The Joy and Flavour of Being Cuban:

An Ethnographic Study of Cuban Humour

by

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Abstract

This study explores the social functions of humour in present-day Cuba. Nine participants located in the area of Santa Marta, Cuba, of varying age, sex, and occupation responded to ten questions on a questionnaire related to humour and Cuban life. Transcripts of their answers were analyzed using thematic analysis for major themes consistent across interviews. Eight themes were identified related to humour in Cuba: Identity, Resilience, Enriching Relationships, Group Bonding, Nicknames, Creativity, Undermining Authority, and Expression of Freedom. These themes were analyzed using Austin and Butler's Speech Act Theory, Goffman's Frame Analysis and Facework, and Bourdieu's Forms of Capital. Information collected from participants was supplemented by the researcher's own lived experience in Cuba. Each theme was considered individually and in combination to provide a picture of the social functions of humour usage in Cuba. Humour is an integral part of Cuban identity, an essential component in the creation and maintenance of relationships, and a tool for navigating the social and political dynamics within Cuba.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Josephine Baker. The research project of which this thesis is a part received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, project name “An Ethnographic Study of Cuban Humour,” No. 00099214, July 13th, 2021.

Dedication

To my grandpa, whose patience, guidance, and unwavering support have been invaluable to my success, now and always.

To my mother, who taught by example what it means to be a driven, accomplished, proud Indigenous woman.

To Leo, gracias por tu apoyo y por creer siempre en mí.

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Chapter I: Introduction

I first became interested in the topic of humour as it relates to communication in Cuba when I moved to Cuba at 19 years old. I moved into a full household, consisting of a 50-something-year-old single mother and her two adult children, a son and a daughter each in their early 20s. There was a constant stream of people in and out of the house: neighbours, extended family, vendors, government workers.

My day-to-day interactions with Cubans as they went about their days gave me insight into the importance of humour in Cuban communication, as well as the wide variety of situations and interactions that involve humour. Humour is an integral piece of daily Cuban life. Joking occurs not only between friends and family, but between co-workers, acquaintances, store clerks and customers, bosses and employees, and the list goes on. Joking is not bound by age and occurs between people of the same age group as well as between cross-age groups of adults, the elderly, and youth.

Having grown up in Canada, I experienced a significant adjustment period as I learned the cultural norms related to joking. In Canada, my joking relationships are restricted mostly to my friends and family members. While in Cuba, I had to relearn the rules about who I could joke with and what I could joke about. In Canada, I would never tell a dirty joke to a family member, yet within my first few weeks in Cuba I experienced exactly that.

I will begin this section with a joke, which I unwittingly participated in the creation of: Have you heard of the lucky rice worm? The lucky rice worm appears during the process of washing rice, when a little worm wiggles its way out onto the table as you sort through the rice, pulling out any dirt, rocks, or other bits and pieces that are not meant to be in the rice.

The process of sorting through and cleaning rice is a daily ritual in most Cuban homes, which takes place before rice is cooked for meals. When the lucky rice worm emerges during the cleaning process, the person who finds it is supposed to say, “Good luck worm” or “Buena suerte gusano,” before squishing it under their finger. If this is done when the worm appears, the person who squishes it will have good luck.

This story was told to me when I first moved to Cuba while I was still learning how to perform daily tasks, so I followed the instructions and squished the rice worm under my finger whenever I found it. This went on for a week or two until I mentioned it to a woman while she was cleaning her own rice, and she burst out laughing.

It was then that I learned that I had been involved in a *chiste Cubano*, or a Cuban joke. This joke in particular, made fun of the current social and economic conditions that lead Cubans to have to pick bugs out of their rice each time they cook, and also pointed to the Cuban tendency to make fun of *yuma* (foreigners). The joke worked so well because at that point, I did not have a good grasp on Cuban cultural norms and stories and therefore I was the perfect mark of the joke.

Here is another funny story about learning Cuban customs. A friend and I would often have *guarapo,* a Cuban drink made out of sugarcane. Drink stands are open in the streets around Santa Marta. We would stop by one of these stands and he would order each of us a glass. From the very first time, my friend would always chug the glass. There are common beliefs about guarapo. When you drink it, depending on your current mood, it will either put you to sleep or give you tons of energy, as well as being an aphrodisiac. As I was trying to create my own internal framework and understanding of Cuban beliefs and customs, I formed a belief that to get the effects of guarapo you had to drink it very fast like he always did.

For about a year and a half, every time we had guarapo I would chug it as fast as I could. It was fairly unpleasant and always gave me a brain freeze. Finally, my family came to visit, and we went for guarapo. I immediately instructed everyone that they had to chug the drink to be as Cuban as possible. At this point, my friend turned to me and exclaimed "What!". I then learned the reason he chugged his glass. It was because he really enjoyed guarapo and usually got a second glass, which he would then drink more slowly. He was drinking the first one quickly just to make sure he would have time for two glasses.

Studying Humour

There are many definitions of humour. For the purpose of this thesis, I will rely on the following definition of humour as presented by Martin. Humour may be best defined in reference to a group of related features. These features include cognitive and social elements such as the ability to cause others to laugh and be amused, as well as the ability to understand humour and laugh at jokes told by others. Other elements of humour include being "habitually cheerful," having a "bemused outlook on the world…and a humorous perspective in the face of adversity" (Martin 2003, 49).

Humour plays an important role in human communication and is found worldwide. There are endless ways in which humour can be expressed, both verbally and physically, and as such, there are numerous categories that attempt to differentiate, describe, and classify humorous acts. Humour can be used to build rapport between people, to entertain, and to influence the mood of an interaction. Humour can also be used as a method for delivering sensitive or controversial information under the guise of "poking fun" or joking. While there are social and cultural

guidelines for where humour is and is not appropriate, humour can be used in an infinite variety of ways and situations, changing depending on the culture, time period, and the participants.

Humour can also function as a form of nonviolent resistance. It allows people to express their opinions while maintaining a cover of non-serious intent, giving them plausible deniability should their intentions be questioned. There are a number of categories dedicated to or encompassing humorous dissent, such as parody, puns, ridicule, and satire. For example, satirical cartoons are used to comment on political or economic policies, often depicting heads of state and other authority figures. Humour works to create solidarity between people who share opinions and experiences, providing a voice to those who are oppressed or marginalized.

Background for Research in the Cuban Context

Cuba has been shaped by centuries of colonialism, slavery, foreign intervention, wars, and most recently, the Cuban revolution. Because of centuries of slavery, many aspects of Cuban culture have deep African roots, as well as heavy European influence from the plantation owners who colonized the island. The Cuban Revolution, which occurred in 1959, brought with it a communist government. Under the Revolutionary Government, Cuba experienced social and economic reform, as well as scarcity and embargoes due to US interference. The Revolutionary Government has also implemented various forms of surveillance, with Cuba's "intelligence and security agencies [having] for decades maintained widespread surveillance of Cuban society through eavesdropping…and networks of informants and undercover agents" (Associated Press 2019). This has led to the development of protective and subversive communication strategies, including through humour. Today, Cuba has a vibrant culture, where many traditions, such as music**,** song, dance, and humour, are based in social interaction. Success in Cuba is often based

on whom you know, and high value is placed on the formation and maintenance of social relationships. Humour provides an avenue for bonding and connection to occur. Each of these aspects of history has formed the joking and communication styles of Cubans today.

Research Purpose

My research question is as follows: Given the sociopolitical context of Cuba, what social functions are expressed through humour by Cubans in their daily lives? I will address this question through a case study of Cubans living in the region of Santa Marta, a town located in the Cuban province of Matanzas. This region was chosen based on my pre-existing familiarity with the region and community. My intention is that my research will contribute to the contemporary literature about Cuban humour, which is sparse relative to what has been reported in historical literature. I note in particular that the Cuban Revolution of 1959 has resulted in broad changes to Cuban society, leading to potential differences with historic assessments of Cuban humour. My approach uses qualitative research methodology for an examination of humour as it is used currently in Cuba. Based on interview data, I develop eight themes to describe and analyze the social function of humour in the lives of Cubans.

As discussed in the following chapter, I will utilize the concepts and theories of scholars who have conducted fieldwork and analysis of humour across cultural groups, as well as those who have studied the linguistic forms and social purposes of humour. Recent research on Cuban humour has focused on specific comedians or humoristic art; however, much of the research on Cuban humour was conducted decades ago and needs updating with an analysis of contemporary social circumstances (Pérez Firmat 1984; Salois 2017; Torres-Robles 1992). Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have attempted to temper my own beliefs and personal attachments to

Cuba. At the same time, there are sections where I have called on my own experiences while living in Cuba in order to provide context and additional information.

