

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

IMPERMANENT, INFORMAL, AND INSECURE(?): A SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF  
FOOD ACCESS IN MUNICIPIO CABRERA, PROVINCIA MARIA TRINIDAD  
SANCHEZ, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

GLOBAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL STUDIES

by

Susannah R. Barr

2022

To: Interim Dean Shlomi Dinar  
Green School of International and Public Affairs

This dissertation, written by Susannah R. Barr, and entitled Impermanent, Informal, and Insecure(?): A Social Geography of Food Access in Municipio Cabrera, Provincia Maria Trinidad Sanchez, Dominican Republic, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

Andrea J. Queeley

Nelson Varas-Diaz

Mahadev Bhat

Gail Hollander, Major Professor

Date of Defense: October 3, 2022

The dissertation of Susannah R. Barr is approved.

Interim Dean Shlomi Dinar  
Green School of International and Public Affairs

Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION  
IMPERMANENT, INFORMAL, AND INSECURE(?): A SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF  
FOOD ACCESS IN MUNICIPIO CABRERA, PROVINCIA MARIA TRINIDAD  
SANCHEZ, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

by

Susannah R. Barr

Florida International University, 2022

Miami, Florida

Professor Gail Hollander, Major Professor

As the world recovers from the coronavirus pandemic, political instability and conflict exacerbate the global food security crisis. While international organizations define food security in a material sense, indicating that food be effectively omnipresent, smaller scale measures of food security – and food insecurity – incorporate affective experience. Thus, food (in)security is an illusion created by individuals’ sense of their capacity to reliably access food, not by the permanent material presence of food itself. This dissertation defines food access – a critical component of food (in)security which is more often defined by measurements than by conceptual development – and situates it within the political economies of rural and urban life in Municipio Cabrera, Provincia Maria Trinidad Sanchez, Dominican Republic. Through ethnographic research spanning nearly a decade, I demonstrate that reflexive relationships between consumers and food resources shape the material world through market expectations, gender dynamics, mobility, history, and more. Local decisions and circumstances reflect and refract larger

scale policy decisions as informal economies and impermanent food resources arise to fill the gaps that policy does not cover. This work concludes with a discussion of political approaches that anticipate or encourage impermanent and informal solutions to food insecurity by cultivating opportunities for food access – a place where alimentary and economic forces meet and interact.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Chapter 1: An Introduction to Food Access .....	1
Chapter Overview .....	9
Chapter 2: Dominican History, Identity, and Politics.....	13
A Brief History of the Dominican Republic .....	14
Developing Dominican Identity .....	19
1916 – 1996: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic.....	26
1996 – Present: Social and Economic Stabilization & Change .....	33
History, Identity, and Food Access .....	40
Chapter 3: Positioning Municipio Cabrera within the DR .....	41
INESPRE & Dominican Food Policy .....	43
Transporting People and Food on the North Coast .....	48
Cabrera: High Domestic Tourism, Low Political Clout.....	51
An Overview of Cabrera’s Foodscape .....	55
Chapter 4: Who am I in Municipio Cabrera? .....	64
Getting to Cabrera .....	67
Expats in Cabrera .....	74
Solidifying my Identity as a Teacher-Researcher in Cabrera .....	83
Concluding Remarks.....	92
Chapter 5: Research in Pandemic Conditions .....	94
Research Procedure .....	98
The DR’s pandemic response.....	102
Cabrera’s Tourism.....	105
Cabrera’s Education & Electricity .....	108
Chapter 6: Rural Food Access .....	111
Getting to La Esquina.....	113
The Impact of the Pandemic .....	121
Becoming Family .....	125
Front Porch Food Access .....	129
Mobility, Gender, and Generation: Competition for the Vendors .....	135
Kitchen Strategies .....	140
Leaving La Esquina.....	145
Chapter 7: Urban Identities and Food Access in Cabrera.....	149
Accessing Food “like a Dominican” .....	155
Supermarket Identities .....	158
Accessing Food Out of Town .....	165
Conclusions.....	172
Chapter 8: Working for Food Access .....	174
Time for Food Access .....	175

Budgets and Routines.....	177
Credit, Resilience, and Food Access.....	182
Development and Food Access.....	183
Chapter 9: Conclusions.....	188
Describing Food Access in Municipio Cabrera .....	189
Food Access & Food (Security) Policy.....	194
Beyond Policy .....	198
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	202
VITA.....	211

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
Figure 1. This dissertation draws on multiple data source which will be explained later in the text. ....	9
Figure 2. This figure shows the production regions for four major cash crops in the Dominican Republic. While tobacco and sugar production regions overlap, cacao and coffee are concentrated in different areas of the country. ....	21
Figure 3. Municipio Cabrera (circled in red) is in a region that exports cocoa, but not other major commodity crops .....	42
Figure 4. Cabrera is located on the north coast of the Dominican Republic, between Nagua and Rio San Juan. The coastal highway connects Cabrera to Nagua and Puerto Plata, the two nearest major cities. ....	51
Figure 5. Two maps of Cabrera's food resources in 2016. These maps were originally published in the appendix of Barr (2018). ....	56
Figure 6. (Top) The inside of the colmado in La Esquina (Source: Barr (2017), Barr (2015)); (Bottom) A colmado in Cabrera (source: Author 2014, 2021) .....	57
Figure 7. This market tries to supplement its fresh produce offerings with household goods and supplies. This market uses plastic bins to display produce by arranging them into shelves or moving the bins out to the sidewalk to draw customers into the market area. Typical market shelves line the back wall of the store. (Source: Author 2021) .....	59
Figure 8. In 2019, Cabrera's park had a vibrant street food economy that slowly returned in 2021. (Top Left to Bottom Right) The quipe vendor, the chimi vendor, the local food truck, and the coquero (coconut water vendor) continued their work during and after the pandemic. (Source: Author 2019) .....	61
Figure 9. A simplified version of my mental map of Municipio Cabrera, which focuses on the areas between Cabrera and La Entrada and goes as deep into the foothills as La Capilla and Loma Alta. La Esquina is small, even for rural community. ....	65
Figure 10. The view from the front yard of a home on the edge of Loma Alta (Source: Author 2013) .....	72

Figure 11. (Left) The pick-up/drop-off zone for guaguas, busses, and motoconchos in Cabrera's central park; (Right) A guagua approaching to pick up a passenger along the Cabrera-Nagua Highway. (Source: Author 2021) .....	74
Figure 12. (Left) A housing compound of traditionally constructed homes in Loma Alta (2013); (Right) Examples of typical home construction in Cabrera, captured on film while in transit (2019). Source: author.....	96
Figure 13. A screenshot of my MAXQDA dashboard demonstrating the breadth and depth of codes applied to daily notes. The note describes one interaction with a set of fresh produce vendors from February 17, 2021.....	101
Figure 14. Notices posted inside the guaguas. (Left) Fares were updated to compensate for a reduction in the number of passengers per seat (3) and riders were encouraged to enforce that restriction without fear of reprisal from drivers (Right) (Source: Author 2021) .....	113
Figure 15. A map of the family compound, including the outdoor kitchen facilities. Julia's house has been under construction since 2012. Kelvin and his friends like to spend time there. ....	115
Figure 16. (Left to Right) Walking up the alley between houses, I approached Dulce's outdoor kitchen to find her presiding over the fogón (Source: Author 2021) ...	116
Figure 17. A simplified kinship diagram highlighting the relationships between family members who are represented in this chapter. X and Y are husbands whose presence is impactful in their own homes, but not in Dulce's household. ....	121
Figure 18. One bag of food distributed to the family by MINERD in March (Source: Author 2021).....	123
Figure 19. A utility cabinet in Dulce's indoor kitchen keeps dry goods and other ingredients protected from the elements. It also stores bags of macaroni (2nd shelf, left side) and cans of sardines (4th shelf, right side) that Dulce rarely uses (Author 2021) .....	124
Figure 20. The view from Dulce's front porch. The power lines were installed between 2015 and 2016 (Source: Author 2021) .....	128
Figure 21. (Left to right) Members of the household purchase fresh produce, clean water, and cleaning supplies from mobile vendors.....	129
Figure 22. The styer behind the family compound once held pigs. Now it stores everything from construction materials to discarded containers and clothing. Several fruit trees grow around the styer. (Source: Author 2021) .....	141

Figure 23. Over time, Dulce and her family have cultivated a collection of fruit trees (papaya, branberi, avocado), herbs, and ornamental plants in their front yard (Source: Author 2021)..... 143

Figure 24. Cilantro, eggplants, and cabbages purchased from a local farm on March 11, 2021 (Source: Author 2021) ..... 144

Figure 25. The main seating area at Leo and Mari's restaurant wraps around the kitchen, cashier's station, and a smaller indoor seating section. Clear tarps between each of the green posts can be rolled down to block wind and rain. Bamboo centerpieces keep the beer cold, and plastic tables and often combined to seat larger groups. (Source: author)..... 149

Figure 26. (Left) A picture of Garcia's parking lot as Pilar and I arrived to buy groceries in May 2019. (Right) A panoramic view of Garcia's interior prior to the 2020 expansion which nearly doubled the size of the store. (Source: Author 2019) ..... 164

Figure 27. The entrance to Playero, a supermarket in Sosua, Provincia Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic (Source: Author 2021) ..... 169

## Chapter 1: An Introduction to Food Access

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the global landscape was riddled with the results of food access inequity – over 2 billion people were suffering from overweight or obesity, which is linked to poor quality food, and at least another 800 million were plagued by malnutrition attributed to inadequate access to food (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO, 2020). The way different organizations around the globe measure these different phenomena differs significantly, pushing the numbers up or down, but all of them agree that the economic and social consequences of a global pandemic will worsen food insecurity around the world. As I write in Summer 2022, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has caused a dramatic increase in food shortages and food prices, exacerbating food access inequity on a global scale.

I use the term food access inequity instead of food insecurity because the term food insecurity is deeply tied to an over-simplified, industrialized imaginary of the food system that assumes that food access can be solved by producing more food, or producing more calories, and then putting that food in close spatial proximity to people (Carolan, 2018). It ignores cultural preferences and ecological consequences, and has contributed to economic dependence, the destruction of indigenous knowledge, and to global hunger. Conducting research and developing policies to address the realities of the global food system instead of the imaginary upon which it was built is a process that is both monumentally difficult and potentially catastrophic. Our current system is not perfect but ending it abruptly would plunge billions of people into starvation by destroying their livelihoods and/or cutting off their access to food. Adjusting the food system is a delicate, piecemeal process – my contribution to this process is a definition of

food access that supports the development of food (in)security policies that leave room for place-based solutions.

Food insecurity is foremost defined as a lack of food security. The United States Department of Agriculture breaks down food insecurity by measures of reduced food intake, reduced food quality, and affective experience, but the idea of food security persists at smaller scales of measurement (USDA NIFA, 2020). Measures of food insecurity in developing countries account for household-level food production and ecological resilience, but food security is the ultimate aim (Upton, Cissé, & Barrett, 2016). In 1996, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defined food security as a state in which “all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy lifestyle.”

At. All. Times. Those three little words make food security unattainable for most of the global population if the phrase “at all times” is taken to mean that food must be omnipresent. While the addition may have been well-meaning, it highlights the naïve, privileged perspective of policy makers at the time. Food access *at all times* is unachievable without the logistics infrastructure of global food production and sale, which creates an illusion of permanence for consumers whose food experiences lose their ties to season, climate, and geography. While consumers who have access to this system certainly feel secure, documented cases of healthy humans *needing* food *at all times* are few and many spaces are socially or legally designated as “no food zones”. In addition to widespread cultural prohibitions against eating where people dispose of waste, many workers are prohibited from eating where they work out of concern for safety and sanitation.

Definitions of food (in)security are very clear that access is a key concept, but the definition of food access is unclear. Food access is *measured* according to a mix of different metrics that vary in precision. One of the most popular metrics for measuring food access are the dimensions of availability, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, and accommodation (Caspi, Sorensen, Subramanian, & Kawachi, 2012). Availability and accessibility are both spatial measures, affordability refers to perceptions of cost and value, while acceptability and accommodation measure consumer perceptions of food resources. As a theoretical model of how to *measure* food access, these five dimensions are a great place to start; however, they do not define food access itself.

These metrics have given rise to other concepts, which have spawned entire academic literatures. I was introduced to concepts of food access and food insecurity through one of those literatures – the food environment. The latest definition of the food environment as a “term used to describe the geographies of food in the built environment”, but the concept has evolved significantly since its first appearance in the mid-1990s, intersecting with politically charged terms like “food desert”, “food swamp”, and “food apartheid” (Kolb, 2022; Widener & Liu, 2021). A critical element of the food environment literature is its reliance on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and generating maps that have inspired political intervention in the name of consumer health equity.

My earliest research projects took the tools and concepts of the food environment into a non-US context – the Dominican Republic – to see how they fared. First, I struggled to find GIS data to make the maps that seemed to be required for a food

environment analysis. The US and other countries in the Global North have a legacy of mapping their territories, creating vast archives of spatial data to digitize and analyze through GIS (Willems-Braun, 1997). In the Dominican Republic, and other developing countries around the world, the violence and instability associated with colonialism, revolution, regime change, and natural disasters has made it very difficult to develop a spatial archive, let alone digitize it for public use. With the support of international agencies, the Dominican Republic is steadily building its archive, but the process is slow (ONERD, 2010).

The data that was available through the Dominican census helped me build basic descriptions of the food environment, but it ignored the food resources I found most compelling in my research: mobile vendors. While many scholars are beginning to factor in consumer mobility to their food environment analyses by incorporating transportation and store choice in their models, the mobility of food resources is rarely considered (Bosco, Joassart-Marcelli, & O'Neal, 2017; LeDoux & Vojnovic, 2013). I had to go outside the food environment literature to find discussions that aligned with my observations that, in some contexts, mobile food vendors were key to allowing consumers to access food (Patel, Guenther, Wiebe, & Seburn, 2014).

The most damning critiques of the food environment literature come from scholars like Julie Guthman and Ashanté Reese. As the term food desert was popularized in the early 2010s, Julie Guthman pointed out that the maps associated with the food environment were ignoring the influence of social class not only on where people live, but also where they shop (Guthman, 2011). Ashanté Reese's work further emphasized the ahistorical nature of most food environment analyses with her discussion of a historically

Black neighborhood in Washington D.C., whose resources were profoundly influenced by (de)segregation and redlining (Reese, 2019). The food environment that we can map today has been produced by broader social, political, and economic policies applied over time. For this reason, many food scholars use the term foodscape, which refers not only to the physical infrastructure of the food system, but the affective and intangible elements that shape it (King, 2009). Some of the food environment literature conflates the two terms, further complicating the search for information to understand food access.

Seeing my own observations echoed in the critiques of the food environment and frustrated by the absence of a definition of food access, I decided to develop my own definition through another preliminary research project. In the rest of this dissertation, I follow the examples set by Reese and Guthman, and try to understand the broader historical, social, and economic circumstances influencing food access in my field site.

### Developing a Definition of Food Access

This research is situated in Municipio Cabrera, a predominantly rural municipality on the north coast of the Dominican Republic. In trying to develop a definition of food access, I chose to focus on Cabrera, the urban hub of the Municipio, and use mapping as a data collection tool instead of a research product. I followed my interest in mobile food vendors and chose to concentrate on mapping their movements and sales through Cabrera's Central Park, a popular location for them to congregate. Without access to hi-tech data collection tools, I sat in the park and watched vendors conduct business, conducting informal interviews to understand their sales strategies and routines. I printed out maps I had developed in previous projects and drew the paths of the vendors, marking the duration and relative location of any sales they made while I was observing them.

Through my observations I was reminded of why there are five dimensions of food access, only two of which are spatial measures. The presence of a food resource is not the same as food access. As vendors zipped, wandered, and strolled through Cabrera's Central Park, many without encountering a customer, I was reminded that food access requires two parties – a food resource and a consumer. A food vendor can only contribute to food access if a customer purchases their product(s). Likewise, a customer can only access food if the food vendor is available, accessible, affordable, acceptable, and accommodating to them (Caspi et al., 2012).

Thus, I arrived at my definition of food access – a place where alimentary and economic forces meet and interact. In Geography, place is defined as little “envelopes” or bubbles of space-time that are heterotopic, meaning that they are simultaneously unique from and the product of the surrounding social, political, and ecological circumstances (often referred to as political economy or political ecology) (Halfacree 2018; Massey 2005). Food access is a cultural behavior, with norms governing how food consumers and food providers behave in the context of food access. As soon as food access ends, the behavioral norms shift back to “normal”. Economy not only refers to retail exchange, but also to gifting and exchanges of time and labor. Alimentary forces include food resources and feeding resources which makes restaurants as important as food pantries, supermarkets, home gardens, and kitchens. Food access requires interaction, whether it is with a vending machine, a store clerk, or the land itself. Without that interaction, the availability of food resources has no effect on consumers.

Food access is a situated concept – it depends heavily on the social, economic, and political context in which it occurs. It is also something so deeply incorporated into

daily life that observing food access requires observing and understanding a host of other phenomena – religious beliefs, grief, business strategies, gender norms, class ideologies, economic development, social change, etc. These phenomena are themselves situated, as broad economic, political, and discursive trends flow unevenly across social and physical space-time, influencing one another even as they are adopted, resisted, and refracted by individuals and communities (Burawoy, 2000; Gibson-Graham, 2002; Massey, 2005).

Accordingly, there are several sections of this dissertation dedicated to describing pieces of Municipio Cabrera’s dynamic political economy that do not directly address food access but are part of the construction of the foodscape. I pay close attention to education and physical infrastructure, as both have undergone major changes in the last decade and have significant power over food access. Gender and class dynamics make it more likely for some people to access food than others at certain resources, but the roots of those dynamics are best understood through history. The integrity of kin networks and their ability to facilitate mutual (food) aid must be positioned with discussions of economic development, migration, and attitudes towards progress that have developed over multiple generations. This holistic approach is necessary to appreciate the complexity of food access – a quotidian activity that many people carry out without thought to its life-sustaining importance.

The tools of ethnography and participant observation are frequently used to understand the complexities of global-local dynamics because of their holistic lens, which ignores prescribed boundaries and slides from local to global and everywhere in between (Burawoy, 2000). Understanding the antecedents of food access – the phenomena that support, restrict, and shape the places where alimentary and economic forces meet and

interact – requires not only observations made in the moment, as food access happens, but observations made at a distance, as policies change, and people move in and out of one another’s lives. This research is an extended ethnographic case study of Municipio Cabrera, Provincia Maria Trinidad Sanchez, Dominican Republic, with special attention paid to the way history – global, regional, local, social, political, economic, and discursive – influences food access. I seek to address the following questions:

- What are the social and economic circumstances that shape how food access happens in Municipio Cabrera?
- How does identity influence the way people in Municipio Cabrera access food?
- How do the physical contexts of urban and rural affect food access?
- As the Dominican Republic continues along a developmentalist path that began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, pushing for progress and cosmopolitanism, how do food access norms change?

To address these questions, I draw on the work of historians and social scientists examining the Dominican Republic and on almost a decade of ethnographic observation in Municipio Cabrera, preserved in notes, letters, pictures, and videos. This research-journey was also heavily influenced by my interlocutors, who pulled me into their lives and gave me space to follow my instincts and grow as a researcher and as a person. I was also fortunate to end up in a country, and a part of that country, where there is a strong journalistic tradition and a consistent effort to reach an international and/or diasporic audience. Municipio Cabrera’s news outlets are a group of Facebook pages, including a page for the mayor’s office and Cabrera589, which is managed by a news outlet in Nagua, the capital of the province (Informando y Educando, 2022).

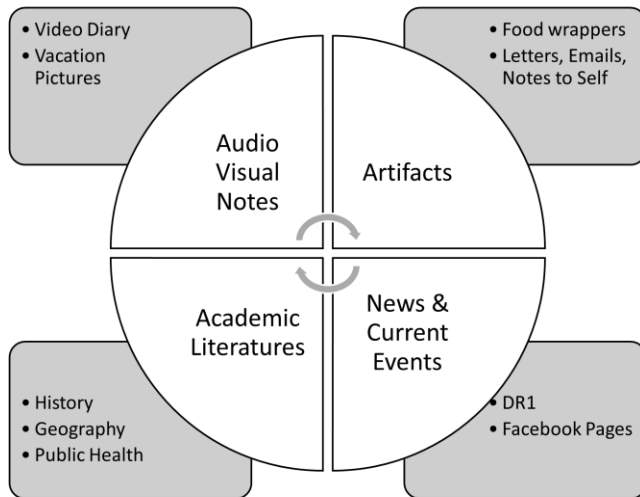


Figure 1. This dissertation draws on multiple data source which will be explained later in the text.

A broader overview of news in the DR is provided by DR1, an online newspaper and forum established in 1996. DR1 produces a daily English-language newsletter that summarizes key news stories and events in the DR for an audience of expats residents, international businesspeople, and Dominicans

living abroad. I signed up for DR1’s newsletter in 2013, as I prepared for my first research experiences in Municipio Cabrera and began saving emails and news stories into a digital archive shortly thereafter. DR1 has led me to many of the stories and resources about the DR’s current political economy that help to frame this research. There are rarely stories about Cabrera in the Dominican national news, but nearby cities like Nagua, Cabarete, and Sosua, appear more frequently.

### Chapter Overview

In the next two chapters, I will provide an overview of the historical and geopolitical position of the Dominican Republic, with special attention paid to the global food system. The island of Hispaniola’s rich agricultural history continues to impact Dominican identity and the way Dominicans choose to access food (Baud, 2014; Mintz, 1986; Schrank, 2005). Over the last century, the Dominican Republic has repeatedly resisted pressures to integrate fully into the global food system, sticking to policies that

protect domestic producers and consumers, while caving to economic pressures for tourism and free trade (Mitchell, 2009). The result is a unique mixture of trade and agricultural policies with variable national, regional, and local impacts. The latter part of Chapter 3 zooms in on the position of Municipio Cabrera within the political economy of the DR and describes a typology of food resources to guide readers through the remaining chapters.

Chapter 4 explains how I ended up on the north coast of the Dominican Republic from my hometown in Texas and describes why I kept going back for almost a decade. Since starting this adventure at age 18, I have used my passion for volunteering and service to connect with people and communities in Municipio Cabrera and to facilitate participant observation and ethnography. In La Esquina, a rural community of less than 300 people, I am a researcher, a student, and a member of my host family. In Cabrera, an urban center with a population of approximately 4000, I am one of several “misfit” expats with ties to different segments of Cabrera’s expat and Dominican communities through my volunteer work. These positionalities have allowed me to observe food access in some contexts but not others. Chapter 5 continues the narrative of my experiences and discusses the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on my research.

Chapter 6 demonstrates how food access is gendered and the way changing gender norms influence food access habits through my research in La Esquina. The chapter is dedicated to Dulce, who welcomed me into her home in 2012 and kept me fed physically and spiritually each time I returned. Her kitchen serves as a stable food resource for an ever-changing number of extended family members. Prior to the pandemic, Dulce’s food access habits changed dramatically due to the loss of her

husband in 2016. His death forced her to become more active in purchasing food, breaking with the comfortable gendered division of labor she had lived with for most of her life. The pandemic caused Dulce's casual reliance on kin networks and gardening to become more purposeful as the number of people depending on her for food doubled. Her children and extended family, each of whom have left La Esquina and returned having reached educational and occupational outcomes that Dulce could never have predicted, act as key mediators. As a generation, they each grapple with rural-urban biases and global-local dynamics, providing insight into the food access habits of their generation and the next.

Chapter 7 focuses on the ways Cabrera's food resources accommodate customer expectations, which are rooted in different people's perceptions of the "right way" to do food access. Beginning with a retrospective episode that focuses on my experiences with Alicen, my best friend and former business partner, I highlight how different perceptions of Dominican identity influence food resource selection. Then I zero in on my own experiences with supermarkets in Cabrera and beyond, highlighting the impacts of mobility, class, and expat-ness on food resource accommodation.

Chapter 8 focuses on the impacts of economic and social development on food access in Cabrera. After my friend Pilar redirected my research agenda by pulling me further into her daily life as a working-class professional in Cabrera, I began to think more about the connections between food access and access to time, land, and credit. Cabrera's unique position in the political landscape of the Dominican Republic meant that many of the pressures of economic and social development were slow to reach its population. Since then, however, the pace of development in Cabrera has accelerated

dramatically, allowing residents to rely on modern and traditional mechanisms of food access.

Chapter 9 will provide an overview of the key factors that influence food access in my observations in La Esquina and Cabrera. While each factor has an observable expression, all of them relate back to identity and the broad, rapid socioeconomic transformations brought on by Dominican economic and social development. After establishing that who people are and who they think they want to be influences the where, when, and how of food access, I will discuss the implications of my definition of food access – a place where economic and alimentary forces meet and interact – on policies meant to address the growing global food insecurity crisis.

## Chapter 2: Dominican History, Identity, and Politics

Understanding the creation and development of Dominican identity is critical to understanding the logics of food access and the momentum behind social and economic changes in Municipio Cabrera. This chapter will provide an overview of Dominican cultural and agricultural history, introduce two socio-cultural archetypes that appear in the literature on Dominican culture and history and discuss more recent shifts in Dominican identity.

Much of this chapter relies on the work of Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, a Dominican sociologist whose books have been essential to my understanding of Dominican history. Much of the literature on the Dominican Republic has focused on its geopolitical and cultural development since it gained independence in 1865, but Maggiolo's work stresses the importance of the island's early agricultural development in marking regional (and eventually national) economic and social differences. The differences are as simple and as complex as sugar and tobacco – two of the DR's major plantation crops.

The last section of this chapter will focus on recent social and economic changes in the DR, some of which played out while I was there. The Dominican Republic and its citizens have continued to evolve under internal and external pressures to develop economically and socially according to the desires of the global market.

Improvements to physical infrastructure, changes in educational policy, shifting religious affiliations, a changing economy, and increased access to the internet have transformed life in the Dominican Republic. Later chapters will be dedicated to understanding the influence of these transformations on where, when, and how people access food.

## A Brief History of the Dominican Republic

Cristobal Colon (Christopher Columbus) landed on the island of Santo Domingo (modern day Hispaniola) in 1492 and returned to establish a settlement in 1493. Early settlement of the island was chaotic, leading many early settlers to abandon European groups led by Cristobal and Bartolomé Colón and strike out on their own, joining indigenous groups or establishing their own claim on plots of land in the interior of the island and starting their own conflicts (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). As initial Spanish settlements were moved from the north coast to the mouth of the Ozama River on the southern side of the island, the mountains of the interior were dotted with skirmishes between indigenous *caciques* (chiefs) and Spanish settlers, threatening Spain's imperial control over its first colony.

In 1510, the arrival of Friar Nicolás de Ovando and others from the Dominican and Franciscan orders marked the introduction of a viciously imposed colonial regime that quickly decimated indigenous populations and brought settlers to heel (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). As governor, Ovando oversaw the creation of Dominican society, which privileged wealth and whiteness but promoted intermixing among the lower classes to produce a sturdier labor force. His treatment of indigenous laborers caused their population to disappear by the 1530's, leaving the burden of labor to enslaved peoples from Africa and the Caribbean coast of South America, who often escaped into the rugged landscape of Santo Domingo's mountain ranges (E. Roorda, Derby, & González, 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). Ovando's work was carried out as much through governing as it was through the school established by Dominican friars. By 1538, the friars' work led to the establishment of *Universidad de Santo Tomas de Aquino*, the

first university in the Americas, which was responsible for educating the upper classes of Spain's colonies (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). Ovando and the friars transformed the desperate settlement at the mouth of the Rio Ozama into an urban hub befitting its role as a seat of Spanish power in the Americas.

While the university drew students from the mainland colonies, it was not enough to get them to stay; a revolving door of wealthy students, merchants, and government officials appointed by the Crown maintained the flow of money and news among the upper classes of Spanish colonial society (Ferrer, 2014; E. Roorda et al., 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). The Gulf Stream brought ships to Havana first before pushing them along the Gulf coast of the American mainland and looping back through the Caribbean Sea, leaving ships full of raw materials docked at Santo Domingo to stock up on provisions for the return to Europe. Largely unable to access finished goods, Santo Domingo's lower classes sustained themselves economically through farming and raising cattle, pigs, and chickens for subsistence and to supply outgoing Spanish ships (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017).

After the discovery of gold in Mexico and silver in Peru, the focus of Spain's military and economic power shifted from the Caribbean to the American continent. Beyond large settlements and the port on the south side of the island, Spain's attention toward Santo Domingo almost disappeared. The north coast of Santo Domingo became a hot-spot for smuggling and illegal trade (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). Ranchers, unable to get finished goods from the urban hub to the southeast, built trade networks with French and English pirates, some of whom were tasked with harassing Spain's colonies (E. Roorda et al., 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). As alliances between colonial powers changed

throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, so did the legality of trade networks along the north and west coasts, strengthening solidarity among the growing creole populations of Santo Domingo and weakening their allegiance to any sovereign.

In 1605, Governor Osorio of Santo Domingo was given orders from the Spanish Crown to curb illegal trade and uphold the Catholic identity of the colony (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). Osorio ordered the forced resettlement of colonists living on the northern and western parts of the island, demanding that they destroy and abandon their homes and relocate to interior regions just north of Santo Domingo. Many of the colonists openly resisted the order or disappeared into the frontier. While the centralization of Santo Domingo's population may have made it easier for Spain to control them, it ultimately left over 80% of Spain's cattle supply in the hands of pirates and maroons (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). Outside the eye of the Crown, the "abandoned" regions of the island continued to trade, establishing an informal hub at Isla Tortuga (Turtle Island).

The buccaneers began to lose control over Isla Tortuga and the coasts of Santo Domingo in 1640, as wealthy French planters began settling parts of the west coast and France gradually gained military control over the western half of the island, resulting in the creation of the colony of Saint Domingue in 1655 (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). Refocusing on its first colony, Spain fought to keep its territorial hold on Santo Domingo, supporting Dominican-led uprisings and refusing to acknowledge French control over the western half of the island, even after they signed a treaty to end armed conflict. Meanwhile, France turned Saint Domingue into one of the most valuable colonies in the world through sugar production and a brutal plantation regime (Trouillot, 2015).

Smuggling and illegal trade continued to sustain Dominicans along the coasts and the new border with Saint Domingue (E. Roorda et al., 2014). The island became the staging ground for conflicts between Spain and France throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, culminating in the early conflicts of the Haitian Revolution (Trouillot, 2015).

According to Veloz Maggiolo, Dominican identity is rooted in these early colonial experiences (Veloz Maggiolo, 2006, 2017). He finds that the fundamental differences between Haitian and Dominican cultural expression are rooted not only in the linguistic differences between French, Kreyol, and Spanish, but in the economic organization of the two halves of the island. Despite the strict hierarchies imposed by Ovando, the lifestyles of ranching and herding in the frontier produced a relaxation of those hierarchies in other parts of the island. Left unsupervised by the Spanish Crown, survival outweighed anti-black sentiment and political ideology as wealthy landowners, smugglers, and former slaves adopted and maintained pragmatic labor and trade relations that suited their needs (E. Roorda et al., 2014). Meanwhile, French plantations created rigid social and economic divisions that were strictly maintained by officials who were largely disconnected from local circumstances (Ferrer, 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). Eventually, the tension within the hierarchies of plantation society in Saint Domingue exploded into the geopolitical conflicts of the Haitian Revolution, inspiring a chain reaction that forced Santo Domingo to develop its own identity in opposition to other political powers (Mayes, 2014).

The Haitian Revolution was marked by two geopolitical conflicts. The first was conflict between Spain and France, which eventually resulted in Spain abandoning the island of Santo Domingo to French control (Ferrer, 2014; Trouillot, 2015; Veloz

Maggiolo, 2006). France left the island after it was defeated by Haiti in 1804, leaving the citizens of Santo Domingo without colonial protection as Haiti began to solidify its control over the western half of the island and push eastward, decimating Dominican settlements (Ferrer, 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2006). Starting in 1809, the citizens of Santo Domingo sought to re-connect with Spain, only to find that Spain was no longer interested in the island (Veloz Maggiolo, 2006).

In 1822, finding themselves without any allies or sense of national identity, the citizens of Santo Domingo relinquished control of the colonial city and its holdings to Jean Pierre Boyer, President of Haiti (Veloz Maggiolo, 2006). Dominicans became citizens of Haiti and gained representation in Haitian government, but that was not enough to make them Haitian. The next twenty-two years were a lesson in the powers of cultural difference as Haitians and Dominicans tried to reconcile their histories, languages, economic systems, and prejudices to form a functioning republic. According to Veloz Maggiolo, by the time Dominicans called for independence in 1844, all that remained of their society was a rural petit bourgeoisie in the central and northern parts of the island and a few key territories held by wealthy *caudillos* (militia leaders). Over the next fifteen years, Dominicans fought a war of independence from Haiti and a civil war amongst themselves, culminating in their independence in 1865 (Mayes, 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2006). Whereas many independence movements stem from the development of a core identity that conflicts with those in power, Dominican identity formation occurred in conjunction with the struggle for independence and continued well into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Developing Dominican Identity

Starting with state sanctioned importation of enslaved peoples from the Caribbean coast of South America and then Africa in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, the island of Santo Domingo has been constantly bombarded by different cultural influences (Veloz Maggiolo, 2006, 2017). The corsairs and landowners in the abandoned areas of early 17<sup>th</sup> century Santo Domingo came from all over Europe and from other European colonies. Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Spain was sending ships full of Spanish citizens from the Canary Islands to bolster the population and ensure its cultural hold over the upper classes (Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). As Santo Domingo struggled to find a sovereign in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, immigration continued from the United States, different areas of Europe, including Italy and Great Britain, as well as from Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria (Mayes, 2014; E. Roorda et al., 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2006, 2017). Most Dominicans continued to sustain themselves on a combination of ranching, agriculture, and piracy well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Each new wave of immigration was slowly fused into a unique Dominican identity (*dominicanidad*) that coalesced during the war(s) for Dominican Independence.

The position of that identity in the racialized geopolitical hierarchies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a major topic of debate among the elites of Dominican society (Derby, 1998; Mayes, 2014; E. Roorda et al., 2014). Dominican intellectuals in favor of becoming a U.S. protectorate cited cultural roots in African, Jewish, and Levantine traditions as a source of intellectual and constitutional inferiority, concluding that they were incapable of governing their own territory effectively (Mayes, 2014; E. Roorda et al., 2014). Others held fast to the whiteness of the upper classes as proof of the capacity to govern and

began to join thinkers from other former Caribbean colonies in developing a Pan-Antillean identity (Mayes, 2014). Key thinkers like Gregorio Luperón, Eugenio María de Hostos, and Salomé Ureña Henríquez promoted Dominicans' capacity for progress through education and economic development (Mayes, 2014). Ultimately, Dominican identity settled somewhere in the middle, leaving the Dominican Republic to maintain its sovereignty from a weak geopolitical position as it sought a stronger relationship with the U.S.

The Dominican Republic gained its sovereignty in 1865, just as the United States ended its own civil war and members of the Confederate planter class fled south into the Caribbean. Some of them joined a growing number of sugar plantation owners of varying national origins in previously under-exploited sugar production regions (See Figure 2) (Mayes, 2014). What had once been a marginal economic activity due to lack of labor and capital, became a centerpiece of the Dominican economy by the 1870's, re-shaping it and further influencing Dominican identity (Mayes, 2014). Alongside the burgeoning capital-intensive sugar industry, the long-standing, peasant-driven tobacco industry flourished into the most stable driver of the Dominican economy, generating its own social structure in the upper Cibao Valley, near the city of Santiago de los Caballeros (E. Roorda et al., 2014). The production dynamics of tobacco and sugar merged with debates about Dominican identity to lay the foundations for the bifurcated, interlocking social systems that Dominicans must navigate today. They also gave rise to two key archetypes in Dominican society: *la normalista* and *el tíguere*.

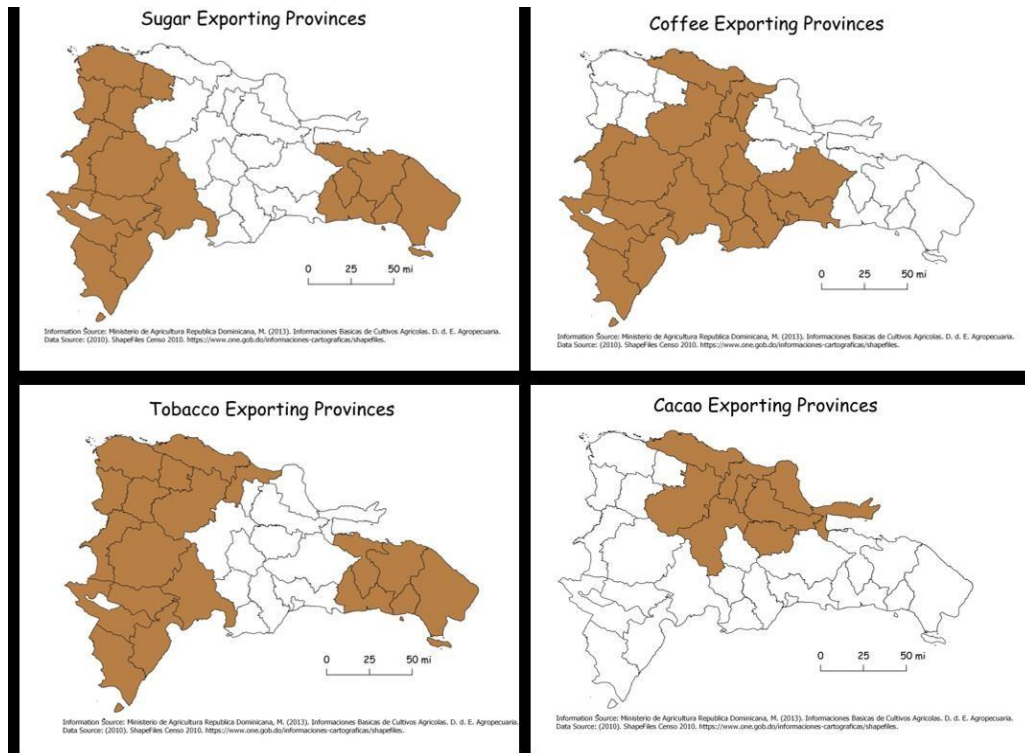


Figure 2. This figure shows the production regions for four major cash crops in the Dominican Republic. While tobacco and sugar production regions overlap, cacao and coffee are concentrated in different areas of the country.

### *Cosmopolitan Sugar & the Development of la Normalista*

April Mayes’s work examines how the actions of sugar plantation owners and other elites influenced the development of Dominican national identity in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Mayes, just as identification in opposition to Haiti spurred the formation of Dominican identity, opposition to non-Catholic and non-Spanish-speaking immigrants further solidified it (Mayes, 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). Dominicans found themselves sandwiched between non-Dominican elite planters who re-enforced racial hierarchies that not only privileged whiteness, but actively demonized blackness; and the dark-skinned immigrant laborers from the Anglo Caribbean and Haiti who were brought in to work in the plantations (Marrero Aristy, 1939; Mayes, 2014). The strict class hierarchy of sugar production bled into the small settlements of the East,

reinforcing the patriarchal organization of Dominican society and creating bustling urban industrial centers with a cosmopolitan elite (Mayes, 2014).

The rural-urban divide began to take on more powerful social connotations as the elites of Dominican society sought to prove they were capable of sovereignty, industrialization, and participation on the geopolitical world stage (Mayes, 2014). *Campesinos* (peasants) were associated with lawlessness and ignorance, a perception operationalized by dictator General Ulises Heureaux during his authoritarian reign (1888 to 1899) (Mayes, 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2006). As he passed laws to protect Dominican control over local and national government, he limited the right to vote to Dominican men from the upper classes (Mayes, 2014). This trend of political and social exclusion continues into modern day Dominican national policy, as urban centers of power continue to monopolize the depiction of Dominican identity on the international stage (Carruyo, 2007; Mayes, 2014; Mitchell, 2009).

The role of women from elite classes in urban centers like Santo Domingo, San Pedro de Macoris, and Santiago became crucial to the development of Dominican identity (Mayes, 2014; E. Roorda et al., 2014). The standard patriarchal social model established under colonial rule and then reenforced by plantation agriculture bound women's influence to the home, but the well-educated Dominican women of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century found a politically and socially influential position as exemplars of progress and morality which extended beyond the home (Mayes, 2014). Several started schools within their homes and eventually established colleges for women, using their authority as the inculcators of Dominican identity to bolster Dominican nationalism and promote progress. The association between these women and the Normal schools (precursors to

modern teachers' colleges) where they were trained merged into the feminine archetype of *la normalista*.

