FOOD AS A GOOD VERSUS FOOD AS A COMMODITY

CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN STATE AND MARKET IN TUTA, CUBA

Marisa Wilson

'The role of power…becomes most evident in instances where major organizational transformations put signification under challenge' (Wolf 1990: 594).

1. Introduction

Although relatively recent (1993) shift to a dual economy in Cuba has been countered by a renewed official emphasis on 'just' forms of exchange in the socialist economy, discrepancies between the state and market versions of socialist society have created tensions in the local moral economy of provisioning. Openings to the market in the Cuban agrarian economy (as well as in other sectors) underscore growing contradictions with significant implications for household provisioning in 'Tuta',[1] a rural town located about forty kilometres southwest of Havana city where I conducted fieldwork for fifteen months from 2005 to 2007. Though the agricultural market exists, smallholders and state workers who harvest food for redistribution must uphold moral rather than monetary inclinations to produce. For Tutaño consumers, discrepancies within the dual economy are not only evident in costs, but also in the quality and availability of *desired* items, that is, of goods located outside the bounds of state-defined 'needs.' Indeed, memories and valuations of desirable consumer goods may be as important in the local moral economy of provisioning, as is the need to produce for the self-sufficiency of the national *oikos* and to 'resist' market influences.

The Cuban state's authority to use and control supplies of food can be compared to the 'first-fruit rights' held by the chief in some African societies (Richards 1932: 158). As with chiefly powers to distribute entitlements to land and its products, officials and institutions legitimated by the Cuban state are at the top of a hierarchy of ownership. According to rules of ownership

[1] To protect the anonymity of my informants, I have disguised the name of the location where my fieldwork was conducted, as well as the names of individuals.

embedded in the national moral economy, the power to use and control food supplies must ideally coincide with the revolutionary obligation to direct all production to the centre, rather than hoarding goods to fulfil individual interests.

In the Cuban national 'moral economy' (a broader notion than 'ideology'), the Acopio enterprise, which works as a centralized redistributive mechanism, is seen as the most 'just' way to distribute the products of land. Because the state assumes that petty commodity producers may divert the means of production from social uses to individual profit, most *campesinos* may only market their produce after selling most of it at low cost to what is officially regarded as their 'natural market' (*Granma,* 4 June 2008: 2) namely the Acopio enterprise. On every level (national, provincial, municipal, council), the Acopio institution mirrors the Communist Party and other institutions in Cuba in its vertical structure. It distributes foodstuffs to benefit either 'social consumption', i.e. in schools, day-care centres, hospitals, etc., or to replenish the often scanty state markets which opened in 1998 to offer a smaller selection of produce (and, very rarely, meats) of much lower quality, but sold at a 'just price', as opposed to the high priced *mercados agropecuarios* or markets (hereafter MAs), where farmers and traders sell goods supposedly set by supply and demand.

In an article in *Granma* in June 2008, the Cuban government and PCC [Partido Comunista Cubano, the Cuban Communist Party] re-affirmed their paternal commitment by insisting that *campesinos* and *parceleros* should be more inclined towards their 'natural market,' the Acopio, rather than the MA or any other market (*Granma,* 4 June 2008: 2). The idea of a 'natural market' is closely aligned with Aristotle's 'natural economy.' Chayanov noted in 1925 that prices for goods are absent in economies based on the Aristotelian idea of a 'natural economy', of which he claims there are only three: the natural economy (Aristotle's household), the peasant economy, and the communist economy (Chayanov 1966 [1925]: 25). In the natural and peasant economies, the household (*oikos*) is a bounded unit (like an organism) wherein both production and consumption work towards the reproduction of the unit. The 'natural economy' of the Cuban nation, along with its 'natural market' which sets prices, is based on Chayanov's third type of natural economy: the communist nation.

However, as indicated earlier, the communist ideal has not yet been reached in Cuba (or

anywhere), and indeed, according to Marx, the law of supply and demand that determines prices in the market does not disappear during the socialist transition to communism (Meso-Lago 1981: 20). Accordingly, the Cuban state has inevitably had to open up its economy to markets which compete with its 'first-fruit rights.' Even so, the presence of markets in Cuba has not led to a society like that which Mandeville described in *The fable of the bees: or private vices, public benefits* (1714). As I will argue in this article, consumer demand for high-quality items in Tuta does not always mean that economic transactions made between *campesinos* or *parceleros* and others, or between intermediaries and consumers, are solely based on self-interest. Rather, the relation between production, consumption and value takes particular shape in the local moral economy of provisioning.

2. Farmers' remunerations in the market, the Acopio and the tourist economy

Because rural areas in Cuba like Tuta, which specializes in citrus, sugar, tobacco and dairy products, are places where the 'market principle' has not yet fully penetrated the 'market place' (Herskovits 1962: viii; Bohannan and Dalton 1962: 1-2), it is *especially* evident that the 'market' concept – the idea of an amalgamation of individuals who always act in pursuit of their own interests – is not sufficient for the analysis of economic activity in these areas. To rely solely on the metaphor of the market ignores other kinds of 'internal exchanges' that take place within and between market settings (Herskovits 1962: xiv). In his preface to George Dalton and Paul Bohannan's classic volume, *Markets in Africa* (1962), Melville J. Herskovits argued against this kind of analysis, which poses 'the market' as a homogenous social fact that applies to all societies in the same way. He argued that societies with combinations of barter, 'money-barter' (or script; see below) and money are different 'in kind' (rather than in degree) from societies with an all-encompassing market, or what Bohannan and Dalton called societies in which economic transactions are carried out using a single 'general purpose money' (ibid.: 16).[2] Indeed, as Herskovits pointed out, these differences are not only ' … between impersonal and face-to-face

[2] As the formalist/substantivist debate that ensued illustrated, Bohannan and Dalton's position was flawed in that it was still based on the 'primitive'/modern polemic. Economic anthropologists now use their ideas and those of earlier substantivists (especially Karl Polanyi) to show that even 'modern' economies cannot fully be explained by the market principle.

relations but also in the number and nature of mechanisms of determining and establishing price – that is, expressions of value – and of the numbers of persons involved in the process' (ibid.: xv).