In the following chapters, I will examine relevant literature, explain my research process, and analyse my research findings. In Chapter II, I review the approaches that anthropologists and social theorists have taken to the study of humour. I include the following four theories: Speech Act Theory, Frame Analysis, Facework, and Forms of Capital. I then add major linguistic, ethnographic, and theoretical approaches developed by anthropologists for studying humour. Following this, I provide examples of how contemporary anthropologists have engaged with the study of humour. Finally, I discuss the role of humour in cultures that share similar sociopolitical contexts with Cuba.

In Chapter III, I describe my research methodology. This includes details of participant recruitment, steps taken in thematic analysis of interview transcripts, and the specific interview questions and rationale. In Chapter IV, I present the results of my interviews in relationship to the theoretical concepts from Chapter II. Interview data is organized into eight themes, which are based on the most prominent and consistently mentioned topics from the interviews. Finally, in Chapter V, I summarize my findings through selective quotes from participants. I then consider limitations and directions for future research. Throughout, I have referenced jokes and other forms of humour for illustrative and exemplary purposes where appropriate for the purpose of this thesis.

Chapter II: Situating Cuba Within the Study of Humour

The study of humour through the lens of anthropology provides a holistic view of the many ways in which humour appears in human interaction. Through ethnography, anthropologists experience, observe and participate in the day-to-day lives of people. In doing so, they encounter both uncommon or exceptional experiences and the mundane. By examining human interaction within a variety of situations, anthropologists are able to approach language usage from an infinite variety of perspectives, which can be both exciting and overwhelming.

The literature in this chapter has been chosen to establish context for the interview data and analysis in this thesis. First, this chapter examines the historical and cultural context that contemporary Cuban humour has developed from. This section also includes a discussion of various approaches that have been taken toward the anthropological study of humour. Following this, I discuss two recent anthropological case studies which demonstrate that humour can develop in vastly different ways and for different purposes depending on the context. I then look at the use of humour under communism in different global contexts, to establish how humour has been utilized by both citizens and governments in nations with a similar political context to Cuba. The concepts in this section inform my own analysis of humour, providing guidance for understanding humour in the historical, political, and cultural context that it has developed from and occurs within.

A History of Humour in Cuba

From 1492 to 1898, Cuba was a Spanish colony. Following the 1898 Spanish-American War, Cuba became independent but had its affairs overseen by the United States. Cuba spent the first half of the 20th century under dictatorial rule. The dictatorship of Gerardo Machado lasted

from 1924 to 1933 and was known for the state-sanctioned violence and assassinations of political critics (Peraza 1933, 5-9). Next came the rule of Fulgencio Batista, first as elected president from 1940 to 1944 and then through a military coup as a dictator from 1952 to 1959. Batista's dictatorship was "bloody and repressive" and included the murder of "20,000 Cubans in 7 years" (Kennedy 1960). In 1959, Batista fled Cuba as Fidel Castro and an army of guerrilla fighters led the Cuban Revolution to victory (Chomsky et al. 2019, 145).

The Cuban Revolution has been ongoing since 1959, under the leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba. With the Cuban Revolution came major changes, such as improvements to social services, education, and healthcare. The Cuban Revolution also brought increased surveillance and militarism, as well as social, political, religious, and economic restrictions (Human Rights Watch 2019). Sources on Cuba, whether academic or journalistic, often come with a bias that is either pro- or anti-revolution or pro- or anti-Castro. *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics* says it best, "When someone picks up a book on Cuba, inevitably the first and decisive question is which side is it on" (Chomsky et al. 2019, 1)?

Ideology deeply influences the interpretation of Cuba's history and contemporary circumstances. *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics* also provides the following joke, which "[circulated] Cuba at the end of the 1990's" to highlight this point (Chomsky et al. 2019, 1).

> When Pope John Paul visited Havana in 1998, he was personally welcomed by Fidel Castro, who invited him to tour the city. They rode in the Popemobile, and since it was a warm day, they opened the roof. Everything was fine until they reached the Malecón, when suddenly a gust of wind blew up and swept the Pope's *zuchetto* off his head and out into the sea. There it floated, bobbing on the waves.

> ‘Don’t worry, Your Holiness,’ exclaimed Fidel, ‘I’ll get it for you!’ He jumped over the side of the Popemobile, leaped over the seawall, and sped out to where the zuchetto lay floating on the waves. Then he turned and dashed back, still skimming over the surface, leaped over the seawall, and jumped back into the Popemobile, without getting a drop of water on his clothes. ‘Here, Your Holiness,’ he panted.
>
> The next day, newspapers all over the world reported this amazing incident. In *Granma,* the Cuban Communist Party newspaper, the headline read ‘Fidel Is God; He Walks on Water.” In *L’Osservatore Romano,* the Vatican newspaper, the headline read ‘Pope Performs a Miracle: Makes Fidel Castro Walk on Water.’ And in the *Miami Herald,* read by the Cuban exile community in Miami, the headline read ‘Castro Doesn’t Know How to Swim.’ (Chomsky et al. 2019, 1)

There are no written accounts of Cuban life before colonization. As such, it is difficult to comment on the history of humour on the island pre-1492 when the island was inhabited by the Indigenous Taíno and Ciboney (Chomsky et al. 2019, 7). Cuba’s contemporary culture was created from a mixture of elements from African, Asian, and European nations and cultures. Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban anthropologist, uses the metaphor of the Cuban stew, ajiaco, to refer to “Cuba’s cultural and ethnic mixture.” Ajiaco is a “traditional Taíno stew of vegetables, roots, and meats...the ingredients do not ‘melt’ but rather contribute individually with their distinctiveness” (Chomsky et al. 2019, 25).

Cuban art and humour have been heavily influenced by different African cultures and traditions. “Many African cultural forms were re-created in the new Cuban context” (Chomsky et al. 2019, 73). These cultural forms included dances such as rumba, where “Cuban workers of all colors and from many occupations rendezvoused and shared their creole heritage in music and dance” (Chomsky et al. 2019, 74). Rumba likely began as “remembered fragments of songs and

steps from Africa" (Chomsky et al. 2019, 74). Rumba functioned as a form of protest for enslaved Africans, particularly in Havana, where "slave barracks became focal points of anguish and protest. Rebellion was difficult and dangerous, but protest in a disguised form was often expressed in recreational music and dance" (Chomsky et al. 2019, 74-75).

I have included this brief discussion of rumba to highlight two points. The first is to show the influence of African culture on Cuba's development. Rumba is now often considered Cuba's national dance, developed from the dances and rhythms of West Africa. The second reason is to provide evidence of the long-standing experience of subversive resistance throughout Cuban history.

Afro-Cubans have used humour to discuss the joys and sorrows of life in Cuba. One of the most prominent Afro-Cuban figures is Nicolás Guillén, a poet who lived from 1902 to 1989. In 1961, Fidel Castro recognized Guillén as Cuba's National Poet for his commitment to the revolution and his literary contributions to the nation, and in 1981 he was awarded "Cuba's highest honor, the Order of José Martí" ("Guillén, Nicolás" 2009). His poems spoke about "urban black themes...national concern...the broader Caribbean vision...the Spanish Civil War...race, identity, and the hierarchy of colour that had characterized race relations in prerevolutionary Cuba" (Chomsky et al. 2019, 191).

Interlaced in his commentary on Cuban life is humorous wordplay, onomatopoeia, satire, and *costumbrismo*, which is the artistic depiction of local life and customs (Barquin 2022, para. 7). Guillén's poem "Tú No Sabe Inglé" is an excellent example of the use of multiple forms of humour in his poetry (Guillén 1987, 170). The title translates to "You Don't Know English." The topic of the poem is a man, Bito Manué, who fell in love with an American woman and is made fun of for not speaking English. Throughout the poem, Guillén uses language that indicates a

lower-class or uneducated grasp of Spanish to humorous effect, indicating that not only does Bito Manué not know English, but he does not know Spanish very well either. For example, the word “Ingles” (English) is spelled “Inglé”, dropping the “s” in order to evoke the Cuban stereotype of the *guajiro* (country person or peasant) accent. This poem is topically humorous and uses humorous wordplay for added effect. As Cuba’s National Poet, Guillén’s work is read in schools across the nation, and has been integrated in the Cuban cultural consciousness. Guillén and his poetry are a prime example of the deeply embedded role of humour in Cuban culture and life.

