

CUBA IN TRANSITION:  
ENTREPRENEURS, TOURISM AND POLITICAL COMPROMISE IN HAVANA

by

ARIEL JUDITH STAPLETON TAYLOR

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2008

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Sociology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Vancouver)

August 2011

© Ariel Judith Stapleton Taylor, 2011

## **Abstract**

Since the early 1990's Havana, Cuba has undergone considerable socioeconomic transformation resulting from the legalization of some forms of private enterprise. Paladares, Cuban owned and operated restaurants, have emerged in Havana as a significant industry, fueled largely by both tourism and Havana's second economy. The liberalization of Cuba's domestic economy has, in turn, impacted social and political ideologies, particularly among Havana's wealthiest paladar owners. Concerns and speculation about the future role of Communism in the country have made the role of paladares increasingly problematic for both researchers and political officials in the region. However, this research demonstrates that more modest paladar owners attempt to mediate principles of socialism and capitalism by largely acquiescing to stringent government regulations. Alternatively, their wealthy counterparts engage openly in illicit business practices, often with near impunity from Cuban officials now indentured to the financial dividends traded for toleration. This research spans four neighbourhoods across Havana and draws on interview data gathered from nine paladar owners and ten weeks of participant observation. This thesis argues that paladares are not antithetical with ongoing social security and political stability for Cuban people and that tourism along with the second economy it helps to enhance are themselves detrimental to many of the gains championed by Cuba's revolution.

## **Preface**

This research has been approved by the Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia as well as by the UBC Behavioral Research Ethics Board (ethic certificate number H10-01507).

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Dedication</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Havana’s Barrios .....	3
The American Embargo & Cuba’s Second Economy.....	6
Tourism .....	10
Paladar Regulation .....	13
In Sum .....	17
<b>Methodology</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Methodological Challenges.....	21
Methodological Solutions .....	23
Structural Overview of Research .....	26
(Participant) Observation .....	28
Interviews .....	29
Ethnography .....	30
<b>Analysis</b> .....	<b>32</b>
Cuba’s Social Contradiction .....	36
The Exclusive Paladar .....	38
The Double Standard of Paladar Operation .....	40
The Modest Paladar.....	44
Employing the Unemployed .....	47
Entrepreneurialism vs. Americanism .....	50
In Sum .....	52
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>54</b>

Discussion .....	57
A Final Word.....	60
<b>References.....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>67</b>
Appendix A : Map of Habana Barrios .....	67
Appendix B : Letter of Initial Contact .....	68
Appendix C : Letter of Self-Introduction.....	72
Appendix D : Scripts for Oral Consent.....	76
Appendix E : Preliminary Interview Schedule.....	80

## **Glossary**

**Barrios:** a neighbourhood, community or district within an urban centre.

**Casa Particulares:** a guest house or bed and breakfast; often a rental room in a Cuban home with meals provided at an additional cost; also subject to government regulation.

**Jinitero:** a colloquial reference to a prostitute, or any Cuban who informally does business with tourists/foreigners.

**Malacon:** the Havana seawall and northern border; a popular place for Cubans to congregate in order to socialize, fish and bathe

**Paladar(es):** a privately owned and operated restaurant, usually operating out of, or adjacent to, a family home and subject to government regulation.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first and foremost like to thank the many Cubans to whom I owe the integrity of this work as well as its many revelations. To Chely and Geurro, thank you for welcoming me into your home and your family, and for helping me to better understand your country, your community and your lives. To Señora Aderis, thank you for nurturing my love of Spanish and for all your patience, persistence and humor during our lessons together. To Carolina, Valentina, Tina, Wendy, Nicolas, Nina and Miguel: thanks for all the amazing adventures in Havana and for your friendship and support while so far from home! To my friends and family back home in British Columbia, this project would not have been possible without your unconditional support and encouragement - I am so lucky to have such amazing people behind me!

To the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), thank you for providing the financial assistance necessary to complete this project and for giving young researchers the means to explore. Thank you to all my graduate professors who helped me nurture my SSHRC application and challenged me to always do better. To Amy and Dan: I could not have asked for better mentors throughout my university career! Dan, thank you for your confidence in me and for the countless opportunities and challenges you've presented me with over the years. Amy, thank you for coming along on this amazing journey and for being so open to leaning along the way. Your contribution to this project has been extraordinary; it's been a pleasure getting to know you and an honour working with you over the last two years.

## **Dedication**

This project is dedicated to my grandfather, William Stapleton, who believed so strongly in the humanity of socialism and the possibility of a more equal, just and peaceful world. He used his life to document the human experience and imparted in me a lifelong curiosity about far away people and places, as well as an ardent sense of responsibility towards them.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this project to the Cuban people; for inspiring community, camaraderie, and ultimately change in their country and the world.

## Introduction

The economic and social transformation of Cuba in the years following its socialist revolution is today romanticized by many in Western cultures as the stuff of political folklore and historical incredulity. Notorious for its defiant rejection of neoliberal ideology and capitalist laissez-faire economic policies, Cuba has long been the model of Latin American self-determination and anti-Americanism in the region. Demonized by many, yet celebrated perhaps by more, Cuba is today the epitome of radicalism and avant-garde communalism, yet the realities faced by those who lived it have perhaps never been quite as romantic or self-empowering as the mythology evokes. The reality of Cuba today is one of extraordinary contradiction, and for those who venture beyond the paradise of white sand beaches and chilled mojitos, little is found to endorse such superficial claims of a socialist utopia. In short, life for Cubans today is far more nuanced, convoluted, and contradictory than the popular imagery would suggest, and perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the dubious realm of private enterprise in the nation's capital city, Havana.

Despite Cuba's political and economic ties with other Communist countries including the former Soviet Union, Communist China and Vietnam, the country has maintained relative autonomy in the face of international pressures to liberalize, globalizing world trade and the dissolution of some of its closest former allies. Revolutionary leader Fidel Castro has endured eleven U.S. Presidents, countless assassination attempts, and an economic depression unbeknown to many in the developed world. This persistence has not come without challenges and consequences for Cuban people who themselves have made tremendous sacrifices in the name of socialist ideology. The decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union marks a period of unprecedented shortage and economic contraction across Cuba. The economic situation would be further compounded by renewed antagonisms with the United States and internal pressures liberalize the country's domestic markets. The result would produce significant legal and economic reforms across the island, and consequently, serious compromises would be made between policy and ideology.

The privatization of some sectors of Cuba's domestic economy was intended to be a temporary solution to the country's economic challenges and meant to be repealed over time. But as the country neared the end of the twentieth century, self-employment, particularly in tourist-related fields, had become the most viable form revenue for a significant portion of the Cuban population and showed no signs of waning, whatever the political implications. Despite a freeze on all new licensing of autonomous businesses, the forcible closure of some already in existence, and a political campaign to combat growing approbation of capitalistic values, market forces have become firmly embedded in Cuba's tourist economy. The government has weathered the economic storm, but now faces a new and internal threat to its hegemony.

The longstanding economic embargo adopted by the United States and an acute and growing dependence on foreign tourist revenues have helped to promote and support an ubiquitous second economy throughout Havana. Growing socioeconomic disparities among the city's population are largely facilitated by tourist dollars, resulting in unequal access to wealth across the population. Havana's barrios are marked by these growing divisions, as individuals struggle to capitalize on limited and largely unpredictable tourist revenues now vital in order to meet inflated costs. The Cuban government remains publicly contemptuous of informal economic activities, but remains perhaps unable to intervene without its own sustained and formidable solution to economic shortage. The result is an impending, yet muffled, transition to economic liberalization supported almost exclusively by foreign tourists and embraced by the free market ideology governing the city's many private businesses - paladares being chief among them.

The mounting tension between economic necessity and political ideology is perhaps the elementary social friction one feels once immersed in the ebbs and flows of life in Havana. Negotiations between individual prosperity and collective austerity are coloured by the distinct success of those Cubans whose livelihoods have been polished by compromise. With so many markers of social gradation throughout Havana, one is left to wonder where the dogma of egalitarianism, camaraderie, and social revolution exist beyond the political slogans and propaganda that paint the city's notorious streets? With Cubans and tourists no longer wholly partitioned, these competing world-views are magnified by their tangible differences. Perhaps

historically insulated by the revolutionary fever that captured the hearts and minds of so many Cubans disenchanted with social and economic polarities, today many Cubans are no longer under the same spell of optimism. Tourism remains a necessary evil; one that openly embraces an international market of luxury travel, while singularly providing the only real means of maintaining Cuba's political affinity with the past. Yet, it is the daily struggle for economic security that most critically informs the social milieu of Cuba's largest city. Cuban entrepreneurs, and particularly paladar owners, are uniquely positioned to face the contradictions now intrinsic in their society, and therefore provide a unique window into the domestic lives of those Cubans literally caught between competing, though perhaps not necessarily conflicting, aspirations for themselves, and ultimately their country.

This chapter will explore Havana's unique barrios in order to reveal the social and economic conditions that shape their communities. It will then address the implications of the persisting American embargo on Cuba and the resulting second economy that has developed in response to the pronounced economic shortage it continues to generate. Implications of the second economy will be contextualized within the purview of Cuba's economic liberalization and the opportunism it creates for many of Havana's entrepreneurs, and in particular paladar owners who, despite their common occupation, are distinctly manipulated by political motivations. Tourism uniquely drives Havana's economic system, particularly paladares, and will therefore be addressed in detail, followed by an overview of paladar origination, legalization and ultimately regulation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research question and a brief overview of findings.

### **Havana's Barrios**

Initially one is struck by the scale of disparity among the Cuban population and the ease with which rich and poor seem to occupy the same political space. In a country where egalitarianism has been the official dogma for over fifty years, BMWs parked in newly paved driveways behind tall fences is not the reality one expects to discover. The realization that such inequality is accepted, let alone tolerated, is even more perplexing. Nevertheless, it does not take long to

discern the lines by which the city seems to segregate itself. While these neighborhoods are the product of decades of municipal planning and political oversight, market forces have played a central role in their evolution. Today, Havana is decidedly separated into four distinct socio-demographic areas: Habana Vieja, Centro Habana, Vedado, and Miramar (see Appendix A). Each is profoundly affected by the influx of tourism each year, however tourism remains the principle factor in their continued segregation. Paladares were visited, and interviews conducted, in each of these four neighborhoods - Miramar and Vedado being home to the luxury paladar, while Centro Habana and Habana Vieja support more modest level businesses.

Habana Vieja is the most easterly part of the city and undoubtedly the most popular among tourists. Its unique architectural and historical legacy has earned it a UNESCO World Heritage Site designation along with monetary investments in renewal projects to preserve its aesthetic integrity. Cubans here live in small vertical apartment units overlooking endless souvenir shops, clothing boutiques, rum houses and the largest concentration of hotels and restaurants in the city. These Cubans easily coexist with foreigners of all nationalities, relying directly upon their patronage and charity, yet never short on services offered in exchange for a little extra. This neighborhood is the city's bread and butter, and businesses here are all but monopolized by state controlled companies, eager to capitalize on the neighborhoods popularity among tourists and expatriates alike.

Centro Habana sits sandwiched between Habana Vieja to the east and the commercial district of Vedado to the west. "This is where the Cubans live," is how one local described it to me. The neighborhood is crowded, loud and smelly with curbside domino matches, impromptu street soccer and competing boom boxes. State-run food provisions are supplemented by crowded vegetable markets, bakeries, and butchers all charging in local currency, while refurbished electronics, car parts and even old mattresses are bought and sold informally in a complex and extended network of suppliers. Few tourists frequent this neighborhood, so those who do are quick to draw attention and shopkeepers notoriously take advantage of this opportunity to charge a little extra. This is where the informal economy thrives, and a large percentage of Cubans rely on this network to obtain any number of commodities. Life is hard here, yet decades of

economic hardship have forged a resilient and integrated community where, next to tourists, networks are perhaps a Cuban's most valuable resource.

Vedado is arguably the newest barrio of Havana. A late building boom west of the center supplied the city with some of its highest buildings, most esteemed hotels and the largest ice-cream emporium in the world! The nearby university draws visitors from around the world, while numerous cinemas host international film festivals and the infamous Hotel Nacional welcomes world leaders and celebrities to its grounds. This is the domain of the nouveau riche. Any semblance of a burgeoning middle-class is to be found here with business towers occupied by foreign companies, state bureaus, and political henchmen. This is the financial heart of the city and its growing popularity among tourists only adds to its shimmering charm. The highest concentration of paladares is to be found here, with many ranking among Havana's best.

Lastly, on the western-most side of the city, considered suburbia by some, is the diplomatic and political epicenter of Havana; Miramar. Expats abound, embassies are ubiquitous and an altogether different atmosphere leaves few similarities between this neighborhood and the rest of the capital. Large colonial mansions line manicured streets and estate-like hotels provide tennis courts, swimming pools and luxury car rentals. The city's largest supermarket, which rivals the big-box stores of North America, is located here and at night, the Tropicana nightclub captivates with tuxedoed waiters, elaborate performances and all the glitz and glamour of a Hollywood production. This is a neighborhood removed, and sometimes begrudgingly so, by Cubans frustrated by the glaring disparities between themselves and those Cubans fortunate enough to reside amidst such opulence. Miramar is perhaps Havana's most conspicuous contradiction. Here, there is little to betray the hardships of Cuban life and, despite the official political line of national austerity, most Westerners would feel quite at home among the air-conditioned buses, buffet breakfasts and poolside lounge chairs.

Havana's diverse barrios are perhaps the most telling component of the city's enduring conflict between socialist homogeneity and capitalist inequality. While some Cubans I spoke with blame the radiating effects of tourism, especially on Cuba's youth, for the dramatic surge in

consumerist ideology, others point to outdated government policies and a system that has fundamentally failed to improve the quality of life for Cuban people. In short, there is a pervasive sense of unease and frustration across and between these neighborhoods, and while their grievances range broadly, they are united by a shifting narrative about the realities of their country, their livelihoods and ultimately, their uncertain futures. Though paladares operate in each of these neighbourhoods, they too are shaped by the unique social, economic, and political landscapes that surround them.

### **The American Embargo & Cuba's Second Economy**

For nearly five decades Cuba has been subject to a sustained economic embargo levied towards its government by its neighbour the United States. Originally devised in 1958 as an arms embargo in response to popular Cuban uprisings and the guerilla warfare movement that would eventually spawn the Cuban Revolution, between February and March 1962 former President John F. Kennedy would expand its scope to include a ban on trade. The *Trading with the Enemy Act* was sanctioned as a result of warming Soviet-Cuban political relations and persisting anti-Communist sentiments across North America. Then in 1963, in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the embargo was again broadened to include a travel-ban for American citizens to the island, further isolating Cuba economically. The travel ban was briefly lifted under former U.S. President Jimmy Carter between 1977 and 1982 and thousands of American tourists (and American dollars) flooded the country (Leogrande 1997; Kuntz 1994). Reinstated in 1982 under Republican President Ronald Reagan, the travel ban remains in effect today, however amendments now only make American 'economic transactions' in Cuba illegal, effectively making any travel to the island impossible.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The 1963 embargo was again reinforced in 1992 under newly elected Democratic President Bill Clinton when the *Cuban Democracy Act* was signed into law. The Act, along with its *Helms-Burton* counterpart, prevents foreign companies doing business in Cuba to also do business in the United States. Passed largely in response to renewed American-Cuban tensions brought on by the attack of two unarmed U.S. airplanes that killed three American citizens, the law was widely unpopular with European and Canadian governments who continue to engage in trade with Cuba. For example, foreign ships docking in any Cuban port are forbidden to enter marine ports in the U.S. for a period of six months, and litigation proceedings can be pursued against company management. Foreign executives can even be refused entrance to the United States and sanctions levied against their companies (LeoGrande 1997).

American dollars are now banned throughout the island, with fees for exchange often exceeding 20% in all national banks and currency exchanges. The Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC) acts as the primary tourist currency in the country, its exchange rate based directly on the current value of the USD. The National Peso or *Moneda Nacional* (MN) is the country's second currency, reserved exclusively for use by Cubans and is valued at twenty-five times less than that of the CUC (Ritter 2006; 2005). Basic items such as produce, bread, and public transport are priced exclusively in MN while 'luxury' items such as cosmetics and cellphones are available to Cubans only in CUC. In fact most transactions in Havana occur almost exclusively in CUC's as tourists continue to saturate the domestic market with the higher valued currency. As a result, the cost of many things is simply out of reach for average Cubans, while tourists often encounter prices comparable to their home countries.

The effects of sustained economic and political isolation have not been lost on the average Cuban in Havana. The prevalence of shortage, throughout the island, of basic products including many electronic equipment, car parts and medical supplies, is a constant source of frustration for many Cubans (and tourists) who struggle to procure items largely taken for granted in the surrounding regions. Food subsidies, redistributive fiscal practices and centralized economic planning mean domestic products are often spread thinly across the population and are subject to extreme fluctuations in availability. Even when such items do become available their high demand means prices are often dramatically inflated, leaving them out of reach to all but the most wealthy. Items brought to Cuba from abroad by tourists or family members are regularly sold informally in what has become known as Cuba's 'second' economy (Ritter 2006; 2005; Pérez-López 1995).

