because “the state of agriculture has become like a state secret” (September 2008). Cook et al. (2006:656) summarize the complexity and opportunity of making food the core of a research project: “It’s simultaneously molecular, bodily, social, economic, cultural, global, political, environmental, physical and human geography.” In Cuba, I soon discovered, it is also about security.

At the time, I thought perhaps I had misunderstood this dramatic statement, but another colleague informed me months later that the critical food situation after the hurricanes had been considered a question of national security, hence the tightly guarded information, and the reluctance of officials to speak about the food situation with foreigners. Thus, the research questions I had set out to explore became closed off. They had also become somewhat irrelevant—the distant and indirect impacts of a world food price crisis on Cuba were nothing compared to the domestic food crisis that was looming (and which subsequently materialized). So while the hurricanes had closed some doors, they had created research opportunities that I could never have planned for—an opportunity to experience a food crisis firsthand and gain insight into the daily realities of living in a food insecure capital. As a consequence, my research focus shifted from a macro/country scale to a household one.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I adopt a feminist lens to qualitatively examine food security in Cuba at household and individual scales—first through a literature review, and then through my period of fieldwork. For **Chapter 4**, I conducted a secondary analysis of the published literature that shows the disproportionate impacts of food insecurity on women during the Cuban Special Period. Then, I demonstrate how the system of urban agriculture created in response to the food shortages has also become gendered and how—in contrast with other urban agriculture programs

where women are predominantly responsible for, and benefit from the program—in Cuba, urban agriculture has tended to become “men’s work.” I situate these dynamics in relation the social roles associated with household reproduction during a period of economic crisis. Although a direct analysis of gender and urban agriculture in Cuba has not yet been conducted, with this chapter, I demonstrate that there is enough secondary material from which to extrapolate a compelling argument for a gendered analysis of Cuba’s urban agriculture policies and programs.

In **Chapter 5**, I present a published paper¹ co-authored with Dr. Catherine Krull (formerly of Queen’s Sociology Department, cross appointed with Women’s Studies) that is founded on the results of my three-month period of fieldwork in Havana in the fall of 2008. During this time, I lived in Havana and relied primarily on ethnographic research, participant observation and semi-structured interviews to collect data related to food scarcity, food prices, coping strategies and gendered divisions of domestic labour during the food crisis period that ensued from the 2008 hurricane period. This data, combined with Dr. Krull’s earlier focus groups with women in Havana, creates an original contribution that offers insight into the challenges faced by Cuban women, how they navigate difficult food landscapes and how they strategize to withstand the recurring food crises of the new millennium. This chapter demonstrates how, twenty years after the onset of the Special Period, women’s opportunities for gender equality continue to be affected by periodically recurring economic and food crises.

The papers presented in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate the importance of scale to the study of food security in Cuba. In particular, by focusing on the food security challenges faced at the household level, these chapters contrast with the positive macro level measures of food security over time that are presented in Chapters 2 and 3. They shows that while Cuba as a state is

¹ Davidson, M. and C. Krull. 2011. “Adapting to Cuba's Shifting Food Landscapes: Women's Strategies of Resistance.” *Cuban Studies* 42:59–77. Results from this paper were also presented at two conferences: Davidson, M. and C. Krull. 2010. “Adapting to Cuba’s Shifting Food Landscapes.” Paper presented at the 8th Conference on Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, February, Miami, FL; Davidson, M. “Beans are More Important than Canons” Paper presented at the international conference The Measure of a Revolution, Cuba 1959-2009, May, Kingston, ON.

lauded for its food security programs, Cuban women are often left to fill the gaps left by the retraction of the state or by destabilization of food system. These chapters serve in part as a caution against the overemphasis on, and reductionism of, quantitative statistics to examine food security given that they can mask the varieties of experiences and “the creative and chaotic flux of everyday life” (Entrikin and Tepple 2006:31) . These chapters also serve to recognize that by its very nature, the publication of research findings is always a necessarily simplified version of the multiple and complex realities that exist—and thus, these need to be examined critically. As Goodall Jr. (2000:12) noted:

One of the gifts of the postmodern challenge has been the cool but sometimes chaotic dismantling of this model of representational truth telling.(...) The problem with this construction of reality is that there are ‘realities’ more so than there is a ‘reality.’ What counts as the truth depends on where you are standing when you observe or participate in it, what you believe about it in the first place, and what you want to do with it.

Chapters 6 and 7 fall within the Humanistic tradition of geographical inquiry² and take historical geographical approaches to cultural angles of food studies and Cuba. While different from the other chapters in this collection in their theoretical underpinnings and approaches (and writing style), these two chapters stem from reflections on my period of fieldwork in Cuba and how experiences with food contribute to the constructions of the sense of place and the production of geographical knowledge.

Through textual analysis of a primary source (the diary of a 19th century “gentleman traveller” to Cuba), in **Chapter 6**, I show how the day-to-day experience of food are often overlooked but are in fact key to the constructions identity, of “othering” and of power relationships (whether they be gendered, racial, or economically driven). As noted by Tansey and Worsley (1995:7), albeit in a very different context, “food is so basic to our well-being that it is almost too obvious; it is taken for granted.” So too have the everyday aspect of food led it to be

² In line with Tuan’s (1976:266) broad definition: “Humanistic geography achieves an understanding of the human world by studying people’s relations with nature, their geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place.”

trivialized, overlooked and/or edited out of thematic collections of Cuban travel writing, but I contend that it forms an integral part of the “othering” process and of a traveller’s experience of Cuba. I demonstrate that these processes can be examined through material culture and the lens of embodied knowledge (e.g. knowledge gained through sensuous and visceral engagement with food and nature).³ I also show that beyond acting as markers of place and difference, the consumption of “exotic” Cuban food was central to the embodiment of the exploration process and served to affirm the traveller’s status as heroic explorers, ready to take risks and suffer bodily harm to gain knowledge about their destination.

Building on the case study presented in Chapter 6, in **Chapter 7** I outline a doctoral research project proposal. Building on the traditions of exploration, travel and imaginative geographies, combined with new geographies of food, I propose a project to investigate the overlooked relationships between food, exploration, travel and writing. In particular, this project seeks to investigate the ways in which food contributed to how identities (travellers, host, audience) as well as Cuban nature and culture were actively constructed, negotiated, contested and translated for foreign audiences. In particular, it aims to establish how the material, sensuous, and visceral qualities of food served to determine or reinforce travellers’ epistemology of Cuban nature and culture and how such investigations could be used to establish the travel writer’s credibility and position of authority in relation to their hosts and audience.

1.2 Situating Myself within Geography as a Field of Study

As Cloke, Philo and Sadler wrote in the epilogue to their 1991 book *Approaching Human Geography*, “for many of us....at bottom what drives our own ‘geographical imagination’ is

³This case study and paper was submitted to Correspondence: Travel, Writing, and Literatures of Exploration, c. 1750-c. 1850, an international conference hosted by the University of Edinburgh and National Library of Scotland (April 2010); unfortunately, I had to withdraw from participating.

something that continues to be energised by quite fundamental beliefs, which cannot readily accept their ‘equality’ with other sets of beliefs. For many of us, then, there is still a desire to cling on to profound and seemingly consistent frames of reference.”

As can be gleaned from the body of work presented in this half-thesis, I have used the Master’s in Geography as a way to reflect on and consider what drives my own “geographical imagination” and the “frames of reference” that guide my practice of human geography. As you will recall from the opening of this paper, I came to the discipline with a strong positivist frame of reference. As an undergraduate, I was introduced to the scientific method of the natural sciences but not to other philosophies of science. Consequently, when I became interested in more social phenomena, I was poorly equipped and could only rely on a positivist approach: “Positivism is a set of philosophical approaches that seek to apply scientific principles and methods, drawn from the natural and hard sciences, to social phenomena in order to explain them” (Kitchin 2006:20). To counter this limitation, I strived to make my foray into Geography a journey of exploration: of new methodologies, approaches and writing styles.

For this reason, you will note that throughout this collection of work, I have carefully avoided labelling myself with a particular “ist / ism” associated with some of the broad schools of thought in Geography (such as positivism, Marxism, realism, feminism, postmodernism, postcolonialism...and the list could go on). This was a conscious effort given that my interests fall at the intersection of several of geography’s sub-disciplines and my aims with the Master’s program was to learn through immersion. Thus, much like the history of the discipline itself, my geographical imagination progressed from a quantitative approach, to an engagement with critical geographical approaches (such as feminism and postcolonialism) and finally took a cultural turn.

As I reflect on my trajectory, I see that I began my journey with the logical positivist expectation that “scientists are disinterested observers, able to stand outside their subject matter and observe and record its features in a neutral way, without in any respect changing those

features by their procedures, and able to reach dispassionate conclusions about it, which can be verified by other observers” (Kitchin 2006:20). I am now more aware of my own role in the research process and recognize the value of “reflectivity,” or the self-reflection process on what we know and how we gained that knowledge. This “situated knowledge” has helped me recognize that

...knowledge is not simply ‘out there’ waiting to be collected but is rather made by actors who are situated within particular contexts. Research is not a neutral or objective activity but is shaped by a host of influences ranging from personal beliefs to the culture of academia, to the conditions of funding, to individual relationships between the researcher and the researched, and so on (Aitken and Valentine 2006:342).

As Gregory (2000:799) remarks: “there are probably few geographers who now situate their work under the sign of a single ‘-ism’ or ‘-ology’.” However, he also warns that “this does not mean that intellectual work can evade the responsibilities of discrimination and judgement.” I hope that despite its span, this collection of papers shows my aptitude to engage with geography’s traditions using such discrimination and judgement.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Global Food Security and the World Food Problem

2.1 The World Food Problem

It is customary to start a discussion of the world's food problems with statistics outlining the number of persons who are undernourished worldwide. In 2008, more than 950 million people, or one out of every seven of the world's population, did not have enough to eat on a regular basis (FAO 2008; Population Bureau 2008). In 2006, one in four children under the age of five, or more than 140 million children worldwide, already showed physical signs of inadequate nutrition and were underweight for their age and sex (UN 2008). Notwithstanding the health consequences of poor nutrition, the economic and social consequences of an inadequate diet are devastating: children cannot grow and learn, and adults cannot lead active and productive lives. In the long-term, the impacts of inadequate diets go beyond individuals to affect societies and become causes as well as consequences of poverty and under-development.

The sheer magnitude of the world food problem has been recognized internationally and is the focus of the first of the United Nation's (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); that is, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and in particular, Target 3 of this goal: to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger (UN 2000). The target is a modification from a similar target set at the 1996 World Food Summit, which was to halve the number of people undernourished by 2015.

Such global objectives are not new. In 1974, for example, the 135 governments attending the first World Food Conference agreed to eradicate food insecurity, malnutrition and hunger within their boundaries in less than a decade. They also concluded the meeting by signing a declaration which stated that "every man, woman and child has the inalienable right to be free from hunger and malnutrition in order to develop fully and maintain their physical and mental

faculties” (UN 1975:5). This recognition of food as a human right and of states’ obligation to uphold that right has been reiterated by the UN on numerous occasions since this first declaration.⁴

Despite this obligation, most states have failed to uphold the right to food and, as can be deduced from the MDGs, the ambitious 1974 goal was not met. And while the target date for the achieving the MDGs has not yet been reached, the progress reports to date have indicated that the limited gains made in hunger reduction in the 1990s are being eroded by the recent worldwide increases in food and oil prices and “as a whole, progress is insufficient to achieve the MDG target [related to hunger reduction]” (UN 2008:11).

The roots of under-nutrition, and of our inability to tackle the world food problem, are complex, multi-causal and multi-scalar. Likewise, the literature published on world food systems and their problems is extensive and spans many disciplines, including (but not limited to) agriculture, anthropology, political sciences, economics, sociology, development, health studies, geography, history and ethics. While each of these disciplines brings its own focus to the question, there are many overlapping themes which will be explored in this chapter. I will first begin by introducing the concept of food security, which will be followed by an overview of the main theoretical approaches used to explain famines on one hand, and chronic hunger on the other. I will close this chapter by examining the main challenges to global food security at the beginning of the 21st century, as maintained in the global food system(s) literature.

2.2 Defining and Measuring Food Insecurity

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) considers that food security exists when “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient,

⁴ For example, see Downe’s (2007) list of the numerous resolutions adopted in the last decade at the UN General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights and at the Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 1996:4). When these needs and preferences are not met, food *insecurity* exists. Food insecurity, as a concept, can be used at multiple scales to define which individuals and households, or which regions and countries, do not have adequate food to maintain a health.

The main dimensions of food insecurity are linked to availability (are there sufficient quantities of appropriate quality food?), accessibility (do individuals have adequate personal and public resources to acquire the food?), stability (is availability and access secure over time?) and utilization (can the food be effectively converted to meet energy needs?; See Figure 2.1 Dimensions of Food Security). The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)⁵ adds another facet to its definition of food security, and stipulates that to be considered food secure, access to food must be obtained through “socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies)” (USDA 2008:4).

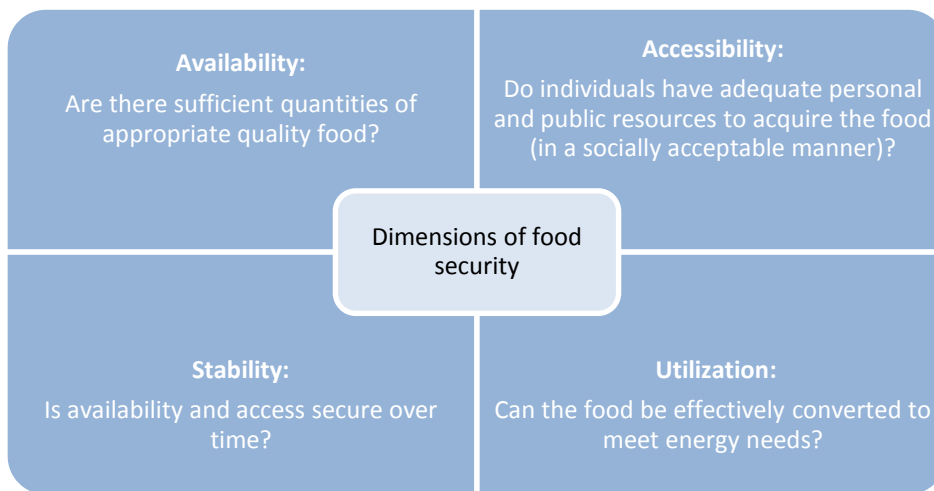


Figure 2.1. Dimensions of Food Security (adapted from Stamoulis and Zezza 2003; USDA 2008)

⁵ The USDA’s conceptualization of food security and the measures they have developed were originally meant for the United States only. However, they have now been adapted and used in many developing countries in South America, Africa and South Asia, including in the context of USAID programs (who, in collaboration with the USDA are responsible for the United States’ foreign food assistance programs).

Individual and Household Level Food Insecurity

At the individual or household level, food insecurity—like poverty—is a dynamic phenomenon that varies in intensity and duration. Food insecurity can be transient (for example, resulting from a period of unemployment), cyclical (following the pattern of seasonal crops or fisheries), or it can be a chronic situation that offers limited periods of relief, if at all. Food insecurity ranges in intensity and scale from food secure or absence of food insecurity, to catastrophic famine (Howe and Devereux 2007). Table 2.1 outlines the basic conditions associated with the four different categories in the gradient of food insecurity at the household level. Note that a distinction is also often made within very low food security households in terms of whether or not children, as well as adults, have reduced their food intake. This is because parents will often reduce their own food intake as a coping strategy before that of their children. Consequently, reduced food intake by children is taken to indicate more severe food insecurity (Studdert, Frongillo and Valois 2001).

Table 2.1. Household Food Insecurity Classification

High food security	No reported food-access problems or limitations.
Marginal food security	Anxiety over food sufficiency or shortages in the house, but with little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.
Low food security ⁶	Reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
Very low food security ³	Multiple reports of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. May distinguish households with adult-only food insecurity from households where adult and children both suffer from food insecurity.

Adapted from USDA (2008) and Studdert, Frongillo and Valois (2001)

⁶ These categories were previously labelled food insecurity without hunger and food insecurity with hunger. The labels were changed in 2006, following the National Research Council's recommendation that the word "hunger" be removed from the label given the ambiguity associated with the word.

Regional and Country-Level Food Insecurity

The extent of food insecurity at the regional or country-level can also be estimated through the use of household surveys that ask questions about food-related behaviours and conditions (e.g. the World Bank's Living Standards Measurement Surveys which include a question on consumption adequacy). However, detailed surveys of household food insecurity are sparse and usually not comparable from country to country. Consequently, the most widely cited measure of country-level food insecurity is the FAO's undernutrition measure. For example, the current global estimates of food insecurity cited in the opening of this chapter are based on this calculation.

Undernutrition is defined as one of two forms of malnutrition which can result from an inadequate supply of food or inadequate biological utilization of food ingested.⁷ At the individual level, protein-energy undernutrition results when protein and calorie intake is below the necessary levels to meet basic needs. The second form, micronutrient malnutrition, results from a deficiency of vitamins and minerals (most commonly, vitamins A, B and D, iron, iodine, zinc and calcium; Ramakrishnan and Huffman 2001). Both types of malnutrition can co-occur or be independent of one another.

For the purposes of measuring food insecurity at the country level, caloric undernutrition is calculated based on estimates of domestic food production and food imports which are then aggregated to approximate the number of kilocalories available to the population (kcal/person/day). Estimates of the population structure are used to calculate the number of kilocalories required to meet the minimum recommended standards for health for the given population (Naiken 2002). Using a probability distribution and measures of inequality derived from income and expenditure surveys, the extent of undernutrition in a country is estimated and expressed as the proportion of the population undernourished.

⁷ A third form of malnutrition resulting from overconsumption leading to overweight and obesity has also been recognized.

A second measure related to the depth of hunger has also been recently introduced by the FAO to provide an indication of the intensity of undernutrition within a country's undernourished population. This indicator is defined as the number of kilocalories that are deficient on a per diem/per caput basis for the population that is considered undernourished. For example, approximately 10% of both the Chinese and Venezuelan populations are considered undernourished. However, using the depth of hunger measure, the undernourished population in China faces a greater the food deficit (240 kilocalories per person per day to meet the recommended minimum daily caloric intake) compared to the undernourished population in Venezuela (190 kilocalories; my calculations using FAOSTAT 2008).

These resulting macro level measures of the extent of food insecurity and depth of hunger are, of course, imperfect. On the technical side, there are a number of concerns with the food balance sheets, which provide the underlying data used to make the calculations, as these often contain inconsistencies and flawed data about food production and trade (either accidental or intentional). The FAO calculation are also based on a number of assumptions, such as the standard nutritional value of food items used to calculate the energy content available to the population, the energy requirements of the population which are based on an assumption of light activity levels and assumption of adequate biological utilization of the food available (FIVIMS 2003). This latter point is particularly problematic if there are large segments of the population who are sick, for example with diarrheal conditions or with HIV/AIDS, which compromises the body's ability to absorb nutrients and creates a need for increased food intake to gain the same nutritional value (Piwoz and Preble 2002).

Beyond the technical concerns, the FAO's method of calculating food insecurity also has some practical limitations. First, it does not allow for age and sex disaggregation of the data, nor does it allow for sub-national information, leaving a large gap in our understanding about the distribution of food insecurity within a given country. Second, the measure of undernutrition is a

measure of availability, but not of the other key dimensions of food insecurity such as access, stability and utilization. Combined with the fact that the undernutrition measure does not help us identify causes of food insecurity, it may lead to misguided attempts to tackle food insecurity problems through measures that aim to increase food availability (when this may or may not be appropriate, see Section 2.3 Conceptualizing Food Insecurity and Famine, below). Finally, as with all *ex-post facto* measures, most measures of food security currently in use at the household level and the country level only provide snap-shots of past food insecurity situations. They do not allow for forward-looking models that can identify who is at risk of becoming or remaining food insecure in the future and which of these risks can be managed to either prevent food insecurity from manifesting itself or becoming worse (Løvendal and Knowles 2007).

Despite these limitations, the FAO's undernutrition measure is a useful tool for identifying trends over time and for tracking progress (or lack thereof) towards hunger-reduction goals at the country level. However, these measures are not helpful in identifying populations suffering from periods of acute food insecurity and/or famines. These food crisis experiences, as discussed in the following section, imply more than severe undernutrition of the population.

2.3 Conceptualizing Food Insecurity and Famine

This section will review the main theoretical approaches to famines and their causes, from Malthus' classic work on the *Principles of Population* to current scholars focusing on the "new famines." While famines are an acute and extreme manifestation of food insecurity, many of the tenets from famine theory also apply to situations of chronic hunger and transient food insecurity. There are some distinctions, of course, and these differences will be the focus of the second part of this section.

Malthusian and Neo-Malthusian approaches

Thomas Robert Malthus was a political economist and demographer who lived in England at the end of 18th century and beginning of the 19th century. A contemporary of the Industrial Revolution, he was a Fellow of the Royal Society and he is best remembered for his *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798/1826). Although not interested in the causes of poverty and hunger per se, his insights in the *Essay* and his proposed Law of Population were to have an important impact on how famines were explained in the past two centuries (and in fact, they continue to have some influence today). Malthus's critical insight was that "the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man. Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio" (reproduced in Downs, 2004:246). Thus, because land is finite and food is necessary for human survival, when the population outpaces the possible food production capacity (which it necessarily will), then famine results to ease population pressures.

As an extension of Malthus's work, Ricardo (1817) posited the law of diminishing returns for food production—that is, that as population increased, inputs onto a fixed piece of land would need to be increased in an attempt to produce more food, until the point when outputs no longer justified the added inputs. Marginal and less fertile land would also need to be exploited despite their greater costs of production, eventually requiring sacrifices in other areas of society (Warnock 1987). Thus, population would be sustained only if more *intensive* and *extensive* production was made possible, but then, only to a certain breaking point.

Malthus's basic argument has been proven flawed: famines do not act as "natural population checks." In fact, only a very small proportion of the population dies in a famine (although still too many) and the population quickly returns to pre-famine levels, usually through the baby boom that follows the crisis because reproductive age adults are more likely to survive than young children and older adults (Devereux 1993). Other criticism of Malthus has come from

Marx and his followers, who argued against a universal law of population, stating that “every specific historic mode of production has its own special laws of population historically valid within its limits alone. An abstract law of population exists for plants and animals only, and in so far as man has not interfered with them” (Marx 1867, in Howard and King 1988:93). It was not that Marxists rejected the possibility that resources might one day place limits on population, but they objected to the reification of a “natural law” that was unavoidable and inexorable, when they perceived the sources of hunger and destitution to be rooted in the capitalist mode of production and its need for relative surplus population (or reserve army of labour; Gimenez 1973).

The Malthusian idea that there is equilibrium between population and resources is both simple and compelling, particularly in periods of perceived resource scarcity. Thus, neo-Malthusians, and their concern with overpopulation and the earth’s carrying capacity,⁸ enjoyed widespread support and were the dominant theory of the 1960s and 1970s when changes in the international monetary system and rising oil prices led to a global food crisis (Mitchell, Ingco and Duncan 1997). These decades also saw several major famines including in China (1959–60), India (1965–67), Ethiopia (1972–74), the Sahel region of West Africa (1969–73), and Bangladesh (1974). Because of the Malthusian/Neo-Malthusian focus on the failure of food supply as the primary cause of hunger, food insecurity and famine, the solutions sought to address the problems were naturally aligned with increasing food production in the third world.⁹

The ensuing Green Revolution with its emphasis on “miracle seeds,” pesticides, fertilizers and irrigation to increase grain yields was going to be the solution to food security in the third world and with the assistance of foreign capital and foreign experts, poor famers would

⁸ See for example: Ehrlich (1968) *The Population Bomb*; Borgstrom (1965) *The Hungry Planet: The Modern World at the Edge of Famine*; Meadows, Meadows, Randers and Behrens (1972) *The Limits to Growth*; and Meadows, Randers and Meadows (2004) *The Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*.

⁹ Others also emphasized the need to implement population control measures in developing countries. See for example Paddock and Paddock (1967) *Famine, 1975! American’s Decision: Who Will Survive?* and Ehrlich (1968) *The Population Bomb*, who both argue that food aid should be tied to birth control programs.

increase their yields and be able to climb out of poverty while providing more food for the hungry. The Green Revolution was partially a success: production increases meant that the total food available per person in the world increased by 11% between 1970 and 1990 (Rosset 2000). But were poor farmers able to climb out of poverty and feed the hungry? The short answer is no, on both counts. The relationship between food availability and hunger is much more complex, as Sen's entitlement approach argues.

Sen's Entitlement Approach

In his 1981 book on *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, Sen described a new approach to the analysis of famines based on "entitlements." This approach was positioned in opposition to the predominant supply-side theories of famine which postulated that food availability decline (FAD), whether due to overpopulation or natural disasters (such as drought or floods), were the main causes of famine. Through the use of four cases studies of 20th century famines (i.e., the Great Bengal, Ethiopian, Sahelian and Bangladeshi famines), Sen sought to prove his opening statement, namely that "Starvation is the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat. While the latter can be a cause of the former, it is but one of many *possible* causes" (Sen 1981:1). The entitlement approach shifted the focus of famine theory from aggregate availability of food (or supply) to an individual's ability to access this supply.

Sen posited that individuals are endowed with assets and resources (including labour power) that, through a process of "exchange entitlement mapping" can be converted into entitlements or sets of alternative commodity bundles (such as food).

Figure 2.2, below, provides a schematic of the entitlement approach. Sen identified four sources of entitlement that could be used to gain access to food in a private ownership market economy:

- Trade-based entitlement: “the right to own what one acquires through exchange of commodities with willing parties” (e.g. buying food).
- Production-based entitlement: “the right to own what one produces with one’s own (or hired) resources” (e.g. growing food).
- Own-labour entitlement: “the right to self-employment or to sell one’s labour power” (e.g. working for food).
- Inheritance or transfer entitlement: “the right to own what is willingly given by others” (e.g. being given food by others, whether through public systems or private ones).

Each of these entitlements may be converted directly for food, or these entitlements can be combined to form a number of possibilities so that food may be accessed indirectly (e.g. one might receive money through transfer entitlement and trade it for food, or one might produce food and exchange part of the harvest to meet needs for other foods).