The discussion of Cuban humour would be incomplete without mention of *choteo*. Choteo is a form of humour that originated in Cuba, characterized by “mockery, levity, and distraction” (Loss 2018, 14). The best-known theorist of Cuban choteo is Jorge Mañach, who presented and published his essay *Indigación del Choteo* (An Inquiry into Choteo) in 1928. Mañach lived from 1898 to 1961 and was a Cuban author and attorney. He was “widely known both in Spain and throughout Latin America” due to his involvement in the Latin American vanguard movement, which was an artistic and social movement involving the “exploration of Latin American problems and values” (Álvarez 1989, 833; Forster and Galdo 2008, 234).

“What defines choteo, in the manner in which the Cuban Jorge Mañach exposes it in 1928, is... [to] make oneself equal to someone of superior authority, desacralize with humor the emblems of that authority...Chotear is thus synonymous with distorting the serious representation of a subject and his speech” (Valdés-Zamora 2008, 53). Mañach’s interest in choteo was “fueled by his desire to identify what Cuba [missed] in order for it to be civilized” (Loss 2018, 18). He was concerned with what he perceived as the Cuban “absence of authority and the lack of popular respect toward the social hierarchies”, which he saw as key elements of choteo (Albis

2012, 503). He noted that most Cubans are predisposed towards the use of choteo due to a combination of tropical climate, insufficient moral education, and a national history of rebellion, but that with sufficient maturity and discipline this could be corrected (Mañach 2018, 71, 77, 99-100).

Mañach recognized that choteo had developed from and served Cubans in their fight for independence from colonial rule, where "the expressions that were predecessors of choteo -irony and mockery-...were used by Cubans during the nineteenth century as weapons against the colonial regime" (Albis 2012, 503). However, Mañach felt that by moving past choteo to more refined forms of humour, the nation could achieve a "socially accepted and hierarchically shared order in which reason displaces instinct in human conduct" (Albis 2012, 503). His writing was both a criticism of Cuban choteo, and an attempt to guide Cubans toward what he considered to be more civilized forms of social organization and interaction.

"Mañach's formal definition of *choteo* illustrates these emphases: '*Choteo* is a desire for independence that is externalized in a mockery of every non-imperative form of authority'" (Pérez Firmat 1984, 69). Contemporary Cuban American scholar Gustavo Pérez Firmat critiques Mañach's analysis and definition of choteo, saying that it "suffers from insufficient specificity. Although Mañach describes the environment in which this phenomenon materializes, he says nothing directly about its specific content… There exist, after all, other varieties of *burla* [taunt] that would meet his loose criteria" (Pérez Firmat 1984, 69). Drawing on Mañach, Pérez Firmat brings together the following elements to highlight and define choteo as distinct from other forms of humour.

Pérez Firmat's first addition to the definition of choteo is that "Cuban mockery *moves* - both in that it is theoretically elusive and in that its concrete manifestations involve a

displacement of some sort" (Pérez Firmat 1984, 70). This movement "may then be described…as a movement toward, or assault from, the margins…between a center and a periphery" (Pérez Firmat 1984, 73). Choteo involves detours, disorder, and displacement (Pérez Firmat 1984, 73).

The second addition is the importance of scatology to choteo. Pérez Firmat says that "*choteo* is often scatological but seldom genital. These are not 'dirty' jokes in the usual sense of the word, but only because they deal with real, not figurative, dirt…Reference to sexual activity play a relatively minor role in *choteo*; most of the time they are carefully (and hence obtrusively) skirted. By contrast, excrement is everywhere" (Pérez Firmat 1984, 74). The "ultimate resource" of choteo, the *trompetilla* (to blow a raspberry), is "simply the fart of the upper body" (Pérez Firmat 1984, 72). Blowing a raspberry is "the *choteador's* all purpose weapon…a 'low-culture' manifestation" that leaves the target with few options for rebuke, as any attempt can be met with another raspberry (Pérez Firmat 1984, 72). By ignoring the scatological aspect of choteo in his writing, "Mañach attempts a 'purification' of *choteo*, a filtering out of its baseness or filth" (Pérez Firmat 1984, 76).

In combining the works of Mañach and Pérez Firmat, we gain a more complete understanding of choteo. Choteo is a subversion and mockery of authority, a rejection of limitations and constraints. Few topics are truly off limits for choteo, as evidenced with the following joke: "Some Cubans were visiting the Municipal Crematorium in Paris. On seeing a corpse go into the incinerator, one of our compatriots remarked, addressing the somber operator: 'Once over, please'...[reducing] those human remains to the category of steak" (Mañach 2018, 67). Even death, a usually somber affair, can be joked about through choteo. In fact, since death is "a fundamental limitation on the individual's freedom of action", it is a well-suited target for choteo. The addition of movement to the definition of choteo provides insight into why Cubans

would choose to joke at the crematorium, as death is an excellent target for the imposition of humorous movement onto a subject that logically should be still (Pérez Firmat 1984, 69).

Likewise, with choteo and in Cuban life the opportunities for scat and anality are endless. When I was first learning Spanish, I witnessed the delight that Cubans took when my misspelling of "feliz año nuevo" (happy new year), became "feliz ano nuevo" (happy new anus) through the loss of the accent over the "n" in "año". While Mañach laments the "Cuban's tendency to not take anything seriously," his work demonstrates the longstanding tradition of Cuban humour (Loss 2018, 17). Loss notes that "like many others encountered in *An Inquiry into Choteo*, complaints over Cubans' inconsistency continue to be heard in the present" (Loss 2018, 17). Choteo continues to be relevant to the study of Cuban humour, with its legacy influencing contemporary forms of joking and play.

Challenges of Studying Humour

Studying humour anthropologically comes with challenges, as Carty and Musharbash show in their article "You've got to be joking: Asserting the analytical value of humour and laughter in contemporary anthropology" (2008). Humour is a form of communication that connects to a plethora of social processes, beliefs, and expectations. In studying humour, anthropologists can gain insight into the political, economic, religious, personal, and public spheres of a community or culture, because jokes and joking can relate to nearly any topic.

In order to understand the humour of another culture, one must have a deep understanding of the language and society one is living in. Carty and Musharbash say that "knowing how to make other people laugh with you - instead of at you - is for many anthropologists the high-water mark of fieldwork" (Carty and Musharbash 2008, 209). They

point out how humour is often a metric that anthropologists can use to measure how well they understand the role and society around them (Carty and Musharbash 2008, 209). For example, when I spoke in the introduction about the story of the "lucky rice worm," at that time I was still being laughed at, and not laughed with. However, as teasing and mockery are core components of Cuban humour and choteo, in Cuba a signal of my immersion was reciprocal teasing. Sometimes others would laugh at me, and sometimes I would laugh at others.

The challenge of researching humour is the "strangely nebulous heart of understanding and belonging, within social relationships (Carty and Musharbash 2008, 209). It can be a daunting task to attempt to categorize, or even document and describe accurately and with enough context. A further challenge to the study of humour is the problem of retaining the humour in a joke when describing and analyzing it, along with the difficulty that comes from translating a joke from a foreign language while maintaining its humour (Carty and Musharbash 2008, 211).

Even with the challenges that anthropologists face when studying humour, anthropology is well positioned for its study and analysis. "Laughter is a human universal and what people laugh about is not" (Carty and Musharbash 2008, 213). While humour is found everywhere, we can learn an immense amount from when, why, and how people joke and laugh.

Theories to Guide the Study of Social Interaction Through Humour

Below I will review four major theories related to humour separately. They are Speech Act Theory, Frame Analysis, Face work and Forms of Capital. I will then consolidate all of them into one personal example to illustrate their application and relationship.

Speech Act Theory

I will touch on speech act theory, developed by John Austin in 1962 in his book *How to Do Things with Words***.** I will define three terms coined by Austin in relation to speech acts. The locutionary act is the expression or act of speaking. The illocutionary act is the type of act that is performed, such as to give an order or request. The perlocutionary act is the effect on the addressee. Speech act theory is relevant to the study of humour. At the locutionary level, there is no specific combination of words or grammar that are clearly humorous. At the illocutionary level, humour may be recognizable depending on convention, interpretation, and on the type of speech act performed. Humour is most clear at the perlocutionary level through the effect on the addressee, as a joke makes them laugh, scoff, or react in some form.

