Insight Cuba

A Reflection Rapport and Three Features Connected to Cuban Economy

1. Skänkta cyklar får nytt liv på Kuba
2. Ekonomin, en av de största utmaningarna på Kuba
3. Utbredd sexturism på Kuba

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Introduction

The journey of producing this master thesis, consisting of three features connected to the Cuban economy, began in 2017 when I was awarded a Minor Field Study-scholarship from SIDA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency). The money enabled me to travel to Cuba where I stayed for three months. During these months I realised that Cuban society with its many rules, possibilities and challenges would only be understood spending a longer period of time in society. After the initial three months I therefor returned home to Sweden and a few months later travelled back to Cuba for a second visit where I spent another seven months researching and living in the country.

The study is based on qualitative research methods and was undertaken in a multi-sited fieldwork environment in Havana, the rural areas of the northwest of the island and in the tourist area of Varadero. Two trips to Mexico were made, one to Mexico City and the other to Cancun in order to interview, participate with and observe Cubans traveling there for “business”. I had to leave Cuba every 90 days for VISA purposes so timing was perfect.

The aim of this master has been to produce slow news journalism. With a bachelor degree in Cultural Anthropology I wanted to combine the knowledge from that field into a journalistic piece of work. Anthropologists usually spend a year or more in the field to properly gain knowledge of what is being studied and this master provided me with the opportunity to do so. One of the most important things people discussed or talked about whilst I was in Cuba were issues connected to and related to the economy/money. The result of these conversations, interviews and participant observations were put into three features that all look at the economy from the local to the global.

1. Background

Since the Cuban revolution, led by Fidel Castro and Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara to overthrow the Fulgencio Batista regime in 1959, Cuba has been under communist rule. During the cold war the ties were tight to the Soviet Union. That relationship and the fact that the new government in Cuba now began to nationalized U.S.- owned property and taxed American imports a full economic embargo was placed on Cuba by the United States in 1962. The embargo also included rigorous travel restrictions between the two countries (Renwick 2016). The end of the cold war and the fall of the iron wall in 1989 created a new political and financial situation that decimated the Cuban economy (Sim 2016). The Island became short on medicine, shoes,
soap, gasoline, food and basic supplies. Desperation reached its peek in 1994 where 33,000 Cubans took to open sea in homemade rafts in an attempt to reach the United States for a better life (Castellanos 2017). To mitigate the financial situation, created by the heavy embargo and fall of the eastern block, the government in Cuba implemented the so called “Special Period in time of peace” a period that has lasted for more than two decades, a series of austerity measures were taken using both socialist, capitalist and pre-capitalist strategies in order to overcome the economic crisis (Babb 2011: 52, Ritter 2010). During his presidency President Obama said that the economic sanctions placed on Cuba, which over five decades have cost the Cuban economy over 1.1 trillion dollars, were a failure and an out-dated burden on the Cuban people (Kennedy 2016).

1.2 Purpose & Topic Selection

Many journalist and tour operators when covering or selling Cuba are under the impression that the island has been looked up in a time capsule and that nothing has changed for more than 50 years. Others write that its people really want change, liberty and Wi-Fi (Abel 2016).

The purpose of this master’s project has been to find out (by living with Cubans in their society) how the economy affects them. What problems are they facing on a daily basis and how do they cope with some of the financial challenges presented to them?

Instead of using journalism as a way to extract specific information the aim has been to extract conceptions of the lived world by using qualitative methods like participant-observation to create slow news journalism or ethnographic journalism. By using this method the stories in the reports have been able to unfold with and through time, rather than having been created from a set of already determined priories. The study is based on qualitative research methods undertaken in a multi-sited fieldwork environment and the result shows that the economy effect people differently depending on where they are located both geographically, economically, spatial, and societal.