Although access to formal education was strictly limited to the upper classes, the figure of *la normalista* – a morally upstanding woman dedicated to advancing the nation – became the ideal of feminine *dominicanidad* and gave women social and political power from within the home. Irreparably tied to the strict hierarchies produced by sugar plantation labor, *la normalista* is also fundamentally opposed to the lawless moral ambiguity associated with *campesinos* and rural life. The influence of *la normalista* persists and is reflected in the DR's current education statistics, which indicate that more women are pursuing higher education than men (Tactuk, Cáceres Ureña, & Martínez Mejía, 2012). Education is not only seen as a way for women to advance economically, but to reinforce notions of propriety and respectability without completely toppling the patriarchal values to which many Dominicans still cling.

#### *Rural Tobacco & the arrival of el Tíguere*

The dynamics of race, class, and gender often warp as they cross the rural-urban divide, compressing social differences and weakening barriers between groups, while maintaining stark economic contrasts between landowners and laborers (Baud, 2014; Danticat, 1998; Veloz Maggiolo, 2006). This was the case in the Cibao Valley in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as wealthy landholders depended on peasant labor to build the tobacco industry (Baud, 2014). Traditionally, Dominican *campesinos* claim a small plot of land called a *conuco* by clearing it of vegetation and then packing it with enough fruit trees, vegetables, and tubers to sustain a household. As the men of the household tend the *conuco*, they may also herd livestock for a rancher nearby or establish another *conuco* to

plant a low-maintenance cash crop, like tobacco or cocoa (Baud, 2014; E. Roorda et al., 2014). This way of life is still practiced in rural parts of the DR, though agricultural production focuses more on livestock and staple foods than cash crops, and many farmers are also non-agricultural laborers.

When the Dominican Republic gained independence in the 1860s, there were already feudal relationships between landowners and peasants in the tobacco-producing regions of the southwest (Veloz Maggiolo, 2006). Locked in the Cibao Valley between the Cordillera Septentrional and the Cordillera Central, elite landholders near Santiago de los Caballeros lacked the capital to establish tobacco plantations, instead depending on their relationships with *campesinos* to generate a tobacco crop (Baud, 2014). Then, in the late 1890s, a railroad was built between Santiago de los Caballeros and Puerto Plata, opening a trade pathway and increasing the value of farmland in the Cibao Valley (Baud, 2014).

Instead of shifting to a plantation-style system of tobacco production, landowners intensified their relationships with *campesinos*, developing close personal and social ties across significant differences in wealth and social class (Baud, 2014). In public, the rural upper classes were as strictly patriarchal as the urban elite, enforcing age, class, and gender hierarchies upon the rural communities around them. In private, however, relationships between peasants and the *patron* (landlord) created a different landscape of social mobility among rural populations. Although formal marriage outside one's class was discouraged, the ideals of masculine virility and social responsibility encouraged men of means to have extramarital relationships with women of lower classes and offer social and financial support to any children resulting from those relationships. Thus,

women and children crossed otherwise strictly upheld class boundaries through personal relationships, often advancing their economic or social standing in the process. To this day, women in rural areas are encouraged to seek out wealthy men and become wives or mistresses to pay bills or support their extended family. These private relationships are rarely acknowledged publicly, but their influence is evidenced by lifestyle improvements, styles of dress, new businesses, and, more recently, access to education.

Compressed social relations in rural populations create a class continuum that runs parallel to the strict urban social hierarchy, where one's position is determined more by social connections than individual wealth and power (Carruyo, 2007; Danticat, 1998). It is this continuum that provides the stage for the figure of *el tíguere* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as rural men (unable to advance economically through marriage) searched for ways to advance their social and economic standing. The original *tíguere* appeared during the Haitian occupation (1822 – 1861) as a street kid who made his living picking pockets and begging (E. Roorda et al., 2014). As the DR reshaped itself socially and economically in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *tíguere* transformed into a charlatan and a thief who appeared unexpectedly in the rigidly moralistic social structures of urban areas and sought to advance himself by any means necessary (Damirón, 1895; E. Roorda et al., 2014). The *tíguere*, with his mysterious background and apparent disregard for law and order, represented a threat to the morally upright, industrialized, cosmopolitan ideal that the elites were crafting for the benefit of the nation (Damirón, 1895). More recent interpretations of the *tíguere* laud him as a sort of anti-hero of the urban poor, though he is neither good nor trustworthy; a hustler or a pirate who often operates outside the law, but gains social and economic power through his own wits and a profound understanding

of the social order (E. Roorda et al., 2014). No one wants to associate with him, but everyone wants to be him.

Many Dominicans would disagree with including *el tíguere* in *dominicanidad* because of his moral ambiguity and inherent outsider status. As an archetype, *el tíguere* is the antithesis of what the DR aims to portray socially and geopolitically today and in the earliest years of the republic. I include *el tíguere* in *dominicanidad* because this archetype is the root of *tigueraje*, a form of agency which acknowledges multiple positionalities and then utilizes them to achieve a goal. *El tíguere* is adept at the use of *tigueraje*, as evident by his ability to appear in the social hierarchy in a way that others deem inappropriate, given his origins. However, *tigueraje* is widely practiced by Dominicans, creating rich social and political landscapes that are resistant to infiltration from outsiders, be they *campesinos*, cane workers, foreign investors, or global powers.

#### 1916 – 1996: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic

The growth of the sugar industry and the influx in commercial connections between the United States and the Dominican Republic in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century laid the foundations for a trade relationship that continues today (Mayes, 2014; OECD, Trade, Development, America, & Caribbean, 2020; E. Roorda et al., 2014). The U.S.'s monopoly on trade relations with the DR has had drastic political and social consequences for Dominicans, affecting not only their government and trade policies, but also their identity and social structure. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the DR was plagued with political instability, causing it to fall behind on paying back loans from the U.S. In 1915 and 1916, the U.S. invaded Haiti and then the DR to recuperate its losses and ensure political stability on the island between Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Over the next eight years of occupation U.S. companies cemented their control over the Dominican sugar industry, more than quadrupling sugar productivity and placing sugar production firmly at the center of the Dominican economy (Ayala, 1999; E. Roorda et al., 2014). In contrast to the individual private companies that dominated the sugar industry at the turn of the century, American corporations began to expand into the DR, buying up acreage that had once been held communally and privatizing access to it (Ayala, 1999). U.S. companies expanded sugar production in the east and started plantations in the southwestern provinces of the DR, eventually dominating sugar production across the country and shifting more horizontal social structures toward sugar's strict hierarchies. By the time U.S. Marines left Dominican territory in 1924, only the interior of the country and areas where the land was not suited to sugar production retained the tobacco-growing social relations of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, further distancing cosmopolitan *dominicanidad* from *campesinos* and agricultural lifestyles.

Prior to the U.S. invasion in 1916, Dominican national identity was not explicitly anti-black nor specifically anti-Haitian (Mayes, 2014). As U.S. Marines combined the police and the military and made changes to Dominican government between 1916 and 1924, they also imposed their own racist social hierarchies on the Dominican people through political and social violence. Pro-black labor movements and organizations supporting pan-Antillean identity were forcibly quashed and publicly demonized as sources of unrest and violence, inserting layers of anti-black racism into complex Dominican social hierarchies (Mayes, 2014). This violence was not the most insidious legacy of the U.S. occupation, however, nor was it what cemented anti-blackness into Dominican society. During eight years of occupation, the U.S solidified and

operationalized racial categories (black, white, mestizo) within the military and in the realm of policy through the census and other mechanisms of governance (Mayes, 2014). These changes interacted with the existing social landscape to produce the two most influential Dominican political figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Rafael Trujillo and Joaquin Balaguer (E. P. Roorda, 1996). Each of them further influenced expressions of *dominicanidad* and laid the foundations for modern Dominican political economy.

#### *1931-1961: General Rafael Trujillo*

In 1931, General Rafael Leónidas Trujillo took the presidency after assassinating many of his opponents and openly threatening anyone who contested the election results (E. Roorda et al., 2014). A U.S.-trained military officer who rose quickly through the ranks of the Dominican military, Trujillo outwardly embodied the figure of the *caudillo* from the DR's revolutionary era. In practice, he transformed *el tíguere* into someone who could take on a variety of roles at different positions in society and not only threaten the status quo, but society at large. Over the course of his life and thirty-year dictatorship, he rose from an indigent street kid to a powerful politician, expanding his repertoire of immoral practices from street-level theft and social manipulation to rape, torture, and mass murder (Damirón, 1895; Danticat, 1998; DeLugan, 2018; E. Roorda et al., 2014; E.P. Roorda, 1996; Turits, 2002). Trujillo twisted every pre-existing indicator of *dominicanidad* to fit a self-aggrandizing narrative of hyper-masculinity and white supremacy all the while glorifying Dominican identity without upsetting his relationship with the U.S. (Derby, 2000; Fiehrer, 1990).

Trujillo spent almost a decade testing the limits of his relationship with the U.S. after it shifted to its “Good Neighbor Policy” in the 1930s (E. P. Roorda, 1996). After his

violent rise to power in the early part of the decade, Trujillo decided to allow for political organization and labor unionization in the late 1940s in order to improve his democratic image (E. Roorda et al., 2014). In 1946, cane cutters and other sugar plantation workers successfully pressured U.S. sugar companies into increasing wages and shortening the workday to eight hours. However, when the leaders of one faction of laborers known to be anti-Trujillo continued to resist returning to work, Trujillo had them assassinated. While he was willing to let Dominicans advocate for themselves against the U.S., there was no tolerance for opposition to their own government. Even when Trujillo publicly ceded control to puppet regimes in the 1950s, again pursuing a more democratic image, his control behind the scenes was violent and absolute (E. Roorda et al., 2014). Dominicans lived in constant fear of the volatile dictator, creating a culture of silence around direct discussion of political or economic issues.

Trujillo also co-opted existing gender dynamics. Building on the imaginary of the *patron*, Trujillo cultivated a series of love-triangle narratives at the national level, converting *la normalista* from an outspoken political advocate to a demure morally-upstanding wife set in opposition to the mistress, a sexualized puppet of the state, both objects to be collected and showcased for the country's (i.e. his) benefit (Derby, 2000). Behind expensive and ostentatiously decorated women who sang Trujillo's praises as the pinnacle of masculinity, there were eugenics campaigns against the dark-skinned and the poor, and predatory pursuit of the light-skinned and the wealthy (Derby, 2000; E. Roorda et al., 2014). Trujillo was well known for his pursuit and collection of young women, often leveraging the safety of wives and daughters against potential political opponents. By the time he was assassinated in May 1961, Trujillo had irreparably shaped the

narrative of Dominican identity into one that embraced hyper-masculinity, esthetic extremism, anti-Haitianism, white supremacy, and political clientelism. He had also exhausted the patience of the U.S., who had begun to impose economic sanctions on the DR, which Trujillo studiously ignored, bankrupting the country and enriching himself (E. Roorda et al., 2014). After his assassination, the DR entered a period of tumult, from which rose Trujillo's former Vice President, Joaquin Balaguer, who exercised *tigueraje* in fundamentally different ways and further shaped the DR's political and social geography.

#### *Joaquin Balaguer, Juan Bosch, and the Dominican Political Landscape*

Joaquin Balaguer began his political career in 1930 as one of Trujillo's advisers and became a key figure of the Trujillo administration (E. Roorda et al., 2014). Where Trujillo was aggressive and unpredictable, the embodiment of the *caudillo*, Joaquin Balaguer was calm and logical, a gifted diplomat adept at hiding his ruthlessness (E. P. Roorda, 1996). His reserved demeanor, while helpful for governing, did not grant him the charisma to win a fair election. Of his six presidential terms, only one is considered to have been won fairly.

In the wake of Trujillo's assassination, then Vice President Balaguer briefly took over the Dominican Republic, however he quickly lost control of the country and was pressured to step down by the U.S. in 1962 (E. Roorda et al., 2014). Around the same time, Juan Bosch, a leftist political leader previously imprisoned for speaking out against Trujillo, returned to the DR after twenty-four years in exile. At the end of 1962, after ratifying a new constitution, the new provisional government of the Dominican Republic held presidential elections and Bosch won by a landslide.

Despite his popularity and many of the reforms he enacted in his short term as president, Bosch was also unable to stabilize the Dominican Republic. After a military coup by pro-Trujillo Loyalists sparked conflict with the urban poor of Santo Domingo in 1965, the US invaded the Dominican Republic for a second time to quell the unrest and support the Loyalist government (E. Roorda et al., 2014). The presence of 24,000 U.S. troops in the capital put an end to all-out warfare between the Loyalists and the Constitutionals but did not completely end the fighting as both sides continued to find ways to attack each other, killing U.S. troops who got caught in the middle. After the initial invasion, the U.S. began providing humanitarian aid, restoring electricity, and repairing roads throughout the country, hoping to disguise their military presence as a humanitarian mission to support their allies.

Joaquin Balaguer had not been idle in his exile from the DR, making connections with U.S. politicians and informally advising the State Department on the best way to handle the Constitutionalist revolution (E. Roorda et al., 2014). In June 1966, when the U.S. allowed the DR to hold a presidential election, Balaguer and Bosch ran against each other for the first time. In a move only slightly less violent than his dictatorial predecessor, Balaguer used his connections to U.S. officials to limit participation at the polls and secure the presidency for himself.

Trujillo and Balaguer held power through different strategies, but both of them depended on a clientelist network of individuals and organizations to manage and monitor the country during their presidencies (E. Roorda et al., 2014). Trujillo used threats and bribery to control the wealthy and spectacle to entrance the populace, ultimately alienating them as the stark contrasts between his extravagant lifestyle and

widespread poverty became clear (Derby, 2000). Realizing this, and under international pressure from the U.S. to be more democratic, Balaguer sought to reach beyond the upper classes and draw more people into a clientelist relationship with him. The creation of clientelist political parties made it possible for Balaguer (and Bosch) to send agents into poorer neighborhoods and build a broader political base based on personal associations instead of ideologies. It also facilitated broader political participation and opened avenues of social mobility for those who had previously been excluded.

The rivalry between Bosch and Balaguer shaped Dominican politics for the next forty years and continues to echo in the agendas of their political parties almost twenty years after their deaths (Mitchell, 2009). Balaguer served three more terms as president, from 1966 to 1978, in an infamous period known as “The Twelve Years” during which state-sponsored terrorism was almost as bad as it was under Trujillo (E. Roorda et al., 2014). Under political pressure from the U.S. to accept the election results without interfering, Balaguer was finally voted out of office in 1978 as the population sided with the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD), a party Bosch established and then left, deeming their agenda too centrist (Mitchell, 2009; E. Roorda et al., 2014).

Economic crises, corruption, and political unrest pushed Dominican voters back to Balaguer and the Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC) in 1986 (Mitchell, 2009). His third presidency was significantly more tolerant of political opposition as he focused on major infrastructure projects and getting the Dominican economy back on track. Balaguer and Bosch ran against each other again in 1990, with Bosch as a candidate for the increasingly popular Dominican Liberation Party (PLD). Once again, Balaguer interfered in the election, cheating Bosch out of the presidency and angering the

Dominican people. He did it again in 1994, against Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) candidate Francisco Peña Gómez, whose immense popularity made Balaguer's interference in the election even more obvious.

In response to popular unrest and international pressure, Balaguer finally agreed to the Pact for Democracy, in which he halved his term to two years and did not run for political office again (E. Roorda et al., 2014). PLD Candidate Leonel Fernandez narrowly won the election after Balaguer lent him public support, abandoning his own PRSC and backing his old rival's party. When Balaguer finally relinquished his power over the presidency, he left behind a legacy of political clientelism, widespread democratic participation, and resentment toward external interference in domestic issues.

Today, entire communities identify with a particular party through colors (purple for PLD; red for PRSC) which pop up during election campaigns as local, provincial, and national political candidates parade through the area, rallying for support and handing out money to voters. While they may look like bribes, these handouts are more of a source of encouragement for people to vote than they are an incentive to vote for a particular party, as they cannot be enforced. Dominicans traditionally pay closer attention to the economy and its effect on them than they do to individual candidates and their ideological agendas (Mitchell, 2009). The money is compensation for wages lost to the national voting holiday, a reminder of the value of the vote, and a method of redistributing the wealth generated by political fundraising and campaigning.

#### 1996 – Present: Social and Economic Stabilization & Change

Understanding the influence of Dominican history on the formation of *dominicanidad* is key to understanding social and economic tensions faced “on the

ground” in the Dominican Republic. While conducting research in rural areas, it is impossible to ignore the incessant push to urbanize, develop, educate, and improve economically *and socially* through the celebration of all things urban and cosmopolitan, while the rhetoric of media outlets, religious leaders, and politicians diminishes or demeans the lived experiences of *campesinos* (Carruyo, 2007). In this section, I will highlight several major transformations that have occurred since the Pact for Democracy. It is important to remember that these changes are occurring simultaneously over a thirty-year period, making the experiences of one generation of Dominicans drastically different from the generations before and after them. Some of these changes began in the DR’s cosmopolitan centers as early as the 1960s but have taken decades to be felt in rural areas, while others are sweeping the entire country within a few short years.

The DR has maintained a relatively stable political climate since the mid-1980s, even with Balaguer’s election scandals in the 1990s. Like many other developing countries, the DR was pushed toward import substitution through World Bank and IMF loans, leading to the creation of export processing zones (EPZs) throughout the country (Derby & Werner, 2013; Mitchell, 2009; Rosing, 2009). Andrew Schrank (2005) analyzes the success of export processing zones in Santo Domingo and Santiago de los Caballeros, where the same historical processes that produced the rural-urban divide in Dominican identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century worked to produce different economic outcomes (Schrank, 2005). The developmental goal of import substitution strategies, of which EPZs were a part, was to create a well-paid blue collar working class that would eventually take over companies in the EPZ or replicate domestic versions of them outside the EPZ, leading to the development of a professional white collar class (Schrank, 2005).

In Santo Domingo, the EPZs contributed to greater social stratification and spatial resource disparities, with very few Dominicans working their way up the ranks and into management positions (Schrank, 2005). In Santiago, the EPZs contributed to the same spatial resource disparities, but the development model worked, as companies were slowly taken over or driven out by domestic competitors (Rosing, 2009; Schrank, 2005). Andrew Schrank attributes this success to the density of social networks among producers of coffee, tobacco, and cacao in the Cibao Valley, which allowed greater numbers of Dominicans to advance through the ranks by exercising *tigueraje* (Schrank, 2005). The same rules of patronage that produced mutual aid obligations between landowners and peasants shifted from providing food or money to providing jobs and job recommendations in factories where landowners joined middle management and *campesinos* became wage-earners (Carruyo, 2007). In Santo Domingo, the strict hierarchical legacy of sugar production produces social networks that are dense, but more horizontal than vertical, making it difficult to use *tigueraje* to cross class boundaries.

Starting during Balaguer's terms in the 1980s, improvements to physical infrastructure have been the fallback tool for soothing political unrest in the Dominican Republic. While most improvements are focused on major population hubs like Santo Domingo and Santiago de los Caballeros, under every administration there has been some effort to expand the highways and improve access to water and electricity throughout the country. At the national level, more recent physical infrastructure projects have focused on bridging the telecommunications gap within and beyond the DR, as the country aims to become a regional telecommunications hub (Dominican Today, 2017; The Business Year, 2017).

In 2013, I had to walk to the top of the nearest hill to get cell phone signal in La Esquina, and Wi-fi was too expensive for most people in the area to afford. In 2021, most residents had a data plan, and I could carry a Wi-fi hotspot in my pocket and reliably access the internet to check social media on my cell phone or to grade online assignments on my laptop. Over the same period, smartphones became commonplace in areas where landlines never existed, and residents upgraded their haphazardly assembled analog antennas for satellite television packages. Social media became an increasingly important tool for keeping up with current events in my field sites, as any resident under 40 years of age had at least one social media profile, even if they rarely checked it. Pre-existing international migration networks once mediated by word of mouth, remittances, and occasional in-person visits were enhanced by connections via social media, flooding Dominicans, especially youth, with information about life in other parts of the world, including ideas about health, nutrition, and food. Whereas food advertisements had previously been bound to print and television advertisements closely regulated by the Dominican Ministries of Agriculture, Public Health, and Telecommunications, social media introduced images and ideas about food from beyond the DR.

Influences from beyond the DR were already changing ideals and identities among the growing Dominican middle class prior to the proliferation of social media. As the middle class has grown since the 1990s, contact between individual Dominicans and prevailing ways of thinking abroad has increased. The Dominican public education system is notoriously underfunded and poorly performing. In 2013, the Medina administration increased educational spending to transition all Dominican public schools to an 8-hour school day. Prior to Medina's educational reforms, public schools operated

on half-day schedules, which allowed students to go home for the midday meal. The transition took about three years, during which hundreds of new schools were built, existing schools were outfitted with kitchen facilities for a school lunch program, and teachers were re-certified.

In Municipio Cabrera, rural residents were shocked to see changes being implemented; they were unused to government programs and reforms reaching them so quickly (or at all). Transitioning to an 8-hour school day also shifted the burden of feeding children (and teachers) away from their families, changing longstanding household labor dynamics. Women once responsible for cooking a midday meal for an entire family found themselves picking up unfamiliar chores once completed by school-aged children as the demand for food preparation labor was diminished.

Middle class households, many of whom have historically paid housekeepers or cooks to prepare a midday meal, also tend to rely on private schools, many of which have always had an 8- or 6-hour school day or transitioned to one well before 2013. While many of these private schools are accredited through the Dominican Ministry of Education, many others are international schools and education projects with foreign accreditation that maintain a highly educated labor force of people from Europe and North America<sup>1</sup>.

While many of these educational projects were drawn to the country by the demand of wealthy business owners, others are the product of faith-based missions aimed at supporting economic development among the poor. These faith-based projects, most of

---

<sup>1</sup> This knowledge comes from my experiences working and volunteering for an educational program in Municipio Cabrera that uses a similar accreditation scheme and conversations with co-workers there. More explanation in Chapter 4.

which are associated with a denomination of Protestantism, draw a mix of long-term employees and short-term missionary volunteers, who spread their religious beliefs as they provide education and mentorship. They are a small part of a larger invasion of Protestant religious groups into the DR over the last two decades that has destabilized staunchly Catholic *dominicanidad*. Brendan Jamal Thornton's work on the role of Pentecostalism among the urban poor near Santo Domingo discusses how residents use their affiliation with the Christian faith to manipulate their social position. According to Thornton, religious affiliation has become part of *tigueraje* as men with former gang affiliations use the conversion process from Catholicism to Protestant Christianity as a way to adopt a new, more respectable identity, without losing the power they gained as gang members (Thornton, 2016).

Based on my observations, conversion is less common among the middle classes, whose inculcation of Christian ideals has been more long-standing as multiple generations have now attended institutions that emphasize a Protestant ethic of individualism and the rule of law. Idealization of the rule of law comes into direct conflict with *tigueraje* in the public sector, which contributes to widespread corruption and a lack of transparency (Transparency International, 2020). Among the middle class, widespread discontent with government corruption boiled over during the 2016 election amid a constitutional crisis regarding the use of electronic voting machines. The release of the "Panama Papers" by WikiLeaks in April 2016, led to the revelation that Odebrecht, a Brazilian construction company, had paid off officials in the Medina Administration (and several others around the world) to ensure that they were awarded major infrastructure contracts and to help cover-up the failure of the company to fulfill those

contracts. The Odebrecht scandal and the global movement against government corruption that it inspired took hold of the Dominican middle class, heralding a major political transition.

Balaguer's red PRSC has faded from the political landscape over the last decade, as purple PLD has increased its control over the Dominican government since 2004, culminating in the almost uniform election of PLD candidates in 2016. Both parties are centrist and non-ideological, the last obvious remnants of Balaguer and Bosch (Mitchell, 2009). In 2006, amid the dominant atmosphere of centrism, a new political party broke off from the red PRSC coalition to form the Modern Revolutionary Party (PRM), a more progressive, social democratic party which was formally recognized in 2014.

Popularly referred to and identified by their party colors, indigo and white, PRM candidates tend to be younger, and many have received some education abroad. Their pluralist party platform and reformist stance attracted the support of voters concerned about corruption and economic inequality after the 2016 election. Many blamed corruption and *tigueraje* for economic pressures on the middle class and the worsening economic gap between wealthy and poor, which has caused even the integrated social networks of the Cibao valley to buckle as the Dominican economy quickly transitions from one rooted in agriculture, to one dependent on international tourism and other service industries. Though PRM garnered few successes in the 2016 elections, it swept the 2020 elections, and Luis Abinader, leader of the party and former tourism executive, took the presidency in the middle of a global pandemic (Nagovitch, 2020).

Speaking with rural residents about the change in political power, there was a sense of resignation. In the next chapter, I will touch on the agricultural policies enacted

during the Medina Administration, which made many rural residents feel politically recognized and included. The same residents also see politics as something that only benefits the elite, preferring to cast their votes, take the cash from campaigns, and stay away from public demonstrations or discussions that might put them in the spotlight. Political activism is for the elite and the urban middle class, and it is them for whom the PRM speaks. Rural residents expect the Abinader administration to focus on tourism and urban centers, ignoring, hopefully without harming, rural livelihoods.

### History, Identity, and Food Access

This chapter provided an overview of the broader social and political stage upon which this research takes place. Understanding the process of *dominicanidad* through its history is key to understanding how food access is enacted in conjunction with it. From its roots in multi-cultural informal agricultural trade networks, Dominican identity transformed and grew in opposition to Haitian identity and global economic pressures to conform to racist and patriarchal geopolitics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Dominican identity was further transformed by the Trujillo dictatorship, and then politically galvanized by the corruption and opacity of clientelist politics developed under Balaguer's administrations. Economic growth and social change over the last half century have broken down the ties between *dominicanidad* and agriculture, as a growing middle class with cosmopolitan ideals and Protestant ethics pushes for transparency and global integration. In the next chapter, I will focus on Dominican food policy, which has largely resisted or twisted attempts a global market integration through Balaguer-era institutions, powerful labor unions, and *tigueraje*, creating a multi-level foodscape that shapes the experience of *dominicanidad* by class, gender, and geography.

### Chapter 3: Positioning Municipio Cabrera within the DR

The first part of this chapter will provide an overview of major policies affecting the Dominican agricultural economy, then narrow in to focus on Municipio Cabrera, where this research takes place. Municipio Cabrera is located along the periphery of Dominican “cocoa country”, while most of the literature about the Dominican Republic is centered on the urban and agricultural hubs of sugar and tobacco (Baud, 2014; Carruyo, 2007; Derby, 1998, 2000; Derby & Werner, 2013; Mayes, 2014; E. Roorda et al., 2014; Rosing, 2009; Schrank, 2005), or along the Dominican border with Haiti (DeLugan, 2018; Fiehrer, 1990; E. P. Roorda, 1996; Sheller & León, 2016; Turits, 2002). While the Dominican Republic is proud of its status as a cocoa producer – dedicating a museum in the Colonial City to the history and production of chocolate – the cocoa producing regions of the country hold comparatively little power over national policy, in part because Dominican cocoa is almost exclusively exported as a raw commodity (Estrella, 2016). Had I not encountered the cocoa museum in the colonial city and mapped all sixty of the DRs agricultural exports after I was given a list of them in 2013, I would never have considered the relationship between cocoa and Municipio Cabrera. Instead of cocoa trees, the fields along the Municipio’s coastal highway are full of grazing cattle, standing in the shade of large mango trees and steep cliffsides. The nearest visible fields of cash crops are the rice fields in and around Nagua, to the east of Municipio Cabrera. Meanwhile, tobacco and sugar are processed into finished commodities and the regions that produce them have historically garnered more attention from stakeholders within the DR and beyond its borders (See Figure 3).

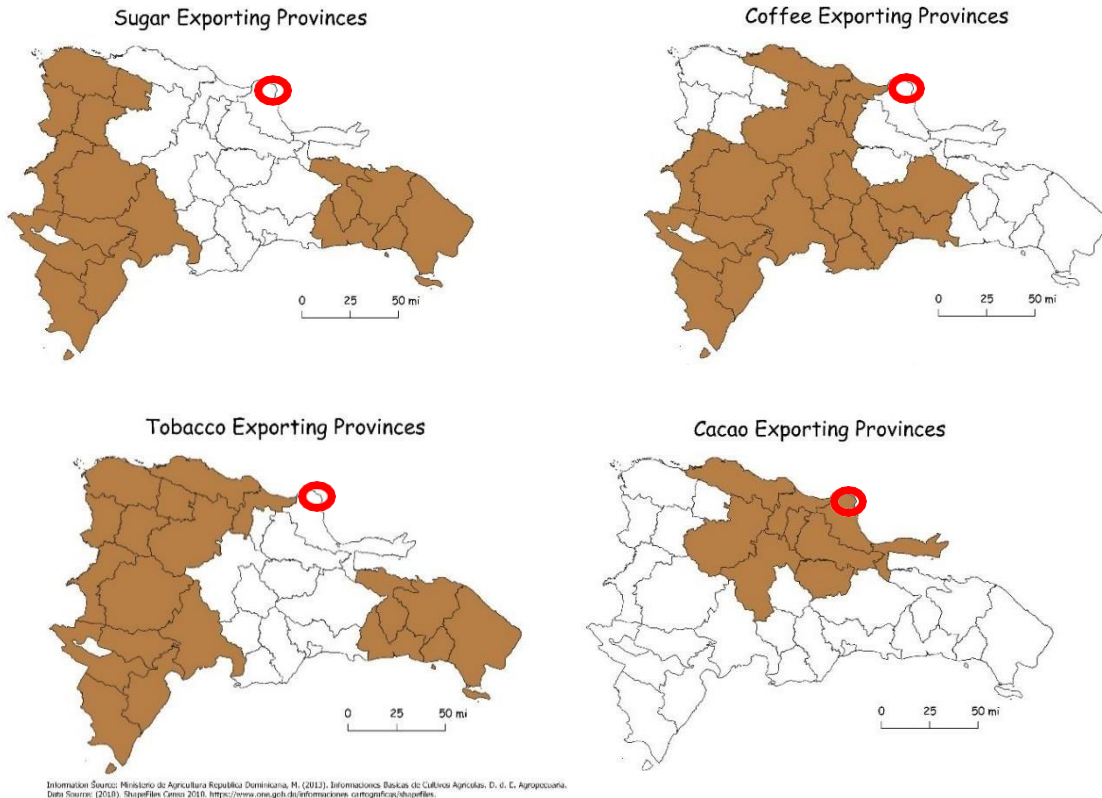


Figure 3. *Municipio Cabrera* (circled in red) is in a region that exports cocoa, but not other major commodity crops

The central hub of agricultural production in the Dominican Republic is the market in Santiago de los Caballeros, which was once the heart of tobacco country until Dominican farmers began to produce a greater variety of foods on an industrial scale. Santo Domingo, the Dominican capital city, is the country’s diplomatic and manufacturing center, with close ties to the sugar-producing regions of the eastern part of the country and a longer history of industrial labor than other parts of the country. As the two largest population centers Santo Domingo and Santiago de los Caballeros dominate the national political gaze, and most of the DR’s domestic food policy is geared towards appeasing them politically.

While the DR produces and exports more than 60 different agricultural commodities, its reputation in the global economy is oriented toward manufacturing,

tourism, and increasingly, digital infrastructure (2017). In fact, DR-CAFTA, the latest trade agreement between the DR, the United States, and several countries in Central America, focuses on export quotas of textiles and other manufactured goods from the DR and *import* quotas of US meat (Florida Shipper, 2005; Food Chemical News, 2004). As a primarily agricultural municipality, in a region of the country with high rates of domestic tourism, Municipio Cabrera's connection to manufacturing is limited to the rates with which *cabrereños*<sup>2</sup> migrate to Santo Domingo and Santiago de los Caballeros in search of manufacturing jobs. Most of this chapter is dedicated to understanding some of Cabrera's key physical infrastructure, including the results of a geographic survey of Cabrera's food resources which I conducted in 2016.

#### INESPRE & Dominican Food Policy

Under Trujillo, the sugar industry grew to enrich the Dominican economy, but not the Dominican people, many of whom lost their land and their livelihoods to U.S. companies and were barely surviving on wages from sugar plantations. After the Cuban Revolution, the U.S. dropped the price of sugar to undercut the Cuban economy, exacerbating the economic struggles of poor Dominicans. Just like Trujillo, Balaguer used the national treasury as his personal bank account, but instead of engaging in spectacle he used it to soften the image of his own authoritarian rule (Mitchell, 2009; E. Roorda et al., 2014).

In 1969, halfway through his second presidency, Balaguer created INESPRE (Instituto de Estabilización de Precios; Price Stabilization Institute), which established a nationwide system of food distribution meant to alleviate the impacts of increasing food

---

<sup>2</sup> Cabrerans; an identity label for people who are from or belonging to Cabrera

prices on poorer families (Mitchell, 2009). Tied directly to the president's office, INESPRES was/is used to provide humanitarian relief during natural and economic disasters and cushion price shocks in the food system by funneling surplus food through storage facilities, pop-up markets, and *colmados*<sup>3</sup> (Mitchell, 2009). INESPRES was not enough to keep Balaguer in office in the 1970's or the 1990's, but threats or changes to it have heralded changes in political power since Balaguer left office in 1996 (Mitchell, 2009).

The Dominican Republic depends heavily on loans from the IMF and the World Bank to sustain its reliance on importing fossil fuels (Mitchell, 2009). The conditions of those loans reflect the neoliberal ideals of the Washington Consensus, which has been pushing for the privatization of major government institutions in the DR since the 1980s (McMichael, 2004; Mitchell, 2009). Kenneth Mitchell's work examines how INESPRES, a state-sponsored food systems management entity, has survived international pressures for privatization for over 50 years (40 at the time of his publication) (Mitchell, 2009). The DR has privatized large sectors of other parts of the economy, including most of its tourism industry, and established export processing zones with foreign companies throughout the country, yet inefficient and corrupt INESPRES persists, along with many other social programs (Derby & Werner, 2013; Hornbeck, 2007; Mitchell, 2009). Mitchell points to the legacy of political clientelism and high voter turnout, which have a tendency to reenforce the status quo (Mitchell, 2009).

I would add to this analysis by highlighting the campaign practices of political candidates and the role of *tigueraje*, which applies to the DR as a nation on the

---

<sup>3</sup> A type of food resource that will be explored later in this chapter

geopolitical stage, and to its political leaders. While *tigueraje* is strongly connected to masculinity in the academic and historical literature, I believe that connection is a product of the spatialization of patriarchal gender norms, which puts men in the public eye and obscures the role of women. *Tigueraje* is essential to the maintenance of social and economic networks, and it undergirds political clientelism in the Dominican Republic since Balaguer and Bosch expanded the membership of political parties beyond the upper classes.

Whereas political parties only campaign every four years, INESPRES trucks and stores are a constant reminder to low-income neighborhoods of how the party in power affects their lives. INESPRES went through several periods where it lost funding, but an economic crisis would inevitably follow, forcing political change and re-instatement of INESPRES funding. Leonel Fernandez, Balaguer's PLD successor (1996-2000, 2004-2012), promised the IMF to de-fund and re-shape INESPRES into an agricultural exchange institute during his first term in office, but did not follow through before he lost his first reelection campaign (Mitchell, 2009). During his second term, he added to INESPRES, creating a social security program for families in extreme poverty (Mitchell, 2009). His expansion of social programs during the economic crises of 2008-09, despite international demands for privatization, is likely what kept the presidency purple in 2012.

Danilo Medina's administration defied the Washington Consensus and built on the social infrastructure put in place by the Fernandez administration, connecting INESPRES more firmly to the Ministry of Agriculture and focusing on improving the DR's food sovereignty (ReportateRD, 2018). In the daily news briefings that I began receiving via email in 2013, there were almost-weekly news stories of Danilo Medina

inaugurating food production infrastructure (e.g. chicken houses) or meeting with producers unions to discuss policy demands (OPRD, 2019). Meanwhile, his Vice President, former First Lady and Ambassador to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Margarita Cedeño, continued working with the Ministry of Public Health to implement a national nutrition education campaign she developed during the previous administration (Despacho de la Primera Dama, 2009). In a form of geopolitical *tigueraje*, The Medina Administration made up for its defiance of the Washington Consensus by increasing educational spending and changing the structure of the Dominican public education system to meet international standards. In this case, *tigueraje* is a protective mechanism against outside social and economic influences.

Appeasing the international community by investing in education instead of dismantling INESPRES and other food programs likely buffered the DR from food supply shortages and price increases created by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Like many other Caribbean countries, the DR shut down air travel in April 2020, stopping incoming flights from major tourist markets in Europe and North America. INESPRES played a pivotal role in buffering the economic toll of curfews and lockdowns, collaborating with the Ministry of Public Health and the Ministry of Agriculture to stabilize the price of basic goods and distribute them to the urban poor in Santo Domingo and Santiago (OPRD, 2020). The Dominican government also launched a collaboration with Dominican supermarkets (including subsidiaries of international chains like Walmart) to subsidize groceries for those who have contributed to the national social security program and used the recently expanded education infrastructure to ensure students had adequate access to food (DR1, 2020a). These collaborations started under the Medina

administration and continued into the first year of the Abinader administration (Dominican Today, 2021a).

In 2018, Danilo Medina claimed that 85 per cent of domestically consumed food is domestically produced in the DR (ReportateRD, 2018). While this is likely true, the path from farm to table is not direct. While there are still many rural families using the *conuco* to supplement their diet and that of their social network, most farmers sell the crops and livestock they produce to bring in cash income (S. R. Barr, 2015). Wholesalers take those products to markets in Santiago de los Caballeros, where prices are set, and the food is redistributed to food outlets that purchase wholesale, domestic markets in each province, and export hubs in Santo Domingo. This is reflected in variable food pricing across the country as transportation from Santiago is factored into the price of fresh produce in markets.

I decided to test Medina's claim on my own grocery shopping habits by examining the labels of the products I brought home from a locally owned supermarket in Cabrera. All packaged foods in the DR include the address of the manufacturer and distributor of the food product. Fresher products like milk and butter were processed in Provincia Puerto Plata, which runs along the North Coast of the DR and contains the third largest urban center in the country, the city of Puerto Plata. Having seen dairy cattle in pastures throughout the coastal plains of the DR's northern and northeastern provinces, including Provincia Maria Trinidad Sanchez, I was not surprised by this finding. Meanwhile, processed foods, like breakfast cereals and snacks, all had manufacturers addresses located in provinces just west of Santo Domingo – where there are several export processing zones (EPZs) for companies like Frito Lay and Nabisco. These export

processing zones allow food products to be produced by Dominican workers for Dominican consumption using cheap, imported ingredients from the U.S. and other countries. Thus, Medina's claim is probably true, but for Dominicans living in urban areas and depending on cheap, processed foods to survive, it does not properly convey the full story of their food supply.

### Transporting People and Food on the North Coast

Transportation not only has an impact on the price of food in the DR, but on customers' ability to encounter food. Public transportation in the Dominican Republic has a reputation for being disjointed, dangerous, and unreliable, the complexity mystifying and intimidating to those who rarely or never use it. The leaders of transportation syndicates are colloquially referred to as "*los verdaderos dueños del país*"<sup>4</sup> because they not only control the transport of goods, but also the progression of daily commutes and traffic in major cities. The turf wars between transportation syndicates in major cities like Santo Domingo, Santiago, and Puerto Plata have been known to get violent, and the arrival of rideshare companies like Uber was met with protests (Diario Libre, 2017). The syndicates control passenger fares, drivers' routes, and drivers' hours, lobbying with the national, provincial, and local governments to reduce the costs of fuel, fleet vehicles, and tolls for their members. There is an unspoken rule against challenging a transportation syndicate bolstered by the implication that the consequences would not be worth it.

Added to this layer of intimidation is the reality of using public transportation in major cities. Santo Domingo is one of the most dangerous cities to drive in in the world (Kushner, 2015). People with private vehicles must contend with the fact that the "rules

---

<sup>4</sup> Translation: The real bosses/leaders of the country

of the road” have little to do with traffic signs and right of way, and more to do with the will of public transportation drivers, who will work together to direct the flow of traffic in chaotic intersections, block oncoming traffic to allow another vehicle to turn safely and decide the speed limit for certain stretches of road. There are syndicates of *guaguas publicas*<sup>5</sup> and *carros publicos*<sup>6</sup>, which run set routes with designated stopping points, and syndicates of taxis and *motoconchos*<sup>7</sup> which operate from specific hubs and areas within the city. Then there is the Metro, an ongoing passenger rail project in Santo Domingo that has eased some of the cities notorious traffic congestion at peak commuting hours (N Digital, 2021b).