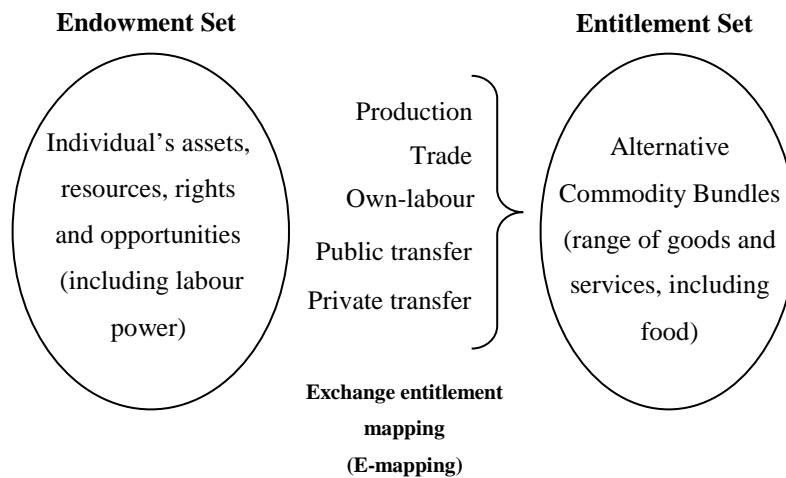


Figure 2.2. Sen's Entitlement Approach (based on Sen 1981)

A critical insight derived from the entitlement approach, is that famines can occur even when food markets are “functioning well” (Devereux 2001) since entitlement collapse reduces market demand by certain populations or geographical regions, and, as Sen and Drèze have emphasized, markets have no moral or legal obligation to meet subsistence needs (Sen 1981; Drèze and Sen 1989).

By taking an entitlement approach, the causes of famines can be identified as either an exchange entitlement decline (e.g., conditions that result in falling wages reduce one’s exchange possibilities, as do rising prices) or direct entitlement decline (such as FAD—for producers, this also results in exchange entitlement decline). Consequently, while Sen emphasizes exchange entitlement declines as a major contributor to famine, he does not reject that FAD can also trigger food insecurity:

So a disastrous failure of food entitlement on the part of a substantial section of the population can take place with or without any overall reduction in food availability for the country as a whole. And nevertheless, in almost all cases the total availability of food would tend to have some influence on the prices that prevail in the market, thereby influencing food entitlements of people to varying extent (Sen in a preface to Haggard and Noland 2007:xvii).

There have been a number of criticisms and critiques of the entitlement approach since the publication of *Poverty and Famines* (see e.g. Rangasami 1985; Bowbrick 1986; de Wall 1990; Nolan 1993; Osmani 1995; Fine 1997; Devereux 2001; Elahi 2006 and Gasper 2008, among others). One of the main critiques of the entitlement approach is that Sen does not recognise entitlements derived from illegal sources (e.g. looting), nor does he discuss entitlements in semi-legitimate environments (e.g. in black-market economies). This makes the entitlement approach difficult to apply in context where social and legal structures have collapsed, such as in complex emergency situations that arise in war-related famines (de Waal 1990). The other critique raised is that the entitlement approach was positioned by Sen in theoretical opposition to FAD and that it is at times presented as a theory—despite Sen’s statement that the “entitlement approach is descriptive, rather than theoretical, and empiricist rather than normative—‘a general framework

for analyzing famines rather than one particular hypothesis about their causation” (Sen 1981:162 in Devereux 2001:247). However, since it does not allow for hypothesis formation as to the causes of famine (Fine 1997), one of the strongest criticisms of the entitlement approach is precisely its inability to elucidate the mechanisms—political, social and historical—that lead to the economic collapse of entitlements that form Sen’s analytical focus. This failure to engage with the political nature and social process of famine has been ascribed to Sen’s focus on the individual and household as the unit of analysis without critically assessing the tensions between micro-level analysis and aggregation at the macro level, between the systemic and proximate causes of famine (Devereux 2001 and 2007a; Fine 1997) and without examining intra-household dynamics over the command of food (Webb 2002).

The New Famines

Most recognize that “perhaps the most valuable contribution of the entitlement approach to famine theorizing is that it shifts the analytical focus away from a fixation on food supplies—the Malthusian logic of ‘too many people, too little food’ and on to the inability of groups of people to acquire food” (Devereux 2001:246). A third wave of famine research and theorizing attempts to go beyond the Sen’s entitlement approach to examine the social and political root causes of the “new famines.”

Devereux (2007b) considers the new famines as “acts of man” (as opposed to “acts of God” such natural disasters) because recent famines have all been caused by human action or inaction. In this sense, new famines “are *political* because they are almost always *preventable*” (Devereux 2007b:11, emphasis in the original). Howe (2007), for example, stresses the role of famine in the political decision-making process, noting in particular that famine can be the result of neglect (i.e. when it is not considered), by-product or trade-off (i.e. when famine is pitted against other priorities), but also that famine can be an actively sought occurrence (famicide, as in

the case of North Sudanese famine of 1998) or a means to a larger priority (e.g. withholding food aid from North Korea in an attempt to force the government into negotiations about nuclear proliferation). Along the lines of positioning famine as a the result of political processes, Edkin (2001) urges a shift in the language that is used to describe famines, preferring instead “mass starvation” because of the discourse of famine identifies it as an exogenous event and a local failure, which, she argues, leads to diffusion of responsibility and denies links between the local and the global (and in particular, the inequalities in the global economy).

While de Waal (1990) agrees with the need for more accountability in famine causation, he advocates for the de-linking of famine and starvation, because “it is not the undernutrition caused by the famine but the social disruption caused by it that is critical in causing excess deaths” (de Waal 1990:481). His health crisis model challenges Sen’s logic (i.e. entitlement collapse equals lack of food which equals death) and focuses instead on the social process of famine, showing that patterns of migration, and in particular displaced populations and crowded refugee camps, and exposure to new disease vectors that lead to epidemics (e.g. cholera, measles or typhus) that are in fact the main causes of famine-related deaths. Young and Jaspars (1995) and Ravallion (1996) suggest that these relationships might not be mutually exclusive and that distress migration might lead to more exposure, while malnutrition leads to increased susceptibility to infection.

Although these recent work on famines have attempted to elucidate some of the historical, political and social forces at play in famine causation (see *The New Famines*, ed. Devereux 2007c), a holistic theory of famine has not yet been proposed. Watts and Bohle (1993:117) outlined criteria that such a theory would need to “account for:

- the particular distribution of entitlements and how they are reproduced in specific circumstances;

- the larger canvas of rights by which entitlements are defined, fought over, contested, won and lost (i.e. empowerment or enfranchisement); and,
- the structural properties...of the political economy which precipitates entitlement crises.”

Until such a theory is developed, Devereux (2001:259) argues that analysis based on the entitlement approach needs to be accompanied by complementary social and political analyses, otherwise “only a small part of a very complex phenomenon” can be illuminated.

Chronic Food Insecurity versus Famine

Conceptually, there is a large degree of overlap between chronic food insecurity on one hand and famine on the other; after all, famines are acute manifestations of food insecurity. Although there are no agreed upon definitions of famines, generally speaking famines are defined by their extraordinary nature as acute events of limited temporal and geographical scope. Famines have killed over 70 million people in the last century alone (Devereux 2000), but deaths related to famine are only a fraction—approximately 10%—of hunger-related mortality. The other 90% stems from the “silent killer”: chronic and persistent hunger (Young 1997:18). There are important differences that need to be considered when formulating causal theories to explain the materialization of chronic hunger and famines, and, perhaps more importantly, in designing solutions to redress these distinct situations.

The literature on food insecurity not directly concerned with famine also has its origins in Malthusian-like beliefs: chronic food insecurity, it was thought, occurs when there is instability in food availability (see Maxwell and Smith 1992 for a review of the evolution of the household food security concept). Like famine theory, in the last few decades the theoretical framework has moved away from such explanations to consider how food is distributed, both between community members (Viswanathan and Meenakshi 2007) and amongst family members (Guha-Khasnobis and Hazarika 2007). While the unit of analysis in chronic food insecurity research

continues to be at the household level (Guha-Khasnobis, Acharya and Davis 2007), researchers now concentrate their efforts on elucidating the links between the social and economic circumstances of the family and their links to food access (Carr 2006).

More recently, the trend in food security research has been to embed food security as one of the many facets of livelihood outcomes. Using the livelihood approach, food security is recognized as “one of a number of goals, resources and outcomes” (Carr 2006:17) that is part of the choices, trade-offs and strategies employed by households to maintain (or improve) their standards of living or to cope with adverse events (Brown, Stephens, Ouma, Murithi and Barrett 2006). Contrary to famine approaches, the livelihood approach has a long-term time horizon (i.e. it is no longer the case of “weathering a storm”, but of providing security over the life course).

The differences between chronic food insecurity and famines are particularly salient when it comes to interventions. Whereas responses to famines focus in the first instance on food aid for the temporary relief of acute food insecurity, the livelihood approach calls for an integral and long-term development program to build economic and social security for the family, through the enhancement of five types of capital (human, social, physical, natural and financial; Rakodi 2002).¹⁰ Such a holistic response is not a short-term investment—it takes time to implement, and time to see results. Since the “policies, organizations, institutions and processes that are relevant to livelihood strategies operate at all levels, from the household to the international arena,” (Rakodi 2002:16) this approach draws attention to the structural causes of poverty, inequality and food insecurity, including how households and countries are situated with to the global food system.

¹⁰ The use of food aid (especially foreign-produced) in chronic hunger situations has been shown to have adverse effects on livelihood strategies by undermining local agriculture practices and markets (Friedmann 1990).

2.4 Global Food System

The body of literature that explores with the structural roots of food insecurity and famine is generally found outside these two fields, within the field of global food systems. In the food security and famine literature, food problems are often couched in terms of regional or nation state problems. However, the post-Second World War food system, as recognized in the food systems literature, is one that is industrialized and globalized (McMichael 2009) and needs to be studied at that scale.

The global food system that exists today is “rooted in decades of neo-liberal policies that dismantled the international institutional architecture for food and agriculture and undermined the capacity of national governments to protect their food producers and consumers” (Via Campesina, in Holtz-Giménez and Patel 2009:185). Alternatively referred to as the agro-food system (Whatmore 1995), agrofood regime (Friedmann 1993) and the food provisioning system (Fine and Leopold 1993; Fine 1994), the focus of this body of work is not concerned directly with food insecurity, but rather with the social and political organization of the food systems (from production and processing to distribution and consumption) and with the “new agrarian question” (the politics and political economy of agrarian transitions to capitalism, originally raised by Kautsky in 1899, and reformulated again by Byres (1996) and Bernstein (1996), among others). In doing so, the food systems literature explores the contradictions and uneven development of agrarian capitalism (Goodman and Watts 1997), as well as the specificity and implications of food as an organic commodity, both in its origins and ultimate destination in the human body (Fine 1994; Fine and Leopold 1993; Rosset 2006).

Given its size, a detailed exposé of the food systems literature is simply not possible here; however, a brief overview of a few of its key concerns from each the production and distribution sides is presented below, followed by a short introduction to the 2007–2008 WFC.

Production

On the production side of the equation, capitalistic agro-food systems are restructuring rural environments through industrialization, which is leading to a shift from self-exploited small family farms to large agro-businesses (Wilkinson 1997). These transformations have been tied to a number of shifts, including:

- the appropriation of farming processes by larger transnational corporations which favour larger enterprises and increase costs of production for small-farmers (e.g., high-yield seeds, fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, irrigation and mechanical equipment; Goodman, Sorj and Wilkinson 1987);
- land dispossession and displacement of labour from rural to urban areas (see Hart 1997 for case studies in Africa; and Wilkinson 1997, on the trend in Latin America); and
- the favouring of export-oriented production (cash-cropping, mono-crops) over production for domestic consumption (Gladwin 1991).

These shifts are partially the result of Green Revolution “philanthropism” supported by the United States (via USAID and the Ford Foundation, for example; McMichael 2009), and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. These programs emphasized creating a source of income for developing countries through agricultural exports that require intensive high-input farming destined for export, and were promoted in terms of increasing global food supply and reducing hunger (Young 1997; Gladwin 1991).

One of the notable singularities of the industrial restructuring of agriculture (as opposed to other non-organic commodities), is the transfer of risk. With agriculture the standardization and normalization associated with capitalist production is simply not possible with natural and biological processes, which makes on-farm production risky (Rosset 2006). Instead, value is added in off-farm sectors (as with the inputs indicated above, and in processing and distribution

that occurs after the farm-gate). Thus, by contracting with multiple growers and avoiding large investments in land, corporations can avoid large risks, remain more flexible, “greatly reduce their fixed costs and increase their geographic mobility” (Raynolds 1997:125; see also Watts 1994). This threat of mobility can also be used by agribusinesses to extract favourable investment terms from national governments (such as tax-breaks or even subsidies, as well as a convenient blind-eye to infringements on the rights of workers; Raynolds 1994). “Ultimately it is rural populations which are most deeply affected by restructuring processes which are simultaneously undermining existing agrarian livelihoods and reinforcing rural job insecurity and the political and economic marginality of rural workers” (Raynolds 1997:130).

Distribution

On the distribution and consumption end of the agro-food spectrum, a number of tensions have also been explored in the literature. Foremost is the simultaneous de-regulation and re-regulation of the food economy. On the one hand, there has been a push for further trade liberalization (through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, World Trade Organization and other multilateral agreements) of protected national agro-food systems with their enormously complex state regulated forms of protection, tariffs and subsidies (Rosset 2006). Yet, despite the prevailing tendency towards an integrated global economy, “food and agriculture have proved to be the most significant stumbling blocks along the way to re-structuring the global trading system” (Rosset 2006:12). In particular, disagreements over farm subsidies, quotas and protectionism are central to these tensions, with the United States playing a hegemonic yet paradoxical role since “the main challenge to present rules [against mercantilism] comes from the source of those same rules in the early postwar years—the US state” (Friedmann 1993:32).

Simultaneous to this push for liberalization is a propensity towards further regulation of national food systems, under the auspices of health and safety concerns. While there are genuine

new health concerns that have risen out of industrialized agriculture (e.g. mad cow disease, e. coli outbreaks, avian flu, to name a few; Kjaernes, Harvey and Warde 2007), the boundaries between protecting consumers and protecting domestic markets is blurred, as can be gleaned by the trade war between the United States and the European Union over genetically modified grains (the United States accused the European Union of protectionism, while the European Union raised concerns for human health and biodiversity; Mitchell 2003).

Many developing countries, caught in the conflicts between liberalization and re-regulation have signaled “frustration with the increasingly exigent standards faced by their [agricultural] exports, the new obligations to justify their own regulatory regimes, or both. They worry that without more progress on meeting these challenges, their participation in international trade will be further marginalized” (Josling, Roberts and Orden 2004:75). Because of the subsidy inequities between North and South, and dumping practices presented under the auspices of food aid, many small farmers in developing countries are faced with floods of cheaply priced food imports that cut the bottom out of their market, making it extremely difficult (if not impossible) for them to cover their production costs and sustain their livelihoods—leading to increased food and livelihood insecurity in rural areas and driving millions of farmer off the land and into urban slums (Rosset 2006:41).¹¹

World Food Crisis 2007–2008

In early 2008, the FAO publicly recognised that the global food system was in crisis. This global food crisis, which peaked from 2007–2008, raised concerns about the structural inequality in the global food system and the ability of this system to stem global hunger. From 2005 to 2008, the rising price of staples led an estimated 130 to 155 million more people into poverty and

¹¹ As well as to waves of farmer suicide precipitated by their inability to repay debt loans, documented in India, Mexico and South Korea, but likely occurring elsewhere as well (Rosset 2006).

sparked social unrest and riots in more than 20 countries, including Mexico and Haiti in the Caribbean basin (UN 2011). In the short period leading up to the crisis, the price of soy doubled, corn and wheat tripled, and the price of rice quintupled—despite the fact that global production of these grains was not significantly affected by adverse weather (such as droughts, floods or storms), and in fact, total global production was more than it had been in previous years (UN 2011).

These trends have prompted renewed debates on questions of sustainability of the food system in peak oil scenarios, on the commoditization of food and the morality of financial speculation involving food products. It also raised questions about trading and hoarding of food staples, the production of agrofuels as alternatives to oil¹² and changing demand for high value foods, such as meats, from the booming middle classes in India, China and Latin America (see Magdoff 2008, for a review). All these factors have highlighted the fragility of the current global food system which is at risk from not only catastrophic weather events, but also of cyclical crises related to the broader global economy.

Amidst this increasing global food insecurity, there has also been a renewed interest in identifying success stories to be emulated and alternative paths to food security for marginalized and/or vulnerable countries and peoples. Cuba, as will be described in the next chapter, has been repeatedly cited as a key example from which others may learn.

¹² Two years following the 2007 “tortilla riots”, which saw nearly 70,000 Mexicans take to the streets to protest the ever increasing price of tortillas (up 700% since 1994), Mexico has recently announced the introduction of new legislation on the production of agrofuels: maize will only be permitted for use in the production agrofuels if there is a national surplus and domestic demand has been met (Najar 2009). While the causes of the tortilla price rise is certainly more complex and the extent of contribution by agrofuels questioned, agrofuels have been identified, both among the population and the government, as a tangible cause towards which anger could be directed, and policies could be implemented.

Chapter 3

Literature Review: The Cuban Urban Agriculture Program

In early June 2008, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) held its six-yearly world food summit. It was intended to bring together heads of state, senior policy-makers and key non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to discuss the impact of climate change and agrofuels on food security worldwide. However, the already soaring price of food staples such as rice, corn, soy and wheat, redirected the focus of the meeting to the rapidly deteriorating world food situation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, local and global causes of the world food crisis (WFC) that peaked in 2007–2008 are complex. While the weight attributed to each of the possible causes vary from author to author, those who offer potential solutions to the food crisis invariably suggest that urban agriculture programs such as the one developed in Cuba should be adopted by countries affected by the WFC. For example, in his review of the sources and solutions to the WFC, Magdoff (2008:12) writes that: “Urban gardens have been used successfully in Cuba as well as other countries to supply city dwellers with food as well as sources of income. These should be strongly promoted...”

While the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) estimates that over 800 million people worldwide practice urban agriculture, the experience of the 117,000 workers involved in the urban agriculture system in Cuba is often offered as the example par excellence (UNDP, 1996). In this essay, I review the literature published on urban agriculture in Cuba and examine why the Cuban experience has led to its becoming a “best practice” example. I begin with an overview of the food crisis situation that developed in the early 1990s to demonstrate the severity and rapidity with which the Cuban food system deteriorated and how it created a need for alternative food sources. I then review the system of urban agriculture as it has been implemented

by Cuba and highlight the inputs that were necessary for its success. In the final section of this chapter, I consider the specificities of Cuban urban agriculture system as well as its present and future challenges. In doing so, I question the relevance of Cuba's experience to other countries facing difficult circumstances due to the WFC.

3.1 The Cuban Special Period and Food Crisis of the Early 1990s

The return to a Republican government in the United States in the early 1980s increased the Cuban government's fears of military aggression towards the island. When the USSR informed the Cuban government that they would not be in a position to aid the country in case of a military blockade or invasion, the Cuban leaders came together to draw-up an emergency contingency plan for a "Special Period in Wartime" (Ministerio de las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias/Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces—MINFAR 2007). These plans remained shelved for many years; however, when the Eastern Bloc unravelled in 1989, the anticipated shortages on the island were similar to those that had been predicted in case of siege. Thus, in a public statement in January 1990, Fidel Castro drew parallels between the two situations and declared the upcoming period a "Special Period in Times of Peace":

... due to certain factors or processes in the Soviet Union that our country would have had [sic, will have] to confront an exceedingly difficult supply situation. Take into account that all of the fuel comes from the USSR - or it might be, for example, that this could have been [sic, could be] reduced to half due to difficulties in the USSR or even reduced to zero, which would be equivalent to a situation like the one we call special period in wartime. It would not, of course, be exceedingly grave in peacetime because there would be certain possibilities for exports and imports in that variant (MINFAR 2007).

Cuba did indeed quickly face an acute economic crisis after the collapse of the USSR in 1989 and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc's Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1991. Known in short as the "Special Period," one of the principal causes of this crisis was the almost immediate discontinuation of the agreed quotas for discounted crude oil from Russia in return for Cuban sugar (the oil-for-sugar programs; Alonso and Galliano 1999).

The rapidity with which these changes took place had effects that were worse than Castro's optimistic address had presaged. By 1991, oil imports from Russia had dropped by nearly half and by 1992 they were reduced to 20% of the pre-1989 period (see Table 3.1 Cuban Oil Imports from Russia between 1989 and 1999). The results were devastating for the Cuban agricultural sector. Prior to the Special Period, the sector had relied on a whole fleet of highly technical machinery such as harvesters and combines. However, without enough fuel and replacement parts, farmers soon had to set them aside and work with smaller, older tractors which used less gas (Warwick 1999). Eventually, most of those were replaced by "economical" (but hardly comparable) oxen yokes (CBC 2006). Coupled with the drastic reduction in the availability of pesticides and fertilizers (which are oil-derivatives and were made essential by the high-input style of agriculture adopted in the 1960s and 1970s), the agricultural and agro-food sectors collapsed.

Table 3.1 Cuban Oil Imports from Russia between 1989 and 1999

Year	Oil Import (Millions, Metric Tons)	% of 1989 Levels
1989	8.5	--
1990	8.5	100
1991	5.3	62
1992	1.8	21
1993	1.6	19
1994	1.8	21
1995	1.125	13
1996	1.125	13
1997	1.125	13
1998	1.125	13
1999	1.5	18

Source: Adapted from Alonso & Galliano (1999)

Thus, the rapid decline in oil imports was mirrored by a drastic decline in agricultural output, and in particular sugar production, which by 1993 already yielded only half of the 1989 harvest (see

Table 3.2 Raw Sugar Production between 1989 and 1999). Even if Cuba’s sugar production had not plummeted, the discontinuation of oil-for-sugar quotas had also left the country without a market for its principal export and therefore without an accessible source of income.

Table 3.2. Raw Sugar Production between 1989 and 1999

Year	Raw Sugar Production (Millions, Metric Tons)	% of 1989 Levels
1989	8.12	--
1990	8.04	99
1991	7.62	94
1992	7.01	86
1993	4.30	53
1994	4.00	49
1995	3.33	41
1996	4.45	55
1997	4.25	52
1998	3.23	40
1999	3.78	47

Source: Adapted from Pérez-López (2005).

Similarly, the production of fruits and vegetables, and the number of livestock and their yield, saw sharp declines in the early to mid-1990s (see Table 3.3 and 3.4, on the next page).

Unlike the sugar production, however, most of these crops and livestock were destined for consumption by the domestic market (Kost 2004). Their erosion, therefore, had a direct effect on the availability of food products on the island.

Table 3.3. Select Indicators of Cuban Domestic Food Production between 1989 and 1995

Year	Citrus (Production in Billion Pesos)	Rice (Production in Billion Pesos)	Cattle (Heads per capita)	Eggs (Million units)	Onions (Tonnes)	Squash and other gourds (Tonnes)	Tomatoes (Tonnes)	Bananas (Tonnes)	Grapefruit (Tonnes)	Guavas and mangoes (Tonnes)
1989	1,015.8	532	0.49	2,672.6	21,619	54,000	259,955	182,549	265,716	80,845
1990	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	18,058	56,000	164,960	195,000	331,157	72,476
1991	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20,841	56,000	175,012	213,997	271,593	122,048
1992	787.0	358	0.46	2,331.2	13,413	36,000	265,480	312,142	326,064	41,162
1993	644.5	177	0.45	1,512.2	8,420	27,000	171,954	189,000	248,160	18,960
1994	505.0	226	0.42	1,561.1	6,500	33,500	95,900	185,000	234,679	46,666
1995	563.5	223	0.41	1,414.9	7,745	43,428	180,900	202,300	271,332	104,800

Source: Columns 1-4: Mesa-Lago (2000). Columns 5-11: My analysis of FAOSTAT (ProdSTAT), retrieved July 2008.

Table 3.4. Select Indicators of Cuban Domestic Livestock and their Yield between 1989 and 1995

Year	Pig	Cattle	Milking Cows	Chickens	Laying hens	Cow milk (Kg/Animal)	Eggs (gram/animal)	Cattle Meat (Kg/animal)
	Number of animals					Yield		
1989	1,393,360	885,720	589,475	78,413	9,889	1,919	10,933	156
1990	1,600,000	900,000	557,500	73,000	10,398	1,855	11,799	151
1991	2,072,700	720,500	521,700	70,000	10,874	1,572	11,863	125
1992	3,594,853	682,746	535,326	52,845	13,592	1,162	7,963	112
1993	3,339,082	532,524	503,145	41,120	11,159	1,163	6,292	123
1994	3,102,316	452,160	496,579	45,878	9,865	1,279	7,347	141
1995	2,326,071	465,782	502,378	49,456	8,565	1,271	7,924	144

Source: My analysis of FAOSTAT (ProdSTAT), retrieved July 2008.

Beyond the actual decline in food production, other factors resulting from the economic and energy crisis served to aggravate the food situation in Cuba. For example, substantial waste of agro-food products occurred because of the lack of transportation from the production sites in the countryside to the consumption sites in cities. Álvarez, an agro-economist at the University of Florida, estimates that up to 15% of Cuban perishable foods were lost due to “lack of organization and inadequate marketing and distribution systems” (Alvarez 2004a:3). His calculations do not include items that require refrigeration, which we can assume would increase the percentage of wasted products given that adequate refrigeration could not always be assured by the unstable electricity system of the 1990s (both within individual houses and in food distribution centres).

Unfortunately, Castro’s other “possibilities for exports and imports” envisaged in his 1990 address were in fact very elusive and the decline in food availability in Cuba could not be easily be remedied by increasing imports because the country lacked the necessary income to complete purchases on the world market. As a consequence, food imports, which accounted for more than half of the caloric intake of Cubans prior to the Special Period (Rosset and Benjamin 1994), declined by approximately 30% from 1990 to 1994 (see Table 3.5 Total Agricultural Imports to Cuba between 1990 and 1995).

Table 3.5. Total Agricultural Imports to Cuba between 1990 and 1995

	Agricultural Import¹³ (US\$1,000)	% of 1990 Imports
1990	821,312	100
1991	829,196	101
1992	662,582	81
1993	640,554	78
1994	593,483	72
1995	694,275	85

Source: My analysis of FAOSTAT (TradeSTAT), retrieved July 2008.

¹³ Agricultural imports include food for humans, as well as animal feed, livestock themselves and most products derived from animals and vegetables, such as fibres, oils, wool and skins.