Most small-scale producers I interviewed in Tuta did not sell their products in the market directly, but rather were embedded in complex, mercantilist arrangements in which their products were sold at marginal prices to intermediaries with access to transport. The latter then sold them at higher prices (usually with a mark up of one peso) to other intermediaries or to a *campesino* ('peasant') representative in the market. And, of course, since gifts, barter and the Acopio are also means by which the product is circulated to the population, only a certain amount of produce actually enters into these transactions in the first place. The products which finally do end up in the market (place) are set at prices that are at least double the original 'profit' earned by the producer. Indeed, it seemed that most smallholders I interviewed just broke even, though most evaded this sensitive issue (by, for example, answering my questions about earnings with 'Cubans don't think of savings').[3]

Despite the 'humble' dimensions of their economies (as many *campesinos* described themselves), small-scale producers and the intermediaries who may assist in the marketing of their produce have historically been targeted by the Cuban government as perpetuating the 'evils' of market society. Indeed, while it is recognized that market sales by private producers may temporarily co-exist with the centralized, 'egalitarian' distributive system (the Acopio enterprise), the Cuban government and the 'interstitial, supplementary and parallel structures' (e.g. the agrarian university; Wolf 2001: 167-8) that help the state to function must 'control' the risks of profit-hoarding and exploitation by petty commodity producers and intermediaries. In socialist countries (as well as in non-socialist contexts in which the idea of a 'just price' has long been aligned with 'cultural notions of fairness';[4] Dilley 1992: 4) such 'discipline' is seen as imperative. Otherwise, as

[3] However, while many small-scale producers pointed out to me that their earnings were far from profitable, most did admit to being better off than Cubans who did not have land on which to grow a small amount of food for the household: 'I do not know what Tutaños in town do without land!'

[4] This is the point that Paul Alexander, John Davis and Michael Stewart have so graphically illustrated in their contributions to *Contesting Markets* (Dilley 1992). For Roy Dilley and others before him (see, for example, Godelier 1972 [1966]: 9), public control over private self-interest was also a key aspect to economic regulation in medieval Europe: 'Price-fixing by public officials or the strictures of the Schoolmen [i.e. Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas] were attempts to articulate a view of man who was in need of protection from vice, cupidity and avarice to which he or she may succumb in the domain of the market-place' (Dilley 1992: 4).

Humphrey argued in her study of consumption in post-socialist Moscow, 'people will resort to [the] dark and violent self-interest' (Humphrey 1995: 44-5) associated with market transactions.

In Tuta, it was indeed evident that prices in the market were very different from the 'just price' set by the state (in state markets, for example, which are usually sparse). The farmers' market (or MA) is regarded as the *bandido del rio frio* (Cold River Bandit, the name of a villain in a Mexican soap opera) because the prices charged in the MA are seen, by both local Tutaños and state officials, as 'robbery'. Indeed, we may recall Fidel Castro's comment that 'market prices are theft' (quoted by Pérez-López 1994: 106). Yet 'sticky' prices (Álvarez 2004b: 6; i.e. consistently high prices) in the MAs and other markets are partly the result of the dominant model of the national moral economy, which has led to official neglect of the way prices are formed in the MAs and other markets and the periodic implementation of price controls.

As with so-called 'free' markets elsewhere, the boundaries of the few markets in Cuba that theoretically work through the laws of supply and demand (the MAs, *puntas de venta* or sales points in towns and cities, ambulatory sales or sales from the farm gate, and the tourist market) are not impermeable to rules of ownership and entitlement formulated by the state. For instance, the Acopio enterprise can take any commodity out of the market if there is a shortfall in rationed items (Wright 2008: 22) or if the state sees a need to sell a certain food item at a 'just price'. When I met a *campesino* who was selling avocados and black beans at the MA in Tuta, he told me: 'I do not have any plantains today. The state market needs plantains, so no one in the market [MA] has plantains.' Instead of stockpiling produce to increase prices (as do those who invest in 'commodity futures'), the Cuban state hoards foodstuffs in order to *decrease* prices: 'the state … flood[s] the market to lower the price of any commodity whose price was too high on the market' (Wright 2008: 245).

As Eric Wolf argued, 'markets are never neutral meeting grounds for equivalent exchanges among economic equals; they are arenas of encounter and conflict' (Wolf 2001: 283). Cuban smallholders are mostly not permitted to earn CUCs (Cuban convertible dollars) by selling produce for export. This position is filled by state-owned agricultural enterprises, who 'do not see money', only state cheques, and who are in charge of 'controlling' production for export by UBPC cooperatives. The tourist market, which is also regarded as an 'export', is the only exception to the smallholders' limited access to hard currency markets (as discussed below). Pesos, symbols of the

national domain of value, circulate in other *legal* markets in Cuba, which are listed above (in 2007, 25 pesos was equivalent to 1 CUC). But all such markets are more profitable for the smallholder than their so-called 'natural market' (the Acopio), from which they earn roughly 20% of that paid in the MAs and other places (excluding costs for sale in the MAs, such as the payment of intermediaries and taxes).

For the majority of producers who sell a large proportion of their produce to the Acopio, this redistributive institution is seen as having many problems that affect both producers and consumers. In the 2006-2007 period, *nearly every* smallholder in Tuta complained to me about wider problems of the Acopio, including the tendency to damage produce (or the lack of transport to pick it up in the first place) and, of course, very insignificant payments.[5] One Tutaño *campesino*, the president of his CCSs (Credit and Service Cooperatives), told me that many smallholders were frustrated as the cheques they received from the Acopio 'have little value because *they* have no money in their account.' Another told me angrily that, 'One has to spend two days working for the Acopio before one has enough to sell for a day at the market!' The same person said that delays in payments from the Acopio can last up to a year. Indeed, many smallholders interviewed complained that the state has not (yet)[6] provided enough material incentives to produce for the Acopio, though almost every *campesino* is required to 'donate' (i.e. sell at a very low price) at least half of his or her production to this redistributive institution (from my interviews, it seems that many did so gladly).