While drivers do their best to ensure the physical safety of their passengers, and crashes on public transportation are surprisingly rare, based on my conversations with several life-long residents of Santo Domingo, incidents of theft and assault on public transportation are exceedingly common, particularly for those travelling at night. Most transportation between cities in the DR operates between sunrise and sunset to mitigate the inherent dangers of driving at night in a country where many roads are narrow and unlit, and to avoid the potential for violence. The threat of highway robbery, once used to demonize rural populations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, remains a real possibility on Dominican roads in urban and rural areas (Mayes, 2014).

Compared to Santo Domingo and other parts of the DR, transportation along the North Coast is safer and simpler. There is only one transportation line between Nagua

---

<sup>5</sup> 15-passenger busses or vans used for public transportation

<sup>6</sup> Sedans or mini vans used for public transportation

<sup>7</sup> Motorcycle taxi

and Rio San Juan (*guaguas*), and two between Rio San Juan and Puerto Plata (*guaguas* and *carros*). Transportation to Santo Domingo from Rio San Juan, Cabrera, or Nagua is solved by Caribe Tours, a private bus company that runs four trips per day. The simplicity of public transportation resources between Rio San Juan and Nagua leads to a perceived lack of public transportation among those with the means to acquire their own.

Most expats and a growing number of Dominicans choose to use private vehicles, an increasing number of which are SUVs and sedans instead of motorcycles. Less expensive, cheaper to fuel, easier to store and maintain, motorcycles were the most popular vehicle on Dominican roads until the last decade, when the growth of the Dominican middle class shifted trends toward larger vehicles (Kushner, 2015). The increase in vehicle size has become an issue on the narrow roads and highways that weave throughout Municipio Cabrera.

Most *motoconchos* and other transportation workers are male. In Cabrera, work as a *motoconcho* is one of the only ways for men with low levels of education to make a living. Due to low overhead costs, most *motoconchos* will make a profit with only a couple hours' work acting as taxis and package delivery workers. The postal system in Municipio Cabrera is practically non-existent, so *motoconchos*, *guaguas*, and Caribe Tours are used to transport *everyone* and *everything*, except large livestock<sup>8</sup>. While Nagua and Rio San Juan have had syndicated groups of *motoconchos* for years, the *motoconchos* in Cabrera have only recently begun the process of forming their own

---

<sup>8</sup> In this case, "large" is anything bigger than a chicken. Live chickens are allowed on public busses, but they must be contained in a cage, box, or sack. I have seen drivers prioritize the safety of chicken(s) in a sack over a passenger's fare, telling a passenger to wait for the next bus to see if there is more room. Large dogs are rare on public transportation. Caribe Tours does not technically allow animals, but drivers will turn a blind eye to cats and small dogs if they are in a carrier.

syndicate. Smaller communities have informally organized groups of *motoconchos* that connect the main public transportation line to more remote areas of the municipality.

### Cabrera: High Domestic Tourism, Low Political Clout

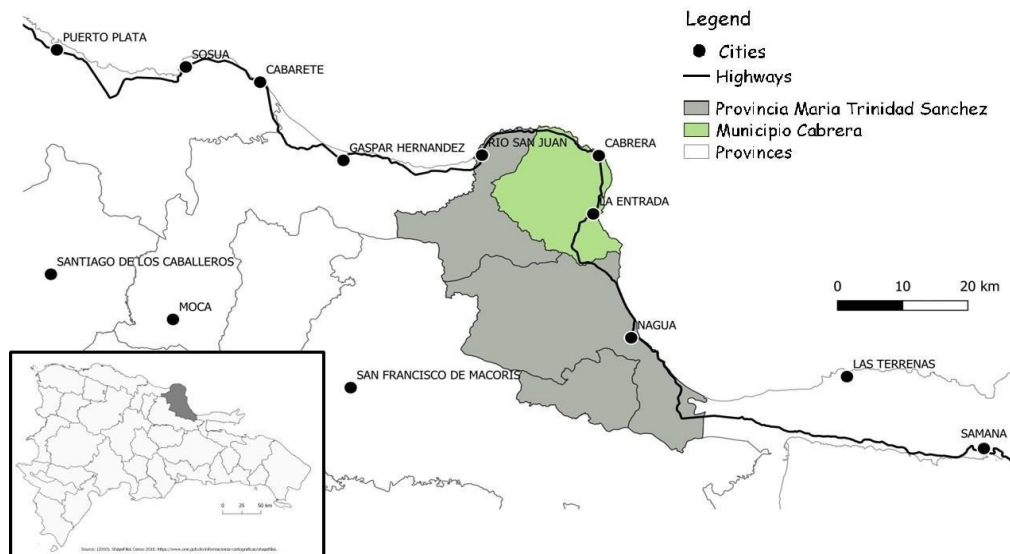


Figure 4. Cabrera is located on the north coast of the Dominican Republic, between Nagua and Rio San Juan. The coastal highway connects Cabrera to Nagua and Puerto Plata, the two nearest major cities.

Cabrera, Municipio Cabrera, Provincia Maria Trinidad Sanchez, Dominican Republic, (pop. ~4000) sits on a promontory on the north coast of the DR (See Figure 4) (Tactuk et al., 2012). To the north and east sits the Atlantic Ocean, the lifeblood of Cabrera’s two largest industries: fishing and tourism. El Puerto, a small settlement to the west of Cabrera, is the center of the local fishing industry, hidden away from the rest of the town, out of sight of tourists who might pass along the highway. To the south of Cabrera sit the foothills of the Cordillera Septentrional, one of the Dominican Republic’s many mountain chains and a major source of seismic activity in the region (S. Barr, 2018). Nearby sits the community of La Entrada, a much smaller urban center that acts as the gateway to one of the Municipio’s most popular beaches, Playa la Boca.

Cabrera's founding families are landowners, many of whom still raise pigs and cattle for meat and milk, the backbone of Cabrera's agricultural economy. The area also boasts four chicken farms, a few orchards, and scattered farming operations in the foothills of the Cordillera Septentrional. Despite the richness of local agriculture, tourism is the main driver of Cabrera's economy. To the southeast of Cabrera sits Orchid Bay, a rocky coral beach surrounded by the same cliffs that protect the town from storm surge during major hurricanes. Forty years ago, the cliffs around Orchid Bay were empty except for a few grazing cows.

In the late 1990s, the land around Orchid Bay was bought by Rebecca McDonald, a Canadian natural gas mogul. Through her connections, she turned Orchid Bay into Orchid Bay Estates – a subdivision of luxury villas owned by a mix of global elites and property management companies that cater to the rich and famous. Aside from the occasional visit from international celebrities and their film crews, the destination wedding industry draws thousands of short-term guests to Orchid Bay and Cabrera, employing local Dominicans and expats from Europe and North America (Boucher, 2021).

Orchid Bay is not the only draw to this area. Provincia Maria Trinidad Sanchez is dotted with unique beaches. Like Orchid Bay, Cabo Frances Viejo is surrounded by tall cliffs, a bowl-shaped inlet that sits below an historic monument – a Colombian era lighthouse. Where the cliffs disappear, the coastline is dotted with estuaries, which line other beaches like Playa Diamante, a shallow inlet filled with crystal clear water and sticky, clay-like sand. Busses of Dominican tourists from Santo Domingo and Puerto Plata come to Playa La Boca, where the Rio Boba dumps out into the Atlantic, cutting the

expansive beach in half and creating safe areas for families to enjoy river or ocean water. Playa Grande, now the most important beach in the area, straddles the line between two municipalities – Cabrera and Rio San Juan – and was relatively untouched when I first saw it in 2012. Immediately to the west of the beach sits the Playa Grande Golf Course, which has drawn professional and amateur golfers to the area for decades.

Cabrera is no stranger to the ebb and flow of tourism and migration. Within the expat community, those who live in Cabrera for most of the year return to their communities of origin for vacation between June and November, fleeing the summer heat. Throughout the summer months there is a steady return of Dominican family members from Santiago and Santo Domingo who are taking advantage of time off from school and jobs in other tourist destinations in the country to visit and enjoy Cabrera.

In August 2016, I attended a community meeting to discuss the future of Cabrera’s tourism. An expert from the Dominican Ministry of Tourism was astounded that Cabrera was not benefiting from international tourism. The community sits half-way between two airports (one in Puerto Plata, one in Samaná), minutes from a dozen different beaches and freshwater attractions (waterfalls, caves, etc.), and yet Cabrera does not look like Sosúa or Cabarete. The expats in the room chuckled, pointing out that flights into Samaná are double the cost of flights to other parts of the country, a limited number of airlines fly into Puerto Plata, and transportation between Cabrera and either airport requires knowledge of the roads, the public transportation syndicates, and/or friends with access to vehicles. The tourists who come for weddings and events at nearby villas have pre-arranged private transportation included in their stay. Most of the expats living in Cabrera fly in and out of Santo Domingo and use Caribe Tours to reach the airport.

Stunned by this information, the expert began to listen to the people in the audience instead of continuing his presentation. Everyone agreed. They all wanted more jobs, higher wages, more opportunities for advancement without having to leave Cabrera. But no one wanted to become like Sosúa and Cabarete – resort towns with rampant prostitution, illicit drug use, crime, and progressively worsening wealth inequality between expats and Dominicans. The typical model of resort-style hotels does not work along the north coast between Rio San Juan and Nagua like it has in Sosua, Cabarete, Santo Domingo, and Punta Cana. Evidence of failure dots either side of the coastal highway – crumbling hotels with faded paint and boarded windows, many occupied by squatters. To the relief of the audience, the expert took note of these failures and recommended that Cabrera focus on its fishing and agricultural industries to create affordable boutique experiences and draw domestic tourism instead of international tourism.

The process of building a reputation as a tourist destination began with the promotion of Cabrera’s annual Spring Fair (*Expo Feria Cabrera en Primavera*), which draws artisans and local businesses from Cabrera and other nearby municipalities. In 2017, *Cabrera en Primavera* fit within the confines of the central park in Cabrera and offered an exciting atmosphere with vendors from Rio San Juan, Nagua, Puerto Plata, and other towns along the north coast who were selling ornamental plants, jewelry, beauty products, and other handmade crafts. In 2018, the event expanded, taking over the roads around the park and bringing vendors from Santo Domingo and Santiago. A media tour promoting the event drew Dominican tourists from all over the country, making *Cabrera en Primavera* one of the most popular events in the country that weekend (2018). It is

with this new national reputation that the municipal governments and the provincial government of Provincia Maria Trinidad Sanchez rolled out a national media campaign promoting tourism in the Provincia, highlighting the beaches and other natural attractions around Cabrera and Rio San Juan, including Playa Grande, in early September 2018 (Divaluna, 2018).

Domestic tourism to Cabrera was beginning to take off in 2019. The usual influx of summer tourists from major cities was more intense, putting the housing market under stress. The parking lots at supermarkets were overflowing on the weekends, as Dominican tourists stopped there to buy snacks for the beach instead of going to the *colmados*. The tour busses that had been bringing Dominicans from Santo Domingo to Playa La Boca for years, were larger, louder, and more numerous in 2019. Prior to this increase, most residents of La Esquina and other rural areas would have spent their weekends at Playa La Boca, or in La Entrada. Once the tour busses started arriving more frequently, the only people from the *campo* who were going to the beach on the weekends were *motoconchos* looking for more work<sup>9</sup>. What had once been a large crowd of familiar faces from across the Municipio there to enjoy the day with their families had become a massive crowd of strangers with unknown backgrounds and motivations.

#### An Overview of Cabrera's Foodscape

Using a community assessment technique called asset mapping, I conducted a geographic survey of the urban density neighborhoods between the Atlantic Ocean and

---

<sup>9</sup> This topic came up in conversation with a group of young men (18-22) in La Esquina in May 2021. When they were younger (12-18), this group went to La Entrada most weekends to either play baseball or spend time at Playa La Boca. I went with them several times.

the coastal highway in May and August of 2016 (S. Barr, 2018). While the DR's geographic data infrastructure has improved thanks to targeted investments from the UN, it does not provide the level of detail necessary to create a comprehensive view of formal and informal community assets in Cabrera. For this project, I defined a community asset as anything that contributes to the community through social or economic means. Consequently, I produced maps that included government offices, healthcare facilities, churches, schools, and – most relevant here – food resources. The two maps in Figure 5 were included in the appendix of my final report and serve as a starting point for describing Cabrera's foodscape.



Figure 5. Two maps of Cabrera's food resources in 2016. These maps were originally published in the appendix of Barr (2018).

### *Typology of Food Resources*

As will become clear throughout this dissertation, Cabrera's population is unexpectedly diverse, both within the urban center and in the surrounding Municipio. That diversity is reflected in its food resources, which I have broken down into categories

based on their physical infrastructure, mode of operation, and affiliation with specific demographics. Throughout this dissertation I will use “Cabrera” to refer to the urban center where this research was conducted and refer to the surrounding municipality as a point of contrast. All food resources in Cabrera are independently owned and operated by local entities or individuals, likely because Cabrera’s remote location, small population, and political obscurity disqualify it from consideration by large food resource chains.

The most ubiquitous class of food resources in Cabrera are *colmados*, which serve as social and economic hubs and supply basic goods and foodstuffs. Present in major cities and rural communities across the DR, *colmados* are highly adapted to the needs of their customers, who tend to live within walking distance. As such, there are *colmados* that resemble convenience stores (like *bodegas* in New York City) and bars, and those

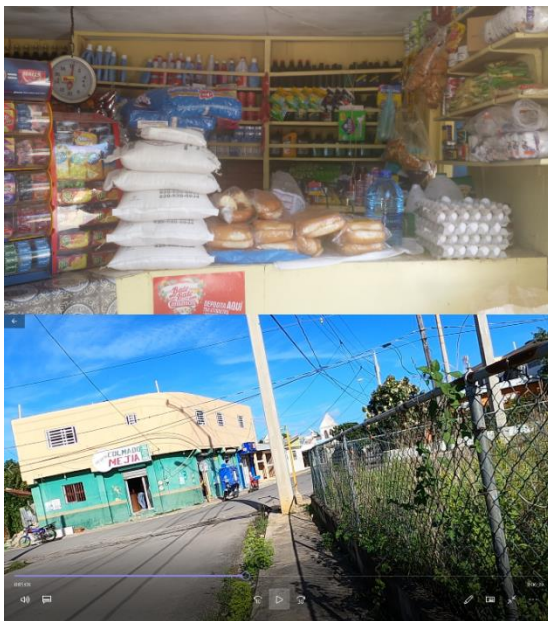


Figure 6. (Top) The inside of the colmado in La Esquina (Source: Barr (2017), Barr (2015); Bottom) A colmado in Cabrera (source: Author 2014, 2021)

that resemble the early 20<sup>th</sup> century general stores of the American West. In the rural areas of Municipio Cabrera, more *colmados* resemble general stores, offering a reliable supply of dry goods and key cooking ingredients sold in small quantities to the rural communities that dot the landscape. Most cannot store large quantities of fresh produce but have access to enough refrigeration to keep a stock of beer and

sugar-sweetened beverages<sup>10</sup> to complement the stock of potato chips, candy, and other junk food that boosts their profit margins. The *colmado* in La Esquina, the rural site for this research, also has a supply of diapers, motor oil, and disposable safety razors (S. R. Barr, 2015). *Colmados* in Cabrera range from barely-not-a-bar to too-much-junk-food-for-a-fresh-market, offering the same small quantities of dry goods as *colmados* in rural areas of the Municipio, but with a greater variety of available brands for each product.

As a class of food resources, the diagnostic characteristic of a *colmado* in Municipio Cabrera is the presence of a counter that separates customers from most of the goods in the store (See Figure 6). This requires customers to interact directly with staff, who are usually owner-operators, to select and parse out specific goods. A secondary diagnostic characteristic of a *colmado* that it is a spatially separate from a residence, although that separation may be an interior doorway instead of an exterior wall. It depends largely on the financial resources of the owner-operator and the degree to which their business has been formalized.

Many *colmados*, even those in commercial real estate spaces, are not formally registered as businesses with the Dominican government. Until recently, Cabrera's cash economy made it unnecessary to register as a business to conduct business transactions or place orders with wholesalers. As local infrastructure has improved and electronic payment methods have become more popular, many *colmados* are being pressured to formalize their business, which they must do to accept electronic payments. In Cabrera, the complement to *colmados* are half a dozen fresh markets (*mercados*).

---

<sup>10</sup> Juice boxes, soft drinks, energy drinks

Fresh markets range in size from Rebeca's 40 m<sup>2</sup> warehouse in the middle of a neighborhood to a tiny shack on a corner of Cabrera's main thoroughfare. While fresh markets tend to have counters placed between customers and smaller goods, like spices and bundles of herbs, the bulk of the fresh produce they sell is arranged in large shallow shelves that allow customers to interact with their stock (Figure 7). Fresh markets do not sell junk food like *colmados* but depend on the same degree of social interaction as customers retrieve items from the shelves and place it at the counter for the attendant to weigh and bag. Fresh markets could be considered specialized food resources because of their focus on fresh produce, which complements the focus of Cabrera's handful of *pescaderias* (seasonal fish market), *carnicerias* (butcher/deli), and *panaderias* (bakery).



Figure 7. This market tries to supplement its fresh produce offerings with household goods and supplies. This market uses plastic bins to display produce by arranging them into shelves or moving the bins out to the sidewalk to draw customers into the market area. Typical market shelves line the back wall of the store. (Source: Author 2021)

Juxtaposed to fresh markets, *colmados*, and specialty vendors selling fresh foods are Cabrera's three local supermarkets. Often combining a *carniceria* with a small fresh produce section and aisles of dry goods, the diagnostic characteristics of a supermarket

are largely aesthetic. Like fresh markets, supermarkets allow customers to collect products from the shelves without the involvement of store staff and stock a similar range of the same dry goods as *colmados*, but supermarkets rarely sell items in small quantities. For example, instead of purchasing eggs on a per-egg basis, they must be purchased in half-dozen increments. Physically, supermarkets can be distinguished from fresh markets by their glass-front doors and plate glass windows, which make it possible to seal the building and provide customers with air conditioning. Fresh markets tend to be open air, even when enclosed in a concrete structure, with complex concrete window-work and open rolling garage doors. Cabrera has six supermarkets, including its INESPRES store, a mini-mercado, and the teachers' co-op, which offers a discount to public school employees. The other three, Jasly's, Rebeca's, and Garcia's, are discussed in-depth later in this dissertation. Each supermarket has tailored its reputation to attract a specific subset of Cabrera's population, which makes it possible for so many fresh food resources to exist in Cabrera – an urban center that fits within 1 mi<sup>2</sup>.

Moving on to “Places to Eat”, there are only a few stand-alone bars in Cabrera. Most are attached to restaurants or subsumed within a *colmado* and tend to offer other activities like dancing, karaoke, and billiards. Restaurants are separated from prepared food vendors by the presence of an indoor seating area. Cabrera has a few small cafes, three ice cream shops, and a few Italian eateries. Despite its proximity to the sea, and to fishermen, the most popular restaurants in Cabrera sell pizza more than anything else on their menus. Restaurants tend to open for dinner service during the week and for lunch and dinner on the weekends, largely due to competition from *comedores*.

*Comedores* are an essential resource for Cabrera’s working-class population.

While some have seating and buffet-style serving areas, most *comedores* dedicate their infrastructure to the kitchen, and many are operated by women working from their home kitchens. The defining characteristic of a *comedor* is its menu of traditional Dominican staples and side dishes. The menu changes each day, but the customers are given two to three options for rice, beans, protein, and sides. The most popular food in Cabrera is *pica pollo* (fried chicken) and most of it is sold by *comedores* around midday as businesses around town order quick, hot meals for their workers. By late afternoon, most *comedores* are closed, leaving workers to choose between Cabrera’s restaurants and street food vendors.

“Street foods” are a broad category of food sold in public spaces around the world by vendors using all manner of conveyance to reach customers. Irene Tinker’s overview



of the multinational Street Food Project conducted in the 1980s and 90s, identifies “street foods” as prepared foods sold through the use of public space that may be prepared on- or off-site (Tinker, 1999). Cabrera’s street foods are mostly fried, and while a few of them are

*Figure 8. In 2019, Cabrera's park had a vibrant street food economy that slowly returned in 2021. (Top Left to Bottom Right) The quipe vendor, the chimi vendor, the local food truck, and the coquero (coconut water vendor) continued their work during and after the pandemic. (Source: Author 2019)*

prepared on-site near Cabrera's Central Park, most are prepared in the home and then ferried around town in containers on foot or on the back of a motorcycle. Cabrera's street food vendors are complemented by an array of mobile fresh produce vendors who travel throughout the Municipio. These fresh produce vendors will be discussed in depth in a later chapter, as they represent a key resource for rural communities.

### *The Social Foodscape*

There are no known organized efforts to eat local in La Esquina and Cabrera, but most residents claim to value fresh produce more than processed foods. Most of the people I interacted with throughout my time there live near livestock and agricultural activities, and I have never heard any Dominicans question why most food comes from Nagua and Santiago when plenty of it grows in the immediate area. There are foods, however, that consumers in Cabrera and La Esquina will not buy at the market because they grow in abundance locally. One of the first agricultural impacts of the coronavirus pandemic was the surplus of tropical fruits resulting from the closure of Dominican tourism (Corcino, 2020). Mangos, pineapples, and ripe bananas were plentiful and inexpensive, but no one in Cabrera or La Esquina would buy them. Even in areas of urban population density, like Cabrera, mangos and bananas grow in patios and yards throughout the community. Those who do not have their own trees often have ties to neighbors and family members who do, helping those social connections to offload seasonal surplus.

Just as there are some foods that no one in Cabrera or La Esquina will buy, there are others that consumers want that never make it into the local fresh markets. In 2019, I interviewed a fresh market owner who was trying to get his hands on breadfruit at the

request of a few clients. He described driving through the back roads around Cabrera, stopping at houses with breadfruit trees to introduce himself to owners and chat with neighbors, hoping it would result in a future business transaction. Indigenous to Southeast Asia, breadfruit is not a mainstream food in the Dominican Republic, only appearing in stores and markets in Santo Domingo or Santiago, especially after it became trendy in the mid-2010's. A nutritious substitute for potatoes and other tubers, breadfruit is associated with being *campesino* in Cabrera, whereas the identity promoted by Dominican nationalism continues to be one that is urban and cosmopolitan (Carruyo, 2007; Mayes, 2014). I knew from spending time in the *campo* that many of the households the market owner was attempting to buy from use their breadfruit trees to supplement their own diets, passing the excess off to family members in other communities or in Cabrera itself. Thus, they had nothing to sell to him. The only way to supply his market with breadfruit was to become family, a process he was only just starting when I spoke with him. He had similar troubles supplying cashew fruit, another seasonally abundant food that circulates almost exclusively through familial networks in Cabrera and the surrounding areas.

In areas of the DR that are still predominantly rural, food provisioning through familial networks is still common practice. With increased mobility, migration, and urbanization, however, those networks have broken down, making markets the most efficient source of fresh foods. Consumers in Santo Domingo, Santiago, and Puerto Plata live in a foodscape that is mostly industrialized, though the strength of producers' and traders' unions and the informal economy have created pathways for the use of *tigueraje* to access desirable foods and cross the rural-urban divide.

#### Chapter 4: Who am I in Municipio Cabrera?

By this point in the text, the reader should have a broad understanding of food access research, Dominican history and identity, Dominican food policy, and Cabrera’s position in the Dominican foodscape. This chapter focuses on my position in Cabrera, providing a more intimate perspective of some of the nation-wide changes occurring the in DR and highlighting specific details that make Cabrera special. Over the course of nine years (2012-2021), I have experienced significant personal and professional growth because of my experiences in Municipio Cabrera, and I feel it is important to share some of my observations and experiences so that readers have a deeper understanding of my positionality in this research (See Table 1).

Year	Site	Time On-Site	Research Project	Community Work
2013	La Esquina	9 weeks	Yes	
2014	La Esquina	7 weeks	Yes	Yes
2015	Road Trip	1 week		
2016	Cabrera	1 week; 10 days	Yes	Yes
2017	Cabrera	9 weeks	Yes	Yes
2018	Cabrera	5 months		Yes
2019	Cabrera	9 weeks	Yes	Yes
2020				
2021	La Esquina; Cabrera	5 months	Yes	Yes
Totals		77 weeks		

*Table 1. A summary of time spent in the field each year. Most visits occurred between May and August because of my enrollment as a university student.*

Service – be it public service, community service, or customer service – is one of my core values. I come from a family of people who love to work, and prefer to do so in service to others, each person finding a way to use their skillset to the benefit of specific communities or the broader public. Throughout my experiences in Municipio Cabrera, I have deployed my penchant for service as a methodological tool, expanding opportunities for ethnographic observation and fulfilling my vision of ethical research by “giving back”

to the communities I study through volunteering. While I was enrolled in university courses, I worked as a teacher, a program coordinator, and a researcher without monetary compensation, instead using my work to connect with people in the community – and earn a free meal or two.

Much of my personal journey in Cabrera revolves around primary and secondary education, which has put me in the position of observing Cabrera’s class relations pre-and post-pandemic through the lens of an educator working with students from various backgrounds. It also gave me access to several rural communities in Cabrera, which I have added to the map for this chapter (see Figure 8). While food access was ever-present at the edges of my mind and in the background of my life while I was in Municipio Cabrera, it did not become my focus until my formal dissertation research in 2021. Even

during my dissertation research, my position in Municipio Cabrera was much more closely tied to my roles as a teacher and program coordinator for different projects than to my research interests.

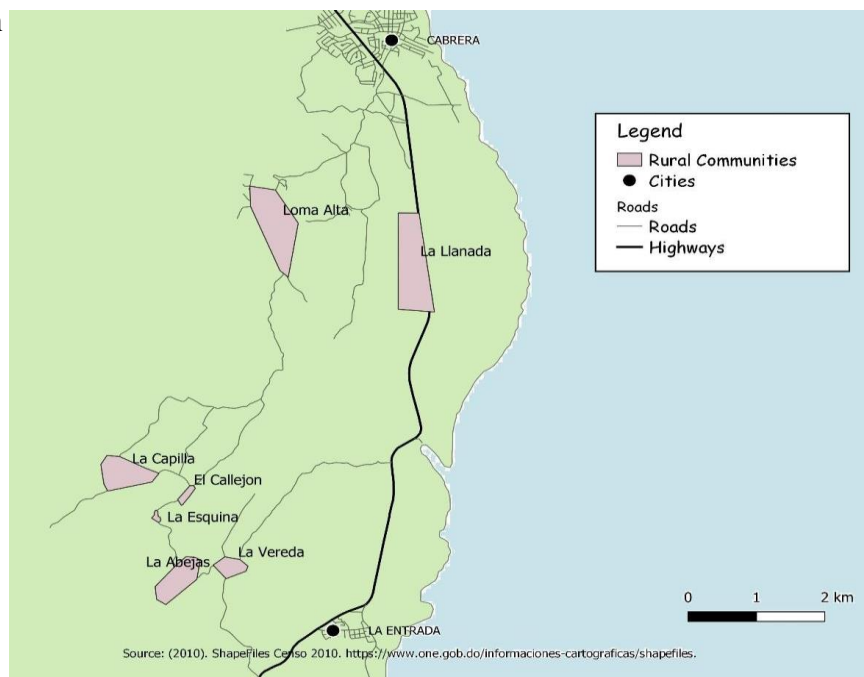


Figure 9. A simplified version of my mental map of Municipio Cabrera, which focuses on the areas between Cabrera and La Entrada and goes as deep into the foothills as La Capilla and Loma Alta. La Esquina is small, even for rural community.

Some readers may notice a curious gap in my experiences in Cabrera – religion. Much like the rest of the DR, Cabrera has a very rich religious landscape undergoing rapid changes as the nominally Catholic country has begun to boast greater numbers of Protestant worshipers and organizations (Thornton, 2016). Based on my observations, followers of Protestant denominations of Christianity out-number those of the Catholic faith in Municipio Cabrera. Adventist and Jehovah’s Witness worshippers are the most visible groups. Even though my experiences in Municipio Cabrera began with a mission trip, I have never been strongly affiliated with institutionalized religious groups, and the prospect of doing so in Cabrera made me exceedingly uncomfortable. Religious beliefs do factor into food access for some of my interlocutors, but as each individual’s faith is unique to them, I have chosen to address it as it pertains to each case in the later chapters of this dissertation.

In this chapter the reader will “meet” many of my interlocutors for the first time. Apart from a few public figures and Alicen, who has been mentioned in previous writings and is publicly connected to me through Somos Girasoles<sup>11</sup>, the names of all other participants are pseudonyms. While most of the participants in this research have known me long enough to know that I am never *not* gathering data or thinking about food access, the potential impacts of being named in this research are not well understood by them. Quite frankly, given the opacity of Dominican politics and the interconnectedness of drastically different social and economic strata in Cabrera (and the “magic” of *tigueraje*), I cannot be sure of the potential impacts either. Particularly in the case of expats and Dominican transplants to Cabrera, whose diverse backgrounds are the product of lives

---

<sup>11</sup> Described later in this chapter. Translation: “We are sunflowers”

lived in completely different social contexts, pseudonyms and strategic silences are deployed to protect their privacy. The names of communities and organizations described in this dissertation are real, as my knowledge of them is well documented and publicly accessible through websites and news stories.

### Getting to Cabrera

My first destination in Municipio Cabrera was La Esquina, a tiny rural community located about 10km southwest of Cabrera itself. An 18-year-old on her first trip outside of the United States, I was travelling with my mother, my sister, and a handful of other church members led by Dr. Christine Tisone, who had been bringing groups of people to La Esquina for over 20 years. I grew up in College Station, Texas, home to Texas A&M University, where both of my parents earned their PhDs and introduced to me to research. As a community, College Station is simultaneously part of the academic elite, the sheer density of highly educated professionals yielding exceptional educational opportunities through social connections, and part of the Conservative Southern Bible Belt responsible for producing and exporting religious ideologies through domestic and international missions. International mission trips are a rite of passage for teenagers from College Station, TX and this was my chance to join my peers despite being nearly agnostic and decidedly uncomfortable with the incongruity between their stated “missions” and the stories they told about their experiences abroad.

Our group was the second group of missionaries sent to La Esquina from our Episcopal church in Texas to deliver school supplies and carry out local infrastructure projects. We worked on our projects in the morning, ate lunch with Christine’s host

family, and then spent the afternoons vacationing at nearby beaches before returning to our hotel in Rio San Juan (See Figure 3 in Chapter 3). When Christine asked me if I wanted to return the next year to help her collect data for a research project, I agreed.

My return to La Esquina in 2013 was facilitated not only by a brief introduction to my host family in 2012, but by the social infrastructure Christine put in place to manage the groups of undergraduate students she had mentored through study abroad programs. Even though the group of four students I arrived with were volunteer research assistants instead of study abroad students, and we stayed for nine weeks instead of three, these differences were negligible in the eyes of the community. We each stayed with different households, all of whom had hosted study abroad students in the past. Through Christine, we all paid a weekly stipend for room and board. And most importantly, we were all white, college-educated women in our late teens and early twenties who spoke Spanish with varying levels of proficiency.

The younger cousins and siblings in our host-families became our social network, as they were too young to work, too bored to stay at home, and too curious to not ask questions. We spent a lot of time with a group of early-adolescent boys, hopping fences and crossing pastures to climb mango trees and watch the sunrise, playing baseball with a stick and a ball of socks, and riding motorcycles. Our “study abroad student” status gave us the freedom to roam from house to house, visiting with each other and members of the community without seeming out-of-place. When the *actual* study abroad students arrived just before our departure later that summer, I realized we had become something in between study abroad students and community members. We belonged more than other visitors, but less than our host family members.

We accomplished a small percentage of our research tasks that summer, leading one of our group members to stay in La Esquina permanently instead of coming home. Alicen had graduated from Texas A&M University with a degree in Early Childhood Education and was determined to figure out how to adapt the outdoor education curriculum from the Texas Junior Master Gardener program to fit local needs and circumstances. She felt “called” to stay and continue the work, despite having limited command of the Spanish language and no source of income. I felt a similar call, though while Alicen attributes hers to her faith, I attribute mine to concern for Alicen’s wellbeing, and a quiet obsession with the way the economy of the *campo*<sup>12</sup> moves, especially the food economy.

I grew up in an environment where there were no mobile vendors or a visible informal economy, as strictly enforced regulations not only restrict “business activities” in residential areas but place an aesthetic standard on food resources. After years of volunteering at food pantries, I could not help but appreciate mobile vendors’ effectiveness at distributing food to populations that did not otherwise have the means to reach it. I saw similarities in the settlement patterns of rural Municipio Cabrera and Central Texas, where multiple generations of a single family tend to live clustered near one another on otherwise isolated county roads, well away from urban hubs where most retail food resources are located. I wanted to understand why there could be mobile vendors in La Esquina, but not in Central Texas.

---

<sup>12</sup> Spanish for country, and Christine’s preferred way of referring to La Esquina and the surrounding areas. While (*el campo*) is my preferred term, I have heard “la loma” and “el monte” used by others to indicate the rural areas surrounding Cabrera

When I returned to La Esquina in 2014, I came armed with my own research agenda and a new sense of purpose. After three weeks, I realized the project I had designed to help Alicen develop her new program was not feasible, and she had to remind me of the progress she had made in the 10 months I'd been absent. She spent four months adjusting the outdoor education curriculum we'd been given and volunteering as an English teacher at a nearby public school before she saw a sign on the highway for *Academia Internacional de Cabrera* (AIC). AIC allowed her to pilot test the program with their students during the Spring semester, renewing her sense of purpose as an educator and pushing the development of the program into something entirely new. Then, AIC gave her US\$500 to teach the program in rural communities around La Esquina. Alicen named the program "Somos Girasoles" [We are Sunflowers] and built the curriculum around the premise that teaching kids about health, nutrition, and environmental sustainability would translate into healthier decision-making throughout the communities where the camps were hosted. As I wallowed in my own sense of failure, Alicen spunkily reminded me that I was also there to help her with this new summer program. In doing so, she unintentionally re-oriented my summer research plans to ask: Does La Esquina *need* a nutrition-education program? (S. R. Barr, 2015).

After a summer of assisting with Somos Girasoles' half-day program and conducting interviews with female heads of household in the afternoons, the short answer was no. Most female heads of household included in my study were making every effort to provide a balanced diet to their families, but highlighted physical access as the greatest obstacle in achieving that goal (S. R. Barr, 2015). At this point in my academic career, my concept of food access was purely spatial and economic, shaped by road conditions,

access to private vehicles, and the cost of fuel. Somos Girasoles was not prepared to handle these access issues – we had a staff of three people, zero connections to local government, and meager financial resources.

The summer of 2014 was a key turning point in my development as a scholar/researcher, and the beginning of a significant shift in both mine and Alicen’s identities in Municipio Cabrera. Somos Girasoles may not have done much to influence nutrition in La Esquina and the surrounding communities, but it certainly solidified my identity as “someone who does stuff to help the community” and Alicen’s as a teacher. By the end of the summer, Alicen was offered a job at AIC and my host family had collectively concluded that I was *always* working on something.

During the 2014-2015 school year, Alicen taught at AIC, and I wrote my undergraduate thesis, both of us pondering the future of Somos Girasoles<sup>13</sup> and its purpose. I visited La Esquina while on a family vacation with my mother, my sister, and Christine, opting to stay the night in the *campo* instead of returning to the hotel in Rio San Juan with them. The next morning, I woke to the sound of a motorcycle pulling up in front of Alicen’s one-bedroom house and Alicen’s half-asleep exclamation as she scrambled to open her window and address Carlos, the *motoconcho* waiting outside.

Carlos lived “up the hill” in another community and spent his days working in Cabrera as a *motoconcho*. When he realized Alicen lived just “down the hill” from him, they negotiated a weekly rate that saved her time and money. At the time, many people in La Esquina and the surrounding communities did not have their own means of transportation. In households that did have transportation, it was usually used to get men

---

<sup>13</sup> Somos Girasoles was still an informal organization at the time; we did not formalize until late 2017

to work, leaving most women to depend on an informal system of *bolas*<sup>14</sup> to reach the coastal highway and the public transportation line that runs from Nagua to Rio San Juan. There are a group of *motoconchos* who work along the road that runs through La Esquina, taking people up and down the hill to the coastal highway, but they charge 100 DOP (Dominican pesos) each way. At the time, it cost another 60 DOP from the bottom of the hill to reach AIC on public transportation. Alicen’s deal with Carlos was for 50 DOP per ride per day, and she would pay him at the end of each week.

That morning we took “the back way” to Cabrera, through a community called Loma Alta, instead of going down to the highway. As the three of us bumped along the unpaved road on Carlos’s motorcycle, I marveled at the landscape. While the town of Cabrera sits on a relatively flat promontory, with 60ft cliffs at its coastline, the lush



Figure 10. The view from the front yard of a home on the edge of Loma Alta (Source: Author 2013)

foothills and ridges of the Cordillera Septentrional begin almost immediately to the south and southeast of the town. The roads through the *campo* run along these ridges, offering breathtaking views of

---

<sup>14</sup> Translation: free ride; usually accessed through familial obligation, guilt, or other forms of *tigueraje*

the coastline on one side and a mix of open fields, sheer cliffs, and deep gullies on the other (See Figure 10). Several gullies contained *conucos*, whose trees and vines were beginning to bloom, adding bursts of purple, yellow, and white to the deep green foliage.

When the road surface suddenly changed from rough washed-out caliche to buttery smooth asphalt, Carlos and Alicen both sighed in relief while I made a bewildered noise in Alicen's ear from my position on the back of the motorcycle. She briefly explained that the road to Loma Alta had been paved recently because of some *tigueraje* involving a judge and politics. Recognizing that my caffeine-dependent friend was still partially asleep, I excused that woefully inadequate explanation and enjoyed the rest of the steep, winding ride down to Cabrera. Alicen and Carlos dropped me off in Cabrera's Central Park, where I sat, quietly re-orienting myself to a town I barely knew, despite its proximity to a community I knew like the back of my hand.

While living in La Esquina in 2014, I had always gone to Nagua to run errands, even though it was farther and cost more in transportation. As a foreigner whose resources were mostly electronic living in an area without access to electronic payments, I needed reliable access to an ATM that would charge fewer transaction fees. Until 2018, there were two ATMs in Cabrera, and the local bank branches mutually agreed to restrict withdrawals on foreign transactions to 2000 DOP, while the standard daily cash withdrawal limit at the time was around 20,000 DOP. Meanwhile, the banks in Nagua did not impose a local limit, instead using the national limit of 10,000 DOP per transaction regardless of the account origin. It made more sense to go to Nagua, where I could get more cash with fewer fees, and therefore fewer trips.

Sitting on the bench in Cabrera's Park that morning in 2015, I knew something had changed, but the cool air of a morning in mid-March was so logically different from my hot, dusty, memories of an afternoon in summer that it wasn't until someone from Cabrera posted a picture from 2013 on social media in 2019 that I realized the roads had been paved. Just like the roads in the *campo*, Cabrera's residential roads were mostly caliche until the city pulled the funds together to pave everything with asphalt in late 2013 and early 2014. Neither Alicen nor I had noticed the difference because our lives in the area had been centered around La Esquina while the change was happening, and despite their physical proximity, La Esquina and Cabrera are not socially connected. As the *guagua* with a banner for the local transportation syndicate pulled up to the curb in Cabrera's Park in 2015, I gathered my things and carried on with my family vacation, arriving at the hotel in Rio San Juan before breakfast was served.



Figure 11. (Left) The pick-up/drop-off zone for guaguas, busses, and motoconchos in Cabrera's central park; (Right) A guagua approaching to pick up a passenger along the Cabrera-Nagua Highway. (Source: Author 2021)

### Expats in Cabrera

My use of public transportation is something that has consistently set me apart from the various expat groups in Cabrera. Most expats use personal vehicles to travel in and around Cabrera, though certain groups are more likely to use public transportation in-

town, but not between communities. Cabrera has several distinct pocket-communities of expats and a few individuals who traverse between the groups. These groups are separated primarily by their motivations for coming to Cabrera, though their arrivals and their reasons tend to follow a chronology, so I refer to them as generations. The motivations of each generation are the product of identities developed prior to their arrival in Cabrera, in social and economic dynamics that may be significantly different.