A large and ingrained second economy has developed to fill the domestic void left by both the embargo and Cuban production deficiencies. Though the sale and consumption of items procured outside of government-sanctioned business is technically illegal, Cuba's secondary (and largely free-market) economy should be understood primarily in terms of its ideological, rather than its legal, implications. Pérez-López (1995) has argued that opposed to the informal nature of many 'black market' economic activities, Cuba's 'second economy' is distinct because

it exists within a context of collectivity, redistribution, and ostensibly egalitarianism as opposed to the individuality of the free market. Cuba's second economy should therefore be understood as capturing, "all forms of deviations from the model of a socialist command economy," as opposed to more prevalent 'black' or 'informal' markets that tend to develop in underdeveloped capitalistic economies (Pérez-López 1995 13). Entrepreneurial activities are therefore undertaken within a social and political context where societal or collective gains are preferred over singularly private ones. Cuba's second economy is, in short, defined largely by the absence of political control and the sharp contrast it creates to the centralized economic planning of the official, or 'first,' economy.

This phenomenon is, however, not unique to Cuba and can be found in research and literature concerning many former Eastern European countries. For example, Rona-Tos (1997) presents a picture of twentieth century Hungary wherein informal economic activities eventually gave way to privatization under the weight of immense post-war economic shortage. Hungary's second economy, much like that of Cuba, fed the material needs of a growing petty bourgeois whose actions, Rona-Tos argues, eroded any ideological support individuals may have had to the political system overall. Verdery (1996) uses the case of Romania to argue that the consumeristic drive behind the proliferation of black markets within the socialist context is the product of collective disenchantment with government. She points out that within capitalist systems desires are concrete and specific, to which specific, if ever-changing, goods are made available. Socialism, by contrast she argues, nurtures desire by deprivation. Black-markets are thus an inevitable consequence of socialist systems that attempt to exist in a largely capitalist world, whereby alienated consumers express their dissatisfaction for government through the material goods they buy.

Day-to-day life in Havana is largely informed by the prevalence of this second economy which manifests itself in routine and unexceptional decisions like what to make for dinner or how to get from home to work and back. The food ration system is often supplemented by the second economy, whereby individuals will anticipate shortage and try to compensate by buying items in advance at lower prices and selling stored items when they become scarce and therefore more

profitable (Ritter 2006; 2005). Similarly the cost of private transportation is largely dictated by the number of informal drivers who will provide their service and vehicle to you. For example, I learned that I would always pay more for transport the later I stayed out at night when the availability of alternatives was at its lowest.

I would often be asked by Cuban friends and acquaintances to leave behind or send items that were hard to procure in Havana. I learned that basic personal items such as women's bras, children's socks, and hair and nail accessories were highly coveted by young Cuban women eager to obtain what were considered lavish, but largely unavailable items. Even the extra hair elastics and partially used bathroom products I offered to leave with my housekeeper were accepted with great excitement and promise of financial returns. My nearly full bottle of nail-polish remover fetched a Cuban friend nearly 5CUC (almost \$8CND) from a neighbour's twenty-something year old niece. Considering the average salary of a Cuban professional equates to between 15CUC-20CUC per month, the high values attributed to these consumer products are shocking (Ritter 2006; 2005; Pérez-López 1995; Henken 2008; 2000). In part, these heightened costs are the product of the second economy, which in some instances allows even a young unemployed twenty-something-year-old woman to obtain one of these much coveted products at such an inflated price.

The prevalence of these unregulated, and subsequently illegal, economic transactions begs the question of how and why the Cuban state has not cracked down on second economy activities? Despite the introduction of six thousand new police officers in Havana between 1997 and 1999 many illegal activities continue to occur openly on Havana's streets (Trumbell 2000). I, along with other Cuban researchers, found that indeed many Cubans consider their government to turn a blind eye to these activities. With such widespread unemployment and commodity shortages the government has little choice but to tolerate any activity that relieves its own political and economic burden. As poignantly observed by a Cuban man named Joaquin, "The government is concerned about its image [...] Of course, it's not a matter of them [Cubans participating in the second economy] being delinquents, but based on the fact that there is not another way for them to make money. They don't choose to be illegal" (Henken 2000 330).

By choosing to largely ignore (and therefore deregulate) facets of the second economy, the Cuban government may benefit in the short term by allowing informal transactions to fill voids left by a thinly stretched national budget and a persisting embargo. In the long term however, scholars argue that Cuba may well look to its former Eastern European allies and take stock of the “significant threat to top-down control of both the economy and polity” the second economy may pose (Henken 2000 328). Its growing economic importance can be seen in the Cuban government’s attempt to integrate prevalent activities into the official, and legal, economy as was the case with the sanctioning of paladares in the early 1990’s. And with many more government workers slated to be let go in the coming year, it is likely that the second economy may begin to look more and more like the first.

## **Tourism**

Once known as ‘the brothel of the Caribbean,’ Cuba has had a long and complex relationship with foreign visitors and the tourist industry that has developed to support them. Like many former colonies in the region, tourism has been both a blessing and a burden for Cuban people; a vestige deeply rooted in collective memories of exploitation and subjugation, but profoundly embedded in a country with limited economic alternatives. Tourism to the island was banned for a time under the revolutionary government which chastised the industry for many societal ills including prostitution and gambling (Jackiewicz & Boslter 2003). Indeed, Castro’s political success, both during and after the revolution, has largely been attributed to his anti-imperialist and nationalistic appeal among Cubans disenchanted with foreign exploitation and global disparities in wealth (LeoGrande 1997). Ironically, however, the tourist industry in Cuba today resembles much of its pre-revolutionary opulence with many of the same social disparities and exploits so reminiscent of its former years.

Nearly two million tourists now visit the island each year, leaving behind upwards of \$2 billion USD annually in Cuba’s state-owned resorts, restaurants, golf courses and even souvenir stands (US State Department 2011). Tourist-related facilities such as these are estimated to employ in

the neighbourhood of 80,000 Cuban workers, approximately 20,000 of whom hold university degrees, many in the travel and tourism field (Cuban Ministry of Tourism 2008). The official private sector is also dominated by tourist-friendly services, including room rentals (*casa particulares*), private restaurants (*paladares*) and bicycle-taxis, together estimated to provide just over 160,000 licensed jobs at the end of 1998 (Jatar-Hausmann 1999). As previously noted however, the unofficial revenues generated in by tourists in the second economy are likely far more significant than the licensed sector suggests, with goods and services provided “for hire” in nearly any circumstance.

Over the past decade, the tourist industry has become one of the most significant factors governing growing socioeconomic divisions across Cuban society, and it remains particularly palpable in popular tourist centers such as Havana. In 1995 the estimated median monthly income for an unofficial taxi driver in Havana was \$125 USD, \$348 USD for a female prostitute, and \$640 USD for a licensed paladar owner, compared to monthly state-earnings of just \$12 USD (Leogrande & Thomas 2002 532). With doctors, military personnel and university professors all earning significantly less than Cubans working in tourist-related fields, the Cuban government has resorted to public condemnation of unofficial tourist occupations and the capitalistic pursuits of licensed self-employed individuals. Fidel Castro himself has publicly stated, “It’s good the competence this has brought. It’s good that these markets and self-employment have taught people a little bit of capitalism...But we have to think of how to do things correctly...Some [of these self-employed] earn more in a day than our honored teachers earn in a month” (Henken 2000 320). In response to these pronounced distinctions in personal income, the Cuban government has taken measures to reduce the contact between tourists and Cubans in highly populated tourist areas. Varadero and Cayco Coco are both off limits to Cuban visitors, as are some bars and restaurants throughout Havana (Trumbell 2000).

This renewed emphasis on segregation has, in part, reinvigorated not only class distinctions between wealthy tourists and impoverished Cubans, but also underlying racial tensions long present in Cuban society. Researchers note that prior to the Cuban Revolution, black and mixed-race Cubans were among the most economically deprived populations, occupying low-status

service and hard-labour positions (De la Fuente 1995; Zeitlin 1966). The success of the revolution was made possible, in part, by widespread support among non-white Cubans who hostilely resented their exploitation by largely Caucasian-American tourists and white Cubans (De la Fuente 1995). In fact, the largest emigrant population to the United States in the years following the revolution were themselves Caucasian, a phenomenon that underscores widely unequal access to remittance dollars among Cuban families today, further compounding distinctions of socioeconomic class (Blue 2004). My own Caucasian heritage was regularly highlighted when in the company of other, non-white, tourists who would often be asked to show identification proving they were not, in fact, Cuban. In one instance a Mexican-American friend, and fellow tourist, was initially barred from entering an up-scale paladar until it was made clear he was, in fact, not Cuban. Though the owner was sincerely apologetic, the experience highlights the neocolonial implications of luxury tourism in Cuba as well as the persisting racialization of wealth across the population.

Increasingly Cubans are entering tourist industry professions (both officially and unofficially) in order to capitalize on the unparalleled profits made possible by foreign visitors. With little incentive for Cuban youth to pursue professional employment in state-monopolized sectors such as law or medicine, university attendance has sharply declined, particularly among Cuban women (Toro-Morn, Roschelle & Facio 2002). It is little wonder that increasingly Cuban women find informal employment in the tourist industry, notably prostitution and escort services, a more lucrative enterprise than the minimal state options available to them, or even the unpaid positions of housewife and mother. Prostitution (or *jiniteros*) was once all but eradicated in the ensuing years of the Cuban revolution (Murray 1979), however today it has largely reemerged as a viable source of income for many Cuban women. Fernandes explains that, "Given the need to market Cuba to a global clientele to attract tourism and investment, images of black and mulatta women as erotic, sexualized, and available have become more common" (Fernandes 2005 438). Just one consequence of a country indentured to the industry of luxury tourism, Cuban women have largely shouldered much of the social burden. Dwyer (2011) argues that increasing market liberalization across Cuba threatens gender equality by devaluing domestic work and eroding social security. By the year 2000 only 30% of Cuban women were represented in the national

workforce, a more than 10% drop in just a short decade (Jennissen & Lundy 2001). This drop would suggest that as Cuban women move out of the shrinking state-employment sector, they must find alternatives in the second, and largely precarious, economy.

As an American tourist and business destination in the early 20th century, Cuba suffered from extreme social and economic stratification, political corruption and cultural exploitation. The remarkable success of the 1959 revolution was realized largely because it directly challenged the social and economic disparities ubiquitous at the time. Great strides were made in eliminating many of the societal ills brought on by an over-reliance on foreign tourism, however with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the severe economic challenges the island continues to face, tourism has largely reemerged as the dominant economic guarantor for the country. However, without American access to the country, it may be difficult to reach the 10 million tourists predicted (and projected) by the government for 2010 (Trumbell 2000).<sup>2</sup> Not only has tourism reinvigorated many socioeconomic divisions and racial tensions across Cuban society, the rising number of self-employed Cubans (both officially and clandestinely) suggests free market ideology and endorsement is growing, an irony even the Cuban state appears unable to remedy.

### **Paladar Regulation**

With the sudden collapse of Cuba's chief economic ally, the Soviet Union, in 1989 and its government's ongoing condemnation by American leaders, Cuba entered the last decade of the twentieth century with few allies and even fewer economic options. Without the \$5 billion USD a year in Soviet subsidies, the Cuban government could no longer afford to employ its 4.4 million workers and, as a result, 300,000 Cubans were left unemployed (Trumbell 2000 309). In order to mitigate growing unrest among the unemployed population, the Cuban government begrudgingly introduced legislation in early 1993 allowing for the liberalization of some sectors

---

<sup>2</sup> The latest tourist data comes from 2009 when 2.42 million tourists are estimated to have visited the island. However, tourist revues fell by 11% in the same year largely due to the reduced time spent by tourists, on average, in the country (US State Department 2011). Tourism numbers have remained relatively stable at around 2 million since 2004 though many Cubans I spoke with suggested 2009 was a difficult year due to fewer tourists visiting Havana. Many blamed "the American economic crisis" for this trend.

of its domestic economy, particularly in tourist-related industries. 117 activities became sanctioned for self-employment, including facets of the food and beverage industry, though the laws governing these new establishments remained vague. The initial two years of operations were characterized by lenience and interpretation and lacked any taxation system through which the government could garner funds (Henken 2008). In short, the Cuban state, strained by economic shortage, came to rely directly on a small, but not insignificant, private sector to help prop up government services, providing goods and revenues the Cuban state could not. Paladares quickly became a leading player in the country's gradual move towards liberalization.

The word *paladar*, meaning 'palate' in Portuguese, was adopted by Cuban fans of the popular Brazilian television series *Vale Tudo* which aired in Cuba in the early 1990's. The show featured a local restaurant chain called *Paladar* which quickly gained traction among Cuba's newfound food and beverage entrepreneurs. Though small restaurants had been operating in Havana clandestinely for years, thousands of Cubans flocked to obtain operating permits and quickly transformed the food industry in Havana largely overnight. By 1996, 209,606 self-employment licenses had been issued, and despite some contention among Cuban officials that paladar licenses should be revoked due to their, "promotion of competition, dependence on pilfered supplies, and unlawful contracting of employees," 4,000 paladares are estimated to have been in operation by the end of the decade (Henken 2008 170).

In light of the widely recognized fiscal success of many paladares, the Cuban government moved to introduce Cuba's first personal income tax legislation in almost 40 years (Jatar-Hausmann 1999; Henken 2008). Monthly quotas were established for paladares charging in both CUC and MN, the former initially required to pay 400CUC per month while the latter paid just 500MN. However with the industry's growing success, in 1996 the government announced an increase in monthly tax rates for many occupations, including doubling MN paladar rates to 1000MN and raising CUC operations to 600CUC. Additionally, all paladar employees (usually family members) were henceforth required to obtain their own self-employment permit and also pay a monthly personal income tax equal to 20% of the taxes paid by the paladar itself. For many paladares, this additional tax is absorbed by the paladar owner, further increasing monthly taxes

to upwards of 1400MN or 840CUC (Henken 2008). In short, the financial return of licensed paladares for the Cuban state more than doubled within their first three years of operation, putting immense pressure on owners to consistently meet inflated tax demands.

In addition to tax increases, the Cuban state also introduced legal regulations to govern the daily operation of these new businesses. Severe limitations were placed on the size and scope of paladares in a bid to limit competition between them. A seating capacity of just twelve chairs, prohibitions on providing live entertainment, displaying a television, or maintaining a bar area were coupled with directives limiting each household to a single self-employment license and making it illegal to purchase any foodstuffs or supplies outside state-run stores charging in the CUC currency. Serving beef and shellfish were also made illegal and university graduates were banned from obtaining operating permits (Henken 2008; 2000; Jackiewicz & Boslter 2003; Trumbell 2000).

Fiscal penalties were likewise introduced in order to insure widespread compliance among self-employed Cubans. For minor infractions, such as being unable to provide an official receipt for any business-related item, fines of 500 to 1500 MN or CUC (depending on the operating currency of the business) could be imposed. For more severe violations, including seating increases, a two-year suspension of one's business license could also be imposed with only limited assurance that it would be eventually reinstated. Finally, for the most acute violations, business licenses could now be revoked and all business inventory seized (Henken 2008). These measures are widely known among paladar owners across Havana and many know of others who have been affected directly by any number of these legal penalties. Inspectors are often reported to be scrupulous when accounting for inventory and in some cases even demand on-the-spot bribes for their endorsement of dubious business practices. There is indeed a level of fear mongering that promotes self-regulation among paladar owners and their network of employees, suppliers, and customers.

Paladar owners who are caught breaking these regulations, and who are closed down as a result, are publicly labeled criminals or cheats, while those who remain in operation are tempered by

fear of reprisals. Henken argues that, “What could be seen as a structural imbalance of flaws in the economic system, is instead interpreted for the public by the government-controlled media as the result of a few criminal, or capitalist ‘bourgeois’ elements trying to cheat an otherwise smooth, egalitarian socioeconomic system” (Henken 2000 331). In short, paladar owners who break regulations are publicly villainized as traitors to the socialist system and are made examples of in order to promote conformity with the government’s political agenda. Thus, licensing requirements and taxes on paladar owners are not necessarily redistributive, and nor are they successful in alleviating growing inequalities throughout the country. Instead, stringent regulations and costly taxation policies are designed to make paladar operation beyond the financial reach of many, and as a result, it all but impossible to accumulate private wealth (Henken 2000).

However, it is important to note that paladares vary considerably in legal status, appearance and profitability and that generalizations about the sector as a whole are problematic (Jackiewicz & Boslter 2003). Indeed, this research will demonstrate that within Havana alone, a considerable amount of variation exists, and furthermore, that not all paladar owners are held to the same legal standards of operations. Though public condemnation of ‘bourgeois’ ideology and practice are commonplace, there is likewise a quiet recognition that self-employment is inevitable for Cubans with shrinking opportunities in state professions, a booming tourist industry and a second economy that already fills much of the economic voids of the country. In short, paladares are a fundamental element of Cuba’s economic and social landscape today, despite regulations that seek to guarantee their permanent peripherality.