Austin also presents the concepts of "performativity "and "felicity". Performativity refers to a speech act where the "issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (Austin 1962, 6). When a speech act is executed correctly according to social conventions, with the illocutionary act achieving the intended perlocutionary effect, the act is felicitous. If a speech act fails to meet the requirements of felicity, then it is infelicitous. Austin notes that for a performative speech act to be felicitous, one "must not be joking", and the social conditions must be appropriate for a performative utterance to be felicitous (Austin 1962, 9). For example, for the performative speech act of the words "I do" to be felicitous and therefore result in the action of a monogamous marriage, one needs to be unwed and speaking in front of someone who can legally perform a marriage (Austin 1962, 8-9).

The following quote provides a succinct explanation for considering how speech act theory relates to humour: "The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked…The procedure must be

executed by all participants correctly…[and] executed by all participants completely" (Austin 1975, 34, 36). Because felicitous performative acts rely upon the serious intentions of participants and specific, appropriate circumstances, many jokes draw upon insincere intentions or inappropriate conditions to create humour out of infelicitous performative utterances (Austin 1975, 39). Infelicitous performative utterances may be intentionally utilized to humorous effect, or humour may arise as the result of infelicitous performative speech when the speech act is unintentionally undertaken in "inappropriate circumstances; and where the procedure was faultily executed or incompletely executed" (Austin 1975, 39). For example, if someone kneels in front of their romantic partner as they tie their shoelace, and when they look up their partner says "Yes, I will marry you," the performative utterance of "I will" is infelicitous. Although the people are in a social position to become engaged, the intentions of the speaker are insincere and instead are a humorous play on circumstance, so their relationship status does not change to betrothed.

Butler, drawing on Austin, discusses injury by language. To Austin, in order to judge the effect of a speech act one must "locate the utterance within a 'total speech situation' (Butler 1997, 1). Butler says that "it is not enough to find the appropriate context for the speech act in question, in order to know how best to judge its effects," because it can be the loss of context that causes an effect (Butler 1997, 1).

Butler goes on to explain that "to be injured by speech is to suffer a loss of context, that is, not to know where you are" (Butler 1997, 1). Butler asserts that we as humans are "linguistic beings…formed in language" (Butler 1997, 1). I suggest that the concept of speech injury through a loss of context can be applied to understandings of humour. For example, Butler refers to name calling as a form of injurious speech, which "interpellates and constitutes a subject"

(Butler 1997, 1). People often feel that their name is an essential piece of who they are. When someone is teased through an unkind nickname, the loss of personal context is injurious as it can change the way that a person is perceived by themself and others.

Modes of humour such as teasing, taunting, and pranks utilize injurious speech in order to remove a subject of humour from its usual context. Butler describes that "it may be that what is *unanticipated* about the injurious speech act is what constitutes the injury, the sense of putting its addressee out of control" (Butler 1997, 1). When someone is given an unkind nickname, a loss of control is felt when others refuse to stop using the name. The loss of control and context on the part of the subject is what creates humour. Forms of humour that rely on injurious speech are more likely to be humorous to the person utilizing injurious language, rather than for the subject of the injury.

Frame Analysis

Another element that is essential to understanding how a joke is presented and understood is the way an act or utterance is framed. Goffman's (1986) theory of frame analysis addresses the ways in which people construct meaning within social situations. The theory of frames explains the following: Frames, or frameworks, are a mental tool used to identify an act as it relates to a social situation. Frames are constructed through previous experiences and existing knowledge and help one to make sense of a situation (Goffman 1986, 21).

Goffman describes frames as "schemata of interpretation" and explains that they are "seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful" (Goffman 1986, 21). Frameworks can be based on a series of rules or can be composed of "understanding[s]" and "perspective[s]" (Goffman 1986, 21). Frameworks are frequently applied unconsciously, and often one is "unable to describe the framework with any

completeness if asked, yet these handicaps are no bar to his easily and fully applying it" (Goffman 1986, 21).

Frames are an essential component of humour. The theory of frames reflects the same sentiment expressed by Austin and Butler, which is that the context of an utterance is essential for understanding how to act and respond to a situation. Drawing back to Austin, the locution, or expression and meaning of a joke needs to match the illocution, or type of act, and finally the perlocution, or effect. In order for the effect and reception of a joke to match the illocutionary act of the speaker, a humorous frame needs to be constructed around the utterance. Frameworks provide the ability to anticipate what might occur within an interaction by creating a boundary around the situation.

This boundary is based on knowledge formed from a previous experience, or based on cultural knowledge (Goffman 1986, 21). If humorous speech occurs in a situation where the frame does not match, the joke will fail. For example, in the frame of an office workspace flirtatious humour is often considered inappropriate. If used within the office frame, a flirtatious joke would likely lead to conflict or discipline for the joke teller, rather than appreciation from the audience.

Goffman also spoke about fabricated frames, in which one or more members of an interaction intentionally attempt to manipulate the frame "so that a party of one or more others will be induced to have a false belief about what it is that is going on" (Goffman 1986, 83). This type of framing lends itself to practical jokes and pranks, where for the target of the joke "what was real for him a moment ago is now seen as a deception" (Goffman 1986, 84).

Facework

Goffman's theory of facework has two main components, "face" and "line." Face is the "positive social value a person…claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman 1955, 213). A line is the series of verbal and nonverbal actions that occur within an interaction, which express one's view of the situation, the people involved, and of themselves (Goffman 1955, 214).

Throughout an interaction, participants will take lines in order to support the face they are presenting. Goffman explains that "a person may be said to *have,* or *be in,* or *maintain face* when the line he effectively takes presents an image of him that is internally consistent, that is supported by the judgements and evidence conveyed by other participants, and that is confirmed by evidence conveyed through impersonal agencies in the situation (Goffman 1955, 213-214). One can be "out of face" when one does not present the type of line expected of participants within that situation (Goffman 1955, 214).

There are a number of ways that a person can react to being "out of face." If one feels that they are out of face, they may "feel ashamed or inferior because of what…may happen to his reputation," they may feel that "[they are] perceived in a flustered state by others" (Goffman 1955, 214-215). One may become "shamefaced" if they lose face, which refers to a form of face-saving behaviour wherein a person attempts to downplay their loss of face. Whether one is successful at recovering from a loss of face relies on one's "poise," which Goffman describes as "the capacity to suppress and conceal any tendency to become shamefaced during encounters with others" (Goffman 1955, 215). Being shamefaced or out of face is not a solitary experience, and others can help one recover from a loss of face. This concept is referred to by Goffman as

"giving face," which occurs when they are able to "arrange for another to take a better line than he might otherwise have been able to take" (Goffman 1955, 215).

The theory of facework is relevant to the study of humour. While Goffman does not explore the connection between humour and "being out of face", many forms of humour, such as teasing, pranks, and ridicule are based on the "intent…to lead a person into showing a wrong face or no face" (Goffman 1955, 214). In connection to Butler's concept of injurious speech, jokes at the expense of others often rely on depriving the target of an acceptable line on which they can base their face, causing them to become "out of face". Humour can be used to critique or disrupt balances of power and hierarchy through attempts to cause someone else to lose face. Jokes that rely on someone becoming the "butt of the joke" are particularly well-suited for challenging someone else's face.

When one's face is threatened or otherwise at risk of being damaged, humour can be used as a way to save face. This can occur either by framing the face-threatening event as a joke or by using humour to ingratiate oneself with their audience, using humour to make light of a situation in a comedic manner. Humour can also be used to "give face," as other participants within an interaction can use jokes to mitigate or distract from someone else's face threat or face loss.

Forms of Capital

Bourdieu wrote about the forms of capital that people within a society hold. He defined capital as the "accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated…enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified labor" (Bourdieu 1986, 15). According to Bourdieu there are multiple forms of capital, each of which are related to the accumulation of resources. They are cultural capital, symbolic capital, economic capital, and social capital, each of which are cultivated through various mechanisms,

such as through knowledge, finances, education, relationships, or social positions (Bourdieu 1986, 16). Cultural capital is closely related to a person's ability to create and understand humour. In order to understand whether a joke is funny, one needs enough cultural capital to understand relevant topics within that society. Someone with high cultural capital is likely able to master humour more effectively than someone with low cultural capital, as they would know which topics will connect with their audience. Similarly, someone with high cultural capital is more likely to understand humour found in literature and other classical arts (Bourdieu 1986, 16-18).