As members of each generation adjust to living in Cabrera, they find balance between reproducing the same lifestyles and circumstances from their places of origin and adjusting to the resources available in Cabrera, especially when it comes to food resources. Each generation has a different way of influencing and interacting with the Dominican community in Cabrera, which contributes to further splintering within the expat community. Mathew Hayes's work, *Gringolandia*, describes a steadily growing population of North American lifestyle migrants in Cuenca, Ecuador. These lifestyle migrants have altered the physical and social landscapes of urban spaces, reinforcing global social inequities by buying up property and outbidding local buyers and renters in the pursuit of an "active retirement" (Hayes, 2018). Expats also bring with them political and social perspectives which exacerbate racist colonial hierarchies by creating exclusive, expat spaces (Hayes, 2018).

Over the last decade, more lifestyle migrants fitting Hayes's description have arrived in Cabrera, but their numbers are small. Beyond the housekeepers and gardeners that serve them, most of these ex-pats have few social relationships with the Dominican community. Many of them have purchased land in the Municipio and built retirement homes, while others have long-term rental arrangements with Dominicans or other expats

to occupy properties for part of the year. They depend heavily on multi-lingual tourism workers from the Orchid Bay Generation to access food and local service providers, enthusiastically engage with the young expat professionals of the AIC/Faro Generation, and delight in conversing with the well-travelled expats of the Discovery Generation.

### *The Orchid Bay Generation*

Before Orchid Bay Estates, Cabrera was a sleepy fishing town, a stopping point along the highway for farmers, ranchers, and fishermen to socialize or conduct business with the municipal government before moving on to larger cities to sell their goods. With the development of the villas in Orchid Bay, the orientation of this small middle-class community changed. Most of the villas are not permanently occupied, but marketed as sites for destination weddings, family reunions, and vacations. Some of the owners live on site, but most depend on property managers and staff to keep everything running smoothly.

Colonial stereotypes are reinforced in the property management hierarchies at the villas. Local Dominican men work as landscapers and maintenance workers. Local women work as cooks and housekeepers. For particularly labor-intensive operations like construction or remodeling, members of the local Haitian population are hired as day laborers. Dominican men and women who speak additional languages (English, French, Dutch) are more likely to occupy service positions that come into greater contact with guests. Property and Household Management positions are almost exclusively reserved for expats, who hail from Europe or North America.

The demands of maintaining one or more villas throughout the year has led property managers to settle permanently in Cabrera. Predominantly female, some of these

managers have been in Cabrera since the villas first opened in 1998. For example, Greta works for a property management company that owns two villas in Orchid Bay, both of which she manages directly. After moving to the Dominican Republic in the mid-1990s, she moved among several different properties along the north coast before settling in Cabrera, where she has raised her family and become a critical mediator between expat and Dominican communities.

The villas have also drawn expats to the area without hiring them directly. Some of the lifestyle migrants from North America and Europe are former villa guests and their friends, drawn to the slower pace of Cabrera compared to other Dominican cities (Hayes, 2018). Others were drawn to the Dominican Republic for unrelated reasons and found a niche in Cabrera as wedding and event planners, floral designers, estheticians, and even professional photographers. The consumerism associated with destination weddings has proved to be a secondary stimulus for the growth of the local expat population.

In the early 2000s the villas provided an economic stimulus to the community and re-oriented the goals of many of its residents. The colonial hierarchy echoed in the organizational hierarchy of Orchid Bay did not sit well with middle class Dominican residents, many of whom own land and have connections to larger cities. In the last twenty years, positions vacated by expats in the villas have been filled by members of the local community who went to universities in Santiago and Santo Domingo to become accountants, lawyers, and multi-lingual hospitality workers. The villas provided an opportunity for *cabrereños* to come back home and earn a living instead of having to move to a major city. For those without the connections to get a university education, the villas provided other opportunities through employment networks. There are several

families in Cabrera who have leveraged their connections with particular property management organizations to get work visas to the U.S., Canada, or EU member states.

### *The AIC/Faro Generation*

The development of Orchid Bay shifted the focus of Cabrera's residents from fishing to tourism. In the late 2000's, a group of local parents came together to start *Academia Internacional de Cabrera* (AIC), a bilingual private school that hired teachers from abroad to come educate their children and prepare them to compete on the global job market. Taking advantage of the wealth sitting on the edge of town, AIC parents leveraged their connection to villa owners and managers to fund this non-profit educational project. AIC spent several years trying to earn official accreditation from the Dominican government before formally closing its doors in 2014 to be re-born as Faro de Cabrera, a non-profit business that hosts an educational program accredited through a U.S.-based homeschool program. The AIC/Faro Generation is divided by this organizational change. Since it first opened, AIC/Faro has drawn teachers from North America and Europe in its search to give local Dominican youth a bilingual education. While some of these teachers are the spouses of military veterans and retirees drawn by the narratives of the Orchid Bay Generation, most of them are young professionals searching for alternatives to schools (and school systems) in the Global North.

The politics and disorganization of AIC drove some of the teachers it hired to start their own education projects. The Esperanza Project, started by two of AIC's former teachers, has been a decade-long alternative to AIC/Faro. The Esperanza Project runs an affordable full-day and after-school bilingual education program that reaches Dominican and expat residents alike. Esperanza brings in volunteers from North American

universities to assist their small team of teachers with classroom management and activities. Each group of teachers spends anywhere from 6 weeks to a year living with a Dominican family and working for their program. In the summer, the number of Esperanza volunteers more than doubles because of their six-week summer program, Camp Esperanza, which usually serves about 100 youth between the ages of 5 and 16. Many of the volunteers return multiple times, reaffirming the relationships they make with their students and their friends in the community.

When Alicen joined AIC as its 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher in 2014, the organization was mid-collapse. Alicen became the de-facto administrator, making space for me to alternately adopt the role of a generic volunteer (2016, 2017, 2019), administrative secretary (2018), and teacher (2019-2021) in a context where “researcher” did not make sense to anyone in the community. Unlike La Esquina, where students had been conducting small research projects for decades through Christine’s study abroad programs, Cabrera’s primary exposure to young, light-skinned, college-aged females who *live* in Cabrera is through the AIC/Faro Generation. Working with (and for) Faro gave me and Alicen new insight into the Dominican education system, causing us to re-focus our efforts with Somos Girasoles, which we allowed to lie dormant in 2015 as Alicen moved permanently from La Esquina to Cabrera and I started taking courses for my master’s in public health.

Faro de Cabrera’s student body is directly linked to the villas – until the start of the 2018-2019 academic year, most Faro parents worked for one or more villas in various capacities. Some villa owners sponsor individual students. Faro also hosts students from expat families while those families are vacationing in Cabrera. There are also several

students whose parents are teachers at local Dominican schools – a testament to their opinion of the Dominican public and private education systems.

Like the full-time teachers for The Esperanza Project, the Faro teachers tend to integrate into the community as members of Dominican households and/or the local working class. They are encouraged to start or join different community projects in collaboration with Dominican facilitators. The effect of the AIC/Faro generation on Cabrera has been an amplification of educational opportunities and a disruption in colonial hierarchies. Whereas the Orchid Bay generation drew wealthy tourists to the area, some of whom bought land and built smaller vacation homes, the AIC/Faro generation draws North American and European students and young educators from a broader range of backgrounds. The tourists rent cars and eat in restaurants every night; the AIC/Faro generation walks or uses public transportation and goes to the market to buy food to cook at home. No one knows the tourists except those who work for them or for the villas; everyone knows the teachers from Faro and The Esperanza Project, and most assume that new strangers are volunteers if they stay longer than one week.

### *The Playa Grande Generation*

In 2013, my friends and I were able to pile into Christine's rental car and drive onto the sand of Playa Grande. When I returned in 2014, I walked through a designated entrance on the edge of a parking lot to get to the beach and saw the hotel my friends from the *campo* had been talking about. They were working as day laborers hired by a local contractor to install water purification systems, heated tile floors, recessed lighting, and satellite television in hotel rooms that none of us would ever be able to afford. In 2017, Cabrera was buzzing with the news that the Playa Grande Golf Course was closed for

renovation, the Amanera Resort and Spa was complete, and Aman (Amanera's parent company) had installed a collection of luxury villas right on the beach.

I did not have a clear idea of the impact of the Playa Grande Project until I began working full-time at Faro de Cabrera as their administrative secretary in March 2018. Alicen and the other teachers at Faro had befriended some of the people in charge of the Playa Grande Project. They work for a company called the Discovery Land Group, which owns golf courses and luxury subdivisions all over the world. The company bought the Playa Grande Golf Course and much of the surrounding land in partnership with Aman, a Russian hotel chain. This partnership kept the Amanera hotel and spa open and running while Discovery invested heavily in what is slated to be a new community of multi-million-dollar homes.

Discovery Land Group's clientele is a step above that of Orchid Bay's in terms of wealth and power. These property owners are A-list celebrities, business moguls, and multi-billionaires who, per their real estate agreement with Discovery Land Group, will not allow guests to stay more than three nights, cannot use their property to generate income, and can only pass their golf club membership on to a family member in the event of their death. At least, those were the rumors in 2018<sup>15</sup>. Either way, investors in the Playa Grande Project are not set up to evolve in the same way as Orchid Bay's.

Another key component of Discovery Land Group's business model is the efficiency of the services they provide. To achieve that efficiency, they hire their

---

<sup>15</sup> Alicen and another Faro teacher befriended several Discovery staff in 2018, orchestrating group gatherings aimed at fostering a relationship between the two organizations. The deed restrictions on Playa Grande residences were often the subject of jokes and humor, the vast differences between the concerns of the wealthy and those of "normal" workers ripe for ridicule.

administrative staff before they ever show a property to a potential investor. Even though the people in charge of the different branches of the project are expats, most of this new administrative staff are Dominican. In 2018, the Playa Grande project briefly reversed the flow of Dominican outmigration from Cabrera, drawing accountants, lawyers, agronomists, and tourism specialists from Santiago and Santo Domingo. These were the people calling and texting me about tuition rates at Faro while I was the administrative secretary in 2018. My office became a place for people to tell their reunion stories. A man working for Discovery who had been living in nearby Rio San Juan while his wife and kids stayed in Santo Domingo for a year saw us as the necessary ingredient to convincing his wife to move the family to the north coast. A woman who spent 10 years working as a massage therapist in Nantucket, Massachusetts had found a job at Amanera that meant she could move back home and afford to send her daughter to Faro without financial aid. Local families once enrolled in AIC came back to Faro looking for information, drawn by the interest of family members and friends who might be returning. Enrollment at Faro exploded from 38 students in 2017-18 to almost 100 expected students in 2018-19.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, Cabrera was at a turning point with the arrival of the Discovery Generation. These expats were mostly men, ages 20-40, who were functionally single. They went out to eat every night, rented vacation homes from Orchid Bay Generation tourists, and traveled around the Municipio in large SUVs at dangerously high speeds. The Dominicans arriving in Cabrera with this generation were a mix of highly qualified professionals with families (and their own SUVs) and young, newly employed low-level staff members in the service sector dominated by Amanera.

Cabrera's already opaque housing market froze up as the normal ebb and flow of available housing got locked up into one- and two-year contracts. Land prices jumped in areas like Loma Alta, where investors could build houses with an ocean view without paying beach-front prices. The sudden influx of cash pushed local supermarkets and businesses to expand, but also caused a spike in theft and prostitution as youth with incomplete or inadequate education sought ways to earn a living. The influx of larger vehicles on Cabrera's narrow roads, easily traversed by motorcycles and scooters, has also led to increased traffic and parking issues in the city center. The tensions this new cocktail of economic and social influences was creating in Cabrera came to a screeching halt with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. Before I discuss the impact of the pandemic, I will return to the topic of education in the DR and my own experiences in Cabrera between 2015 and the start of formal dissertation fieldwork in 2021. As previously stated, my work with Faro was critical in shaping my opportunities for ethnographic and participant observation, as they helped the broader community place me in the broader sociocultural landscape.

#### Solidifying my Identity as a Teacher-Researcher in Cabrera

I conducted three separate research projects in Municipio Cabrera prior to my dissertation fieldwork in 2021. The most recent, an attempt to map mobile vendors in Cabrera's Central Park, is described in the introduction. I briefly described the outcomes of my first project earlier in this chapter, and I will return to one of the key lessons from that research in Chapter 6. In the previous chapter, I used the research I conducted in 2016 to explain Cabrera's foodscape. In addition to my maps for that project, I also conducted interviews with community stakeholders and much of the information gleaned

from that project helped inform the previous chapter (S. Barr, 2018). While Alicen was not included as a participant in that project, she contributed greatly to my understanding of local issues as we shared meals, re-organized the furniture in her classroom at Faro, and sat around her living room discussing my project.

Alicen's house had become the hub for activities with Transitando, an organization of artists from Santo Domingo who began doing activities with Faro and in the broader community during the 2014-2015 school year. The constant stream of eccentric visitors helped position Alicen as a community organizer and helped her develop a new direction for Somos Girasoles. That summer, she worked with a group of artists from Transitando to host new-and-improved summer camps in Cabrera's Central Park and in two of the rural schools we had worked with in 2014, testing out the logistics and social dynamics of her evolving vision for Somos Girasoles.

After almost three years in the DR, Alicen was very critical of the Dominican education system. Cabrera has two public primary schools, one public high school, a Catholic private school for grades 1<sup>st</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, The Esperanza Project, Faro, and Arco Iris, another privately funded non-profit education project. There are primary and secondary public schools and other education projects scattered throughout the rest of the Municipio. When we arrived in La Esquina in 2013, before the Medina administration's educational reforms were announced, each public school hosted primary grades (1<sup>st</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>) for one half of the day, and secondary grades (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>) for the other half, with students eating at home in the middle of the day. Teachers often rotated between two schools with off-set schedules, and it was difficult for rural schools to find teachers for more complex subjects like high school sciences. The kids who kept us busy picking mangos in 2013

were often going to class during the school year to find that their teacher was teaching somewhere else that day and there were no substitute teachers. The transition to the full school day exacerbated the teacher shortages.

Additionally, rural areas around Cabrera have been slower to embrace the value of education because there is not a strong tradition of staying in school. La Esquina is an exception, likely due to its consistent exposure to university-educated young adults through Christine's study abroad programs. In other rural communities, today's youth are supposed to complete high school because many of their parents could not, and most of their grandparents had to stop going to school at 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The emphasis is on completion (i.e., attendance), not on learning or excelling in school. The half-day schedule allowed older students to earn income for their households and continue their education. It also placed the burden of feeding students (and teachers) on their families. Building new schools and adding kitchen facilities to existing school buildings to provide students and teachers with lunch during the school day significantly delayed the schedule transition in less politically powerful municipalities like Municipio Cabrera.

The full school day also caused a spike in drop-out rates, especially among boys. While girls and young women have the archetype of *la normalista* modelled for them by representations in the media, and the women in their lives, the gendered expectations of boys and young men push them to begin working at a younger age. In households where there are no male counterexamples, the quest for success and prosperity aligns more closely with the archetype of *el tíguere*, who does not fit in the normative educational environment. Young women and girls also have greater access to alternative education programs, many of which were established to compensate for high teen pregnancy rates.

Alicen saw the potential of Somos Girasoles to spark deeper interest in education among youth in rural communities of Municipio Cabrera. The town of Cabrera has an abundance of enrichment resources, with The Esperanza Project’s accessible educational programs and Transitando’s public art workshops, which have covered every empty wall in Cabrera with bright, detailed murals. Rural communities like Loma Alta, La Esquina, and even La Entrada are too far away from Cabrera’s resources for youth to be able to use them. After working with the crew of artists from Transitando in 2016, Alicen felt confident that we could make it work the next summer.

Unlike the program in past years, the goals of Somos Girasoles shifted from objectives based on the content of lessons in art, music, health, and nutrition to objectives based on participation, attendance, and conduct. One week of art classes was not going to turn camp participants into professional painters and sculptors, but it could reward them for continuous attendance, remind them how to behave in a classroom setting, and expose them to attainable models of success – our counselors, many of whom were working artists and university students whose education granted them access to new opportunities.

Over the next two years, my position in Municipio Cabrera solidified into a few different roles. In La Esquina, I became a “researcher” and a member of my host family, continuing to be the person who is *always* working. In Cabrera, I was associated with Faro de Cabrera but recognized as someone who did more than that, as I was often seen walking around town with my backpack<sup>16</sup>, taking pictures, writing in a notebook, or just

---

<sup>16</sup> Faro teachers were often assigned nicknames by community members who knew us by sight but not by name. Alicen is *la pequeña* or *la bajita* (the little one), another of our friends, who is 6ft tall, is *la grande* (the big one), and I am *la que tiene la mochila y los lentes* (the one with the backpack and glasses) or *la secretaria* (the secretary).

quietly watching things happen. In the communities where we hosted Somos Girasoles, I was Alicen's organizing partner, the one who maintained order within the summer camps while she directed the chaos of using public spaces for presentations, organizing meals for our staff, and enlisting reliable adults from each community to help us. When Alicen was offered her dream job at the beginning of 2018, we both knew it would be the last year of Somos Girasoles. I ran the last week of camp in Loma Alta on my own that year, as Alicen packed up her life in Cabrera and moved back home to Texas in July.

Returning to Cabrera in 2019 without Alicen was strange for me. She had contextualized so many of my experiences, that I knew she would continue to have a strong influence on the positionality of my research. Most of my remaining connections in Cabrera were through Faro and an eclectic mix of expats from different generations who all met Alicen before they met me. My main contact in town shifted from Alicen to Pilar, another Faro teacher who eagerly recruited me to volunteer as a writing teacher for upper-level high school students in 2019, cementing my role as "Faro teacher" in Cabrera. My attachment to Pilar facilitated further connections in the expat community and shaped many of my observations of food access.

Through my few connections in the expat community, I stumbled into the role of volunteer house-sitter/pet-sitter that facilitated my research in 2019 and 2021. Another thing that has set me apart from most expats in Cabrera is that I tend to be in Cabrera during the "worst" time of year – the summer – when most expats return to their countries of origin to escape the heat. After staying with Pilar and teaching high school students for a month in 2019, I began house- and pet-sitting for Dana and Steve, an expat couple from Oklahoma, who could not travel with their two small dogs. My first

experience house- and pet-sitting in Cabrera coincided with the completion of two major infrastructure projects and the explosion of domestic tourism discussed previously.

### *Roads, Electricity, and Modern Homes*

Road improvements in Municipio Cabrera began in 2014 then stalled with local political changes and funding issues. After several years of political promises, crews finally began paving all the other public roads in Municipio Cabrera with asphalt in 2019, skipping past private drives and uncooperative neighborhood associations. Progress was likely slowed by confusion about which roads were public, as the foothills around Cabrera are a mix of Dominican communities like La Esquina and Loma Alta and expat subdivisions, many of which are technically owned by a private corporation of homeowners. While the mechanics of corporate home ownership are unclear to me, the effect of it on the local government's efforts to pave every road in the Municipio was clear in the social media posts from members of smaller Dominican communities protesting the delays in the process (Aguero, 2019).

Because of its location on one of the main backroads through the Municipio, La Esquina was one of the earliest communities to have its road resurfaced. Its residents were also some of the first to openly complain about the new speed bumps and dips that had been placed in the road to slow speeding vehicles. While appropriate for SUVs and sedans, the motorcycles and scooters that most residents of the *campo* have access to are more easily damaged by these safety measures and less capable of reaching speeds that would endanger drivers or the public.

Meanwhile, the neighborhood where I was pet-sitting did not get its roads paved, despite its location just across the highway from Cabrera's town center, because the

neighborhood association did not work out an agreement with the local government. While conducting preliminary fieldwork on food access in Cabrera in 2019, the only effect of nearby road improvements on my daily reality was in the increased level of activity at the *arenera*<sup>17</sup> across the street and the ever-present layer of dust on every surface of the house.

While my interaction with road improvements was limited, Cabrera's long battle to get 24/7 electricity caused a few headaches over the course of my one-month stay. Electricity in Cabrera is notoriously unstable, though it has always been more predictable than the electricity in La Esquina. Most households in Cabrera have back-up power in the form of an inverter and at least one pair of car batteries. A pair of batteries is enough to keep the lights on and run small appliances for several hours, if the batteries have been properly charged and maintained. Most houses in Cabrera are wired to allow renters to install their own batteries, which are connected to everything but major appliances like refrigerators. Prior to 2019, there were unspoken agreements between EDENORTE<sup>18</sup> and the community to ensure that people had electricity at night and for long enough periods of time to fully charge their batteries, creating the illusion of 24/7 electricity in households with enough back-up power.

In 2019, however, EDENORTE began to ignore those unspoken agreements. The entire country was affected by similar electricity shortages, inspiring protests which *cabrereños* decided to mimic in June and July of 2019 as blackouts began to extend beyond the capacity of most people's back-up systems, leaving children and the elderly overheating and unable to sleep at night, while restaurants lost entire freezers full of food

---

<sup>17</sup> A business that sells sand and other backfill materials for construction projects

<sup>18</sup> The electricity authority for the North Coast of the Dominican Republic

(Cabrera Red Digital, 2019). Similarly, the few businesses that had begun to rely on electronic payments were forced back to cash-only transactions to avoid costly interruptions in service.

Improvements to electricity infrastructure in Municipio Cabrera began quietly. In La Esquina, between my 2013 departure and my arrival in 2014, every house was given an electricity meter by EDENORTE. Prior to this change, most households were illegally integrated into the electrical grid. Instead of punishing the offenders, EDENORTE went door to door and offered two payment options – an affordable flat rate or a bill based on usage. Each house got a new meter, and EDENORTE upgraded the posts and wires of existing power lines. The change was welcomed in the *campo* where deaths from fallen wires and faulty electrical hookups are unacceptably frequent<sup>19</sup>. Regularized access in the *campo* generated income for EDENORTE to continue the infrastructure improvements needed to meet the demands for 24/7 electricity in Cabrera’s neighborhoods.

Less cooperative than others, Dana and Steve’s neighborhood was among the last to have its infrastructure upgraded. Dana and Steve had invested in an array of eight batteries, enough to ensure that Steve could continue his work online without interruption whenever the power went out. They were renting their home from a local woman who lives in Toronto while her mother manages the property from their family home in Cabrera. This convoluted chain of ownership was a constant problem as Dana and Steve sought to properly maintain the residence.

---

<sup>19</sup> In summer 2017, a toddler in one of the communities where Somos Girasoles was working died when she stepped in a puddle near a fallen powerline. Many of our students left camp in the middle of the day to attend her funeral.

I was not at home when the workers installed the new lines and disconnected the house from the old meter, and I do not know if EDENORTE notified the owner of the change. Based on the melted ice cubes in the freezer, Dana and Steve's array of eight batteries had lasted at least three days before the illusion of 24/7 electricity evaporated with the Wi-Fi at around 8am on a Sunday morning in July 2019. Unfortunately, the power was out everywhere in Cabrera at the time, so it took an additional four hours for me to realize that I had been cut off. I slept in the living room that night, the patio doors open to capture the breeze, the brand-new streetlamp outside the house glaring back at me in my little island of darkness as I jostled for space on the couch with the dogs.

The next morning, I put my loosely connected social network to work for the first time, knowing that *tigueraje* would get me further than making phone calls or waiting in a line at the EDENORTE office. My nearest neighbors, Raquel and Darío, were parents of Faro students, who not only explained what was going on with the electricity, but personally escorted me to the EDENORTE office to help me fix it. Raquel and Darío had been through this situation before, but as the owners of their home, they were able to fulfill their obligation to reconnect their house to the new meter. I was not in the position to do the same, a fact which Darío made abundantly clear to an EDENORTE supervisor, after bypassing the line in the waiting area with purposeful strides and friendly greetings. Darío even convinced the supervisor to give me a ride back to the house on his way to inspect the situation. That afternoon, a group of off-duty line workers finished (illegally) re-connecting the house to the power grid, waving to me as they drove away.

Unfortunately, that re-connection had caused a chain reaction. As explained by Gabriel, a local contractor loosely connected to me through friends and Faro, re-

connecting to the main grid had caused a surge, which destroyed one of the transistors in the inverter. Frustrated, Gabriel explained that Steve had neglected to install a bypass switch or a grounding wire – basic safety measures which protect homes from electrical fires and people for electrocution. Grumbling about *extranjeros estúpidos*<sup>20</sup> under his breath, he loaded the inverter into his truck and drove away with a wave.

It was not the first time Gabriel had dealt with the unrealistic expectations outsiders have for Cabrera's infrastructure. As one of the most well-known local contractors, Gabriel often bears the burden of figuring out how to mesh modern dream homes built around the ideals of a stable electric grid, central heating and air, and in-line natural gas with the reality of stoves and hot water heaters connected to propane tanks and household wiring connected to back-up batteries and inverters. The popularization and accessibility of single-room air conditioning units has not only contributed to further burden on the electric grid, but it has also changed the way houses and apartments are built in Cabrera. Newer constructions in Cabrera turn into giant ovens if the power goes out mid-day, with few openings for cross-breezes and materials that hold heat instead of releasing it (concrete vs wood, glass vs aluminum). Unfortunately, the aesthetics of modern construction are winning out, even in the vacation homes of Dominicans, whose aesthetic preferences are influenced by the cosmopolitanism of the DR's major cities.

### Concluding Remarks

The first four chapters of this dissertation have served to provide a foundation for the theoretical and practical aspects of this research. This chapter focused on my early

---

<sup>20</sup> Translation: stupid expats

experiences in Cabrera to give the reader a more intimate understanding of Cabrera's social and physical landscape, and to explain how I was able to conduct an ethnography in Municipio Cabrera. The opacity created by *tigueraje* in public institutions extends to social circles, insulating and isolating groups of people based on identities and common activities. Throughout my time in Municipio Cabrera, I have been privileged to float between multiple social groups, my history in the area garnering access to some, while my appearance as an expat grants access to others. Cabrera's vibrant social and economic landscape was interrupted by the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. In the next chapter, I will highlight how the pandemic impacted Municipio Cabrera and the reality of conducting ethnographic research in both La Esquina and Cabrera.

## Chapter 5: Research in Pandemic Conditions

In 2021, Pilar contacted me a week before I arrived in Cabrera to discuss the logistics of my stay. The Caribe Tours busses continued their normal operations, but the nationwide curfew in effect at the time meant that I would only have one opportunity to catch the bus in the afternoon, instead of two. That meant I could not check a bag, as the usual delay at baggage claim would cause me to miss the bus. Spending the night in Santo Domingo, the epicenter of the DR's winter surge in coronavirus cases at the time, was not an appealing prospect. Then, Pilar informed me of arguably the most consequential logistic change caused by the pandemic [in English<sup>21</sup>]:

“Antonio and Rain broke up, so he's in your room. Well, his room, but it was your room most recently. And now it's his again. And Belén is in hers, so I don't have room for you, sorry, kid. I'm talking to Rain to see if you can stay with her.”

Pilar's son, Antonio, depended on Cabrera's tourism industry for income. He worked for several villas before finding his niche as a mediator between the growing population of English-speaking retirees building new homes in the foothills around Cabrera and local Spanish-speaking tradesmen like Gabriel (discussed in the previous chapter). By January 2021, the stresses of unemployment and the pandemic finally broke the long-term relationship between Antonio and his partner, Rainbow (aka Rain). I first met Rain in 2016, when she began working with her sister Sunshine, a local concierge. Sunshine does everything from event planning to real estate, to hair and makeup for

---

<sup>21</sup> Pilar has equal fluency in English and Spanish, though Spanish is her first language. Most of our communications occurred in English. The conversation described here is a condensed version of communications carried out across text messages and phone calls on January 12, 2021. Expletives, emojis, interjections from her daughter, Belén, and tangential topics have been removed.

weddings and special events. Rain gradually took on floral design jobs, adding local *viveros*<sup>22</sup> to Sunshine's extensive network of service providers, and starting her own growing operation focused on succulents and other ornamental plants.

Originally from Virginia, Sunshine and Rainbow's family have maintained strong ties to Cabrera, visiting multiple times each year and building their own homes in the Municipio. In terms of the generations laid out in the previous chapter, Sunshine and Rain's parents are Orchid Bay Generation expats, while their daughters are beneficiaries of the Orchid Bay destination wedding industry. For Rain, ending her relationship with Antonio was the final straw after a year of not working, not being able to see most of her family, and struggling with the effects of the pandemic. A week after talking to Pilar, I arrived at Rain's house on the back of a motorcycle to find Rain busily arranging for her permanent return to the U.S. As she rolled the front gate open, she laughed, watching me uncurl myself from around the bright purple suitcase in my lap and struggle to maintain my balance as I dismounted, my overstuffed backpack testing both my resolve and my abdominal muscles. I almost tipped over, but the *motoconcho* caught me and my suitcase before we could topple, laughing behind his mask good naturedly. After helping me into the house, Rain continued anxiously packing up her life, talking through the logistics of coronavirus testing, booking flights, and paying out the rest of her lease.

As I listened, I realized my arrival was as much an opportunity for her as it was for me. Rain was deeply worried about leaving her dogs largely unsupervised for a week before her parents would arrive to help transport them to the U.S. Meanwhile, I was keenly aware that my transit was by far the most likely time in my fieldwork that I would

---

<sup>22</sup> Ornamental flower producers

contract COVID-19. While I had not encountered a single un-masked person in my travels, I had spent three hours in a bus operating at 100% capacity instead of the 50% occupancy mandated for public transportation in the DR at the time.

As Rain worried about her dogs, I worried about my host-family in the *campo*. Most houses in the *campo* are still built with the traditional peaked tin roof and no ceilings (See Figure 12). While my host family and many others have replaced wooden walls with concrete block, the open attic space between the tops of the walls and the tin roof remains. Increased ventilation is good for reducing the risk of COVID-19 infection and dissipating heat but makes it impossible to effectively quarantine as a preventive measure. Like most houses in Cabrera, the house Rain was renting has a flat roof and ceilings, making it possible to quarantine effectively and to install air conditioning units in each bedroom. Rain's imminent departure also meant the house would be empty of other



Figure 12. (Left) A housing compound of traditionally constructed homes in Loma Alta (2013); (Right) Examples of typical home construction in Cabrera, captured on film while in transit (2019). Source: author.

humans, something that could not be said of Dulce's house in the *campo* (see next chapter). Even though I was reassured when Rain's pre- travel coronavirus test came back negative, I decided that putting off my return to the *campo* would be the best decision.

"Y'know, I still need to set up internet and figure out volunteering at Faro for the semester. I'm also still paranoid after that bus ride. Would you mind if I stayed for another week? I could watch the dogs for you."

Rain's shoulders visibly relaxed and her facial expression momentarily cleared as she sighed and dropped down onto the chair next to me, "Could you? That would help a lot. I don't want to mess up your research, but it would be great if you could stay here a little longer. I'm not sure how long you plan to be out in the *campo*, but you could stay here afterwards too... if you want." She continued, pointing out that an empty house, even in a "safe" neighborhood, is an easy target for theft and mischief. She told me about the new neighbors, a mix of long- term renters from Santo Domingo and *cabrereños* recently returned from abroad, and the awkwardness of every delivery person in town knowing her address as "*la casa de Antonio*"<sup>23</sup> even though they also knew he didn't live there anymore.

As she spoke, a young man on a motorcycle pulled up in front of the house across the street and honked the horn. A woman emerged from the house to roll open the gate across the driveway as the man unloaded a few bags of groceries and a five- gallon jug of water from the crate strapped to the back of his motorcycle. She gestured him into the house, waving her hand at me in greeting when she saw me watching. I waved back as

---

<sup>23</sup> Antonio's house

the man emerged with an empty water jug and accepted the coins the woman offered him as he climbed back onto his motorcycle and drove back down the street. She rolled the gate back into place and retreated into the house.

Rain chuckled as she realized I'd been distracted by the exchange, "You're such a nerd," and then she paused, drawing my attention again. "I guess I will miss grocery delivery. It's so much more expensive in the States! What project are you working on this time?" she asked.

I shrugged. "It's another continuation of all the other projects, to be honest. I've told you about the food environment and food deserts, right?" She nodded. "I'm still trying to figure out why they don't work. I mean, I know why they don't work, but there's something about food access that the academic literature is missing, and I think I've almost got it figured out. There are more food resources than just supermarkets and convenience stores, and I think the pandemic has exposed the importance of a lot of the cultural behaviors people depend on to access food, you know, the tiny things we don't think about."

Rain nodded, "That make sense. So, what's the plan?"

### Research Procedure

After an initial ten days or so staying at Rain's house in Cabrera, I spent February and March 2021 in La Esquina living with Dulce, the reigning matriarch of my host family. Each day, I wrote notes about the way food entered the household (grown at home, gifted from another source, or bought from a vendor) and documented the frequency with which mobile vendors came through La Esquina. To capture the timing and nuance associated with accessing the mobile vendors, I used film. Alternating

between my cell phone camera and an action camera, I captured the mobile vendors as they moved through the community, documenting the way they slow their speed as they approach Dulce's home at the edge of La Esquina. Most mobile produce vendors rattle off prices and products through a megaphone in a common rhythm and cadence known as a *pregón*, a common practice often combined with song by street vendors in the Caribbean (Fonseca Mendoza, 2018). Somos Girasoles theater classes always began with the *pregón* as an example of public art and shared culture; children in rural areas and artists from urban Santo Domingo bonded over the proper way to advertise plantains, apples, grapes, and *yuca*<sup>24</sup>.

I was able to capture a few recordings of interactions between Dulce and different mobile vendors. As discussed in the next chapter, the dynamics of gender, class, and *dominicanidad* influenced the way some mobile produce vendors interacted with Dulce when I was present, producing higher prices, more aggressive sales behaviors, and unwelcome flirtation. My brief conversations with produce vendors were aimed at understanding vending routes, price setting, and product origin. I also made notes about my conversations with Dulce and other members of the household regarding food, the economy, and the pandemic.

Every Friday, Dulce's son, Jorge, took me down the hill on his motorcycle so I could catch the bus into town, arriving at Faro before 7:30am. In the privacy of an empty school yard, I recorded video fieldnotes with my cellphone in selfie-mode, pausing to

---

<sup>24</sup> Plantains, apples, grapes, and *yuca* may seem like an odd list, but they were the most common examples our counselors used to connect with our camp participants. Plantain and *yuca* are widely accessible and sold in most produce trucks. Grapes and apples are expensive, and while most of our camp participants had never bought or eaten them, the *pregón* for them is easy to remember and fun to say.

watch each of them before recording the next. This (literally) reflective habit developed as a coping mechanism during my struggles with mental health in graduate school and throughout the pandemic. In the context of this research, using film allowed more flexibility in organizing my thoughts, documenting observations by theme, often independent of their chronology, leaving myself reminders within one field note to make a note about another topic or event.

Data Type	Phase 1	Phase 2	2021 Total
Video Diaries	49	115	164
Written Notes	52	20	72

*Table 2. The number of video diary entries and written field notes shifted with my living circumstances. Phase 2 video diary notes also included reflections on data from Phase 1 as I was reviewing it. Video diary entries range in length from 2 minutes to 25 minutes.*

I continued to record video fieldnotes after I moved back to Rain’s house on April 1, 2021, where living alone made it easier to do more filming and less writing. I also spent most of April rewatching my recordings and reviewing written fieldnotes. I imported my files into a qualitative analysis software where I had already begun to store relevant news articles, and fieldnotes, pictures, and videos from previous visits in the DR. After returning to the US in June, I added my fieldnotes from the remainder of my fieldwork and conducted a thematic analysis based on the ways food access occurred in my observations (grown, gifted, retail, and/or government programs) (See Figure 11). I focused on identifying the situations and stories that most effectively demonstrated the complexity and political economy of food access and the diversity of experiences of my interlocutors.

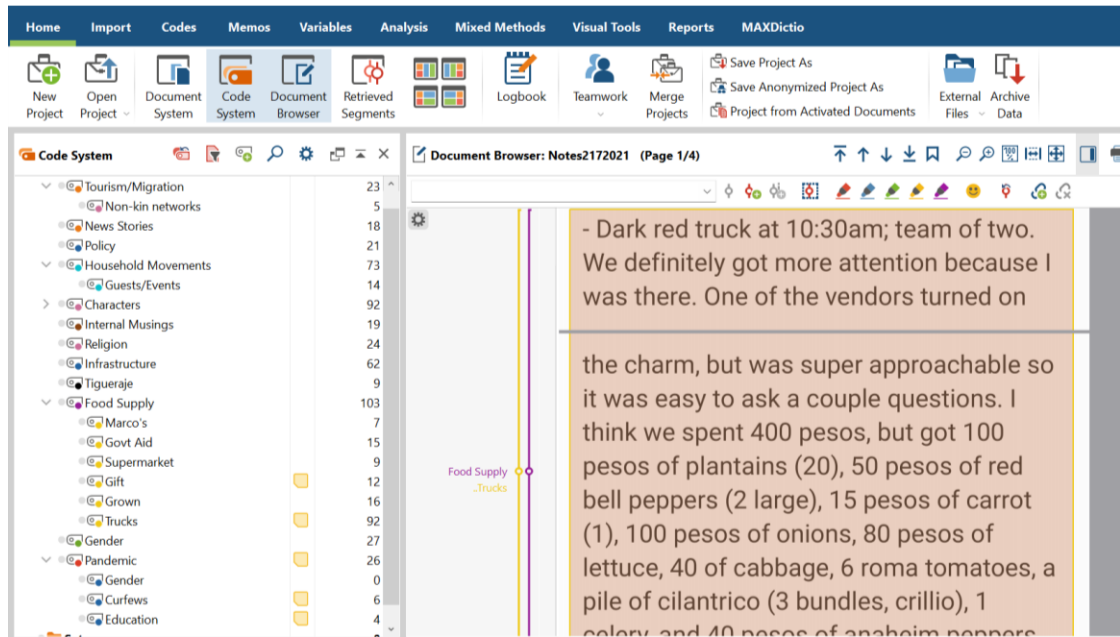


Figure 13. A screenshot of my MAXQDA dashboard demonstrating the breadth and depth of codes applied to daily notes. The note describes one interaction with a set of fresh produce vendors from February 17, 2021.

I spent the month of April working from my new home (Rain’s house), reviewing my fieldnotes and grading online assignments during the day and spending my pre-curfew evenings with Pilar at a local restaurant. I increased my time at Faro to twice a week, taking advantage of the free meal I got for volunteering, and made purposeful trips to different food resources in Cabrera and beyond to observe food access behaviors. As I ran out of fieldnotes to re-watch and the Spring semester ended, my sense of isolation and boredom intensified. Pilar noticed and, as she so often does, found a solution to benefit everyone<sup>25</sup>.

“Could you teach U.S. Civics?” she asked suddenly as we sat at our usual table at Mari & Leo’s restaurant in late April. I tilted my head, silently asking her to explain.

<sup>25</sup> The dialogue described here is a condensed version of the conversation with tangents, jokes, and colorful language removed.

“The kids [at Faro] need to learn U.S. Civics to get their diplomas through the homeschool program we use, since it’s based in the U.S. I found a great online video series to help with content, but they need an instructor, and my schedule is full. You should do it.”

That is how I ended up teaching a 3-week mini-course on U.S. Civics to Faro’s 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders during the month of May. The shift in activity significantly altered my food access habits from those of an independent remote worker to those of a teacher or other office worker living in Cabrera. I began volunteering at Faro every weekday, teaching my classes and helping Pilar to prepare for the administrative chaos that is the end of every school year. Towards the end of May, my teaching assistant responsibilities began for the summer session at FIU, so in June, I was once again working from home.

#### The DR’s pandemic response

The DR’s initial response to the pandemic was swift and in line with the Medina Administration’s long-time priority of keeping the country fed. INESPRES, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Public Health were in constant collaboration throughout the pandemic, negotiating with producers’ unions and supermarkets to set the price of essential goods (Diario Libre, 2020). The “*Quedate en Casa* [Stay at Home]” program launched in early April, transferring payments of 5000 DOP<sup>26</sup> to 850,000 Dominicans who were registered through the country’s labor and social security databases<sup>27</sup> (DR1, 2020d). Aimed at keeping low-income workers out of extreme poverty

---

<sup>26</sup> About 100 USD. The value of the Dominican Peso has steadily decreased over the last decade from 40 (2013) to 59 (2021) DOP per dollar.