Fundamentally, this research seeks to address the foundations of socioeconomic stratification in Havana, with particular emphasis on how paladar owners are uniquely impacted by political and economic agendas that, on the surface, appear to mitigate their financial success. In fact, this research will show that while the majority of paladares in Havana have attained only marginal success, largely due to high rates of taxation and stringent operating regulations, other paladares have burgeoned well beyond the imagination of the average Cuban, and in often openly defiant ways. An in-depth discussion of research methods will be followed by a discussion of the

pronounced double standard by which paladares are governed, as well as the potential explanations for, and implications of, government duplicity. Paladar owners and staff will be invoked to help illustrate both the diversity and continuity of this industry, as well as to provide important personal context for individual experiences. This research will ultimately address the paradox of paladar operation in Havana today, as well as provide insight into the divided support for Cuba's communist future. Finally, recommendations will be made for future work in the region.

## **In Sum**

Post-socialist scholar Karel Muller argues that in order to understand the process of social change, or the social problems that arise out of institutional change, one must consider, "the divergence between objective changes and subjective expectations" (Muller 2002 299). Egalitarianism is perhaps an unlikely social aim in the face of mounting dollarization, declining university enrollments and the meritocracy that underwrites many entrepreneurial ventures in Cuba (Roberg & Kuttruff 2007). However, economic equality continues to be the objective of the Communist state, despite the mounting social costs of its enforcement. Many in Cuba do not share the historical nostalgia employed by official ideology and instead welcome opportunities to enhance their material lives through private ventures. While the cost of open political dissent remains too high for many, Cubans increasingly recognize the growing contradictions between objective changes and their own individual expectations.

Paladares have long been in operation throughout Havana, however their sanctioning under Cuban law has been only a recent phenomenon, and one that remains largely ad hoc and experimental. Indeed, there is little consistency in regulation, high levels of corruption and bribery, as well as skewed public representations of their business practices. Tourism continues to drive the success of paladares throughout Havana and the second economy makes possible their continued operation and profitability through informal networks of suppliers and street-level workers. In short, the informality of Cuba's tourist economy is largely the product of deepening state deficiencies in addressing growing socioeconomic divisions among its

population, brought on by the unequal access to tourist revenues and the corrupt institutions of its public sector. Despite tightening regulation on private industry, many Cubans continue to find their livelihoods to be intimately connected to secondary economic endeavors or the stigmatized, yet legitimate, self-employed sector that the Cuban state so begrudgingly relies upon.

## **Methodology**

I arrived in Havana on September 26, 2010 with the objective to spend a full three months living and working in Cuba's capital. Having never before travelled to Cuba, I arrived with only excitement and expectations, the product of months of research, but altogether unsure of my surroundings. For the first two weeks I would find myself living in a large, international hotel in the Western suburb of Miramar where my language school provided accommodation. By far the wealthiest neighbourhood in Havana, my introduction to the city proved to be largely unrepresentative, yet this experience would become central to my research findings and fundamentally shape the direction of my thesis.

From my four-star hotel room in Miramar, I subsequently moved further east and into the largely black and lower class district of Centro Habana. Occupying a small room in a four-story apartment complex, I would spend the remaining months exploring the surrounding city, conducting interviews with paladar owners and staff, observing daily operations, and immersing myself in the ebbs and flows of the community. Centro Habana would prove to be an ideal base from which to conduct research, from there I could easily access Vedado to the west and Habana Vieja to the east, allowing for a greater sample of paladares, while remaining largely isolated from the epicenters of Havana's tourist industry.

My initial visit to a paladar occurred largely by accident. I overheard a conversation in the lobby of my Miramar hotel that led me to a small garden paladar, just blocks away, that I would return to many times for food and observations. My first interview was likewise serendipitous, when my Spanish language instructor offered to introduce me to a friend who ran a paladar nearby our school, also in Miramar. My initial two weeks in Miramar would prove to be instrumental in my understanding of socioeconomic stratification across the city, and the paladares I visited, and people I spoke with, likewise created an extraordinary first impression. In short, the opulence of tourist-life in Miramar would come to set an economic standard by which all other experiences in Havana would come to be measured.

Relocating to Centro Habana would prove to be a more difficult adjustment, and there, I struggled to integrate with community life. I had precious few contacts on which to rely for introductions, so my guidebooks became, at least initially, my primary source of paladar listings. Although I perhaps never gained complete immersion while in Centro Habana, this neighborhood, and its surrounding barrios, would come to inform and contrast my experiences in Miramar. After two and a half months, I had visited seventeen paladares spanning four Havana neighborhoods, completed nine interviews with paladar owners and employees, and spent countless hours observing the ins and outs of paladar and city life across an astonishing range of socioeconomic conditions.

I would eventually decide to cut my stay short by two weeks as my funding was quickly running out due to the largely unanticipated cost of frequenting these establishments. As this chapter will show, money continues to be the driving force behind much of the country's entrepreneurial spirit, with price tags that often surpass North American standards - a significant challenge to a study that requires substantial investments in these burgeoning businesses. My early departure was further affected by a pronounced interest on behalf of the Cuban state into my research, an important insight into the larger political landscape, but unsettling for a researcher who relies so heavily on integration and trust. Upon my departure my belongings were searched and some of my notes confiscated, and I was subject to accusations of journalism and espionage by Jose Marti International Airport immigration officials.

In sum, this project is largely a work of exploration and opportunism. I do not pretend to be systematic, representative, or fully objective in my pursuits, however I wholeheartedly defend the research presented here as fundamentally inductive, pragmatic, and experimental.<sup>3</sup> Cuba is a country ripe with entrepreneurial fever and social change and navigating this foreign landscape meant venturing well beyond the walls of the paladares included here. There were precious few

---

<sup>3</sup> Mario Small (2008) argues that these should not, in fact, be the goals of qualitative research and furthermore, that: "The strengths of qualitative work come from understanding *how* and *why*, not understanding *how many*, and improving this work should mean improving the reliability of its answers to how and why questions" (Small 2008 8). This research has been undertaken in this spirit and strives to promote the value of ethnographic research methods.

moments of clarity, and as each day seemed to challenge the lessons of the last, I was often frustrated by the seeming disorder around me. In short, this research reflects the many nuances of my time in Havana, as well as the many Cubans who made that time intelligible; it is because of them that this work has been made possible.

### **Methodological Challenges**

Contemporary Cuba does present some unique challenges to a qualitative researcher in the social sciences as laid out in detail below. However, under the framework and guidance of other experienced, qualitative Cuba-researchers (Henken 2008; 2000; Jackiewicz & Boslter 2003; Peters and Scarpaci 1998; Jatar-Haus-mann & Julia 1999), I embraced an ad hoc approach to participant recruitment and largely encouraged interview respondents to dominate discussions. Despite the psychological and emotional turmoil endured throughout the research period, I was not alone in navigating Cuba's foreign landscape. My immediate need upon arriving in Havana was to relearn many of the intricacies of the Spanish language. The Cuban dialect is laden with cultural nuances that often escaped me and I will unequivocally state that much of my initial data collection was impeded by this reality as I initially struggled to find my voice. That said however, I am confident that all data referenced throughout this paper is accurate to the absolute best of my abilities.

As previously noted, and to be revisited elsewhere, Cuba remains a relatively impoverished country wherein tourism provides the backbone of the national economy. In 2009, 2.4 million tourists visited the island, generating 2.1 billion dollars in revenue, by far the principle source of wealth in the country (U.S. State Department 2011). For Cubans living and working in the nation's capital, foreigners are a daily part of life largely due to the booming tourist trade in Havana's Old City - an official UNESCO World Heritage site since 1982 (UNESCO 2011). It is not uncommon to be approached by Cubans for money and even seemingly polite invitations often result in expectations of financial remuneration. Many foreigners describe themselves as "walking dollar signs," a difficult gap to bridge even over an extended period of time.

Perhaps most challenging to overcome is the ubiquitous nature of the Cuban Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*, PCC) and the very real consequences associated with open dissent. The product of over fifty years of varying degrees of ‘openness’ permitted by the PCC, many Cubans remain distrustful of outsiders and are subsequently guarded about sharing personal information such as political views or economic activities (Henken 2008; 2000). A large police force is omnipresent throughout Havana, a constant reminder of the need for discretion when engaging in public conversations (Jackiewicz & Boslter 2003). On at least two occasions during my stay, Cuban individuals were questioned by police about the nature of a casual discussion we were having on a public street - in one case I was simply asking for directions. The police never directed any questioning towards me and instead attempted to remove the individuals from the situation by directing them to move on. I include these examples here to illustrate the scope and magnitude of this reality in Cubans’ lives and to better explicate the challenges involved in conducting qualitative research in the region.

Lastly, and in many ways related to political control, are the challenges involved in protecting information in Cuba. Guaranteeing anonymity to research subjects yields considerable complications in light of the PCC’s explicit interest public opinion and activities (Jackiewicz & Boslter 2003). As previously noted, a high level of state surveillance exists throughout the country and many report the ‘tattling’ of friends and of financial incentives to root out ‘counter-revolutionary’ activities. Many individuals believed initially that I worked for the Cuban authorities (or in one case the American government); a false assumption that at times became difficult to refute. The social sciences generally, and qualitative field research specifically, are not commonly practiced in Cuba, leaving many individuals to mistake my project as a work of journalism, a profession I later learned was perceived as being stigmatized among a portion of the population due to the frequent criticism of Cuba’s political system in many foreign publications.

In short, there were many challenges, both anticipated and unforeseen, awaiting my arrival in Cuba, some which would prove to be more easily overcome than others. I have largely taken comfort in the advice of prominent Cuba-scholar Ted Henken (2000) when he writes: “It goes

without saying that doing sociological research in today's Cuba poses special challenges for any researcher, native or foreign. Recognizing these very real stumbling blocks, however, does not mean that meaningful sociological research is impossible in Cuba" (Henken 2000 326). It is my hope that, despite these challenges, this research reflects the thoughtful and committed dedication with which it was undertaken.

### **Methodological Solutions**

Upon arriving in Havana in late September of 2010, I immediately enrolled in a two-week intensive Spanish immersion school run by the German company Spracafe. The school is staffed exclusively by Cuban teachers who are employed by the Cuban Ministry of Education to provide Spanish-as-a-second-language training to foreigners. I completed sixty hours of in-class study with a special focus on Cuban vernacular and culture. This training was followed by two-hour, weekly, private classes with the same instructor for the subsequent four weeks.

The expectation of financial remuneration remained difficult throughout the research period, whether it be for something as basic as offering directions, or as involved as completing an interview. Though cash incentives to participate in interviews were never offered, I was aware that repeat patronage of paladares would inevitably become a form of economic remittance. Attempts to mediate this potential bias were addressed by (a) only requesting interviews after having frequented the paladar at least one time prior to a formal introduction, (b) limiting spending to no more than 10CUC per visit when possible, and (c) consuming in the same paladar a maximum of three times per week. While these solutions may be imperfect, these steps formed the best possible solution to an extremely complex and sensitive issue; one not only pertinent to data collection and quality (ensuring answers were not biased by remuneration and that paladares benefitted as equally as possible from my patronage), but also one embedded in larger processes of economic exploitation and neocolonialism.

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of most ethnographically driven research is the ability to integrate oneself fully into another culture and community. Besides the socioeconomic barriers

of conducting qualitative work in an impoverished country, issues of state scrutiny and personal, as well as participant, risk are compounded by the pervasiveness of black market commodities and informal employment. I was frequently privy to, and at times complicit in, illegal activities both within paladar spaces and the community beyond. That unregulated economic activities are technically illegal does not dismay their prevalence, which in turn results in the informal submission of their regulation. Yet blurred lines between legitimacy and criminality were a constant source of anxiety, and were frequently unearthed in heat-of-the-moment questions of ethics, consequence, and ultimately credibility. Possessing incriminating information about interviewees, routinely being scrutinized about my intentions, and becoming increasingly aware of cloak-and-dagger strategies employed by the Cuban state, all contributed to a ubiquitous “culture of fear” explicated by other social scientists working under similar conditions of social uncertainty and political autocracy (Yang 1994; Yeh 2006). When these concerns were validated upon departure from the country, I was, and continue to be, profoundly disturbed by actions of the state, as well as fearful for the well being of those who confided in me.<sup>4</sup>

My ability to create and utilize local social networks was fundamental to the success of this research, as well as the overall quality and candidness of the completed interviews. Gaining access to such networks often involved employing an intermediary, someone who could not only provide introductions, but also vouch for the legitimacy of my intentions. *Jinitaros* (street-level intermediaries paid on commission to drum-up business or transport illegal supplies for select paladares) were used whenever possible and provided access to more obscure businesses. Those with established relationships to paladar management also provided a level of legitimacy to my endeavors - often premised on my own powers of persuasion and, at times, generous financial compensations. In other words, *jinitaros* often possessed knowledge of, and access to, the most invisible of paladares, and for the right price, provided invaluable access by way of introductions. As previously noted, introductions made via my Spanish instructor led to my first

---

<sup>4</sup> Having learned from other Cuba-scholars that harassment on the part of Cuban Immigration was a real possibility, I took precautionary measures to mitigate any potential harm to either myself or those Cubans involved in my research. Data encryption served as a primary line of defense, while written notes remained vague and nonspecific. I have since been in contact with two individuals who report having experienced no legal or extralegal repercussions in relation to this research. As no identifying information was included in field-notes, it is my conviction that no individuals should be negatively implicated by any information authorities seized upon my departure.

interview with a paladar owner, another important endorsement of my intentions and competence to an otherwise complete stranger. Though I am certain paladar owners and staff remained somewhat guarded despite these social cushions, interviews prompted without these mechanisms were markedly more defensive, insular, and superficial.

Clarity of my intentions and validation of my credentials were essential in gaining the trust of many research participants. As qualitative social science research is largely unheard of in Cuba (except perhaps among Cuban academics) requests for interviews were almost always initially understood as journalistic or, in a small number of cases, political. As a result, each request to conduct interviews or observations was accompanied by a Letter of Initial Contact as well as a Letter of Self Introduction outlining in detail the objectives of the project, my affiliation with the University of British Columbia and, most importantly, a guarantee that no identifying information about the paladar or its employees would be recorded (see Appendix B & C). Every effort was made to write only a minimal amount during the interview itself, as I quickly noted a marked disruption in the quality and openness of the conversation whenever pencil was put to paper. This was hardly surprising given the continued politicized nature of private enterprise in Havana and the penalties levied against (some) businesses that become too successful.

Special permission was obtained by the University Ethics Board prior to my departure to gain oral consent from interview participants in order to avoid many of the risks involved in safeguarding electronic audio-recordings (see Appendix D). This course of action was justified by the continued politicization of Cuba's economic liberalization process over the past decade, as well as wide-spread fears within the Cuban population of government backlash to political dissent. I found these fears to be warranted when my own field-notes were confiscated at Jose Marti International Airport in Havana when returning back to Canada. It is likely that even with documentation from the University of British Columbia, the absence of any audio-recording devices, and the continued reassurance that no identifying information would be recorded in notes or included in any later publications, many participants were not willing to speak openly.

However, a noted phenomenon of conducting interviews in Cuba, touched on by Henken (2000) suggests that, despite the somewhat guarded nature of many participants, Cubans may in fact be more comfortable expressing their true feelings and opinions about Cuban society to foreigners. He writes: “Ironically, as I was surprised to find again and again in my interviews [there is] a deep desire for many stressed self-employed individuals to vent, getting their frustrations; ‘off their chest’ (desahogarse), a process whereby a foreign researcher acts as a kind of confessor” (Henken 2000 326). My own experience conducting interviews in Havana adds some support to Henken’s claim as a hand-full of my participants cathartically expressed their complaints with state policy to me. This tendency stands in contrast to popular notions that politically oppressed individuals are fearful of engaging in open criticism and will therefore minimize dissent by supporting the status quo. While I recognize the implications of these potential shortcomings, I maintain that this work, while preliminary and exploratory, nevertheless sheds light on social realities in Cuba today and serves as a necessary building block to more comprehensive and long-term research in the region. I am likewise confident that, like Henken (2000), I too was privy to uncensored disclosures on behalf of, at least some, research subjects.

### **Structural Overview of Research**

This research includes interviews and observations of a convenience sample of seventeen paladares spanning four neighborhoods of Cuba’s capital city, Havana: Habana Vieja, Centro Habana, Vedado, and Miramar. As paladares are not permitted to advertise, initial contact was made via (a) guidebook listings in Lonely Planet (2009) and the Rough Guide Havana (2010), (b) informal recommendations from foreigners and Cubans in Havana, as well as online travel blogs, (c) *jiniteros* employed by paladares to recruit tourist-patrons, and (d) inquiring to all interviewees for information about other paladares in their neighbourhood.

Initially, I visited each paladar exclusively as a patron, that is to say that paladar owners and staff were unaware of my academic interests or intentions. During the initial visit, basic information such as menu items, prices, hours of operation, number of tables and chairs, number of present staff, gratuities levied, languages spoken, clientele, quality of food, etc. were each observed and

recorded. This was a necessary first step in order to assess which types of questions would be pertinent if, and when, an interview was requested and subsequently agreed to, as well as providing important points of comparison for visits to other paladares (for example, comparisons could then be made both within and between neighborhoods). This initial visit usually lasted between one and two hours during mealtimes and was often completed alone.

A conscious effort was made to capture a wide variety of paladares in both interview and observational data collection, however the small number of licensed paladares throughout the city did create some limitations. The sample presented here is not a representative sample, in so far as it does not reflect an accurate distribution of paladares by neighborhood, menu price, size, or any other distinctive meter. It is instead a purposive sample that attempts to capture a socioeconomic spectrum of paladar businesses throughout Havana.