The connection between the local, the national and the global had to be made, as the subject is all encompassing in society, and many questions emerged through time. The research has focused on the relationship between Cubans, tourists and tourism and touches upon aspects such as the dual money system, different forms of employments, how the embargo is felt in society, remittances, how the formal and informal markets work, and the complex relationship between foreigners and Cubans.
1.3 Adaptation to Audience/ Genre

The genre of text used to narratively construct this piece of work has been based on an *ethnographic journalism* to portray human environments from within. As suggested by journalist Ann Kristine Hermann this type of journalism “may respond to the rise of multiculturalism, generally, and context-aware journalism, specifically” (Hermann 2016: 263). According to her, it challenges the epistemic level of conventional journalism in several ways: its cultural values, the objective ideal and its occupation with singular events. By including the search for meaning, using reflexivity instead of being concerned with the journalistic who, what, when, where, how, and why of a particular event, the process of collecting data has differ from the usual journalistic way of gathering information. Scholars such as Galtung and Ruge (1965) have also suggested that journalist in order to counteract prevailing news factors, should try to report on long-term, complex and ambiguous issues instead. When covering international news and the global south, for instance, it is important to include a background to the story instead on focusing on specific events as they are interrelated to larges sequences and do not happen in isolation (Jorgensen & Hanish 2009:19,163).

The long format of a journalistic story, a literary reportage, was chosen for this master in order to have more room for personal and environmental descriptions within the text. A news article would have been to small and to event focused whereas a longer feature provided a deeper understanding for the chosen subject. To create this genre journalist needs to venture out into the world and spend time in the field, instead of hanging out in the comfort zone of their office (Sundelin 2008) and the word reportage literary means to bring back (Häger 2014).

The reports are written in Swedish and the text is made up of different scenes and dialogs between people. There is also a facts box to each report to separate some of the information from the actual text. The reflection report is written in English, this is due to the fact that SIDA requires it to be in that language. Considerations have been taken weather or not to translate the reports into English as well but as of now they are in Swedish, as hopefully they will be sold to one of the daily larger newspapers in Sweden.
1.4 Delimitations

The geographical field of the study has been limited to the province of Havana, the city of Havana, outskirts of Havana and the province of Matanzas, where Varadero is located. Although the field was limited many of the findings can be applicable to other places in Cuba where tourism is apart of the everyday fabric of life, such as in the city of Santiago & Holguin to mention a few.

The reports do not touch upon on male prostitutes, so called “pingueros” in Cuba, nor does it cover under aged prostitution in the reports on sex tourism. It would have been too challenging and time consuming to lift these matters as well. Building up trust with people required extensive networking on the ground and time to enable them to share their experiences.

Although the reports touch upon some economic figures and numbers that are of importance to the storyline, the perspectives of the people and their lived realities have been the main focus and importance of the study.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

In order to know what to look for in society different theoretical lenses have been used. A Theory of Practice has been used to see how people navigate and construct their lives in a Cuban context. Anthropological economic theories have been used to understand how people think and behave in relations to their specific economic culture. A Post Colonial perspective has been used to look at the process and consequence of colonialism and decolonization as these experiences are still shaping the world today. Slow news journalism and Ethnographic journalism have been used in order to look at other ways of producing and creating news and information.

The theories have all worked as supporting legs throughout the research, when interviewing and choosing subjects. They have been useful when looking at micro, meso and macro-processes in order to see the relationship between individuals, groups and political decision-making bodies (Poluha & Rosendahl 2002). It has been important to take notice of historical and contemporary changes in Cuba as people are incorporated into major economic, political, social and cultural processes.

Please note that stories inside the features only show a fraction of all of the lived realities and experiences had in a very complex country with millions of inhabitants. One can easily dig
much deeper into how the concept of colour and colonialism are shaping the choices made by sex buyers and Cubans trying to gain money within this economy. The meaning of Jinterism for example is a very complicated one, and there are numerous academic papers and books on this particular subject. The same can be said about many issues brought forward inside the reports.