If a *campesino* has the opportunity to sell in the tourist market, which seems to be a very limited opportunity, it must be done through state enterprises (though some sell in the illegal tourist market). The tourist market is organized through a state enterprise called Fruta Selecta, which

[5] Unfortunately, as I was to find that prices and markets were nearly taboo subjects in the contexts of my interviews, I was not able to obtain detailed information which would enable me to compare prices of produce in different markets. However, others have been able to acquire data regarding differential prices, which is useful to consider. According to Recio and Jiménez, in 1999 the differences in prices between the MA and state markets in Havana (respectively) were (in pesos per kilogram): sweet potato: 1.11 vs. 0.47; banana: 1.53 vs. 0.28; onion: 4.63 v 2.66; rice 4.43 v. 3.31 (Recio and Jiménez 1999, quoted by Wright 2008: 102).

[6] In an article in *Granma* in June 2008, it was claimed that the state was addressing the issue of prices for sales to the Acopio.

processes and sells cleaned and sorted produce to hotels in Havana and other tourist areas. Fruta Selecta sells both fruit and vegetables of a higher quality, mostly organic.

As mentioned above, for smallholders the tourist market regulated by the Fruta Selecta institution crosses over into the hard currency economy; it is thus the most lucrative market for them. However, as also indicated above, it is rare for Cubans to be remunerated in CUCs, and *campesinos* who sell to the tourist market are no exception. Despite the Cuban state's attempts to break the symbolic link between CUCs and US dollars (creating a 'convertible' currency covered in revolutionary symbols), CUCs are still manifest symbols of the market economy, if only in their inflated value as compared to the national currency (in 2007 the rate was 25 pesos = 1 CUC).

Perhaps to create a buffer in the rural economy between productive earnings in CUCs and the remuneration that most Cubans receive, namely pesos, the Cuban state has created a system of communal money, or script, to pay *campesinos* and *parceleros* who sell high-quality produce in the tourist market. As with LETs schemes in the UK and Ithaca HOURS in the US (both being alternative forms of currencies tied to non-monetary values created by specific communities; Gudeman 2008: 139), in Cuba, the script money that smallholders receive by selling their meat and produce in the tourist market becomes a kind of special purpose money (Bohannan and Dalton 1962: 16) that may be used in state stores which sell particular goods such as bicycles, while excluding the sale of others, such as alcohol.[7] By regulating what is and is not considered acceptable (and available) remuneration, the state sets the standards of value for the way local agrarian economies may enter the tourist economy. And, as Louis Dumont has argued, 'when the rate of exchange is seen as linked to the basic value(s) of the society,' it becomes a 'total social fact' rather than merely an 'economic fact' (Dumont 1986 [1983]: 259-60).

As with other alternative currencies, script received in payment for produce destined for the tourist market works as both a 'med[ium] of exchange in the commercial realm and a means for building social relationships in the communal sphere' (Gudeman 2008: 139). Moreover, like the peso economy itself, the script system for remuneration from the Fruta Selecta enterprise has the side effect of encouraging transactions in another communal sphere: the 'informal' economy. As

[7] It would be fascinating to have been permitted to visit one of these stores, but unfortunately the only information I was able to obtain about them was through interviews, and very few *campesinos* were willing to discuss the subject.

one interviewee who sold bigger, better quality plantains than those 'that the people eat' (the former 'take more water') told me, 'the payments for Fruta Selecta can buy a bike, but they cannot buy clothes. So if the *guajiro* [peasant] needs clothes, he buys a bike, sells it and then buys clothes.'

As we shall see below, the very separation between a domestic market in pesos (state) and a tourist market in CUCs (market) has led to a growing unease in the minds of Cuban consumers, which has largely been left unaffected by the re-opening of the high-priced MAs in 1994. The reason the state gives for distinguishing between the tourist market and domestic distribution is that national returns in hard currency in the former are used 'for the good of all' – in other words, all profits from national markets in hard currency are directed towards the maintenance and creation of social property. In fact, I have been told by a primary informant that most of the profits made by CIMEX (Cuba's largest trading company, which is managed by the Ministry of External Trade, the *Ministerio de Commercio Exterior* or MINEX) fund the 'Battle of Ideas' programme, which was initiated in 2001. The latter is a good example of the ideal of utilizing collective earnings for collective benefits: the programme not only buys and distributes (actually, sells) imported energy-efficient appliances (but, according to more than a few Tutaños, of low-quality), it also provides building materials for the construction of and supplies for new polyclinics, especially in rural areas (one was in the process of being built by voluntary labour in Tuta during the 2005-2007 period of fieldwork, though 'no one knows' when it will be completed).

In a similar fashion, profits for fruit and other produce sold in the tourist market should ideally be used for the 'social good'. An article in *El Habanero* published on 19 January 2007 outlined the progress of a new, government-funded project to increase fruit production in Havana Province. At the very end of the article, the author added: 'For the moment all harvests are for tourism, which benefits the whole population' (Leonardo 2007: 2). However, it was clear to me that some of the profits from the tourist trade are distributed to a few fortunate farmers with access to this market (though, as we have seen, 'profits' are remunerated through the medium of script for particular goods and thus cannot be used as capital to increase farm output).

3. Consumption and the moral economy

3.1 'Need' versus desire in the consumer domain

As with most workers within the Cuban economy, for smallholders there is a growing contradiction in Cuba's dual agrarian economy: the widening separation between food treated as a good in the domestic economy and food treated as a commodity in the market. For consumers, frustrations with the growing gap between state and market were most evident in their constant references to differences in price and quality between goods provided at subsidized prices by the state and commodities sold at high prices in the MAs or CUC stores. Just as state workers, like most smallholders, receive peso salaries (averaged at about 300 pesos, or 12 CUCs per month) but must purchase items in CUCs (at world market rates, 1 CUC = £0.80), so all consumers in Tuta must buy produce from both state outlets (the *bodega*, state market or other 'points of sale' that sell goods at subsidized prices) and more highly priced markets.