In sum, seventeen paladares were visited during the research period with meals consumed and preliminary observations conducted at twelve. Of these twelve paladares, informal, open-ended interviews were conducted at nine. More in-depth, systematic, observations were restricted to just two paladares, with an interview complementing only one of the two establishments. These two paladares, one in Miramar and the other in Centro Habana, reflect each end of the socioeconomic spectrum, with the latter providing a more modest and locally oriented sample and the former being more high-end and tourist-driven. An interview was obtained from the manager of the Miramar paladar, however the Centro Habana staff declined the interview request.

This approach was undertaken only after visiting a wide sample of paladares throughout the city and coming to appreciate the vast social and economic variation between them. By employing more in-depth observation in these two paladares, I hope to also offer some analysis of the middle ground, informed by the remaining eight interviews and ten preliminary observations and experiences. These paladares occupy distinct and often peripheral spaces throughout Havana, despite being united in their marginality under the political system in which they operate.

## **(Participant) Observation**

Observations were a central component of this research and provided essential insights into the working world of paladares throughout Havana. Often completed over an accompanying meal, I was able to observe not only the operational side of paladar business but equally the clientele who frequented these establishments and provided the backbone of their economic life.

Standardized data was recorded at twelve different sites including hours of operation, menu items and prices, number of seats, decor, employee numbers, gender, age, ethnicity, gratuities, etc. This preliminary observational data was recorded during the initial visit to the research site and was not explicitly articulated to staff or customers. Repeat visits helped to further streamline these initial observations as well as capture discrepancies and trends.

These preliminary visits were essential in determining which two paladares to focus on more intimately as I wanted to account for the wide variety of paladares throughout Havana. A smaller sample of just two paladares were approached and consent to observe was obtained orally by the necessary individuals. The paladares occupied distinct neighborhoods, catered to either a local or foreign clientele and ranged considerably in price, selection, ambiance, quality and service. These differences at times created further methodological challenges as my ability to blend-in was strained in the Cuban-driven business, while completely effortless in the more tourist-friendly establishment.

In-depth observations were made over the course of a minimum of 5 visits at varying times of day/night, depending on the business hours of each paladar. When possible, both lunch and dinner shifts were observed, as well as weekday day and weekend operations.<sup>5</sup> Meals were always ordered and consumed during the observation process in an effort to remain unassuming and 'blend in'. Every effort was made to not monopolize space and to provide at least a minimum level of business to the paladar. Visits would often last between one and two hours, however at times this length of stay would be limited due to line-ups and owners' need to maximize seating, and ultimately profit.

---

<sup>5</sup> Mondays in Havana are typically 'family days' when many business establishments are closed.

While I was able to remain largely inconspicuous at the higher-end, tourist-driven paladar, in the more locally-oriented paladar it was often challenging to do so. Many questioning and curious eyes would scrutinize my abnormal presence, however this became diluted with repeated visits and lengthy stays. While customers continued to recognize the unconventionality of my presence, staff members quickly grew accustomed to and even seemed to welcome my patronage. While it is likely that any interaction was influenced by the novelty of my presence, the participatory nature of this research method left little room for alternatives.

I term this research “(participant) observation” because I did not engage in the operational side of everyday paladar administration. However, my participation comes from the act of patronage within the paladar itself and the resulting interactions and experiences shared within this role. In other words, the act of ordering, consuming, and purchasing a meal was in itself participatory, an action that would be repeated countless times over the course of the research period yielding considerable appreciation for the foundations of micro-capitalism in Cuba.

## **Interviews**

Nine semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted within the paladares themselves, during off-hours, and when possible, with the paladar owner him/herself. In the two instances when the owner was not available, paladar managers took their place. Interviews typically lasted between half an hour and an hour depending on the candidness of the interviewee. Discussion points included, but were not limited to, individual background, paladar ownership and basic operation, socioeconomic life, political involvement, and future aspirations - both personal and professional (see Appendix E).

As previously noted, special permission was obtained, prior to arriving in Havana, to forego traditional interview procedures in order to better guarantee confidentiality to interview participants. No audio-recording equipment was employed, informed consent was obtained orally, and only limited notes were taken during the interview itself. In almost all instances this

measure was beneficial as I was able to engage more fully in the conversation. Interviewees themselves were clearly more relaxed and reassured after these precautionary measures were outlined and explained.

In order to maintain clarity and quality of the information gained during each interview, I would immediately complete extensive field-notes once the interview was completed. These notes were then encrypted onto my laptop, a procedure that made the interview data password protected as well as encoded. While I recognize the potential shortcomings of this interview style, as inevitably some information was lost between the time it was said and the time I recorded it, given the unique sociopolitical context of Cuban society and the need to protect the identities of participating interviewees, this approach was deemed to be the most appropriate under these precarious circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

## **Ethnography**

A ten-week period was spent living and working in the field, between September and December 2010, during which time I attempted to integrate myself fully into the ebbs and flows of life in Havana. Renting a room in Centro Habana, I was intentionally isolated from the tourist-saturated areas of the city, and was thus gradually able to become privy to the everyday routines, challenges and activities of many of my Cuban neighbours. The Cuban family with whom I lived was well known within the community and their apartment would often be filled with visitors recanting stories, lending hands, or sharing resources. Living beside the ocean meant fishing was a constant topic of conversation, as well as a near nightly activity that brought people out of their houses and into the crowded streets. In short, I came to feel accepted, and even welcomed, by many in Centro Habana, and would anticipate their daily pleasantries and inquisitive stares. Though I remained largely a mystery to many, my lingering presence meant I became perhaps less of the distraction I had initially been, and more of the proverbial fly-on-the-wall so fundamental to ethnographic research.

---

<sup>6</sup> These reflection and field notes remain encrypted on my personal computer as well as on a password-protected external hard-drive and will be destroyed after a period of five years.

My own routine allowed for a considerable amount of time ‘hanging out’ in a variety of Cuban paladares and state-restaurants, a pass-time that proved to be an important component of relationship building, while also providing more nuanced understandings of operational regimens. While these ‘everyday’ interactions were extremely informal and congenial, they yielded significant appreciation for the complexities of individual backgrounds and experiences among Cuban people; yet, perhaps most significantly, they helped to shed light on the frustrations and challenges that ultimately unite them. These interactions were not always under the pretext of research, nor were they always academically fruitful, but together they helped to provide a distinct and honest lens through which to comprehend preexisting literature and data as well as my own transforming experiences.

The sociopolitical constraints of my project were not always conducive to the kind of embedded ethnographic research I had originally imagined prior to arrival in Cuba. Though I spent much time frequenting paladar businesses, I was not permitted to work in one, and inflated prices meant even my patronage had to be scaled back significantly. Despite these structural challenges, I maintain this to be a work of ethnography in its most spirited form; as the formulation of local knowledge through engagements with the ‘every-day’, typical and mundane. It was, and remains, my intention to frame this research in the details of individual people as much as the systems that govern them, be they social, political, economic, or ideological. This project is a recognition that variation is as important as continuity, and that Cubans specifically face distinct and varying challenges, despite a political ideology that strives to treat them all the same.

## Analysis

Amidst the prominent historical and cultural treasures of present-day Havana is a city awash in international currencies, commodities and the tenacity of big business. The ebbs and flows of a city indentured to foreign tourism is omnipresent, and the informal economy that tourism buttresses is increasingly palpable. The secondary economy rules in Havana, and despite repeated political efforts to restore state control of the market, Cubans have long found ways to cope with shortage, insecurity, and even surveillance by the state (Pérez-López 1995). The result manifests in contradictions between systems of Communism and Capitalism, ideologies of egalitarianism and individualism, and growing divisions between social classes. This negotiation between socialist and free-market ideologies is further compounded by stagnant state wages, a devalued national currency, and a progressively more consumer-driven lifestyle, most notably in the country's largest city, Havana. Though tourism has reemerged as the island's primary lifeline since the early 1990's, it has simultaneously magnified many of the internal challenges grappled with by the Cuban state; namely: how the bastions of Communist ideology can be maintained amidst an expanding free market of luxury tourism?

For the many Cubans who rely directly upon tourist dollars, navigating a largely corrupt system of informal policing and unfair advantage can be a difficult task, particularly in light of renewed public condemnation of private enterprise, material wealth and nonconformity to political ideals.<sup>7</sup> Learning to “play the game” can yield tremendous economic rewards for business owners savvy and well connected enough to evade state regulation, yet Cuban businesses lacking these resources face the challenge of how to remain profitable under the economic demands of the state. The solution, for businesses on either end of the economic spectrum, lies in both the prevalence of Havana's secondary economy and the Cuban state's capitulation that its own future is pendent on the maintenance of tourist dollars. This negotiation of the tension between

---

<sup>7</sup> Speeches delivered by Fidel Castro are notorious both internationally and in Havana for their condemnation of the ‘evils’ of capitalism. In a 2005 address at the Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of Castro's admission to the University of Havana, on November 17, he spoke of the potential for economic exploitation in relation to paladares specifically. A transcription of his speech was reprinted in the state newspaper, Granma the same day (Castro 2005 in Granma Internacional 11/17).

state intervention in, and toleration of, private enterprise in Havana is the foundation of an array of contradictions that manifest themselves in the city's infamous paladares.

Indeed, paladares themselves are the product of Cuba's over-burdened economic system, only legalized after decades of covert operations and the inevitable recognition of the fiscal opportunism they represent. Today, while a small number of paladares operate throughout the city, the economic possibilities they represent have firmly implanted themselves in the psyches of Cuban entrepreneurs throughout the capital. Increased economic liberalization, and particularly the introduction of private enterprise, has been widely cited as a leading factor in the prophetic downfall of the Cuban regime (Otero & O'Bryan 2002, Aguirre 2002, Cole 2002; Roberg & Kuttruff 2007; Hausmann & Jatar 1996). The, at times, fierce regulation of paladares on behalf of the Cuban state has thus been interpreted as a testament to their potential economic and political might (Henken 2008).<sup>8</sup>

However, beneath the deeply politicized exterior of Havana's paladar industry lies an array of individual principles, motivations and ultimately choices that uniquely challenge any unifying narrative of paladares' collective assault on Cuban socialism. In fact, by illuminating the subtle negotiations made between sociopolitical ideology and economic reality, paladares themselves can be seen as helping to prop up the Cuban status quo. And though this negotiation is fraught with contradictions, the future stability of Cuba's political system relies largely on a fragile balancing act between toleration and repression of paladar prosperity. Though Cuban officials may publicly condemn the inequitable prosperity of some paladar businesses, privately many officials make concessions to those same owners (in some cases even dining in their establishments) in an effort to exploit the important economic remuneration they provide.

Why do state officials at one moment publicly criticize burgeoning paladares for evading regulations and succumbing to capitalistic desires for wealth, while in the next moment condone illicit operations by turning a blind eye to their practice? Why are modest paladar owners

---

<sup>8</sup> Former American President Jimmy Carter visited a high-end paladar in the Western suburb of Miramar in 2002 in a bid to promote economic liberalization in the region.

punished with lofty fines and even forced closures for minor offenses, while highly successful paladares continue to defiantly prosper? In short, what promotes and sustains this double standard among paladares in Havana and how do these contradictions help to illuminate the current state of Cuba's political, economic, and social fabric? I was consistently struck by not only the disconnect between official rhetoric and action, but by the complacency of some paladar owners regarding their illicit behaviour. Initially, it simply did not make sense that Cuban officials would tolerate excessive displays of material wealth by highly successful paladar owners, but quickly intervene in more modest, and seemingly politically supportive, businesses that were already struggling to remain open.

This research will show that state toleration of burgeoning, illicit and, at times, subversive paladares in wealthier neighbourhoods of Havana is the result of persisting economic shortage domestically and the country's absolute dependence on foreign tourism. That the exorbitant revenues generated by some paladares via high-end tourism are exploited by state officials to, perhaps not only line their own pockets, but to finance the national political agenda cannot be substantiated by this research alone, however in light of entrenched economic stagnation, and official taxation policy towards private enterprise, it is also not unlikely. It is similarly probable that toleration is premised upon forgotten economic and political gains if intervention was, in fact, pursued. For example, unemployment brought on by closure would directly increase individual reliance on social assistance programs, further straining state budgets. In short, state officials are weary to shutdown successful paladares, despite their unique fortune, because the cumulative cost to the government's political and economic agenda is simply too high.

Modest paladar owners experience a marked disadvantage in that economically they cannot compete with their high-end counterparts. Because the continued legitimacy of the Cuban government relies directly on their ability to enact a socialist ideology, state officials must be cautious about how liberal they appear in supporting a private economy. Modest paladares take the brunt of state regulation precisely because they are the most visible, contribute fiscally less, and are more numerous than their high-end counterparts. This research will show that while high-end paladares are often hidden within unmarked houses and are regulated by doormen,

modest paladares openly compete to attract business, employing innovative, albeit limited, advertising and recruitment methods. In part due to their visibility, modest paladar owners largely operate according to regulation in order to avoid costly interventions on behalf of the Cuban state, and to secure their own economic independence from its domination. Economic independence, in turn, helps to promote a sense of pride amongst modest paladar owners who feel they are giving back to, and helping to maintain, the socialist state, towards which many Cubans feel a pronounced sense of allegiance.

An important conclusion of this research is that the Cuban government's hypocrisy towards private capital has the potential to significantly strain its public credibility as the guarantor of equality for all Cubans, and in turn, poses perhaps the largest threat to its future sovereignty. The Cuban government has become indentured to private enterprise in order to finance its socialist policies, and ultimately maintain the party's public integrity and access to power. The resulting conflict uniquely manifests in the entrenched toleration of wealthy paladar owners, and the skewed punishment of modest, and largely acquiescent, ones. Wealthy paladar owners remain largely opposed to economic regulation and hefty taxation, both fundamentally tied to the government's future economic ambitions. In light of the historically forceful suppression of political dissent in Cuba, the government's endurance of such openly hostile business practices is telling.

The paradox of Cuba today is that openly unlawful paladar owners are permitted to quietly burgeon, while modest owners, who remain generally supportive of economic governance, are severely penalized for even the smallest infraction, and in some cases, publicly demonized for their entrepreneurialism. And so as some paladar owners continue to prosper, their ideological commitments to a socialist society weaken as they become increasingly captivated by material comforts and the social status they attempt to emulate vis-à-vis their tourist-driven businesses. Modest owners, on the other hand, largely maintain their faith in the socialist vision of their government, and despite their arguably inevitable transgressions, understand the importance of their unique contribution to Cuba's future prosperity.

## **Cuba's Social Contradiction**

There is perhaps nothing more emblematic of social distinction than how and where we publicly display status and wealth. Indeed, conspicuous consumption practices have long been employed throughout human history to denote individual status and power and this continues to be true in modern times (Veblen 1899). In capitalist societies elegance and prestige are embedded in the clothes we wear, the luxuries we exploit, and the places we have access to (Bourdieu 1986). Materialism and consumption have long been implanted into our social psyches as the highest achievements of power and success and an entire industry of luxury service has long profited from such preoccupations (Sherman 2007). Cuba likewise has a long history of luxury tourism, and indeed is endowed with a 'playground' reputation that has spanned centuries of colonial domination, exploitation and criminal impunity (Murray 1979; Fernandes 2005). Prostitution, gambling, and political corruption were, for centuries, the economic lifeline Cuba relied upon, while at the same time, the catalyst for change under the charisma and intellect of the now infamous Three Amigos: Che, Camilo, and Castro.

The socialist revolution was successful largely because of a growing popular dissatisfaction with what came to be seen as the foreign exploitation of Cuba's land, culture, and people for the benefit of Western tourists, politicians, and businessmen. Prostitution was rampant, government corruption endemic, and poverty increasingly radicalized in the face of large socioeconomic divides. When, in January of 1959, the revolution finally reached Havana, thousands of wealthy Cubans and expats fled the country, taking with them millions of dollars in cash and assets, while others rejoiced in the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie - though it would be years later before the regime openly identified itself as Communist (De la Fuente 1995; Blue 2004). The following decade would see unprecedented land reforms, housing revisions and the redistribution of billions in tax revenue in an attempt to stabilize and equalize incomes across the population. The revolution explicitly sought to weed out all semblances of consumerism, individualism and egotism for the greater collective good of the country (Nazzari 1983).

Perhaps the greatest irony of Cuba today is the extent to which the economy now relies on the influx of tourist dollars and the very capital market the Communist government intended to destroy. State-run resorts, clubs, clothing stores and restaurants make up an impressive array of exclusive retreats which, in turn, help to bankroll the socialist agenda of the Cuban state. Combined estimates from The U.S. State Department and the Cuban Ministry of Economy and Planning suggest that approximately 2 million tourists visit Cuba each year, generating revues of close to \$2 billion (USD) and providing 80,000 jobs in over 300 state-run hotels and restaurants (U.S. Department of State 2011; Cuban Ministry of Economy and Planning 2008). And while initially, and intentionally, segregated from the lay population in secluded resort towns and islands, including Varadero and Cayo Coco, today tourism intermingles with local routines, sharing bus routes, beaches and even bars. Cash is now the primary entity keeping Cubans and foreigners apart. As Cubans, especially younger Cubans, become more and more enchanted with a Western way of life and continually disillusioned by the lack of opportunity available to them, the ideology of the state has too begun to shift from absolute condemnation of materiality to a tepid acceptance of its inevitability.