Someone with high cultural capital is likely able to accumulate high symbolic capital, as they are able to use their cultural knowledge to produce funny and clever forms of humour, increasing their social or symbolic prestige when others find them funny. The use of humour can also help to create social capital. Social capital enables the user to feel connected through social relationships and to enjoy shared humorous interactions with others (Bourdieu 1986, 21). The idea of different forms of capital working together can even be applied to economic capital in relation to humour. For example, comedians and public figures with high cultural and social capital can use their knowledge and prestige to create successful careers out of humour (Bourdieu 1986, 20, 24).

The ability to perform felicitous speech acts, and to achieve the intended perlocutionary effect based upon one's illocutionary act is related to one's capital. Successful speech acts also rely on already having capital, as cultural and social knowledge is required in order to communicate successfully with others. Some performative utterances can only be performed felicitously if the speaker holds certain types of cultural capital through their professional, educational, or other type of position. Capital also impacts one's ability to apply the correct types

of humour, or other types of communication, within different types of frames. Likewise, capital is related to the successful maintenance of one's face and the mastery of poise, as face loss could threaten social and symbolic capital, leading to the loss of economic capital as well.

Consolidation of Theories

If humorous speech occurs in a situation where the frame does not match, the joke will fail. For example, while living in Cuba I was often told that I was getting fat, accompanied by a gesture of widened arms and puffed cheeks. At first, I did not have the cultural knowledge and experience to understand the frame of the comment, and I found such comments insulting. Over time, as I gained more experience and information regarding Cuban customs and history, I was able to understand that such comments were framed as humour and even as a compliment, as they indicated affluence and the availability of food in a country often plagued by scarcity. Although the illocutionary intention of the speaker in this case might have been to joke or to compliment, due to discordant cultural frames, the perlocutionary effect was insult. The perlocutionary effect of insult was a threat to my face until I correctly understood the frame and realized that the illocutionary act was making a joke (Austin 1975, Goffman 1986). My face was thereby saved from the perceived threat.

Anthropological Approaches to Humour

Humour serves as a conduit for many social functions, including social bonding, resistance to authority, the reinforcement of social norms and values, and as a method for expressing frustrations. Anthropologists have used a variety of research methodologies, such as ethnography, linguistic analysis, historical review, and comparative studies to look at the sociocultural roles of humour. The anthropological study of humour highlights the importance of

cultural relativity when analyzing and engaging with humour. The ways in which people joke and play, as well as whether something is perceived as humorous, changes based on cultural context. As said by Douglas, “in every period there is a pile of submerged jokes, unperceived because they are irrelevant or wrongly balanced for the perspective of the day” (Douglas 1968, 366).

Anthropologists have formed many definitions of humour and joking. Douglas called jokes “a play upon form. It brings into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another which in some way was hidden in the first” (Douglas 1968, 365). Bateson defined play as “a phenomenon in which the actions of ‘play’ are related to, or denote, other actions of ‘not play’... an instance of signals standing for other events” (Bateson 1955, 317). Apte referred to humour as “a cognitive, often unconscious experience involving internal redefining of sociocultural reality and resulting in a mirthful state of mind” (Apte 1985, 14).

A common thread between many of these definitions of humour is the juxtaposition of two elements, one commonly accepted and one counter to the norm. Douglas summarizes this concept when she says, “all jokes have this subversive effect on the dominant structure of ideas…a joke is a play upon form…A successful subversion of one form by another completes or ends the joke, for it changes the balance of power” (Douglas 1968, 364-365).

Early research often focused on ritual joking and the relationship between jokes and social ties. The impact of joking, and the regulations surrounding when, where, and with whom one may joke, were of particular interest to anthropologists in the early half of the 20th century. While not the main purpose of his research, Malinowski observed how Trobriand Islanders used humour to navigate their social and economic relationships. He noted that amusement played an

important social role for Trobrianders through group festivities, games, and laughter (Malinowski 2005, 50, 164, 230, 302, 311).

Radcliffe-Brown's research on joking relationships looked at "all those types of social relationship in which two persons are by custom permitted, or even required, to use speech or behaviour which in other relationships would be grievously offensive" (Radcliffe-Brown 1949, 133). Joking relationships are "one of permitted disrespect" (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 196).

He noted that some joking relationships allow for mutual joking, while others only allow one party to tease the other (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 195). Joking relationships function to "prevent conflict…the whole maintenance of a social order depends on the appropriate kind and degree of respect being shown towards certain persons, things and ideas or symbols" (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 196-197).

Mary Douglas looked at the systems involved in telling and perceiving jokes. She highlighted the importance of understanding a joke within its cultural conditions, saying "a joke form rarely lies in the utterance alone, but that it can be identified in the total situation (Douglas 1968, 366). In order to understand what makes a joke, she said "its form consists of a victorious tilting of uncontrol against control" (Douglas 1968, 366). To Douglas, the essence of a joke was the subversion of dominant norms and ideals, and the flipping of power balances (Douglas 1968, 364-365).

In addition, Douglas pointed to the social immunity bestowed upon joke-tellers. She explains that the status of a joke-teller is different from that of a "taboo breaker whose polluting act is a real offence to society" (Douglas 1968, 372). A joke teller is given a special status, where they engage in acts that threaten social norms and balances, but only symbolically rather than literally. She says, "safe within the permitted range of attack, he lightens for everyone the

oppressiveness of social reality, demonstrates its arbitrariness by making light of formality in general, and expresses the creative possibilities of the situation" (Douglas 1968, 372).

Edward Sapir looked at human behaviour through linguistic analysis. He wrote that the morphology of a word can produce humorous effects (Sapir 1963a, 184-186). He spoke about how myth characters are often given humorous speech patterns based on real-life language mistakes and misuse. This is evidenced in the following quote:

> I am inclined to believe that the observation of consonant substitutions such as take place, with involuntarily humorous effect, in the speech of those that articulate incorrectly, has set the pace for the consciously humorous use of the same or similar substitutions both mocking, and directly or indirectly, myth-character forms…A myth character whom it is desired to treat humorously may, among other possibilities, be relegated…to the class of poor talkers. (Sapir 1963a, 191)

Humorous language lends itself to the continuation of specific cultural traditions. He suggested "a general tendency to give color to the speech of a mythological character," as "a humorous story travels faster" than other common topics (Sapir 1963b, 414; 1963c, 466-467).

Edmund Leach looked at the social and linguistic distinctions that humans create in order to navigate the world around them. Things that do not fall neatly into categories become taboo, with Leach saying, "taboo applies to categories which are anomalous with respect to clear-cut category oppositions" (Leach 1966, 39). Leach says that the pun "occurs when we make a joke by confusing two apparently different meanings of the same phonemic pattern. The pun seems funny or shocking because it challenges a taboo which ordinarily forbids us to recognize that the sound pattern is ambiguous" (Leach 1966, 25). Animal categories are often evoked in humour, "in which a human being is equated with an animal of another species" (Leach 1966, 28).

Evoking the name of an animal which we consider socially close does not create a humorous effect, while those considered socially distant do. This is why categories of animals kept as pets are not funny, but farm animals often are (Leach 1966, 37). Pigs fall between the distinct categories of pet and livestock, making their meaning ambiguous and therefore taboo. This makes terms associated with pigs particularly effective for insult and humour (Leach 1966, 50-51).

Gregory Bateson suggested a framework for understanding the role of play in human interaction. He noted in particular that in order to be capable of play, both humans and some non-humans must be "capable of some degree of metacommunication…of exchanging signals which would carry the message 'This is play'" (Bateson 2006, 316).

Bateson linked metacommunication to framing, which Goffman built upon later. He explains that through the frame of play, and the metacommunicative signals given in that frame, participants in an interaction come to understand that "the messages or signals exchanged in play are in a certain sense untrue or not meant; and…that that which is denoted by these signals is nonexistent" (Bateson 2006, 319).

Victor Turner wrote about play through the lens of liminality and communitas. Turner describes liminality as "a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes…it is a time of enchantment when anything *might*, even should, happen" (Turner 1979, 465). Communitas refers to the shared experience of a liminal space, "the mutual confrontation of human beings stripped of status role characteristics" (Turner 1979, 470-471).