As noted above, this decline in food imports was primarily due to the loss of revenue associated with lower sugar production and the loss of a market to export it. However, this situation was made worse by the economic blockade imposed by the United States which left Cuba with limited access to international credit, thereby obliging the country to pay cash upfront for imports (Eckstein 1994). Moreover, the Cuban government estimated that the cost of importing food was 36% higher in Cuba because of the blockade, the result of a combination of longer travel distances (e.g. importing rice from India and China when it could have been purchased from the United States) and inefficient cost-splitting of shipping because of the Torricelli Act introduced in 1992 and the Helms Burton Act of 1996¹⁴ (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba/Ministry of Foreign Affairs—MINREX 2003).

For the Cuban population, the rapidly deteriorating agricultural sector, distribution difficulties, and declining food imports, combined to create a serious food crisis characterized by the frequent occurrence of severe food shortages. The impacts of these shortages on the day-to-day lives of the residents of Cuba are considered in Chapters 4 and 5.

3.2 Introduction of Urban Agriculture in Cuba

Within a few months of the onset of food shortages, many families throughout Cuba began trying to supplement the foods available to them by growing or raising their own. This practice had long been adopted (and in fact, was expected) in the Cuban countryside, where subsidized food rations were less than in the cities (Premat 2005). In Havana and other Cuban cities, however, the

¹⁴ The Torricelli Act of 1992 (a.k.a. the Cuban Democracy Act in the U.S.) bars any vessel which has docked in Cuba from also docking at a U.S. port within 180 days. The result is that vessels used to ship to Cuba are often not part of a fleet's main shipping routes (preventing cost splitting of long travel distances with other countries) and are often older and fuel-inefficient. Because of Cuba's poor purchasing power, vessels often travel to the island with only partial cargo capacity and leave the island empty (rather than with export merchandise) thereby also increasing the cost per volume of the items imported (Gott 2004; Klepak 2008). The Helms-Burton Act of 1996 (a.k.a. Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act) threatens sanctions for non-U.S. companies trading with Cuba (in essence, forcing a choice of these companies between the smaller Cuban market or the larger American market).

practice of growing or raising your own food had been fairly limited before the Special Period. This was in part due to the fact that most Cubans perceived it as a sign of poverty and underdevelopment (Altieri et al. 1999). In Havana, it was also because the anti-agricultural prejudice held by the population and policy-makers had been formalized into legislative strictures that confined the cultivation of “agricultural” crops to the backyard, and permitted only ornamental plants in the front of houses (Premat 2005; Altieri et al. 1999). However, once food in local *bodegas* and shops became scarce, cultural perception yielded to necessity, and local law enforcers began to turn a blind eye to the self-provision gardens that mushroomed wherever space was available.

Thus, the practice of urban agriculture, defined as growing or raising of food products within, or on the fringe of, a town, city or metropolis to supply part of the nutritional needs of the population within that area (Mougeot 2005), began like in many other areas around the world: as an individual or small group response to the basic requirements of family subsistence. The production capacity of such kitchen gardens is therefore usually limited by a lack of tools and materials (e.g. adequate soil, seeds, water, insecticides and pesticides) as well as by a general lack of knowledge about food production for domestic consumption. In Cuba, however, the promise of urban agriculture was recognized and quickly promoted at the neighbourhood level through existing institutions such as block committees (or Committees for the Defence of the Revolution and the Federation of Cuban Women— *Federación de la mujer cubana*—FMC; Altieri et al. 1999). These organizations helped the new gardeners to meet their production needs, but more importantly perhaps, these organizations also campaigned for national recognition of this new form of agriculture and the support of the Ministerio de la Agricultura (Ministry of Agriculture/MINAGRI). As a result, in 1994 Raúl Castro championed the creation of a Department of Urban Agriculture and launched a national program which would formalize and “would organize urban agriculture into a system” (*Granma* July 1, 2003, my translation).

The formalization of urban agriculture was carried out by way of a series of policies and programs aimed at facilitating access to land, equipment and knowledge for those interested in producing food (Altieri et al. 1999). For example, “unproductive land”—both public, such as parks and empty lots, and privately-owned land not under cultivation—was made available through free usufruct programs (*usufructo gratuito*) coordinated through the *Poder Popular* (literally “People’s Power,” the smallest organizational unit of Cuba’s government; Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003). Training sessions were held by newly formed horticultural clubs and international NGOs, state-sponsored and subsidized seed-and-tool houses were created, and networks of technical experts affiliated with MINAGRI and local universities were developed in every neighbourhood to ensure rapid diffusion of research results (Altieri et al. 1999).¹⁵ The urban agriculture program and the support services offered to the population were even publicized on Cuban television by the ministry (Moskow 1999).

By certain measures, the efforts to promote and support self-provision gardens were successful. For example, by 1996, Havana had more than 8,000 plots used for self-provision and by 2000, the 17,000 workers utilizing these plots provided more than 84 million kilograms of fresh produce for their (extended) families (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003). The yield on these plots is substantially higher than in other cities. For example, in Cuba, the estimated yield is of 81,700 kg/hectare (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003) while in Nairobi the yield is of approximately 9,000 kg/hectare and in Addis Ababa it is of 8,300 kg/hectare (Egziabher et al. 1994).

Despite these achievements and the supports proffered, the number of family plots under cultivation declined by about 30% from the mid-1990s to 2000. As Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina (2003:34) note: “The decrease in the number of gardens, producers and the area for

¹⁵ Given that most agronomists were trained in large-scale high-input agriculture, which is very different from intensive small scale organic farming, it is important to recognize that knowledge flowed both from researchers to urban farmers and from urban farmers to researchers (Premat 2005).

cultivation is partially due to a revision of the original figures but also to the fact that many producers opted out of this activity, given the current higher availability of food traded in agricultural markets and in other forms of urban agricultural production.”

The other forms of urban agriculture to which Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina refer have had a key role in increasing and sustaining the increase in the availability of food in Cuba. Alongside with the promotion of the kitchen gardens, in the early 1990s the government chose to make substantial investments in the creation of high-yield urban gardens (*Organopónico de Alto Rendimiento*) and later in greenhouses (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003).¹⁶ It also promoted the creation of (cheaper) urban state farms at large places of work (e.g. at MINFAR) and made available large tracts of land for use by cooperative farmers. The aims of these alternative forms of urban agriculture were to increase the availability of food products to the urban population in general. To maximize the potential of these alternative forms of urban agriculture, however, new incentives were required for farmers to produce surpluses beyond family subsistence and new mechanisms were required to distribute these surpluses.

The new legal framework assumed to meet these needs helped shift urban agriculture from a subsistence enterprise to a commercial one. For new urban farmers, two important measures were taken. First, agricultural markets were established where extras could be sold at prices set by supply-and-demand principles and second, new classes of entrepreneurial workers and cooperatives were allowed. Certain conditions were set, such as the obligation to apply (and pay) for annual licensing and the obligation to fulfill certain production quotas for local schools, hospitals and workplaces (Premat 2003). However, despite these overhead costs, the average income of urban agriculture worker in an *organopónico* is about 800 Cuban pesos per month, which is nearly 3.5 times higher than that of a mid-ranking state worker (Caridad Cruz and

¹⁶ While successful, it should be noted that most of the production of these greenhouses is geared towards the tourism sector and sold in convertible pesos (produce for the tourism sector are usually imported). Only “products not meeting the requirements of the tourism sector are sold in national currency to the general population” (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003, 38).

Sánchez Medina 2003). Urban agriculture workers also receive part of their output, thereby saving on the cost of food, an important incentive in a country where the cost of food is often the family's major expense (Moskow 1999). And while most of the workers are technically self-employed, in Cuba, this type of work is regulated through the cooperative organizations, and workers are covered by social security (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003).

The investments made and measures taken by the state led to quick success for the extended urban agriculture program. Yields per hectare on non-family gardens continued to increase as more experience was gained and certain plants matured. They now account for more than 60% of the yearly urban agriculture production and their importance relative to family gardens is expected to continue increasing (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003). Altogether, it is estimated that the various types of urban agriculture gardens in Havana provided 300 grams of fruit, vegetables and herbs per capita per day (the minimum daily dietary intake recommended by the FAO) as well as 3,650 tonnes of meat and 7.5 million eggs per year (Mougeot 2005). While this is far from making Cuba self-sufficient, it has alleviated the food shortages faced at the height of the economic and food crisis and it has decreased Cuba's reliance on food imports. As importantly for city-dwellers, it has also provided 117,000 direct and 26,000 indirect jobs and several environmental benefits including increased green space, reduced garbage accumulation on derelict land and improved recycling and composting (Mougeot 2005).

3.3 Concluding Remarks: Challenges and the Future of Urban Agriculture in Cuba

The urban agriculture program in Cuba has met many successes, but it has not been without its challenges. Despite the best efforts and intentions, access to adequate amounts of space, soil and water are constrained, especially in the most densely populated municipalities in Havana (e.g. in Old Havana and Centro) while long travel distances make it difficult for technical support staff to offer services in Havana's outlying municipalities (e.g. in La Lisa; Premat 2003). In addition,

despite the ever increasing yields, urban agriculture fruit and vegetable production is still not enough to meet local demand and therefore prices at the free markets remain high for city dwellers not partaking directly in food production.

Animal production (e.g. eggs, chicken, rabbit and pork meat) too is inadequate, mostly because this form of urban agriculture continues to be problematic both logistically and within the legal framework, which favours “greening” forms of urban agriculture (Premat 2005). While there are some animal cooperatives, most of the animal production is therefore done clandestinely from patios and rooftops and sold on the black food market (again resulting in high prices for non-producers; Cluster and Hernández 2006). Alberto Pedro Torriente’s 1993 play *Manteca* (Lard) humorously but poignantly captures the difficulties of trying to raise animal-based proteins within the city:

Pucho: Let the whole building hear this—the neighbors, the foreign press. We’re clandestinely raising a pig, a pig! And we can’t take it any more because they’re three of us and the apartment’s too small and we’re living like prisoners so that the stench doesn’t escape. We’re raising a pig that’s not letting us live, breathe or receive visitors! A pig, a pig, a pig! We’re raising a pig on the threshold of the year 2000, secretly, in an apartment building, defying the sanitary laws that have made it possible for the cities of the planet to flourish, because we need protein, protein, protein, and lard, lard above all, lots and lots of lard, tons of lard!

The prejudice against the urban raising of livestock is one of the challenges facing the future of urban agriculture identified by the *Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre*, a key Cuban NGO that has worked with the state and local organizations to promote urban agriculture in Cuba. The other major challenges that the *Fundación* is working to counter are, first and foremost, linked to the sense both within the population and in the government that urban agriculture was an emergency measure to be adopted and tolerated only for the duration of the economic and food crisis (Premat 2005). Gradually, this way of thinking is leading to the closing or abandonment of small parcels within the city to focus on larger production sites at the outskirts or outside the city (i.e. the sites of traditional agricultural production). Similarly, the high-labour, mainly organic modes of production adopted at the time of the economic crisis are

progressively being returned to lower-maintenance higher-input agricultural methods now that chemical fertilizers, pesticides and machinery are becoming more widely available on the island. Ironically, the increased availability of food (especially since the American embargo was partially lifted to allow ‘humanitarian’ trading of food products in 2001), is also perceived as a threat since it decreases the perceived need for the urban agriculture program.

The slow attrition of the urban agriculture program in recent years has raised serious questions about the longer-term sustainability of the urban agriculture model in Cuba. In order for it to remain successful, there is a need to unify the patchwork of policies and investments adopted in the midst of the crisis into a long-term urban agriculture development plan.¹⁷ Although it is too soon to evaluate, the WFC and increasing instability in the global food system may have added the incentive needed to protect the Cuban urban agriculture program from further erosion by reaffirming the vulnerability of countries depending on food imports.

Other countries looking to emulate the Cuban urban agriculture experience may soon find that “the unique factors at work in Havana may not necessarily be replicable in all settings” (Moskow 1999:133). When Cuba faced its food crisis, it had organizational structures and communication networks in place which could be used to make land, tools and knowledge available. It also had distribution mechanisms through the *bodegas* and social centres (e.g. schools, hospitals, workplaces) which ensured fair distribution across the population. But more importantly, urban agriculture enjoyed the wide-spread support of grassroots organizations as well as the full support of a state that already had a strong commitment to the right to food.

¹⁷ As discussed in Chapter 4, there is also a need to examine the gendered impacts of the urban agriculture policies and programs.

Chapter 4

Literature Review: Gender Roles in Social Reproduction and Urban Food Production during the Cuban Special Period

I was raised at my grandparent's house in a small village in Eastern Ontario. Every spring I helped my grandmother plant a large garden in the backyard and then, throughout the summer and fall months, I would help her tend to the garden and distribute its harvest to neighbours and to extended family that profited from it. Having grown up in a very large family during the Depression and lived through the rations of the war years, she had learned from her mother the importance of having an independent and relatively self-sustaining food source for her family. The garden offered her protection against economic hardship. The two long rows of potatoes that edged the garden, on the other hand, were my grandfather's territory; every day he would ensure that potato bugs weren't destroying his crops and every year he would measure his success by the date at which, the next year, my grandmother had to buy potatoes at the grocers. If he had provided well for the family, that need would not arise until the next harvest was almost ready.

Providing food for oneself and for one's family is a universal concern and food provision has historically been gendered, as illustrated perhaps most starkly by the representations of early men and women as hunter-gatherers and berry-pickers. The dichotomy between the breadwinner and the homemaker also reflects a traditional gendered division in how men and women contribute to the sustenance of the family. In Cuba, the focus of this paper, Safa (1995) demonstrated that the myth of the male breadwinner is weakening due to women's increased participation in the labour force and the proliferation of women-headed households. Despite many gains made by women after the Cuban Revolution, however, women in Cuba are still primarily responsible for acquiring and preparing food for the family, a role that has placed them at a disadvantage during the economic crisis of the 1990s.

The objectives of this essay are twofold. First, I will illustrate how the food shortages in Cuba during the “Special Period” had a gendered impact that disproportionately affected women. In particular, I will argue that the economic crisis faced by Cuba resulted in a crisis of reproduction for women in Cuba that is similar, in some ways, to the intensified burden of social reproduction faced by women in Third World countries that have undergone structural adjustments programs (SAPs). Then, I will demonstrate how the system of urban agriculture created in response to the food shortages has also become gendered. Specifically, I will show that the shift from “informal urban gardens” to a “system of urban agriculture” has restructured the roles in the production of fruits and vegetables from one that was considered women’s work to one that it is now men’s work. I will then postulate some theories on why this transition has occurred and will argue that while the culture of *machismo* may have had a role, other factors such as the formalization of urban gardening, the introduction of farmer’s markets, unemployment patterns and patriarchal dynamics must also be taken into account.

4.1 Gendered Impacts of Food Shortages during the Special Period

As described in Chapter 3, Cuba suffered an acute economic crisis in the early 1990s, which led to significant energy shortages and had important ramifications for its internal capacity for food production and distribution, as well as its ability to import food. As a result of these shortages, the country came to an almost complete stop; transportation was halted, industry was brought to a standstill, and a domino effect rippled through the Cuban society and seemed to leave the whole island waiting. Ben Corbett (2004:13–14), a journalist, describes the Cuban way of life during the Special Period as:

They wait...and wait...and wait...and wait...and wait...They wait at the bus stops, the *bodegas*, the cinemas, the taxi pools, the *agromercados*, the *tiendas*, the hospitals, the currency exchange booths (...) Another may wait four days in a provincial terminal for an airplane that’s sitting in a hanger in some other province waiting for repairs from a mechanic who happens to be waiting in line at the doctor’s office, but the doctor is late, still waiting for a permission slip from a government functionary who’s behind schedule because she, too, had to wait in line all morning...

For residents of Cuba's main cities, part of this waiting was caused by the disruptions to the food supply that occurred during the Special Period. In the day to day lives of the residents of Havana, for example, the difficulties with food production, transportation and imports translated into severe shortages of agricultural products and other foodstuff, which in turn led to lengthy queues at the *bodegas*—the local distribution nodes of the food ration system installed shortly after the Revolution of 1959 (Alvárez 2004a). It also led to drastic reductions of the regular food rations. For example, rations for guaranteed food products such as rice, sugar, beans, and non-guaranteed food products such as eggs, beef, fish were reduced and were frequently unavailable on the date or in the quantity promised (Díaz Vásquez 2000; Enríquez 2000). Per capita monthly allowances for the purchase of chicken were reduced to one pound, coffee to six ounces and rice to six pounds; the distribution of meat and meat derivatives (humorously referred to as “non-identifiable edible objects”) was changed from weekly to every nine days in order to “save” one cycle a month (Alvárez 2004b; Díaz Vásquez 2000).

Based on a series of interviews conducted in 1994, Pearson noted that as a result “many Havana households reported that they were unable to survive on the allocated rations and were increasingly forced to meet some of their consumption needs on the black (or submerged) market” (Pearson 1997:684). Food products such as cooking oil, milk, eggs or extra beans were purchased on the pricier black market or the dollar¹⁸ *shoppings*, or they were used to barter for other coveted foodstuffs. One Havana woman, a long time Party militant, reported: “I have to buy up to 70 per cent of my food at the *mercado negro*—to get some garlic, onion, tomato—things that give taste to the food” while another, a civil servant, stated that “I sell the monthly bottle of

¹⁸ The possession of US dollars was decriminalized in 1993 and a convertible peso, tied to the US dollar, was introduced in 1995. This has led to the existence of a dual economy in Cuba—one based on the peso and the other on the dollar—and has created inequalities between the 10% of society that has access to dollars (e.g. those who receive remittances or are employed in the tourist sector) and those who do not (Jennissen and Lundy 2001).

rum—I buy it for 11 pesos and sell it for 51 pesos, or I exchange rum for cooking oil” (Pearson 1997:686).

Despite the strategies developed to try and meet the daily or weekly needs of the households, the food shortages were chronic and had a cumulative effect on the health of the population. For example, it is estimated that in 1993, Cubans were consuming only 75% of the calories required to meet their basic needs, while between 1996 and 1998, one in five Cubans was chronically undernourished (Centro de Investigaciones de la Economía Mundial 2000, cited in Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003; FAO 2000). These statistics may be camouflaging important differences between men and women, since when a household is faced with food insecurity, women often reduce their own intake to spare their families (Tarasuk and Beaton 1999; MacIntyre et al. 2003). In Cuba, this is reflected in the fact that in 1994, nearly twice as many women as men were classified as underweight (13.6% of women versus 7.5% of men were underweight according to international body mass index classification; Porrata, Rodríguez-Ojea and Jiménez 2000). Women also represented nearly two-thirds of those affected in the epidemic of neuropathy¹⁹ triggered by nutritional deficiencies, while about a third of the cases were in men and children were mostly spared (Centre for Disease Control 1994). At the beginning of the 1990s, there was also an increase in the number of low-birth weight babies, suggesting that new mothers were not adequately nourished. However, special provisions to guarantee better nutrition to pregnant women through the ration system returned the rate to one that fluctuated to between 5.5% and 6% of births by the mid-1990s (a rate which is comparable to Canada and lower than in the United States; Frank 2005; WHO 2001).

Beyond the direct reduction of their food consumption, women in Cuba were also disproportionately affected by the extra work required for food acquisition and preparation

¹⁹ In Cuba, neuropathy took on two main forms: optic, which resulted in loss of vision, colour vision and created some transient blind spots, and peripheral, which resulted in numbness, pain and lack of coordination in the hands and legs. Both were associated with deficits in Vitamins A and B.

because in Cuba, as in much of the world, household reproduction tasks are gendered and mostly fall to women. Despite the introduction of the Family Code in 1975 that decreed that men, women and children should share equally in housework, women continued to do most, if not all, of the cooking and were the ones who waited in various lines for food provisions and, when none were available, returned the next day (Smith and Padula 1996; Randall 1981). When supplies were limited, the main responsibility for coping with the shortages rested upon women (Ferguson 1993) who devised ingenious ways of coping and who relied on the coordination of extensive family and communal networks to survive (Burwell 2004). Rather than creating possibilities for restructuring these gendered domestic roles, the shortages reinforced the gendered division of reproductive labour through a shared discourse on the expertise of women in domestic work. As one woman informed Pearson in 1994: “I do the shopping—men are ‘abused’ in the stores. I don’t want him to cook—he uses too much oil,” while another said “my mother taught me how to cook economically—he does not know” (Pearson 1997:699).

The extra burden born by women during the Special Period has led it to be coined a “crisis in reproduction” by Pearson (1997), a situation which resembles that of women in Third World countries that have undergone SAPs (c.f. Afshar and Dennis 1992; Bakker 1994; Elson 1992; Moser 1993; Sagrario Floro 1995; Sparr 1994).²⁰ One of the key characteristics of SAPs is the reduction in public expenditure and a retreat of the State which results in the transfer of social and labour reproduction from the public to the private domain. While this macroeconomic policy is “couched in gender-neutral terms, it is nevertheless imbued with male bias,” which Elson argues “relies on the availability of unlimited supplies of female labour” and thus results in

²⁰ While many authors have studied the structural adjustments made by Cuba in the Special Period, I have not found any that specifically contrast Cuba’s structural adjustment to SAPs adopted in other countries as a result of demands by the IMF or World Bank. In the literature on women in Cuba, especially, authors are reticent to draw parallels and point to the fact that healthcare and education were maintained as a state service as support for Cuba’s uniqueness. It would nonetheless be an interesting study to systematically compare the two to see where and to what extent they differ, and also where and to what extent they are similar, in their aims, methods, impacts (particularly on women) and longer-term outcomes.

women bearing the hidden costs of adjustment through their unpaid labour (Elson 1991:24–25). While SAPs are imposed on a country externally as a condition for loans by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank, because of the economic crisis it faced, “Cuba has found itself having to administer its own ‘structural adjustment’” (Stubbs 1993:228). Because of Cuba’s commitment to education, healthcare, and childcare, social reproduction has been less impacted than the day-to-day reproduction of labour power (i.e. ensuring household functioning through adequate nutrition, clothing, place for rest, etc.). In particular, the renegotiation²¹ between the State and the household in terms of food provision has led to an intensification of the time and labour required simply to feed the household and women in particular have had to find new strategies for coping with this increased demand while also fulfilling their other roles as paid workers and/or as head of the household.

The time spent in queues and the erratic summons announcing new deliveries to the neighbourhood store, which required immediate action, became especially problematic and have led to clashes with women’s paid work, negatively impacting their income, reputation as reliable workers and their ability to be “productive” members of the State (Smith and Padula 1996). In some cases, this had led to unofficial discriminatory practices against women: “Some administrators would not hire women because it would increase the rate of absenteeism. After all, women still had to do all the work in the home, and it was the mother who would miss work to care for sick children” (Leiner 1994:65). Many women struggling with their double (and sometimes triple) shifts have resorted to finding alternative jobs that are more flexible—for example, selling goods on the street or offering services such as hairdressing and nail painting from their home (Burwell 2004; Pearson 1997). As one woman explains, this flexibilization has

²¹ Rodriquez Calderón (1993:354) argues that by fulfilling this extra domestic burden, Cuban women are acting politically and choosing to protect their gains in other state services and that otherwise, “lacking political commitment to their social system, they might have gone out in the streets, like their Latin American counterparts, protesting, repudiating, and the cursing the government that rules them.”

its advantages: “I don’t have transportation worries. I can spend the time I need finding food” (Burwell 2004:82). However, unregulated work is insecure and does not entitle women to state services such as children’s day care, thereby further shifting the burden of reproduction, often onto older women.²² “I work the streets, selling clothes. There is more liberty that way. It’s not too difficult, but it is always a struggle, *la lucha* [the fight], to find food. I look for food in the afternoon, but since I don’t work, she (her daughter) can’t go to the *círculo* [day care centre], so my mother watches her while I look for food” (Burwell 2004:82).

As Burwell remarked, “The running of the household, indeed the actual necessity of feeding someone and being able to be there to buy scarce food products, cannot occur unless someone is marginally employed or a full-time worker in the home” (Burwell 2004:86). While many women turned to more flexible work as one way of coping, many more developed complex systems of community and family networks based on reciprocal obligations to get by (Burwell 2004; see also Chapter 5). It also became clear, both to households and the state, that one way to alleviate this hardship was to create alternative food sources, especially given that the Special Period, unlike other transient periods of hardship, was going to last for many years.²³ In response to these important food shortages, a number of self-provisioning gardens sprung up throughout Cuban cities and towns.

4.2 Gender and Urban Agriculture in Cuba

As discussed in Chapter 3, urban agriculture is an industry that includes the growing or raising of food products within, or on the fringe of, a town, city or metropolis to supply part of the nutritional needs of the population within that area (Mougeot 2005). In many cities throughout

²² In Cuba, it seems that women will turn to older women or peers for help, as opposed to younger women or their daughters as in other areas in Latin America (see for example, Moser 1993 or Sagrario Floro 1995). This is probably a result of the importance attached to education.

²³ In fact, Raúl Castro reminded Cubans that the Special Period struggle was still an ongoing battle in 2007 (*Grandma*, 26 July 2007).

the world, a formal urban agriculture sector has always existed; however, in the past 30 years there has been a dramatic expansion of the informal form of urban agriculture, as it is increasingly used for survival and in some cases income-supplement by the growing number of the world's urban poor (Mougeot 2005). Because informal small-scale urban gardens are used as a supplement to meet the needs of family consumption, they are by their very nature an extension of household maintenance tasks that are considered women's purview (Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security 2006). One could argue that their spatial location in proximity to the house also constructs them as women's space, as women, because of their reproductive roles, are generally associated with the house or private/domestic spaces, while men, because of their 'productive' and political roles are associated with public spaces (in Latin America, this is known as the *casa/calle*, or house/street, divide; Safa 1995). Thus, in many countries, women are the primary urban producers despite rural agriculture being dominated by men (Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security 2006).

As noted in Chapter 3, in Cuba prior to the Special Period, urban agriculture in any form was limited and was perceived by most Cubans as a sign of poverty and underdevelopment (Altieri 1999). In Havana, this anti-agricultural prejudice held by the population and policy-makers was formalized into legislation that restricted the cultivation of "agricultural" crops to the backyard, and permitted only ornamental plants in the front of houses (Premat 2005; Altieri 1999). However, because of the need felt at the height of the food crisis, the enforcement of this regulation was relaxed and many started to grow edible and food bearing plants wherever they could: the front, back, or side of the house, as well as on balconies, patios and rooftops. In a short period of time, these efforts towards self-provision were recognized and formalized through state support.