Paladares occupy a unique and politicized space, not only in the market for tourist dollars, but in the larger ‘battle of ideas’.<sup>9</sup> The only alternative to state-owned restaurants and a symbol of national entrepreneurship, paladares experience steep competition in a market of near state monopoly, and restrictive regulations imposed by the state all but ensure they remain peripheral. Yet, their sustained operation is, according to international and state media, Cuba’s way forward, and with estimates of 500,000 or more state employees slated to be laid off by the end of 2011, promoting entrepreneurial self-employment is, it would seem, a move towards capitalist reformation (Haven 2010; Malkin 2010). The state adamantly denies this economic intent, and maintains that taxation of private enterprise is the best way forward for Cuban autonomy, self-determination, and ultimately social security (Correa 2011), and among, at least, the more

---

<sup>9</sup> The Battle of Ideas, an expression employed by Fidel Castro to promote the combat of misinformation on the part of foreign media campaigns, and through which Castro explicitly promotes five political objectives: (1) the liberation of the five Cuban men incarcerated in Miami for espionage; (2) the end of the Helms-Burton Law, Torricelli Act, and other forms of the U.S. blockade; (3) the end of the world economic crisis that threatens humanity and particularly the Third World; (4) world peace; and (5) education and culture (Flikke 2007).

modest paladar population, there is an enthusiastic embrace of this vision. For those who own and operate the city's most exclusive paladares, there remains an implicit rejection of state ideology and a growing imitation of, and preoccupation with, the status and culture their businesses promote.

### **The Exclusive Paladar**

Paladares are still largely hidden in Havana as they are often indistinguishable from the more prevalent state-run restaurants that monopolize much of the city. There is little to indicate their private-status, and the persisting ban on advertising means owners rely exclusively on word of mouth, foot traffic, and guidebook endorsements to attract new business. Though some vehemently embrace the small allowance of a single exterior sign on their establishments, others forego this provision altogether in order to benefit from the potential exclusivity their peripheral existence provides. In a city so saturated with tourist-touting commerce, the appeal is in their seeming indifference; after all, there is only so much solicitation one can take.

However there is, it would seem, another motive for maintaining anonymity; namely, the highly illicit nature of their operation and the discretion required in order to evade government repression. To be clear, there is little doubt state authorities are aware of the existence (and prosperity) of these exclusive paladares, and there are even murmurs of their lavishness among Havana's communities. In one case a paladar owner even reported hosting high-ranking government officials in his restaurant, though he refused to name names or describe the nature of their meeting. In short these businesses are tolerated by state officials in exchange for hefty bribes, exorbitant taxation, and the recognition that they attract a significant amount of revenue from tourists. Yet it is perhaps the danger of explicit condemnation on behalf of a largely impoverished Cuban public that keeps these owners, and state officials, weary of too much noted exuberance.

My first experience with such a paladar occurred largely by accident. After accepting another expat's dinner invitation, I was surprised to find the restaurant to be just blocks from my own

hotel in light of repeated inquiries to hotel staff about paladares in the area. Located on a dark and quiet street in Miramar, the house itself gave nothing away to suggest it housed a restaurant, and only when my escort approached an elderly man sitting alone in a chair beside the curb did the waiting taxis and soft music become noticeable. No exterior sign revealed the presence of any business, yet the elderly man reassured us we had arrived. Led through a series of locked gates and a large wooden door we entered an open stone patio adorned with live goldfish swimming in an intricate series of ponds, white linen table clothes, ornate plants and all the formalities of a Western fine-dining restaurant. I was overcome by a profound sense of disbelief and wonderment that such luxury could exist in Cuba, particularly in light of all I had learned about the revolution's ideology.

The degree to which such luxury explicitly violates state regulations around paladar operation is staggering. Understanding how and why luxury paladares are permitted to maintain their illicit operation is fundamental to the assessment of the socialist system more broadly, and is a phenomenon which is rooted in testimonials ranging from corruption, to impunity, and ultimately to acceptance and toleration. When I returned to the aforementioned paladar to speak with management, I was equally shocked by the frank and honest admittance of breached regulations, and the dismissive tone reserved for questions of state politics.

When I ask Juan, the paladar manager, about potential problems with the authorities he simply smiles and admits, "of course we've had problems," yet maintains the state would never dream of shutting the paladar down. Unruffled by my line of questioning, Juan goes on to tell me the odd bribe is sometimes given to appease "hot-headed" officials, but that his paladar attracts big money to the neighbourhood of Miramar, so in his mind, it's in the state's interest to keep the paladar in operation. He quickly follows with the suggestion that *if* they shut him down, thirty university-educated staff members would become suddenly unemployed, a burden the state, according to him, does not wish to carry.

Juan is a young, clean-cut and stylish Afro-Cuban man probably in his early 30s. He is one of an entire generation of Cubans born under Castro's regime, and who came of age during one of the

most catastrophic periods of the nation's history. With little to no economic prospects after graduation, many apathetically entered unemployment, while those who pursued higher education now endure stagnant state wages and limited opportunities for advancement in the state dominated labour market. Tourism provides the lion's share of the wealth to the population and, for those fortunate enough to win a position in a hotel or restaurant, the payoffs are considerable. Although state rules governing paladar ownership officially mandates the absence of a university degree, staff members or 'helpers' at this, and other, high-end establishments benefit from university training in travel and tourism.

With 15 years in operation, 85 seats and a staff of over 30, who combined speak a total of six languages, the magnitude of such success is admirable in a country where luxury goods are scarce, competition is rife, and reputation alone is formidable. That these university educated and skilled workers have chosen to forego the much coveted service positions in state-run hotels and restaurants in exchange for private management is also telling. While liberation from the protocol of state employment is enticing, it is the possibility of an improved quality of life that is most effective in attracting qualified staff. When I ask Juan how working in the paladar has changed his life, he smiles sheepishly and explains that he is able to afford a lifestyle that most Cubans cannot dream of. His wife is very happy he assures me, and I can't help but empathize with her as I examine Juan's gold wedding band, polished leather dress shoes, and tailored suit. Such luxury is rare in Cuba, and though emulated through faux designer merchandise and wannabe gangster youth culture, Juan represents something more refined, and perhaps more markedly opposed to the ideology of the Cuban state.

### **The Double Standard of Paladar Operation**

The strict and invasive legislation governing the operation of paladares was drafted explicitly to curb the significant potential for high economic returns among paladar employees and owners. A twelve seat maximum, restrictions on luxury foods (such as lobster) and caps on employment are just a few of the most notorious regulations. Yet many paladares, and indeed all of the most high-end ones, openly break these rules and, in turn, benefit from higher sales and more

impressive services. This research found that all three high-end paladares visited by the researcher openly broke all three of these regulations. Although accounts of forced closures and state repossessions are numerous, the pay offs are considered to be worth the risk, especially when mediated in the form of bribes or tax revenues.

As previously noted, it is widely recognized that the legalization of paladares themselves was the product of decades of underground operations and such wide-spread prevalence in the informal economy that when the government finally legalized their operation in the early 1990s, it simply validated what had been tolerated for years (Henken 2008). Today, the proliferation of restricted or illegal activities, ranging from the sale of black market goods, to fudging tax documents, and even the bribing of state officials, continues throughout the city in nearly all facets of daily life, and many Cubans, including paladar owners, have come to rely on, and perhaps take for granted, such public and political toleration. Some of these activities are so prevalent that I was continually surprised to learn they were in fact illegal - using an unofficial taxi, purchasing lobster, and even working as a prostitute are all prominent examples of this trend.

Cubans seems to justify illicit activity by invoking the low wages paid by the state and the “impossibility” of a life from those wages alone. The lack of obvious legal enforcements around restricted and illegal activities seems to compliment their ongoing operation. Though it is explicitly restricted to hire an unofficial taxi, I along with countless other tourists and Cubans relied almost exclusively on this cheaper form of transportation and only once had a police officer levy a fine against the driver for his lack of legal compliance. Reports of bribes are widespread among local communities and my landlady would often remind me to keep extra cash in my pocket when going out, “in case of an emergency.” Foreigners are regularly the target of petty schemes and blatant overcharging, yet rarely are these activities condemned by bystanders or even the police. I, along with other foreign friends, came to accept these practices as commonplace. It is likewise not uncommon for money and material possessions to be publicly displayed without consequence, and many Cuban youth make flagrant displays of materiality without fear of repercussion as police appear unwilling or unable to stop them.

In light of the widespread toleration of petty crime in Havana, the extensive use of security around upscale and exclusive paladares was surprising, but not uncommon: of the seventeen paladares visited throughout Havana, three employed a considerable level of discretion while screening potential patrons. In two cases individuals were stationed outside the paladar itself and acted as gatekeepers, employing cell-phones and security intercoms to communicate with those inside. My own Western appearance was in all three cases the only necessary validation required for entrance, however had I been Cuban, there would have likely been impossible barriers to overcome.

These seemingly excessive security measures are multidimensional at best, and at worst, themselves contradictory. The highly illegal nature of these up-scale paladares requires the utmost discretion so as not to attract unwelcome attention or scrutiny. Screening patrons prior to entrance, not only maintains paladar exclusivity, but curbs the risk of exposure to average, working-class Cubans who are unable to afford such luxuries, and would perhaps be less than enthusiastic that their fellow comrades are capable of providing it. In light of public condemnation of “greedy” paladar owners by the Cuban state, toleration in this realm would be potentially dangerous to, an already volatile, political credibility (Castro 2005). In other words, these security measures safeguard against heightened public opposition, while at the same time allowing for business to continue and, in turn, the state to collect its share of the profits, while publicly saving face.

Maintaining peripherality, I would learn, was as intentional as the menu choices and adorning decorations. Juan informed me that beyond the immediate desire to garner exclusivity for the business, the absence of any exterior sign was also intended to deter Cubans from entering. “We don’t want just any person coming in from off the street,” he says. When asked to explain himself further he describes his customers as foreigners or “important Cubans” who come to his paladar for its privacy, its professionalism, and its discretion. The goal is to provide patrons with, “a level of service to be found in Europe or North America,” and an atmosphere that is both comfortable and familiar. Concealing itself from “ordinary” Cubans has no doubt helped to create an air of class, but this is perhaps merely a byproduct of the need to remain obscure. And

though toleration of a developing materialism among the lay population remains abstract and difficult to police, high-end paladares are perhaps the most glaring example of state indulgence, and ultimately, hypocrisy.

In light of the location of Juan's paladar and my obvious status as a tourist, I was curious as to why I had not been informed of this paladar by hotel employees or the many Cubans I regularly spoke with and who were aware of my intention to visit paladares. When I described my initial visit to a Cuban friend, named Shelly, I was surprised she had never heard of the restaurant. As I began to describe my experience there she interjected to say that she'd heard of "such places" from other tourists but had never herself been to one. Beyond her initial shock, and then outrage, at the menu prices I described, she also frankly admitted that, "it is no place for Cubans" and furthermore that "you'd never catch me there."

There is a nuanced understanding of class employed by these more peripheral paladares that stands in sharp contrast to the dogma of equality and redistribution that have been the tenets of Cuba's socialist society for over fifty years. These paladar owners are intimately aware of capitalism's taste for social gradation and, more importantly, the potential financial opportunities it can yield. Yet they remain acutely peripheral to Cuban society, preferring the lives of tourists to those of their fellow comrades. While I was initially quite shocked to witness Cuban families paying the equivalent of a month's state salary to enter the pool at my hotel, I now understand this to be the most obvious outcome of a system that promotes the accumulation of wealth among a subset of the population, but limits the extent to which that wealth may be made visible. The Cuban elite, high-end paladar owners surely included, remains peripheral largely because the toleration by the state that they enjoy is premised upon their ability to remain discrete and even obscure. By engaging in activities and frequenting facilities reserved for those with disposable incomes, they avoid the public scrutiny all but guaranteed in places like Centro Habana.

Cuba is still a communist country after all, and the social expectations of collective camaraderie must be upheld in order for political stability to be maintained. While the folklore of these

paladares' existence remains largely speculative among Cuba's lay population, their services, and thus status, are infinitely out of reach to them. Havana's high-end paladares occupy a contentious space between blatant criminality and subtle toleration. While their success is profoundly linked to their obscurity, they remain an important source of revenue for the Cuban state, despite the ideological and political implications of their success.

### **The Modest Paladar**

While Havana's higher-end paladares benefit from state toleration, less profitable paladares must learn to navigate the maze of rules and regulations that govern their operations. Substantial taxation coupled with economic inflation means these paladar owners are all but forced to participate in and, in turn prop up, Havana's informal economy. Avoiding substantial mark-ups by buying produce and livestock directly from producers, selling restricted items 'on special,' employing street-level hustlers to attract patrons, and fudging tax documents are just a few examples of the measures more modest paladar owners report going to in order to remain in business. Yet, unlike their up-scale competition, these paladares do not benefit from state indulgence and are often the targets of legal scrutiny and even public cynicism. Ironically however, it is these more modest businesses that appear to support the Cuban narrative of collectivism, and who, despite participation in the unregulated economy, are empathetic to state decree. Mid-level and more modest paladares are, however, under constant surveillance and are regularly audited by state authorities. This is intended to act as a deterrent to owners who may consider risking hefty fines in exchange for increased revenues.

An elderly modest paladar owner, Silvia, operating out of a secondly story Habana Vieja apartment, tells me that although some paladares break many of the rules she is not willing to do so, even though she recognizes she could make more money if she did. For her, the potential financial repercussions are just too great, while her long and deeply emotive commitment to the state likewise prevents her from doing so. Surrounded by family and friends, in a small living room directly adjacent to the dining area, and with Christmas lights and decorations hung in conjunction with political portraits and even a Cuban flag, it is immediately evident this modest

business is part and parcel of Silvia's home. When I first tell Silvia I am interested in learning about private enterprise in Cuba, she shakes her head and tells me her paladar is not privately owned, but the property of the Cuban state. Sensing my confusion, she explains that while she is technically self-employed, she owes everything in her house to the government.

Carlos, another modest paladar owner, and also in the tourist epicenter of Habana Vieja, tells me that despite the obvious advantage of having one of the few paladares in this neighborhood, he is content to following government regulations. Despite his awareness that many other paladares sell illicit goods and pay off members of the police force and government to gain access to different consumer items, he refers to his family when he tells me "I am not a greedy person, my family has what it needs to live." Implicit in this statement is perhaps the familial responsibility Carlos feels and the great economic risks involved in dissent. The paladar may be modest, but Carlos and his wife Anita are content raising their two small children and helping to support Anita's sister in return for her help running the business. By local standards, they are comfortable, a luxury in and of itself for many of their Cuban neighbours.

Carols and Silvia share a widespread recognition that informal and illicit activities drive the city's limited economic prosperity, yet both live modest, family-centered lives with many mouths to feed and responsibilities to keep. Both in their elderly years, they speak of the revolution animatedly and, despite some of their own criticism levied against the government, they remain empathetic to Cuba's economic plight. Both invoke comparisons with pre-revolutionary Cuba, as well as the economic difficulties of many friends and relatives living in Miami in order to demonstrate their relative security under the current Communist system; an economic and political juxtaposition I would hear invoked over and over again during my time in Havana.

Although neither Carlos nor Silvia hesitate to voice their frustrations about "exorbitant" taxes and "ridiculous" regulations, and both admit to at times manipulating their own tax reports, they remain empathetic to the difficulties of the socialist struggle. Having both been alive to see the revolution occur, they are cautious to criticize a government to which their own social security is

so intimately entangled. The integrity of their convictions about Cuba today lies in the stories they recount about the often painful and difficult decisions made between their homeland and the alternative so many have embraced just ninety miles across the Gulf of Mexico. Silvia mourns the loss of her brother and sister-in-law just a few years earlier, but maintains she chose to stay in Cuba despite their encouragement to also leave. This conviction is captured in the popular expression, “I was born in Cuba, so I will die in Cuba!” regularly invoked by individuals recanting tales of friends and family members abroad. Despite the allure of material success, unabashedly touted by the thousands of tourists who visit their city each year, the desired future described by Carlos is one of simplicity and security for his family. He speaks of the potential for Cuba to pioneer a new economic system, and says he is proud to live in a country where Cubans themselves are the political and economic priority; “not large corporations or foreign interests like in your country” he laughs.

In short, the necessity to generate state revenues leads to exorbitant tax rates that modest Cuban businesses scramble to meet without the benefits of toleration enjoyed by their high-end counterparts. The contradiction here lies in the Cuban officials’ willingness to prop up already burgeoning and potentially politically catastrophic high-end paladares, while severely limiting the ability of modest and politically empathetic paladares to simply operate without fear of reproach. And this is the fundamental contradiction of Cuba today. Those who embrace penchants of capitalism in the form of social gradation, material indulgence, and individualism, do so with the sanctioned impunity of state officials, while others who remain committed to a socialist future are left perpetually fearful of forced closures and fragile livelihoods. Perhaps desperate to hold onto power in the midst of growing economic uncertainty, the state seeks stability above ideology despite the contradictions this may yield. The consequence, however, of alliances made between those at the top may be catastrophic to those closer to Havana’s social and economic bottom.