<sup>27</sup> The total population of the Dominican Republic is around 10.5 million

and supporting household food security, the programs were gradually expanded to include transportation workers, most of whom only have ties to the formal economy through their affiliation with transportation unions (DR1, 2020f). Cash transfers were limited to one person per household, but extra money was given to heads of household over the age of 65, as though the government anticipated that extended families would converge geographically around elder members.

While the DR's efforts to support the population with cash transfers were impressive, and effective enough to garner additional support from international lenders, their reach was limited by the integration of workers into the formal economy (DR1, 2020e). Street vendors and other small business owners who were not integrated into the social security system received little or no support from cash transfers and emergency programs (Rodríguez, 2020). As household composition across the country adapted to get the most assistance possible, many Dominicans fled urban centers, following family ties back to rural and peri-urban communities to wait for jobs to return and to avoid the rapid spread of the virus in high-density housing.

Suspicious about the corruption of the Medina Administration continued to grow as people became concerned about the lack of transparency around pandemic relief spending (DR1, 2020b). Public consternation sharpened as congressional and presidential elections were re-scheduled from May to July while the Medina Administration scrambled to set up testing and monitoring, shut down tourism, and implemented curfews and lock-down measures (Nagovitch, 2020). The DR's municipal elections, which occurred on March 15, were not disrupted by the pandemic, though the Medina Administration later stated that they should have been (Nagovitch, 2020). Despite lock-

down measures, almost 50% of the population voted and election day went smoothly as voters flipped most government seats to PRM candidates. The Abinader (PRM) administration continued the “*Quedate En Casa*” programs through April 2021, slowly incorporating them into the “*Supérate [Overcome]*”<sup>28</sup> program, which provided smaller cash transfers and targeted relief toward food assistance programs (DR1, 2021). The shift in aid programs occurred as food prices rose steadily in early 2021, inciting discussion and concern on the news and social media.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, both presidential administrations adjusted pandemic restrictions to balance disease spread and the needs of the economy, especially the tourism industry. In 2021, weekly changes in national and regional curfews were a regular part of the news as the government adjusted the hours, allowing exceptions in major tourism hubs to try to keep the economy afloat. Outbreaks and high-traffic holidays like Christmas and Holy Week inspired a tightening of curfew restrictions, but by mid-summer 2021, curfews were much less strictly enforced in Cabrera.

At the end of 2021, the DR had experienced three major spikes in coronavirus cases and was working its way up to another. The first (July – September 2020) occurred shortly after the country re-opened its airports and reduced travel restrictions; the second (November 2020 – February 2021) was attributed to the Christmas holiday, which lasts close to a month for most Dominicans and consists of domestic travel, family gatherings, and massive block parties; the third (May 2021 – July 2021) occurred after the U.S. changed travel restrictions, unleashing a flood of international tourism upon the

---

<sup>28</sup> Alternate translation: “Get over it”, but with a softer more motivation connotation that reflects the “bootstrapping” ideology of neoliberal social and economic policies.

Caribbean and other major travel destinations (Bixby, 2021). The delta variant was not detected in the DR until September 2021, but the omicron variant drove cases back up during the 2021 holiday season (Dominican Today, 2021b, 2021c).

The DR's economy is expected to recover well (IMF, 2021). Once economies in the US and Europe began to open again, remittances to the DR steadily increased, surpassing previous levels and making 2021 a record-setting year (BCRD, 2021). Two-dose Sinovac vaccines arrived in the DR in February 2021, and by March teachers and the elderly were getting their first doses in Cabrera and La Esquina, exceeding local expectations for the effectiveness of the Dominican government's vaccine roll-out. My position as "Faro teacher" (albeit part-time) gave me early access to the vaccine while I was still living in La Esquina. I took advantage of the offer, using the experience to answer questions and dispel any hesitation among my host-family members in La Esquina. Most adults over the age of 30 were eager to get the vaccine, while younger people were resistant. The rest of my host-family received their first dose of the vaccine in May 2021, as government officials and news columnists alike expressed concern for slowing vaccination rates in the DR.

### Cabrera's Tourism

The DR opened its airports on July 1, 2020, and the resort areas of the DR recovered steadily despite the travel restrictions put in place in Europe and North America, the DR's major sources of tourists (DR1, 2020c). The Dominican government allowed resorts to manage their own restrictions, independent of government oversight; if guests were on resort property, they were not subject to national, provincial, or local government restrictions. Cabrera saw little benefit from the initial return to tourism, with

many Orchid Bay workers receiving pay-cuts or being laid off from their jobs. In the villas she manages, Greta did not have a single booking between July and December 2020, prompting the management company for those villas to make the strategic decision to reduce their prices and adjust their advertisement strategies to attract wealthy domestic tourists from Santo Domingo and other larger cities. They were not the only Orchid Bay villa to do so.

The shift coincided with the Christmas season and the corresponding spike in coronavirus cases. Greta went from having no work to having a new group in the villas every week, while many of her staff contracted COVID-19 multiple times in the first half of 2021. Provincia Maria Trinidad Sanchez became one of the highest-ranked provinces for coronavirus spread during the winter spike as the wealthy sought a break from the noise (and restrictions) of the DR's major cities. The villas also attracted guests from other Caribbean countries, and Greta quickly became an expert on coronavirus testing and travel policies throughout the region.

Between Christmas and Holy Week, the steady flow of domestic tourism expanded, returning to 2019 levels, with many tourists deciding to stay for weeks instead of days. The global construction boom left its mark on Municipio Cabrera as entire subdivisions were created along the highway and other municipal roads like the one weaving through La Esquina. In response to increasing land prices, residents of the *campo* were selling off chunks of land to pay their bills and feed their families. While several subdivisions are complete, it is difficult to tell how many of these new homes are vacation homes for Dominicans and how many are for expats; in the end, they all seem to drive large SUVs and shop at supermarkets instead of *colmados*.

While a few expats in Cabrera's pocket communities had the means to travel between March and July of 2020, most stayed through the initial lock down. Once restrictions lifted, they were faced with the predicament of deciding whether the pandemic would be worse "here" in Cabrera or "there" in their countries of origin. Restrictions in Europe and Canada were particularly stringent, causing some expats to decide against travelling as they saw fellow members of their community get "stuck" in their countries of origin. Expat pocket communities became more insular and location-based, with fewer cross-over members and less interaction with the local Dominican community.

The pandemic brought a new wave of North American and European lifestyle migrants to the villas around Cabrera. While they practice many aspects of the same inequity-building lifestyles as Hayes' boomer retiree "lifestyle migrants" (2018), these expats are young professionals traveling with children enrolled in a worldschooling program (Hayes, 2018). In brief, worldschooling is an educational philosophy which encourages experiential learning over classroom instruction and encourage students to engage with their local environment (We Are Worldschoolors, 2022). While worldschooling can be done using online resources, the model implies that students, often with their families, will travel to new places and speak with members of different communities. In February 2020, just before the start of the pandemic, a worldschooling hub was established in Abreu, between Cabrera and Rio San Juan. The first group of worldschoolors arrived in Cabrera shortly after the DR's travel bans were lifted.

Sunshine was instrumental in managing each group of up to a dozen globetrotting families and their teachers as they settled into villas and went on educational excursions

throughout the region. I only know of the existence of these groups because of conversations with Rain, Sunshine, and Greta, which highlights the insulated, curated nature of these worldschooling experiences<sup>29</sup>. Alicen and I first heard whispers of the worldschooling program coming to the area in 2018, and the program seems to have unfolded as we expected. While students are off learning with their teachers and guides, parents work remotely or hold informal social gatherings at restaurants, cafes, or beaches near their temporary homes – none of which are in Cabrera itself. Occasionally seen shopping at Rebeca’s and Garcia’s supermarkets, the worldschooling families have almost no interaction with expats or Dominicans outside their travelling group. Their children’s’ experiences – educational and otherwise – are fundamentally different from what most students in Municipio Cabrera lived through during the pandemic.

#### Cabrera’s Education & Electricity

In Cabrera, the 2019-2020 school year ended in March for most students, despite best efforts from teachers and administrators. Faro de Cabrera fumbled through the end of the school year as teachers learned new digital platforms and students negotiated Wi-Fi-signals and mobile data plans with their families. They refined their methods for the 2020-2021 school year, developing a complex schedule that broke classes into smaller sizes and rotated teachers. Faro students were constantly battling for bandwidth in their homes, using cell phones to attend class and do homework, and shouting over barking dogs, screaming babies, and rumbling engines to answer or ask questions in class.

---

<sup>29</sup> This topic came up in conversation with Rain on January 20, 2021, as she updated me on local gossip. I later asked Greta about it, and she confirmed much of what Rain communicated to me. Both were quietly astounded at the amount of money these families were willing to spend on housing, food, and activities for themselves and their children.

Traditional Dominican homes, whether they are made of cinderblock, wood, or a combination of the two, are built to promote airflow, which also allows sound to carry through the home and into “quiet” study areas. Pilar and I joked about teaching the rooster in one student’s home because he interrupted class whenever she unmuted her microphone, despite the family’s efforts to keep the bird away from the house during school hours. Another student’s family owns and operates a motorcycle repair shop, and it was not uncommon to see the seventh grader rolling her eyes and yelling at someone beyond the screen before unmuting her microphone to answer questions or practice English-language pronunciation. All Faro teachers know which students live in homes without back-up power, because electricity blackouts did not completely disappear after EDENORTE’s improvements in 2019.

The 2020-2021 school year was very different for non-Faro students. When I arrived in La Esquina at the end of January 2021, I expected to find a cohort of jaded school-aged children who had given up on education, left behind by a system that would depend on resources most of them did not have. I underestimated the ingenuity of the Dominican Ministry of Education (MINERD). Luz, a teacher and a member of my extended host family, explained MINERD’s system to me [translated from Spanish]:

“Each grade has two TV channels they watch and two classes each day. They air the first class in the morning at 9am, then again at 10am, and one last time at 1pm. The second one airs in the afternoon at 2pm and then again at 4pm. The same classes are broadcast online and on the radio for people who don’t have a television or a phone. On Fridays, students turn in this week’s packet at the school and pick up a new one. It works well, especially now that the electricity only goes out on the weekends.”

I raised my eyebrows at that, “Entonces, la luz fué político, no práctico? [So the electricity was a political issue, not a practical one?]”. Luz nodded and shrugged as I shook my head in disbelief. Then we both laughed at the irony that it took a global pandemic to finally get reliable electricity in the *campo*.

When I asked Luz’s 14-year-old daughter, Blanca, about school, she was sitting cross-legged on her bed, hunched over a packet of papers, and squinting at the phone propped up on the bed in front of her as she scrolled through documents and slideshow presentations on its tiny screen. For a moment, she was the little girl I first met in 2012 as she giggled and motioned to the packet of paper in front of her. Then she rolled her eyes, transforming back into a moody teenager, and told me the work was challenging and she wished they didn’t give so much each week, but she felt like she was still learning.

I spent all of February and March of 2021 in La Esquina, living with Dulce and watching Blanca negotiate her school packets and the different class options, switching the between the TVs available in Luz’s home and Dulce’s. As she worked on her homework, I graded online assignments for my teaching assistantship at FIU and for the writing class at Faro, while Dulce and Luz cooked and cleaned for both households. At the same time, all of us were responsible for ensuring Rosa, Luz’s youngest daughter, stayed out of the kind of trouble in which only a toddler can find herself.

## Chapter 6: Rural Food Access

In July 2017, after years of eschewing the label of “picky eater”, I was shocked to learn that I do not like *habichuela roja* (Dominican red beans). After two weeks of Somos Girasoles summer camps, throughout which Alicen managed to keep us and our staff of 6 counselors fed, she announced my dislike of red beans to the entire team as we planned our final weekend’s worth of mid-day meals. All the counselors agreed with her observations, leaving me aghast. The next week, we hosted summer camps in Loma Alta. It was our second year in the community, and while Alicen arranged for the other counselors to join other households in the community for the mid-day meal, she and I made the trek to Luz’s home, where we were welcomed as friends and extended family. Blanca (age 11 at the time) always managed to arrive and eat before we did, leaving us alone with Luz in her tiny, one room house.

As we chatted about the lesson plans for the summer camps, Luz busily scooped rice, black beans, and chicken into bowls and plucked spoons from a nearby drawer. Alicen complimented Luz’s cooking skills as I enthusiastically devoured my meal, starving after a morning of teaching and managing summer camps. Alicen teased me about my (apparently obvious) preference for black beans, causing Luz to laugh and remark that she too preferred black beans. Glad I wasn’t the only one, I took a sip of homemade juice and explained:

“Apenas aprendí que no me gusta habichuela roja. Siempre sabía que prefería la habichuela negra, pero no me di cuenta que no me gusta la habichuela roja. No sé como no sabía, pero evidentemente es verda’. [I just learned that I don’t like red beans. I always knew I preferred black beans, but I did not realize that I disliked red beans. I don’t know

how I didn't know that, but evidently, it's true.]" Alicen dissolved into giggles, and Luz's eyes went wide.

"Pero es por mi tía Dulce! [It's because of my aunt Dulce!]" she exclaimed, laughing as Alicen's jaw dropped in realization and the sudden change in her breathing triggered a round of hiccups. As Alicen tried to get her hiccups under control so she could finish her meal, Luz continued, "No sé qué hace, pero solamente me gusta la habichuela roja cuando lo hace ella. Algún día, voy a aprender su secreto. [I don't know what she does, but I only like red beans when she makes them. One day, I am going to learn her secret]."

Luz's Aunt Dulce has been my host-mom since 2013, her household serving as a home base in La Esquina, even during the summers that I spent living with Alicen in Cabrera. Dulce is also a food resource for her family; her extensive knowledge of her craft and the needs of her family is as essential to providing them with food as the food itself. This chapter will examine Dulce's food provisioning strategies and discuss how they have changed over time. In her position as a woman bound to her home by traditional gender norms, Dulce relies heavily on mobile food vendors and her kin network to bring food to her kitchen. The influence of changing gender norms and women's increased access to public space has changed which parts of that kin network are most effective at acquiring food, but also affected Dulce's ability to pass on her knowledge to the next generation. This chapter also outlines the *possibilities* of food access in rural areas of the Dominican Republic so that the reader can understand how they change as my research shifts to urban Cabrera.

## Getting to La Esquina

My arrival in La Esquina for the start of fieldwork has been different every time. On my first visits, I arrived with a group in a rental car. In 2014, Alicen made the trek to Las Americas Airport to come get me, then called her neighbor to come get us from the bus stop at the bottom of the hill. After 2015, when Alicen moved to Cabrera, I travelled to La Esquina for weekend visits, catching the *guagua* from the middle of Cabrera and riding to where the road up to La Esquina intersects with *la pista*<sup>30</sup> and then riding up to La Esquina with one of the *motoconchos* who work at that intersection. My arrival in 2021 resembled these weekend visits, except that I was carrying more stuff, and everyone was wearing a mask.

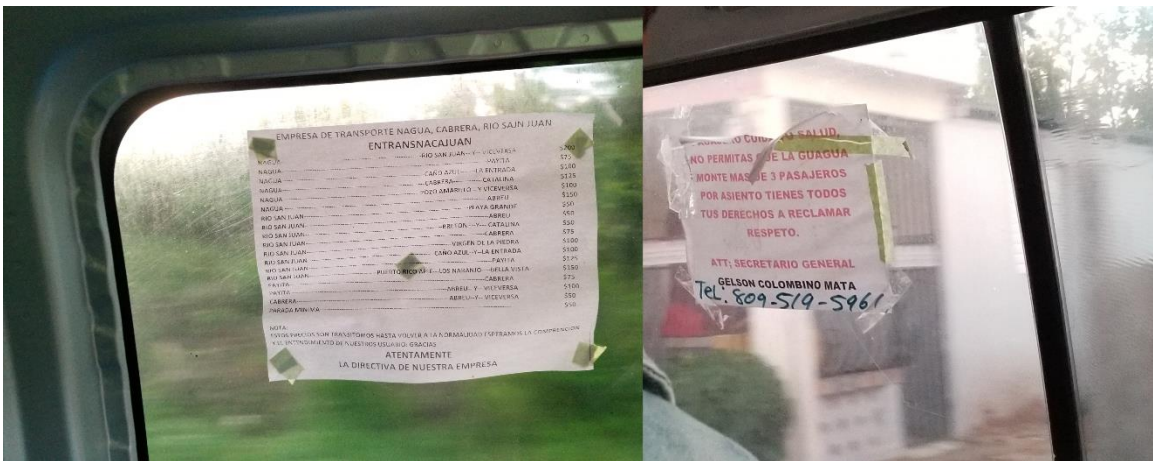


Figure 14. Notices posted inside the *guaguas*. (Left) Fares were updated to compensate for a reduction in the number of passengers per seat (3) and riders were encouraged to enforce that restriction without fear of reprisal from drivers (Right) (Source: Author 2021)

As I boarded the *guagua* in Cabrera, I sent a text message to Luz to let her know I was on my way, and she told me to look for Jorge at “the bottom of the hill”. I sat back in my seat with my luggage and watched the familiar landscape pass by. The bus was

<sup>30</sup> short for autopista; referring to Autopista Cabrera-Nagua, the coastal highway

unusually quiet, each of the women on board in their own row instead of packed in like we would have been prior to the pandemic. I let the driver know where to let me off and learned that the fare had increased because of pandemic restrictions, which reduced the number of passengers per bus. I gave him a suspicious look in the rearview mirror, glancing around at the other passengers to see them nodding quietly in confirmation. I sighed and handed over the coins in my pocket, thankful I always carried more coins than necessary when travelling.

I hauled my luggage out of the bus just as Jorge rumbled down the hill on his motorcycle and came to a stop. Jorge shooed the other *motoconchos* away from me as they tried to help me with my bags, aggressively pulling his bike around so I could climb on behind him. I looked at the other *motoconcho* apologetically and then glared at the back of Jorge's head as he began to pull away. I rode silently behind him, somewhat disturbed by his behavior but knowing that there were probably reasons for his behavior that I did not understand yet. As we jolted over yet another speed bump, not having seen another vehicle pass in either direction, I decided that the road improvements made throughout the municipality were not made to benefit residents of the *campo*.

As I climbed off the bike in front of Dulce's house, I awkwardly handed Jorge 100 DOP, once again unsure if this was a "family discount" situation. He snatched the bill from my hand and rode off up the road, leaving me to haul my luggage up the steep hill in front of the house.

Perched on its own little ridge set back from the road, Dulce's house is one of three concrete houses that form what I think of as "the family compound" (see Figure 15). The alleyway between Dulce's house and what is now Luz's house is just wide

enough for Jorge to drive his motorcycle from the front door of his apartment (attached to the back of Dulce’s house) down to the rocky pathway that connects the alley to the road. On the other side of Luz’s house there is a cistern, and then another home, which the family still refers to as Julia’s, even though her son, Kelvin, has been the one living there

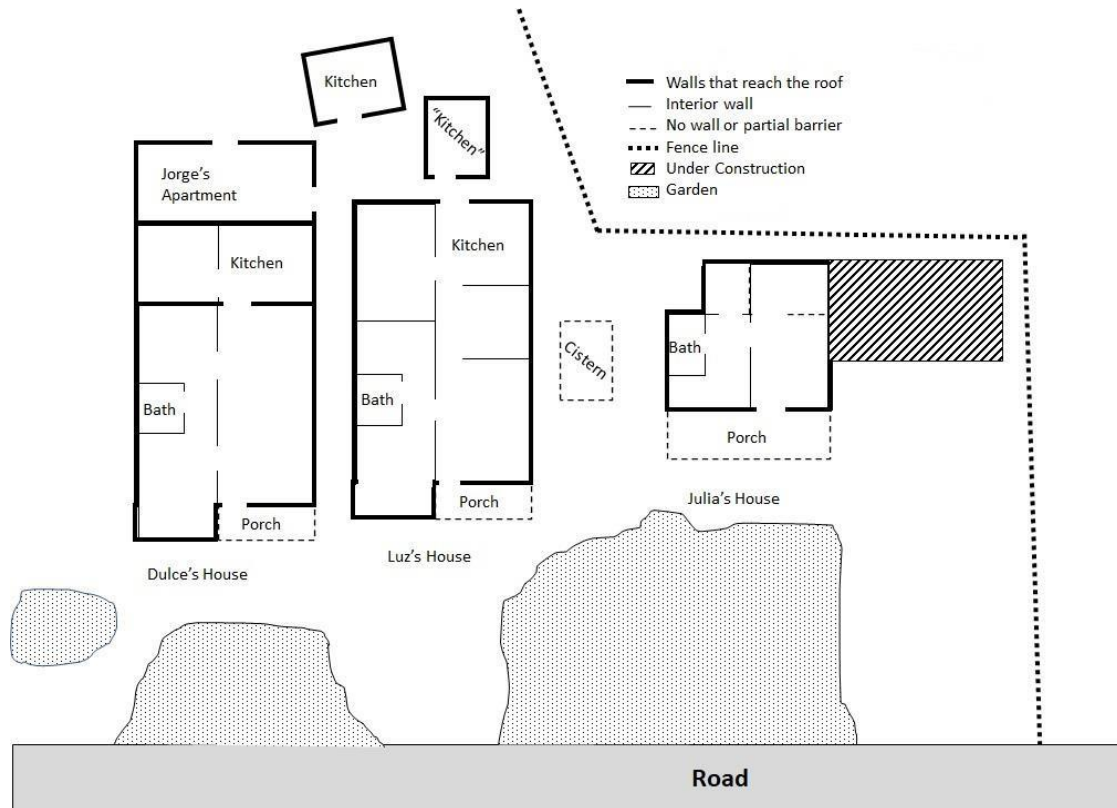


Figure 15. A map of the family compound, including the outdoor kitchen facilities. Julia's house has been under construction since 2012. Kelvin and his friends like to spend time there.

most consistently since Julia has been working in Spain for most of the last decade. When he was 12, Kelvin enthusiastically guided my friends and I across pastures and into caves in search of adventure. Now he splits his time between university courses in Nagua, short-term work in Santo Domingo, and capitalizing on the freedom of having his own home at age 21. There is an invisible line bisecting the cistern between Kelvin’s bachelor pad and Luz’s home that is rarely crossed by the adults in the family, affording Kelvin his independence and giving his aunts and cousins a layer of plausible deniability.

If you include the camping stove in Jorge's one-room apartment, there are six kitchen spaces in these three houses. However, only four of them are consistently in use. Luz and Dulce each have a kitchen with a refrigerator, a four-burner gas stove, an oven, and cabinets for storing food and utensils. The ovens are used mostly for storing pots and pans, as baking burns through too much propane to be done frequently. Each kitchen includes multiple propane tanks which can be refilled at one of the propane stations on the coastal highway, a task Jorge completes for both Luz and Dulce.



*Figure 16. (Left to Right) Walking up the alley between houses, I approached Dulce's outdoor kitchen to find her presiding over the fogón (Source: Author 2021)*

The alley between the houses opens to a common yard space, the opposite side of which is bordered by two outdoor kitchens. Each of them contains a rectangular *fogón* with concrete blocks that are shifted around to form fire pits, and stacks of wood brought from the family farm, which is in another community down the hill from La Esquina. The largest outdoor kitchen is Dulce's domain, where she spends most of her mornings cooking the midday meal for the whole family (See Figure 16). The smaller outdoor kitchen was added in 2016 to provide a similar cooking space to Chela, Dulce's sister, who passed away suddenly in 2017. While the absence of a female head of household in the original family home was not the primary impetus for Luz taking over in 2019, it was a welcome change for Dulce as she took on the care of both households in the interim.

Daniel, Dulce's youngest brother, now runs the family farm, but he once worked as a chef in a restaurant in Sosua. As the female heads of household have changed over the years, Daniel and Nestor, the family patriarch, have continued to reside in the family home. The smaller outdoor kitchen has become Daniel's, though no one refers to it as a kitchen anymore because he uses the *fogón* to prepare slop to feed the pigs he keeps on the farm. Luz stores the *caldero*<sup>31</sup> that Daniel uses to boil *yuca*<sup>32</sup> for some of the family's evening meals in her kitchen, away from the mess of kitchen scraps set aside for the pigs.

### Food, Gender, and the Home

Daniel's role in food preparation diverges from Dominican ideals of masculinity in the interest of practicality. In his early 50's, Daniel is the youngest of his generation in the family and only a few years older than his eldest nieces and nephews, who are Dulce's children. During his time in Sosua, Daniel was married with children and acted as an anchor point for his nieces and nephews to attend university courses and find higher paying jobs. After he got divorced and his son migrated to Puerto Rico, Daniel decided he preferred the quiet life of the *campo* and returned home, taking over the farm and doing what he could to support his sisters and their families. Whereas hyper-masculine gender norms would dictate that he be outside the home for most of the day, talking with other men in public spaces when not working on the family farm, Daniel is just as likely to spend that time sitting with the rest of the family, playing with Luz's youngest daughter, Rosa, or helping with labor-intensive household tasks.

---

<sup>31</sup> Pot with handles, ideally made of cast iron but aluminum versions are very common

<sup>32</sup> Manioc or Cassava root; not to be confused with yucca, a desert plant that grows throughout the western hemisphere

In contrast, prior to the pandemic and after Daniel took over the farm, Nestor would spend his mornings visiting the different households of the extended family. Every morning, one of his daughters would send him up the road to drop off food and other items at the home of one of his unmarried grandchildren or great grandchildren, knowing that he would stop to talk to his friends and other family along the way. He would eat the mid-day meal at least once each day, depending on how many households he visited, and be home in time to watch *telenovelas*<sup>33</sup> in the evenings. As the winter surge of 2020-2021 began to fade, Dulce began sending Nestor to purchase ingredients from the *colmado* down the road just to get him out of the house, where he grew frustrated with being confined by his potential vulnerability to COVID-19. Now in his mid-80s, his age has also begun to limit the range of his wanderings, and it is not unusual to find him dozing in a chair on Kelvin's front porch.

Jorge (age 44) follows a similar schedule to his grandfather, though instead of visiting family, he is searching for opportunities to earn money as a *motoconcho*. As the pandemic slowed people's daily movements, the *motoconchos* at *la pista* agreed to work alternating days to make sure they each got equitable chances of earning money. Private arrangements between individual *motoconchos* and specific clients are exempt from this agreement. On days when Jorge was not waiting for fares at *la pista* he was waiting for them in La Entrada, where beachgoers rely on private vehicles or *motoconchos* to run errands (and people) between La Entrada and Playa La Boca. While Jorge would usually come home to eat the midday meal his mother and cousin had prepared for the family,

---

<sup>33</sup> Spanish-language drama series. In past years, the *telenovelas* we watched in La Esquina were reruns of shows originally broadcast in the U.S., Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil. In 2021, we were watching dubbed Spanish-language reruns of several popular Turkish drama series, which have significantly more episodes than a standard *telenovela* from Latin America or the US.

there were several occasions during my fieldwork when he decided to eat at a *comedor* in town. This became more common as chicken prices soared, causing Dulce to use eggs or eggplants as a substitute for meat, much to Jorge's frustration. In addition to gendered associations between masculinity and meat consumption, he subscribes to the well documented narrative that the ideal Dominican meal consists of rice, beans, and meat; without all three pieces, it is not a complete meal (Derby, 1998; Mayes, 2014; E. Roorda et al., 2014).

Prior to his death in 2016, Dulce's husband Francisco ensured she never had to leave the house. While she would send Nestor or a visiting grandchild to the *colmado* for small quantities of eggs or oil, Dulce relied primarily on Francisco to purchase food for the household. She would give him a list of what she needed, and while he was out selling tickets for the National Lottery from his motorcycle, he would stop at different supermarkets, specialty vendors, and *colmados* to get the things on the list. He usually came home with pockets full of hard candies or mints, which retailers use as a substitute for 1 DOP coins. As we rested after the midday meal in the heat of summer munching on hard candies, I would sit on the front porch with Francisco and Dulce as he read her the jokes printed on the inside of the candy wrappers. When Francisco was killed while he was out one day, Dulce faced not only the loss of her life partner, but the overwhelming task of reintegrating into a foodscape that had changed significantly during 40+ years of marriage. At the age of 62, she had to re-learn food purchasing skills that her children, grandchildren, and neighbors took for granted.

In August 2016, six months after Francisco's death, I captured a video of Dulce hailing a passing produce vendor. Thanks to a megaphone, the produce vendor's voice

carries over the hill, reaching the front porch of Dulce's home before the vendor can be seen coming down the road. As the vendor comes closer, Dulce wipes soapy hands on her bright pink apron before she raises one and yells over the din of the vendor's voice until he cuts the engine of his pickup truck, killing the audio as he rolls to a stop. She disappears from the frame and then returns, quickly picking her way down the front yard to meet the vending team. Clutching the bill in her hand, she confidently gestures to the different piles of produce, watching as one vendor weighs each item and calls out a price to his partner before stowing the item in a plastic bag. At the sound of the final cost, Dulce's brow furrows as she counts the money in her hand. Then her cheeks redden, and her shoulders sag as she realizes that she did not grab enough money after hailing the vendors. I stopped the recording as she trudged back up the hill to her home, sadness in her eyes.

Lidia and Teresa, Dulce's daughters, have done what they can to fulfill their father's role in providing food for Dulce when she needs it and to help her adjust to purchasing food on her own. Lidia gets particularly frustrated with her mother's continued habit of staying home, pushing Dulce to take advantage of opportunities to leave the house and visit with friends and family. Teresa, who has stayed closer to home throughout her adult life and career, misses the way her father would randomly show up at her home or office, usually leaving behind a piece of hard candy.

The Impact of the Pandemic

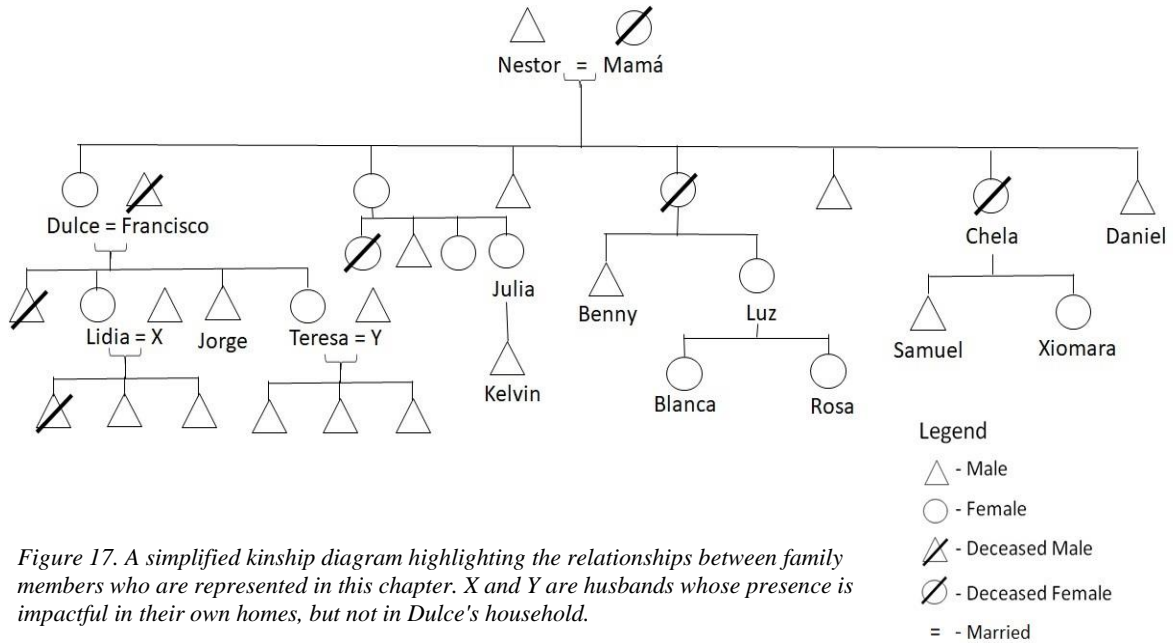


Figure 17. A simplified kinship diagram highlighting the relationships between family members who are represented in this chapter. X and Y are husbands whose presence is impactful in their own homes, but not in Dulce's household.

When the pandemic began, Luz was working as a high school life sciences teacher at Arco Iris, one of the education projects in Cabrera. Each day, Luz and Blanca, would go to Arco Iris in Cabrera and leave Rosa (born August 2019) with Dulce. Arco Iris struggled with the transition to remote learning even more than Faro and encountered additional financial and organizational issues. Luz resigned from her position before the start of the 2020-21 academic year after the organization failed to pay her yet again. Samuel (age 34), Chela's son, is also a teacher, but he works for the public primary school in Cabrera. His job was secure, and he began returning to work in February 2021 as vaccines became available. Samuel lives a few houses further "down the hill" with his sister, Xiomara (See Figure 19).

After losing her secretarial job in Cabrera because of the pandemic, Xiomara (age 22), who is unmarried and does not have children of her own, tried to earn income by

selling accessories and clothing. This is a common practice among women who can travel to a major city and purchase items from wholesalers, bringing goods back to rural communities like La Esquina and selling them to friends and family. Like many women her age who have grown up in multi-generational households with family members and media outlets telling them that education is the path to a better life, Xiomara has not picked up the skills Dulce so adeptly uses to prepare food for the family. Consequently, Xiomara and Samuel also depended on Dulce for their main meal of the day while they waited for the pandemic to end.

The pandemic irrevocably altered the composition of Dulce's household, and thus the progression of my fieldwork. If the pandemic had not made it so that there were always several caregivers present for Rosa – a very rambunctious toddler – I would not have been able to keep up with my various teaching responsibilities and data collection. Rosa's adventures commanded far more attention than grading assignments and taking notes. If everything had been "normal", Dulce would not have been cooking for so many people every single day, providing me with ample opportunities to observe the myriad ways in which food enters the household. In our family full of teachers, "normal" circumstances would have meant Dulce was feeding five people – me, Jorge, Daniel, Nestor, Rosa, and herself. Samuel, Luz, Blanca, and Xiomara would all have eaten their midday meal at work or school. Remote learning, limited reasons to travel, and job loss meant that Dulce was feeding at least ten people each day, the number fluctuating with visits from her daughters and grandsons.

The pandemic also produced novel food resources. With schools shut down, MINERD worked with INESPRES to provide food aid to students and staff each *quincena* (15-day pay period). On the 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, Samuel brought home a bag of food for himself and for each child in the household. One of the first bags I observed included 2lb of rice, 2lb of black beans, a large carrot, a can of sardines, a packet of cooking oil, 15 cartons of milk, 15 enriched juice boxes, and a dozen eggs. The contents of the bags varied. Rice was



Figure 18. One bag of food distributed to the family by MINERD in March (Source: Author 2021)

occasionally replaced with wheat germ or cornmeal, but more often substituted with spaghetti or elbow macaroni.

One set of bags contained at least a pound of carrots in each bag, most of which Luz spent hours grating and blending into fresh juice. That evening as we sat watching the news and drinking carrot juice, we learned that the carrot producers' union had come to an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture after demanding higher prices for the unexpected bumper crop; an agreement which the Ministry was later accused of ignoring (N Digital, 2021a). I scrambled to type the details of the story into my daily notes, realizing that the school bags had likely served as a mechanism for offloading the surplus carrots. The links between national food policy and household food access were rarely so clear during my fieldwork.

While food was never thrown out, products like elbow macaroni and sardines were rarely used (Figure 19). On a day when she had few leftovers to feed the family dog, Dulce added a can of sardines to his beans and rice to make up the difference, laughing about how thankful the dog was for the efforts of the schools. Dozens of bags of elbow macaroni filled one of the shelves in her pantry, all “gifts” from the schools that Dulce was unsure how to use.

Over the years, I have tried to integrate myself into Dulce’s kitchen in the name of participant observation, but the experience was uncomfortable for both of us. While Dulce was always patient with me, hovering silently as I fried plantains for dinner or added ingredients per her instructions, she could not hide her discomfort at sitting still and watching someone else cook. In these uncomfortable moments, I realized that participant observation of the cooking of the food, or of Dulce’s activities in the kitchen did



*Figure 19. A utility cabinet in Dulce's indoor kitchen keeps dry goods and other ingredients protected from the elements. It also stores bags of macaroni (2nd shelf, left side) and cans of sardines (4th shelf, right side) that Dulce rarely uses (Author 2021)*

not provide a complete picture of how she accesses food. While her kitchen is the source of meals for the family, the ingredients she uses to prepare meals come from outside the kitchen, if not outside the family compound (Sebastian, 2021). Lidia and Teresa take every opportunity to challenge her control over the kitchen in the name of caring for Dulce, but I decided after a few attempts that there were plenty of other ways that I could fulfill my role as a member of the household, demonstrate care and appreciation for Dulce's role in the family, and further the goals of my ethnography.

### Becoming Family

On my first day back in La Esquina in January 2021, I dropped my backpack on the living room sofa and placed my suitcase on the floor nearby, before going back out the front door and over to the alley between the houses<sup>34</sup>. I knew Dulce would be in the outdoor kitchen at the back of the house, leaving the house itself completely empty.

As I walked up the alley, a tiny face with a halo of dark curly hair peeked around the corner of Luz's house and then darted away. Rosa had heard Jorge's motorcycle and expected it to be him coming up the alley, his heavy gait a stark contrast to my quiet strides. Alerted by the shuffling of Rosa's toddling feet as she went in search of Luz, Dulce looked up as I entered her cooking space, smiling as she extracted her hands from the bowl of rice she was rinsing.

“¡Llegaste! ¡Gracias a Dios! Le pedí ayuda, y aquí estás, toda la familia cerca de nuevo, ¡[You're here! Thank God! I prayed for help and here you are, the whole family

---

<sup>34</sup> Overall, there is a preference among residents of the family compound for walking between the houses to get from the front to the back of them instead of walking through the inside of one house or another. It keeps the floors clean, but also emphasizes the fact that during the day, the family spends more time outside than inside the houses of the family compound.

close again]” she exclaimed as she left the rice to soak and embraced me, her head resting briefly on my shoulder as she sighed in relief. Her initial greeting was one of very few indications of the financial stress the family had been under because of the pandemic. Arguably the most reserved member of the family, Dulce rarely expresses her concerns aloud, instead doing what she can to quietly stretch the family’s resources to accommodate their needs. As the Abinader government shifted from the *Quedate en Casa* program to the *Supérate* program, cash transfers initially deployed to support vulnerable populations through the pandemic began to decline, and the prices of cooking gas and key foodstuffs continued to rise, increasing financial stress for families whose resources were running low.

My arrival has always meant a slight influx of cash for the family. The weekly stipend that Christine once distributed to host families became my weekly contribution to the household. Coming from a background that emphasizes the *sentimental* power of familial bonds over their *economic* power, handing a stack of small bills to Dulce each week always made me uncomfortable and led me to question the legitimacy of my status as a family member. The cautionary tales spread by expats to be careful of *los tígueres*, to not let Dominicans take advantage of me because of assumed associations between whiteness and wealth have echoed in my mind since my earliest research experiences. For years, I quieted my worries by reminding myself that it costs money to house and feed a person, so the stipend was essentially payment for services rendered, even though reducing my relationship with my host family to a financial one always felt wrong. Dulce’s relieved, heartfelt greeting finally settled some of my longstanding discomfort with what it means to “be family” in contexts where sentiment and economics overlap.

Lidia is a successful businesswoman. Teresa is a successful lawyer. Samuel and Luz are teachers. All of them make regular cash or in-kind contributions to the household that has been a steady force and reliable food resource for the family since before many of them were born. Dulce's marriage to Francisco was unusually stable, and together they created a home whose composition and economic status did not change as quickly or as frequently as other members of the family<sup>35</sup>. Pre-pandemic, my contributions were one of many each week; even when I was living in Dulce's home full-time in 2014, my contributions were appreciated but not needed, especially with Francisco's consistent income<sup>36</sup>. Dulce was sometimes resistant to accept the money, and I would remind her that it was to offset the cost of extra food for me, both of us retreating into that overly rational justification of our relationship.

With a dozen people depending on her for meals in 2021 and the family's different income sources and cash savings drying up, my stable income from the U.S. made more of an impact than in previous years. My re-integration into the family also came with other benefits for the household that were much easier to accept than a handful of cash. Once Rosa accepted me, I became yet another person to keep her entertained, falling into a routine with Luz, Blanca, and Dulce that allowed all of us to complete our respective work assignments without leaving Rosa unsupervised. While I have never been able to insert myself into Dulce's primary domain by assisting with food

---

<sup>35</sup> Failed marriages, many of which are not legally documented, fatal accidents, and domestic and international migration are very common in the lives of people living in La Esquina and other rural areas. See page 49 for a discussion of the hazards of Dominican roads. The constant absence and reappearance of family members creates a dynamic, but slightly unstable household for many of the residents.