In the national moral economy in Cuba, the 'natural market' for the nation's 'needs' is valued as being infinitely superior to all other market(s) in the country. But like Chayanov, who relied on an underlying notion of 'minimum needs' for the household, so those who uphold the Cuban economic model value the *canasta básica* (basic food basket) as the most important aspect of consumption in Cuba. Indeed, comparable to past and present global 'food-security' policies, the 'socialist food discourse' (Pertierra 2007: 100) in Cuba emphasizes physiological needs more than social needs, calories and levels of nutrition more than taste or local preferences. Like the quantitative focus of Cuban agriculture, the

> [s]tate-produced discourse on food emphasizes measuring and quantifying foodstuffs; food rations allocated to citizens, portions served in restaurants, and crops produced in the agricultural sector are all listed in detail, with weights and volumes specified, in ration books, restaurant menus, newspapers and governmental announcements. Food allocation by the Cuban state is determined and evaluated principally by *nutritional* criteria, and the nutritional status of the Cuban population was (and continues to be) a principal forum by which the progress of the socialist revolution is determined. (Pertierra 2007: 61)

However, as James Scott has argued, quantitative measurements which work as 'visual representations of order and efficiency' ignore the 'illegible' aspects of local systems of value

(Scott 1998: 223, 1-2). Over seventy-five years ago, in her study of Bantu 'morals of food' (Richards 1932: xv), Audrey Richards emphasized that economists, scientists and other primary agents of agricultural policy must also take into account '[h]uman emotions, which are from their very nature passionate, complex and infinitely various, [and which] rebel against the scientists' classifying hand' (ibid.: 116).

Defendants of the national moral economy in Cuba fail to encompass local processes of valuation within their own schemes of value. Yet both are the historical products of long-term (political) economic relationships between local, national and international spheres. Local valuations of food in Tuta and elsewhere in Cuba are inseparable from historical processes in the development of what Audrey Richards called 'nutritive relationships' (Richards 1932: 116) or historical, socio-cultural formations of food networks and values. The official ideology in Cuba, which is tied to a version of history that allowed for a strict break from the previous authoritarian capitalist regime, has always competed with local systems of valuation, which are also legitimized by historical precedents, as indicated by the memories Tutaños have of consuming (North) American commodities (though this is a topic for another article). The re-opening of the MAs in Cuba, as well as the visible presence of the workings of outside markets, particularly the tourist market, recalls an earlier time in Cuban history when commodities entering (and exiting) the market did not compete with collective goods in the redistributive economy.

In a very important sense, present-day Cuba is different from other places where important studies of the 'moral economy' have been carried out. In both Tudor England (Thompson 1993 [1971]) and the peasant societies of James Scott's Southeast Asia (1976), the moral economies of local people were largely associated with traditional, paternalistic orders threatened by encroaching market relationships of an impersonal nature. Both E. P. Thompson and James Scott associated certain forms of collective, moral indignation (demonstrated through food riots, for example) with the illegitimacy of new power structures that failed to abide by the commoners' 'subsistence ethic': '[t]he breakthrough of the new political economy of the free market was also the breakdown of the old moral economy of provisioning' (Thompson 1993 [1971]: 258).

Protests in Havana that preceded the re-opening of the MAs (which had been closed from 1986 to 1994) were neither entirely about hunger nor unequivocal reactions to the fall of an original paternal order. In Cuba, 'dependence upon imported consumer goods was established as part of

"local" culture long before the introduction of socialism' (Pertierra 2007: 48). Commodities provided through ties to markets outside Cuba as well as from sales in local markets have played a significant part in provisioning processes at least since the eighteenth century. Local memories of capitalist relations between state and market in pre-revolutionary Cuba may be leading to a partial de-legitimation of the Cuban state in the present period, as cyclical shifts between state and market, which have allowed for periods of 'temporary' openings up to the market, have occurred since the late 1970s.

3.2 Food as a good: implications for Tutaño consumers

In Tuta, the growing and visible realm outside the confines of state-defined 'needs' reflects contradictions between food treated as a good in the national moral economy and food treated as a commodity in Cuban markets. But before we analyse such contradictions, it is worth considering a case where the moral idea of food as a good *does* influence consumption decisions on the local level. The value of food as a good that should be distributed to all is tied to historical notions of 'our' land and 'our' property as expressed in the work of José Martí, the Cuban poet and war hero of the late nineteenth century. Collective values embedded in consumption are illustrated by an oft-quoted adage by Martí: 'the wine is sour, but it is *our* wine'. To a certain degree, this quote from Martí expresses ideas and actions at play in *both* national *and* local moral economies. Indeed, as we shall see below, *both* long-held valuations of foreign and domestic commodities *and* revolutionary morals which espouse the idea of 'food for all' are present in the motivations behind local economic transactions in Tuta. As Stephen Gudeman argues, all economies – local or national – are comprised of two dialectically connected value domains, what he calls the 'mutual realm' and the 'market realm' (Gudeman 2008: 4). As with long-term exchanges of food between households, agricultural inputs and information, consumer decisions in Cuba are not always explained by the collective pursuit of individual interests. For instance, when I offered to buy rum to share one evening with a man recognized as my 'Cuban father', we had several choices:

1) to buy a bottle of Havana Club™ in the CUC store for 2.90 CUCs (about £2.50),

2) to buy one from the *particular* – a man living in a house nearby who periodically sold rum 'from

the factory' at 40 pesos a bottle (about £1.10). It was of lower quality than Havana Club,™ but better than:

3) *la gasolina,* a poor quality rum which available from a neighbour. *La gasolina* is aptly named, as it is truly disgusting, but it is available through state outlets and very cheap (about 10 pesos or £0.28) to buy from people who have 'grabbed' a quantity from their state work.