While high-end paladares are successful in part because they provide a particular service, and fill an obvious void, other paladares struggle to maintain themselves amidst intense competition, high rates of taxation, and the variability of the industry itself. Paladares remain in a discernible

minority to their state-restaurant competitors throughout Havana's barrios. Inhibited by regulations, depleted by ever-increasing taxation, and largely reliant upon reputation alone, these paladares must exploit every available advantage in order to get ahead. Commissions on recruited customers and inclusive gratuities are just two examples of widely employed strategies intended to help these businesses prosper. Paladares make use of street level entrepreneurs (including many taxi drivers and hotel employees), and it is not uncommon to be approached with verbal menus and special offers while taking in Havana's sights.

### **Employing the Unemployed**

At the mid-range or modest level of operation, it is essential that paladar owners exploit the existing network of street "hustlers" or *jiniteros* in order to attract more customers and thus increase profits that, in turn, are needed to remunerate monthly taxes. I, as were many foreign acquaintances, was approached numerous times by such individuals eager to promote a local business or offer themselves for any number of tasks. In one such instance, I was explicitly told that the individual simply wanted the commission he would be paid if I was to patronize a particular paladar and that I should concede because, "everyone needs to try and make money from the tourists because its the only way we can survive." In short, the tourist pot is deep in Havana, and everyone seems eager to cash-in on a share of the wealth.

The consequence of severe and sustained economic decline during the post-Soviet era, Cubans have suffered tremendous losses in social programming, ranging from shrinking food subsidies to ill-equipped medical facilities and public schools. No longer able to rely on state interventions, a large and embedded system of informal transaction has developed to fill the void. Of the nine interviews conducted with paladar staff/owners, only one business owner, Silvia, explicitly denied ever paying out commissions, and a large sign inside her stairwell decidedly stated this policy; a deterrent to prospective wage earners. Fearful of potential consequences related to employing informal help, namely snowballing commission demands and threats of heightened state intervention, Silvia knowingly passed over potentially profitable opportunities in order to help insure the security of her business.

There is no shortage of available labor in Havana. The fallout of mass layoffs and sweeping underemployment, idleness is commonplace among many of the city's young adult and middle-aged populations. Loitering in parks, fishing off the infamous Malacon, or simply wandering Habana Vieja in search of needy tourists are all popular and daily rituals for many unwilling or unable to secure more permanent employment. Though this informal labor pool is an important resource for some paladar owners in the form of patron recruitment or commodity procurement, there is also an underlying resentment towards the unemployed. Some paladar owners feel the tax dollars they contribute to Cuba's social safety net in the form of food, shelter, and medical subsidies for all Cubans regardless of employment, means they carry an unfair economic burden that is often publicly ignored.

Silvia contends that, while she agrees the government should provide medical and financial support to the sick, the old and the incapacitated, she does not agree with, and is quite condemnatory of, the large number of Cubans who simply do not work, yet still benefit from the programs of the socialist state. For Silvia, now an elderly woman herself, she would rather those who are capable work, so that others, especially older people, aren't forced to. Today many paladar owners are beyond the mandatory age of retirement (60 for women, 65 for men), yet continue to work in order to offer financial support to family members and friends.

Yet, the unfair public burden carried by these owners in the form of exorbitant taxation - a paladar in Vedado or Habana Vieja pays anywhere from 400CUC - 700CUC per month depending on location, number of employees, and menu price, representing over 80% of earnings in most cases - is seen by some as a necessary hardship. Among these paladar owners there is a recurring narrative of responsibility towards the country itself, and despite pronounced frustrations towards the lack of work ethic among a subset of the population, there remains a willingness, or at least acquiescence, to prop up the collective good of the nation. Self-employment is itself seen by some as a playing a key role in this purpose.

Carlos is enthusiastic about entrepreneurship and when I finally secure a moment out of his busy day, he is bursting with ideas about how he'd like to expand his business in the future. When I ask him about the possibility of more paladares operating in Havana and potentially taking away some of his business, he just smiles and tells me he's not worried at all. In fact, he thinks more Cuban *should* open paladares and hopes the taxes paid out by them can help to make the country more prosperous. Though he hesitates handing over the business to his two young children when they're older, as he wants them to attend university first, he agrees that more Cubans need to contribute to the local economy and, in turn, help prop up the social security of the country.

Another paladar owner, Maria, also operating Centro Habana, echoes this sentiment. Maria, like Carlos, imagines her business as being an important component of Cuba's economic prosperity and future, yet goes one step further and expresses her sincere commitment to the party itself. For her, it is not simply an ideological allegiance to social values and economic equality, but rather a political commitment to Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and all those who lost their lives in the fight for Cuba's so-called liberation. Maria explains that though she is from a capitalist family - many of her relatives fled to Miami during the first years of the revolution - she chose to stay and be with her country. She exclaims she is a proud supporter of Cuba's socialist transformation, led by the "father" Fidel Castro, and sees her business as playing an important part in that transformation. "Paladares are part of the revolution," she explains.

In the face of endemic shortage and continued isolation from global markets, modest paladar owners have exhibited a robust instinct for perseverance. Maria, Carlos, and Silvia are each a unique example of the entrepreneurial spirit required to be successful for the near two decades each has been in operation. However, this success has not been easily achieved, and they have not benefited from the economic leverage employed by their upper-scale business counterparts. These more modest businesses are perhaps the strongest ally the Cuban state has in its tremendously difficult task of bankrolling a socialist future, and their continued economic cooperation is essential in achieving this end. And while there remains frustration, criticism, and dissent among this population, there is simultaneously immense pride and dedication towards building a sovereign future for their country.

## **Entrepreneurialism vs. Americanism**

Perhaps a far more explicit theme, and one intimately felt by all those in the paladar community, is the persisting consequence of the American embargo on the country. Researchers have long pointed to the negative health impacts directly related to the persisting embargo. They have likewise argued the U.S. embargo explicitly violates the human rights of Cuban people by denying them basic health provisions including access to basic medicine and patient care. Declining rates of nutrition, increases in infectious disease, and deteriorating healthcare infrastructure have all been implicated in the embargo's endurance, and some point to the potential implications of these trends on the future stability of the population (Garfield & Santana 1997; Kuntz 1994).

Without disparaging the incredible ingenuity of nationalized production and valuable trade deals with their Latin American allies, Cuba lacks some of the most basic provisions that many Westerners take for granted in our daily lives. For example, I spent nearly an entire afternoon tracking down a razor, tampons, and painkillers, and finally managed to purchase each at premium prices from a warehouse flea market. Basic foods such as yogurt, olive oil, brown bread, and non-powdered milk are all but impossible to procure. Those luxury goods that do make it onto the island are inevitably inflated in value and are often beyond the reach of the average Cuban.

A recurring theme among paladar owners is the unattainability of luxury items desired by foreign patrons. Carlos, the modest paladar owner from Habana Vieja, tells me that some of the finer food items tourists desire are financially impossible for him to procure. Coffee, he tells me, is made in his paladar from a simple Cuban-style stove top percolator, instead of from the fancy (and expensive) espresso machines used in almost all state-run restaurants. He would like to have one, he tells me, but they are in high demand and short supply on the island, making them financially out of reach for his modest pockets.

The effects of the American embargo have been suffered by those Cuban paladares without the capital to procure more desired commodities and thus grow their businesses. This, coupled with pervasive anti-American political propaganda, has helped to maintain an incisive condemnation of American policy towards Cuba, exasperated further by the many personal, and often painful, connections with estranged family members in cities such as Miami. It seemed nearly every Cuban I spoke with had at least one immediate connection to family across the Gulf and, while fleeing to America does remain a coveted possibility particularly of younger generations, there too are stories of violence, oppression, and misery once emigration is achieved.

This anti-Americanism shades attitudes towards private business in Cuba. There is hesitation, particularly among more elder Cubans, that too much capitulation to American-style reforms will destroy the fragile social gains already achieved in Havana. While frustration with, and criticism of, Cuban economic realities remains, there is a shade of caution against too much economic liberalization, even among those who perhaps stand to gain the most. Elsa runs a very small paladar at a busy intersection in Centro Habana. Though she doesn't make a lot of money, she regularly sends financial assistance to her son Manuel living in Miami. "Life is very hard for him there" she tells me.

Alejandro, a 68-year-old paladar owner in Miramar, points to the gains in education made during the revolution and laments the difficult situation of unemployment facing the country. For him, tourism provides the answer to Cuba's economic woes, while also challenging its people to put that education to good use. For him, lifting the American embargo means more potential customers for his restaurant and a chance to demonstrate Cuban competency in business. He explains that, "the government needs money in order to have socialism and tourists help to pay for things like education and medical care." He laughs and tells me that Cubans have the education to be successful in capitalism as well. "We know things in Cuba" he says "we have a lot of skills, but no jobs in which to put them to good use."

Maria tells me that while she does not want a return to the unequal and exploitative system of her youth (and parents' generation), she embraces the opportunity to be her own boss and is very

proud of her achievements as a business owner. She thinks she is a better citizen of the country working for herself and paying high rates of taxation than she would be working at a fixed rate in a state job. She echoes Alejandro's comments by invoking the educational gains of revolution and the resulting confidence she now feels to excel at her chosen profession.

There is tremendous pride among paladar owners who see themselves as competent, active, and independent members of society, and who regularly position themselves in diametric opposition to what they perceive as the lazy, apathetic, and freeloading habits of their unemployed or underemployed comrades. Self-employment for them is a liberating and empowering experience, one that emancipates them from the confines of state prescription and social apathy. It offers autonomy where there is little to be found, and a sense of participation and investment in Cuban society itself. In short, calls for further allowances towards self-employment by paladar owners is at the same time a comment on the social and economic condition of the Cuban people, and a celebration of active citizenship and a more robust and autonomous future for Cuba itself.

## **In Sum**

Though paladares in Havana have helped to reinvigorate a luxury tourist market based on bourgeois consumerism, materialism, and status, they have also helped to provide the economic means to sustain a fragile socialism, one that has defined the Cuban identity for more than fifty years. At odds with this incongruous partnership are the unequal treatment of paladar businesses and the growing hypocrisy of government inaction around the most elite businesses. Though modest paladar owners complain of unreasonable rates of taxation and crippling regulations that lead them to assume great risk in continued operation, they remain largely committed to the ideological project of collectivity and redistribution. Their elite counterparts do not share in this vision and flagrantly defy government regulations, be it out of public view, with near impunity. The result is a society enveloped in, and indentured to, deep-seated contradiction.

As the government continues to struggle with economic shortage and the near-saturation of the labor market, self-employment, particularly in the tourist sector, has become the only saving

grace of the current regime. Ironically, the most successful self-employed Cubans are those who achieve prosperity through clearly illicit means, however these paladares are tolerated precisely because intervening is too costly. Though the ideology of the state does not support the most basic principles of their success, namely, deregulation, class exploitation, and materialism, they are indebted to the profits they incur. For the owners, a sense of impunity only reinforces their contention that capitalism is good for Cuba and with little blowback from government officials it would seem the state, at least privately, agrees.

The more modest paladares, who are not immune from breaking regulations, do so with great anxiety, and primarily to make payments in the form of taxes and support dependent family members. Many do not themselves aspire to the same level of luxury as their high-end counterparts, but are under constant pressure to abide by strict guidelines designed to curb personal economic gain. These owners do not openly defy government regulations with the same impunity as their luxury counter-partners, however their exploitation of the informal system is similarly paramount to their success.

While owners of both degrees of paladares embrace their emancipation from state employment, the more modest paladar continues to reject the tenets of American-style capitalism, while the elite paladar embraces its possibilities. For average paladar owners, and particularly those of later generations, there is a sense of responsibility and indebtedness to a system that, despite its many flaws and frustrations, has improved the quality of life for many Cubans. They remain committed to the self-determination of a country that has continuously been subject to imperial pressure to liberalize. However, perhaps the most paradoxical of all is Cuba's renewed dependence on capitalistic consumption and liberalized markets in order to finance its socialist campaign, bankrolled, at least in part, by the entrepreneurial fervor of its citizens.

## Conclusion

This research illuminates the present-day socioeconomic milieu of Cuba's largest city, Havana. Through a qualitative, in-depth, exploration of the city's rapidly expanding private sector, the findings of this study make intelligible what is surely the country's most significant sociopolitical transformation in recent history. Foreign luxury tourism has again become the island's primary source of revenue, a reality often difficult to square with domestic policy and social doctrines. The result has been a set of political contradictions and social tensions that have attempted to mediate between systems of Communism and Capitalism. In particular, the negotiation between state intervention in, and toleration of, private enterprise in Havana has become the foundation for a host of double standards and informal regulations that manifest themselves in the city's infamous paladares.

Though tourism has re-emerged as the island's primary lifeline since the early 1990's, the industry has simultaneously magnified many of the internal challenges grappled with by the Cuban Communist state; namely: how can the founding principles of a socialist ideology be maintained amidst an expanding free market of luxury tourism? Paladares have thus become unique spaces of socioeconomic experimentation, aiming to wed "the market" with intensive government regulation and domestic priorities. The infamous politicization of the paladar industry has been overwhelmingly attributed to their so-called inherently neoliberal nature and, as a result, the industry has become the subject of intense and, at times, hostile condemnation from Cuban politicians. However, growing domestic economic insecurities have resulted in the informal expansion of paladar operations across Havana and, with additional permits slated to be issued by 2012, the requisite contribution of paladar revenues, both formally and informally, is irrefutable.

Yet beneath the economic and political discourse surrounding Havana's paladar industry, there are an array of individual principles, motivations and ultimately choices that uniquely challenge any unifying narrative of paladares' collective assault on Cuban socialism. In fact, by illuminating the subtle negotiations made between sociopolitical ideology and economic

necessity, paladares themselves can be seen as helping to prop up the Cuban status quo. And though this negotiation is fraught with contradictions, the future stability of Cuba's political system will rely largely on a fragile balancing act between toleration and repression of paladar prosperity. The extent to which social attitudes of individualism eclipse those of egalitarianism will be largely determined by the placation of those entrepreneurs posited to burgeon, as well as the mollification of Cubans, particularly youth, long frustrated by austerity.

However, the state-regulation of paladar wealth has not been a consistent, uniform, or credible endeavor, and has been largely championed as an exercise in public relations. Economically modest paladares continue to endure the brunt of state regulation precisely because they are the most visible, contribute fiscally less, and are more numerous than their high-end counterparts. By contrast, highly profitable paladares operate with near impunity, peripheral to most in Cuban society, and their owners enjoy material lives and status far beyond the purview of Cuba's ostensibly egalitarian social structure. The discriminatory regulation of paladar owners and their businesses remains an enduring double-edged sword towards which the current political leadership is both beholden and anxious.

Though many scholars have predicted the inevitable, if not imminent, downfall of Cuba's Communist regime, this research argues that such prophetic calculations fail to consider the nuanced and often contradictory legacy of economic reform for the Cuban people (Aguirre 2002; Otero & O'Bryan 2002; Roberg & Kuttruff 2007). That paladares represent a significant shift in political and popular discourse about the future structure of Cuba's domestic economy is for certain, however the rigorous regulation of paladar operations is not, as Henken (2008; 2000), Trumbell (2000), and Jackiewicz and Bolster (2003) suggest, necessarily reflective of their subversive, and therefore partisan, nature. Although some paladar owners have burgeoned tremendously, the vast majority continues to lead frugal and often spartan material lives. Though grievances abound among this modest population, they overwhelmingly maintain their ideological and political support for socialism and take a measure of pride in their contribution to Cuban society.

The toleration of illicit paladares, as well as the second economy that largely supports them, is likewise a more convoluted phenomenon than some have previously suggested. That modest paladares are subject to disproportionate regulation, are often forced to pay costly fines and endure widespread public scrutiny has often been interpreted as evidence of the state's aversion to private enterprise (Henken 2008; 2000; Trumbell 2000; Jackiewicz & Bolster 2003). However, this research has demonstrated that highly successful paladares operate with near impunity from official regulations and, in at least one case, are even patronized by some Communist Party members. Interviews referenced here suggest that corruption may not be solely an individually driven motivation, and that rather bribes and dispensation are part and parcel of a government strategy to maintain economic, and therefore political, hegemony.

However, contemporary Cuba does reflect, at least in part, observations made by both Rona-Tos (1997) and Verdery (1996) in post-Soviet Hungary and Romania where consumption, particularly in the second economy, fueled by what Verdery (1996) refers to as "desire by deprivation," has helped to transform consumerism into a form of political defiance. For Cuban youth in particular, materialism and consumer wealth are tantamount to individual success and social status and are increasingly pursued in open defiance of social conventions such as collectivism, austerity and redistribution. For owners of high-end paladares, the pursuit of luxury and the accumulation of capital are driving forces behind their illicit operations and, in turn, their rejection of much of the social ideology of their government.

Scholars of gender also find support in this research, in particular Fernandes (2005) and Dwyer (2011) who argue that Cuba's economic liberalization is complicit in the exploitation of Cuban women. A reinvigorated tourist market has meant the devaluation of professional academic degrees and a return to domesticity for many Cuban women. Prostitution is likewise visible on Havana's streets as young women find increasingly limited opportunities for fiscal autonomy from husbands, fathers and other male breadwinners. Though paladares, especially highly profitable ones, are dominated by male owners and staff members, there are some, albeit modest, businesses throughout Havana that are run exclusively by Cuban women. Though these women are overwhelmingly of an older generation, they provide an important exception to Cuba's

erosion of gender equality and often act as role models to nieces, daughters and even granddaughters. The financial autonomy paladares represent for Cuban women remains an important alternative to the social consequences of tourism among Cuba's female population.