2.1 Theory of Practice

The Theory of Practice created by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu; was used to understand how people navigate and construct their lives, as our perception of the world is the result of social practices. His key concept of Capital, Habitus and Field has been used as tools to look at parts of Cuban society. Values, assets and resources are capitals that are either symbolic or economic in their form. Habitus is the system of dispositions that allow people to act, think and orient themselves in the social world and the Field is the social context in within which the capitals are located (Broady 1991). Power and class thinking is part of all that is learnt where dominance and submission are created, manipulated and challenged (Bourdieu & Waquant 1992).

The theory sees the individual as a political actor and takes notice of historical processes that have shaped the discourse both locally and globally. Previous research has found that although Cuba has come a long way in terms of health care, education, social welfare, the arts & sports the consequences of the “Special Period in Times of Peace” have changed the lives of the people very differently depending on their ethnicity, socio-economic situation and gender (Babb 2011). Practice theorist within the economic field point out that although people know the rules for proper behaviour and the should do, in a social setting on one level, they also manipulate and break rules all the time on another hence people mix with the system all the time. They are however not free from social restraint (Wilk & Cliggett 2007).

2.2 Economic Anthropology

Every culture has an economy and all people take part in some form of economic behaviour and thought (Wilk & Cliggett 2007). In the book "Economies and Culture", the authors Wilk & Cliggett share three models of understanding different aspects of human behaviour regarding economics: The self-interest model, the social model and the moral model.
The self-interest model of human culture is often linked to the micro economy whose thoughts on supply and demand form the basis. This utilitarian model sees people as rational maximizing individuals, aware of their choices and their consequences. In order to maximize the total amount of “good” in the best possible way people forms groups, both for rational and selfish reasons. What this "good" consists of is disputed but it can be both emotions and material things. There are various economic theories studying the actions of individuals' within this model (Wilk & Cliggett 2007:42,84, 70). Anthropological empirical studies show that not all people are self-motivated however. They have found that there are other aspects behind their behaviours such as: traditions, power of prestige, religion and social factors (Brown 2009).

The social model of human culture is often linked to political economy and looks at how people forms groups and exercise power because "the tension between the individual and the group is a central theme in our society" (Wilk & Cliggett 2007:83). Marx's theories of power and struggle have been very influential within this model. His research focused on power, conflicts, changes, production and ownership between various social formations, both within the social system and within the classes included in this system (Ibid, 2007). This theory can be helpful when trying to understand historical changes, see exploits, lack of social equality and conflicts.

The moral model deals with human behaviour and morals and is based on how people think and what their beliefs about the world are. According to this model the moral persons motivations are shaped by their cultural beliefs and value systems. The study of gift exchange lies within this model for example, which takes notice of all the aspects of human nature in action at once. Gifts can both be seen as a rational exchange, to build political and social relations, and as an expression of moral ideals and cultural meaning (Ibid, 2007: 156).

2.3 Postcolonial Theory

A post-colonial perspective looks at contemporary cultural, economic, political and social processes as a consequence of colonialism where its heritage and power structures still surrounds us in the world today. (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thorn, 2005, Farahani, 2007, Jonsson, 2005). Although colonialism formally ceased to be in Cuba, its structure and effect still has many implications on an economical, social and cultural level today. The post-colonial perspective should not be seen as a paradigm shift from colonialism, or something
that happened thereafter. It can be understood as a relationship between different temporalities and transition phases where the experiences of colonialism and decolonization shape and influence those we call "us" and "them" in an economic, cultural & social sense (Eriksson, Eriksson Baaz & Thörn 2005). The main claim of the theory is that it is impossible to understand the world we live in today without looking at the relationship we have to the history of colonial rule and imperialism.