<sup>36</sup> Workers for the national lottery earn a commission for each winning ticket they sell. The Dominican National Lottery is extremely popular, partially because people regularly win small sums of money.

preparation, I quickly fell back into my routine of helping her with her primary income-generating activity – selling ice.

For at least a decade, Dulce has sold bags of ice as a supplemental income source for the household. Over time, her ice storage capacity has grown to include multiple chest freezers, each of them hooked up to back-up power on an independent circuit and filled with foot long tube-shaped blocks of ice encased in clear plastic sleeves. As the weather began to warm in March 2021, Dulce’s ice business was bringing 100-150 DOP per week to the household. Supplemental income streams are common in La Esquina and rural

Municipio Cabrera, especially among women who are bound to the home by traditional gender norms and low educational

attainment (Carruyo, 2007). Their front

porches act as the intermediary between

public and private space, hosting their

business activities without letting

strangers into the home. Consequently, in

this research and previous projects, the

front porches of Dulce’s home and others’ have served as the primary research setting for

data collection. As I sat on or near Dulce’s porch each day, watching for mobile vendors

and scribbling fieldnotes about recent news stories and happenings within the household,

I easily integrated into the ice-selling process, often completing transactions while Dulce

was back in the kitchen cleaning up from one meal or preparing another.



*Figure 20. The view from Dulce's front porch. The power lines were installed between 2015 and 2016 (Source: Author 2021)*

## Front Porch Food Access

The view from Dulce's front porch is stunning, despite obvious signs of the DR's expanding telecommunications infrastructure and the recent appearance of new concrete structures (Figure 19). Inhospitable in the mornings with the sun beating down on the white tile floor, the porch is a great place to rest in the afternoons, an ever-present breeze coming in off the Atlantic Ocean and winding its way through the metal bars that mark the boundary of the space. The wind carries with it not only cooler temperatures, but also the sounds of incoming resources, including cleaning supplies, water, and fresh produce.

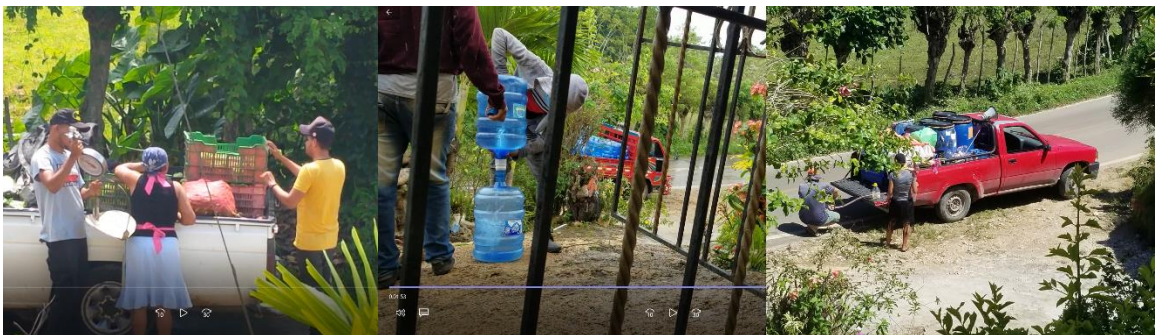


Figure 21. (Left to right) Members of the household purchase fresh produce, clean water<sup>37</sup>, and cleaning supplies from mobile vendors.

In my first research project in Municipio Cabrera, I demonstrated that mobile produce vendors may influence household fruit and vegetable (F&V) consumption by comparing F&V consumption in households along the main road through La Esquina and in those along a less popular road. While there was a noticeable difference between the two groups, my sample was so small it was difficult to draw a statistically significant connection between the presence of the vendors and F&V consumption in rural

---

<sup>37</sup> Most mobile water vendors transfer the water from the wholesaler's bottles into bottles the household already owns because the vendors get reimbursed for every bottle they return to the wholesaler, but only if the brands match. Vendors and wholesalers change over time, making it more efficient to transfer the water instead of trading out the bottles. Prior to 2020, this area was served by a man with a 50-gallon tank of water who refilled bottles for a much lower fee. The pandemic put him out of business, and several other vendors took his place.

communities like La Esquina. My model was developed largely from memory, and one of my personal goals for field research was to clarify key details about these produce vendors and their role in rural food access.

After greet Dulce and putting my luggage away in 2021, I wandered over to Julia's house to spend time with Kelvin. After discussing his studies and my research, I asked him if he had noticed any changes in the vendors since the pandemic. He commented that they seemed to be coming through more frequently, and that there seemed to be more vendors than before. When I asked if he thought the road improvements had affected the vendors, he shrugged and became distracted by a game on his smartphone.

Each of the vendors I spoke with said the same thing: their daily journeys began early in the morning in Nagua's regional markets, where they purchased their stock from wholesalers as it arrived from Santiago de los Caballeros. All of them carried a cell phone and a notebook with hastily scribbled prices on it, some even waiting until a customer asked about the price of an item before calling the market in Nagua to get the information. When I asked about the prices, they all claimed that the market sets the prices for them and implied that the information is easily accessible.

In mid-February, as rumors swirled about schools re-opening now that the vaccine was available, Dulce had difficulty finding a vendor who had plantains in stock. When one finally passed by, I asked the driver why there were so few plantains. He explained that plantain producers were holding their stock, allowing the plantains to grow larger, because the schools would be able to afford them. Dulce kept her face carefully blank as she listened to the exchange, closely inspecting tomatoes and bell peppers for

imperfections. After the vendor left and we walked back up to the house, I asked her what she thought.

“Solo quieren más dinero. Antes, un plátano de diez pesos era así, [They just want more money. Before, a 10 DOP plantain was like this]” she held out her hand, hooking her pointer finger, and smacking the flesh of her inner forearm just below the elbow crease with the pointer finger of her other hand to indicate the length of a plantain, “y ahora son pequeñas y sin sabor [and now they’re tiny and tasteless].” She threw her hands up and scoffed, “Las escuelas no van abrir así tan rápido [The schools are not going to open *that* fast]”.

I nodded in agreement, knowing that the timelines for vaccine deployment and school re-openings we saw discussed on the news each night were meant for places with more political clout than La Esquina. However, the plantain producers were making production and marketing decisions based on the rumors behind the news stories and their own knowledge of the Dominican market. Therefore, it did not matter if the rumors were true or realistic, they had a tangible impact on the supply and pricing of plantains, a dietary staple, and offered vendors an opportunity to pass the blame for higher prices or lower quality goods onto the market, the producers, and the schools.

While some vendors worked alone, most travelled in teams of two. In transit, one person drives and the other advertises. When stopped for a customer, one person makes the sale and the other tracks inventory and cash flow. I observed one team with a man and a woman working together, but her role was significantly diminished from that of a typical male vending partner. While her partner drove, he also advertised, and when they stopped, he handled the sales as she quietly wrote down inventory information and

calculated total costs from the passenger seat of the truck. I was unable to speak with any of the solitary vendors. The one who visited La Esquina most frequently (~3 times/week) invariably drove through the community just as the household was waking up<sup>38</sup>.

I asked three vendors about the way their business was organized. They each claimed to be working independently, exerting complete control over where they sold their goods and how often. One explained that they chose a different road each day “porque la gente que compra hoy no compra mañana [because the people who buy produce one day are not going to buy it the next]”. Over the course of my observations, I saw at least a dozen different vendors come through the area, about six of them returning frequently enough for me to recognize their vehicles.

The independence of each vendor (or vendor team) aligned with the apparent chaos in the timing of their visits. I observed more vendor visits on Monday through Thursday than I did on Saturdays and Sundays, but the pattern was difficult to see. One Friday in late February, I came home to see Dulce sitting anxiously on the porch, 200 DOP crumpled in her hand as she watched and listened for a produce vendor.

When I asked her what was wrong, she exclaimed, “Ni uno ha llega’o. Y tú sabe, mañana es sábado y no puedo cocinar ese día y tampoco puedo comprar. Ojalá que vengan el domingo. [Not even one vendor has come today. And tomorrow is Saturday, so I cannot cook or buy anything. I hope they come Sunday.]” Seeing my worried expression, she went on to explain that normally there were fewer vendors on Fridays, but usually one would come through and she would be able to make sure everything was

---

<sup>38</sup> The household is “awake” when the front door is open. Rosa starts waking people up around 6am, but the front door was usually left closed until everyone had eaten breakfast and/or had coffee.

prepared for Saturday's meal. The vendors that week had all arrived around 11am, as she was entering a critical time in food preparation when she could not leave the kitchen unattended. Even when she could hear the vendors over the sounds of the *fogón*, Dulce could not get from the back of the house to the front in time to catch their eye. Luz's father had passed away the week before. In the nine days that followed, she spent most of the day in her father's home, grieving with that part of her family. Dulce, Daniel, and I stepped in to supervise Rosa and Blanca, shifting the household labor dynamics to accommodate Luz's absence and Rosa's distress<sup>39</sup>.

Dulce and I had already discovered that the vendors' demeanor changed if I was with her when she bought produce. We walked away from those interactions having spent more and bought more than she planned. My presence seemed to inspire the vendors to become more aggressive in their marketing tactics, which Dulce struggled to challenge. Even though it had been five years since Francisco's death, Dulce was still insecure in her role as a customer. I was no help, lacking not only the knowledge of proper pricing but also having little idea of the needs of the household. From my perch on the porch, I experienced mild harassment from vendors, so I was reluctant to approach any vendors without another person present. Dulce was reluctant to let me, especially given the household's tenuous financial state and the likelihood that I would be over-charged.

This perfect storm of poor timing from the vendors and lack of qualified support from available members of the household made it impossible for Dulce to meet her own expectations for her role as the family food resource. Her distress at the situation was made more acute by her evolving religious commitments.

---

<sup>39</sup> Luz's day-time absence was a major change in Rosa's routine, turning the feisty, adventurous 14-month-old into a worried, micro-manager.

Between 2007 and 2017, Dulce lost at least six close family members, including two sisters, her husband, her eldest son, and her eldest grandson. She has been grieving for as long as I have known her. That grief produced a crisis in faith and a change in her religious practices, as it has for many others in the DR (Thornton, 2016). Dulce decided to begin attending an Adventist church nearby with Nestor, Teresa, and a few other members of the extended family who had already transitioned from the nominally Catholic practices they grew up with to a more active, Pentecostal faith. Nestor and Benny (Luz's brother) were the first in the family to convert, and Benny's active participation in the church had made it more popular in the surrounding area. Already a member of the church, Luz's relocation back to La Esquina furthered Dulce's change in faith practices, the two of them supporting one another in overcoming Dulce's ultimate challenge: proper observation of the Sabbath. Saturdays are dedicated to rest and reflection in the Adventist Church, which meant Dulce needed to find a way to cook for the family without spending the morning of the Sabbath laboring in the kitchen.

In previous weeks, Daniel had taken over preparing the Friday evening meal for the family, boiling *yuca* and distributing bowls of it topped with onion vinaigrette to everyone in the household. Meanwhile, Dulce prepared rice and beans to be reheated the next day, and Luz prepared boiled squash or eggplant as a side dish. The next day, if anyone wanted animal protein with the meal, Teresa and Lidia fried eggs, saving their mother from breaking her commitment to observing the Sabbath. With Luz grieving the loss of her father with her extended family, Dulce lost the only other person in the household who was qualified to either purchase F&V from the vendors or help cook the family meal. The hitch in our routine resulted in a Saturday meal that was blander than

usual, as Dulce rationed out cilantro, garlic, and onions to ensure there was enough to make it until the next vendor came through.

### Mobility, Gender, and Generation: Competition for the Vendors

While it may appear to be the case, Dulce's household is not completely dependent on the mobile vendors for fresh produce. They are by far the most consistent (albeit unpredictable) resource of fresh fruits and vegetables in La Esquina and the surrounding communities, but even home-bound women like Dulce, whose adherence to the gender roles of their generation not only keeps them at home but keeps them from learning to drive motorcycles or cars, have strategies for accessing food that compete with the produce vendors apparent monopsony. Chief among them is reliance on kin networks, the power of which has been greatly expanded by changes in gender norms and economic opportunities for women in the last thirty years.

As the oldest female in her generation of the family, Lidia paved the way for her sister and her cousins to far exceed what was expected of them growing up in La Esquina (see Figure 16). Now in her early 50s, Lidia's outgoing personality and sense of adventure led her to follow Daniel to Sosua after he moved there to work in the 1990s. There she met her first husband and raised three sons, acting as another anchor for the family to access resources in Sosua. Teresa moved to Sosua as a teenager and took an active role in helping to raise her nephews. She also gained access to a better education.

In the 1990s, schools were fewer and farther apart in the *campo*, requiring students to travel long distances and halting their educational attainment at eighth grade. Attending high school required immense resources to get to school in Cabrera, the costs of transportation prohibitive to most families. Sending Teresa to live with Lidia and

Daniel in Sosúa put her in walking distance to some of the best private schools in the country and bypassed the barrier posed by transportation. Teresa was pursuing her law degree when she met her husband, finishing the last of her coursework as a part-time student while she also started a family and set up a law practice in Cabrera.

Teresa and Lidia are significantly more mobile than their mother. Both know how to drive and while Lidia prefers to zip around the municipality on her scooter, Teresa's position as a lawyer requires the storage space of a small sedan to move her and any required documents back and forth between Cabrera, Nagua, and appointments with clients. Teresa uses her mobility and the storage space in her car to access supermarkets in Cabrera and beyond, often purchasing goods on Dulce's behalf, just like Francisco used to. Dry goods and household staples are less expensive at the supermarkets in Cabrera than they are at the *colmados* in La Esquina, but transportation costs continue to be prohibitive for those who do not own private vehicles. Even if Jorge provided transportation for free<sup>40</sup>, it is much more efficient for Teresa to do the shopping for Dulce, especially because she is already in Cabrera for business and has a better grasp of household needs.

Teresa rarely brings fresh produce to Dulce because the prices at the supermarkets are the same or higher than the mobile vendors' prices. Recall, the prices are set at the market in Nagua, which means any changes in price are (theoretically) due to the overhead costs of the vendor. While supermarkets and mobile vendors both pay for

---

<sup>40</sup> He is reluctant to provide free rides, even for Dulce or his sisters. He provided me with free transportation "down the hill" to la *pista* every Friday because he was already on his way to work, and the rest of the family pressured him into it. I paid regular price to come up the hill and I was expected to prefer riding with him instead of riding with other *motoconchos*. Jorge is an expert at dodging Dulce's infrequent requests for transportation or help around the house.

transportation, supermarkets also pay for rent, refrigeration, and employee wages. The next chapter will offer a more detailed description of Cabrera's supermarkets, but it is safe to say that the mobile vendors are slightly more cost-effective fresh produce resources. Case in point: Teresa has an agreement with one vendor to make sure that he drives in front of her house on Fridays, when she works from her home on the coastal highway.

Despite spending a significant portion of her formative years in Sosua, where the influence of expats and Dominican ideals of cosmopolitanism hold sway over education and business dealings, Teresa has stubbornly clung to home and the *campo*. The closet in my room in Dulce's house is full of clothes and shoes that Teresa has left behind on her weekend visits; a mix of fancy suits and dresses, stiletto heels and accessories, haphazardly hung and stacked in the small space. Like many women around the world, Teresa immediately changes into more comfortable clothing when she arrives home – even when it's her mother's home instead of her own. One afternoon, as Teresa scrambled to leave for a meeting after the midday meal, I realized that none of these clothes were deliberately left behind. After gathering her things, downing a cup of coffee, and hurrying down to her car, she drove off without her shoes. Dulce, Lidia, and I were sitting on the porch when I noticed the black stiletto heels sitting by the door to Dulce's bedroom.

“Se fue sin zapatos? [She left without her shoes?]” I laughed. Lidia rolled her eyes and dropped her face into her hands before popping back up and throwing her hands in the air, “No entiendo como una abogada puede ser tan desorganizada [I do not understand how a lawyer can be so disorganized]” before launching into stories of

Teresa's forgetfulness. Dulce chuckled, shook her head, and sat back in her chair to listen, doing her best to stay neutral. A few minutes later, we all turned at the sound of staggering steps; Rosa had found a new pair of shoes to play with, undeterred by the height of the heels she was stepping into (and out of) with her tiny feet. A few moments later, Blanca and Luz joined us on the porch, Rosa trapped in Luz's arms as Blanca tried on Teresa shoes. As 14-year-old Blanca stood and did her best imitation of a model walk through the living room, Rosa sulked, Luz and Dulce shook their heads, and Lidia cheered.

Lidia's time in Sosua (20+ years) shaped her into an industrious businesswoman with an appreciation for organization and punctuality. She re-located to La Entrada from Sosua in 2016, after a traffic accident and grief made it difficult for her to be so far from family. She has struggled with shifting back to the slower pace of life in Municipio Cabrera, often expressing frustration with practices that she describes as backward. She keeps herself busy and connected to the community through her work as the chicken supplier for restaurants and *comedores* in La Entrada and the surrounding rural areas.

While I was in La Esquina, Lidia often arrived at the family compound in the morning with a plastic bag containing a plucked chicken carcass, leaving it in the kitchen sink before walking back to the patio to greet everyone. After consulting with Dulce, Lidia returned to the indoor kitchen to butcher the chicken using a machete. Some of the parts went directly to Dulce for that day's midday meal, while the rest was stored or thrown into the bucket for pig slop. One Sunday afternoon in April, as Lidia gave me a *bola* down to the *pista*, I asked Lidia about how the chicken business (the *pollera*) works:

"Vienen dos veces por semana para entregar el pollo. Les mantengo yo hasta que alguien les compra, y los alimentos son muy caros. También, por los precios de la pandemia, la gente no quiere comprar de la pollera, entonces me quedo con mucho pollo que no puedo mantener ni vender [They deliver chicken twice a week. I maintain them until someone buys them, and the chicken feed is very expensive. Also, with the pandemic prices, people do not want to buy from the *pollera*, so I am stuck with a lot of chicken that I cannot maintain or sell]", she replied.

"Y de dónde viene el pollo? [Where does the chicken come from?]", I asked. "Bueno, hay cuatro granjas en Cabrera, pero son caras, entonces el pollo que vendo yo, viene de Moca<sup>41</sup> [Well, there are four chicken farms in Cabrera, but they are expensive, so the chicken I sell comes from Moca]." Lidia informed me, completely reshaping my mental map of Cabrera's foodscape. I had no idea there were four industrial chicken houses in the Municipio.

"Y son criollos o gringos? [Are they *criollos* or *gringos*?]", I asked, grinning because I was pretty sure I knew the answer.

Lidia laughed. "No, no, ¡todos son gringos! La gente no quiere gallina, aunque comerlos es mejor para la salud y mantenerlos es más fácil. Solo quieren el pollo industrial. [No, no, it's all gringos! People don't want hens, even though eating them is better for health and maintaining them is easier. They only want industrial chickens]."

As we were having this conversation, I was thinking back to Robin Derby's work on Dominican nationalism and food in the early 1990's. In her work, she outlines how lingering concerns over Dominican sovereignty in the face of commodity flows driven

---

<sup>41</sup> Moca is a medium-sized city and a secondary agricultural hub near Santiago de los Caballeros.

by the US manifested into sensationalist stories of industrial (*gringo*) chickens being infested with worms (Derby, 1998). They are (still) called *gringo*<sup>42</sup> chickens because of their association with the US and the industrial food system; their plumage also happens to be completely white. Consumption of *criollo* chickens<sup>43</sup> in the early 1990's was an act of Dominican nationalism; a way of resisting US control over individual and household food provisioning (Derby, 1998). Less than two generations later, local tastes have shifted away from this nationalist ideal, likely due to the broader economic shift from agriculture to the service sectors, and population shifts from rural to urban. Teachers, lawyers, doctors, and *motoconchos* do not have time to raise chickens, and urban environments present significant barriers to household food production. Unlike her daughters, Dulce has the space and time to produce some of her own food.

### Kitchen Strategies

Like many of her neighbors, Dulce tries to supplement the household's food supply with foods grown in the yard. After Francisco's death, she and Daniel raised pigs in the yard beyond the patio and the kitchens. Daniel has since moved the pigs to the family farm, where he collaborates with several other farmers to feed and care for their combined assets. The empty sty is now a receptacle for farm supplies, tools, and trash.

---

<sup>42</sup> To call an expat a *gringo* is to label them as a complete outsider, and if the expat accepts the label, it means they do not understand or care that it is an insult. Expats with more time spent in the DR and/or closer ties to the community know to push back against the label of *gringo* and demand they be called *rubio* (a more polite term for light-complected people) or by their national origin. Calling an expat a *gringo* is not a polite thing to do, so in my experiences, the label has been lobbed at me by young children who think they're funny and men trying to get my attention – sometimes it's sexual harassment, sometimes it's helpful, I never know unless I respond. After some trial and error, I've learned that the most effective response is holler back with "No soy un pollo! [I am not a chicken!]" There is more subtext to this response, because *pollo* refers to chicken that is eaten, not the chicken running around in the yard – that is a *gallina* (hen) or *gallo* (rooster). I choose to say *pollo* because it usually makes people laugh (diffusing any tension) and it critiques the instigator for treating me like a piece of meat.

<sup>43</sup> the smaller, multicolored chickens produced by rural and peri-urban households



*Figure 22. The sty behind the family compound once held pigs. Now it stores everything from construction materials to discarded containers and clothing. Several fruit trees grow around the sty. (Source: Author 2021)*

One afternoon I stepped into the outdoor kitchen as Dulce was scraping ashes out of the *fogón*, a yellow gourd resting on a recently cleared cement block, its leaves curled and wilted. I asked Dulce about it:

“Sí, es una berenjena. Lo planté allí en el patio y creció bien, pero los vecinos echaron químico en su patio y se me murió la berenjena. Voy a ver si la semilla sirve, que ya tu sabe, trato de sembrar todo lo que puedo [ Yes, it is an eggplant. I planted it there in our yard and it grew well, but the neighbors put out chemicals in their yard and it killed the eggplant. I am going to see if the seeds are still good, because you know I like to plant whatever I can].” She rambled, scraping ashes, and looking at the yellow eggplant sadly. She continued:

“Cuando era niña, todo el mundo trabajaba en la finca. Siempre estábamos sembrando y cosechando cuando vivíamos allá en la finca. Después, cuando vivimos aquí, seguimos sembrando y cosechando, pero la gente del gobierno, ellos nos enseñaron

hacerlo diferente. Ahora es todo químico y los granjeros usan motores en vez de caminar, y no necesitan mano de obra para cosechar. Dime, ¿qué pasa a la mano de obra? ¿Como esa gente van a cuidar de sus familias sin ese trabajo? [When I was a girl, everyone worked on the farm. We were always planting and harvesting when we lived there on the farm. After, when we lived here, we continued to plant and harvest, but the people from the government taught us to do it differently. Now it's all chemicals and the farmers use motorcycles instead of walking, and they do not need manual labor to harvest. Tell me, what happens to the manual laborers? How are those people going to take care of their families without working?]"

And so began one of the longest conversations Dulce and I have ever had about food production and consumption. She explained that, in recent years, the “government agents” had changed their strategies, giving out more information about how to control pests without pesticides and encouraging people to save seeds. Luz joined in, the passion for plants that drove her to become a science teacher coming into the conversation as we began a slow tour around the family compound. While the eggplant vine had succumbed to the neighbor’s indiscriminate use of herbicide, the pigeon pea plants and bitter orange trees on the side of Dulce’s house were still bearing fruit every three to four months; the cashew fruit and breadfruit trees beyond the patio were beginning to produce again; the *branberi*<sup>44</sup> tree in the front yard was blooming; and the medicinal plants strategically planted around Dulce’s impressive collection of orchids continued to provide relief from the cough that never seemed to leave us. Dulce pruned plants and pulled weeds from the patio and the front yard as we walked, and Luz took over the conversation.

---

<sup>44</sup> I do not know the official name of this plant, but it also appears in an appendix of my undergraduate thesis (S. R. Barr, 2015). I think it might be related to a hackberry tree. The fruit is delicious.



*Figure 23. Over time, Dulce and her family have cultivated a collection of fruit trees (papaya, branberi, avocado), herbs, and ornamental plants in their front yard (Source: Author 2021)*

“Gracias a Dios por esa finca allí, que ya tienen todo listo para vender. Los dueños decidieron sembrar algo para vender a la comunidad porque el transporte es tan caro, no vale mandarlo a Nagua o Santiago [Thank God for that farm over there, that they almost have everything ready to sell. The owners decided to plant something to sell to the community because transportation is so expensive, it’s not worth it to send the harvest to Nagua or Santiago].” Dulce mumbled her agreement and when I asked Luz about the location of the farm, she pointed down the road.

A few days later, Dulce disappeared while I was grading online assignments. I looked up at the sound of her dropping a large bag of produce on the counter in the kitchen with a satisfied huff. I got up from where I was sitting to grab my phone and take a picture of the haul which was easily double the size of what she could usually purchase from the mobile vendors for the same 200 DOP. She was particularly proud of the cilantro:



*Figure 24. Cilantro, eggplants, and cabbages purchased from a local farm on March 11, 2021 (Source: Author 2021)*

“Esto se llaman ‘tierra colora’o’ [This is what they call ‘red dirt’]” she said, proudly pointing to the rusty red roots on the pungent pile of cilantro on the counter, “Significa que es de aquí, y huele y sabe mejor. Ese cilantro americano no sabe na’a! [It means that it’s from here, and it smells and tastes better. That American cilantro has no taste!]” She chuckled. I laughed in agreement, knowing that I had never smelled cilantro as pungent as the pile on the counter. I helped Dulce arrange and store the vegetables before we each went back to our respective morning tasks.

Later that day, I saw other women from La Esquina walking down to the farm and coming back with arms full of produce, proud smiles on their faces. The opportunity to purchase food from people they knew at prices they could afford empowering them at a time when so much of the world was outside of their control. Over the next week, none of the vendors who came through La Esquina were stopped by a customer who wanted to buy from them; the audio of their advertisements never paused as they drove through the

community. The next week, fewer vendors came through. The week after that, the farm finally ran out of produce, but the vendors were still fewer than usual. It took another week or two for the vendors to come back through in their usual numbers.

### Leaving La Esquina

On the morning of April 1, 2021, I hugged Dulce and Luz and waved goodbye to Rosa and Blanca before climbing onto the back of Jorge's motorcycle to ride down to the *pista* with my luggage. Anxious to get to Cabrera in time to meet Sunshine to get the key to Rain's house, my mind was spinning with the information I had learned during the first phase of my dissertation fieldwork. I left with a much deeper appreciation for the complexity of food access.

This chapter has provided a snapshot into that complexity, particularly as it pertains to the influence of changing social norms on gender and mobility in the Dominican Republic. Aside from strict social and logistic limitations, which impose order on who can access food and how, food access in rural areas is relatively chaotic. Dulce's household relies on a combination of food grown on land the family owns, direct retail purchases from vendors and other farms nearby, contributions from family members (grown or purchased), and during the pandemic, government assistance. While government assistance and home-grown food follow regular patterns of availability, retail and kinship-based food access relies on the instincts of a third party. Teresa and Lidia's instincts are aided by frequent contact with their mother in her kitchen, their mobility, and their economic and social positions as professional women. Vendors instincts are supported by the relative immobility of customers, vendors' experiences selling fresh produce in the area, and a mix of national, regional, and local rumors about supply and

demand. The relative mobility of vendor and consumer is highly gendered in rural areas of the Dominican Republic where, less than thirty years ago, social and economic avenues that women could use to advance were rare.

It is important to remember, that while the difference in mobility between Dulce and her daughters is dramatic, the difference in social and economic mobility between her late husband Francisco and her son Jorge is negligible. Similarly, the economic and educational outcomes for men have not increased to the same degree that they have for women over the last generation or so, leaving many men economically and socially stagnant while women make dramatic changes.

In these dynamics, I see echoes of the circumstances that produced *la normalista* and *el tíguere* in the late 1800's (see Chapter 2). The push for a cosmopolitan Dominican identity and an urban, service-oriented economy is accompanied by the model of *la normalista*. Lidia, Teresa, and Luz each embody dimensions of the *normalista* archetype of the educated, morally upstanding woman. Their physical and emotional attachment to La Esquina is, to some degree, a proxy measure for the extent to which they have succumbed to the cosmopolitan views of urban centers, which frame rural populations as ignorant and backward (Carruyo, 2007; Mayes, 2014). Whereas Lidia rejects much of her rural roots, Luz embraces them not only by staying in her family home, but by working closely with Dulce to cultivate and prepare food for the family. Teresa is caught in the middle, exhausted by trying to maintain a grip on the lifestyle of the *campo* and contribute to broader society as a lawyer.

Xiomara, the youngest of her generation in the family, has been so thoroughly influenced by the cosmopolitan values of *la normalista*, improved access to education,

exposure to television and social media, and the success of her older cousins that she has not learned the food preparation and acquisition skills around which her Aunt Dulce's life revolves. Luz worries about her daughters Blanca and Rosa becoming similarly deskilled and encourages both to spend time in the kitchen while food is being prepared. The fate of youth was a popular topic of conversation in both phases of fieldwork, which I will address in my concluding chapter.

Lidia and Teresa worry about their sons and the apparent stagnation of Dominican men, who have little choice but to move to urban areas and embody the archetype of *el tíguere* or to go abroad. Their uncle Daniel was pivotal in improving their access to resources by moving to Sosua and working in the 1990's and 2000's, but he has ultimately returned to the *campo* and the way of life he grew up with. Both of their brothers and one of their cousins migrated to major cities. Their eldest brother was killed in a motorcycle accident in 2007; Jorge and Benny each returned home after experiencing violence. After years of struggling, Benny found religion to cope with his traumas; Jorge has struggled with substance abuse for decades. As mothers of young men, one of whom has already been lost in a motorcycle accident, Lidia and Teresa are perpetually concerned for their sons' futures and the continued integrity of the family unit.

Dulce holds the family together with food, and this chapter showcases the multiple strategies she uses to access food. Tradition and limited formal knowledge hold Dulce in place, where she comfortably fulfills her role as the primary food resource for the family. Changing gender norms and pressures to become more cosmopolitan have dropped many of the boundaries that contained Dulce's generation of women, and applied pressures to push Lidia, Teresa, and Luz out of the home and into the world.

They play pivotal roles in supporting Dulce's status as a food resource for the family, even as they negotiate the gendered expectations of their role as food providers in their own homes and communities.

## Chapter 7: Urban Identities and Food Access in Cabrera



*Figure 25. The main seating area at Leo and Mari's restaurant wraps around the kitchen, cashier's station, and a smaller indoor seating section. Clear tarps between each of the green posts can be rolled down to block wind and rain. Bamboo centerpieces keep the beer cold, and plastic tables are often combined to seat larger groups. (Source: author)*

A Dominican lawyer, an artist, a retired Swiss fixer, an Italian landlord, a criminal defense attorney, a married couple from Oklahoma, three U.S. military veterans, and six teachers sit around a plastic table drinking after a long day of work. It sounds like the start of an interesting joke, but it's a typical Tuesday afternoon at Leo and Mari's restaurant in 2021. We are occasionally joined by Greta, a French-Canadian locksmith, a few different Playa Grande Project employees from around the world, and/or local elected officials, but this core group of 10-12 people<sup>45</sup>, which Pilar affectionately refers to as our "Collection of Misfits", sustained Leo and Mari's family restaurant through the pandemic. Until May 2021, Mari and Leo were living in an apartment at the back of the restaurant, along with a few of their family members. With the pandemic causing school closures, restricting business hours, and reducing the number of customers, much of the

---

<sup>45</sup> For those of you trying to reconcile the math, most of the U.S veterans at the table have moved on to other careers, including teaching.

“front of house”<sup>46</sup> began to look more like “home” as Mari’s grandchildren essentially took over the space for most of the day.

While most of the expats included in the Misfits belong to the AIC/Faro generation, each having spent less than five years in the Dominican Republic, our cumulative time in the DR approaches the century mark thanks to the landlord and the retired fixer, who have been conducting business in the DR since the mid-1980s. None of us completely fit the profile of lifestyle migrants that have trickled into the area because of the Orchid Bay generation, building homes in the foothills and developing their own pocket communities (Hayes, 2018). Nor do any of us fit in with the recent wave of upper-middle class remote workers from North America and Europe that began to fill some of the villas nearby. Most of us are politically outspoken and peripherally attached to the local Dominican community and at least one expat group, a collection of intermediaries who prefer debates and discussions over the group-thinking tendencies of some of the local expat communities. Conversation around the table ranged from decolonial theories and personal accounts of political hijinks in the Dominican Republic to practical discussions of navigating immigration and local infrastructure – as well as our fair share of nonsense<sup>47</sup>.

“How can it be east!?! It’s the North Atlantic!” Pilar exclaimed, slamming her glass down on the plastic table and glaring playfully at Travis, a fellow teacher.

---

<sup>50</sup> “Front of house” is restaurant lingo for the dining and reception areas of a restaurant. “Back of house” refers to the kitchen and staff meeting areas.

<sup>47</sup> The following conversations took place on different days in April 2021 and are paraphrased. Some conversations and incidents occurred multiple times. I have threaded them together in an order that furthers the narrative of this chapter.

Travis tapped a few icons on his smartphone and then held it up so that Pilar could see his compass app. “I’m not making this up! The water is *east* of here. North is *that way!*” he laughed, gesturing down the *malecón*<sup>48</sup>.

Pilar glared at the image of the compass on Travis’s phone. “It lies. I’ve spent my entire life on this island, learning that the North Atlantic is north of here. Decades in Sosúa, on the north coast, and the North Atlantic was to the north. And then I move here, and nothing makes sense anymore. I will never understand this town!” she lamented, throwing her hands in the air dramatically before covering her face and feigning grief.

I nodded at the half-empty glass of rum and cola in front of her and asked, “Did you eat any of the lunch at school today?”

Pilar dropped her dramatics at my subject change, “No! The chef must be angry with us. Or maybe she misses having students around. Either way, I cannot stomach another plate of overcooked pasta.” Travis grunted in agreement. Pilar finally noticed my pointed glances at her glass. “Oh, good point. Where’s Leo?!” she yelled, turning towards the kitchen of the restaurant. She paused, tilting her head to the side. Travis burst out laughing as he noticed the issue.

“ALONDRA!” Pilar shouted, causing the rest of us to turn and watch as the chestnut mare backed out of the kitchen and into the yard separating the restaurant from the cliffs. As Alondra exited the kitchen, Leo emerged, clapping his hands, and making shooing motions, resigned to the chaos. Leo turned to make his way over to Pilar, only to have his progress interrupted by his granddaughters, who sped past him toward the *malecón* where a group of women gathered for the community Zumba class – the only

---

<sup>48</sup> Translation: Boardwalk

sanctioned community social activity allowed since the onset of the pandemic. Leo smiled indulgently, shook his head, and continued over to the table. As Pilar ordered food, most of the men at the table turned their chairs to watch the class warm up. Leo returned to the kitchen and conversation died as the class began. Janice shook her head and leaned over to speak to me from her end of the table.

“It is objectively creepy that they do this every day,” she gestured to the men, “but there’s really nothing else to do. Well, except drink.” She snorted before taking a sip from her glass. After a few moments, she turned to me again and asked, “Are you gonna put the horse in your dissertation? By the way, how’s your project?”

“Oh yeah, the horse, the Zumba class, North being East, it’s all part of Cabrera’s special kind of chaos.” I laughed, “Right now, I’m reviewing all my data from La Esquina and coming up with a data collection plan for research here in Cabrera. I need to do some observations at each of the local supermarkets, and I’ll be making a trip to Sosua soon, but food access can happen anywhere at any time, it’s just a question of how, so I’m pretty much always in observation mode.”

“What do you mean ‘how’?” Janice asked, curious.

“Have you ever thought about how you shop for food? How you make decisions about where to shop, what to buy, and how much things should cost? All those decisions impact patterns of food access.”

Janice sipped her drink in thought, greeting Charlie as he ambled over from paying their tab at Mari’s bar/cashier station. “Hey, we’re talking about Susie’s project.”

“Oh yeah? Something about food, right? By the way, you got change?” Charlie asked.

I nodded, digging the bag of coins I use to navigate public transportation from the bottom of my purse and swapping the bill he held out for the correct assortment of coins. For a moment, I considered the best way to explain my project to Charlie, whose artistic expertise has not exposed him to food literature.

“Have you heard of food deserts?” I asked.

Charlie nodded, “Yeah, my hometown is a food desert. Everybody’s all up-in-arms about it, all these projects trying to come up with solutions and stuff.”

“Okay, you’ve seen the trucks that go around and sell produce? They go through the rural areas, and one even stops here at Leo and Mari’s a couple times each week.” He nodded again. “Alright. Why don’t they have that in your hometown?”, I asked.

Charlie’s jaw dropped, “Well, damn. I just figured it’s because we’re Black.”

Janice laughed, “Oh, it is, sweetie. Redlining isn’t just about housing.” Within minutes Charlie was overwhelmed with recommendations for books, films, and websites on alternative food networks in Black communities, as Janice and I discussed our knowledge on the topic. At a pause in the conversation, he excused himself from the table, typing search terms into his smartphone and pulling a cigarette and a lighter from his pocket.

“Oops, scared him off again.” Janice chuckled good naturedly. “I hadn’t really thought about how what I do is impacted by the broader picture. Now I’m thinking about how I used to shop when my boys were little.” She paused and I nodded to show I was listening. “I’d just left the service, I was in school, my husband was deep into his dissertation, and money was tight. I used to plan grocery shopping like it was a tactical

assault – what’s the cheapest meat, what veggies and starches go with it, comparing price per ounce... I used to spend *hours* at the supermarket each week. Now I don’t even look at the price. Especially here, because most things are cheaper, and I know I have enough money. That reminds me, I’ve got to start teaching my boys how to budget. They’ve grown up very differently than I did. They don’t remember money being tight, but they need those skills just like everyone else.”

Janice fell quiet, the mention of her late husband and how life used to be igniting her grief. Despite the passage of years and finding a new partner, Janice still struggled with her loss, finding solidarity in her friendship with Pilar, who is also a widow. Having sat quietly next to me, eating her dinner, and listening to the conversation, Pilar caught the sudden silence and jumped in to break it before it could settle into sadness.

“I’ve been saying for years that we need a financial literacy course at Faro.”

That caught the attention of Travis and several others at the table, igniting a vigorous discussion as the Zumba class ended. None of us moved as the restaurant staff began to stack chairs and wipe down tables in preparation for curfew, which was supposed to halt in-person dining. As we continued to linger during the official “transit time” that followed curfew, Leo emerged from the kitchen to shoo us away from the table, waving at all of us as we climbed into our vehicles and drove back to our residences. Pilar dropped me off at my house, where I recorded fieldnotes and thought about the impacts of socio-economic status on food access.

This chapter will highlight the impact of class identity on food access in Cabrera. Class itself is a complicated category, and in the context of Cabrera, it cuts across divisions by gender, socio-economic status, and nationality, creating a mosaic of

performed identities better understood through the way food resources accommodate them. The first group of food resources consists of *colmados*, fresh markets, and street vendors, which represent a Cabreran identity that straddles the rural-urban divide and emphasizes belonging and personal connections over efficiency and prestige. My introduction to these food resources was facilitated by Alicen, whose quest to integrate herself with the Dominican community in Cabrera drove many of her practices and decisions while she lived there from late 2015 to mid-2018. The second group includes Cabrera's supermarkets and food resources further afield, each of which have tailored themselves to fit the needs and capacities of their customers. The use of supermarkets is closely tied to private vehicle ownership and the quest for specific food products.

As discussed in the previous chapter, I had no food-related agency in La Esquina because Dulce bore the burden of feeding me and everyone else in the family.