One may be tempted to categorize these types of rum in terms of a Bourdieuesque hierarchy of taste and class, as does Jack Goody (1982: 178-9) in relating his 'local drinks / bottled beer / spirits' ladder to a similar hierarchy of West African classes: 'rural workers / lower elite / upper elite'. However, unlike such theories, which assume that consumer choice always reflects the interests of a maximizing individual within a hierarchical social system, the choice of rum made by my Cuban father was not a direct indicator of his need to find the highest quality commodity for the price.

The day we were to drink the rum, my Cuban father came back in the afternoon with a bottle of *gasolina* (to my dismay), rejecting, in his hospitable and 'humble' way, my offer to buy the more expensive variety. After delicately introducing a discussion about the different types of rum he could have obtained, we began to converse about the topic:

CF: I could have got a bottle from the *particular* [choice #2 above; he had the money to do this], but I got this amount of *gasolina* (a half-litre bottle, #3) because I worked for our neighbour down the street [the price of the Havana Club™ bottle placed it out of his range of choices].

M: Did you get paid to work for your neighbour?

CF: No! One is not paid to help construct a neighbour's house. All the men in the neighbourhood who can go to help build go when someone needs their help. Their *mujer* serves bread with egg, and you may get some rum, but you are not paid in *money*.

M: And this rum was given to you for working?

CF: Yes. We drank a bit there, but they gave me this too because I worked extra hard. It is not as nice as that of the *particular*, but it is for *everyone*.

M: What do you mean?

> CF: This rum is cheap, it comes from the state. Everyone can buy it. It is good because of this. And everyone got a bit of it at our neighbour's house, but I asked for a small bottle for tonight and worked harder. Now I know my neighbour will come and work for us when we need it.

Rather than choosing the better quality rum to share with me that evening, my Cuban father opted for the *gasolina* earned by helping his neighbour construct his house, an activity which reinforced his long-term ties to the local community. As Stephen Marglin has recently argued in reference to the Amish community in the United States (Marglin 2008: 1-2, 27-34), one cannot analyse such activity in terms of the (neoliberal) economist's model for the maximizing individual, as this negates long-term processes of identity-formation and obligation, social processes linked more to community or mutuality than to market relationships. As Marglin notes, '[I]t is simply not credible that a decision to put the community ahead of one's individual interest can be understood in the language of utility maximization' (ibid.: 34).

As with my Cuban father, some Tutaños with whom I interacted saw the universal distribution of lower quality goods as superior to commodities bought in the market, if only because the former were cheaper. But there are other instances where maintaining the value of 'food for all' is seen as better than individual manifestations of self-interest, whether the ascetic choice is inspired by cognitive factors or by the visible presence of coercive power. A situation comparable to my Cuban father's choice to procure universally available rum through non-market arrangements is highlighted by the refusal to accept CUC beer from 'tourists' to avoid being seen as mercenary (Wilson, forthcoming), though this kind of beer is usually highly desirable. Such moral aspects to economic life call into question Veblenian assumptions about the universal desirability of 'luxury' goods.

However, though the anthropologist may be tempted to romanticize economic acts that further the long-term goals of local and national communities, Tutaños were also 'in need of all they [could] get'. Moral ideas about universal distribution in Tuta may thus typify what Marglin calls 'communities of necessity' (as opposed to 'communities of affinity;' Marglin 2008: Chapter 2). The local emphasis on collective 'needs' has been formalized by the common expression: '*¡lo que te dan, cógelo'* or 'what they give you, take it!'

Yet the state ('they') still has the power to define goods deemed as 'necessary', and the way these 'needs' (and others) are fulfilled is social. For instance, when one Tutaño sees another with a good that is available in the *bodega* (neighbourhood distribution centre), this is a sign that it has 'arrived' and is available at their own local *bodega* (if it hasn't already 'run out'). Tutaños must communicate about when an item 'has arrived' in the *bodega,* but they also must have and spread knowledge about where to find things that are recognized as being of superior quality to state goods. Because, in the state's productive and distributive model, food is valued more in terms of nutrition than the satisfaction of Cuban tastes, many items on offer in state outlets do not appeal to Cubans. Indeed, despite the continued relevance of the morality of 'food for all', many people with whom I interacted in Tuta and elsewhere were fully aware of differences in quality between goods provided by the state to satisfy 'needs' and items they saw as more desirable. For instance, when carrots were being sold at the *feria* or state fair in Tuta, which sells surplus items from state storage facilities several times a year (though it is supposed to be monthly; interview 12/6/07), I heard one man make the comment: 'Cubans are not rabbits! No Cuban likes carrots.'

One Tutaño *campesino* regarded foodstuffs that the state regards as legitimate dietary substitutes for scarce items, such as *picadillo de soya* – ground beef and soybean – as an 'imposition' on consumers.[8] Actually, I heard many people in Tuta make jokes about some of the state provisions, especially the 'ONCIs' or *Objecto Comestible No Identificados* (Non-identified Edible Object; Díaz Vázquez 2000: 51; cited by Álvarez 2004a: 5-6), an acronym used to describe substitute meat products such as *picadillo de soya.* With a diet largely rooted in Spanish and African eating habits, Cubans do not like soya products, preferring meat over other kinds of protein.