Babb’s (2011) research for instance show that socio-economic inequalities exists within the tourism trade and that most Cubans lack access to tourist venues and the money it provides, unless they are employed within this trade (Ibid: 2011). Alejandro De La Fuentes research has looked at race and income in Cuba. Based on his and other researchers conclusions, racial inequality has increased in Cuban society due to unequal access to both remittance and access to tourism or joint ventures where people of colour are situated in the lowest income brackets (De la Fuente, 2011).

In terms of foreign reporting, documenting and bringing stories into life from other countries, means that journalism is partaking in the construction of otherness. The Post Colonial condition is therefore also part of the construction of gathering and creating news. Many times reports and news are perpetuating ideas of racial differences especially when reporting on issues happening on the African continent (Thomas, 2016). In order to subvert dehumanizing and negative representations slow news journalism has been used when producing these features. Since news play a part in creating people’s beliefs and views of the world it is more and more important that we as producers become aware of our own biases and think about how we portray and understand “the other”.

2.4 Slow News Journalism & Ethnographic Journalism

The landscape of the media market has undergone major and rapid changes since the late 80s. With the introduction of mobile telephones, computers, social media networks, apps, technical solutions an increasing number of media producers/channels are on the market. As a result the industry has had to change to survive financially. With declining advertising revenues, increased competition and the paper magazine in crisis, workplaces have changed (Asp 2012, Andersson 2014). This has had consequences for the journalistic work/approach and for the organizations/individuals working in this field (Asp 2012, Andersson 2014, Zadig
& Oleskog Tryggvason 2014). Quality has suffered, news is abundant 24/7, ethics have been compromised and the attention of the users has changed.

News is often event-driven, immediate and fast. With a wish to break the news first journalist have less time to think and place the particular event into the system in which it is created (Drok & Hermans 2016, Thomas, 2016). Some scholars have said that this renders the world to be one-dimensional and homogeneous (Craig 2016). Many scholars and journalists are therefor questioning the culture of journalistic production and its final product. What is being lost in such fast production and what could be gained from a different type of journalistic production? Could there be another way of practicing journalism, of getting away from “McJournalism” (Le Masurie 2016, Drok & Hermans, 2017).

The term ”Slow News Journalism” was coined by Susan Greenberg in 2007 and has been theorized by many scholars and journalist since then (Greenberg, 2007). It is inspired by other slow movements such as the slow-food movement “stressing sustainability, transparency about origin and nutritional value, while avoiding the use of unhealthy colourings or flavourings” (Drok & Hermans, 2016: 541) The core principles of “good, clean and fair” is shared with other similar movements and the process is about taking the time to do things properly. Slow news should provide in depth stories with context that offer a variety of sources and perspectives that requires time for deeper reflection and investigation (Le Masurie 2016, Le Masurie 2015, Drok & Hermans 2017).

The process of collecting data for this master has differed from usual journalistic ways of gathering information. The search for meaning, using reflexivity amongst others, has been included instead of being concerned with the journalistic who, what, when, where, how, and why of a particular event.

In order to explore the perspectives of others, be self -reflexive and open to pre-established value positions time is of the essence. It is about “hanging out” in a place and thereby lessening the construction of otherness and carefully consider the consequences of the final product, the images constructed and the relationship with the sources used (Craig 2016, Thomas 2016). It would have been impossible to produce report number two and three without spending a longer amount of time in the field. In order to gain a deeper knowledge of the country one has to live with the locals and move within society so that the layers of society can be understood from a holistic perspective.
3. Methods and Challenges

A variety of methods were used when producing the reports. Research before leaving Cuba consisted in reading articles, academic papers and books connected to Cuba. Formal and informal interviews, semi-structured interviews and everyday conversations with people were conducted in the field and these are at the heart of the material. Observations and participant observations have been used in order to get the bigger picture and not only take interviews and conversations for face value or the truth.

A field journal, to harness the feelings and moments that might have been forgotten with time was kept during the entire fieldwork. Some events/moments were recorded as sound files onto a phone. This is a great way of follow ones own thought, as they are non-linear when spoken as supposed to when written down.