The Cuban government's hypocrisy towards private capital has the potential to significantly strain its public credibility as the guarantor of equality for all Cubans, and in turn, poses perhaps the largest threat to its future sovereignty. The government has become indentured to private enterprise in order to finance its socialist policies, and ultimately maintain the Communist Party's public integrity and access to power. The resulting conflict manifests in the entrenched toleration of wealthy paladar owners, and the skewed punishment of modest, and largely acquiescent, ones. And so, as some paladar owners continue to prosper, their ideological commitments to a socialist society weaken as they become increasingly beholden to the material goods and the social status they attempt to acquire vis-à-vis their tourist-driven businesses.

By contrast, modest paladar owners largely operate according to regulation in order to avoid costly interventions by the Cuban state, and to secure their own economic independence from its domination. Economic independence, in turn, helps to promote a sense of pride amongst modest paladar owners, who feel they are giving back to, and helping to maintain, the socialist state, towards which many Cubans feel a pronounced sense of allegiance. Though paladares in Havana have helped to reinvigorate a luxury tourist market based on bourgeois consumerism, materialism, and status, they have also helped to provide the economic means to sustain a fragile, albeit strained, socialism; one that has defined the Cuban identity for more than fifty years.

## **Discussion**

Despite many of the notable failings of Cuba's revolution, one is hard-pressed to ignore the substantial and enduring social gains that have concurrently been achieved. Indeed, much of the criticism levied towards the Cuban Communist Party and its leadership is both Eurocentric and ideologically driven, and at times even border on hypocritical. One only need look to Cuba's Caribbean neighbours to give some credence to these claims, as well as to contextualize the

undeniable significance of Cuba's social and economic transformation. Reforms in education, healthcare, as well as significant moves toward gender equality, have all helped to shape Cubans' quality of life as well as to preserve the political legacy of its revolution.

The implications of tourism for underdeveloped and largely impoverished countries are likewise not unique to Cuba and are perhaps even more pointed in neighbouring Caribbean islands where social unrest, poverty, and political instability are embedded in national landscapes. Perhaps of central consequence to these failings are that violence and crime in neighbouring countries, including Antigua and Barbados, far surpass Cuba in both frequency and severity (US State Department 2008). Cuba, by contrast, is accredited with ranking among the highest literacy rates in the world, surpassing both the United States and Canada according to a 2009 United Nations report (UN Development Program 2009). Healthcare in Cuba too is widely applauded as being both universal and progressive and has increasingly drawn foreigners seeking expensive or unconventional treatments. In direct response to this phenomenon, the Cuban government recently introduced mandatory medical insurance for all travelers visiting the country in order to curb the growing costs associated with medical tourism (Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs 2011).

To be clear, processes of neocolonialism are far more acute in neighbouring Caribbean islands including tourist-friendly Dominican Republic and post-earthquake Haiti where ongoing economic reforms have resulted in the near hegemony of Western industry and government in domestic political and economic affairs. Cuba has remained perhaps stubbornly insular and, though closely allied with Venezuela, Mexico and several other countries, continues to reject international calls for domestic reform and widespread liberalization. Concessions have been made to be sure, but the Castro brothers and their political allies remain firmly committed to maintaining Cuba's autonomy, particularly from U.S. intervention, and benefit from over fifty years of largely unchallenged sovereignty. In fact, the long-standing U.S. embargo on Cuba has only reinvigorated nationalistic sentiments and unintentionally provided a powerful scapegoat for Cuban politicians. Despite the many marked failings of the revolution, and indeed in light of its admirable achievements, Cuba has arguably fared far better than many other nations for whom

laissez-faire economic policies have surely failed the vast majority of ordinary people; a reality Cuban government officials do not hesitate to capitalize on.

The ambitions of state-socialism, and ostensibly communism, have always been perhaps naively utopian and therefore particularly vulnerable to critique. This has indeed been the legacy of many former Eastern European countries as eloquently argued by Michael Burawoy (1992) and other post-Marxists scholars interested in the transitional social milieu. By its very nature, the Cuban state has exercised control over a considerable amount of people's everyday lives, so it is not surprising that it has not escaped critique and even condemnation by some. However, the ongoing support for its vision, no matter the idealism, continues to prop up much of the Cuban state's domestic legitimacy, arguably the governing factor in its remarkable endurance and longevity. That ordinary Cubans continue to buttress, at least in theory, the objective goals of the revolution, and particularly those to whom America remains the eternal enemy, suggests that the optimism by which the revolution was won has not been completely marred by its own shortcomings.

The relative success of Havana's paladares to many, particularly in the West, has signaled the inevitable destruction of Cuba's communist legacy and is often central to predictions of the government's impending defeat. However, this research has demonstrated that such oversimplifications ignore the vast difference of opinion within the industry itself as well as the many ways in which the dichotomy of Communism versus Capitalism is itself incongruous with day-to-day life. That state toleration of unlawful operations exists is testament to the degree of compromise required by Cuba's government in order to remain credible. Indeed, market reforms allowing for increased autonomy among newly self-employed workers continue to be implemented, albeit largely to stave off fiscal deficits and to promote new streams of revenue vis-à-vis taxation. However, at least for modest paladar owners, this is perhaps an ideal solution; their businesses remain somewhat lucrative, while a skeletal social safety net of subsidies and government provisions remain intact. For them, questions of political hypocrisy, and even corruption, are, at least for now, secondary to day-to-day operations and familial responsibilities.

## **A Final Word**

Conducting field research in Havana, Cuba as a graduate student was truly an eye-opening experience, and one that fundamentally challenged many of my preconceptions about the process of completing qualitative fieldwork. Little could have prepared me for the acute sense of isolation one feels as an outsider in another culture, and despite my ample travel and work experience abroad, Cuba somehow remains distinctly detached. Everywhere, there is an ardent sense of scrutiny towards Cubans and foreigners alike, and many of the conversations highlighted here took place in muted whispers and cautioned proprieties. I remain forever grateful to those who trusted in my discretion, and wholly sympathetic towards those who did not. The unfortunate nature of my own departure only helped to substantiate many of the underlying fears expressed by some Cubans with whom I met, yet perhaps also served to validate officials' apprehension towards Western scrutiny and unregulated expression. Accusations of espionage, journalism and even political subversion were levied against me while I became the subject of intensive and often threatening interrogation by immigration officials.

My personal tribulations aside, I hope I have offered an ethnographical exploration of Cuba's current socioeconomic milieu in order to illuminate the Cuban experience of Communism and the sociocultural implications of the country's current economic challenges. Indeed, many of the challenges of conducting fieldwork in Cuba are themselves reflective of the inherent tensions at play between social, economic, and political ideologies. Paladares represent a unique and important space through which many seemingly contradictory tensions play out against a backdrop of social ideals, a history of iconography, and a globalized present-day in which assimilation is all-but inescapable. Tourism may be Cuba's only economic lifeline to its ongoing self-determination, however it is likewise the biggest threat to Cuban solidarity and, in turn, the country's sociopolitical ideals. What remains certain is that the future of Cuban society will be forged not by outsiders but, as has been true of the last five decades, by domestic will and popular demand. It is up to those scholars and researchers captivated by Cuba's past to better understand the idiosyncrasies of its present, and ultimately the significance of its future.

## References

- Aguirre, Benigno E. 2002. "Social Control in Cuba," *Latin American Politics and Society*, 44(2): 67-98.
- Blue, Sarah. 2004. "The Social Cost of Remittances: Race and Income Equality in Contemporary Cuba," *Paper presented at the meetings of the Latin American Studies Association Las Vegas, Nevada*.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital," In *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. (Ed.) Richardson. Pg. 241-258. Greenwood Press: CA.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1992. *The Radiant Past: Ideology and Reality in Hungary's Road to Capitalism*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois.
- Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs. 2011. *Travel Report: Cuba*.  
[http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries\\_pays/report\\_rapport-eng.asp?id=69000](http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=69000) Accessed: June 8, 2011.
- Castro, Fidel. 2005. Speech delivered by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of his admission to University of Havana, in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana, on November 17, 2005. Accessed at: <http://www.granma.cu/documento/ingles05/17nov.html> Accessed April 1, 2011.
- Correa, Yenia Silva. 2011. "Security for all, with the contribution of all," *Digital Granma Internaccional*. Published March 10, 2011. <http://www.granma.cu/ingles/cuba-i/10marzo-Security%20for.html> Accessed April 1, 2011.

- Cuban Ministry of Tourism. 2008. "Informe Sobre los Resultados Economicos del 2008 y lost Lineamientos del Plan Economico y Social para el 2009," Ministerio de Economia y Planificacion: <http://www.cubagob.cu/> Accessed: April 24, 2011.
- De la Fuente, Alejandro. 1995. "Race and Inequality in Cuba 1899-1981," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30: 131-168.
- Dwyer, Joseph de la Torre. 2011. "Precarious Politics: Experiments in Market-Socialism and the Prospects for Cuban Women's Unfinished Revolution," *New Political Science*, 33:2 211-237.
- Fernandes, Sujatha. 2005. "Transnationalism and Feminist Activism in Cuba: The Case of Magin," *Politics and Gender*, 1:3 431-452.
- Flikke, Michelle Tisdell. 2007. Review Essay: The Museum of the Battle of Ideas Cardenas, Cuba, *Museum Anthropology Review*.  
<http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/mar/article/viewArticle/14/160>. Accessed April 1, 2011.
- Garfield, R. & S. Santana. 1997. "The Impact of the Economic Crisis and the U.S. Embargo on Health in Cuba," *American Journal of Public Health*, 87: 15-20.
- Haven, Paul. 2010. Castro Urges Cuban Union to Accept Layoffs. *ABC News*.  
<http://abcnews.go.com/Business/wireStory?id=12023936&page=2>. Accessed April 1, 2011.
- Henken, Ted. 2008. "Vale Todo: In Cuba's Paladares, Everything is Prohibited but Anything Goes," In *Reinventing the Revolution: A Contemporary Cuba Reader*. (Eds.) Philip Brenner, M. Jimenez, J. Kirk, and W. LeoGrande. Rowman & Littlefield: New York, NY. Pg: 168-78.

- Henken, Ted. 2000. "Last resort or bridge to the future? Tourism and workers in Cuba's second economy," In *Cuba in Transition Volume 10: Papers and proceedings of the eleventh annual meeting of the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy*, 321-36. Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy: Washington, DC.
- Hernandez, Leticia Martinez. 2010. "Self-Employment: Much more than an Alternative," *Digital Granma Internacional*. Published: September 24, 2010. [www.granma.cu/espanol/cuba\\_24sept](http://www.granma.cu/espanol/cuba_24sept) Accessed April 1, 2011.
- Jackiewicz and Bostler. 2003. "The Working World of the *Paladar*: The Production of Contradictory Space During Cuba's Period of Fragmentation." *The Professional Geographer*, 55(3) 2003, pages 372-382.
- Jatar-Hausmann, Ana Julia. 1999. *The Cuban Way: Communism, Capitalism, and Confrontation*. Kumarian Press : West Hartford, CT.
- Jatar-Hausmann, Ana Julia. 1996. "Through the Cracks of Socialism: The Emerging Private Sector in Cuba," Presented at the Annual Conference of the ASCE (Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy) Miami, Florida.
- Jennissen, Therese & Coleen Lundy. 2001. "Women in Cuba and the Move to a Private Market Economy," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 24(2): 181-198.
- Kuntz, D. 1994. "The Politics of Suffering: the Impact of the U.S. Embargo on the Health of the Cuban People," *International Journal of Health Services*, 24: 161-179.
- LeoGrande, W.M. 1997. "Enemies Evermore: U.S. Policy towards Cuba after Helms-Burton," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 29: 211-221.

- LeoGrande, William and Julie Thomas. 2002. "Cuba's Quest for Economic Independence," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 34(2): 325-363.
- Malkin, Elisabeth. 2010. "Cuba's Public-Sector Layoffs Signal Major Shift," *New York Times*.  
Published September 13, 2010.  
[www.nytimes.com/2010/09/14/world/americas/14cuba.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/14/world/americas/14cuba.html). Accessed April 1, 2011.
- Muller, Karel. 2002. "The Social, Cultural, and Civilization Effects of Transformation," In *Structural Change and Modernization in Post-Socialist Societies*. Wladyslaw Adamski, Pavel Machonin & Wolfgang Zapf (Eds.) Reinhold Kramer Verlag: Hamburg, Germany.
- Murray, Nicola. 1979. "Socialism and Feminism: Women and the Cuban Revolution," *Feminist Review*, 2:57-73.
- Nazzari, Muriel. 1983. "The Woman Question in Cuba: An Analysis of Material Constraints on Its Solution," *Signs*, 9(2): 246-263.
- Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs. 2011. "Cuba: Background Notes," The U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2886.htm> Accessed: January 26, 2011.
- Otero, Gerardo and Janice O'Bryan. 2002. "Cuba in Transition? The Civil Sphere's Challenge to the Castro Regime," *Latin American Politics and Society*, 44(4): 29-57.
- Pérez-López, Jorge F. 1995. *Cuba's Second Economy: From Behind the Scenes to Centre Stage*. Transaction Press: New Brunswick.
- Peters, Phillip and Joseph L. Scarpaci. 1998. "Cuba's New Entrepreneurs: Five Years of Small-Scale Capitalism," Alexis de Toqueville Institution. [http://adti.net/html\\_files/cuba/TCP-](http://adti.net/html_files/cuba/TCP-)  
Accessed: June 12, 2011.

- Roberg, Jeffrey L. & Alyson Kuttruff. 2007. "Cuba: Ideological Success or Ideological Failure?" *Human Rights Quarterly*, 29: 779-795.
- Rona-Tos, Akos. 1997. *The Great Surprise of the Small Transition: The Demise of Communism and the Rise of the Private Sector in Hungary*. University of Michigan Press: Illinois.
- Sherman, R. 2007. *Class Acts: Service and Inequality in Luxury Hotels*. University of California Press: Berkley California Press.
- Small, Mario L. Forthcoming 2011. "Lost in Translation: How Not to Make Qualitative Research More Scientific." In *Report from Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research*. Michèle Lamont and Patricia White (Ed.s) National Science Foundation: Washington, DC.
- Toro-Morn, Roschelle & Facio. 2002. "Gender, Work and Family in Cuba: The Challenges of the Special Period," *Journal of Developing Societies*, 18(2-3): 32-58.
- Trumbell, Charles. 2000. "Economic Reforms and Social Contradictions in Cuba" *Cuba in Transition, Volume 10*. Papers and Proceedings of the 10th Annual Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE). Miami, Florida.
- U.N. Development Programme. 2009. *Human Development Report 2009*. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, NY.
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 2011. "World Heritage Convention," United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <http://whc.unesco.org/> Accessed: January 26, 2011.

- U.S. Department of State. 2011. Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, Background Note: Cuba. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2886.htm> Accessed: June 10, 2011.
- U.S. Department of State. 2008. Barbados and Eastern Caribbean 2008 Crime and Safety Report. Available at: <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportPDF.aspx?cid=6664> Accessed: June 7, 2011.
- Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of the Evolution of Institutions*. Macmillan Press: London.
- Verdery, Katherine. 1996. *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 1994. *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*. Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY.
- Yeh, Emily T. 2006. “An Open Lhasa Welcomes You: Disciplining the Researcher in Tibet,” In *Doing Fieldwork in China*. (Ed.s) Heimer & Thogersen, 96-109. University of Hawaii Press: Honolulu, Hawaii.
- Zeitlin, Maurice. 1966. “Economic Insecurity an the Political Attitudes of Cuban Workers,” *American Sociological Review* 31: 35-51.

# Appendices

## Appendix A : Map of Habana Barrios



Havana, Cuba: research area by neighbourhood.

© Google 2011

## Appendix B : Letter of Initial Contact

### THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive,  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1  
[www.soci.ubc.ca](http://www.soci.ubc.ca)

Dear

Hello! I am a Graduate Student of Sociology at the University of British Columbia, which is located in the city of Vancouver, in Canada. I am contacting you in the hopes of securing your assistance with my research on paladares in Cuba. In particular, I'm hoping to learn more about how people in Cuba think about self-employment and entrepreneurship. I hope to understand how running paladares impacts owner's lives and how they are perceived from the perspective of ordinary Cuban people.

This is why I have contacted you. I hope to interview you about why you decided to open your own business, what impact it has had on your own life as well as your family's, and how self-employment has, or has not, affected your social beliefs. I anticipate that an interview might last between 30 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes.

If you are willing to meet with me, I would be most grateful. When I conduct interviews, I follow the standard procedures that researchers at my university adhere to. The interview will be confidential: Only I see my research notes, and I only use them for my research. I keep my research notes locked and secure. I will not use your name in my notes or in any of my research reports. You will not have to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering, and you can stop or cancel the interview at any time. If, after the interview, you decide that you do not want me to use the information you gave me, you can contact me and I will follow your wishes.