Turner pointed to liminality as a space especially primed for play. He explained that "liminality is full of potency and potentiality. It may also be full of experiment and play. There

may be a play of ideas, a play of words, a play of symbols, a play of metaphors" (Turner 1979, 466). As an example of situations involving play and liminality, Turner described carnivals and stage plays explaining that "they are liminal phenomena, with a good deal of reflexive commentary interwoven with the descriptive narrative" (Turner 1979, 486).

Humour relies on many of the attributes listed by Turner, such as the play of ideas, words, symbols, and metaphors. Many forms of humour utilize the unknown in order to produce a comedic effect. Members of a humorous interaction experience communitas within the liminal space of comedy. They are confronted with shared questions: Will the joke land? Who will be the target of the prank? What will the punchline be? As Turner says, "no longer is social structure relatively solidary; class and gender have become self-conscious, reflexive, and one part of the social system employs formerly shared cultural symbols to provide a critique of others" (Turner 1979, 490).

Mahadev Apte spoke about the many social impacts of humour. Apte's research looked at humour in social groups that had previously been overlooked. For example, when speaking about women's humour, Apte said that conclusions about women's humour being more limited than men's might be due to "either in a lack of interest in women's activities…or in attempts to force women's verbal creations into preexisting categories and genres developed from men's expressive culture" (Apte 1985, 74). He also spoke about the importance of children in the study of humour. He explained that children's humour is "often modeled on adult patterns of social interaction and humour. Some of the same techniques of humor are used, and the same genres and categories are emphasized" (Apte 1985, 83).

Apte pointed to humour as a way for oppressed groups to express themselves. He explained that "minority ethnic groups expressed in their humor as it indicates their status in and

relations to dominant groups in the society at large" (Apte 1985, 109). He pointed to humour as a form of protest, where humour "is seen as functioning to relieve the 'suppressed aggression'" or "cathartic release of aggression" for minority groups (Apte 1985, 141).

Judith Irvine discusses strategies for the communication of taboo or otherwise "unmentionable" topics (Irvine 2011, 16). She points to two common mechanisms for veiled language, euphemism, and footing, which she refers to as "containment efforts" (Irvine 2011, 18). Both euphemism and footing can be used together or separately. Euphemisms refers to "masking and distancing," in which speakers substitute the unspeakable language with more socially acceptable language (Irvine 2011, 18).

Footing is a theory developed by Erving Goffman, which refers to the "alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self" of a participant in an interaction (Goffman 1981, 128). Through a shift in footing, a speaker could "introduce a correction or some other out-of-frame comment to be omitted from the official record," and then return to their previous footing and resume the original line of conversation (Goffman 1981, 152). A change in footing could also signal to others that a speaker is quoting another person, rather than claiming authorship over a statement themself (Goffman 1981, 151). In relation to taboo, it is through footing that speakers can speak directly about the taboo subject, "but distance is established between the referent and the current speaker" by placing origination onto someone else (Irvine 2011, 18).

Irvine also mentions containment through use of another language, giving the example of English speakers inserting Latin terminology to refer to a taboo subject (Irvine 2011, 18). This type of container draws on Bourdieu's cultural capital, as it utilizes "ways of speaking and writing that must be acquired through lengthy formal education are available only to the elites…only those hearers who can be trusted to handle the information in a socially appropriate

way can receive it at all" (Irvine 2011, 19-20). This strategy is primed for humour, as those outside of the elite can appropriate the same exclusive language in order to mock, taunt, or ridicule the upper classes.

Irvine notes that "reported speech, code-switches, and euphemistic language as means of avoiding responsibility for something problematic don't always work. Dirt can stick; registers (and footing shifts) can leak, spilling some portion of their potentially toxic contents onto the speaker" (Irvine 2011, 23). In the context of humorous speech, failed containment strategies can result in something as innocent as a bad pun, or something as potentially serious as subversive speech being attributed to the speaker.

Irvine highlights that whether something is unmentionable or taboo is relative to the context, pointing to the "interactional setting of usage rather than only the inherent toxicity of the linguistic expressions themselves" (Irvine 2011, 25). When something cannot be said but would be appreciated by members of an interaction, there can be a "thin veiling of a topic…[which] can serve the mischievous purpose of ostentatiously drawing attention to the very topic that has been evaded" (Irvine 2011, 32). This type of containment is often accompanied by a gesture - "smirking, the arched eyebrow, a slyness of manner" - indicating shared appreciation of the topic (Irvine 2011, 32).

Irvine wrote about insult within Wolof society in her chapter "Insult and Responsibility: Verbal Abuse in a Wolof Village." Irvine uses "xaxaar," which is a form of insult poetry in order to examine when and how "responsibility for disreputable acts…[are] allocated" (Irvine 1993, 105). She explains that an analysis of insult needs to consider "the contexts - cultural, linguistic, and situational - that might be relevant to understanding local instances of evaluative discourse" (Irvine 1993, 105).

Irvine examines the use of ambiguity and circumlocution as "escape routes" to avoid responsibility for an insult (Irvine 1993, 124). Through escape routes, "some of the most outrageous insults can be uttered" (Irvine 1993, 114). Irvine points to metacommunication as one such escape route, where "smiling and laughing while delivering the rebuke marks it as non-serious" (Irvine 1993, 127). Another strategy is to deliver an insult indirectly by directing the comment to a third person, allowing the target to hear the insult but not be directly addressed in conversation (Irvine 1993, 127). Attributing an insult to another source through quotation "[dissociates] speaker from author" (Irvine 1993, 125-126). Additionally, the speaker of an insult can use linguistic strategies that obfuscate their intent. Irvine says:

> It is always possible to shift the expression of verbal abuse away from bald assertions by using semantic mitigations and circumlocutions: euphemisms, metaphorical constructions, and forms of ellipsis or avoidance of the actual defamatory assertion, which is implied rather than stated" (Irvine 1993, 128).

In the words of Irvine, "The moral life of language does not reside in the linguistic properties of utterances alone, nor only in the moment of interaction. The words not spoken, the discourse contexts, the interactional and societal histories, the responses by interlocutors, the conventions of genre, the regimes of language, truth, and knowledge that prevail in the interlocutors' social worlds - all of these are relevant as well" (Irvine 2011, 35).

The studies described in this section demonstrate many divergent approaches to humour. Some researchers, like Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, approach humour as a mechanism for social connection and mediation. Others, like Sapir and Leach, have looked at humour through the lens of linguistic analysis, attempting to determine the linguistic factors involved in making something humorous. Bateson focused on the creation of a framework through which humour

can be identified, understood, and analysed. Turner and Douglas looked at the social norms and spaces that speakers utilize, subvert, and critique in order to create humour. Douglas, Apte, and Irvine looked at the effects that humour can have on users, such as protection from retribution or release of frustration. Douglas and Irvine also highlighted the need to understand humour within culturally specific circumstances.

Put together, the approaches taken by these scholars create a framework for the study of humour. This framework recognizes the internal and external implications of humour on relationships, coping, relating to others, and expressing oneself. It also provides a guide for identifying the linguistic elements involved in humour, and the social norms that are subverted or inverted to comedic effect. My research will draw upon these concepts, and I will refer back to these studies as a guide for analysing my data later on.

Recent Anthropological Case Studies on Humour

The previous section looked at the various approaches that anthropologists have taken toward the study of humour over the course of the discipline. Here, I provide two examples of recent case studies to illustrate how these anthropological approaches function within contemporary research. These studies occur within different cultures, providing examples of the different ways humour can develop depending on the context.

Siegman studied the role of humorous interactions between Palestinians and Israelis working together in Israeli settlements. He found that humour functioned as a way for Palestinians to challenge power imbalances. Humour also created a sense of camaraderie and shared experience between Israeli and Palestinian workers, despite the larger political conflict surrounding them **(**Siegman 2020, 103-104). In an example provided by Siegman, a Palestinian

worker used humour to satirize the militarization of everyday spaces, including the store that he worked in. The worker would imitate the Israeli military salute in front of Israeli settlers, though to no one in particular, using parody to "[dramatize] the violence and [draw] attention to it" (Siegman 2020, 109). Siegman emphasizes that he views Palestinian humour as "emerging from and shaping the contact zone" rather than acting as "a straightforward form of resistance" (Siegman 2020, 108).