As with most dairy products, as well as high-quality seafood and produce, the state has the 'first-fruit rights' over the distribution of beef, the most highly valued meat in Cuba. During the two-year period I spent visiting Tuta to conduct fieldwork, prices for beef on the black market rose from 25 pesos per kilogram to 38, and then beef ceased to be available at all. Beef is not only valued by local Tutaños because it is seen as 'nutritious' (*'¡alimenta!'*), it also symbolizes strength

[8] I was told that the reason there is a miniscule amount of beef in *picadillo de soya* is that many people who work in meat factories 'grab' their share of it.

and 'real' food that gives strength, as in other areas of Latin America (Pertierra 2007: 78; Orlove 1997: 257; Scheper-Hughes 1993: 158; Gudeman and Rivera 1990: 28-9). If beef is regarded as a luxury, then something must take its place in everyday meals. A warm meal (usually the same prepared food eaten over the course of lunch and dinner) must include, at the very least, some kind of meat or fish. When I visited a friend in hospital and asked her how the food was, she said 'I don't eat anything here. Look, I'm getting as thin as a rail!' About twenty minutes later a tray arrived, with two fried eggs, rice, beans and some overcooked vegetables. As I continued my conversation, she proceeded to eat the entire meal. I could not help but say: 'Well, it looks like they have finally fed you!' She responded: 'Fed me? This is not a meal/food (*no es comida*)! Did you see it? There was no meat on my plate!'[9]

As with some meals served in state institutions (e.g. a hospital), Tutaños I have spoken to have also expressed frustrations with what is on offer in local markets such as the MAs, as selection in these markets is related to state controls over production for the market. In a heated conversation, one infuriated Tutaño *campesino*, Angelo, contrasted the state's market for supply with the 'real' market for demand: 'There is an abyss between the two markets: one of necessities, the other of tastes!' Angelo was mainly frustrated that the state's model of production did not allow for feedback between the two markets. He complained about the kinds of seeds available through the Seed Enterprise, the only legal arena where seeds may be purchased. According to Angelo, one can only plant seeds authorized by UA and ANAP officials. The resulting produce 'satisfies neither necessity nor consumer taste'. He criticized the state for 'car[ing] more about *quintales*[10] than quality' and showed me a handful of the seeds 'he must buy' which yield a large quantity of green tomatoes. 'People do not buy these green tomatoes! They produce it to avoid plagues, but no one eats it! […] In the black market I can buy foreign seeds that produce large, red tomatoes. Consumers want this kind of tomato!'

As opposed to the state, which, according to Angelo, prioritizes quantity over quality, *particulares* (petty commodity producers) 'care more about their products'. Concern for consumer

[9] It seems that other Cubans would have been so offended that they would not have even touched the plate. According to Julia Wright's interview with a nutritionist, 'the people's way of resisting is to refuse to eat what may be offered to them, and so the state has learned not to offer what may be rejected' (Wright 2008: 236).

[10] One *quintal* is approximately equivalent to 4 *arrobas* or 50 kilograms.

choice was evident in the actions of petty commodity producers within 'micro-enterprises' (Ritter 1998) comprised of one or a few households. This is illustrated by a conversation I had with a man who bought syrup to make soft drinks that had been 'grabbed' from the state, processed the soda and sold it in bottles to people on the block (when no 'inspectors' were around). He explained to me that he had just changed his entrepreneurial tactics, bottling the soda in plastic bottles rather than glass:

> The refrescos end up of a better quality when one puts them in plastic bottles. These bottles are twice the size of the others, but I charge only one peso more – three pesos rather than two. Now there is competition – the guy down that road sells refrescos, another one sells them over there. One has to think about quality.

Another of the petty commodity-sector traders who sold in the MA linked differences in quality with the different levels of effort and astuteness of the workers in each sphere (state and market). This elderly *campesino*, who sold at the MA, claimed that state workers 'damage products by bringing garlic heads in a sack on foot, dropping the sacks…or they place the produce in boxes and in the lorry and shut the door on the boxes, breaking them'. He contrasted this way of handling foodstuffs with his own system of transport (which he was very fortunate to have): 'our lorry has a metal bar which separates the door from the boxes inside.' Another *campesino* who sold in the market told me that 'state market workers are the last to show up in the market. They do not care about their work or about consumers as much as *campesinos*. *Campesinos* are the first to arrive.'

4. Work, property and value for petty commodity producers

In addressing these differentiations between work in state arenas and work on one's own plot or within one's own 'micro-enterprise', we may turn to ideas about the mobilization of labour in socialism. Chayanovian notions about the benefits of household production are relevant here: for those who made the above statements, state workers do not work as hard as those who work to improve their own property. In this distinction, there arises a contradiction between two kinds of work: 'work' devoted to the revolution, and 'work' in improving one's personal property. Sometimes the two kinds of work and property come into conflict (but not always, as we shall see

below). For instance, in the history of the revolution (up to the present), state property meant to be used in productive work for the collectivity has often been utilized for the improvement of personal property, though not without moral unease. One elderly Tutaño described such a situation during the era of what he referred to as 'barbarian production' (when the model for agricultural production was Stalinist):

> There were too many tractors. You would get five tractors from the state [to be used] *for* the state [on state farms, for example] and take one for your house for your own use. … You would work three hours for the state and four hours for yourself in your own house. There was oil, chemicals and it was all taken [by such individuals]. The people ate and the food was from the state. The work clothes and *sombrero*, and other things, all free. Food for the workers was free. But a poor country cannot give everything for free. Where does it come from?

While many Tutaños were critical of those who take state property for their own use, almost all felt the need to keep their homes and farms 'clean' and 'beautiful'. As in socialist Romania, where a modernist homogenization of houses was counteracted by individualized efforts to display 'care' in household furnishings (Drazin 2001), or in English council houses, where uniformity is counteracted with material expressions of agency in the creation of a home (Miller 2001), in Cuba consumption of property is always related to overall processes of identity and person-making (Graeber 2007).

It seems that this personalized quality of objects is recognized by high-ranking functionaries of the state. In legal terms, for instance, consumption of personal property does not always conflict with the idea of social property in the national moral economy. As Debra Evenson notes, under Article 22 of the 1976 Constitution, individual rights to 'personal property' are protected (Evenson 2003: 206), except, it seems, for people who leave the country as 'traitors'. This right is re-affirmed in Article 21 of the 1992 Constitution with regard to 'houses possessed by legal title and other goods and objects that serve in the satisfaction of the material and cultural necessities of the person' (*Constitución de la República de Cuba* 2003 [1992]: 5).