If you are willing to conduct an interview with me, please contact me directly at the mobile telephone number written at the bottom of this letter. If you have any questions about me or my research, I would be more than happy to answer them. Again, I would be most grateful for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Ariel Taylor  
Graduate Student, Sociology  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
University of British Columbia  
**Contact information:**

**In Cuba:**

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



[mobile phone number will be provided]

**In Canada:**

**Telephone:**

██████████

**Email:**

████████████████████

**Mail:**

Ariel Taylor  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1  
Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive,  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z  
[www.soci.ubc.ca](http://www.soci.ubc.ca)

Estimado Sr(a)...

Permítame presentarme, Yo soy un estudiante de postgrado en Sociología de la Universidad de British Columbia. Dicha universidad se encuentra localizada en la ciudad de Vancouver, Canadá. Lo(a) estoy contactando con la esperanza de que pueda ayudarme con un trabajo de investigación que estoy realizando sobre Paladares en Cuba, esto como parte de mis estudios de postgrado. En particular, quisiera obtener información sobre cuál es la opinión de los Cubanos con respecto al trabajo autónomo y los emprendimientos privados. También quisiera comprender cuál es la percepción de los Cubanos con respecto a emprendimientos como Paladares, sus propietarios y como sus vidas han sido afectadas por dichos emprendimientos.

Esta es la razón por la cual me he puesto en contacto con usted. Quisiera entrevistarlo(a) acerca de las razones que lo(a) llevaron a abrir su propio negocio, cual es el impacto que esto ha tenido en su vida, así como en el de su familia, y como su trabajo autónomo y emprendimiento han influenciado sus creencias sociales. Estimo que la duración de nuestra entrevista pueda ser entre 30 minutos y 1 hora y media.

Yo le estaría sumamente agradecida si usted estuviera de acuerdo en concederme esta entrevista. Para su información, durante la entrevista, yo seguiré todos los procedimientos que son requeridos por mi Universidad a todos sus investigadores y colaboradores. La entrevista será totalmente confidencial ya que yo seré la única persona que tendrá acceso a los apuntes tomados durante la entrevista y dichas informaciones solo serán utilizadas para la investigación que estoy realizando. Estos apuntes serán mantenidos seguros y bajo llave. Su nombre no aparecerá en los apuntes ni en ningún reporte de mi investigación. Usted no tendrá que responder a ninguna pregunta que lo haga sentirse incomodo o que simplemente no quiera contestar, también puede parar o cancelar la entrevista a cualquier momento si así lo desea. Si, después de la entrevista, usted decide que no quiere que yo utilice la información obtenida durante la misma, usted podrá contactarme y yo seguiré sus instrucciones.

Si usted está dispuesto a participar en una de dichas entrevista conmigo le agradecería si pudiera llamarme, para confirmarlo, directamente al número de teléfono móvil que se encuentra al final de esta carta. Me coloco a su entera disposición para responder cualquier pregunta que usted pueda tener sobre mí o mi investigación. También quisiera reiterarle mis agradecimientos por su asistencia en esta investigación.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Sinceramente,

Ariel Taylor  
Estudiante de Postgrado en Sociología  
Departamento de Antropología y Sociología  
Universidad de British Columbia

**Información de contacto:**

En Cuba:

Teléfono:

En Canadá:

Teléfono: [REDACTED]

Correo electrónico:

[REDACTED]

Correo postal:  
Ariel Taylor  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1  
Canada

## Appendix C : Letter of Self-Introduction

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive,  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1  
[www.soci.ubc.ca](http://www.soci.ubc.ca)

Dear

Hello!

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am an Graduate Student of Sociology at the University of British Columbia, which is located in the city of Vancouver, in Canada. For sometime I have studied Cuban society and have become interested in how the legalization of self-employment is affecting the lives of ordinary Cuban people. I am currently working on a new research project on paladares in Havana, Cuba. In the past two decades, so many changes have occurred in Cuba, and one of the most important has been the introduction of some private enterprise in the context of ongoing political regulation and socialist ideology. I am especially interested in learning more about the benefits and challenges of running a paladar, and experiences of paladar owners living in Havana. I want to understand how people experience such economic changes, and how these experiences are different for different paladar owners. In order to do this, I hope to interview a number of paladar owners about why they decided to open a paladar, what impact being self-employment has had on their personal and family lives, what kinds rewards and/or challenges they have experienced, and how, if at all, paladar ownership has impacted their social beliefs.

This is why I have contacted you. I hope to have the opportunity to observe your work and the daily operations of your business. I want to watch you and your customers engaged in ordinary, everyday restaurant activities, and speak to people about why they chose to come to your restaurant. I am especially interested how paladares have impacted the social lives of ordinary Cuban people.

If you do not want me to observe you or to speak to you about these matters, please just let me know and I will respect your privacy. If you do agree, I will write down my observations, but only I will see these notes, and I will only use them for my research. I keep my research notes locked and secure. I will not use your name or the name of your business in my notes or in any of my research reports. You can stop or cancel my observations at any time. If, after I have stopped my observations, you decide that you do not want me to use the information I gathered, you can contact me and I will follow your wishes.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



May I have the opportunity to watch you work and watch your customers? You can contact me at the mobile telephone number at the bottom of this letter. If you have any questions about me or my research, I would be more than happy to answer them.

Thank you very much,

Ariel Taylor  
Graduate Student, Sociology  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
University of British Columbia

**Contact information:**

**In Cuba:**  
[mobile phone number will be provided]

**In Canada:**  
Telephone:  
[REDACTED]

Email:  
[REDACTED]

**Mail:**  
Ariel Taylor  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1  
Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive,  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1  
[www.soci.ubc.ca](http://www.soci.ubc.ca)

Estimado Sr(a).

Permítame presentarme, Yo soy una estudiante de postgrado en Sociología de la Universidad de British Columbia. Dicha universidad se encuentra localizada en la ciudad de Vancouver, Canadá. Durante algún tiempo he estudiando la sociedad China y he desarrollado el interés por comprender como la legalización del empleo autónomo en Cuba ha afectado la vida de sus habitantes. Actualmente, yo estoy trabajando en un nuevo proyecto de investigación sobre los Paladares en la Habana, Cuba. En las dos últimas décadas, muchos cambios han ocurrido en Cuba y uno de los más importantes ha sido la introducción de algunos emprendimientos privados ya que dichos emprendimientos han sido realizados en el contexto existente de regulación política e ideología socialista. Sobretudo estoy interesada en identificar los beneficios y desafíos que establecer y operar un Paladar en la Habana traen consigo así como cuál ha sido la experiencia de sus propietarios al hacerlo. Yo quisiera comprender como las personas viven estos cambios económicos y como estas experiencias varían de propietario a propietario. Para obtener dichas informaciones espero poder entrevistar varios propietarios de Paladares acerca de las razones que los han llevado a abrir un Paladar, cuál ha sido el impacto que convertirse en trabajadores autónomos ha tenido en sus vidas y en la de sus familias, cuáles han sido los desafíos y satisfacciones que han encontrado durante dichos emprendimientos y si convertirse en propietarios de Paladares ha modificado sus creencias sociales en lo absoluto.

Esta es la razón por la cual me he puesto en contacto con usted. Espero me pueda acordar la oportunidad de observarlo(a) a usted trabajando y realizando las operaciones diarias de su emprendimiento. Quisiera observarlo(a) a usted y a sus clientes realizando sus actividades cotidianas en su Paladares y conversar con sus clientes con el objetivo de identificar la(s) razón(es) por la cual(es) han seleccionado su establecimiento. Estoy especialmente interesada en comprender como los Paladares han impactado la vida social de los Cubanos.

Si usted no desea que yo lo(a) observe en sus actividades cotidianas o conversemos sobre estos asuntos, por favor siéntase totalmente libre de expresar su posición y yo lo(a) comprenderé y respetaré su privacidad. Si por el contrario usted está de acuerdo en que yo realice dichas observaciones y que conversemos al respecto, yo escribiré mis observaciones pero quisiera resaltar que yo seré la única persona que tendrá acceso a mis apuntes y que ellos solo serán utilizados para la investigación que estoy realizando como parte de mis estudios de postgrado. Estos apuntes serán mantenidos seguros y

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



bajo llave a todo momento. Yo no utilizaré su nombre ni el de su establecimiento en mis apuntes ni en ningún reporte de mi investigación. Usted podrá interrumpir o cancelar mis observaciones a cualquier momento si así lo desea. Si después de haber realizado mis observaciones usted decide que ya no quiere que yo utilice la información obtenida durante las mismas, usted podrá contactarme y yo seguiré sus instrucciones.

Si usted está dispuesto(a) a permitirme realizar las observaciones descritas anteriormente le agradecería si pudiera llamarme, para confirmarlo, directamente al número de teléfono móvil que se encuentra al final de esta carta. Me coloco a su entera disposición para responder cualquier pregunta que usted pueda tener sobre mí o mi investigación. También quisiera reiterarle mis agradecimientos por su asistencia en esta investigación.

Sinceramente,

Ariel Taylor  
Estudiante de Postgrado en Sociología  
Departamento de Antropología y Sociología  
Universidad de British Columbia

**Información de contacto:**

En Cuba:

Teléfono:

En Canadá:

Teléfono: [REDACTED]

Correo electrónico:

[REDACTED]

Correo postal:

Ariel Taylor  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive  
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z1  
Canada

## Appendix D : Scripts for Oral Consent

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive,  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1  
www.soci.ubc.ca

Principal investigator: **Ariel Taylor, Graduate Student, Sociology**  
Project title: **Self-Employment and Paladar Life in Havana, Cuba**

### Script for gaining oral consent for interviews

English text of script for gaining oral consent at the beginning of each interview:

Hello! Thanks very much for agreeing to meet with me. Before we begin, I just want to explain my research project and my research methods with you again, just to make sure you are fully comfortable talking with me. My research project is about self-employment and paladar life in Havana, Cuba in the context of rapid social and economic change. In particular, I'm hoping to learn more about how people in Cuba think about self-employment and how paladares are unique sites of social activity. For this reason, I'm going to be asking you questions today about [\*specific to interview: either paladar owner experience or paladar patron experience].

Regarding my research methods, I want to be sure you know that anything we talk about today will be written down in my research notes, but it will be seen only by me, and I will only use this material for research reports. You can choose to have this interview audio-recorded or for me to take written notes instead. In either scenario I will not use your name in my notes or in my research reports, so your identity will be anonymous. Also, at any time, if you decide you don't want me to use the information we talk about today, you can contact me via phone or email [local phone number to be provided along with the PIs email address and the ORS mailing address] and I will not use that material. And finally, if there are any questions or topics that I ask you about today that you don't want to discuss, just say so. You can stop or end this interview at any time you like. There is contact information provided on this letter I have given you [either "initial contact" or "self introduction" letter], and there is also a mailing address for the The Office of Research Services at my university. They can also be contacted with any concerns you might have about participating in this project.

Do you have any questions for me about this research, or what I will do with it? Do you agree to speak with me today as part of this research project? Are you comfortable with audio-recording or would you prefer I take written notes only?

### Script for gaining oral consent for observations

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



English text of script for gaining oral consent at the beginning of each interview:

Hello! Thanks very much for agreeing to meet with me. Before we begin, I just want to explain my research project and my research methods with you again, just to make sure you are fully comfortable talking with me. My research project is about self-employment and paladar life in Havana, Cuba in the context of rapid social and economic change. In particular, I'm hoping to learn more about how people in Cuba think about self-employment and how paladares are unique sites of social activity. For this reason, I hope to observe your business and the way your customers behave.

Regarding my research methods, I want to be sure you know that I will write down a lot of the things I see in my research notes, but it will be seen only by me, and I will only use this material for research reports. I will not use your name, or the name of your business, in my notes or in my research reports, so your identity will be anonymous. Also, at any time, if you decide you don't want me to use the information we talk about or that I observe, you can contact me and I will not use that material. And finally, if there are any questions or topics that I ask you about today that you don't want to discuss, just say so. You can ask me to leave at any time you like. There is contact information provide on this letter I have given you [either "initial contact" or "self introduction" letter], and there is also a mailing address for the Office of Research Services at my university. They can also be contacted should you have any concerns participating in this project.

Do you have any questions for me about this research, or what I will do with it? Do you agree to participate in my research project?

PI's email: [REDACTED]  
ORS: Office of Research Services  
TEF III #102  
6190 Agronomy Road  
Vancouver, BC  
CANADA V6T 1Z3

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive,  
Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6T 1Z1  
[www.soci.ubc.ca](http://www.soci.ubc.ca)

**Investigador Principal:** Ariel Taylor, Estudiante Posgraduada, Sociología  
**Título del Proyecto:** El Trabajo Autónomo y los Paladares en Habana, Cuba

**Escritura para obtener su consentimiento oral para la entrevista:**

¡Hola! Muchas gracias por haber aceptado encontrarse conmigo. Antes de empezar, me gustaría explicar mi investigación y mis métodos de investigación, para asegurarme que usted se siente cómodo/a hablando conmigo. Mi investigación es sobre el trabajo autónomo y los paladares en Habana, Cuba en el contexto de cambio cultural y económico. En particular, me gustaría aprender que piensan los Cubanos del trabajo autónomo y como los paladares son sitios de actividad cultural. Por esta razón, yo voy hacer preguntas sobre  
(las experiencias del dueño de paladar o del cliente de paladar).

En cuanto a mis métodos de investigación, quiero que estés seguro/a de que todo lo que hablaremos hoy será recordado en mis notas, pero que yo seré la única persona a ver estas notas y utilizar esta información en mi informe de investigación. Puedes elegir si quieres que yo grabe esta entrevista o si prefieres que yo tomé notas. De cualquier forma, vuestra identidad se quedará anónima por qué yo no utilizaré vuestro nombre en mis notas o en mi informe de investigación. Si, a cualquier punto, decides que no quieres que yo use la información adquirida, puedes contactarme, y no las utilizaré. Finalmente, si hay preguntas que no quieres responder o tópicos que no quieras hablar, solo diga no. Puedes parar la entrevista a cualquier hora. Mi teléfono de contacto en Cuba y en Canadá se queda en la otra carta donde también puedes encontrar el correo del departamento de Sociología en mi universidad.

¿Tienes preguntas sobre mi investigación? ¿Puedo tener vuestro permiso para entrevistarle? ¿Quieres que yo grabe nuestra conversación o prefieres que yo tome notas solamente?

**Escritura para obtener su consentimiento oral para las observaciones:**

¡Hola! Muchas gracias por haber aceptado encontrarse conmigo. Antes de empezar, me gustaría explicar mi investigación y mis métodos de investigación, para asegurarme que usted se siente cómodo/a hablando conmigo. Mi investigación es sobre el trabajo autónomo y los paladares en Habana, Cuba en el contexto de cambio cultural y económico. En particular, me gustaría aprender que piensan los Cubanos del trabajo

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



autónomo y como los paladares son sitios de actividad cultural. Por esta razón, yo espero observar vuestro negocio y las actividades cotidianas de vuestros clientes.

En cuanto a mis métodos de investigación, yo quiero explicarle que voy a escribir notas de mis observaciones pero que yo seré la única persona a ver estas notas y utilizar la información en mi informe de investigación. Vuestra identidad se quedará anónima por qué yo no utilizaré vuestro nombre o el nombre del paladar en mis notas o en mi informe de investigación. Si, a cualquier punto, decides que no quieres que yo use la información adquirida, puedes contactarme, y no las utilizaré. Finalmente, si hay preguntas que no quieres responder o tópicos que no quieras hablar, solo diga no. Puedes pedir que yo salga de vuestro paladar a cualquier momento. Mi teléfono de contacto en Cuba y en Canadá se queda en la otra carta donde también puedes encontrar el correo del departamento de Sociología en mi universidad.

¿Tienes preguntas sobre mi investigación? ¿Puedo tener vuestro permiso para observar las actividades cotidianas que se pasan en vuestro paladar?

**Información de contacto:**

Correo electrónico:

████████████████████

Correo postal ORS:

Office of Research Services  
TEF III #102  
6190 Agronomy Road  
Vancouver, BC  
CANADA V6T 1Z3

## **Appendix E : Preliminary Interview Schedule**

### Preliminary Interview Schedule: Paladar Owner Interviews

Because these interviews are meant to be exploratory, below is a rough framework of topics that *will likely* be covered in the course of individual interviews.

#### **Background information:**

- Previous occupation(s), family characteristics, educational background, ethnic/racial heritage, gender
- History: how has Havana changed in last two decades, how does he/she feel about changes,
- Neighborhood of paladar: location in city, type of buildings, commercial and transportation services available, socioeconomic status of residents, tourist attractions, social infrastructure

#### **Paladar Operations**

- Why, when and in what context it was opened, who works there, hours of operation, clientele, menu selection,
- Roles/responsibilities of ownership
- Cost of operations: rent, inventory, taxes, commissions
- Regulations of paladar: seating, menu, alcohol, hours
- Net income from paladar, other incomes, tipping,
- Advertising, tourism, entertainment

#### **Socioeconomic Life:**

- In what ways have paladar ownership impacted his/her material, community, family, political life
- How does he/she perceive other, non-self employed, Cubans to regard his/her business, how is this different from tourists?
- What challenges have paladar operations created? What benefits?
- How has self-employment changed Havana? Cuba? Are these changes good or bad for the overall population?

#### **Future Aspirations:**

How would he/she *like* to see the paladar change in the future?  
What challenges exist for continued operations?  
What will likely happen to the business in the future?