Support by the state took on several forms and included making any unused land available to those who wished to cultivate it, developing a network of technical experts to guide

residents and opening state-sponsored (and subsidized) seed-and-tool houses (Altieri 1999). In an effort to promote the sound management of the newly announced system of urban agriculture, and make its outputs more widely available, the State also established free-markets where producers could sell their surplus crops based on supply-and-demand principles. Within five years of this endorsement, the number of self-provision gardens had grown to over 26,000 and over 90% of the production work had been taken on by men (Moskow 1999; Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003).

The gendered division of labour in the production work related to urban agriculture has been noted by several researchers studying urban agriculture in Havana, but none explore the gender dynamics as they relate to urban agriculture. Moreover, the passing explanations they propose for the predominance of men among producers seem incomplete. For example, Moskow (1999:129) focuses on previous experience with agricultural work to explain this shift: “The agricultural background of many of these men is presumably a factor in their high level of participation in the gardens.” This may be the case given that when the food crisis was at its worst in the early 1990s, several international NGOs and aid programs provided training and tool exchanges to help gardeners establish themselves (Moskow 1999). These programs favoured the participation of those with previous agricultural experience, which, judging from the sexual division of labour in rural agriculture, would include almost exclusively men (Stubbs 1993). However, Moskow does not support her claim by indicating the proportion of men who had previous experience compared to the proportion of women. Altieri (1999) suggests that on the whole, few in Havana had agricultural experience and that “many of the new gardeners were cultivating for the first time” (Altieri 1999:133).

Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina on the other hand propose that “an explanation for this tendency can be sought in the Cuban tradition of a masculine paid workforce in sugar cane plantations that did not favour the participation of women” (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina

2003:65). Certainly the culture of *machismo*, often described as unwillingness on the part of Cuban men to change traditionally gendered roles, still pervades rural agriculture of all types in Cuba and results in a strict gendered division of labour. It is present in the discourses: programs to increase production by making a worker responsible for the output of a section of land, for example, are known as “*vinculando el hombre con el area*” (linking the man with the area; Enríquez 2000), and it is present in work practices: women working in tobacco, for example, could pick the leaves of the lighter types of tobacco and thread them together for drying at home or in nearby garment factories (i.e. safely tucked away in women’s spaces, doing work that resembles domestic sewing tasks), but did not participate in cultivating another type of tobacco because out in the sun “heavy work such as this, and field labour in general, were traditionally considered unsuitable for women” (Stubbs 1993:224) .

Similar *machismo* discourses and practices could be found in urban agriculture as well; after all “a strong macho tradition toward the role of women is present in all sectors of Cuban society. Our reality is the fact that *machismo* predominates” (Leiner 1994:75; interview with Cuban doctor). However, in the case of urban agriculture, *machismo* discourses and practices have yet to be documented in the scholarly literature.

I suggest that other factors may have also contributed, or reinforced, this gendered division of labour in urban agricultural production. In particular, one of the other reasons that could explain the predominance of men in this sector is the shift from urban *gardening* into a *system of urban agriculture*. On the surface, this may seem to be only a change in discourse; however, it is linked to the introduction of a series of policies that aimed to formalize urban agriculture. Again, these policies have been couched in gender-neutral terms, but have had tangible repercussions on the way that urban agriculture was supported, encouraged to develop and valued which have clearly favoured men’s participation.

First, the transition from urban gardening to urban agriculture needs to be understood as a move “from a subsistence production to an agricultural practice for consumption by the producers and for trading” (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003:5). This transition has several implications which will be considered in subsequent sections, but first, in order to support the increased production required for this shift, urban agriculture had to be organized to provide better/more land to the producers as well as better methods of production. The resulting sexual division of labour may have its roots in how these needs were met.

The first criterion of better and more land, as noted previously, was fulfilled by making neighbourhood land such as park space and empty lots available to those who wished to cultivate it. Beyond providing more area for cultivation, these gardens allowed farmers to intensify the output of the land in use. For example, the larger spaces allowed for better intercropping which provides an increased mix of produce and also increases yields (for instance, planting sweet potatoes and beans together increases the harvest of both; Chaplowe 1998). Because the soil is of poor quality in most of Havana and chemical fertilizers are not available, the extra space was used to install raised beds which could be filled with enriched soil produced through composting or vermiculture, both practices that also require extra space (Altieri 1999). Finally, the extra space could be used for planting insecticide plants, which do not provide food but help regulate pests which can damage or destroy whole crops, a practice that does not lend itself to small gardens (Altieri 1999). Altogether, these larger gardens were better situated to provide higher yields, for those who knew how to proceed. Thus, there was a spatial shift from the women’s *casa* to the men’s *calle* as the gardens physically moved from the area immediately surrounding the house to public spaces in the neighbourhood or in other parts of the city (Chaplowe 1998).

As can be gleaned from these new practices, urban agriculture has become specialized and in order to have a successful harvest, farmers require extensive training and expertise.²⁴ Given that many women had to limit their previous participation in other voluntary work, political activities and mass organizations because of their dual role and increased time constraints during the Special Period (Luciak 2007) it can be assumed that women's participation in training sessions, horticultural clubs and garden organizational meetings offered by local organizations and MINAGRI has been limited. Combined with the fact that few women would have gained prior experience in rural agriculture, this suggests that few women became properly equipped to work successfully in urban agriculture. Thus, the very foundations required for successful urban agriculture—good land and good production methods—were out of women's reach.

By combining better soil with workers increasingly skilled for small-scale intensive agriculture without fertilizers or pesticides, the shift from subsistence to for-profit agriculture was made possible. In essence, this shift can also be understood as a transition from reproductive work to productive work given that the aims of agriculture were no longer to help sustain the family in their day-to-day nutritional needs, but to generate income with surplus agricultural output which could be sold at the market.

Similar transitions in agriculture for subsistence and agriculture for profit have occurred around the world with the introduction of cash-cropping practices that resulted from capitalist expansion in the global south (Davison 1988). In many cases, the introduction of cash-crops led to a gendered division of agriculture that favoured men's participation in cash-cropping that

²⁴As someone who has tried to grow herbs and vegetables from my apartment balcony and failed miserably, I cannot stress enough how important this is, especially if there are no other accessible food alternatives to rely on in case of failure. It may sound easy, but after only two days of neglect my herbs dried out and died, then after carefully tending my remaining plants, a squirrel ate the peas and peppers that were just a few days from being ripe and ready to eat, and my tomato plants just did not produce any tomatoes, for reasons still unknown. It was not a very productive season, but at least I was not depending on it.

relied on men's access to the best land and technology and which relegated women to subsistence agriculture with fewer resources on smaller, poorer land (for a review of this complex topic and its outcomes, see Spring 2000a, and for a review specific to Africa, see Davison 1988). Much of this process of displacement of women was mediated by land rights that, in most of postcolonial Latin America and Africa, are based on a patriarchal inheritance or distribution system (Deere, 1986; Spring 2000b).

Although in Cuba most of the land is not privately owned, a male bias is certainly present in land entitlement policies in rural agriculture, which results in land security being given to male heads of households and only rarely to female heads of households (and in which case, a male relative would take responsibility for agricultural production; Stubbs 1993). It is not clear if there are practices which lead to a gendered division of land entitlement in urban areas. In theory, the policy states that "anyone" wishing to cultivate the land could apply and be granted access through the *Poder Popular* (Caridad Cruz and Sanchez Medina 2003); however, it is not clear that the theory matches the practice, or whether access is based on the family unit, which reinforces patriarchy, like many other policies in Cuba that treat the family as the basic unit of social organization (Luciak 2007). Nevertheless, other policies regulating entrepreneurial work, which includes urban agriculture, directly promote the exploitation of women's free labour. Under these new laws, Cuban entrepreneurs cannot hire other workers but must instead rely only on family labour to meet their needs (Jennissen and Lundy 2001). In urban agricultural practice, this usually means that wives and daughters of farmers provide free labour by "helping" with maintenance work and at harvest time (this situation is similar to the expectations of women's free labour for cash-cropping; see for example Babalola and Dennis 1988). In one case study of a large cooperative garden in Havana, the researchers have estimated that nearly 60% of farmers relied on this extra labour to meet their production needs (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003). As Standing (1989:1092) notes, the failure to recognize this "help" as work renders

women's contributions invisible: "there are those sectors in which women are vulnerable to "invisibility." In most parts of the world women represent large proportions of the workforce in agricultural smallholdings, in family farms or businesses and in petty trade, all of which tend to be inadequately recorded or recognized when policies are being devised or reformed." Because of the patriarchal organization of the family in Cuba, it is presumably easier for entrepreneurial men to access women's unpaid labour than it is the other way around. Thus, while the existing policies do not explicitly exclude women from gaining access to land or accessing their familial network for supportive labour in times of need, intra-household dynamics must be taken into account.

The gendered division of labour that exists in urban agricultural production can also be partially explained by macroeconomic factors. In a case study of Nigeria, Collier (1988) shows that domestic food production was correlated with the expansion and contraction of public sector employment that resulted from the oil boom and collapse of the late 1970s and 1980s –that is, in periods of expansion the state also expanded and workers were lured from employment in the agricultural sector. This created a decrease in food production, but with the collapse of the oil prices and the downsizing of the state under the neoliberal SAP, increased unemployment in urban areas returned some workers to the agricultural food production sector (Collier 1988; Nigerian NCEMA 2003). In a similar vein, labour force participation in Cuba during the Special Period could explain why more men than women entered urban agriculture's newly created employment sector.

During the contraction of the economy in the early- to mid-1990s, unemployment in Cuba²⁵ rose, especially for men since they were more likely to work in the hardest hit sectors of the economy (women's participation rates increased from 34.8% in 1990 to 39.6% in 2000, whereas

²⁵ Unemployment rates in Cuba are contested. Officially, unemployment is close to nil; however, observers estimate that it was between 35 and 50% at the height of the crisis and was camouflaged by partial employment, underemployment and underutilization (see León 2000). Women's participation rates are thought to be more reliable given the pride associated with achieving such high levels of participation.

men's participation rates were 67.8% in 1990, and, after being at their lowest in 1994–1995, increased again to 59.8% in 2000; Safa 1995; Smith and Padula 1996; León 2004; UN 2007). Thus, unemployed or underemployed men were available to pursue employment in urban agriculture, which, being newly established and entrepreneurial in nature was risky and therefore not for those with relatively secure incomes (in the longer term, this paid off: workers now receive wages and share in profits that, despite being heavily taxed, result in an income that is two or more times higher than that of a state worker on top of being able to provide some food security and savings for their family; Premat 2005). On the other hand, women's economic participation rates did not decline and, as demonstrated in the first part of this essay, their intensified role in reproduction precluded them from entering this new type of work. In fact, "the limitations on participation of women as producers [of urban agriculture] is directly related to the heavy burden of domestic and other work they must carry" (Caridad Cruz and Murciano 1998). This gendered pattern of adoption of entrepreneurial work has also occurred in post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe, where "women's greater sense of security in public sector employment and their lack of time for retraining" restricted them from entering employment in the entrepreneurial and private sectors that has resulted in increased gender inequalities as the countries transitioned from a centrally planned to a market economy (True 2000:80).

Given the evidence presented in this paper, it could be argued that work in urban agriculture has become valued as well as "masculinized" not just in terms of men's proportional participation, but also in terms of the work's characteristics. Indeed, by filling an acutely felt need of the population as well as in a burgeoning tourist industry which partially relies on urban agricultural produce to feed the country's visitors, the task has gained value both in monetary terms and in the eyes of the state. Furthermore, if we understand 'feminized' work to be deskilled, low-waged, devalued and informal (Standing 1989), then work undertaken in urban agriculture can be seen as having become "masculinized": it has become skilled work that is well-

remunerated and is valued. And while most of the workers are self-employed, in Cuba, this type of work does not entail the same precariousness in terms of basic labour and social rights as it would in other Latin American countries. For example, urban agricultural work is regulated through cooperative organizations and workers are covered by “social security and accumulate time and funds for retirement pensions. They are also guaranteed a percentage of their salary even when they are sick” (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003:178).²⁶ Thus, urban agricultural employment is “decent work”, both by lay standards and by the definition used by Juan Somavia, Director-General of the International Labour Organization: “Decent work means productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection” (1999 address at the 87th International Labour conference).

4.3 The Cuban Food Crisis: Producing and Reproducing Gender Roles

Cuba is one of the last few socialist countries in the world. Its commitment to equality and continued investment in education, health and other social services contrast starkly with the retreat of the state and the exacerbated inequalities between rich and poor that have resulted from the adoption of neoliberal policies in many developed and developing countries. The achievements of the Cuban Revolution have been particularly significant for women who are now more educated, healthier, and in a better economic position than most of their counterparts in Latin America. The strides in formal gender equality, such as the rights to employment, to education and to healthcare, however, have not been matched by a transformation of the traditional gender relations in the domestic sphere. Despite the introduction of the *Family Code* in the mid-1970s, women continue to be responsible for most of the reproductive work of the household. Because of this role, the economic crisis of the Special Period—and in particular the resulting food crisis—intensified the burden carried by women and led to a crisis in social

²⁶ I was unable to find out if these social benefits include childcare.

reproduction (Pearson 1997). Rather than providing impetus for restructuring the gendered division of domestic work, this crisis reinforced the necessity of having “a good woman in the kitchen.”

The efforts to alleviate the food crisis, and in particular the introduction of urban agriculture, have had some success in increasing the availability of fresh produce to the island’s residents. In Havana, the introduction of urban agriculture also provided 117,000 direct and 26,000 indirect jobs in 2000 (Mougeot 2005). As demonstrated in this essay, women, who are the traditional urban gardeners around the world, have largely been excluded from urban agricultural production in Cuba. While prior experience in rural agriculture and the prevalent culture of *machismo* have been posited as reasons for this redefinition of the gendered division of labour, I have suggested that policies that have led to the introduction of farmer’s markets where produce can be sold on supply-and-demand principles and to the formalization of urban *gardening* into urban *agriculture*, also need to be taken into account. I have also shown that at a macro level, the gendered division of labour in urban agriculture could be explained by unemployment patterns during the early- to mid-1990s, which are themselves based on a broader sexual division of labour and the differential impact of the crisis on certain sectors of the economy. At the micro level, an examination of the sexual division of reproductive labour within the household and the increased burden on women during the Special Period may explain why they have been precluded from entering into this new type of work.

A consequence of the pattern of development of urban agriculture and of male-biased practices and policies, urban agricultural production has become “masculinized,” both in terms of the proportion of men who work in urban agricultural production compared to women but also in terms of the value attached to the work—urban agriculture is now skilled work that is “decent,” valued and well-remunerated. Thus while women in Cuba may be relying less and less on the male breadwinner (Safa 1995), the food shortages of the Special Period and the development of a

now male dominated system of urban agriculture means that they are either directly or indirectly relying on the male vegetable-grower to feed themselves and their families.

4.4. Methodology and Future Work

This essay was developed from a secondary literature search of published materials on Cuba, urban agriculture, globalization and gender identified through the following library databases: PRIMA, Gender Studies Database, VIVA and Scholar's Portal Geography (which indexes GeoRef, Urban Studies Abstracts, Urban Studies and Planning, PAIS, IBSS and FRANCIS). I have also consulted the electronic archives of the *Granma* (Cuba's state sanctioned daily newspaper) for materials related to urban agriculture, and Google, for instances where clarifications were required or to identify grey literature published by organizations known to be doing work on urban agriculture—for example, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Ottawa), the Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food security (Netherlands) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, Rome).

I have tried to present as complete a picture as I could of the gendered impacts of the food shortages and of the emerging gendered roles in urban agriculture during the Cuban Special Period. There are, however, some notable gaps in the published literature that have raised important research questions for me. I have noted three examples below:

1. There is an absence of information on the racial dimensions of the food shortages and participation in urban agriculture (and therefore by extension, no information on the intersection of race and gender). As Lusane (2000:86) explains, there is overall a limited volume of scholarship on race in Cuba because: "Assessing the nature and contours of race relations in Cuba is complicated by the problem of identifying exactly who belongs in what

racial category²⁷ and by the conscious decision on the part of the post-revolutionary government not to gather racially oriented data.”

The question of race however is important and there is evidence that indicates that racial inequalities in Cuba have increased during the Special Period (see for example De la Fuente 2001). In addition, blacks are under-represented in the agricultural sector in rural areas (a survey by the *Universidad de la Habana* in 1992 found that 98% of rural farmers and 95% of agricultural coop members are white), a probable consequence of their displacement from landownership prior to the Revolution (De la Fuente 2001). Is this pattern mirrored in urban agriculture and if so, what are the reasons and consequences?

2. There is an absence of information on the impacts of the food shortages on men and of their reasons for participating in urban agriculture and their impressions of the newfound work. The Special Period had consequences for the whole Cuban population, but most of the stories of coping are told by women. What pressures did the shortages put on men and what strategies did they adopt? Was working in urban agriculture a choice made in order to help the household facing food shortages in a way that was acceptable given men’s exclusion from reproduction due to the new discourse on women’s domestic expertise? Was choosing to work in urban agriculture a political statement, to lend support to the struggling state,²⁸ or did

²⁷ At the 2002 Census, two thirds of Cubans self-identified as white, 10% as black and 25% as mulatto, a breakdown that does match Cuban and American government’s and scholar’s estimations which ascribe approximately half the population as being of mixed race and less than a third as white. Dade (2007: 2) highlights the differences in self-identification versus classification by an external observer by using the example of Cubans who emigrate to the United States: “Those Cubans who emigrate to the United States quickly find a new racial dynamic, and many who would have identified themselves as white in Cuba find themselves identified as black in Miami or New York, just as African Americans who consider themselves black would be called mulatto in Cuba, and lighter-skinned African Americans would be called white.”

²⁸ One of the case studies of a cooperative garden in Havana noted that the average age of the men working in the garden was 58, an average that seemed replicated in other gardens (Moskow 1999). These men would have been in their late teens/early twenties during the Revolution and on the whole this age group continues to show strong support for the revolutionary government.

they choose to work in urban agriculture for the income possibilities (and to reassert their position as the breadwinner)? Are the two mutually exclusive?

3. If a substantial portion of urban agricultural production has shifted from household gardens to larger neighbourhood plots, what has happened to the smaller house gardens? Are they no longer in use, and if so why? Or, if they are still in use, have they been made invisible because they “only” provide subsistence for the family and are no longer seen as “productive” work?

Chapter 5

Adapting to Cuba's Shifting Food Landscapes:

Women's Strategies of Resistance²⁹

Abstract

The food shortages and increased food prices that followed the destructive Hurricanes Gustav, Ike, and Paloma in autumn 2008 are examples of the many disruptions of the food system with which Cubans, and especially Cuban women, have had to struggle since the onset of the Special Period in the early 1990s. Focusing on the gendered nature of food acquisition and preparation, we examine the consequences of recurrent food shortages on Cuban women's use of time and the informal strategies of resistance that they have adopted to feed themselves and their families.

Cuban women have been clear beneficiaries of the social policies and programs that Cuba's revolutionary government has introduced since 1959. Within a generation, significant gains were made in education, health, workforce participation, and gender equality. Women have, however, had to contend with recurring economic and food crises, which, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the onset of the Special Period in the early 1990s, led to the deterioration of some of those gains, thus making daily living exceedingly difficult for most women because of their impact on household management (Pearson 1997; Serra 2007). This situation was exacerbated by the continuing U.S. embargo, which was significantly tightened in 1992 by the Torricelli Law and in 1996 by the Helms-Burton Act; as a result, the Cuban economy approached collapse (Monreal 2008). Although the Special Period was expected to be transitory, in the

²⁹ This paper was published as Davidson, M. and C. Krull. 2011. "Adapting to Cuba's Shifting Food Landscapes: Women's Strategies of Resistance." *Cuban Studies* 42:59–77. It is presented in its entirety here to maintain the narrative. As a result, there is some minor duplication of content presented in the other chapters of this half-thesis, which I trust the reader will forgive.

twenty-year period that followed circumstances continued to be difficult for women because the country's economy, and its food system in particular, remained unstable and vulnerable to trends in the global economy; poor domestic performance; and environmental shocks such as hurricanes, droughts, and floods (Brundenius 2009). The most recent of these shocks was created by the three hurricanes in 2008 (see Figure 5.1 The Triple Hurricanes of 2008: Gustav (August 30), Ike (September 8), and Paloma (November 8–9)).

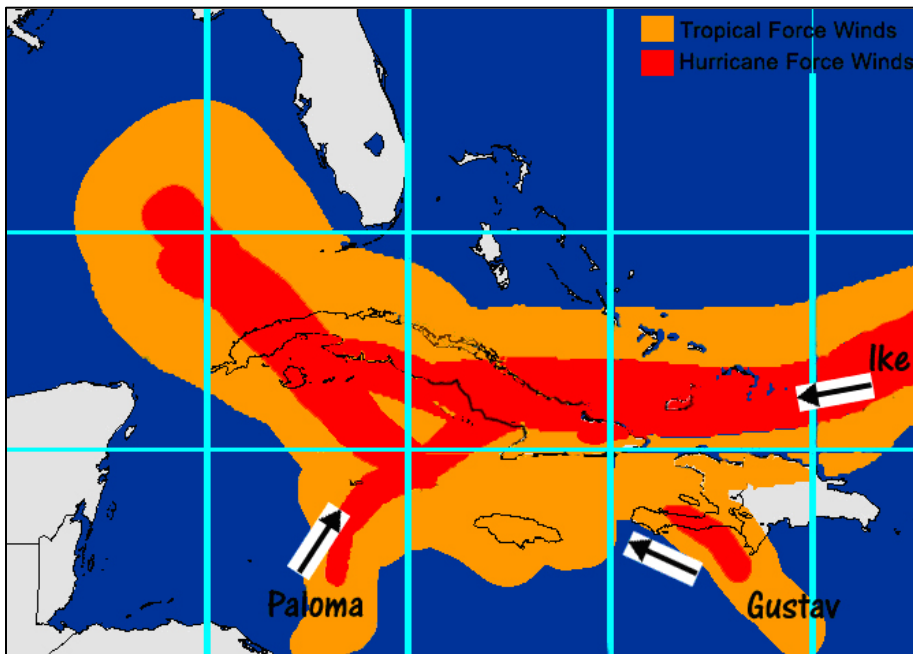


Figure 5.1 The Triple Hurricanes of 2008

Source: Image created by author with data from the National Hurricane Centre, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Miami, FL (2009)

The Cuban government has estimated that the damage caused by the triple hurricanes was more than US\$10 billion, or nearly one-fifth of its annual GDP (Castro Ruz, R. 2009). Most provinces sustained extensive damage to their local infrastructure, and the agricultural sector in particular was hit hard. The food shortages and the difficult situation that resulted from the hurricanes were not unfamiliar to most Cubans. In many ways, the post-hurricane food shortages

and accessibility issues mirrored other disruptions to the food system that have recurred since the onset of the Special Period. Thus, notwithstanding universal food-security programs, Cubans have had to live with intermittent food insecurity, and Cuban women especially have had to find ways to adapt to the complicated and at times onerous process associated with feeding themselves and their families. In the post-hurricane period, women's experience in dealing with times of acute food insecurity gave them the confidence that another crisis could be weathered, if they were able to find ways to resist. To resist, in this case, meant to discover ways to survive the economic crisis without compromising further the social gains women have made in education, health, social welfare, and equality.

The first section of this article examines how, even in the new millennium, women's opportunities for gender equality have continued to be affected by the time required for food acquisition and preparation, given their gendered nature and the recurring economic and food crises that the country faces. The second section focuses more specifically on the period immediately following the devastating hurricanes of 2008 and considers their impact on the country, its food system, and women in particular. The third section explores how women have resisted and strategized in response to the food crises of the new millennium, including during the acute food crisis that followed the hurricanes. Finally, the concluding section reviews some of the macroeconomic restructuring being introduced following the sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba; and it offers insight on some of the challenges facing Cuban women, given that the state has traditionally relied on them to manage the challenges created by these measures at the family level and to fill the gaps left by the retraction of the state.

The analysis draws on ethnographic observations, use of time diaries, interviews, and focus-group discussions conducted in Havana, Cuba over the past nine years, including a twelve-week fieldwork period in autumn 2008 that began immediately following Hurricanes Gustav and Ike and included Hurricane Paloma. Thirty focus groups were conducted between 2003 and 2008

with approximately 160 Cubans. Although overall the participants had a wide range of backgrounds in terms of age, race, family structure, and employment, each focus group consisted of five to six people of the same gender and similar ages. Given our interest in women's daily life, more women participated than men (80 percent and 20 percent, respectively), and female participants were asked to fill out a twenty-four-hour time diary for seven days. In addition, between 2003 and 2010, thirty-five unstructured face-to-face interviews approximately one to two hours in length were obtained through a loose, socially familiar snowball sampling procedure. Interviews and focus-group discussions were taped and then transcribed. Given the impact of food prices and availability on women's daily life, food prices were also monitored at a range of points of sale in the municipalities of Centro Habana, El Cerro, and Plaza de la Revolución in the three-month period following Hurricanes Gustav, Ike, and Paloma (i.e., from mid-September to mid-December 2008).

Even though our sample cannot be construed as representative of the experiences of all *habaneras*, the interviews highlight important informal strategies of resistance used throughout Cuba's economic crisis. They also provide a rich source of detailed information about daily life in Cuba during the Special Period, including the food and economic crisis period after the three hurricanes of 2008.

5.1 The Gendered Nature of Food Acquisition and Preparation during the Special Period

The "woman question" has been central to the development goals of the Cuban Revolution from its very beginning. As Fidel Castro observed, a successful revolution depended on the need "to free the woman from domestic slavery, to create conditions that would permit her to participate as much as possible in production" (Castro Ruz, F. 1963). Yet despite the many gains made over fifty years and the raised expectations about social equality, Cuba's experiences of economic

change, as in most places around the globe, have been deeply gendered, and the country's recurring economic crises have been exceedingly difficult for most women.

The disparity in gendered opportunity structures has been particularly salient since the fall of the Soviet Union, when household work, defined almost exclusively as women's responsibility, became even more laborious because of the country's significantly fewer resources. It has been primarily women who have stood in long queues for food, cared for children and the elderly, volunteered for community work, strategized about making ends meet, and ministered to sick family at home or in the hospital. Hence, women in Cuba carry a triple burden—paid work, domestic and/or reproductive work, and community work—and the economic crises of the Special Period have rendered their public participation precarious, their home life more and more difficult, and their ability to contribute to their community limited by the challenge of trying to make it through every day.

