

IDEAS AND IRONIES OF FOOD SCARCITY AND CONSUMPTION
IN THE MORAL ECONOMY OF TUTA, CUBA¹

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Abstract.

The broad argument of this article is that national values embedded in what I call the Cuban national moral economy affect local valorisations of provisioning in Cuba and that such transmutations from the national to the local may be detected in some forms of language. I contend that local expressions of consumption and scarcity in Tuta, a town of about 10,000 inhabitants located forty kilometres southwest of Havana city, often stem from the value-laden ‘ideational repertoire’ (Wolf 1999: 8) of Cuban revolutionary nationalism. Terms such as ‘the [daily] fight [*lucha*] for provisions’, used in irony, are not only used to describe recurring challenges to household provisioning in post-1990 Cuba, but also to uphold, implicitly or explicitly, overarching values embedded in Cuban society. By drawing analytical distinctions, as well as assimilations, between linguistic expressions of national and local moral economies, I aim to show that ideas and ironies of consumption in Tuta are more profound than what may be ascertained from either nutritional data on the post-1990 economic crisis or outsider interpretations of the difficulties of daily Cuban life.