No surveys were used in the field, as this would have been too eye catching in the community and keeping a low profile was essential when conducting the study. The following section contains information about the methods used and some of the difficulties of using them.

3.1 Research & The Role of The Researcher

Research about Cuba started when writing the initial proposal for the scholarship application. Numerous news articles and books were read. Several documentaries such as The Cuba Libre Story on Netflix and some features on Vice.Video.com were watched. Upon arrival it was all about exploring, understanding and networking the community.

The role of the researcher is always influenced, accommodated and dependent on the life situation of the researcher him or herself. The same must be said about conventional journalism and journalists too. The journalistic production has had a claim on objectivity with its value of showing both sides of a story (Hermann 2016). Reality is often much more complex than two sides of the story and seldom do we question our own “neutral” position, therefor a reflexive approach when producing this thesis has been important. A study is never one-dimensional in its creation and we need to be critically aware of what the significance of the researcher's/ journalist interaction with the informants has for the information that is created (Aull Davis 2008, Agar 2008).
I came to Cuba, as a single white European woman, educated, not married, without children, partially brought up in communist former East Germany. This meant that some fields (situations, places) were harder to access and understand and others easier.

By hanging around in the community for a longer time, learning some of the Do's and Don'ts in society, the relationship towards people and situations change. Time helped build confidence, it helped with gaining access and trust to different groups/persons spoken to during fieldwork as “Presence builds trust. Trust lowers reactivity. Lower reactivity means higher validity of data (H.Russel 2006:354).

3.2 Observations and Participant Observation

When living in a society this method is really used on a daily basis and it creates a lot of information. It is amazing what one can learn by traveling on public transport, going to parties, visiting the doctor, going for walks with people, shopping in the local supermarket, talking to people on their own turf, in their own field. Participant Observation is about living with, interacting with and developing reciprocal relationships with members of a group in order to try to experience the life of your informants to the extent possible (Ibid: 2006:319). It is also about stepping in and out of the context. On one hand you have to get “native” through participation and on the other distance yourself in order to observe (Nazaruk 2011).

What people say and what they actually do may sometimes differ and participant observation can render this visibly. Participating also creates a more solid relationship between informants and the researcher. During my first visit I lived in the city of Havana in a beautiful apartment that was looked after by a curly haired wonderful Cuban women who also provided a cooked meal a day and breakfast. The first visit was more or less spent as a tourist, trying to figure out how things work.

My second time around, spending seven months in Cuba, was a very different experience. I had met a man with whom I later shared a life together with in his community. This changed the field completely and also my role in it. It enabled me to gain new and other insights into Cuban family life, Cuban struggles and opportunities. I was now invited into different spheres of society and made connections to people and society on a whole other level.

I no longer lived life as a tourist in the same way and began navigating differently in the field. This enabled me to become closer to people but it also meant that some of my observations
became difficult from an etic standpoint. I listened in, lived life in a community and heard ordinary conversations, sometimes fights, sometimes saw forbidden acts occurring and so on. My new role made me become more aware of my roles in the field, their roles, and the knowledge produced between us. Not only did the people I met teach me things I also taught them things. Information is always shared, often if you tell something about yourself they will tell you something about them and the other way around. How my stay changed or impacted the people that I know or met I do not know? I only know that living in Cuba has had an impact on my life.

### 3.3 Interviews

During fieldwork informal interviews were used. They usually have no structure or control from the researcher but it is a good initial method when settling into a field (H. Russel 2006: 211). When living in a society most of the everyday conversation with the people is informal which keeps a researcher on its feet, in order to remember conversations a journal was used. There is a lot of information passing through in everyday conversations and being new to the field was hard work although certain things in society were and felt familiar.