On a local level, the right to hold and improve 'personal property' is also highly valued. Indeed, during fieldwork I was surprised at how minutely personal property was defined within enclosed spaces in Tuta, where apparently insignificant objects such as a particular fork that 'has always

been mine' or a front-row vinyl bus seat with a hole in one corner were personalized through associations with specific individuals. And personalizations of property did not just involve objects that would largely be regarded as 'valueless' in monetary terms. As in other socialist countries, in Cuba the owner of a house and/or land is seen by ordinary people as well as the state as its manager rather than its proprietor (Shanin 1990: 25). The ability to be a *dueño* (owner/manager) over one's property allows the owner to engage in work to make the property 'good'.

Work in Cuba is a constant activity – and 'work' in beautifying one's home or farm is seen in a positive light as long as the products of this work are shared by all who experience it. Perhaps this is why some anthropologists of (post-)socialism have focused on the aspect of *visibility* in displays of personal property. Katherine Verdery (2003: 177), for instance, using the term the 'visible economy', gives an example of how farmers in the Vlaicu village of Transylvania (Romania) illustrate the workings of this 'economy':

> In my travels through Vlaicu's fields during the 1990s, visibility was a constant theme. Whoever was with me would comment on the fields we passed, 'Oh, there's Sandu's wheat, look how beautiful it is!' or 'See those ugly weeds? Those stunted cornstalks? That's Dumitru's lousy work!' (Verdery 2003: 178)

As with Adam Smith, who insisted that British smallholders had a moral obligation to improve their estates in order to increase collective (national) wealth (Smith 1976 [1776]: 351-80), so Cubans condemn those who let their personal property (including clothing and general appearance) fall into disrepair. One instance which underscores this point occurred when one of my friends had a row with his brother-in-law, whom he considered 'lazy' because he would not paint his house. My friend saw such work in painting the house as a way of personalizing the place where his sister lived: 'It is a disgrace to my sister that her husband does not even make her house beautiful!' 'Beauty' in Tuta was also identified with carefully attended greenery surrounding the house or farm. When I was sent out to buy spaghetti or some other item from an illegal *particular*, it was most often easy for me to find the house if it was described as '*bonita*' (beautiful), as I just had to look for the place on the street with the most shrubbery and plants decorating the front entrance.

As opposed to land that is 'beautiful', idle land filled with the thick *marabú* weed is 'ugly' and 'not helping anybody'. Tutaños with whom I have discussed the issue are very frustrated by state

monopolies over land, especially because much of the land in Tuta lies idle (at least during the 2005-2007 period). Many, such as the man who made the following statements ('P'), felt that the idle land in Tuta would be better *managed* by individual *campesinos*.

M: Why does one see a lot of land in Tuta that is not in use?

P: Ah…that is the principle question everyone asks. The land is state land and it is very disorganized. That is, no one is in control of it, so no one sows it. But if it a *campesino* was the *dueño* [manager], it would be put to better use.

M: Why don't *campesinos* start sowing this land?

P: You cannot do this. *They* will put you in jail.

M: But the land is good?

P: Yes.

In other areas of Havana Province (e.g. the municipality of San José de las Lajas, in which the Agrarian University of Havana is located), where the extension of institutions dedicated to urban agriculture has been widespread, much idle land has been re-distributed, and those who work it are encouraged to do so in a fairly labour-intensive manner – that is, without the help of chemicals. The most 'excellent' smallholders in San José incorporate new bio-technologies developed by the university and other institutions, but also utilize methods they read in books or acquire from their own experience. They are encouraged to harvest organic produce, which, to some farmers' dismay, is sold at the same price as other foodstuffs of the same kind in the MAs ('in Cuba they do not yet have a market for organic products, but they should…'). However, organic produce is also highly desirable for tourists, and the Cuban government has recognized this. Thus, farmers in San José who grow 'big, beautiful products', as one smallholder put it, often have access to the tourist market, which, as noted above, is much more lucrative than local markets. In the latter, all goods of the same kind are priced the same (as determined by a pricing board that works under the auspices of the municipal-level Poder Popular).

5. Competition between tourist and domestic markets: implications for consumers

Tropical fruits, such as papaya, are specifically targeted for sale in the tourist market – perhaps the reason why Fruta Selecta is so named – though now this enterprise sells all kinds of produce in the tourist market. Tutaños and others often must compete with the tourist demand for tropical fruits, especially citrus. In Tuta, there is an enterprise specifically dedicated to the production and packaging of citrus products. When I asked one informant with knowledge of the enterprise whether hurricanes had destroyed citrus production that year (as it was the season for citrus and I did not notice anyone selling it in the market), he told me that it was a 'political decision' to direct all citrus production and manufacturing to export and tourism, rather than sell these products in the low-priced state markets. 'The people in Tuta are disgusted about this!'

Many other people in Tuta were aware of differences in availability and quality of commodities in the tourist market as opposed to the goods they could obtain from the state. With this knowledge, most Tutaños tried hard to satisfy my tastes. As an outsider or 'tourist', I was expected to desire a wider variety of higher quality foodstuffs than those on offer to Tutaños. Discussing this subject, one woman explained to me: 'You and all the tourists are used to having all kinds of goods, at any time of the year. We have access to tomatoes, lettuce and other healthy items only when they are in season.' With reference to a period when few salads and vegetables were available in the MAs or state markets, another Tutaño exclaimed to me one day: 'It is impossible to maintain a diet here! In the market, there are only avocados! This is the only salad available. People must grab produce destined for the tourist market…the people have to eat!' (there is a linguistic and moral difference between 'grabbing' an item 'for all' – e.g. for the family – and stealing an item).