When the Palestinian worker uses parody without a specific audience, the "defamatory assertion…is implied rather than stated" (Irvine 1993, 128). His actions are an example of the safety that humour can provide, as the threat to social norms is only symbolic and unlikely to pose any real danger to the social balance (Douglas 1968, 372). Siegman's approach demonstrates the importance of culturally specific analysis in the study of humour (Douglas 1968, 366; Irvine 1993, 105). By taking into account the power balances, historical context, and other social factors specific to the Israeli-Palestinian context, Siegman recognizes that Palestinian humour is not solely a form of resistance. Instead, humour serves as a multifaceted form of communication and expression of agency, which is both altered by the space around it and in turn exerts its own influence onto the space.

Black provided another case study on humour. He examined the role that humour played for South Africans living with HIV. Black wrote that humour was a method for South Africans living with HIV to resist and subvert the stigmatizing narratives that they faced in their daily lives (Black 2012, 88). Through jokes, people with HIV were able to reframe their experiences and build connections and community support with others who shared similar experiences. Black said that "talk about HIV within a play frame . . . rooted in the presupposition of acceptance,

improvised self and other-directed joking about HIV became an integral part of support by emphasizing shared community membership" (Black 2012, 99).

Black's research reflects Apte's theory, where humour functions as a way for oppressed or minority groups to express themselves and discuss their status in relation to dominant groups. In the case of HIV-positive South Africans, the use of humour functioned both as a mechanism for coping with difficulty, and likely as a "cathartic release" of emotion related to their diagnosis (Apte 1985, 141). Joking about their HIV-positive status also engaged in challenging the balance of power, which Douglas identified as one of the main components of successful humour (Douglas 1968, 364-365). In reframing their experiences and developing a sense of community with others, HIV-positive South Africans used humour to challenge the norm that socially stigmatized illness often goes hand-in-hand with social isolation.

Black's research provides another example of the importance of culturally specific analysis when researching humour, as the ability to joke about illness is culturally relative. HIV-positive South Africans were able to joke about their illness and create positive connections, while in other contexts joking about illness could be seen as disrespectful or taboo. Black's research emphasizes the important role that humour plays in coping with stigma and discrimination. It also shows the value of humour in creating support networks and community connections.

I take guidance from the approaches of Siegman and Black, recognizing the importance of situating humour within its cultural, political, and historically specific origins. Both authors demonstrate that communities who are stigmatized and oppressed are not just passively acted upon by their environment, but often exert their own agency and influence in return. Siegman and Black demonstrate how the intent and impact of humour is not always straightforward, often

performing multiple social functions. These studies provide examples of the nuance involved in humour analysis. On the surface, jokes might look like they play a simple or straightforward role in communication and connection. Yet depending on the social, cultural, political, and historical context, the meaning and effect of humour can vary widely.

Humour Under Communism

In order to create a comprehensive framework for the analysis of humour in Cuba, the following section looks at humour in countries with similar political backgrounds to Cuba. Today, there are relatively few communist governments in power. Cuba is one of just five countries in 2023 with an official communist government, alongside China, North Korea, Laos, and Vietnam (Britannica 2018). Descriptions of humour under present-day communist rule are limited. In order to address this, I will discuss humour in Romania, the Soviet Union, and China during their time of communist rule. I also include Venezuela because of its historical connections with Cuba.

Robert Cochran (1989) writes about humour in communist Romania under the rule of Nicolae Ceauşescu as "personality cult leadership." The party leader becomes a symbol of "the nation embodied" (Cochran 1989, 260). Many jokes centre around the leadership of Ceausescu and often focus on a reversal of social roles.

Cochran provides the example of a television broadcast where Ceauşescu stood before an audience waving to them. A Romanian man watching the broadcast remarked, "It's the one way he serves us...Almost every night he cleans the television'" (Cochran 1989, 259). In this comment "the message is turned on its head, hierarchy is undone…the would-be emperor is a window washer" (Cochran 1989, 259). Not only does the joke imagine the Romanian leader as

no different from an everyday citizen. There is "a further reversal in the notion of Ceauşescu serving his people, since in real life Romanians are openly urged to devote their lives to serving him" (Cochran 1989, 259). The joke therefore can be seen as a subtle commentary on the demand to constantly serve a ruler who does not support them in return.

Jokes in Romania also focused on scarcity. Cochran describes a joke in which Ceauşescu sees citizens standing in long lines waiting for food. He demands that food be delivered immediately so that his citizens do not go hungry. The first line waiting for bread receives food immediately, as does the second line of people waiting for eggs. Finally, he arrives at the line waiting for meat and after a pause, says with authority "Bring my people chairs!" (Cochran 1989, 264). In Romania, "few individuals actually speak out openly against Ceauşescu…they tell jokes instead. And how do they tell jokes? Very carefully. In a nation where the arm (and ear) of the *Securitate* extends into every workplace, there is an unspoken subtext to every political joke. 'You are my friend,' it says. 'We have our situation in common" (Cochran 1989, 270).

Cochran sees humour in Romania as a release valve rather than a form of social change. "The joke is a protest, certainly, even in its sharing of risk and laughter a more than private protest. But its efficacy is psychological, not political…A private independence is maintained, but no public change is effected" (Cochran 1989, 272). While jokes provide an outlet to express frustrations and provide pleasure to the speaker and listener as they joke about their misfortunes, "there is a defeat at the heart of every joke, a sorrow in the heart of the joker" (Cochran 1989, 272). Humour can often provide a form of protection for expressing controversial or subversive beliefs. The frame of humour allows speakers to backtrack a statement, indicating that it was said

in jest. As seen in Romania, this type of discourse allows citizens to cope with their circumstances.

In the USSR, humorous commentary was identified as a form of dissent that could undermine the government. Under Soviet rule, "joke telling was considered 'anti-Soviet agitation' by the secret police" and was taken so seriously that joke tellers could be prosecuted under the criminal code (Brandenberger 2009, 3). "Tens of thousands of Soviets were arrested every year during the 1930s for even the most innocent attempts at levity and humor" (Brandenberger 2009, 7).

Joking in the USSR was done carefully and "an unspoken taboo precluded joking around strangers" (Brandenberger 2009, 3). The USSR employed a combination of surveillance by the secret police and local informants in order to establish intense and expansive social control. Brandenberger identified times where neighbours, colleagues, and friends were turned in to police for their humour (Brandenberger 2009, 9). Even with the risk of serious consequences, humour continued. In particular, the family home became a place where the most brazen humour could be expressed (Brandenberger 2009, 4).

Joke telling became both a dangerous pastime and a necessary indulgence. People living under Soviet rule needed a way to express themselves and as a way to bond with others during a time where everyone around them was a potential government informant. As such, "this punitive approach to political humor did not…discourage joke-telling so much as it encouraged jokesters to be selective about where and when they made their wisecracks" (Brandenberger 2009, 8).

Jokes often "gave voice to dissatisfaction or frustration through the use of sarcasm, vulgarity, cheap shots…Such wisecracks allowed jokesters to challenge authority while enjoying a degree of plausible deniability that more direct forms of public protest did not afford"

(Brandenberger 2009, 11). A second, more distinct form of humour that often occurred was "Gallows Humor," which is an "elaborate genre of joke-telling, generally revolved around the bitter realities of everyday life" (Brandenberger 2009, 11).

Humour in the Soviet Union shared similarities with Cuba. Membership in the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) incentivized Cubans to report others for anti-revolutionary activities (Colomer 2000, 118). Cubans had to wonder whether their conversations would be overheard by others and reported. As in the USSR, "a tendency to be perpetually on guard was critical for survival" (Brandenberger 2009, 9).

With the presidential election of Hugo Chavez in 1998, Venezuela underwent a populist reform. Although Venezuela was not explicitly communist under Chavez, he worked closely with Fidel Castro in "revolutionary solidarity" (Azicri 2009, 99). After Chavez died in 2013, Nicolás Maduro became president and under his rule scarcity and militarism increased, as did related jokes (Lansberg-Rodríguez 2015).

Lack of material goods and the endless lines of people waiting at empty stores were common topics of humour in Venezuela, demonstrating the role of humour in coping. Politics were included in jokes about scarcity and queues. One joke goes as follows: "Two men are waiting in a food queue and one of them finally snaps. 'That's it,' he announces, 'I'm sick of lines, and I'm off to shoot Nicolás Maduro.' With that, he storms off, only to return an hour later, and jostle back into his former spot. 'Well, did you do it?' asks his companion. 'I couldn't,' the man says. 'The line to kill Maduro was even longer than this one'" (Lansberg-Rodriguez, 2015). Including Maduro in the joke allows the teller to criticize the leader and point to him as the culprit for deteriorating social and economic conditions.