Both structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with men and women, locals and foreigners. The unstructured interview is based on time, lots of it. The person interviewing has a plan in mind for what they want to talk about but the process is about letting the person being interviewed open up and express themselves in their own time and on their own terms (Ibid 2006: 212). This type of interview was used many times but the most used method, once I knew what the subject of focus would be in my reports, was semi-structured interviews. I had a list of topics and questions that I wanted to check off, usually starting the interview with a big open question such as – Please tell me a little bit about your life? Followed by other related questions regarding the subject, such as finances, or the relation to tourism. Sometimes these interviews turned into formal interviews or conversation after a while. This interview technique was used when interviewing people one on one. Sometimes the questions asked lead the conversation into a direction the source felt uncomfortable with, this was the case when talking about the sex trade with one woman. I had to tread very carefully, as many jinteiras do not place themselves into the category of prostitutes at all. In order for this woman to gain trust to talk about her involvement with foreign men, listening, not rush the conversation and taking the time was important. For sensitive topics one to one interviews are more suitable (Jorgensen & Hanish 2009).
When interviewing or doing any study transparency is important. Everyone interviewed for the study was notified that the material and that the research was part of a master thesis in journalism and that it might get sold to a paper.

I tried to talk and interview as many women as possible in the beginning to see what their everyday life was like but soon realised that meeting and talking to Cuban women was more difficult than talking to Cuban men. Contact with women was often established through contacts with men, or male friends or friends of friends or just by knowing someone who knows someone. Many of the male informants started talking to me because they saw an opportunity for something… money, travels, love, sex or other. Sometimes this was also the case with females. There were interviews that could not be used inside the reports. I will give an example of one such interview, as an interview is a dyadic interaction where both parties participate and influence each other in the conversation:

I sit on a bench at Calle de Camel in Havanna - where I meet a middle-aged woman, I ask to interview her and we walk away to one of the parks to speak undisturbed. She tells me she is a dancer. We talk to each other for half an hour and it becomes clear during the conversation that the economy is a big issue for her. It also becomes clear who sits on the money and not. During our conversation, she kindly asked me to buy her a phone (because she lacks one) to buy sweets and milk for her children (since milk is expensive and is only given to children for free until they are six years old) as well as shoes and clothes (children grow fast and need new things often, which is costly).

–This is my problem, she says, everyone has problems … but who will help me? I love my country, people, kids and we are happy! What is lacking throughout the country is higher wages, a bit more prerequisites for getting a better standard of living. We have nothing but we have everything, she continues.

The interview as such could not be used, but it did say something. When she talked I got the feeling that this story had been told many times before, even though some of the things were true, there was a narrative to the story that felt rehearsed. Being aware of the different power relations when interviewing became important after this interview and also being reflexive about who, or what, could be gained from the stories told.

It is quite possible that the interviews with foreign men would have been quite different had they been undertaken in their own country of origin. The men would have been more difficult
to find and talk to there for example. Their experiences and thoughts would have been altered with time and through the shift in localities when moving from one country to the other.

There are many men chatting on different forums on the Internet asking each other for help on where to find women in Cuba but they are in a sense “invisible”. The men spoken to in Cuba were physically there and not only could I talk to them but I could also see their interactions with the women and the procurers on site. The information shared with me in Cuba could only have been shared with me there, on location, in the present.

3.4 Keeping a journal, Recording material and Backing Up

After the initial contact and the first cultural shock everyday life will appear and some things will go on routine. Journaling became a great way of remembering the present and a way to harness experiences from the field (Davis 2008). Keeping a journal or a diary is good method for remembering feelings, things, experiences and conversations that can play a role in the processing of the collected material later (Ibid: 2008). Having had the possibility to leave the field and then return to it again a few months later also provided time for reflections and an opportunity to re-experience Cuba with new eyes the second time around. Some things that initially had not made sense later did through gained experiences.

When something special occurred or when the need to gather thoughts was necessary, they were recorded onto my phone or written down, this enables me as a researcher to become aware of my own biases (Russel 2006).