Though during my stay in Tuta it was clear that items I was used to eating – such as salad – were mostly hard to find, I am now aware that there are many healthy foodstuffs on offer by the Cuban state. Indeed, ever since Fidel Castro attended a summit in Rio de Janeiro, nutrition has become more and more institutionalized in Cuba. The idea of nutrition in this context is more aligned with concerns over general health and medical issues for this 'obesegenic' (Rodríguez-Ojea Menéndez and Jiménez Acosta 2005: 118) country, but information about how to cook with spinach and other healthy foods is also publicized and aired on Cuban TV. The 1990s saw the rise

of 'centres for micronutrient vigilance' and the Food and Nutrition Surveillance System (SISVAN; Wright 2008: 233-4) under the Ministry of Health, as well as an increasing number of studies on obesity (which are, unfortunately, mostly unavailable outside the country).

Julia Wright, a sociologist who has studied nutrition in Cuba, was concerned with the amount of fat consumed by Cuban workers compared to energy output. During a period of volunteer work for an agricultural cooperative, she observed that

> cooperative workers, and especially women, consume[d] one tray-load after the other of starchy carbohydrates (rice with beans, cassava and fried sweet potato). Workers were overeating, yet they did not feel satisfied. As a result, their productivity suffered. (ibid.: 233)

However, Wright's account recalls the kind of reasoning which characterizes nutritionists in the United States, whom Mary Douglas (Douglas 2003: 3-4, 8) criticizes for treating the modern consumer as a rational agent who may be analysed separately from his or her social world. As Douglas and Isherwood argue, levels of consumption are not just reflections of individual choice, but are rather embedded in social contexts. In pubs in England, all members of the same party tend to drink the same amount (Douglas and Isherwood 1978: 122-4).

Rather than viewing consumption as either 'normal' or excessive and, in so doing, placing our own values upon it, we must view it as related to social interactions embedded in everyday rituals, or as 'the joint production, with fellow consumers, of a universe of values' (ibid.: 67). Like any other social form, consumption is linked to processes of value-formation or cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984[1979], Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In order to obtain knowledge of these values, people have to be present at others' 'rituals of consumption'. Such was the practice of some of Anthony Trollope's characters, whose knowledge about fine wines and foods provided a 'mark of exclusion' to poorer outsiders (Douglas and Isherwood 1978: 79-81). However, as we have seen above in the example of a man who chose *la gasolina* over better quality rum, distinctions between 'luxury' and common goods in Tuta may not always correspond to an equivalent hierarchy of persons.

Tutaños recognized that, as an outsider, I had access to other 'rituals of consumption' and thus to knowledge about consumption and health that was unavailable to them. Though the Cuban

government attempts to spread information about nutrition, Tutaños I met were still very curious about which foods are good for the body and which foods are bad. Many questioned me about my dietary habits. One evening I sat talking with three generations of women (daughter, mother, grandmother), and the subject of nutrition arose. The women were very interested in what I knew about the nutritional qualities of certain foods, believing all the 'facts' about nutrition they read in women's magazines from abroad, e.g. that sunflower oil is bad for the brain. The mother was also curious about 'light' versions of manufactured commodities such as mayonnaise (which many Tutaños like).

> I saw in a Brazilian soap opera that people over there read labels before they buy products [e.g. buying 'light' mayo].… I just buy whatever kind of mayonnaise there is without reading the label. Often labels are in English or, even more often, you can't read the labels because the people at the back of you in line [at the kiosk] will yell at you, telling you to hurry up.

Perhaps because going to *la chopin* ('the shopping' or local CUC store) is tied to long lines of impatient people, places with the greatest variety of goods from abroad, such as large supermarkets or industrial fairs in Havana, are not regarded in the same way as local markets (of course, this is also because prices in these stores are often inaccessible to ordinary Cubans). These are places of recreation where one can stroll with one's family and look at all the merchandise without being obliged to hurry one's purchase(s) so that others can reach the front of the line.

The more information people in Cuba have about what people eat in other places, the more apparent are the differences in access between their local markets and the commodities available to outsiders. For instance, while the Cuban state sees tourism as benefiting all Cubans, many Tutaños felt left out. Frustrations were most evident in products such as beef, which, as we have seen, were monopolized by the revolution early on. When dairy farmers in Cuba threatened to stop producing beef, all the pasture areas were nationalized, and all ears of cattle tagged (interview 19/5/07). As one informant said, pointing to a group of scattered cows chewing cud on a vast area of state land, 'All cows are Fidel's cows'.

Like beef, quality fish and seafood are also monopolized by the state for the tourist and export markets. Very rarely are these products available via state outlets (and at a much lower quality and quantity than those sold in the tourist market), and Tutaños were wary of black-market sales unless

they knew the *particular* selling the fish or blue crab (many people get food poisoning from fish and seafood). Blue crab – 'the Cubans' lobster' – was available to Tutaños, though I tried it only once and it made me ill. In Tuta, lobster was not available, except very rarely on the black market.[11] When a *paladar* (private restaurant with limited seats) opened just one kilometre outside of Tuta that served lobster as well as beef in pesos, it seemed that problems of access were improving. The restaurant was, however, short lived. The closure of this restaurant, which was primarily for the benefit of Tutaño consumers, signified for Tutaños the growing divide between food for domestic consumption and food for tourists. One friend was infuriated by the closing of the *paladar*, exclaiming: '*¡los turistas son los dueños aqui!* [the tourists are the owner-managers here!]'

6. Conclusion

Cuban tastes are changing, as is the desire to gain access to goods of higher quality than the standard state fare, as well as the need to access information about nutrition and the preferred foods of people outside Cuban society. As moral economy theorists have continued to emphasize, 'markets are political constructions and outcomes of social struggle' (Edelman 2005: 331). The problem arises when food treated as a good in the state economy rests side-by-side with food treated as a commodity in the market. As Tutaños 'struggle' to join the outside world of global consumers, the old adage of José Martí's – 'the wine is sour, but it is our wine' – may be losing its discursive power.

[11] In the five years I have visited Cuba, I have only eaten lobster once at a Cubans' house, and this was because the host had a family member who fished for lobster illegally.

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