In Cuba, the ideal revolutionary woman has been indistinguishable from that of the good mother—all women as mothers or potential mothers not only are responsible for the care of their families but also, by extension, are endowed as caretakers of the revolution and, thus, the nation. The ideas of motherhood and revolutionary woman become conflated. This was clearly reflected in the logo of the Federation of Cuban Women (*Federación de la mujer cubana—FMC*), created in the 1960s, which depicted a woman in military clothing carrying a gun with one arm and a baby with the other. More recently, the link between mother and revolutionary woman is reflected in a phrase that has resonated throughout Cuba since the early 1990s: “where a woman resists, her family will follow.” To resist, in this case, means to discover ways to survive the economic crisis without compromising revolutionary values. Thus, it is women on whom the state primarily relies to solve the problems of shortages in the country and the household.

For example, in a speech to the FMC in 1995, Castro recognized women's triple-burden but urged them to do more:

It would be extremely unfair if we did not always keep in mind, during this special period, the essential weight of the sacrifices being shouldered by the women...The Revolution needs the support of women today more than ever...These times require us to become more revolutionary and not less...This is why we have the most absolute tenet that women, in a simple and natural manner...will fulfill their corresponding role in this heroic and glorious period, the most heroic and glorious period ever in our history (Castro Ruz, F. 1995).

As the journalist Mirta Rodríguez Calderón observed almost two decades ago, economic crisis renders “the daily life of Cuban women political in the spirit that informs it and in its influence on the family and on society” (Calderón 1993:354). Yet despite this increased politicization, Cuban women are by no means passive victims of their circumstances: they resist; act politically; assume the onerous responsibility of excessive workloads; and strategize collectively to withstand the crisis and protect their social gains in education, health, equity, and social welfare (Krull 2011).

As our interviews relating to the experiences of women since the onset of the Special Period and especially after the 2008 hurricanes demonstrate, the increased burden being shouldered by women, and the sacrifices and demands asked of them, have been a particular drain on one of their most limited resources: time. Women who participated in our study frequently discussed the difficulty in accomplishing what they set out to do on a given day. It is telling that more than half of the women who filled out the use-of-time diary between 2003 and 2008 reported that they either had no free time or counted the time sleeping at night as

their free time (see Figure 5.2 Percentage of Women Aged 18 to 55 Years Old by How they Spend their Free Time, 2003–2008).

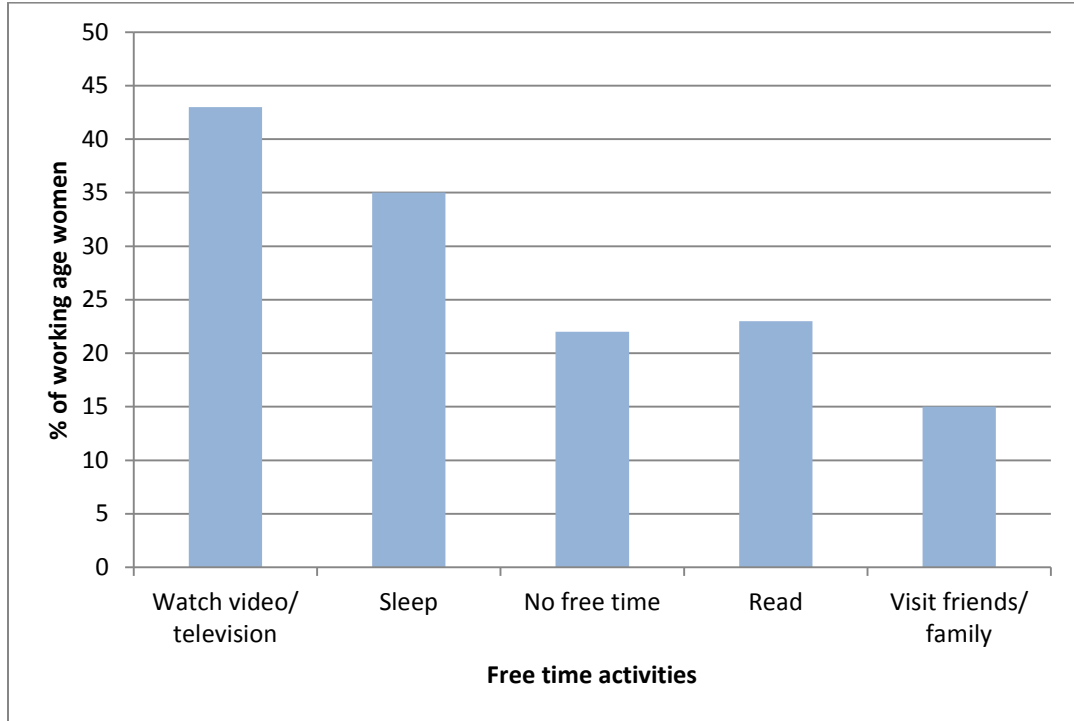


Figure 5.2 Percentage of Women Aged 18 to 55 Years Old by How they Spend their Free Time (2003–2008)

An obvious conclusion is that women have too much to do and too little time in which to do it. On an average day, women in our study spent about 8.5 hours at their paid employment and approximately 7 hours doing laundry, obtaining food, cooking and preparing meals, and house cleaning. Transportation typically consumed another hour. Hence, women were by and large working for more than sixteen hours each day of the week, and they spent one-quarter of that time

trying to feed their family (see Figure 5.3 Average Use of Time per Day for Employed Women Aged 18 to 55 Years Old, 2003–2008).

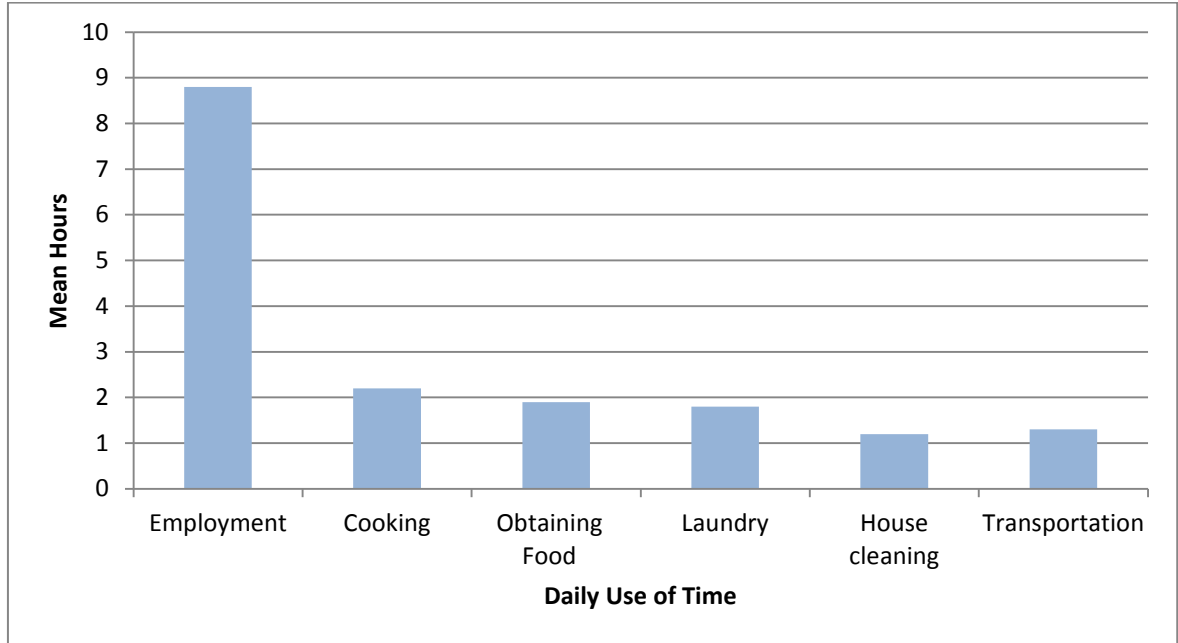


Figure 5.3 Average Use of Time per Day for Employed Women Aged 18 to 55 Years Old (2003–2008)

Figure 5.4 (Percentage of Employed Women Aged 18 to 55 Years Old by Who Helps them with Cleaning and Acquiring/Preparing Food, 2003–2008; on the next page) depicts the gendered nature of this domestic and reproductive work. Reflecting women’s burden, almost 45 percent of employed women in our study reported receiving no help with household work. Only 10 percent said that their partner or husband assisted in the home, and just 2 percent stated that their sons helped. In contrast, more than one-third of employed women claimed that they received regular help from a female relative, typically their mothers or daughters.

It is also important to understand these numbers in terms of the type of assistance received. Female relatives tended to help with all types of household work—acquiring and preparing food, cleaning, and child care—whereas partners and husbands were more likely to

assist with child care than with chores pertaining to cleaning or food preparation. As one woman explained:

Look, in reality, the most general problem women face is the one associated with cooking at home, because women are the ones who have to cook...When you go to the market, everything you find there is expensive...Women, in general, always have problems, because women are, generally, the ones who run the house, they make everything at home, because very few men help them. Generally speaking, women have to take care of everything or almost everything and this becomes a burden... it overwhelms you (Interview, June 2003).

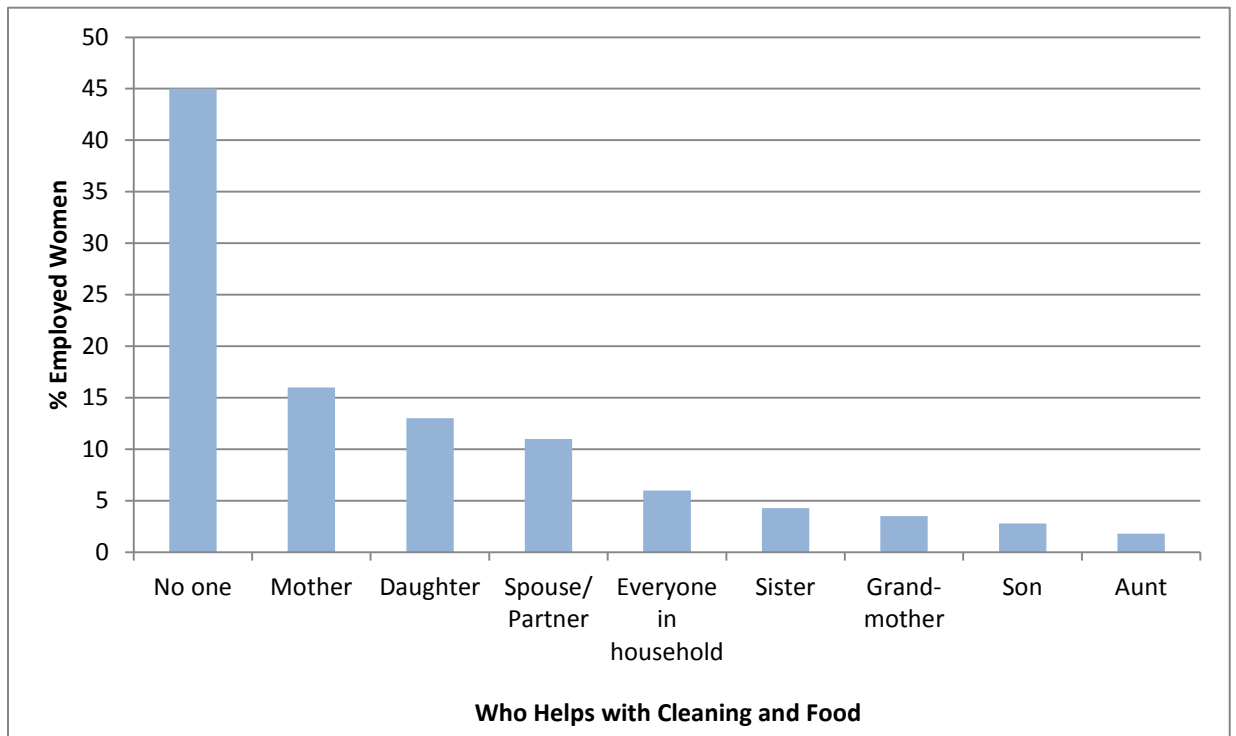


Figure 5.4 Percentage of Employed Women Aged 18 to 55 Years Old by Who Helps them with Cleaning and Acquiring/Preparing Food (2003–2008)

The challenges associated with obtaining and preparing food were not new to most women in our study. However, throughout Cuba, food shortages were especially acute following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when Cuba abruptly lost \$4 billion to \$6 billion annually in

subsidized trade and when oil, fertilizer, and pesticide imports practically ceased.³⁰ In aggregate, these factors contributed to the reduction of domestic food production by more than half; at the same time, Cuban food imports decreased by approximately 30 percent (Mesa-Lago 1998; FAO 2008). As a consequence, Cubans in the early to mid-1990s ultimately consumed 61 percent fewer proteins and 74 percent fewer calories than the daily minimum recommended for their basic needs (Caridad Cruz and Sánchez Medina 2003; for a review of food security in Cuba in the 1990s, see Wright 2009).

The severity of the economic and food crisis of the early Special Period subsided by the late 1990s. However, the Cuban food system continued to be periodically destabilized in subsequent years in step with the recurring economic challenges that the country faced as well as in response to extreme weather conditions, such as periods of droughts, flooding, and a series of major hurricanes—such as Lili in 1996, Michelle in 2001, and Dennis in 2005—and in response to world food prices that were both unstable and continually increasing. Thus, as the women in our study substantiate, the food question remained unresolved and particularly problematic for Cuban women ten, fifteen, and even twenty years after the onset of the Special Period. The term Special Period itself was adopted in part to reflect the expected transient nature of the crisis, but as one woman stated in 2006:

The Special Period has been very hard because it has not been finished yet... Women are most affected because we have the pressure with the food, with the things we need at home, with children and with the rest of the family members; although men had to learn to do some things that they did not do before, such as standing in line... Women were the ones who played the leading role to guarantee the necessary savings and to make all kinds of inventions in order to satisfy the needs (Interview, June 2006).

The Cuban government has long sought to create a food secure environment on the island (Benjamin, Collins and Scott 1984; Enríquez 1994; Wright 2009). For example, since 1959, it has

³⁰ In fewer than three years, oil imports from Russia were reduced to a mere 20 percent of levels in the pre-1989 period (from 8.5 million metric tons to 1.6 million metric tons in 1992; see Alonso and Galliano 1999). Moreover, between 1989 and 1992, fertilizer imports decreased by 77 percent (from 1.3 million tons to 300,000 tons), and pesticide imports decreased by 60 percent (Rosset and Benjamin 1994). See also LeoGrande and Thomas 2002.

endeavored to ensure that food products remained accessible to the population by creating and maintaining food distribution programs such as workplace or school meals and various forms of subsidies and price controls. One of the longest-standing measures is the ration distribution system, the *libreta de abastecimiento*, in place since 1962. Despite substantially reduced allocations in the early 1990s, the *libreta* system continued to provide citizens with approximately half of their daily caloric intake at heavily subsidized prices (Díaz Vázquez 2000; Enríquez 2000). Although various formal mechanisms have been put in place, the distribution of products is frequently inefficient, and foods are often unavailable when expected or in quantities promised. The ensuing gap has been left primarily for women to fill.

The use of time diaries filled out by the women in our study clearly demonstrate the disproportionate amount of time women are required to spend to obtain and prepare food for themselves and their families. In the interviews and focus groups, however, it was not only the time-consuming aspects of acquiring and preparing food but also the constant worry and the disruptions that doing so brought that they highlighted. The instability in the system means that it does not matter what a woman is doing when word circulates that a particular food item has appeared in the markets; everything—at work or home—stops unless she has a neighbor or family member who can pick up that item on her behalf. The instability also creates uncertainty. Among the most frequent comments that women made in interviews were their constant worry about food, especially where to acquire it and how to prepare it so that little (quantity and budget) goes far:

Women have to look for bread, milk; prepare lunch for children and the like...These are problems that overwhelm you. I have two children and if I don't have any food to eat...I have to look for it, stand in long lines. I have to find it however I can (Interview, June 2003).

It is not an easy thing to stand in front of your cooker and think about a way of solving the problem of what to cook. It is not easy for a person who earns one hundred pesos monthly [approximately US\$5]. If you go to the market place, everything costs you twenty-five pesos to seventy pesos (Interview, June 2005).

Over the years, women have had to devise innovative ways to feed their families when little is available and family purchasing power is restricted. Some of the more extreme strategies that women shared with us included boiling citrus peel to make a vitamin C tea, creating mayonnaise from potatoes, and frying the white part of the grapefruit rind as a meat substitute. However, even in periods of relative food security, women in our study highlighted problem solving, prudence, and creativity, both in the kitchen and with the family budget, as essential qualities to develop:

Women always use their intelligence and they always try to solve the problems with food, or at least, they try to do so, they try to invent, to create, day after day, one day with better results, another day with worse results, but they keep on fighting to solve the problems (Interview, June 2003).

We learned to be thrifty, to save the small amounts of things, to administer, to be confident that something else will come tomorrow. There are solutions to our problems here, but you have to find them (Interview, June 2005).

This ability to find and create meals when little is available, and to stretch budgets and supplies beyond their expected limit, were skills and know-how that were once again tested when the country was plunged into a new period of acute economic and food crisis following devastating hurricanes in the autumn of 2008.

5.2 The 2008 Hurricanes and Their Aftermath

From 2004 to 2007, the Cuban economy regained some stability and saw a period of growth (Mesa-Lago and Vidal-Alejandro 2010), which in turn translated into a period of macro-level food security. By March 2008, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization had even commended Cuba's government for having reduced the estimated proportion of the population undernourished to less than 5 percent, a figure on par with that in developed countries and substantially below the official figure, 22 percent, for the rest of the Caribbean (FAOStat 2008; Ziegler 2008). At a macro level, this figure reflects the fact that Cuba had enough food produced or imported to meet the minimum recommended caloric intake for the island's population. It is

important to note, however, that such quantification of *undernourishment* recognizes the increased availability of food but does not measure accessibility or allow for sociocultural accounts of scarcity and hunger (Wilson 2009). It also glosses over the important time costs and the constant difficulties, disruptions, and efforts associated with obtaining and preparing food in Cuba that the women recounted in our study during this same time period.

The short-lived period of economic stability and increased food availability was brought to an abrupt end by a series of destructive hurricanes in the autumn of 2008. In just over a week in late August and early September 2008, two category 4 hurricanes (Gustav and Ike) made landfall in Cuba, and their destructive paths plunged the country back into an economic and acute food crisis. The recuperation and rebuilding process after the two hurricanes was incomplete—indeed, in many areas, damage was still being assessed—when nine weeks later the possibility of a third hurricane was announced. Apprehension quickly turned to shock as Paloma, another category 4 hurricane, passed over Cuba on November 8 with winds between 145 and 170 miles per hour, compounding the devastation wrought by Gustav and Ike (Siegelbaum 2008) Cubans were consumed with anxiety, not so much about structural damages but about the impact on an already-shaken food system (Castro Ruz, F. 2008). What would replace food crops, such as fields of potatoes, that had been re-sown only recently after Hurricane Ike but that now lay in ruin? How would the government pay for food imports? How would women find and pay for the food needed to feed themselves and their families?

Ultimately, the Cuban government estimated that the damage caused by the trio of category 4 hurricanes in 2008 was more than US\$10 billion—nearly one-fifth of Cuba's annual gross domestic product (Castro Ruz, R. 2009). Most provinces sustained extensive damage to their housing, roads, local industry, and electrical systems. The food system and the agricultural infrastructure were particularly devastated; all sectors of production—fruits, vegetables and tubers, grains, poultry, and swine—reported significant losses. What winds and hard rains did not

destroy was damaged by sea surges that accompanied the hurricanes or floods that followed them. Moreover, with Ike alone, an estimated four thousand metric tons of reserve foodstuffs were lost as a result of damage to storage facilities (National Hurricane Centre 2009, citing Instituto de Meteorología de la República de Cuba). Cuba did receive a limited amount of food aid immediately after Ike, mostly in the form of rice and supplemental nutritional powders (World Food Programme 2008). However, because of its economic situation and the longer-term cost of the hurricanes—lost income from tourism; rebuilding expenditures; damage to export-oriented citrus, tobacco, and coffee production—losses in domestic food production could not be easily substituted with increased imports, nor could the pre-hurricane level of food imports be sustained. This combination of factors resulted in limited food availability in the months following Gustav, Ike, and Paloma, which, combined with the accessibility issues from the pre-hurricane period, created an even more difficult situation for Cuban women to tackle. As one woman interviewed as part of our study indicated:

The hurricanes made things very difficult for the woman [because] there is a lack of food, of everything. Very few things are easy now...often there is a lack of gas for cooking, or water in the tank or milk for children...The same thing happens with bread...and besides, the bread is in awful condition now [referring to lower-grade flour used for bread making in the months following the hurricanes]...These are problems that overwhelm women (Interview, January 2009).

Into the new year of 2009, peso stores and markets offered limited food items, and many smaller local state markets, bakeries, and independent butchers were closed entirely. Stores that sold foodstuffs in Cuban convertible pesos (CUCs), in any case out of reach for most Cubans, also had limited supplies. Therefore, access to food items through the *libreta* system and workers' kitchens provided women with some support, and many of the women with whom we spoke expressed relief at having these systems in place in times of high need, as in the months following the hurricanes. It should be noted, however, that many commented on the limited range and quantity of food items available, and particularly their poor quality; they also expressed concern,

knowing that the long-term sustainability of such initiatives was under review and that such support might not be available to them in the future.³¹

Within a few weeks of Hurricane Ike, the government took additional measures to make more food available. Domestic food production, and in particular urban food production, was refocused on short-cycle crops (e.g. onions, radishes, lettuce) so that food markets could be restocked as quickly as possible. These food items began reappearing in markets in Havana approximately ten to twelve weeks after Ike; however, when they did, the markets were flooded with just one type of produce at a time, which resulted in some waste. In the period between the hurricanes and the new harvests of these short-cycle crops, stores of potatoes and oranges harvested before the hurricanes were also made available through state markets, and unripe fruits like guava, avocados, and papaya that had not been knocked down by the winds were harvested early to provide some stock for sale.

One of the biggest concerns in the post-hurricane period that women expressed in our study was not lack of food or the limited types or quality of food available but the rapidly increasing food prices. Food costs were a major family expense before the hurricanes and accounted for an even greater proportion of the family budget afterward. Before the hurricanes, about two-thirds of agricultural markets were government owned and operated and offered produce at relatively low fixed prices. The other one-third came from independent markets that set their prices on a supply-and-demand basis. After Ike, overall scarcity, limited supplies in the state markets, and widespread food speculation led to rapid price inflation: of the few products on offer, many doubled in price (e.g., guava) or tripled (e.g., onions, when available). For some items, prices multiplied even more: black beans reached a peak of twenty pesos per pound,

³¹ Workers' kitchens, which cost the government more than \$350 million annually, were eliminated in 2009. In lieu, workers receive a small daily stipend to purchase their own meals (Lockhart 2009). Moreover, the intention of eliminating the *libreta*, except for those most in need, was made explicit at the sixth Cuban Communist Party Congress in April 2011 (Castro Ruz, R. 2011). See also the section "Current Challenges" herein.

compared to five before the hurricanes; avocados set record prices of up to twenty pesos per unit for small and unripe fruit. In response to this situation, and to maintain food accessibility in the post-hurricane period, the state instituted more price-control mechanisms. Prices were fixed in all markets on the basis of the average price of items in the three-month period before the hurricanes (*Granma* 2008). This policy had some measure of success but also limitations: of the restricted products available, only a few were on the list of controlled prices because other products were not in season before the hurricanes. Thus, the price of sweet potatoes and guava was capped, but avocados maintained very high prices until they were no longer available, about eight to ten weeks after Ike. Given the limited range of items available, it was left to women to use the skills they had developed in prior food crisis situations to devise ways to make ends meet:

The hurricanes have affected us as women. It is now very difficult. There is no food in the markets and everything is so expensive. The Special Period taught the woman to invent, to be creative with food so we have to resist now...We must fight...The problems are big (Interview, November 2008).

I always say that someone [a woman] in the family has to receive extra money from some place—if not, they will not be able to feed the family (Interview, September 2008).

The idea that women are intrinsically domestic “experts”—proficient at household work, solving household problems, and economizing—is entrenched in Cuban society and is most salient during times of crisis. Many women in the post-hurricane period would not allow their partners or children to go to the market, for fear they would return with overpriced and poor quality products, nor would they accept help in the kitchen, for fear that inexperience might lead to wasting precious cooking oil or spoiling the food. Although this is a long-standing, ingrained practice, there can be no doubting it has been accentuated since the beginning of the Special Period. Thus, many men and young people have not developed the skills and know-how to allow them to provide help when it is most required. As one woman explained:

The problem is that I see a lack of responsibility in young people. We the mothers always have to solve the problems...They are served dinner and they don't know where the meal comes from or what we had to do to get it (Interview, March 2009).

The increased workloads that women took on during the post-hurricane crisis did not create possibilities for broadly restructuring gendered domestic roles but, rather, have reinforced the gendered division of reproductive labor through a shared discourse on the expertise of women in domestic work. Although our study did not focus specifically on health consequences, this increased burden placed on women in the post-hurricane period took its toll, as one interviewee noted:

Many women have much stress now. It affects their health. The problems of the house are incredible and it is the woman that has to solve all the problems” when she comes home from work. The men just want to eat and to watch television and to sleep... Maybe they play with the children while the woman makes the meal, but it is the woman who does everything (Interview, January 2009).

To be able to “solve all the problems of the house” under difficult circumstances, Cuban women have developed several informal strategies of resistance.

5.3 Informal Strategies of Resistance

Many of the informal strategies of resistance that Cuban women adopted in the post-hurricane crisis period were tried-and-tested measures developed to withstand the economic and food crises of previous periods. For example, women’s first response to food shortages is typically to change their own patterns of consumption. They reduce their own food intake so that there is more for their families, they choose different types of food (e.g., not eating meat), or they completely skip meals such as breakfast or lunch. This self-restriction was noted most intensely in older women, as they tended to decrease their intake to spare their children or grandchildren, and seniors tended to decrease their consumption in favor of the working-age population in the household. As the experiences with neuropathy in the early 1990s demonstrated, such a strategy is viable for only very short periods of time; otherwise, various health problems may arise.³² The reduction in food

³² By 1994, more than fifty thousand Cubans temporarily suffered optical or peripheral sensory damage by epidemic neuropathy (caused by nutritional deficiency and significant weight loss) during the acute food shortages of the early 1990s. Tellingly, most of the afflicted were women

consumption in the post-hurricane period also extended to family gatherings, which were either canceled altogether or hosted at non-mealtimes to limit work and extra costs for the host.