As time goes by one become more used to the field, its smells, experiences and the values connected to it. When discovering a new city for the first time every road is unfamiliar, the same with society. With time one begins to connect streets with the houses and the different areas. In the end one understand how the city or how the society works. One can see above the houses and get a greater view of it. What you take notice of changes through time, the more you learn the wider the lens becomes.

The worst thing that can happen to a researcher is losing ones collected work. After the initial three months in Cuba my phone needed an update. When putting the phone inside the computer, the computer rewrote the old information onto it, deleting the new. Many interviews and records of feelings and formal conversations with people were lost. I cried, I
swore and I promised to backup and backup again in the future...Thankfully the journal was still there, so all was not lost but it was a lesson.

4 Challenges in the field

There were quite a few challenges in the field but not challenging as many would think. My freedom of movement was much better than expected. Cuban authorities did not know that this study was to be undertaken but I had a paper from SIDA with me explaining what the study was all about, this paper I carried with me. Many people in the community knew that I was a journalist and to my surprise they talked about the subjects very openly, more than would have been expected. Many times our own fears regarding a country effects the way we behave, think and act. Sometimes this means that we take more measures of security than needed. My own fears of undertaking research in Cuba were really uncalled for, with that said I do not wish to diminish the fear many journalist live with in and outside of Cuba for reporting on the country. Also I was working under-cover, not flaunting my research, not interviewing people higher up in government positions.

The aim was to ask questions without placing any worth onto them, not asking questions of “wrong” or “right” but instead showing a genuine interest in understanding society and trying to find out why things are the way they are. The decision of protecting the informants by concealing their names in the reports has been taken as a protective measure; something that journalist seldom does unless really called for. “While the journalists primary responsibility is to serve the public, ethnographers’ primary responsibility is to protect informants” (Hermann 2016: 270, Singer, 2009: 192–194).

Not having Internet all the time was challenging but also a healthy experience. Using time online sensibly created time for other things: such as hanging out together or talking to neighbours. On a personal level the food situation or lack of goods and groceries was the most challenging. Eating beans and rice every day, with chicken, with pork, with eggs, with vegetables, with shrimps (when lucky). Food was sometimes hard to come by and I lost about 8 kilos during my stay. Some foods like potatoes & lobster were on occasion bought on the informal market. Witnessing Hurricane Irma and its aftermath was a huge experience. To see how effectively Cuba mitigated the loss of lives before it hit and how the government, military and the community cleaned up the community afterwards was amazing to experience. Spending five days without electricity was challenging but others in society were worse off.
There are many things I miss about Cuba on a personal level and many things I don´t. In the following sections the focus lies on some of the challenges faced in relation to language, time and the different roles in the field.

4.1 Language & Time

Before leaving for Cuba a course in Spanish was taken at Medborgarskolan was taken in order to brush up on the language. Talking the same language as the people in the society you are going to do research definitely helps with the communication. One can listen in on what people talk about and understand what they talk about around you. Language simply plays a central role in understanding people and it helps to understand and interpret the culture of the language with all the metaphors and idioms (H.Russel 2002). With that said there were times when frustration set in because of a lack of understanding the correct words, grammar and idioms but luckily time meant that questions could be asked again and again, a luxury seldom given to journalists.

Everyday conversations gives you a lot of information about society and the longer stay enabled my Spanish to improve. This meant that interviews could be undertaken in the interviewee’s own language albeit with some difficulties. When being clueless of the meaning I would ask some of my acquaintances or people that I knew for assistance. Sometimes the people I interviewed also spoke some English, which helped. Many times the lack of fluency in Spanish made my informants speak to me in a less complicated manner in order for me to follow their conversation with more ease. The study would have been less complicated had my Spanish been fluent. The questions or follow-up questions would have been formulated in a different way and the colloquial meaning, words and expressions would have been easier to pick up upon.