Transitioning back to having full responsibility for my own food decisions was often comical, as my intense *theoretical* study of food access behaviors sometimes triggered anxiety around the *practical* execution of feeding myself. It took over a week for me to fall into a regular pattern and to appreciate having control over my own food again. When I transitioned from volunteering at Faro twice a week to volunteering every weekday, my food access patterns changed again, exposing another set of factors influencing food access, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

#### Accessing Food “like a Dominican”

The balance of identifying between “tourist”, “expat”, “Cabreran”, and Dominican is one that everyone in the Collection of Misfits has struggled with during their time in Cabrera. As discussed in Chapter 4, my position has never quite fit into a

clean category because of my affiliation with Faro and my history in La Esquina. It was Alicen who first drew my attention to the food access habits of different groups in Cabrera in 2016, shortly after she'd moved there from the *campo*. Determined to reproduce the hard-won sense of belonging she developed after two years of living in La Esquina, Alicen took deliberate steps to be perceived as part of Cabrera's Dominican community. She was committed to spending time with her Dominican colleagues instead of with expat teachers from The Esperanza Project, integrating into Dominican-led community groups, and eschewing many of the modern conveniences that she associated with "expat-ness" – like back-up power and English-language music. Alicen shopped at *colmados* and *mercados* instead of supermarkets; she used public transportation and *motoconchos* on her daily commute, lived in a traditional "*campo*-style" house in the middle of town, and purposefully came up short a few times when buying food at the *colmado* to make it abundantly clear to the ever-present gossip network of this small town that she was not "some rich white girl" from the U.S.

When I stayed with Alicen in 2017, she had relaxed her stance on shopping at *colmados* and *mercados* for several reasons. Firstly, her responsibilities at Faro had increased as she became an administrator as well as a teacher, and she no longer had time to cook meals. During the week, we would subsist off the meals served at Faro, and then buy dinner from a street food vendor in Cabrera's Park. One vendor, who sells a collection of fried foods including chicken croquettes, *quipe*<sup>49</sup>, and stuffed sweet plantains from a shallow plastic bin strapped to the back of his bright red scooter, figured

---

<sup>49</sup> A Dominican dish of Arabic origin; a fried ball of seasoned bulgur wheat stuffed with cheese and/or meat served with ketchup and/or grease to maintain moisture

out our daily schedule while I was there in 2017. He began to appear in front of Alicen's house between 5:30pm and 6pm most weekday evenings, knowing that neither of us had the energy to cook. His diligence paid off when the counselors for our summer camps arrived, increasing the number of potential customers in Alicen's house from two to eight. On weekends, Alicen would return to the shopping and cooking habits she had learned in the *campo*, purchasing ingredients from the *colmado* in small quantities so that they wouldn't spoil during the week. At the start of each academic year, she used her weekends to prepare meals for the week to save money, but by October or November, she gave up on trying to remember to reheat food from her refrigerator during the week.

Secondly, underlying the practical aspects of food access as a busy professional, was a shift in Alicen's understanding of Dominican identity brought on by frequent debates with Pilar. Alicen's perception of *dominicanidad* was profoundly shaped by her experiences in the *campo* and its parallels to the "country" or "small town" lifestyles that she experienced growing up in southeast Texas. Pilar's upbringing in upper-middle class Santo Domingo in the 1960s and 70s, and her experiences as a working professional in Sosua, were steeped in cosmopolitanism and Dominican nationalism. I would watch them go back and forth for hours as they challenged each other, listening to the way the legacies of anti-rural rhetoric, developmentalism, anti-black racism, and colonialism from their different upbringings influenced their perspectives and communication strategies. I learned from them as they learned from one another.

Pilar's negative reactions to the inclusion of *campo* habits as part of *dominicanidad* began to make more sense to me as I had more interactions with other expats and with the Dominican middle-class professionals that make up most of

Cabrera's population. Many expats in Cabrera have a habit of attributing negative experiences with social and physical infrastructure to *dominicanidad*. For example, when Travis got into a major car accident in 2018, several of our mutual (expat) friends complained about the reckless way Dominicans drive. Then they complained about the healthcare and transportation systems, completely ignoring the fleet of concerned Dominicans (mostly parents of Travis's students) who were arranging transportation and medical visits on Travis's behalf. Worse, they were not only making these complaints to me – they were making them to Pilar, her near-perfect command of the English language making them view her as less (or not) Dominican, which she found insulting.

While Pilar was willing to concede that perhaps being *campesino* was not as closely linked to backwardness and lack of education as she had been raised to believe, she played an active role in ensuring that Alicen (and I) incorporated modern, cosmopolitan *dominicanidad* into our imaginaries of being “like a Dominican”. In terms of food access, while shopping at *colmados* and purchasing certain street foods are certainly stereotypes associated with *dominicanidad*, it only takes a few trips to Cabrera's supermarkets to realize that food resource selection is not so much a matter of *dominicanidad* vs expat-ness as it is a matter of socio-economic status and taste preferences.

### Supermarket Identities

Three of Cabrera's supermarkets were located within walking distance of Rain's rental home in Cabrera, the modest three-bedroom, two-bathroom house tucked between large homes with high fences and huge yards. The mobile produce vendors never passed through the neighborhood, though I could hear them as they drove down the streets just

behind my new home, where the houses were more tightly packed, yards had lower walls around them, and dogs were much smaller.

For my first trip to the supermarket, hours after arriving in Cabrera, I chose Jasly's<sup>50</sup>. It straddles the line between *colmado* and supermarket, offering a wide assortment of products and the capacity to purchase bulk orders on request, while still selling eggs and spices in small quantities. Jasly's started as a *carniceria*, and its butcher and deli hold the reputation of being the best in town. Jasly's is not fancy – aside from arranging the food into aisles, having a deli counter, and providing baskets, the store resembles a warehouse with concrete floors and poor lighting. Alicen first introduced me to the store as “the closest place that has tortillas and cheese” back when Jasly's was the only supermarket on that side of town. Salami<sup>51</sup> and cheese quesadillas were an easy snack for us to make on weekends while we waited for rice and beans to cook on Alicen's two-burner stove. I chose Jasly's as my first food resource for the same reason in 2021, the lure of a hot, two-minute meal hard to resist.

As I walked through Jasly's newly expanded store, a short list of items in my hand, I grew nervous about approaching the deli counter and requesting salami and sliced cheese. I could feel myself beginning to panic, my eyes bouncing between different bags of cereal on the shelves as I tried to remember the Spanish word for “sliced”, the name of the cheese and the brand of salami that Alicen and I used to buy, and anxiously wondered if anyone would be able to understand me (or I them) as we spoke through the masks we

---

<sup>50</sup> This observation occurred on April 1, 2021, at approximately 1pm.

<sup>51</sup> For readers who understand cured meats, I have been told that Dominican salami is more like bologna. It has no relation to “authentic” salami, though my understanding of authenticity debates around cured meats is poor.

were required to wear indoors. I decided to forgo the salami and cheese, approaching the counter with my small basket of items.

The owner-operator of Jasly's smiled at me when she recognized me, her eyes crinkling at the edges of her mask. The computer she would normally have used to scan items sat uselessly beside her as she picked up my items and typed the cost of each into a calculator without looking at the price stickers. She saw me watching her and explained that the computer system had gone out with the last power outage, and they were waiting for it to reboot. I laughed, commenting that it was a good thing she still had all the prices memorized. She shrugged and turned the calculator around to show me the total. As I dug a bill out of my wallet she placed my items into familiar yellow grocery bags – the same ones I saw Teresa arrive with whenever she bought groceries for Dulce in La Esquina. I smirked behind my mask, finally resolving the mystery of Teresa's food resource selections.

The few days later<sup>52</sup>, I went to Rebeca's in search of salami and cheese. It was my first visit to Rebeca's newest location, just across the street from Jasly's on one of Cabrera's arterial roads. Built in 2020, the new facility mimics the aesthetics of a supermarket in the Global North much more closely than Jasly's, its white tile floors and cream-colored metal shelves decorated with brightly colored advertisements and labels (Sebastian, 2021). Rebeca's local reputation is built on its ability to source high-quality fresh produce. Their original location is a traditional fresh market tucked back into one of

---

<sup>52</sup> This observation occurred on April 6, 2021, as supermarkets were closed for Holy Week celebrations.

Cabrera's wealthier neighborhoods on the other side of town<sup>53</sup>. As they grew, Rebeca's built a supermarket for dry goods and a deli right across the street from the outdoor fresh market, causing traffic congestion on the narrow roads of the neighborhood every time their suppliers arrived. As the number of cars and SUVs in Cabrera has increased over the last decade, traffic congestion in the neighborhood occurs every time a customer parks between the two halves of the business to buy what they need.

In addition to solving the traffic issue by providing a large parking lot and a loading dock, their new facility also integrated the produce section into the store. As I curiously glanced through the displays of plastic-wrapped zucchinis, eggplants, and potatoes, I was struck by the sharp contrast in the way Rebeca's chose to promote their produce at each of their locations. It was clear, this new facility was designed to appeal to customers who were more accustomed to this dirt-free, plastic-wrapped supermarket aesthetic – most of whom would not have grown up in Cabrera or the surrounding rural areas, where produce could be pulled from the ground. Plastic-wrapped vegetables are foreign to me as well, because the supermarkets in my hometown in Texas do not pre-package their fresh produce. I grew up perceiving it as a “city-thing” and the practice still strikes me as wasteful and unnecessary because, in my mind, washing fresh produce is part of preparing it. Despite their reputation and the aesthetically pleasing arrangement of food, I was not at Rebeca's for fresh produce.

Unlike Jasly's or Garcia's, Rebeca's deli counter has pre-cut cheese and salami that customers can access without talking to deli staff, adding a layer of anonymity that was more familiar to me. As I got in the line for one of the five checkout stations, I

---

<sup>53</sup> A whopping quarter mile away, it feels like a much larger distance than it is.

noticed that most of the other customers in the store appeared to be expats, while all the staff were Dominican. As I approached for my turn, the teenage cashier behind the checkout counter motioned for the man behind me to go to another line, as if my two items were going to take a lot of time to process.

I was puzzled as she scanned the items and rang up the total. The only reason I could imagine that this transaction would take a while was if she didn't have change for a large bill. Accustomed to Cabrera's cash-based economy, I usually shopped at Jasly's, Garcia's, or Rebeca's when I needed to break a large bill that *colmados* and restaurants might not have change for. To my surprise, the girl behind the counter breathed a sigh of relief at the bill in my hand, motioning for the man to come back to the line and yelling to her colleague that another checkout line would not be necessary. As she happily processed the transaction, I spotted the gold credit card in the man's hand and realized that she had been expecting both of us to pay electronically – something that would have been unheard-of just a few years ago because of the probability that electronic transactions would be interrupted by electrical outages.

As the cashier handed over my change, her colleague bagged up my groceries, tying the handles of the bag together before handing it to me. I stared at the handles of the bag as she handed it to me, the change and receipt I would normally have thrown into the bag clutched in my hand and a confused expression on my face. I slowly exited the store, puzzled and feeling as though my identity had been thoroughly misjudged. I stopped just around the corner from the entrance to the store to untie the handles, realizing that the

knot would become impossible to undo if I waited until I got home<sup>54</sup>. As I stood to leave, I watched a couple load similarly tied grocery bags into the back of an SUV from their overfull shopping cart.

That was when it clicked. I had been identified as “some rich white girl” by store staff, whose consistent interaction with wealthy clientele shaped their expectations of my needs as a shopper in their store. Most of the people shopping at Rebeca’s new location were arriving in SUVs or sedans from their homes situated in the wealthy subdivisions within Cabrera or around the municipality. Some of their clientele work for the Playa Grande Project, while others are wealthy vacationers from all over the world who have retreated to villas in the foothills nearby to get a break from the pandemic. Most of them prefer to make electronic payments, which can take a while to process if the payments are coming from an international account. Tying the handles of a grocery bag keeps the contents from spilling out of the bag when it is in the back seat of a car travelling at high speeds.

Whereas the staff at Jasly’s know me from years of past interactions, the young staff at Rebeca’s made their best judgement of me based on my physical appearance and its alignment with their usual clientele. I had come into Rebeca’s in search of the familiar, relatively anonymized experience of shopping in a supermarket in the U.S., realized how different that experience is from my typical shopping experiences in Cabrera, in which my identity has been contextualized by Alicen and/or Pilar.

---

<sup>54</sup> I reuse plastic grocery bags as trash bags, tote bags, packing material, water-proofing material, and for the occasional hair treatment. So do Dulce, Pilar, Alicen, and many other people around the world. I have seen Dominican women scold children for using (and destroying) grocery bags without permission – they are a coveted resource in some households, but not all.



Figure 26. (Left) A picture of Garcia's parking lot as Pilar and I arrived to buy groceries in May 2019. (Right) A panoramic view of Garcia's interior prior to the 2020 expansion which nearly doubled the size of the store. (Source: Author 2019)

While conducting my community assessment of Cabrera in 2016, I learned that Garcia's was the place to go in town for international goods – especially condiments, alcohol, and personal care products. Owned by a family that is split between Cabrera, DR and New Jersey, USA, Garcia's was the only place in town that carried liquor that was not rum, wine that was not La Fuerza<sup>55</sup>, deodorant that “actually works”, and a regular stock of tampons<sup>56</sup> until Rebeca's new store opened in 2020. Like Cabrera's other stores, Garcia's has also expanded recently, adding to its produce and wine sections, and expanding the capacity of its deli. Following the same aesthetic norms as Rebeca's, Garcia's still maintains a sense of interpersonal connection like Jasly's, largely because of its reputation for using its buying power as a supermarket to place specialty orders for international goods on expats' behalf. For the expats in Cabrera who relocated for jobs or to live affordably during retirement, Garcia's is a less expensive way to access the comforts of home than transporting small quantities of goods in suitcases or driving to a

---

<sup>55</sup> Imagine tart, syrupy grape juice with alcohol content. Often served with ice, Vino La Fuerza is a party staple among young people, where it is embraced for being cheap and low quality.

<sup>61</sup> Tampons have become easier to find in the DR over the last decade, but they are not the most popular feminine hygiene products. I suspect this is related to the risks associated with poor sanitation infrastructure and powerful religious norms around feminine purity.

major city to hunt for them. Garcia's stock of international products is also attractive to Cabrera's middle class Dominican families, many of whom have family members who have spent time abroad in Europe and North America, where they have developed tastes for specific products.

Prior to their expansions, Cabrera's supermarkets were maligned as "cute" by many of the expats I encountered in Cabrera. They could "get the job done" but their product offerings were considered limited, if not lacking, by most expat consumers. The recent upgrades to all three supermarkets have quieted many of these voices and challenged the local narrative that one must go out of town to find what they want.

#### Accessing Food Out of Town

The recent upgrades to Cabrera's local supermarkets have drastically reduced the amount of time that Greta spends travelling to Sosua and Santo Domingo in search of villa guests' specialty requests, but not eliminated it entirely. In 2021, one of the villas Greta manages was hosting large groups for several weeks at a time. While Greta managed the facilities and staff, Sunshine managed the group itself, directing them to resources and activities in the area. Hours before the group arrived, Sunshine was finally able to get a list of dietary restrictions and food allergies so that the kitchen staff could prepare. Greta cursed as she looked through the list Sunshine sent her via email<sup>57</sup>.

"Gluten free!?! How am I going to explain gluten free to our chef – explaining the differences between vegan and vegetarian has been hard enough! They don't pay any of us enough for this. I'm going to Playero." She announced as she gathered up her keys and her purse from the table at Mari and Leo's restaurant and stalked over to her jeep.

---

<sup>57</sup> Different variations of this situation took place several times in Spring 2021.

Everyone around the table wished her safe travels and then watched as she went through the long, complex ritual of starting the unreliable automobile.

After a few minutes, Travis got up and yelled, “Do you need us to push!?” all of us hoping that the threat alone would be enough to get the car to function properly. As a few of the other men at the table began to rise, the jeep rumbled to life. Greta waved from the drivers’ seat as she pulled away, all of us sighing in relief that she was on her way.

Greta’s jeep has needed replacing for several years, but she never seemed to have enough time to find a new one and her wages keep depreciating. Having a personal vehicle is essential for tourism management professionals, though owning and maintaining a vehicle in Cabrera’s seaside climate can be costly and time consuming. An hour after Greta left in search of gluten-free pasta, Sunshine pulled up in a shiny red sedan and hustled over to our table.

“Have you seen Greta?” she asked, out of breath.

“Yes, she left an hour ago to go to Playero to get gluten free pasta,” I answered.

“Oh good! So glad she’s on that. The guests will be here in a couple hours, and everything is crazy. Do you think she’s spoken with the staff yet? By the way, my husband will be by later to pick up those beds we left in Rain’s living room. Do you know where we left the sheets for them? There should be a couple extra sets somewhere. Oh! And I talked to Rain this morning and she said to remind you that all the sauces and stuff in the cabinets are fair game.” She paused to breath and looked at her phone. “Oh shoot! I’ve got to go switch out the rental cars. See you in a bit!” She called.

As she drove away, Travis shook his head, “She never stops, does she? Glad I rent a car from one of the shady guys every time I need to go out of town for the weekend. If

Sunshine knew about him, I'd never be able to get a car. Well, shady is not the right word. He's actually a pretty cool guy and he takes good care of the car. Susie, what's the word I'm looking for?"

"For the guy who loans you his car on the weekends for a small fee? Informal? Un-registered? Un-licensed? Actually, he may have all the right insurance and registration to let you do that, so it may not be informal or illegal, just – non-institutionalized? Shady works as long as everyone recognizes that there are degrees of shade and illegal isn't always criminal." I replied. Travis nodded thoughtfully as Pilar shook her head, covering her eyes and muttering about how the *campo* has corrupted me. I grinned at her.

Both Sunshine and Travis rent vehicles as needed to avoid the costs of maintenance and registration. Travis is willing to travel up to two hours on his motorcycle, exploring the foothills and visiting beaches, but prefers to use a car if he plans to venture further. Sunshine and her husband rely on their family pick-up truck most of the time, but when villa guests and special events require them to run errands independently, Sunshine rotates through a series of vehicles depending on her tasks and vehicle availability. For example, she uses the flashy red sedan when she knows she will have direct interactions with guests or staff at the villa, but when she needs to pick up food or floral arrangements, she rents something more utilitarian. The significant difference in wealth and income between Travis and Sunshine is apparent in their mobility habits.

Access to transportation and physical mobility are key indicators of wealth around the world, and key factors in accessing food. While Greta and Sunshine can access

Playero (a well-known international supermarket in Sosua), by private vehicle as needed, Travis would need to rent a car or take public transportation. As previously discussed, navigating public transportation in the Dominican Republic can be complicated, especially beyond the solitary transportation line that runs from Nagua to Rio San Juan. Luckily, I have been using the transfer point in Rio San Juan to access chiropractic care in Cabarete throughout my fieldwork experiences in 2018, 2019, and 2021. Cabarete is only 10 minutes east of Sosua and sits on the same transportation line. As an experiment, I chose to travel to Playero for observations using public transportation<sup>58</sup>.

My familiarity with the transfer points between Cabrera and Sosua helped me reduce the amount of time I spent waiting at the transfer point in Rio San Juan, which can last up to forty-five minutes because there is almost nothing between Rio San Juan and the next town, Gaspar Hernandez. The transportation line between Puerto Plata and Rio San Juan only sends a third of its busses past Gaspar Hernandez because the population in this area is so low that drivers cannot get enough fares. This can double the commute time from Cabrera to Sosua and complicate the return trip as the transportation syndicate tries to predict traffic and appease its drivers.

More than two hours after I got on the bus in Cabrera, I made it to Playero, which has a similar history to Cabrera's supermarkets, but has had significantly more time to mature. Sosua itself is an interesting city because it was the site where Jewish refugees from Europe were resettled by the Dominican government during WWII, starting a cultural transformation that has made Sosua more European than Dominican in many

---

<sup>58</sup> This observation was conducted on April 13, 2021.

ways (Gigliotti, 2006; Metz, 1990; Samuels, 1972). While Sosua’s Jewish heritage has largely disappeared, more recent academic literature has focused on its position as a hot spot for romance tourism and sex work driven by a constant stream of visitors from Europe and North America to nearby resorts (Padilla, Guilamo-Ramos, & Godbole, 2012; Samuels, 1972). Most residents of Cabrera cheekily agree that Sosua’s European heritage has made it one of the best sources of meat on the north coast<sup>59</sup>. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the deli section of Playero sits at the heart of the store and was surrounded by customers when I arrived.



*Figure 27. The entrance to Playero, a supermarket in Sosua, Provincia Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic (Source: Author 2021)*

While Cabrera’s supermarkets may never be able to compete against Sosua’s deli offerings - the sheer variety of cuts and cured meats putting Jasly’s offerings to shame – together they could meet 90% of the needs their diverse customers might have – at a

---

<sup>59</sup> This is a double-entendre that alludes to sex-work as well as butcher shops

significantly lower price. As I walked through Playero's aisles I realized that their reputation came with a price premium, and there must have been enough people in Sosua with the money to pay for it. I bought a pair of donuts<sup>60</sup> and sat in Playero's parking lot for half an hour, watching people come and go. Most of them had shiny, newer-model cars in a range of styles from coups to luxury SUVs. Many were dressed in cargo shorts, Hawaiian shirts, peasant blouses, and brightly patterned leggings; clearly eschewing the rigid expectations of public appearance instilled by the pageantry of the upper classes in 20<sup>th</sup> century Dominican society (Derby, 2000; Mayes, 2014). Others followed those expectations, dressing in perfectly pressed professional ensembles, the women exuding the moral and intellectual authority of *la normalista*.

As I finished my last donut, I watched a store attendant push a shopping cart piled with bags of groceries towards a parked SUV. As I watched him load the groceries into the back of her car, I realized that the cart was full-sized. I went back into the store to throw away the trash from my snack and to reassure myself that I had noticed one final difference between Playero and Cabrera's supermarkets – the aisles were wide enough for customers with full-sized shopping carts to pass each other in opposite directions without colliding. Jasly's does not have shopping carts; they have several plastic baskets, some of which have two wheels, but the classic metal shopping cart is absent from their store. Accordingly, their aisles are just wide enough for customers to pass one another. Rebeca's and Garcia's both have full-sized shopping carts, but they are so seldom used that the aisles of their stores are just over a cart-width wide.

---

<sup>60</sup> Some of the *panaderias* in Cabrera have tried to sell donuts, but few people buy them.

As I caught a bus back toward Rio San Juan, I thought about what cart size and aisle width say about the differences in the customer base for Playero and Cabrera's supermarkets. Customers need carts to hold the items they wish to purchase as they move through the store. The woman with the luxury SUV bought a large quantity of groceries, but she had a large SUV to hold them all. I, on the other hand, was very glad not to be carrying anything other than a small purse as I waited to change busses in Gaspar Hernandez – I had been unlucky in picking a bus that would not be going the full route. As the “new” bus arrived, I boarded with several other people, many of whom were carrying packages and bags like they had come from Puerto Plata's airport. Their eyes were tired but watchful above their masks, their hands gripping the handles of their bags as they tried to shift and make room as the bus was packed full. A large load of groceries (or anything else) is a lot of work on public transportation.

I thought about who from Cabrera shops at Playero. Greta goes to Playero when she needs things for the villas, but rarely shops there for herself. Rain once told me that she and Sunshine would go every few months to stock up on steaks and condiments like ketchup and mustard, which they had space to freeze or store for long periods of time. I thought about Alicen's small refrigerator and its tendency to leave left-overs freezer burnt, causing her to waste food and money regularly. Playero is clearly prepared for customers to purchase large quantities of food at once, perhaps because many of them are like Sunshine and Greta – travelling greater distances less frequently to access specific items.

Meanwhile, in Cabrera (and La Esquina), people cannot store large quantities of food due to lack of space or unreliable refrigeration. Prior to the expansion of its suburbs,

most of Cabrera's population was concentrated in its urban center, putting most customers within walking distance to several food resources. While living near a food resource makes food access convenient, the quantity of food that can be accessed is limited to a person's ability to carry it. It makes sense that Cabrera's supermarkets have adapted to this pattern, which leads most of their customers to purchase smaller quantities of food more frequently. The recent expansion of Cabrera's population caused by the development of Playa Grande and increased villa tourism is closely connected to the expansion of the local supermarkets and their adaptations to a growing customer base that includes workers and vacationers with greater mobility and storage capacity who live beyond Cabrera's urban core.

### Conclusions

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, Cabrera is experiencing rapid demographic and economic transformations. A province-wide effort to support domestic tourism has been compounded by pandemic-induced outmigration from major cities and a change in marketing strategies at Orchid Bay Villas. Additionally, Playa Grande continues to recruit multi-lingual tourism and business professionals from Santiago and Santo Domingo to staff its ambitious residential development. All these changes led to a drastic shift in the demands placed on Cabrera's food resources.

Supermarkets expanded to accommodate an increased number of expats and Dominicans who were more comfortable shopping in supermarkets than *colmados* after spending time abroad and in major Dominican cities. For similar reasons, Cabrera's *colmados* have begun to look more like bars and less like general stores, many of them expanding their outdoor seating and cutting their meager produce offerings. Traffic and

parking, which was usually only an issue during major special events in town, is now a constant struggle as the newcomers' SUVs and sedans jostle for space on roads designed for motorcycles, scooters, and an occasional *guagua*. All this activity is packed into hours dictated by work schedules and pandemic curfews.

The relationship between food resource operation and customer demographics is reflexive. In a place as small as Cabrera, every food resource has a niche and group of target customers with characteristics associated with economic class and identity. Similarly, those customers gravitate toward resources that reflect their expectations for food resources, creating a constant stream of feedback to which Cabrera's independently owned and operated food resources can adapt. That independence is critical, as is the constant involvement of owner-operators in daily business activities.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the group of customers that is missing from this chapter – the working-class professionals that make up most of Cabrera's population. From housekeepers and construction workers to accountants and lawyers, most of the customers served by supermarkets, street vendors, and *colmados* prior to the pandemic were *cabrereños* whose time and mobility are significantly influenced by a structured work schedule and expectations of social and economic advancement.

## Chapter 8: Working for Food Access

Workers like Pilar were the typical customers at food resources in Cabrera before it began to transform due to domestic tourism and pandemic-induced migration. While many workers live in Cabrera proper, a large percentage live in surrounding communities where housing prices are much lower. For example, Samuel, Luz, and Xiomara, who were essentially pushed back home to La Esquina by the shutdowns associated with the pandemic, once ate their mid-day meal in Cabrera while at work, and then may have grabbed a snack from a *colmado* before commuting back to their homes in La Esquina. School-aged children also follow a similar pattern, buying breakfast and afternoon snacks from *colmados* or street vendors on their way to and from school, and receiving the mid-day meal at school. This created a temporal pattern in economic activity around Cabrera as *comedores* focused their activities on the midday meal, closing their doors at night and allowing street vendors and restaurants to take over, while *colmados* operated constantly in the background. Supermarkets were busy on the weekends and relied on periodic shopping trips from the expat residents who felt more comfortable in a shopping environment that supplies familiar products in a familiar format.

The pandemic disrupted this temporal pattern by cutting off the daily ebb and flow of workers and students that sustained many small businesses. Many *comedores* and restaurants shut down without the support of consistent customers. With the flexibility of their business models, most street vendors in Cabrera were able to weather the pandemic despite curfews and restrictions on the use of public space. One fried food vendor invested his savings into a commercial space, while others retreated to their front porches

to serve their immediate neighbors. As curfews were rolled back in spring 2021, the evening food vendors in Cabrera's Central Park began to return, capitalizing on domestic tourists' abuse of the two-hour transit window after official curfew, which forced restaurants to close but ignored street food vendors.

I occupied the position of two different kinds of "worker" in Cabrera during my fieldwork. In April, I was completely independent, working remotely, with very few schedule constraints. During this short period, I was able to make a spur-of-the-moment trip to Playero, randomly visit supermarkets, and spend time analyzing my data from La Esquina. As explained in Chapter 5, boredom began to outweigh freedom as April came to close, inspiring Pilar to increase my teaching load at Faro. I was essentially Pilar's shadow for most of May 2021, and through that experience, I realized how access to time, land, and credit have significant bearing on food resource selection and utilization. Since access to time, land, and credit are also significantly reordered by capitalistic development, the second half of this chapter will unpack some of the broader implications of development on food access in Municipio Cabrera and beyond.

#### Time for Food Access

Having time to prepare food had the most impact on the food resources I used during my urban research. In April, I was able to experiment with different food resources and settle back into patterns I had learned from Alicen while keeping a daily evening appointment with the Collection of Misfits. During the hours of downtime between remote work and spending time at Leo and Mari's, I took advantage of a few food resources in my own backyard – a mango tree, two coconut trees, and several banana trees, all of which were beginning to bear fruit as summer approached.

I left Cabrera before the good mangos began to fall, but the banana trees ripened within weeks of one another, quickly producing more fruit than I could consume. I took branches of bananas to Faro to share with students and fellow teachers; peeled, chopped, and froze bananas for snacking; and Pilar helped me make banana ice cream for the weekly trivia game with the Collection of Misfits. As coconuts began to land heavily on the roof in the middle of the night, startling me awake, I was reminded of an interview I conducted in 2019 with one of the coconut water vendors in Cabrera's Park.

When I asked him about harvesting the coconuts, he explained that his neighbors let him harvest from their trees for free. Harvesting and processing the labor-intensive fruit is a full-time job to which most workers cannot commit. The vendor I spoke with was using the proceeds from coconut water sales to supplement his income as a pig farmer, spending most afternoons and evenings in Cabrera's Park after caring for his pigs in the morning. I thought about contacting him again, but within days of my first coconut scare, two guys with a cart pulled up in front of my house and asked if they could harvest them. After four hours of harvesting, they rode away with enough coconuts to generate over 8000 DOP worth of coconut water. I was left with a complimentary serving of coconut water and the relief that I would not have to worry about injury by falling fruit.

Beyond overly productive fruit trees, land in Cabrera's urban landscape is not utilized for food production. Superseding any underlying ideals about cosmopolitanism and earning a wage, the pragmatic considerations of time and space render most *cabrereños*, especially renters, incapable of supplementing their diets with homegrown food the way that many people in rural areas choose to do. The chaotic multi-faceted food access strategies utilized in the rural setting of La Esquina are compressed and reordered

by the 40-hour work week, bimonthly pay checks, retail exchange, urban density, increased consumer mobility, and the corresponding consolidation of food resources. The compression of time only became more obvious to me as I began volunteering at Faro more frequently.

### Budgets and Routines

Pilar's daily routine is highly predictable, especially with the implementation of curfews included in the DR's national pandemic response. Like most schools, Faro requires teachers to arrive by 7:30am and to stay until 4pm, serving a midday meal to teachers as well as students. Faro also incorporates a morning snack break for students, which Pilar uses to order breakfast from a café nearby. As an institution that would normally be responsible for feeding at least fifty people per day in years prior to the pandemic, Faro employs its own chef instead of relying on a *comedor*. While all but Faro's youngest students were taking classes remotely, the snack and lunch breaks remained part of the daily schedule for teachers. It was often the only time we could step away from our computer screens.

Eating the lunch served at Faro is not mandatory, and, under normal circumstances, both students and teachers choose to bring a lunch on days when the meal being served is not to their liking. Updating and publishing the lunch calendar each month was an essential task during my tenure as administrative secretary at Faro in 2018. With the onset of the pandemic and the continuation of remote learning, the calendar became less important and the meals less labor intensive. Instead of rice with beans, lentils, or pigeon peas and a side of meat with a salad, the chef opted for more pasta

dishes, which are cheaper and less labor intensive, but with which she is less familiar. The results were usually mediocre, and sometimes nearly inedible.

Opting out of the school lunch was not an option for me or Pilar. It was the only tangible benefit I received for volunteering, and often the only reason for me to come to Faro. The same could not be said for Pilar, whose internet connection was not as stable and whose course load was significantly greater than mine. Under normal circumstances, Pilar depends on the school lunches to reduce her food costs throughout the year, allowing her to save up money for emergencies and for her vacation time in July. With the financial stresses of the pandemic, lunch at Faro became more essential. By the end of May 2021, Pilar was making comical threats and pointed suggestions to Faro's chef about the menu for the next school year, hoping to eliminate pasta. The chef was unmoved.

Pilar is an excellent cook, but she rarely has time. The money she saves by eating meals at Faro during the week normally goes into complex culinary creations on the weekends, especially if there is someone else to feed. I spent many Saturdays at Pilar's house, arriving to the sounds of her playlist of Spanish- and English-language pop ballads from the 1970s and 80s, which she blasted from her speakers in retaliation for her neighbors' equally loud stream of rap and *reggaeton* that tended to last well into the night. Over the course of my fieldwork, I brought Pilar most of the sauces and spices stashed in Rain's kitchen, never knowing what Pilar would cook on the weekends but confident she would eventually find a way to use the different ingredients. I usually arrived as Pilar set a pot of coffee on the stove to brew and began sorting through the

contents of her freezers<sup>61</sup> to decide what to cook. I was frequently sent to Garcia's or the nearest *colmado* to pick up an ingredient after the coffee was done and the dish for the day decided. Honey glazed ribs, fancy pork chops, steamed vegetables, chicken fried rice, a Spanish omelet – I never knew what I'd be eating around midday on a Saturday. Pilar would eat the leftovers on Sundays while I was visiting Dulce and the rest of my family in La Esquina.

For as long as I have known Pilar, she has relied on in-store credit at every food resource she uses, budgeting out her bimonthly paychecks to pay off tabs at different places when she can. The first paycheck of each month is dedicated to rent, utilities, pharmacy, and internet. The second is divided among her food resources: Jasly's, Garcia's, her *colmado* of choice, and Leo and Mari's restaurant. She keeps a close eye on her budget, rarely shopping where she cannot set up a tab, and is very proud of the economic relationships she has cultivated in Cabrera since she relocated there from Sosua in 2013.

I asked Pilar why she uses in-store credit instead of paying up front<sup>62</sup> and she replied, "I don't like to carry cash, never have. I've always shopped this way, even in Sosua, and I remember my mother doing the same in Santo Domingo when I was growing up. My mother kept accounts for people at her pharmacy and my father did the same at his store; it's just what people did. Now, it's easier to make sure I'm not over

---

<sup>61</sup> Specialty cuts of meat are a frequent gift from Pilar's children and friends who make occasional trips to Sosua. While the freezer attached to Pilar's refrigerator contains a small number of items, a chest freezer on the patio usually contains a variety of meat.

<sup>62</sup> This conversation occurred while we were in-transit after school on or around May 15, 2021 as Pilar was paying bills.

budget if the store keeps track of my purchases and I just plan to pay a fixed amount every month. Most months, it's less, but I pretend it's the full amount, so I don't overspend at Leo and Mari's."

In-store credit schemes are a common practice in farming communities and lower-income areas around the world, many of them operating informally and only granted to trustworthy, long-term customers. This practice not only benefits Cabrera's ranchers, whose income fluctuates with the growth and sale of their herds, but also tourism workers with seasonal fluctuations in employment, households that depend on remittances, and Cabrera's working class, whose paychecks are enough to live on, but not enough to accrue significant savings.

One evening, Pilar and I stopped at Jasly's to pick up a few items<sup>63</sup>. I stepped back from the counter after paying for my items and watched the owner-operator solemnly draw a spiral notebook from behind the counter. Pilar's usual humorous bluster turned to genuine horror as she saw the extent of the tab for her household. As the owner-operator flipped through the pages of purchases, her expression turned sympathetic as she realized that Pilar had no idea the tab had gotten so large. Seeing the sympathy in her eyes, Pilar visibly straightened, putting on the mask of a no-nonsense professional and assuring her that the bill would be paid in the next month or two. The owner-operator nodded and added the evening's purchases to the list, taking the cash Pilar had on-hand and crossing out the oldest purchases in the notebook. A couple minutes later, as we stopped in front of my house, Pilar was on the verge of tears, her frustration boiling over.

---

<sup>63</sup> This observation occurred around May 30, 2021

“15,000 pesos! How did that happen?!? At *each* supermarket.” She exclaimed. I sighed, knowing there was nothing I could say or do to make the situation better - we both knew how it happened. When Antonio and Rain broke up, he moved back into his room at Pilar’s house, unintentionally creating space in Rain’s house for me to move in. While the change was helpful for me to maintain my independence as a researcher, it had several less helpful impacts on Pilar’s household. Less than a month after Antonio moved in, Belén (Leni) received a promotion at Playa Grande and found an apartment of her own, the historically contentious relationship with her brother outweighing the benefits of splitting the rent with her mother. Leni’s contributions to the rent helped create a budget surplus, but Pilar could cover the cost on her own. With both Leni and Pilar working long hours during the week, electricity bills were low, and most meals were provided outside the home. Leni began grocery shopping for herself in her late teens, exploring vegan and gluten-free diets that did not hold Pilar’s interest.

While Antonio did find work abroad in early April 2021, three months of him living in Pilar’s home had disrupted her carefully calculated budget. With Antonio home all day, searching for jobs online, the electricity bill almost doubled. Pilar told me that she usually went through a loaf of bread every two weeks, often freezing half of it to keep it fresh; after Antonio moved in, they were going through three loaves of bread a week. Other food costs were similarly amplified as Antonio ate enough ham and cheese sandwiches to keep himself full and focused on his job search, relying entirely on his mother’s lines of credit at local supermarkets. The surpluses once created by Leni’s contributions to rent were exhausted, and Pilar was left with significant debts at two local businesses where she had fought to cultivate a good reputation. That reputation afforded

her some patience from the business owners, as Antonio's struggles had not gone unnoticed around town and few establishments in Cabrera are willing to deny anyone food because of debt.

### Credit, Resilience, and Food Access

Pilar's situation made me think about the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic and development on employment and migration, and the differences between Pilar's food access situation and Dulce's. Both Pilar and Dulce experienced an influx of dependent or partially dependent family members in their households because of the pandemic. In Dulce's case, Luz and Xiomara were able to make contributions to the household through labor and sporadic income, while Samuel's consistent (albeit reduced) paycheck and the school food program helped mitigate the effects of lost income long enough for Dulce and Daniel to cultivate additional food resources around the home and on the family farm. My role in the household reflects that of many professional remote workers, who fled cities at the onset of the pandemic but were able to maintain their income streams. While not as common in the DR as it is in other countries, recent advances in telecommunications infrastructure have made it possible. Even without the influence of a remote worker, Dulce and her extended family are afforded a level of security that Pilar is not because they own their homes and their land.

As a renter and a working professional, Pilar does not have access to land to grow food to supplement her diet nor does she have the time to garden or prepare the food that would grow in it. The squash and plantains growing in the yard behind her house are collected by the landlord or left to rot. Instead, in 2021 she depended heavily on the flexibility of local business owners to accommodate budgetary shortfalls, as the resources

she worked to accumulate prior to the pandemic were obliterated in a few short months.

One of the potentially negative impacts of Cabrera's improved electricity infrastructure is the transition away from the traditional cash-based economy and toward one that relies on electronic payments and sales management systems. Food vendors who currently track open tabs for dozens of individuals and families on paper, with spiral notebooks stashed behind the counter, cannot easily convert this informal system to an electronic interface that requires all tabs to be closed at the end of operating hours. Even so, many of Cabrera's businesses are making that transition, cutting off lines of in-store credit and pushing the local cash-based economy into one based on formalized systems of banking and credit. This could be disastrous for individuals who do not have a formal credit history or those whose formal credit history is poor, as they might lose access to the resilient, informal social safety nets that support retail food access when income is sporadic or unreliable.

#### Development and Food Access

The dichotomy of "developed" and "undeveloped" and the progression between them is a product of Dominican history and geopolitics that has shaped modern Dominican identity and the never-ending quest for "progress" and "development" both socially and economically. The pressures of development – shifting gender norms, improving infrastructure, greater access to education and telecommunications, the broader economic shift from agriculture to tourism – are ever-present in Municipio Cabrera. Politically quiet compared to other urban centers and the border region, geographically isolated from the commercial hubs like Santo Domingo and Santiago de los Caballeros, and only recently introduced as a domestic tourism destination,

development pressures have crashed into Municipio Cabrera in the space of four decades instead of trickling in over a century and a half. The pace of change has refracted development trends, causing significant differences within generations and between communities in terms of gender norms, economic opportunities, and physical and social mobility. Individual visions of a “developed” Dominican society and the aspirations associated with it have created a spectrum of identities that *cabrereños* (Dominican and expat) perform through their consumption habits and expectations for local businesses, shaping the foodscape of Municipio Cabrera to reflect a diversity one might not expect from this predominantly rural municipality.

Municipio Cabrera is home to supermarkets that use cash-based in-store credit schemes and electronic sales management systems; off-the-books businesses that operate from legally rented commercial spaces; wealthy farmers with little formal education and indebted professionals with college degrees; the North Atlantic is to the east, horses saunter into restaurant kitchens, and the boundaries between home and commercial spaces are constantly blurred. Despite the strict orderliness of a forty-hour work week, pressures to migrate, and cosmopolitan visions of supermarket supremacy, the rural traditions of Municipio Cabrera continue to support kin- based food distribution networks, informal food businesses, and food cultivation for household consumption. For workers like Pilar, who do not have roots in the Municipio, the resilience granted by dense kin-networks and access to land are out of reach. Her access to resources depends on her income and her ability to cultivate connections with friends and local businesses.