Another strategy often used to withstand an economic crisis is for family members to move in together—what Cubans jokingly call an extended family by necessity—to stretch the food budget and supplies (Krull 2011). This domestic economy of scale was particularly prevalent following the 2008 hurricanes. It is simply more economical and less work to cook for more people; it also means that there are more people to help with household tasks. Older female relatives, typically mothers, are often relied on to help with household tasks and child care, whereas younger employed relatives can contribute to household income. Older retired men are increasingly contributing as well, doing tasks such as queuing at bakeries. As one soon-to-be-retired man confided, this publicly visible domestic task does not hold prestige, and he was not looking forward to becoming “one of those men with the plastic bags” (Interview, November 2008).

Solidarity with female neighbors and coworkers has proved another effective strategy to survive food shortages. When people come by a bag of tomatoes, for instance, they usually share it with neighbors in the same building. Living in different areas of the city, coworkers might have access to different products from the local markets; exchanges are then arranged. Because transportation was not as restricted during the post-hurricane period as during other periods of the Special Period, it was also possible for women to visit family or friends in other areas of the city where they had been informed that different types of products were available. Women also support one another by sharing queuing duty, and when food is particularly scarce, it is not

between the ages of twenty and sixty-four; the least likely to contract the disease were adolescents and children younger than fifteen years, pregnant women, and the elderly. Young mothers, who were most likely to give up their food so that other family members had more to eat, were most vulnerable; the incidence of females between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four contracting the disease was twice that of males in the same age group (Román 1994).

uncommon to make a collective stew or soup for which each neighbor contributes whatever ingredients he or she has:

When I think of the Special Period, I remember that there is solidarity and we share the few things that we have; we go to our neighbors' houses to cook if there is no gas for cooking. Things can be extremely hard, but solutions are always found; and look at us, we are still fighting (Interview, January 2009).

This system of mutual assistance between women is not to be underestimated. As one interviewee noted after the triple hurricanes, "without this system of survival, there would be no country, no economy, there would be, well, nothing" (Interview, November 2008).

When food products are unavailable or financially inaccessible through conventional channels, many women have come to rely on the parallel underground market to meet their families' needs. Notwithstanding the blurred legality of the system—at times tolerated, at others curtailed, as in the post-hurricane period—buying food from the underground market entails some degree of risk, as many food products on offer are adulterated to stretch supply or keep prices in the reach of the customers. For many Cubans, food is the main household expense. Using the underground economy, then, becomes a risk of daily living, and the responsibility for knowing whom to trust rests with women.

Trading in the underground economy, however, is perceived as counterrevolutionary, and it creates an opposition between two sets of responsibilities (revolutionary and familial) that it was otherwise hoped would cohere as one. This has meant that women not only have taken on a significantly increased workload and the onerous burden of dealing with food shortages but also have had to navigate such daily challenges in a climate where gender equity, being revolutionary, and family survival are often at odds. Women have rationalized this internal conflict by creating boundaries that define illicit system purchases (Krull and Kobayashi 2009). For instance, buying milk and eggs, or other items considered necessary but in short supply or too expensive, is acceptable. Luxury foods such as lobster or shrimp or expensive goods marketed for foreigners are considered excessive. Similarly, women who offer food-related services under the table as a

longer-term fund-raising strategy (e.g., juice making, cake baking, or selling snacks) are also judged according to the amount of profit made and whether this strategy was essential for family well-being. Given the limited supplies available through legal channels and through the underground economy in the post-hurricane period, many of these fund-raising strategies were limited. And even when taking products dishonestly from the workplace for either family consumption or selling on the illicit system remains taboo, necessity sometimes is taken into consideration:

What you cannot do is steal. Each one has his or her own points of view. I don't think in the same way you do, because you have a daughter and I don't have any...I realize that you have to look for the food to feed your daughter (Interview, April 2003).

Me? I have never sold anything. And I'm very proud of that...[but] I am lucky (Interview, November 2008).

The preceding comment is from a woman who receives remittances from family members living abroad, which allows her to minimize her food purchases on the underground market and places her in the “lucky” position of not having to seek alternative forms of income (*negocios*). The survival of many families has depended on such remittances, and migration as a longer-term strategy to overcome difficult economic circumstances has been widely adopted and discussed (Eckstein and Krull 2009). More recently, internationalist work by Cubans sent abroad (particularly to Venezuela) has allowed some families to increase their incomes and purchase domestic appliances to facilitate food preparation. Beyond direct financial benefits from these transnational strategies of resistance, temporary or long-term migration of a family member also means one less mouth to feed and worry about; and in many cases, it means that one more ration portion is available for the rest of the family, as the *libreta* allowance is not changed, or at least not immediately. This is also the case when a family member is temporarily relocated to another part of the island for work. City dwellers who are sent to the countryside (e.g., as relief workers after Hurricanes Gustav, Ike, and Paloma) have the added possibility of returning with food products purchased directly from rural producers either for consumption by the family or for

resale on the underground market. Thus, seeking possibilities for internal and external migration has been, and continues to be, seen as viable strategy to ensure long-term family food security.

After the devastating hurricane season of 2008, the previous experience of food insecurity allowed women to confront a new period of adversity with a certain amount of confidence. Despite their know-how, however, a sense of vulnerability—the inability to mitigate potential food-security risks, to cope with problematic conditions as they arise, or to recuperate after an adverse event—remains widespread. Because of the disparity between salaries and cost of living, particularly food costs, many Cubans are simply unable to accumulate the economic assets to help reduce this vulnerability. Similarly, networks of social support require the investment of time and other resources that become scarce in sustained periods of crisis. Though crucial, these reciprocal relationships are therefore entered into only after careful evaluation and negotiations calculated to ensure that the participants do not end up owing more than what they believe that they can give back.

5.4 Current Challenges

Cuba's food system remains vulnerable to environmental shocks, domestic economic fluctuation, and global economic and political trends. The country continues to feel the shock from the three 2008 hurricanes to its agricultural and economic sectors. Rising international food prices and the global economic crisis create major hurdles for economic recovery and food security. In particular, Cuba must contend with the lasting U.S. trade embargo, fewer financing and trading options, lower prices for its main exports, and the ebbs and flows of tourism. In 2009–2010, adding to inefficient domestic production and distribution, imports decreased by 37 percent owing to poor sugar harvests, lost revenues from tourism, and global rice shortages (Malkin 2010).

It is anticipated that the impact of the world crisis on Cuba's economy in 2011 will exceed US\$308 million for basic products. Imported food items such as wheat, corn, soy flour,

soy oil, and powdered milk have increased significantly, and Cuba will need to spend 25 percent more to acquire them. According to Igor Montero Brito, president of the Food Trading Enterprise of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment, the “growth expected in revenues from the export of nickel, services, sugar and other goods and services will not be net gains but must be spent to cover the deficit of the food-import bill” (Leyva 2011). Some argue that, although “the country is not experiencing 1991-levels of economic deprivation, the decline in Cuba’s GDP and the country’s isolation from the world economy renders this crisis more politically devastating than that of 1991” (López-Levy 2011).

The Cuban government has been facing the formidable challenge of how to initiate substantial economic reforms during a global crisis without compromising revolutionary gains in education, health, equity, and social welfare, and without further increasing food insecurity. This was the agenda of the sixth Cuban Communist Party Congress held in April 2011: both the macro-level restructuring of Cuba’s debt-ridden economy and the micro-economic realities faced by Cuban families living on low wages but with subsidized health care, education, housing, and food. At the crux of the congress was the recognition that the depth of the economic crisis, particularly after the 2008 hurricanes, had rendered the state unable to continue financing social programs and the inflated state payroll to the extent it had in the past (Ritter 2011). Among the measures envisaged are the devaluation of the CUC, the gradual layoff or reassignment of more than one-fifth of the state workforce, the reintroduction of self-employment licenses (approximately 200,000 have recently been issued), the leasing of vacant state land to more than 140,000 small farmers, and the phasing out of the ration card except for those most in need (Castro Ruz, R. 2011).

Neither the role of women in the economic plan sketched out for the coming five years nor its impact on women were discussed at the congress. What is certain, however, is that the changes occurring in Cuba will, to one degree or another, have a gendered impact. For example,

the withdrawal of the *libreta* and the closing of workers' kitchens and many local state-run markets might have a direct impact on family food provisioning. More indirectly, family finances are being affected by the devaluation of the CUC and higher international food prices, which lead to higher prices for imported goods, including essentials such as cooking oil and rice, in local shops. And although farmers' cooperatives have in the past increased availability of fresh produce, they have also tended to lead to higher prices. Moreover, because one in five workers will be threatened by the downsizing of state-sector employment, job losses will affect most families.

In summary, this sizable retraction of the state will leave yet another important gap to fill, and Cuban women are again facing a renewed period of change and uncertainty that will test their capacity to adapt to shifting economic and food landscapes. The future success of these recently introduced initiatives will need to be measured not only by macro-level indicators of economic performance but also by their impact on the already-limited resources available to women, in particular their time, as well as their opportunities for achieving gender equity.

Chapter 6

A Very Palatable Exercise: Case Study of the Delicious Experiences of a 19th Century Traveller to Cuba

“I have never seen anything so beautiful. The country around the river is full of trees, beautiful and green and different from ours, each with flowers and its own kind of fruit.”

Christopher Columbus, upon arrival in eastern Cuba,
Sunday, 28 October 1492

6.1 Stepping Into a World Unlike Anywhere Else

For years after his first glimpse of Cuba, Christopher Columbus was convinced that he had found the way to the great island of Japan—the last obstacle to stand between him and the much sought-after riches of China. Little did he know that he had stumbled upon an island which would later become the economic and military heart of the Spanish Empire in America: the place where all ships would pass through on their way to and from Europe, containing goods and slaves destined for the colonies, gold, tobacco, sugar, coffee, hardwood and other luxury commodities extracted for export to the Old World; a place that would become a prize, coveted and briefly taken by the British in the 18th century, an object of 19th century American “Manifest Destiny” and a symbol of resistance to U.S. economic hegemony in the 20th century.

Cuba’s history is defined by its role at the cross-roads of colonial sea traffic, its proximity to the United States and by the establishment of the island’s sugar and tobacco industries—as such, is essentially a military history, and a history of slavery and colonial control.³³ During the 18th and 19th centuries, its location on these trade routes also made “a visit to the island all but

³³ Although never formally a colony of the United States, Cuba was under a “trusteeship” of the U.S. for three years after the Spanish-American war and even after its formal independence in 1902, the U.S. retained the right to intervene in Cuban affairs, including in its finances and foreign relations. Therefore, throughout this essay, “colonial power” encompasses both Spanish (1492-1898) and American (1898-1959) authority over the island.

obligatory to most travellers to the New World,” (Pérez 1992:xxv) while rumours of annexation and the establishment of regular short passages from three American ports made Cuba a fashionable destination for American gentlemen and ladies alike (Dimock 1859:111–112). As suggested by the title of the travel accounts collated and edited by Pérez (1992), the travelogues and diaries of these voyagers have often been used to explore themes related to *Slaves, Sugar, and Colonial Society*. This essay, however, seeks to examine the experiences of travellers to Cuba beyond these broad themes and show how Cuba as a field of study becomes defined as “other” through challenges to much smaller taken-for-granted aspects of daily-living.

Using the diary of Joseph J. Dimock, an American gentleman traveller to Cuba in 1859, I will consider in particular how food can upset the sense of place and act as a powerful and constant reminder to the explorers that they are in a foreign place. As noted by Tansey and Worsley (1995:7), albeit in a very different context, “food is so basic to our well-being that it is almost too obvious; it is taken for granted.” So too, the everyday aspect of food had often lead it to be trivialized, overlooked and/or edited out of thematic collections of Cuban travel writing, but I contend that it forms an integral part of the “othering” process and of a traveller’s experience of Cuba.

6.2 The Delicious Shores of Cuba

Taking part in local cuisine and consuming local produce is one of the many pleasures afforded to the traveller. For the nineteenth century tourist from northern regions of the United States or Europe, the variety and quality of fruits and vegetables, and the various other exotic foods available in tropical regions, were very much markers of difference between “home” and “away”. In fact, in Dimock’s diary, about a third of his entries detail his meal-time encounters, both social and culinary, as well as his experiences with novel foodstuffs or familiar foods that became distinctive in this new setting. For most travellers of the period, the first meeting with the Cuban

cornucopia likely occurred before they had even set foot on land, as “fruit boats, selling oranges, bananas and other tropical fruits to the poor devils who have just come from a snow storm in New York” (Dimock 1859:111-112) regularly met the foreign steamers arriving at Havana harbour. For Dimock, however, the impression of having *arrived* in Cuba occurred when he was close enough to the shore to see Cuban fruit trees display their wares: “the waving coconut and the trim looking orange tree with dark green leaves and golden fruit, the patches of plantain and banana, all pointed out to me, and almost near enough to be touched, begin to make me realize, I am in this enchanted land” (28).

Like the mild temperature, the profusion of fruits and vegetables in mid-winter served to confirm to the “Yankee gentleman,” as Dimock referred to himself, that he had indeed landed on this enchanted island:

It looks odd enough to me on the eleventh of February to [find] on the table, green peas, plantains, beans, lettuce, yams, tomatoes, etc., and for dessert to eat oranges, bananas and coconuts, fresh from the trees. I may be better able to give a more correct and ample idea [of] Cuban dishes and table, but suffice it to say that here of good things eatable and drinkable there is no end (8).

Endlessly eating oranges, in particular, quickly became symbolic of being in Cuba for Dimock. Both oranges and bananas would have been available in New York at the time and therefore were not new to the gentleman traveller; however, true Havana oranges are “very different from the fruit we buy for ‘fresh Havana oranges’ in New York (...) the flavor of the fruit [is] very different from what we have at the north. Bananas also taste different here, so good that it is past all my attempts at description” (65). Thus, sight had informed Dimock of his arrival on the island, but taste was confirming the authenticity of his travel experience. Despite becoming a daily ritual, the physical act of picking oranges directly off the tree continued to hold wonder for Dimock, who wrote almost daily about the act, even after months on the island. Simple entries such as “I find that eating oranges as I pick them from the trees to be very palatable exercise”

(34) and “it is not till one eats oranges plucked fresh from the trees that he becomes aware of the delightful relish of the fruit” (63) abound.

Dimock was not the only one to have been grateful to Columbus for introducing oranges to the West Indies (Seelig 1966), as most travel writers of the period have entries on the Eden-like pleasure³⁴ associated with eating oranges in Cuba (Pérez 1992). One even boasts having been shown “as many as twenty-six different species of orange-trees” (Gallenga 1873:95). Thus, even variations on familiar foods, such as the increased sweetness of an orange, when placed in this new context that was Cuba, elicited the sense of *being there* in an *other* place. Simple day-to-day acts, such as picking a fruit from tree, even after being established as routine, also served to continually reinforce that feeling of distance from home.

The consumption of “exotic” Cuban food was, of course, a must for all the adventurers and key to the exploration process. Unlike the practice of eating oranges, which seems to have been a more personal lived-experience of difference, eating unusual fruits and other foodstuffs was an exercise to validate one’s status of explorer. It was done partially from curiosity and partially for the tales that could be brought back home (and therefore the very experience also reinforced the transient nature of the passage through Cuba). The journal entries and letters describing these exotic encounters focus almost exclusively on listing the fruits seen or tasted, rather than detailing the actual experience of consuming them: “Of fruits there are an endless variety, many of which are never seen in the northern states, such as mango, sapota, sweet lemon, guanabana, citron, bananas, maranox, pineapple, toronja (or orange), guava, etc” (Dimock 1859: 37–38).

The emphasis is also placed on how exclusive to Cuba these encounters are, and therefore, on the impossibility of having these experiences at home or from an “armchair”:

Visited the celebrated fish market this morning (...) I saw but few fish that I could recognize by size, shape, or color. The lobsters are of every color, and with a different

³⁴ For a discussion of New World’s abundance and ties to Eden, see Withers 1999.

kind of animal from what we see at home. The eels are from two to six feet and look like sea serpents, but the flavor is exquisite (...) The turtles too were a novelty to a Yankee, some of them weighing over five hundred pounds. Turtle soup here is the genuine article and “no mock” (Dimock 1859:14–15).

As with other exploration voyages, the Cuban culinary explorer was a heroic personage, ready to take risks and suffer bodily harm in the process if required (Oreskes 1996), which did occur to Dimock on occasion: “The *guarapo* [sugar cane juice] I drank last evening troubled me during the night with a severe pain in my *barriga* (...) I arose early with a bad feeling head and a touch of diarrhea...” (Dimock 1859:34). These risks, however, were not undertaken without purpose and served to establish the voyager as a serious investigator of Cuban culture and the Cuban field (literally, and metaphorically). In describing these experiences, the travel writers positioned themselves as experts and gained authority and credibility in the eyes of their colleagues. At the same time, their accounts were used to transfer their knowledge to future explorers who could then bypass the process of learning from the locals. The report of a visit to rural Cuba by Samuel Hazard in 1866 (211–212), illustrates this dual purpose well:

...the *tasajo brujo*, or jerked beef bewitched, so called from the fact that it grows so much larger in cooking, is the dish found almost everywhere, and cooked in many ways. It is almost always a savory dish the traveller need not be afraid of, particularly if he has had an army experience. There are some other dishes, but with the knowledge above [regarding the different types of cuisine and ingredients used in rural Cuba], the stranger will be safe to accept an invitation to dine with any of the *hacendados* [rural landowner], and it will also be seen that Cuban cookery is not such a fearful thing as we have been led to believe...

In the heroic culinary conquest of Cuba, there was a hierarchy of respect and prestige offered to the traveller according to the authenticity of the Cuban cuisine in which they partook. Generally speaking, rural areas were considered as offering more authentic dishes than cities such as Havana. Hazard (1866:211) posits that this is due to the introduction of foreign cuisine³⁵ in urban areas: “As the service of the table, in most of the cities, at all the hotels, and many of the

³⁵ Although it should be noted that Cuban cuisine is an amalgamation of several different cuisines, mostly introduced through colonization, and therefore mostly ‘foreign’.

best private houses partakes of the nature of French cooking, it is only in the rural parts one can see the bona fide Cuban dishes.” However, the authenticity of the culinary experience can also be viewed as closely tied to the ahistorical beliefs of the foreign travellers that rural areas were “uncontaminated by civilization” and “changeless.” Similarly, the travellers recognized that food was intimately linked to one’s social position and therefore there was also a hierarchy of experience according to social distance required to be traversed between the travellers and their dinner companions. It ranged from the small distance required for meals served in the crystal clad banqueting-rooms of the high society in Havana, which Lady Mary Wortley Montagu joined on several occasions (1851:210–211), to the meals that the Yankee gentleman shared with rural landowners, where he “...tasted, for the first time, a real Cuban dinner. The dishes were many of them strange to me, but very palatable...” (Dimock 1859:32). The most celebrated experiences, though, included “sharing” in the food of slaves on rural sugar plantations.³⁶ Bremer recounts that: “they are not fed here on rice, but principally upon a species of root called malanga, which, it is said, they like, but which seemed to me insipid. It is yellow, and something like potato, but has a poor and somewhat bitter taste...” (Bremer 1853:117). As a consequence of these hierarchies, the experiences of consuming Cuba, like other fieldwork experiences, held more cachet in places that were more physically and socially removed (Passaro 1997). Hazard (1871:211) suggests that one way to measure this distance is according to the degree of penetration of northern foodstuffs: “Civilization has found its way even to the homes of these simple people [in the coffee mountains near Guantanamo]; and, on the richer and larger places, English beer is now generally used, and to strangers even champagne is presented.”

Like many gentlemen of his day, Dimock was a supporter of the annexation of Cuba to the United States. In his opinion, to progress and become civilized, Cuba needed to exert more

³⁶ It is highly unlikely that Bremer, and other travellers from this period, actually shared her meal with the slaves; rather, she was probably given a culinary demonstration of the foods eaten by them at the table of the landowner prior to being offered her “real” dinner. Nonetheless, this experience was highly regarded.

control over its wild nature in order to claim its role as the garden of the world. On several occasions, he uses Cuba's "need" for culture (literally, but also perhaps metaphorically?) as justification for American appropriation. For him, it was as if Cuba was simply waiting for proper care from the right hands to bloom and take its place among developed nations:

Coffee, indigo, vanilla, and tonquin beans grow wild, and are cultivated to some extent, but it is evident to anyone that the resources of the island are not half developed. With proper culture it would be the tropical market of the world (34)... Let it but become a part and portion of our confederacy and everything will be changed here... the whole surface of this garden of the world will burst from bud to magnificent blossom which will astonish the civilized world (104).

Parallels can be drawn between Dimock's annexationist position and his writing about Cuba as a place waiting to be consumed, there to be taken by the American traveller:

Such a grove of orange trees as hide the house here I am afraid I shall never again see their equal. Prim round trees about as large as our apple with their golden fruit and bright green leaves sparkling with dew and **asking to be eaten** (104–105)(...) And from where I sit on the piazza I can see the coconut tree loaded with its delicious fruit, the tamarind covered with those little pods containing its agreeable acid, and the delicious orange **waiting to be plucked and eaten** (87, emphases mine).

The idea of Cuba waiting to be consumed was a reversal of roles given that for most of his time on the island, Dimock waited to consume Cuba. In fact, most of his activities whilst visiting the island were structured around, or included, food. That meals were scheduled at different times in Cuba than in New York served once again to constantly remind the traveller of being in another place. The following passage, from February 15th, 1859 (34–36), shows the organization of a typical day for this gentleman traveller, lists some typical foods eaten and highlights the pervasiveness of food to Dimock's experience of Cuba:

Life here to me is very different than at the North (...) Rise about six o'clock and swallow a cup of coffee...then go out into the piazza and eat oranges just picked from the trees, then for exercise ride about the estate...until about 10 o'clock when breakfast is ready. For this meal we generally have fresh or salt fish, *tesajo* or jerked beef, plantains, yucca, sweet potatoes, *funche* and rice, (which is cooked no where else as here) and then yam or corn cakes, coffee and cigarettes. After breakfast go over to the sugarhouse...chew sugarcane. Then walk over to the drying and packinghouse (...) to see how the hands get along cutting cane, and by this time 'tis twelve o'clock and the sun is getting uncomfortably warm and we return to the house for a lunch of oranges, bananas or pineapples, and for a beverage take fresh coconut milk or tamarind water. By this time a short nap is desirable

and can be followed by reading, writing, or other light exercise, until about four or five o'clock when we are summoned to dinner. Here we find vegetable soup of a quality which the negroes excel everybody else, duck, ham, turkey, fresh pork, etc. and occasionally a boiled dish composed of ground plantain, meats and vegetables which is called "*fufu*" and is universal here. We have the same vegetables as in the morning, with green peas, tomatoes, lettuce, beans, "*kim bumbo*" or okra, etc., cooked in every variety of style, for the negroes here are the very best of cooks. For dessert we have occasionally a Yankee pudding but generally "*dulces*" or sweetmeats, made of guava, limes, oranges, sour sofú, tomatoes, etc., always followed by coffee and cigars. Pies and pasty are unknown here and entirely uncalled for, and fruits of every kind are about in such profusion, that they are rarely put upon the table. Everyone helping themselves in the piazza or directly from the trees. After dinner and until bedtime, we have books, papers, etc. (...) During the evening we have tea or chocolate brought in ...

6.3 A Very Palatable Exercise

Cuba's distinctive history, culture and location have attracted many travellers over the years. As was fashionable at the time, many of the nineteenth century explorers that visited the island kept diaries or wrote letters to friends and family detailing their experiences in the field. These accounts have in the past been used to explore the development of Cuba's sugar plantations, the system of slavery present on the island before its abolition or even colonial ties and military exploits. However, this essay has used the complete diary of Joseph J. Dimock to show how day-to-day experiences with food, which are often edited out collections because of they are taken for granted, are key to the "othering" process that occurs in the field. I have given an introductory survey that has shown how key food is to travellers' experiences of place and how it allows explorers to become heroic personages, to assert their social position or assess that of others, and, as in Dimock's case, to project their political aspirations. While the abundance described in the nineteenth century has clearly dissipated, food remains crucial to understanding Cuban culture and people today.

The distant view of the Empire City just beginning to steam up, reminds me that
in a few hours I must bid farewell to these delicious shores of Cuba...
-Joseph J. Dimock, March, 1859

Chapter 7

Project Proposal: “The Delicious Shores of Cuba”: Food, Travel

Writing and Exploration in the Nineteenth Century

Foreword

This paper outlines (some of) the conceptual and methodological bases for my proposed doctoral research project entitled: *“The Delicious Shores of Cuba”: Food, Travel Writing, and Exploration in the Nineteenth Century*. It forms a preliminary review of the literature related to my current research interests, recognizing that such a project would evolve in directions still to be uncovered as it develops. This paper was used as the basis of my SSHRC PhD funding proposal of the same title (funded, but subsequently declined).

* * * * *

The distant view of the Empire City just beginning to steam up, reminds me that in a few hours I must bid farewell to these delicious shores of Cuba...

Joseph J. Dimock, on his departure from Cuba in March 1859

7.1 Research Context

The nineteenth century saw an increase in travel for pleasure and a proliferation in travel writing (Youngs 2006). At the time, Cuba’s distinctive history, culture and strategic location at the crossroads between the Old and New Worlds made “*a visit to the island all but obligatory to most travellers to the New World*” (Pérez 1992:xxv). Similarly, Manifest Destiny and the expansionist sentiment prevalent in the United States made Cuba a natural destination for American travellers (Caesar 1995). As was *de rigueur* in the nineteenth century, many visitors documented their journeys on the tropical island so that their experiences could inform future travellers to the island

or provide fuel for the imagination of “armchair travellers” (i.e. those who, though travel literature, were able to visit and know other lands and peoples without ever leaving the comfort of their home).

Joseph J. Dimock was on an economic reconnaissance mission when he first visited Cuba in 1859 (Dimock 1859/Pérez, ed. 1998). During his six-week visit he assiduously kept a detailed diary of his experiences and encounters. Given the centrality of food in his daily activities, approximately a third of his journal entries featured meal-time encounters—both social and culinary—as well as experiences with novel foodstuffs. As an example, at one of the sugar plantations Dimock visited, he was offered the customary cane juice drink so that the owner could demonstrate, and Dimock could taste, the quality of the land. While “very palatable” at that moment, within a few hours Dimock’s New Yorker constitution led him to regret partaking in the seemingly harmless tradition. Yet, once the severe pain along his digestive tract had passed, Dimock had gained an advantage that many travel writers sought—his experience would lend him credibility with his audience at home and he could now position himself as a serious investigator of, and expert on, Cuba’s culture and nature (literally and metaphorically).