Being able to perform interviews without interpreters however created trust amongst the people I spent time with. People opened up about their lives. When talking to sex buyers in their own language (German, English) a sense of belonging to the same world as them was created. I was very surprised as to how open these men were talking about their relationships to Cuban women, considering I myself am a woman.
4.2 Different Roles in the field

Sometimes a good source became a friend, hence the closeness made me choose other sources with similar stories. In regards to the stories and things people conveyed I critically had to reflect upon them. One needs to consider the boundaries between researcher and the people you meet. When does a conversation with someone become information? What information can you use and what not? Through what lenses do I make knowledge claims and truths? Spending time in the field for such a long time creates slight problems but also opportunities at the same time because one has to navigate between different roles all the time, in my case: friend, girlfriend, researcher, journalist, tourist and observer.

Being an insider/outsider at the same time requires a lot of patience and reflection. The information gathered inside was of course interpreted from the outside. Being an outsider was helpful in many situations when talking to people. Some people became more open knowing that our conversation would be guarded by silence from other people from my part. Other times being an outsider hurt the interview, such as the time when the women wanted me to buy things for her. With time the role as an outsider changes. The more experiences and knowledge of the field one has the more one understands. The more one understand the more one is trusted and other questions emerge around subjects and one then talks to people on another level. It is like being a child, growing up.

One of the challenges for journalism is trying to understand what people mean when they say things? What does the body with its gestures and expressions say? What sentiments are attached to objects around people? When journalists make quick visits to places (Parachute Journalism for instance) to report on events they listen to what people say but often miss other forms of communicating and so meaning gets lost.

5 The Reports

The idea when writing the reports was to create three features that could each be read on their own but preferably together as a series, in the order presented below, or with the first report read last instead of first. The report about the bicycle was the easiest to write, the most challenging one was the report about prostitution. It was the most challenging in terms of finding people to talk to and I spent a lot of time observing relationships between tourist and Cubans. Many people were reluctant to talk and I also feared asking certain questions not knowing how culturally sensitive I had to be when asking them.
6. Final Reflections

It has been harder and more challenging entering the field with no specific angle in mind as a journalist. It took much longer to produce these reports than expected but the process has been organic or more fruitful because of this. My research could have easily become an academic thesis instead of three reports and a reflection paper. Thanks to the anthropological lenses used I have been able to gain knowledge that can only be gained from living with Cubans in their own community - and not in a fancy hotel. Very often time and money is seldom given to journalist in order to produce this type of work for reasons explained.

Reporter Magda Gad working for Expressen for instance is a journalist who is embedding herself into society in order to find the stories where she spends her time. She often lives with and among the peoples she is writing about, giving her work more depth. After spending time in the field one can gain invaluable insights about the country: the people and their habits, their customs, simply the way things work in that particular society and country. Having journalists live in places from which they are reporting from will hopefully be seen as an investment rather then something troublesome.

In regards to this master’s project and studying at JMK coming from a completely different discipline has proven very challenging when producing these reports. Not enough knowledge has been provided for us students in terms of practical education within the subject of journalism. With one practical course we were later expected to perform well and gain practical knowledge during our internship training. Having read two courses in organisational change in journalism, the university should have been aware of the fact that expectations from the internship placements were high and that our practical knowledge unfortunately was low.

When producing the final product for this master we were given two choices: either to produce a journalistic product with a reflection report attached to it or produce an academic thesis, something we all know how to write from our bachelor degree. With only one course in practical writing - I felt slightly lost when writing the reports. The curriculum has changed since I started and one can only hope that considerations have been made so that new students (from other non-journalistic disciplines) may gain a better understanding of journalism as a practical trade rather than discussing theories without attachments to the ground.

Thank you.
7. Sources and Literature List

Books


**Articles**


Online Articals


Sim, David (2016) 'Cuba: From Fidel Castro's revolution to end of Cold War and Obama's historic visit.' International Business online, 22nd March http://www.ibtimes.co.uk

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