Fortunately, Cabrera’s social landscape is accessible to newcomers. When I was conducting interviews for the community assessment in 2016, every respondent indicated

that Cabrera was special because of its “solidaridad con el ser humano [solidarity with human beings]”, a sense of humanity and generosity that supports those who are struggling socially and economically. This *cabrereño* identity was usually compared to Santo Domingo, the source of rumors and news stories of the kind of violence and misfortune that comes from desperation and anonymity. A man on a *guagua*<sup>64</sup> once told me that “la gente no le interesa el bien de los demás [people are not interested in the wellbeing of others]” in Santo Domingo, “como si la vida no fuera nada [as if life were nothing]”. He also made it very clear that people on *guaguas* in Santo Domingo did not randomly start conversations with one another; they were more likely to be robbed at gun- or knifepoint. I imagine that cultivating the kinds of social and economic connections that saved Antonio and Pilar from going hungry would not be easy in an environment where people cared less about one another than they do in Cabrera.

Yet Santo Domingo and other migration destinations are held up as examples of progress and being “more developed”. Conforming with the ideals of urban cosmopolitanism and rejecting the *campesino* way of life continues to drive Dominican *cabrereños* away from Cabrera and toward this vision of progress, and the hope of a better life. This is especially true for young women and girls seeking to follow the example of *la normalista* to become self-sufficient and respected. Most expats bring their own visions of “developed” and “undeveloped” to Municipio Cabrera, influencing how food resources accommodate their customers and modeling lifestyle choices (from transportation to food selection) that reflect those visions.

---

<sup>64</sup> This discussion occurred in late June 2017 on one of several trips back to Cabrera from Nagua to withdraw cash from the ATM (see explanation in Chapter 4). It was truly random.

I find that the availability of opportunities for food access runs somewhat counter to the narrative of progress. Rural residents of Municipio Cabrera, whose lives are portrayed as simple or “backward”, are stitching together multiple food resources, creating a complex ever-changing pattern of food access that can overcome limitations imposed by gendered expectations of mobility and resist economic hardships. It is chaotic and pieces of it are unpredictable, but women like Dulce understand how to make it work for them. Meanwhile the cosmopolitan urban working class in Santo Domingo has largely been displaced from their kin networks by migration and forced to depend on food resources that can only be accessed through retail exchange. Without income or social support, urban workers lose opportunities for food access, making them more vulnerable to poor health and further misfortune.

It is important to recognize that Municipio Cabrera is not “undeveloped”, nor do most of its residents fit the definition of a *campesino* or peasant – people who depend exclusively on the cultivation of their own land and resources to sustain them. Full-time farmers are integrated into regional, national, and global food production; households that cultivate a *conuco* also depend on wage work, remittances, or small businesses to meet their needs; if there is someone in the household under the age of 40, that household is connected to the internet. In general, Municipio Cabrera is somewhere in the middle of the spectrum between “developed” and “undeveloped” as it applies to the DR, which is itself somewhere between “developed” and “undeveloped” (OECD et al., 2020).

Dulce’s ability to access several different types of food resources is tied to living on a well-travelled road and having daughters with professional careers. Other households in La Esquina benefit from kin who “married well” or found their way to

economic success by immigrating and maintaining their connections to home (Baud, 2014; Carruyo, 2007). As demonstrated in my first research project, those living on less popular roads must depend on personal resources to overcome mobility limitations, as mobile vendors are not drawn to them (S. Barr, 2017). The people in the community who struggle the most are those without strong social networks or a stable source of income, especially if they are spatially isolated from neighbors. Many of them are migrants from Haiti or from other communities, and without income to establish economic relationships, they struggle to build positive social connections. The town of Cabrera seems to be resisting development pressures by clinging to its eccentricities and maintaining longstanding practices like in-store credit and social solidarity. As those practices disappear, however, community members may face the same food access challenges experienced by workers in “more developed” places.

## Chapter 9: Conclusions

Returning to the U.S. from Cabrera was much the same as the trip there, but it felt different to all my other returns. For the first time since 2013, I realized that my return to Cabrera “next year” was unlikely. While the pandemic had been an unexpected interruption in my annual routine, a series of more significant obstacles loomed before me. I had a dissertation to write, a career to find, and a life to build. My pursuit of food access had always been about understanding the concept and ultimately using it to build policies and initiatives that reduce hunger and promote community health. In the earliest stages of my research, I envisioned this work supporting programs in my hometown and the rural areas around it. As I grew with my research, I began to understand the crises of rural food access throughout the U.S., and to accept that, though my love for Municipio Cabrera runs deep, it is not where I need to be to effect the change I want to see in the world.

Everyone asked when I’d come back, and for the first time I had to find a way to tell them that I might not. I explained that I would need to find a job, and that most workers do not get the same freedom to travel as students and academic researchers. I explained the rigors of writing a dissertation, pointed to the chaos of being on the job market, potentially losing my income, and moving to wherever I could find a job. In some cases, it seemed to be the first time my interlocutors had ever considered the amount of time and energy this research has required of me over the years, and all the other activities I could have pursued during that time; the realization that I lead a completely different life abroad seemed unexpected. It was humbling to realize that I

have become part of a regular cycle of events in Municipio Cabrera, my appearance a discreet phenomenon in the ebb and flow of tourism that people anticipate each year.

As I boarded the Caribe Tours bus to Santo Domingo, hugging my overstuffed backpack to my chest and plopping down into a seat near the front, the melancholy I expected was replaced with relief. I finally had the data I needed to address my questions and a clear list of tasks to complete before ending this phase of my life. Having described that data at length in the preceding pages, I now offer some discussion of its implications.

### Describing Food Access in Municipio Cabrera

Food access is a place where economic and alimentary forces meet and interact. It happens in any situation where food, in some form, is transferred from the possession of one entity to another. For Me, Pilar, Alicen, and other urban-dwelling workers around the world, most of that exchange occurs between a customer and a food resource through mechanisms of retail exchange. We buy prepared foods from restaurants and street vendors; we buy fresh, prepared, and processed foods from supermarkets, *colmados*, and convenience stores. To a lesser degree, we also gift food to one another. Every time Pilar and Alicen cooked for me, they were acting as my food resources. Every time I brought them ingredients I was acting as their food resource.

People can be food resources. So can businesses, government institutions, and land. As an alimentary force, Dulce bought food from mobile vendors, accepted gifts or deliveries of food from family members, utilized ingredients from school-issued bags of food, and cultivated a supplementary supply of ingredients. Prior to the pandemic, half of her family received meals from a school or retail food resource away from home. In the context of the pandemic, a person had to be family and perform the economic

responsibilities of a family member to interact with Dulce as an alimentary force. In contexts where she has surplus income or surplus food, that restriction is relaxed to include coffee and snacks with friends and neighbors, should they appear on her front porch after the mid-day meal has been served.

Context – the “place” part of food access – is where identity and political economy work to influence alimentary and economic forces, and thus the *way* food access occurs. Physical characteristics of place, like climate, plate tectonics, and geomorphology, influence what crops can be produced by land, through exchanges of time and labor. In the DR, colonial era crop production influenced the density of social networks and the “vertical” distances between the wealthy and the poor, between landowners and laborers (Baud, 2014; Mayes, 2014; Veloz Maggiolo, 2017). As the Dominican Republic gained independence and its thinkers sought to cultivate a reputation for cosmopolitanism, eschewing its history as a territory filled with peasants, pirates, and formerly enslaved persons, the archetype of *la normalista* offered a development pathway for women that gave them social and political power without upsetting gender-based limitations on their physical mobility (Mayes, 2014). Unable to venture beyond their homes without endangering their moral reputation or their physical safety, women became the anchors of their families, the resources their families needed to meet basic needs – including food access (Carruyo, 2007).

In contrast, men were warned away from social mobility, lest they embody the archetype of *el tíguere*, a man so adept at manipulating his social position that he appears in the social hierarchy at a level which others of that hierarchy deem suspicious or inappropriate. The geopolitical message of *el tíguere* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century encouraged

men to stay close to home and use their physical mobility to build connections and *be known* by their community, thus cultivating credibility through social networks (Damirón, 1895). Then, a previously unknown military officer named Rafael Trujillo ruined that narrative by becoming the most well-known person in the Dominican Republic through a brutal, thirty-year-long dictatorship that altered the social, economic, and political landscape (Danticat, 1998; Derby, 2000; E. P. Roorda, 1996).

In the decades after the Trujillo dictatorship ended, Joaquin Balaguer and Juan Bosch cultivated new pathways for Dominicans to exercise *tigueraje* by establishing political parties that connected even the most remote communities through clientelist relationships. Even if they chose not to embody *el tiguere* by pushing the boundaries of their initial position in the political landscape, men (and eventually women) used these networks to advance themselves as geopolitical pressure from the Washington Consensus shaped the DR's vision of cosmopolitanism, development, and what it means to be Dominican. These networks also facilitated rural-urban migration essential to the growth of the DR's manufacturing sector.

Joaquin Balaguer initiated a tradition of cultivating physical infrastructure in pursuit of being more developed, establishing critical food infrastructure as well as expanding roads, building schools, and improving access to electricity. He and his immediate successors drew the Dominican Republic further into the global economy through manufacturing and trade agreements, which created economic success in areas of the country where agricultural traditions supported dense social networks, especially Santiago de los Caballeros (Schrank, 2005). As men moved to cities to work, women continued to follow the path laid out by *la normalista*, using improved infrastructure to

pursue higher levels of education and respectable forms of employment as educators, accountants, and lawyers. Development pressures accommodated the pursuits of women, loosening their physical restriction to the home and refashioning *la normalista* to fit into global waves of feminism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite separation from the home, women are still socially more connected to food than men. In her terms as First Lady, Margarita Cedeño leveraged that connection to develop public health and nutrition policies; as the country's first female Vice President, she continued that mission. As she continued to work on nutrition and public health, President Danilo Medina focused his public efforts on agricultural production and processing, improving domestic food security by reducing dependence on agricultural imports. Suspected of rampant corruption by a politically active, predominantly urban middle class, the Medina administration made investments in agriculture and education that reached rural areas like La Esquina, adding schools to the list of food resources for students and teachers and gaining the respect of Municipio Cabrera's rural residents.

Politically and socially isolated from the major urban centers, Municipio Cabrera encountered the pressures of development and cosmopolitanism much later than other parts of the country. It is as though a century's worth of development pressures crashed into the Municipio in the last four decades, creating stark contrasts between generations and putting many people in danger of being "left behind". As rural residents of the Municipio were finally able to see political promises fulfilled, the urban middle class and political leadership took decisive steps to shift the local economy further away from agriculture and toward domestic tourism. To capitalize on the influx of domestic tourists and satisfy longstanding demands from expats, Cabrera's food resources modified their

business practices by expanding and reorganizing their offerings, formalizing, and adding parking and electronic payment options.

In many ways, the coronavirus pandemic made it easier to see the factors that influence food access in the Municipio. By interrupting the steady pace of development, the pandemic pushed many Dominicans “back home” to confront how their habits and identities have changed. Professional women, embodiments of modern feminine moral authority, busily commuting to work and shopping at supermarkets, were forced to stop. They followed their kin networks back to their mothers and grandmothers, who, though anchored to the home, exercise their traditional moral authority to mobilize kin networks and household resources, ensuring food access through multiple strategies. Rapid development has given these homebound women a greater number of resources by making it easier for food resources to get to them; mobile vendors and mobile family members both rely on improved roads.

Those unable to retreat to rural areas through kin networks or wealth to weather the pandemic were subjected to the same issues that plagued urban centers around the world. Retail food resources were forced to reduce operating hours, restricting opportunities for confined urban dwellers to access food. Food resources in the informal economy practically disappeared during the DRs initial pandemic response, the vendors’ job loss compounding the impacts of their own food insecurity and that of their neighbors. In Cabrera, the rapid onset of economic and social change has not allowed informal mechanisms of credit and mutual aid to fade away like they have in “more modern” parts of the country. Simultaneous reliance on “modern” electronic retail systems and “traditional” recordkeeping by Cabrera’s locally owned food resources

provided a safety net for those with strong social capital, even if their economic resources were running thin.

The social, political, and economic landscape continues to change in Municipio Cabrera as a new waves of lifestyle migrants sweep through the area. On the one hand, expats from the Global North are steadily migrating into the area, buying up land from cash-strapped residents and influencing the way food resources accommodate their customers. Between the worldschooling families and future Playa Grande Project investors, the wealth disparity in the Municipio is rapidly expanding, creating the potential for significant economic conflict between the needs of local communities and the buying power of comparative strangers. Municipio Cabrera is in danger of joining other lifestyle migrant destinations in the Global South if the local government cannot resist the draw of foreign direct investment, which will hasten the disappearance of the traditional food access practices that have kept people from starving during the pandemic (Hayes, 2018).

#### Food Access & Food (Security) Policy

The policy implications of this research lie in the capacity of policy to change the “place” where economic and alimentary forces meet and interact. Upton, Cissé, and Barrett (2016) theorize food security as resilience using a case study from Northern Kenya. In this case, resilience is defined as “the capacity over time of a person [or] household . . . to avoid poverty in the face of various stressors and in the wake of myriad shocks.” (Barrett & Constanas, 2014; Upton et al., 2016). Municipio Cabrera’s condensed development timeline, and the lingering elements of rural life and the informal economy, make it possible for both Pilar’s and Dulce’s households to be resilient in terms of food

access. Not only is food usually available, accessible, affordable, and acceptable when they need it, food resources are accommodating to their needs (Caspi et al., 2012). As discussed in the introduction, and hinted at in the temporal dimensions of resilience, access to food *at all times* is not a practical reality but an illusory one – as long as people perceive themselves to be food secure, either by the presence of food resources or by their own food access behaviors, they are food secure. I believe the definition of food security should be changed to reflect its affective dimensions, if only to place the power of determining food (in)security more firmly into the hands of the individuals and communities who experience it.

As the world faces widespread political unrest post-pandemic and the effects of climate change become more pronounced, resilience has become a key focus of policy. Whether it's the resilience of infrastructure in the face of natural disasters or the ability of an ecosystem to withstand increasing temperature extremes, resilience is a significant area of academic and political literature. The discussion of food and resilience usually focuses on the dynamics between agriculture and ecology. Resilience and sustainability (another literature) operate in tandem to support a political push for changes to agricultural practices.

Unfortunately, the uptake of sustainable agricultural practices like polyculture, agroforestry, and soil regeneration is not only inhibited by producers' lack of knowledge, but by a system of global commodity chains that have been historically supported by their own set of policies (Carolan, 2018). Corporate contracts make it impossible for larger-scale producers to “shop around” for the best prices, to sell off their products in smaller quantities, or to decide that transportation costs would be prohibitive and try their hand at

direct sales to consumers like the farm near La Esquina did in 2021. The growth in farm size in the U.S. was supported by policies that encouraged farmers to sell staple crops on the global market, pitting U.S. consumers against the global population in competition for staple food resources. The dominance of massive corporations in the food system makes it difficult for producers to contribute to their own food security and that of their communities because the decision of who ultimately consumes their crops is taken out of their hands.

On the consumption end of food supply chains, the supremacy of supermarkets in the U.S. is supported by a history of policies that restrict or penalize informal economic activity and make it difficult for smaller food resources to survive. Policies restricting access to public lands, where black and indigenous communities used hunting, fishing, and foraging to support their diets, went into effect in the nineteenth century, especially after the U.S. Civil War. Throughout the twentieth century, marginalized communities in the U.S. were not only separate from food resources, but from public institutions, community resources, and businesses through segregation and redlining (Kolb, 2022; Reese, 2019). Even though these policies have been overturned, their effects on the foodscape have not been reversed.

Ken Kolb's examination of retail inequality in West Greenville, South Carolina builds on Ashante Reese's work by highlighting how the ahistorical nature of the food environment, which remains a powerful tool in convincing policy makers that food access inequities must be addressed, also supports an overly simplistic and highly deterministic narrative about health inequities across the U.S. (Kolb, 2022). Policymakers and communities assume that adding a new supermarket to a neighborhood full of

consumers accustomed to going outside their neighborhood for food will fix health outcomes co-produced by poor diet, high stress, genetic predisposition, intergenerational trauma, poor access to healthcare, and myriad other factors (Kolb, 2022; LeDoux & Vojnovic, 2013). The neighborhoods that do receive new supermarkets often lose them because they are unable to accommodate local demands (Kolb, 2022). Alternative projects to address food access inequity have run into similar issues, bringing in food access “solutions” that do not fit the political economy of marginalized neighborhoods.

Restrictions on food resources exacerbate the problem. Major cities in the Western US are notorious for prohibitions on public feeding, which makes it illegal for people to distribute food to those experiencing homelessness. In other places, produce from a home garden can be gifted to family, friends, and strangers but retail exchange is highly regulated. A study of mobile produce markets in the U.S. found that the greatest barrier to starting and sustaining mobile projects was the number of regulations restricting not only how food should be stored, transported, and served, but the times and locations that food could be sold (Zepeda & Reznickova, May 2017; Zepeda, Reznickova, & Lohr, 2014). Food access is restricted by policy.

Policymakers justify these laws with legitimate concerns for health and safety. However, vendors around the world know that customer health and safety is key to their long-term success. Even in contexts where sanitation infrastructure is poor, vendors and customers practice behaviors to mitigate risks of food borne illness (Patel et al., 2014). While health and safety are logical justifications for policies restricting food access, the underlying motivations of these policies are often discriminatory, creating a foodscape that supports the same developmentalist imaginary that influences people in the DR.

To support food security as resilience, the goals of food policy should be to promote food access instead of restricting it. I join other scholars in calling for the creation of policies that prioritize feeding people instead of creating profits (Carolan, 2018; Winson, 2014). If more communities were able to legally rely on the heterodoxy utilized by Cabrera's food resources, which cultivate social and economic resilience, instead of being restricted by formalized systems designed to manage regional, national, and international food operations, fewer people might feel food insecure. Localized food provisioning could be treated as a public service, affording communities the independence to care for vulnerable members without the restrictions of regulations designed for interstate and international trade.

#### Beyond Policy

As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, food access is not only governed by the decisions of food resources and policies associated with food. It is also influenced by the forty-hour work week, individual access to time, land, and credit, the density of social networks, gender dynamics, consumer mobility, vendor mobility, and normative ideas about how people are *supposed* to access food. Underpinning these broad social phenomena is a repository of "common" knowledge whose diversity is threatened by the normative pressures of development.

Without Luz's conscious efforts to apprentice Dulce in the kitchen, much of Dulce's vast culinary and botanical knowledge would be lost to future generations. Teresa and Lidia carry that knowledge, but gendered expectations around food restricted how much of it they passed to their sons, who are now young adults. While Lidia's sons learned enough to prepare food on their own, she taught them the skills she thought they

would need in the urban, cosmopolitan environment of major cities. Their utilitarian cooking skills are a far cry from Dulce's nurturing labor; their mass-produced seasoning packets lacking the modifications she derives from the plants grown in her yard.

Traditional knowledge and practices are also being eroded by development pressures on infrastructure. While Pilar has used informal in-store credit schemes throughout her lifetime, Leni is reluctant to leave an outstanding balance at the supermarket or the *colmado*. While Pilar demonstrated the practice to both of her children, Leni's attitudes about debt and her electronically transmitted paychecks have made the spiral notebook behind the counter more trouble than it's worth. Even if policies supported the maintenance of cash-based credit schemes in small enterprises, customers like Leni would only use them in dire circumstances.

Whether due to my position as a teacher, my affiliation with teachers, or genuine widespread concern for the future of society at large, the subject of "today's youth" cropped up almost daily during my fieldwork. Dulce's reaction to news stories about violence, crime, vaccine hesitancy, and traffic accidents was simply to shake her head, somewhat mystified, and repeat the phrase: "Las jóvenes no importan la vida [Youth do not care about life]". Debates and protracted conversations among the Collection of Misfits led to a similar conclusion, with one major caveat: "These kids don't know how to *do* anything – why *would* they care?"

As Dominican youth spend more time indoors, connected to the internet instead of to their immediate living conditions the connection to "common" knowledge – like how to harvest beans or decide which brand of cereal to buy – weakens. Knowledge of place – be it gender dynamics, the location of resources, or the appropriate time to shop

for food – is eroding under pressures from an ever-present cosmopolitan fantasy propagated by social media. Youth want the fantasy but live in environments they have not learned to live in. Their lack of knowledge of place for where the *are* restricts their ability to use what they know to reach for that fantasy. The Neoliberal ethics of hard work fall flat for an audience without the skills or opportunities to work. In Cabrera, lack of jobs drives youth to migrate to new places, where they have even less “common” knowledge. Whether to cope or to search for answers in an environment where they may not have any family or friends to guide them, youth turn to social media and the fantasy that they know, much of which is built on actions that “do not care about life” – driving fast, rebelling against nonspecific figures and institutions, and embodying all the negative aspects of *el tíguere*.

The impacts of social media on diversity of “common” knowledge are a global concern. On the one hand, youth are challenging histories and knowledges about gender binaries, market-based competition, and racial hierarchies. On the other, as a growing number of scholars and politicians around the world call for place-based solutions to climate change and food insecurity, knowledge of specific places is disappearing. While the internet can teach youth about climate change and place-based innovations around the world, it probably will not explain why those innovations will not work as well in their specific physical, social, and political environments. There are obvious examples like not being able to use tidal power in a landlocked country. Much more common are examples like improving food security through urban gardening projects. How can people be expected to support their own food provisioning through gardening if they do not also have the time, knowledge, and permission to use the urban environment? If time is not

available, knowledge is not “common”, and activity is not permitted in a place, the solution will not work. While policy has a role to play in permitting food access, most of the responsibility for producing and maintaining resilient, food secure societies rests beyond the realm of written policy, in the place-based “common” knowledges and practices of individuals, households, and communities.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aguero, D. (2019, May 28, 2019). [Facebook]. Retrieved 1 June 2022
- Ayala, C. J. (1999). *American sugar kingdom. [electronic resource] : the plantation economy of the Spanish Caribbean, 1898-1934*: University of North Carolina Press.
- Barr, S. (2017). Using mixed methods to describe a spatially dynamic food environment in rural Dominican Republic *Human Ecology*, 45(6). doi:10.1007/s10745-017-9953-y
- Barr, S. (2018). Assessment of Cabrera, MTS, RD: An Inventory of Resources and Issues. Retrieved from <https://susannahbarr.weebly.com/cabrera-dominican-republic.html>
- Barr, S. R. (2015). Rural Inequality and Nutrition: an Analysis of Three Rural Communities in the Dominican Republic. *Undergraduate Research Scholars Capstone (2006-present)*. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/154482>
- Barrett, C. B., & Constan, M. A. (2014). Toward a theory of resilience for international development applications. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(40), 14625-14630. doi:10.1073/pnas.1320880111
- Baud, M. (2014). Patrons, Peasants, and Tobacco. In E. Roorda, L. Derby, & R. González (Eds.), *The Dominican Republic reader: history, culture, politics* (pp. 217-224): Duke University Press.
- BCRD, B. C. d. I. R. D. (2021). *Banco Central informa que el flujo de remesas supera los US\$7,000.0 millones de manera acumulada al mes de agosto de 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.bancentral.gov.do/a/d/5184-banco-central-informa-que-el-flujo-de-remesas-supera-los-us70000-millones-de-manera-acumulada-al-mes-de-agosto-de-2021>: <https://www.bancentral.gov.do/a/d/5184-banco-central-informa-que-el-flujo-de-remesas-supera-los-us70000-millones-de-manera-acumulada-al-mes-de-agosto-de-2021>
- Bixby, S. (2021, March 21, 2021). Biden Promises (Some) Freedom From COVID by July 4th. *Daily Beast*. Retrieved from <https://www.yahoo.com/news/biden-promises-freedom-covid-july-013632742.html>
- Bosco, F. J., Joassart-Marcelli, P., & O'Neal, B. (2017). Food Journeys: Place, Mobility, and the Everyday Food Practices of Young People. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 107(6), 1479-1498. doi:10.1080/24694452.2017.1310019

- Boucher, A. (2021, April 22, 2021). Jennifer Lopez Shares Photos from the Dominican Republic Set of Shotgun Wedding After Filming Wraps. *People*.
- Burawoy, M. (2000). *Global ethnography : forces, connections, and imaginations in a postmodern world*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cabrera Red Digital (2019). [Facebook]. Retrieved
- Carolan, M. S. (2018). *The real cost of cheap food* (Second edition. ed.). Abingdon, Oxon ;: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.
- Carruyo, L. (2007). *Producing knowledge, protecting forests : rural encounters with gender, ecotourism, and international aid in the Dominican Republic*: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Caspi, C. E., Sorensen, G., Subramanian, S. V., & Kawachi, I. (2012). The local food environment and diet: A systematic review. *Health & Place, 18*(5), 1172-1187. doi:10.1016/j.healthplace.2012.05.006
- Corcino, P. (2020, 29 April 2020). Exportaciones de mango de Peravia sujetas a que se supere la crisis sanitaria por pandemia del covid-19. *elDinero*. Retrieved from <https://www.eldinero.com.do/105192/exportaciones-de-mango-de-peravia-sujetas-a-que-se-supere-la-crisis-sanitaria-por-pandemia-del-covid-19/>
- Damirón, R. (1895). El Tigre (L. Derby & A. Huezco, Trans.). In E. Roorda, L. Derby, & R. González (Eds.), *The Dominican Republic reader. [electronic resource] : history, culture, politics*: Duke University Press.
- Danticat, E. (1998). *The farming of bones : a novel*: Soho Press.
- DeLugan, R. M. (2018). Reimagining the Strange and Familiar in National Belonging: Memory, Heritage, and Exclusion in the Dominican Republic. *Journal of Anthropological Research, 74*(4), 450-467. doi:10.1086/699939
- Derby, L. (1998). Gringo Chickens with Worms: Food and Nationalism in the Dominican Republic In *Close encounters of empire : writing the cultural history of U.S.-Latin American relations*: Duke University Press.
- Derby, L. (2000). The Dictator's Seduction: Gender and State Spectacle during the Trujillo Regime. *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters, 23*(3), 1112-1146. doi:10.1353/cal.2000.0134

- Derby, L., & Werner, M. (2013). The devil wears dockers: devil pacts, trade zones, and Rural- Urban Ties in the Dominican Republic. *New West Indian Guide*(3-4), 294. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.fiu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsglr&AN=edsgcl.356353926&site=eds-live>
- Despacho de la Primera Dama, S.-N. (2009). Guías Alimentarias Basadas en Alimentos de la República Dominicana. In SESPAS-Nutricion (Ed.). Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.
- Diario Libre. (2017, February 25, 2017). Motoconchistas se rebelan contra Uber y anuncian marcha para la próxima semana. *Diario Libre*.
- Diario Libre. (2020, December 6, 2020). Agricultura acuerda con supermercados disminuir ganancias en productos de la canasta básica. *Diario Libre*. Retrieved from <https://www.diariolibre.com/economia/agricultura-acuerda-con-supermercados-disminuir-ganancias-en-productos-de-la-canasta-basica-NC23120148>
- Divaluna, V. (2018, October 5, 2018). La provincia María Trinidad Sánchez, es Orgullo de esta Tierra. *Revestida*.
- Dominican Today. (2017, October 26, 2017). Dominican Republic Goes Digital. *Dominican Today*.
- Dominican Today. (2021a, March 1, 2021). Dominican Republic supermarkets won't accept food stamps. *Dominican Today*.
- Dominican Today. (2021b, September 21, 2021). More infections in provinces with Delta and Gamma variants. *Dominican Today*. Retrieved from <https://dominantoday.com/dr/local/2021/09/21/more-infections-in-provinces-with-delta-and-gamma-variants/>
- Dominican Today. (2021c, December 29, 2021). Ómicron begins to gain ground in Dominican Republic representing 41% of infections; those of delta 59%. *Dominican Today*. Retrieved from <https://dominantoday.com/dr/local/2021/12/29/omicron-begins-to-gain-ground-in-dominican-republic-representing-41-of-infections-those-of-delta-59/>
- DR1, D. V. (2020a, May 18, 2020). Campesino Movement calls on the government to buy their crops. *DRI*.
- DR1, D. V. (2020b, May 15, 2020). Citizen Participation wants more accountability for government emergency spending. *DRI*.

Retrieved from:

<https://dr1.com/news/2020/05/15/citizen-participation-wants-more-accountability-for-government-emergency-spending/>

DR1, D. V. (2020c, July 1, 2020). DR reopens to tourism. *DRI*. Retrieved from <https://dr1.com/news/2020/07/01/dr-reopens-to-tourism-2/>

DR1, D. V. (2020d, April 6, 2020). How the Stay at Home and FASE programs work. *DRI*. Retrieved from <https://dr1.com/news/2020/04/06/how-the-stay-at-home-and-fase-programs-work/>

DR1, D. V. (2020e, 1 May 2020). IMF Executive Board approves US\$650 million in emergency assistance to the Dominican Republic to address the Covid-19 pandemic. *DRI*. Retrieved from <https://dr1.com/forums/threads/imf-executive-board-approves-us-650-million-in-emergency-assistance-to-the-dominican-republic-to-address-the-covid-19-pandemic.392813/#post-5522900>

DR1, D. V. (2020f, April 24, 2020). Vice President Margarita Cedeño: 70,000 new families to benefit from new government relief package. *DRI*. Retrieved from <https://dr1.com/news/2020/04/24/vice-president-margarita-cedeno-70000-new-families-to-benefit-from-new-government-relief-package/>

DR1, D. V. (2021, January 5, 2021). Abinader government announces welfare programs for 2021. *DRI*. Retrieved from <https://dr1.com/news/2021/01/05/abinader-government-announces-welfare-programs-for-2021/>

el Caribe. (2018, April 16, 2018). Regresa la Feria Agropecuaria, Turística y Comercial Cabrera en Primavera. *elCaribe*.

Estrella, G. V. (2016). A Review of the Dominican Cocoa Industry: Determining Advantages and Factors to Improve. In: LSU.

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO. (2020). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets*. Retrieved from Rome:

Ferrer, A. (2014). *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fiehrer, T. (1990). POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE PERIPHERY: THE HAITIAN MASSACRE OF 1937. *Race & Class*, 32(2), 1-20. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.fiu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hia&AN=46113534&site=eds-live>

- Florida Shipper. (2005). CAFTA con pollo. *Florida Shipper*, p. 4.
- Fonseca Mendoza, C. I. (2018). Negociar en el caribe colombiano: aproximaciones a la comprensión del texto y del contexto de un pregón callejero. *Zona Próxima*, 28, 1-13.
- Food Chemical News. (2004). The Dominican Republic joined the Central American Free Trade Agreement in a signing ceremony last week in Washington, D.C., Brief Article. *Food Chemical News*. Retrieved from <http://http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsggo&AN=edsgc1.123669950&site=eds-live>
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. (2002). Beyond global vs. local: Economic politics outside the binary frame. *Geographies of power: Placing scale*, 25-60.
- Gigliotti, S. (2006). 'Acapulco in the Atlantic': Revisiting Sosúa, a Jewish Refugee Colony in the Caribbean. *Immigrants & Minorities*, 24(01), 22-50. doi:10.1080/02619280600590209
- Guthman, J. (2011). *Weighing In : Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*: University of California Press.
- Hayes, M. F. (2018). *Gringolandia : lifestyle migration under late capitalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hornbeck, J. F. (2007). *U.S. trade policy and the Caribbean: from trade preferences to free trade agreements*. Retrieved from Washington, DC: [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A163681640/AONE?u=miam11506&sid=AONE&xid=93\\_d13306](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A163681640/AONE?u=miam11506&sid=AONE&xid=93_d13306)
- IMF. (2021). *Dominican Republic: 2021 Article IV Consultation-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Dominican Republic*. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2021/07/28/Dominican-Republic-2021-Article-IV-Consultation-Press-Release-Staff-Report-and-Statement-by-462906>:
- Informando y Educando. (2022). Informando y Educando. Retrieved from <https://informandoyeducando.com/contacto>
- King, M. (2009). Sustainable Foodscapes: Obtaining Food within Resilient Communities. In: UWSpace.
- Kolb, K. H. (2022). *Retail Inequality*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

- Kushner, J. (2015, December 29, 2015). Driving Danger in the Dominican Republic. *Pulitzer Center*.
- LeDoux, T. F., & Vojnovic, I. (2013). Going outside the neighborhood: The shopping patterns and adaptations of disadvantaged consumers living in the lower eastside neighborhoods of Detroit, Michigan. *Health & Place, 19*, 1-14.  
doi:10.1016/j.healthplace.2012.09.010
- Marrero Aristy, R. (1939). *Over*.
- Massey, D. (2005). *For space*: Sage.
- Mayes, A. J. (2014). *The Mulatto Republic : class, race, and Dominican national identity*: University Press of Florida.
- McMichael, P. (2004). *Development and social change : a global perspective* (3rd ed. ed.): Pine Forge Press.
- Metz, A. (1990). Why Sosúa? Trujillo's motives for Jewish refugee settlement in the Dominican Republic. *Contemporary Jewry, 11*(1), 3-28.
- Mintz, S. W. (1986). *Sweetness and power : the place of sugar in modern history*: Penguin Books.
- Mitchell, K. (2009). Democratisation, External Exposure and State Food Distribution in The Dominican Republic. *Bulletin of Latin American Research, 28*(2), 204.  
doi:10.1111/j.1470-9856.2008.00295.x
- N Digital. (2021a, April 11, 2021). Crisis de la zanahoria: Productores advierten que autoridades no cumplen. *N Digital*. Retrieved from <https://n.com.do/2021/04/11/crisis-de-la-zanahoria-productores-advierten-que-autoridades-no-cumplen/>
- N Digital. (2021b, July 29, 2021). Inician trabajos de extensión del Metro SD hasta Los Alcarrizos con una inversión de UD\$506 millones. *N Digital*.
- Nagovitch, P. (2020, June 6, 2020). The Dominican Republic's 2020 Pandemic Elections. *AS/COA.org*. Retrieved from <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/dominican-republics-2020-pandemic-elections>
- OECD, Trade, U. N. C. o., Development, America, E. C. f. L., & Caribbean, t. (2020). *Production Transformation Policy Review of the Dominican Republic*.

- ONERD. (2010). *ShapeFiles Censo 2010*. OPRD (2019). [Facebook]. Retrieved
- OPRD. (2020). Gobierno adopta medidas en favor de productores de pollo, leche, queso y vegetales; pronto serán incluidos otros productos [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://minpre.gob.do/comunicacion/notas-de-prensa/gobierno-adopta-medidas-en-favor-de-productores-de-pollo-leche-queso-y-vegetales-pronto-seran-incluidos-otros-productos/>
- Padilla, M. B., Guilamo-Ramos, V., & Godbole, R. (2012). A Syndemic Analysis of Alcohol Use and Sexual Risk Behavior Among Tourism Employees in Sosúa, Dominican Republic. *Qualitative Health Research*, 22(1), 89-102. doi:10.1177/1049732311419865
- Patel, K., Guenther, D., Wiebe, K., & Seburn, R.-A. (2014). Promoting food security and livelihoods for urban poor through the informal sector: a case study of street food vendors in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. *Food Security*, 6, 861-878. doi:10.1007/s12571-014-0391-z
- Reese, A. M. (2019). *Black Food Geographies : Race, Self-Reliance, and Food Access in Washington, D.C.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
- ReportateRD. (2018, October 17, 2018). Medina: País produce 85% de los alimentos. *ReportateRD*.
- Rodríguez, S. (2020, 15 April 2020). Chiriperos: los más afectados por covid-19. *Hoy*. Retrieved from <https://hoy.com.do/chiriperos-los-mas-afectados-por-covid-19/>
- Roorda, E., Derby, L., & González, R. (2014). *The Dominican Republic reader. [electronic resource] : history, culture, politics*: Duke University Press.
- Roorda, E. P. (1996). Genocide next door: the Good Neighbor policy, the Trujillo regime, and the Haitian massacre of 1937. *Diplomatic History*, 20, 301-319. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.1996.tb00269.x
- Rosing, H. (2009). Economic Restructuring and Urban Food Access in the Dominican Republic. *NAPA Bulletin*(32), 55–76.
- Samuels, S. T. (1972). Moshav in the Caribbean - Sosúa Revisited. *American Jewish Committee*, 73, 452-457.
- Schrank, A. (2005). Entrepreneurship, Export Diversification, and Economic Reform: The Birth of a Developmental Community in the Dominican Republic. *Comparative Politics*, 38(1), 43-62. Retrieved from <https://www.jstore.org/stable/20072912>

- Sebastian, T. (2021). *Everyday Food Practices: Commercialisation and Consumption in the Periphery of the Global North*: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Sheller, M., & León, Y. M. (2016). Uneven socio-ecologies of Hispaniola: Asymmetric capabilities for climate adaptation in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. *Geoforum*, 73, 32-46. doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.07.026
- Tactuk, P., Cáceres Ureña, F., & Martínez Mejía, M. (2012). *IX Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2010: Informe General*. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
- The Business Year. (2017, March 09, 2017). República Digital: A Dominican Tech Revolution. *The Business Year*.
- Thornton, B. J. (2016). *Negotiating respect : Pentecostalism, masculinity, and the politics of spiritual authority in the Dominican Republic*: University Press of Florida.
- Tinker, I. (1999). Street Foods into the 21st Century. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 16(3), 327-333. doi:<https://link.springer.com/journal/volumesAndIssues/10460>
- Transparency International. (2020). Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Retrieved from <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results/dom>. Retrieved 18 November 2020, from Transparency International <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results/dom>
- Trouillot, M.-R. (2015). *Silencing the Past: power and the production of history*. Retrieved from <http://http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat06026a&AN=fIU.033797423&site=eds-live>
- Turits, R. L. (2002). A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic. *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 82(3), 589-635. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.fiu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edspmu&AN=edspmu.S1527190002305896&site=eds-live>
- Upton, J. B., Cissé, J. D., & Barrett, C. B. (2016). Food security as resilience: reconciling definition and measurement. *Agricultural Economics*, 47(S1), 135-147. doi:10.1111/agec.12305
- USDA NIFA, N. I. o. F. a. A. (Producer). (2020, 08/09/2020). Glossary.
- Veloz Maggiolo, M. (2006). Mestizaje, identidad y cultura. *Santo Domingo, República Dominicana: Editora Búho*.

- Veloz Maggiolo, M. (2017). *Historia de la cultura dominicana : momentos formativos* (Segunda edición corregida y ampliada. ed.): CPEP, Comision Permanente de Efemérides Patrias.
- We Are Worldschoolors. (2022). We Are Worldschoolors. Retrieved from <https://weareworldschoolors.org/>
- Widener, M. J., & Liu, B. (2021). Food Environments. In *International Encyclopedia of Geography* (pp. 1-6).
- Willems-Braun, B. (1997). Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post) Colonial British Columbia. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 87(1), 3. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.fiu.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjrs&AN=edsjrs.2564120&site=eds-live>
- Winson, A. (2014). *The industrial diet: The degradation of food and the struggle for healthy eating*: NYU Press.
- Zepeda, L., & Reznickova, A. (May 2017). *Potential Demand for Local Fresh Produce by Mobile Markets*. Retrieved from
- Zepeda, L., Reznickova, A., & Lohr, L. (2014). Overcoming challenges to effectiveness of mobile markets in US food deserts. *Appetite*, 79, 58-67. doi:<http://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2014.03.026>

## VITA

SUSANNAH R. BARR

Born, College Station, TX

2012-2015

B.A., Anthropology  
Minors in Spanish and  
Economics Texas A&M  
University  
College Station, Texas

2015-2017

M.P.H., Health Promotion and Community Health  
Sciences Texas A&M School of Public Health  
College Station, Texas

## PUBLICATIONS

Barr, S. (2022). "Everyday Food Practices: Commercialisation and Consumption in the Periphery of the Global North." *Food, Culture & Society*: 1-2.

Barr, Susannah. Using mixed methods to describe a spatially dynamic food environment in rural Dominican Republic (DR). *Human Ecology* 45(6). December 2017.

Barr, Susannah. International influence & community capacity: an assessment of Cabrera, María Trinidad Sánchez, Dominican Republic. Thesis.

Barr, Susannah R (2015). Rural Inequality and Nutrition: an Analysis of Three Rural Communities in the Dominican Republic. Honors and Undergraduate Research.

Available electronically from <http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/154482>.