Partaking in local cuisine and produce was among the many pleasures afforded to nineteenth century travellers to Cuba, and like Dimock, many of their journal entries describe the abundance of food found on the tropical island, novel culinary experiences, and the surprise of finding known foods presented in new ways. Yet despite their great quantity, records of these gastronomic encounters have been largely under-analyzed because the everyday aspect of food has often led to its being trivialized or overlooked (Watson and Caldwell 2005). As noted by Tansey and Worsley (1995:7), albeit in a contemporary context, “food is so basic to our well-being that it is almost too obvious; it is taken for granted.” Like other details of daily activities judged too mundane to be included, everyday accounts of food have also been edited out of most collections of Cuban travel writing (e.g. Pérez’s 1992 thematically organized *Slaves, Sugar and*

Colonial Society: Travel Accounts of Cuba, 1801-1899 is one of the most comprehensive edited volumes, yet very few of the chosen excerpts relate to gastronomic experiences).

I contend, however, that simple day-to-day experiences with food were crucial to the overall travel experience and invariably deeply affected the traveller's sense of time and place. They also acted as constant and powerful reminders of the cultural and environmental differences between "host" and "traveller", and, "home" and "away". But beyond acting as markers of place and difference, for the travel writer in particular the consumption of "exotic" Cuban food was also key to the embodiment of the exploration process and served to affirm the travellers' status as heroic explorers, ready to take risks and suffer bodily harm to gain (and bring back) knowledge about their destination.

To explore these themes more fully, my research project will re-evaluate nineteenth century Cuban travel documents in order to interrogate previously overlooked relationships between food, exploration and travel writing. In particular, it seeks to investigate the ways in which food contributed to how identities (travellers, host, audience) as well as Cuban nature and culture were actively constructed, negotiated, contested in what Pratt calls the "contact zone." She uses this terminology to describe the space of imperial encounter, "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 1992:8). Accordingly, the major objectives of the study are to:

1. Analyze how food practices contributed to the "othering" process between Cuban hosts and nineteenth century travellers from America, Britain, Spain and France, as well as to explore how travellers' raced, classed and gendered identities intersected with nationality and mediated this process;
2. Establish how the material, sensuous, and visceral qualities of food served to determine or reinforce travellers' epistemology of Cuban nature and culture;

3. Examine the conditions under which food encounters became constructed as “gastronomic exploration” and how such investigations could be used to establish the travel writer’s credibility and position of authority in relation to their hosts and audience;
4. Investigate how these historical narratives of food, culture and nature in Cuba have contributed to the formation of the discourse inherited by modern day travellers to the Caribbean (Cook et al. 2004; Daye, Chambers and Roberts 2008).

My proposed project thus falls at the intersection of historical and cultural geographies and is built on the traditions, conceptual bases and methodologies of these sub-disciplines. At its core, though, it can be seen as a humanistic project, as per Tuan’s (1976:266,274) broad definition:

Humanistic geography achieves an understanding of the human world by studying people’s relations with nature, their geographical behavior as well as their feelings and ideas in regard to space and place. (...) Humanistic geography’s contribution to science lies in disclosing material of which the scientist, confined within his own conceptual frame, may not be aware. The material includes the nature and range of human experience and thought, the quality and intensity of an emotion, the ambivalence and ambiguity of values and attitudes, the nature and power of the symbol, and the character of human events, intentions, and aspirations.

Humanistic Geography’s emphasis on particularity and specificity (as opposed to grand theories of spatial organization) was a direct critique of the positivistic models that were prevalent in the 1960s and these methodological foci remain important in many sub-fields of human geography today. In the contemporary context, however, the ‘cultural turn’ of the 1990s³⁷ has diffused the focus of humanistic geography and “made it immensely difficult to identify a distinctively humanistic geography,” nonetheless, the “(...) many of the concerns of humanistic geography have undoubtedly helped to forge a generalized sensibility within the [human geography] discipline at large” (Gregory 2000:362).

³⁷ The cultural turn has been characterized by growing pre-occupation with the concept of culture that lead to new lines of inquiry in the Social Sciences and Humanities. In Geography, these have included: “the discursive constitution of social life, geographical representation, imaginative geographies, identity and identity politics, and the embedding of all human activities (whether economic, political, medical, demographic or whatever) within culturally differentiated ways of life” (Crang 2000:142).

The distinction between humanistic and historical geography proposed by Tuan in the same essay—namely, that historical geography’s purview would continue to be historical events and changes in physical landscape, whereas humanistic geography would emphasize the ways in which people actively construct their own historical myths—has also become blurred, if not moot. Contemporary historical geography addresses a plurality of topics and makes use of a wide range of theoretical and conceptual approaches. Again, the adoption of critical theories (e.g. feminism, Marxism, postcolonialism, poststructuralism, etc.) and the “cultural turn” of the 1990s are at the source of these methodological shifts in historical geography, and indeed in human geography as a whole. In fact, as Cosgrove (2000:134) stated, “much of human geography today might be characterized as ‘cultural’ in focus and content.” The result of these shifts for historical geography as a sub-field has been a re-direction towards three new lines of inquiry: first, the historicity of geography itself has become an important topic following the recognition that Geography/geographical thought did not (and does not) stand outside the socio-political and cultural contexts within which it was produced (see e.g. Gregory 1993; Livingston 1992). The second theme centres on spatiality and temporality of social life and human identity in historically and geographically differentiated contexts (e.g. Blunt and Rose’s 1994 examination of women’s colonial and postcolonial geographies). The third major theme identified by Clayton (2000) is a continuation of the past interest in landscape studies, which has shifted slightly to an examination of the human relationship with nature (such as Castree’s 1997 work on nature’s sociality).

Although I did not set-out to do so, my own project draws on developments in all three main themes in contemporary/cultural historical geography (i.e. how traveller’s interactions with food and nature modulated their sense of identity and their spatiality, and how their experiences contributed to the development and diffusion of geographical knowledge about Cuba). Given the brief nature of this paper, however, I have limited my discussion to two threads in historical and cultural geography that are conceptually important to my study and which have implications for

my choice of methods: travel and imaginative geographies, and the new cultural geographies of food.

7.2 Travel and Imaginative Geographies

The early nineteenth century brought a renewed interest in natural history. The observational methods of study and the period's emphasis on systematic data collection and cataloguing as a way of understanding the natural environment lent themselves well to adoption by "gentlemen scientists" who, as members of amateur societies and field clubs, made important contributions to the advancement of knowledge about the natural environment and, by association, to the development of geographic knowledge. Wealthier members with the resources and time to travel to distant places were particularly valued in this endeavour and a number of travel clubs existed where these travellers could exchange their findings, thoughts and experiences. Two such societies, the Africa Association and the Raleigh Club (previously the Travellers Club) joined to form the Royal Geographical Society of London in 1830 and consequently, as Livingstone (1992:161) remarked, "it is not at all surprising that the vast majority of communications to the society were firsthand accounts of travel and exploration." Through such societies and other popular outlets, travellers and their accounts of faraway places, natures and peoples directly contributed to the construction of a geographic imagination and to collective imaginative geographies of *other* places.

The processes by which geographic imaginations were constructed and by which they in turn created essentialisms and a distancing between a Eurocentric *self* and an *other* have been the focus of a number of studies in Geography and Cultural/Literary studies (see Said 1978 and 1993, for examples of the historical foundations of contemporary imaginative geographies, and Radcliffe 1996, for a feminist approach to the subject, and Gregory 1995 for an example of the reconstruction of imaginative geographies in a historical context). In the case of the Caribbean, the descriptions of abundant nature (and, I would argue the abundance of food produced through

that nature) and idyllic climate lead the geographic imagination to the Garden of Eden and the projection of the Caribbean as an earthly paradise (Withers 1999).

As Sheller (2003:13) describes, this came at a cost: “the Caribbean has been repeatedly imagined and narrated as a tropical paradise in which the land, plants, resources, bodies, and cultures of its inhabitants are open to be invaded, occupied, bought, moved, used, viewed, and consumed in various ways.” Sheller’s research has examined the material relations of consumption and power, but as Said (1978) argued possession can also occur through text and the creation of a consolidated vision of other places (thereby linking geography, knowledge and power; a recurring theme in both the history of Geography and colonial studies; see e.g. Godlewska and Smith 1994; Livingstone 1992).

Gregory (1995) makes two methodological critiques of Said’s discussion of the power of imaginative geographies in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that are relevant for my own study. First, he has reservations about Said’s favouring of textual sources at the detriment of visual cultures and iconographies to construct his argument about Orientalism. I have taken this criticism into consideration when choosing to include both texts and artistic representations in my analysis of the portrayal of Cuba by foreigners. Second, Gregory questions Said’s reliance on abstraction and high culture as the basis for his argument, when it has been demonstrated that the cultures of colonialism also infuse the practices of everyday life (including food practices, as Collingham 1997 demonstrated with her work on the Raj). In Said’s defence, it should be noted that although he does not develop the idea fully, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993:109) he does discuss the “micro-physics of imperialism” and “...the daily imposition of power dynamics of everyday life.” Through the use of biography and travel writing, my own research project will attempt to join the two scales of analysis: first, the travellers, their outputs and aims need to be situated within the broader colonial structures and cultures of the day, and positioned within the political, sociological, and economic hierarchical divisions created by

gender, race, class, and nationality. However, the broader geographical imaginations that these travellers contributed to will be elucidated based on aspects of their daily lives and taken-for-granted world (de Certeau 1984). Although this scale of analysis has been traditionally studied in domestic spaces or familiar places, I am interested in the disruptions in the taken-for-granted world that comes with travel and how these conflicts are subsequently reflected upon and written about in letters, diaries and travel books. Returning to Dimock's travel diary, for example, one of his greatest pleasures/surprises when visiting Cuba was the difference in sweetness of the Havana orange –a fruit familiar to him in New York, yet so different on the island that it came to symbolize the country (and its economic potential, both of them “just waiting to be plucked” and enjoyed by a “Yankee”; Dimock 1859:87).

7.2 New Geographies of Food

Food practices provide a lens of investigation through which to explore and conceptualise social and *cultural* processes (Counihan and van Esterik 2007; Freidberg 2003). Food and eating have been central themes in Anthropology since its beginning in the nineteenth century and have shaped the development of anthropological theory about human society as well as anthropological and ethnographic research methods (Mintz and du Bois 2002). These early studies of food practices focused on the unusual (or, more accurately, what the euro-centric researcher found unusual): unfamiliar or objectionable foods/food preparation methods, food taboos and religious proscriptions, cannibalism and other food-related rituals, for example. Similarly, in History, traditional studies of food have not focused on everyday aspects of food, but rather with the extraordinary such as Medieval feasts or Victorian banquets (I believe this is a consequence methodological opportunism: menus and other written records of a limited number of special events have survived and could be analyzed whereas records of daily food practices are practically non-existent; see e.g. Fernández-Armesto 2002). Another traditional theme examined

by historians and geographers has been the geographical mobility of certain foods and plants (e.g. tomatoes, potatoes, sugar cane) between the Old and New World with the explorers and migrants of the post-Columbian era (Civitello 2007).

Since the mid-1990s, a new interdisciplinary field of food studies has emerged and changed the focus of food research to what Friedberg (2003:3) describes as “the not-so-neat kind of food stories,” that she defines as the “social life of food” or the “stories about eating something somewhere that are really stories about the place and the people there.” These new cultural geographies of food tie-in closely to other topical themes in human geography (and to my own project), such as the constructions of identity and power relationships (whether they be gendered, racial, or economically-based at a local or internal scale), and material culture and embodied knowledge (e.g. knowledge gained through sensuous and visceral engagement with food and nature). To date, studies in the new cultural geographies of food have been limited to contemporary (and mostly western) agro-food systems and society (Domosh’s 2003 historical approach to food marketing at the turn of the twentieth century is a notable exception). While the methods used to approach the topic may be slightly different (e.g. through textual analysis of historical records rather than qualitative interviews or ethnographic observations), I believe that food and eating can also provide a lens to examine and conceptualise social and *cultural* processes in a historical context.

7.3 Some Notes on Methods

Like all research projects, my own is bound by the assumptions I make and the lens through which I have chosen to approach my topic. Moreover, I will not only be constrained by my broad theoretical framework, but also by the methods chosen and, given the historical nature of my project, the materials available for analysis. My key research questions (presented in 7.1 Research Context) will be addressed through iconographic analyses (sketches, engravings and illustrations) and textual interpretations of travel writing (diaries, letters, travelogues and guides) by American,

British, Spanish and French travellers to Cuba in the nineteenth century. In European history, it is not uncommon to refer to the “long nineteenth century,” a period that encompasses the years between the French Revolution (1789) and the First World War (1914). Because of Cuba’s colonial status at the time, this Eurocentric definition of the nineteenth century could apply by extension; however, I have chosen to define it as the period from the slave revolt in neighbouring Saint-Domingue in 1791 to the establishment of the Cuban Republic in 1902. These dates better reflect the changing social, economic and political balance of power in Cuba during this period.

I have identified a number of travel documents that were published in the nineteenth century through coursework completed for my Master’s degree (a select few of these primary sources, such as Humbolt’s treatises, were re-published at the end of the twentieth century). Given the focus of my previous work, the travel accounts that have been identified to date are predominantly by American travellers to Cuba; thus, these sources will need to be supplemented through a more systematic (and multilingual) search in order to include British, Spanish and French travellers. I hope to supplement formally published materials with unpublished sources of information such as correspondence letters and personal diaries so that these less formal accounts of travel in Cuba may also be included in my analysis. To do so, I will conduct archival research at the José Martí national library and the University of Havana Library, both in Cuba; the Caribbean archives at the British Library in London, UK; the General *Archive* of the Indies in Seville, Spain; and Tulane University’s Special Collections Archive, Louisiana and Duke University’s Special Collection Holdings: Caribbean Islands, North Carolina.³⁸

As is the case with other historical research projects, there is an important distinction between the identification of relevant materials (i.e. through searches and bibliographies of other studies) and its acquisition/consultation for analysis. In particular, the Queen’s University libraries have very few resources relevant to my particular project and therefore, I will need to

³⁸ An initial list of primary sources of travel accounts, and secondary sources related to travel and imaginative geographies, and new geographies of food is included in Appendix B.

seek access to the documents I identify through other means (potentially through inter-library loan, although some nineteenth century books are classified as ‘rare books’ and must consulted in person, as are most archives). This can certainly be hurdle—it can require a lot of time and be a financial drain. I raise the issue here also because the availability of historical documents can have important ramifications for the outcomes of research projects. Generally speaking, materials that are not as accessible may not be consulted or used. On the surface, this is benign; however, we might ask why certain documents become less accessible than others? There is, for example, a known urban bias (i.e. collections in smaller towns or libraries are generally less accessible, thereby allowing authors in metropolitan collections to receive more attention). There is also a value hierarchy within collections (e.g. a gentlemen’s travel report on the economic conditions in Cuba in 1856 may receive more resources—better cataloguing, preservation, digitization, etc.—than a travel diary detailing everyday practices of a household by a lady visiting Cuba in the same year). Archives, it must also be remembered, have been constructed to serve a purpose (often as part of the colonial enterprise) and may serve to present only a narrow view of particular histories (Withers 2002). Thus, there is an imperative to not only critically examine what is found but also to critically examine the voids and listen for the voices missing from the historical record (Duncan 1999).

7.4 Conclusions and New Beginnings

My re-examination of the role of food in nineteenth century travel writing about Cuba is an attempt to include some of the voices and experiences that have been previously excluded or erased from the historical record of geographical knowledge production. Although most travellers to Cuba were not part of formal colonial institutions, their presence and actions on the island, and their contributions to a collective imaginative geography of the Caribbean, made them part and parcel of the imperial enterprise. An examination of their lives (even if only for a brief period)

can highlight some of the ways in which identities (travellers, host, audience), and Cuban nature and culture were actively constructed and negotiated in the contact zone and in the imaginations of armchair travellers. In the tradition of humanistic, cultural and historical geographers, my aims are not to generate universalisms, but rather to examine the complex of meanings and processes of place in human experience.

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Appendix A

Research Materials Approved by the General Research Ethics Board

As per Queen's policy for research involving human subjects, I sought ethics approval from Queen's General Research Ethics Board (GREB) prior to leaving for Havana, Cuba. The following research materials were approved in August 2008. Given the difficulties encountered when I arrived in Cuba, a substantially revised interview guide was submitted and approved by GREB in October 2008. The following documents are included:

- A.1. Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form
- A.2. Confidentiality Agreement—Interpreter
- A.3. Confidentiality Agreement—Transcriber
- A.4. Proposed Interview Guide (August 2008)
- A.5. Revised Interview Guide (October 2008)
- A.6 GREB Application Form

Appendix A.1 Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form

Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form: Cuba and the World Food Crisis

Researcher: Mélanie Josée Davidson, M.A. Candidate (6mjd1@queensu.ca)

Affiliation and Sponsoring Institution: Geography Department, Queen's University, Kingston, Canada. This research is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Purpose of the research: This study is part of a larger research project that I am completing as part of my Master's degree and which is designed to explore food provision in Cuba from the colonial period to the present. The purpose of this part of the project is to solicit expert opinions and perspectives on the impacts in Cuba of the current world food crisis as well as shed light on the historical policies and responses adopted by Cuba when faced with food shortages in the past.

What you are asked to do: You are invited to participate in a one-time recorded interview lasting between 1 and 2 hours. There are no known risks relating to your participation in the research. The data you contribute to this study may be published in my Master's thesis and/or in academic papers for publication. It may also be presented at scholarly conferences.

Your rights: Your participation in this research is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time. You are not obliged to answer any questions which you find objectionable. Should you decide to withdraw from this study, any data you have contributed will be deleted.

Your confidentiality: With your consent (below), the interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. The digital file will be erased once it has been transcribed. With your consent (below), the interview may be transcribed by a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement. Both the voice recording and the transcribed file will be identified by a code, which will not be associated with your name or any other identifying information. The transcribed file will be safely stored in a password protected digital file for a maximum of six years following the defense of the master's dissertation and only the principal researcher, her thesis supervisors, a translator and a transcriber who have signed a confidentiality agreement will have access to this information. If you indicate to me that you would like your identity to remain confidential no

identifying information (name, affiliation, position, etc.) will appear in either the raw data or the presentation of the results. Confidentiality will be assured to the fullest extent provided by law.

At the end of the interview, you will be asked to recommend other experts in the field whom you think I should interview for this project. Should you choose to recommend anyone, please be aware that these experts may ask or deduce who recommended them and this may affect your confidentiality. If this is a concern, please do not suggest anyone.

If you are a public official, please note that the public nature of your position means that it may not be possible for me to present the results of this interview anonymously; however, you will not be identified by name in any written report without your consent (below).

Contact Information: Should you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research or research procedures, you are invited to contact the researcher: Mélanie Josée Davidson at 6mjd1@queensu.ca, or her thesis advisor: Dr. David McDonald at dm23@queensu.ca. They may all be reached through the Queen's University central telephone number: 1-613-533-6000 (you will be prompted to indicate the name of the person with whom you wish to speak). You may also contact the Chair of the GREB at Queen's University, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or by telephone at 1-613-533-6081.

In the event that you have any difficulty accessing international communications, you can contact Professor Lourdes Perez from the University of Havana (tel. 831 7869) and instruct her to contact Mélanie Josée Davidson, Dr. David McDonald, or Dr. Joan Stevenson with any questions or concerns about the research or your participation in it.

Consent: I have read this Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form and any questions I have about this study or the research procedures have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing below, I am indicating that I understand what is expected of me and I wish to participate in this study. I am also indicating that I understand how to contact the researcher, her advisor or the Chair of the GREB at Queen's University should I have further questions, concerns or complaints about this project. I will keep a copy of this form for my records.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Permissions (as applicable): By initialling this statement below:

I am granting the researcher permission to digitally record my interview _____.

I am granting the researcher permission to employ a transcriber to transcribe the interview _____.

I am granting the researcher permission to reveal in the publication of the results: my name _____ ; my affiliation _____ ; my position _____.

I am indicating that I want my identity to remain confidential _____.

I am indicating that I wish to review the transcript of my interview (recommended if you have indicated that you wish for your identity to remain confidential) _____.

Verbal consent: I, Participant (code), consent to participate in *Cuba and the World Food Crisis* conducted by Mélanie Josée Davidson, M.A. Candidate, Queen’s University. I have read the Letter of Information and Informed Consent Form and understand the nature of this project. I wish to remain anonymous and do not want my name to appear in any of the data collected for this research, including the Consent Form. My voice recording of this statement indicates that I understand what is expected of me and I wish to participate in this study. I am also indicating that I understand how to contact the researcher, her advisor or the Chair of the GREB at Queen’s University should I have further questions, concerns or complaints about this project. I will keep a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for my records.

Permissions (if applicable):

By reading this statement, I am granting the researcher permission to employ a transcriber to transcribe the interview.

By reading this statement, I am indicating that I wish to review the transcript of my interview.

Letra de Información y Panilla de Consentimiento

Título del proyecto: Cuba y la crisis mundial de los alimentos

Investigadora: Mélanie Josée Davidson, candidata de M.A. (6mjd1@queensu.ca)

Filiación: Departamento de Geografía, Universidad Queen's, Kingston, Canadá. Este proyecto es financiado por el Consejo de investigación de las ciencias sociales y de la humanidad de Canadá (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada).

Propósito de la investigación: Este estudio es parte de un proyecto de investigación más grande y los aspectos a investigar en Cuba forman parte de mi Masters. Se ha diseñado para explorar la disposición del alimento en Cuba a partir del período colonial al presente. El propósito de esta parte del proyecto es solicitar las opiniones y perspectivas de los expertos en el tema sobre los impactos en Cuba de la actual crisis mundial de los alimentos, y también conocer las políticas y las respuestas históricas adoptadas por Cuba para enfrentar las escaseces de los alimentos en el pasado y en el presente.

Particularidades: Invito usted a participar en una sola entrevista registrada con una duración de 1 a 2 horas. No hay riesgos sabidos referente a su participación en la investigación. Los datos ofrecidos podrían ser publicados en mi tesis de Master's y/o en los papeles académicos para la publicación. Puede también ser presentado en las conferencias académicas.

Sus derechos: Su participación en esta investigación es voluntaria y usted puede retirarse de la misma en cualquier momento. No le obligan a contestar a ninguna pregunta que usted encuentre desagradable. Si usted decide retirarse de este estudio, cualquier dato que usted haya ofrecido será suprimido.

Confidencialidad: Con su consentimiento (abajo), la entrevista será registrada en un registrador de voz digital. El archivo digital será borrado una vez que se haya transcrito. Con su consentimiento (abajo), la entrevista se puede transcribir por un transcriptor que ha firmado un acuerdo de secreto. La grabación de la voz y el archivo transcrito serán identificados por un código, que no será asociado a su nombre o a ninguna otra información que lo identifica. El archivo transcrito será almacenado con seguridad en un archivo digital protegido con contraseña para un máximo de seis años que siguen a la defensa de la disertación del M.A. y solamente el investigador principal, sus supervisores de la tesis, un traductor y un transcriptor que han firmado un acuerdo de secreto tendrán acceso a esta información. Si usted me indica que usted quisiera que su identidad siguiera siendo confidencial ninguna información que lo identifica (nombre,

afiliación, posición, etc.) aparecerá en las informaciones en bruto o la presentación de los resultados. El secreto será asegurado al grado más completo proporcionado por la ley.

En el final de la entrevista, le pedirán recomendar a otros expertos en la materia que usted piensa que debo entrevistarme con ellos para este proyecto. Si usted elige recomendar a cualquier persona, esté por favor enterado que estos expertos pueden pedir o deducir quiénes los recomendaron y éste puede afectar su confidencialidad. Si esto es una preocupación, por favor no sugiera a nadie.

Si usted es un oficial publico, observe por favor que la naturaleza pública de su posición significa que es posible que no pueda presentarse los resultados de esta entrevista de manera anónima. Pero, su nombre no se identificará en ningún informe escrito sin su consentimiento (abajo).

Información del contacto: Si usted tiene algunas preguntas, preocupaciones o queja sobre la investigación o los procedimientos de la investigación, le invitamos a que entre en contacto con la investigadora: Mélanie Josée Davidson en 6mjd1@queensu.ca, o su consejero de la tesis: el Dr. David McDonald en dm23@queensu.ca. Pueden todos ser alcanzados con el número de teléfono central de la universidad Queen's: 1-613-533-6000 (le incitarán indicar el nombre de la persona con quien usted desea hablar). Usted puede también entrar en contacto con la jefe general del ética de investigación en la universidad Queen's, la Dra. Joan Stevenson, en chair.GREB@queensu.ca o por el teléfono en 1-613-533-6081.

En caso de que tenga alguna dificultad con el acceso a la comunicación internacional, puede contactar a la profesora Lourdes Pérez de la Universidad de La Habana en el 831 7869 y a través de ella contactar con Mélanie Josée Davidson, al Dr David McDonald o a la Dra. Steve Leighton, si existiera algunas preguntas, preocupaciones o quejas sobre su participación en la investigación.

Consentimiento: Yo he leído esta Letra de Información y Panilla de Consentimiento y cualquier pregunta que tenga sobre este proyecto o los procedimientos de la investigación se han contestado a mi satisfacción. Firmando abajo, estoy indicando que entiendo lo que espera de mí y deseo participar en este estudio. También estoy indicando que conozco cómo entrar en contacto con la investigadora, su consejero o la jefe general del ética de investigación en la universidad Queen's si, en el futuro, tengo preguntas, preocupaciones o quejas sobre este proyecto. Guardaré una copia de este formulario para mis archivos.

Nombre: _____ Fecha: _____

Firma: _____

Permisos (si fuera aplicable): Si aprueba las afirmaciones siguientes, marque con sus iniciales:

Garantizo a la investigadora permiso para grabar digitalmente la entrevista. _____

Garantizo a la investigadora permiso de emplear un transcriptor para transcribir la entrevista. _____

Garantizo a la investigadora permiso para revelar mi nombre _____, filiación _____ y/o posición _____ en la publicación de los resultados.

O

Estoy indicando que deseo que mi identidad sea confidencial. _____

Estoy indicando que deseo repasar la transcripción de mi entrevista (recomendada si usted ha indicado que desea su identidad sea confidencial). _____

Consentimiento verbal: Yo, participante (código), consentimiento a participar en el proyecto:

Cuba y la crisis mundial de los alimentos conducida para Mélanie Josée Davidson, candidato de

M.A., Universidad Queen's en Canadá. He leído la letra de información y la panilla de

consentimiento y entiendo el objetivo de este proyecto. Deseo seguir siendo anónimo y no

quisiera que mi nombre apareciera en los datos recogidos para esta investigación, incluyendo en

la forma del consentimiento. La grabación de mi voz en esta declaración indica que entiendo lo

qué espera de mí y deseo participar en este proyecto. También estoy indicando que entiendo

cómo entrar en contacto con la investigadora, su consejero o el jefe general del ética de

investigación en la universidad Queen's si, más futuras, tengo preguntas, preocupaciones o quejas

sobre este proyecto. Guardaré una copia de la Letra de Información y Panilla de Consentimiento

para mis archivos.

Permisos (si fuera aplicable):

Si leyendo esta declaración, estoy concediendo el permiso de la investigadora de emplear un transcriptor para transcribir la entrevista.

Si leyendo esta declaración, estoy indicando que deseo repasar la transcripción de mi entrevista.

Appendix A.2 Confidentiality Agreement—Interpreter

Cuba and the World Food Crisis: Interpreter Confidentiality Agreement

Mélanie Josée Davidson, M.A. Candidate,
Geography Department, Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6

I have read and retained the Letter of Information concerning the research project *Cuba and the World Food Crisis* being conducted by Mélanie Josée Davidson, M.A. Candidate, Queen's University. In my role as interpreter for the researcher, I understand the nature of the study and requirements for confidentiality. I have had all of my questions concerning the nature of the study and my role as interpreter answered to my satisfaction.

A. Maintaining Confidentiality

I agree not to reveal in any way to any person other than the researcher any of data gathered for the study. I also agree not to reveal to anyone the identity of any of the participants.

B. Acknowledgement of My Services as Interpreter

I understand that the researcher will acknowledge the use of my services when reporting on the research. I have indicated below whether I wish that acknowledgement to be anonymous or whether it may recognize me by name.

I do not wish my name to be associated with the acknowledgement of the use of an interpreter in data gathering for this research.

OR

I agree that the researcher use my name in the acknowledgement of the use of an interpreter in data gathering for the research.

C. Identification and Signature Indicating Agreement

Name: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Signature: _____

Contact Information: Should you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research or research procedures, you are invited to contact the researcher: Mélanie Josée Davidson at 6mjd1@queensu.ca, or her thesis advisor: Dr. David McDonald at dm23@queensu.ca. They may all be reached through the Queen's University central telephone number: 1-613-533-6000 (you will be prompted to indicate the name of the person with whom you wish to speak). You may also contact the Chair of the GREB at Queen's University, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or by telephone at 1-613-533-6081.

In the event that you have any difficulty accessing international communications, you can contact Professor Lourdes Perez from the University of Havana (tel. 831 7869) and instruct her to contact Mélanie Josée Davidson, Dr. David McDonald, or Dr. Joan Stevenson with any questions or concerns about the research or your participation in it.

Appendix A.3 Confidentiality Agreement—Transcriber

Cuba and the World Food Crisis: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

Mélanie Josée Davidson, M.A. Candidate
Geography Department, Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6

I have read and retained the Letter of Information concerning the research project *Cuba and the World Food Crisis* being conducted by Mélanie Josée Davidson, M.A. Candidate, Queen's University. In my role as transcriber for the researcher, I understand the nature of the study and requirements for confidentiality. I have had all of my questions concerning the nature of the study and my role as transcriber answered to my satisfaction.

A. Maintaining Confidentiality

I agree not to reveal in any way to any person other than the researcher any of data gathered for the study. I also agree not to reveal to anyone the identity of any of the participants of this study.

B. Identification and Signature Indicating Agreement

Name: _____

Email: _____

Telephone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Signature: _____

Contact Information: Should you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research or research procedures, you are invited to contact the researcher: Mélanie Josée Davidson at 6mjd1@queensu.ca, or her thesis advisor: Dr. David McDonald at dm23@queensu.ca. They may all be reached through the Queen's University central telephone number: 1-613-533-6000 (you will be prompted to indicate the name of the person with whom you wish to speak). You may also contact the Chair of the GREB at Queen's University, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at chair.GREB@queensu.ca or by telephone at 1-613-533-6081.

In the event that you have any difficulty accessing international communications, you can contact Professor Lourdes Perez from the University of Havana (tel. 831 7869) and instruct her to contact Mélanie Josée Davidson, Dr. David McDonald, or Dr. Joan Stevenson with any questions or concerns about the research or your participation in it.

Appendix A.4 Proposed Interview Guide (August 2008)

Cuba and the World Food Crisis: Semi-structured interview guide and sample questions

Interview Guide	Sample Questions
1. Introduction, letter of information and consent form	
2. General background information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you please describe your current role and how it links to food policy or provision in Cuba? • How long have you been doing this job? • How did you become interested in the topic?
3. Cuba and the World Food Crisis (WFC)	<p>In early 2008, leaders of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) publicly recognised that the global food system was in crisis. In particular, the soaring price of food staples such as wheat, corn, soy and rice (which doubled in price) since 2006 has led to concern over food insecurity and spreading hunger amongst poorer populations worldwide. The situation is so acute that in several countries, including Mexico and Haiti in the Caribbean basin, there has been social unrest and riots linked to food prices. The FAO discusses the impacts of the world food crisis on two levels: at the country level and the household level. For food importing countries, the world food crisis means that they are required to spend a lot more of their budget on food and may not be able to access the same food products as before due to shortages or export bans. Similarly, at the household-level, families must spend more on food and may face food availability issues. The extent to which these situations occur depend on the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you say the current world food crisis is affecting Cuba? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If so, how and who is it affecting the most? ○ If not, why?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the Cuban government have an official response to the WFC? • Has the Cuban government developed any specific policies or programs to address the WFC, either in Cuba or internationally? • Have any other organizations in Cuba developed policies or programs to address the WFC, in Cuba or internationally? • In your opinion, what has been the response of the average Cuban citizen to this world food crisis? • How would you compare the way that Cuba has responded to

	the world food situation to that of other countries in Latin America?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your predictions for the global food situation over the next few years? • How about the next 10-20 years? • How do you see these developments affecting Cuba in the short and long term? • What kinds of official responses do you expect from the Cuban government to this situation in the short and long term? • How would you compare the way that Cuba might respond to this world food situation as compared to other countries in Latin America?
4. Cuban food shortages in the Special Period (SP)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the current World Food Crisis compare to the food shortages and the food provision difficulties that Cuba faced in the Special Period? <p>PROMPT FOR: Similarities and differences for example in terms of prices, availability of foodstuff, perceptions of the crises, the way Cubans are reacting or adapting to the situation and/or the way solutions are being sought by governments and NGOs.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the Special Period, Cuba adopted a number of measures to tackle the food shortages. For example, in the literature that I've read, the introduction of urban agriculture is often cited, as are changes to the ration system. What were some of the other measures or changes introduced to deal with the food shortages? In your opinion, which ones were the most successful? • What were the aims of these programs or policies and how did these alleviate the situation? • In your opinion, who benefited the most from these programs or policies? • Of all the measures you are familiar with, which were the hardest to implement? • Were there any programs or policies that did not work as planned or hoped? (Why?)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the responses of the average Cuban citizen to the food shortages during the Special Period? • Were there any strategies implemented by individuals, families, or grass roots community organizations that were not part of the official governmental programs? (If so, could you please describe them to me and what their aims were? What were the outcomes?)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think are the possibilities for ‘exporting’ the policies adopted by Cuba during the Special Period to other countries currently facing food shortages due to the World Food Crisis? • Are there any specific food policies from that period that you think could work elsewhere? (which ones and why?) • Are there any that you think probably wouldn’t work elsewhere, or in your opinion shouldn’t be attempted? (why?) • Do you think there are policy options available to other countries that may not have been available to Cuba at the time? (if so, which policies and in which countries?)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think that any of the measures implemented during the Special Period should be considered now to deal with existing or potential impacts of the World Food Crisis within Cuba? • What policies in particular do you think could work? • Which policies would not work? • In your opinion, what are the other options that should be considered?
If applicable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have spoken about Cuba becoming more self-sufficient. I arrived in Cuba immediately after hurricane Ike and have seen the impacts of hurricanes on food availability. Would being self-sufficient render Cuba more vulnerable to such storms? • What would you say are the most vulnerable food sectors? (production? what type? distribution? processing?) • With Cuba being in the hurricane zone, what are the provisions taken to minimize the impacts on food availability and prices when such storms occur? • How long does it normally take to recuperate from a hurricane? (for example, one such as Ike?)
5. Referrals	
	Are there any materials on the topic of food supply in Cuba that you think I must read for my thesis –for example, any academic publications, policy documents or other published materials?
	Is there anyone that you think I should talk to on this topic for my thesis – any other experts in the field that you think would be willing to talk to me?
	Is there anything else you would like to add?
6. Thank you and closing administrative details (contact info, transcript, etc.)	<p>Leave open the possibility of contacting for clarification.</p> <p>My number in Cuba: 832-4952 (until 27 of November) or email 6mjd1@queensu.ca</p>

Appendix A.5 Revised Interview Guide (October 2008)

Strategies for overcoming difficult food situations: Semi-structured interview guide and sample questions

Interview Guide	Sample Questions
1. Introduction, letter of information and consent form	
2. General background information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you please describe your current role? • How long have you been doing this job? • How did you become interested in the topic?
3. Post-Hurricane Gustav e Ike	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you had to describe the current post-hurricane food situation, what would you say? <p><i>Probe for:</i> What about access to fruits and vegetables? And their price? What about access to beans and rice? And their price? What about access to protein? And their price? What about access to food items in the dollar shopping? Have they been affected? And their price? This is clearly a difficult situation. How do you think ordinary Cubans are dealing with the problem of food? How are people getting enough to eat?</p> <p><i>Probe for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What is covered by the ration system? ○ Strategies for getting the foods needed (where are Cubans getting the food they need? who is getting it?) ○ Strategies for preparing food or changes in what they eat (have people changed the way they cook foods or what they eat?) ○ Has anyone started growing their own food? ○ (possibly) if buying at increased prices mentioned...ways to increase income? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion, has this situation been more difficult for women or men, or has it been equally difficult for both? Why? • From what you have heard in the news or read in the papers, how is the Cuban government addressing the situation? • Are local organizations helping in any way (for example, Committees for the Defense of the Revolution—CDRs or the FMC or other organizations)? Who and how? • Do you anticipate that the food situation will be difficult for a long time? (why or why not)

4. Cuban food shortages in the Special Period (SP)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the current situation compare to the food shortages and the food provision difficulties that Cuba faced in the Special Period? <p>PROMPT FOR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Similarities and differences for example in terms of prices, ○ availability of foodstuff, ○ perceptions of the crises, ○ the way Cubans are reacting or adapting to the situation ○ and/or the way solutions are being sought by governmental and non-governmental organizations.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the responses of the average Cuban citizen to the food shortages during the Special Period? • What were the strategies adopted by individuals, families, or grass roots community organizations that were not part of the official governmental programs? Could you please describe them to me and what their aims were? What were the outcomes? • What types of programs and policies did the government adopt to address the situation? In your opinion, which were the most important? (why?) • In what year would you say the worse years in terms of the food situation were over? Why do you think it was better then?
5. Cuba and the World Food Crisis (WFC)	
	<p>Can we talk a bit about the last few years, just before the recent hurricanes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you describe the food situation say over the last two years before the hurricanes? • Would you say there were any food related challenges before the hurricane? If so, which ones? • How were these dealt with by most Cubans? • It is my understanding that before the hurricanes, access to food on the black market was easier than it is now. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do you know what types of food were available for purchase this way? ○ Do you know how the prices compared to buying in the shops? ○ In your opinion, how important is the black market to meeting the food needs of the Cuban population? • Earlier this year, there were rumors that the <i>libreta</i> system

	<p>would disappear. Could you tell me a bit about that?</p> <p>If you don't mind, I'd also like to talk to you a bit about the world food crisis. But first, let me explain what I mean by world food crisis.</p> <p>In early 2008, leaders of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) publicly recognised that the global food system was in crisis. In particular, the soaring price of food staples such as wheat, corn, soy and rice (which doubled in price) since 2006 has led to concern over food insecurity and spreading hunger amongst poorer populations worldwide. The situation is so acute that in several countries, including Mexico and Haiti in the Caribbean basin, there has been social unrest and riots linked to food prices. The FAO discusses the impacts of the world food crisis on two levels: at the country level and the household level. For food importing countries, the world food crisis means that they are required to spend a lot more of their budget on food and may not be able to access the same food products as before due to shortages or export bans. Similarly, at the household-level, families must spend more on food and may face food availability issues. The extent to which these situations occur depend on the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you say the world food crisis was affecting Cuba before the hurricanes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If so, how and who is it affecting the most? ○ If not, why? • Is it affecting Cuba now?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you know if the Cuban government had an official response to the WFC? • Has the Cuban government or any other organizations developed any specific policies or programs to address the WFC in Cuba? • In your opinion, what has been the response of the average Cuban citizen to this world food crisis? • How would you compare the way that Cuba has responded to the world food situation to that of other countries in Latin America?
6. Referrals	
	<p>Are there any materials on the topic of food supply in Cuba that you think I must read for my thesis –for example, any academic publications, policy documents or other published materials?</p>
	<p>Is there anyone that you think I should talk to on this topic for my thesis – any other experts in the field that you think would be willing to talk to me?</p>
	<p>Is there anything else you would like to add?</p>
7. Thank you and closing administrative details (contact info, transcript, etc.)	<p>Leave open the possibility of contacting for clarification.</p> <p>My number in Cuba: 832-4952 (until 27 of November) or email 6mjd1@queensu.ca</p>

Appendix A.6 GREB Application Form

GREB APPLICATION FORM for ETHICS APPROVAL

Be sure to consult the “[Instructions to Applicants](#)” when completing this form. Submit 1 original + 2 copies including all supporting documentation to your unit REB. If your department does not have a unit REB, then submit directly the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) through the Office of Research Services, 301 Fleming-Jemmett. See <http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/UnitREB.htm> for a list of the Unit REBs.

The personal information collected on this form is collected under the authority of the Queen’s Royal Charter of 1841, as amended. The information collected will form part of the records held at the Office of Research Services. It will be used to assist in the administration of your research program. A copy of this form may be provided to other offices at Queen’s. It may also be reviewed by external parties in order to meet legislative, audit and/or regulatory requirements. If you have any questions or concerns about the information collected please contact the Office of Research Services, 301 Fleming Hall-Jemmett Wing at 613-533-6081.

Note: This document is in **Protect** mode so that you can tab from field to field. **Protect** mode can be turned on and off from the Tools Menu.

1.0 APPLICANT	
Family Name <i>Davidson</i>	Given Name and Initials <i>Mélanie Josée</i>
Department/Faculty/School <i>Geography/Faculty of Arts and Sciences</i>	
Mailing Address <i>418 College Street, Apt. 3 Kingston, ON K7L 4M7</i>	Email Address 6mjd1@queensu.ca Telephone 613-533-6000 x.75732
Title/Position: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Member <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student Master’s <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ph.D. <input type="checkbox"/> If you are a student, include your supervisor’s name and email address here and obtain signature (see last page) Supervisor: <i>Dr. David McDonald</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Unfunded Project <input type="checkbox"/> Funding Pending <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Funding Received Sponsor/Agency: SSHRC: Canada Graduate Scholarship (Master’s) Start Date: May 1, 2008

Email: dm23@queensu.ca		Anticipated Completion: August 31, 2009	
1.1 Co-applicant(s)			
Name:	Position	Dept.	Email
2.0 TITLE OF PROJECT			
<i>Cuba and the World Food Crisis</i>			
3.0 PROJECT DETAILS			
3.1 Abstract: (300 words)			
<p><i>The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations declared earlier this spring that the rising cost of food staples over the past few years has led to a worldwide food crisis that is disproportionately affecting lower income countries. As a net importer of food, Cuba is one of the many countries affected by this food crisis. Cuba is also in a unique situation, having recently faced extensive food shortages during the economic crisis that affected the island after the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1989 (a period known as the Cuban “Special Period”). During the Special Period, Cuba adopted a series of innovative food policies and interventions to mitigate the impacts of the shortages on the Cuban population (some with more success than others).</i></p> <p><i>This study is part of a larger research project designed to explore food provision in Cuba from the colonial period to the present. In particular, the purpose of this research component is twofold: first, to explore expert opinions and perspectives on the rationale, effectiveness and transferability of the Cuban response to the food shortages of the 1990s to the current world food crisis (both in Cuba and elsewhere); and second, to explore expert opinions and perspectives on the potential impacts of the current world food crisis on a country that is just recovering from an internal food crisis.</i></p>			
3.2 Method			
<p>Provide up to a 2 page description of the research rationale and methods. Attach a copy of your questionnaire(s), sample questions, test instrument(s), thematic overview or interview guide, as appendices.</p> <p><i>This study will use semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 to 12 experts and/or professionals working on food policy and food provision in Cuba. To address the aims outlined in the Abstract, questions will focus on two time periods: a) the economic crisis that Cuba faced in the 1990s and</i></p>			

early 2000s (known as the Special Period) and b) the period of the world food crisis (approx. 2006 onwards). The first set of questions will be designed to explore what participants regard as the most important issues, difficulties, and successes related to food provision in Cuba during the Special Period. The second set of questions will be designed to solicit expert opinions on the potential impacts of the world food crisis on Cuba as well as similarities and differences between the world food crisis and the food crisis that occurred during the Cuban Special Period.

Interviews will be tape recorded, transcribed, and thematically coded for analysis. The proposed interview guide and sample questions are attached.

3.3 Will the data be collected off-campus? No Yes If yes, please consult the *Off-Campus Activity Safety Policy* at <http://www.safety.queensu.ca/policy/activity/>

3.4 Are other approvals or permissions required? e.g. Field Safety Approval, School Board Approval; Community or Institutional Approval No Yes

Specify: *All researchers in Cuba are required to obtain an Academic Visa from the Cuban government prior to beginning their research. I have initiated the process to obtain one. A copy will be forwarded to GREB as soon as it is received.*

Attached Follow

3.5 If you will be using archival data, please describe data source:
N/A

4.0 RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

4.1 Describe the participants (eg. occupation, relevant membership, or student status) that will be involved in the research. Describe any special characteristics (such as age, race, gender, mental or physical disabilities)

Interviews will be conducted with policy- and decision-makers, academics and other experts on food policy and provision in Cuba. These will likely include mid-ranking government officials in advisory positions from ministries involved in different aspects of food policy and provision (e.g. at the Ministry of Economy and Planning, Ministry of Domestic Commerce, Ministry of Food, Ministry of Finance and Prices, Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Foreign Trade). Similarly, the academics working in the field are from different backgrounds and approach the subject from different angles. These include History, Geography, Sociology, Philosophy, Economics, and Environmental Studies. The initial contacts that have been made are professors affiliated with the Universidad de La Habana who focus mainly on the history of agricultural reforms and on urban agriculture as a response to the food crisis of the Special Period (see Section 4.6). They are part of the Faculty of Philosophy and History. Other non-governmental (or quasi-governmental) organizations that may be contacted include the Cuban Association of Small Farmers

(ANAP), la Asociacion Culinaria de la Republica de Cuba and the Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez de la Naturaleza y el Hombre, among others.

4.2 Will vulnerable populations such as children; physically, cognitively or mentally challenged individuals, economically marginalized or incarcerated people be recruited? No Yes
If yes, please describe the population and any special measures that will be needed to address their vulnerable status.

4.3 Will aboriginal peoples be recruited or aboriginal communities studied? No Yes
If yes:

- Has band approval been obtained? No Yes
- Will the findings be reviewed by an aboriginal community before dissemination?
 No Yes Not applicable

4.4 How many participants will be involved? Approx. 10-12

4.5 Source of Participants - Check all that apply

- Queen's undergrad or graduate classes
- Queen's departmental subject pools
- Other Queen's sources - Specify:
- School Boards
- Correctional Services
- Agencies
- Mailing Lists
- Businesses, Industries, Professions
- Health Care settings, Long Term Care Facilities
- Other - Specify:

4.6 Describe how and by whom potential participants will be recruited.

Three interviews have been set-up with professors at the University of Havana through contacts I met while in Cuba with the Queen's University DEVS 305 course (Cuban Society and Culture). Additional participants will be recruited through a "snowball sampling" design whereby initial participants are asked to refer the researcher to other individuals with expertise on the subject who may be interested in participating in the research. (See also Section 4.1)

Please attach any recruitment notices, advertisements, or information sheets.

4.7 If remuneration or compensation will be offered, please provide the details.

No remuneration will be offered.

4.8 Will people be informed of their right to withdraw from the study? Please describe procedures should

someone wish to withdraw.

Participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw both orally and in writing (i.e. on the consent form). Should a participant indicate during the interview that they wish to withdraw, I will immediately cease the interview and any data that I have collected from this participant will be destroyed. Similarly, should a participant wish to withdraw after the interview, any information collected during the interview will be destroyed.

4.9 If your study requires a formal debriefing, please provide details about the procedures you will use.

N/A

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF RISKS	NO	YES
Will this study involve any of the following:		
5.1 Questions about sensitive or personal issues?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2 Psychological or emotional risk?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.3 Physical, economic or social risk?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.4 Dangerous location such as war-torn countries (see section 3.3)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.5 Risks to participants due to power imbalance?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.6 Language and cultural sensitivities?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.7 Other risk, please describe:		
N/A		
5.8 DECEPTION		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No		
If deception is involved, will it be minor, major or by omission?		
<input type="checkbox"/> minor <input type="checkbox"/> major <input type="checkbox"/> by omission		
Describe deception:		
6.0 BENEFITS		
Please describe the benefits of the research to the participants, the research community and to society, at large.		
<i>The participants will receive no direct benefits from their participation. However, with the rising concern over a world-wide food crisis, the results from this research have the potential to help policy- and decision-makers in Cuba and elsewhere better understand the complexities of food systems and shortages. Detailing Cuba's experience with food shortages, including interventions developed to mitigate the effects of these shortages on the population, may be of interest to others facing a similar situation. This research also has</i>		

<i>the potential to make an important contribution to the larger body of academic work in various disciplines interested in food studies (e.g. geography, sociology, economics, politics, history and health sciences, among others).</i>		
7.0 PRIVACY: Confidentiality and Anonymity	NO	YES
7.1 Will the participants identify themselves in a way that will allow you or anyone else to match their identity to the information you gain from them? If yes, explain. <i>As the research methods involve interviews which I will conduct and transcribe, I will be privy to the identity of the person providing the information. The interviews will also likely be conducted with a translator present, who will therefore also have this knowledge (they will be asked to sign a confidentiality form prior to beginning the interviews). If permission is granted by the interviewee, a transcriber may also be employed to transcribe the interviews and would also be privy to the identity of the person providing the information.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7.2 Will the confidentiality of the participant's identity be protected? If no, explain. <i>When presenting data from expert interviews, it is common to use the names, professional affiliations and/or position of the expert. Participants will be requested to indicate their permission for me to do so when presenting my results, or their wish to remain anonymous, on the consent form. Should the participants indicate their wish to remain anonymous, their confidentiality will be assured and I will refer to them only as professionals working in the area of food policy or provision.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7.3 Will information about the participants be obtained from sources other than the participants themselves?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.4 Will the information on individual participants be disclosed to others?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.5 Could publication of the research allow participants to be identified? <i>See point 7.2 above.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7.6 If it becomes possible that the participant's identity can be deduced by anyone other than the researcher, will the participant be told?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Will he or she be able to withdraw?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<p>7.7 Will anyone other than the applicants listed here have access to the data? <i>My advisor will have access to the data. A translator and transcriber may be employed to conduct and transcribe the interviews. They would therefore would also have access to the data for the duration of their work.</i></p> <p>If using a translator will he or she sign a confidentiality agreement? <i>If a transcriber is used (with permission), they will also sign a confidentiality agreement.</i></p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>7.8 Please provide specific details about the security procedures for the data as well as plans for the ultimate disposal of records/data. <i>The interviews will be recorded (if permission is granted); however, the recordings will be deleted once the interviews have been transcribed. The transcriptions will be given an identification number known only to myself and my supervisor and stripped of any identifying information before being saved in a password protected file for a maximum of 7 years.</i></p>		
<p>8.0 INFORMED CONSENT - indicate all applicable</p>	NO	YES
<p>8.1 Letter of Information Participants will be given a Letter of Information (LOI). If no, please explain. <i>This is the normal procedure.</i> Instructions at http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>8.2 Consent Form</p> <p>a) Participants will be asked to sign a written consent form (may be combined with LOI) If no, please explain. <i>Participants will also be given the option of providing verbal consent (recorded) in lieu of written consent should they not wish for their name to appear in any of the data collected for this research. While the risks associated with this particular research project are minimal, making this option available has been recommended by my thesis supervisors. This is the normal procedure except with some survey questionnaires.</i> Instructions at http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>b) Participants will be given a Letter of Information and will give Verbal Consent as a Category I exemption, see http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm#exceptions</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>c) Participants will be given a Letter of Information and will give Verbal Consent as a Category II exemption, see http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm#exceptions .</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

d) Participants are not in a position to give Consent to participate, so written permission will be acquired from person with legal authority.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Participants are children or other population unable to legally provide consent. Voluntary assent will be obtained.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.0 SIGNATURES		
Applicant(s): I/we, the undersigned, certify that (a) the information contained in this application is accurate; (b) that conduct of the proposed research will not commence until ethical certification has been granted; (c) that the Board will be advised of any revisions to the protocol arising before or after ethical certification is granted. Conduct of research using human subjects that has not received ethics certification is a breach of University policy on integrity in scholarly activity.		
Applicant's Signature:	Date:	
Supervisor's Signature: <i>I have reviewed this application and agree with the information it contains.</i>	Date:	
10. SUBMISSION CHECKLIST - required	Attached	N/A
Copy of the verbal or written Letter of Information that will be provided to participants before they are asked for consent to participate	X	
Copy of the informed consent(s) that will be distributed to each participant	X	
Copies of questionnaire, sample questions, thematic overview, interview guide	X	
Recruitment: your recruitment notice, advertisement, and/or information sheet as well as that used by a sponsor or supportive organization, as may be applicable. Refer to Recruitment Guidelines document on our webpage		X
Completed and signed application for review - original with 2 copies	X	

Appendix B
Selected Bibliography in Support of Research Proposal
Presented in Chapter 7

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