The Mao era of Chinese history spanned from 1949 to 1976 and is often described as "oppressive, puritanical, traumatic, and inhuman" (Zhu 2019, 2). During this time, in contrast with other communist leadership where humour was silenced or policed, humour became a tool used by the communist government in China. Laughter became a political act in which "the 'enemy'...could only laugh hypocritically or deceitfully," while "the socialist citizen's laughter was often described as cheerful, hearty, genuine, and healthy…the outer manifestation of the socialist spirit" (Zhu 2019, 6).

At present, the Chinese government censors humour to a degree. In May of 2023, a Chinese stand-up comedian was given a fine of over two million dollars for invoking a Chinese military slogan while joking about his dog, leading to concern that "stand-up comedy could be virtually wiped out in China following fears of similar punishment in the future" (*BBC News* 2023). Humour has become "a powerful rhetorical discourse that Chinese artists have turned to in order to sanction, critique, subvert, and transform established patterns of thought and expression" (Rea and Volland 2008, ix). "Canon mocking" is a form of parody through which canonical works of art and literature are "rewritten and reshaped," subverting the "discursive order of traditional canons, including their underlying aesthetics, morality, and cultural codes" (Dongfeng 2007, 203-204). Canon mocking as a form of satirical humour has received approval from the Chinese state in recognition that it has "limited ability to challenge the political establishment" (Zhu 2019, 334).

Today, humour continues to be used as a tool for critique and expression of frustrations. Gallows humour, or dark humour, has been used to cope with the crash of the Chinese stock market, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the thick smog that has overtaken many Chinese cities in

recent years (Lu 2012; Ma 2020; *Reuters* 2016). Through humour, Chinese citizens make fun of their circumstances and sometimes themselves as well.

There is a Chinese proverb which says "'A good laugh makes one younger' (*Xiaoyixiao, shaoyishao* 笑一笑，少一少)" (Zhu 2019, 1). In the spirit of that proverb, I will end this section with gallows humour from China, with some unintended irony as pollution is known to age one faster. As people cope with choking smog, the following joke provides guidance on how to deal with the pollution: "Individual therapy: put a mask on. Family therapy: buy health insurance. If you have money and the time: go on holiday. If you've no class: emigrate. National therapy: wait for the wind" (*Reuters* 2016).

Summary

This chapter has covered the history of humour in Cuba, the various approaches that anthropologists have taken toward the study of humour, examples of recent approaches to the study of humour, and a discussion of humour under communism. Humour is a complex topic that has been investigated extensively in anthropological research, and it has been viewed from different theoretical perspectives. Its use has also been found to vary when studied across distinct cultures. Humour has been suppressed through surveillance in other communist countries similar to Cuba.

Cuba is a culture in which humour has been observed to have a significant presence historically and in the present. Taken together, the literature supports the importance of research on the role of humour in Cuba. Cuba's history of colonialism, political upheaval, violence, and revolution has resulted in the development of culturally relevant joking habits. In the following chapters, I will draw on the concepts and theories discussed in this section, using them to guide

my discussion and analysis of interview data. In the following chapter, I will discuss my data collection and research methodology.

Chapter III: Methodology

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to Covid-19, my research was originally planned to take place in person, in the city of Santa Marta and the surrounding communities. In my original research plan, I was going to meet face-to-face with participants and interview them with a similar set of questions as I ended up using in my asynchronous online interviews. In my original research plan, interviews would have included conversation, and I would have introduced follow-up questions. Additionally, my original research plan would have allowed me to meet with participants in circumstances that were convenient for the participant, which might have influenced the size or demographics of my research sample. Due to changing circumstances and the loosening of travel restrictions, I was able to do a face-to-face interview with one participant, Peludo, with follow-up questions as originally planned.

However, I was only able to interview the rest of my participants using asynchronous online interviews. The term “asynchronous interviews,” in this case, refers to the following process: Interviews were conducted through the messaging app WhatsApp. Participants were provided with interview questions and were then asked to reply through either written message or voice message. This process was chosen because of the instability of wifi and cellular data in Cuba, where video and phone calls frequently fail to connect, or if connected, frequently freeze or drop partway through the call. Additionally, wifi and cellular data are not available in all locations. In order to avoid putting undue hardship on participants, I chose to provide them with the questions and then have them respond through written or voice-recorded messages when they were able to connect to wifi or cellular data at their own convenience.

Data was analyzed through thematic analysis. Caulfield provides a step-by-step guide for the creation of themes in qualitative data analysis (Caulfield 2022). Transcripts were translated by me from Spanish to English. Segments in the transcripts considered relevant to the research question were highlighted. Descriptive codes were assigned to the highlighted segments. Codes were combined into themes reflecting broader patterns throughout the research (Braun and Clarke 2022, 9).

Analysis of interview transcripts yielded eight themes and accompanying explanations. The results are presented in the "Discussion" section following the format of Bowles et al. for presenting themes in qualitative research. Specifically, the themes are listed with short explanatory paragraphs (Bowles et al. 2009, 43-45). They are followed up by a more detailed and extensive discussion inclusive of the real-life experiences of the participants as expressed in the transcripts. My discussion follows advice in the literature for presenting qualitative research. Anderson advises that "The researcher should select quotes that are poignant and/or most representative of the research findings" (Anderson 2010, 3). Lingard writes that quotes should be "reasonably succinct" and "representative of the patterns in the data" (Lingard 2019, 2).

I have also borrowed advice from Wang and Geale from narrative research. They say to "look for ways to understand and then present real-life experiences through the stories of the research participants" (Wang and Geale 2015, 195). They add that this "allows for a rich description of these experiences and an exploration of the meanings participants derive from their experiences" (Wang and Geale 2015, 195). Throughout the Discussion I provide selective quotes and stories of real-life experiences from participants that elaborate on the eight themes emerging from the data. I consider the quotes to be a succinct representation of my research as

well as those that are most poignant. I also add my related observations and commentary from my time spent in Cuba.

Recruitment

While the term “informants” is commonly used in qualitative research, like many other more recent writers, I have chosen to use “participants” due to the historical and political connotations associated with the term “informant” in Cuba and other contexts. My research participants were recruited through a snowball recruitment process. This is a technique where existing contacts recruit participants from among their acquaintances. The sample group is said to grow like a snowball. According to Nikolopoulou, this sampling method is “used to study sensitive topics, or topics that people may prefer not to discuss publicly…due to a perceived risk associated with self-disclosure” (Nikolopoulou 2022, chap. 1).

Snowball sampling considers ethical issues, such as protecting privacy and ensuring confidentiality when accessing these populations. Recruiting participants for a study of humour in Cuba where humour has been suppressed involves that risk. Snowball sampling was considered the most appropriate method for this study.

The process involved providing information about my study to my personal contacts in Cuba. They were given a one-page document written in Spanish, which described the nature of the study. The document also included my contact information. Potential participants were then instructed to contact me for further information about the study. I chose to have participants contact me, and be identified through the snowball method, in order to avoid potential influence or pressure that might come from being contacted by a foreigner to participate in a study.

My personal contacts were asked to disseminate the information to people who they thought would fit the research criteria and who might be interested in participating. The research

criteria for participants were to be above the age of consent (18 years old) and to live in the town of Santa Marta and the surrounding area.

Participants

Table 1. Demographics of Participants by Age, Sex, and Occupation.

Name (Pronunciation)	Age	Sex	Occupation
Gallego (Ga-ye-go)	70s	Male	Photographer, Historian, Retired Military
Tito (Tee-toe)	60s	Male	Historian, Archivist
Zurdo (Soor-doe)	30s	Male	Computer Systems Analyst
Blanquito (Blank-ito)	20s	Male	Construction
Bruji (Brew-hee)	30s	Female	Public Relations
Pocha (Po-cha)	20s	Female	Pharmacy Technician
Jefe (Hef-ey)	30s	Male	Doctor
Flaco (Flack-o)	40s	Male	Construction
Peludo (Pel-oo-doe)	30s	Male	Waiter

Participants are diverse in age, sex, and occupation. The participant sample size of 9 exceeds the 4-6 key participants recommended in the literature and approaches the 10 suggested by Muellmann et al. as the number to strive for (Muellmann et al. 2021, 1-3). I was also able to add my lived experience in Cuba as anecdotal evidence considered of value as additional qualitative information (Van Manen 1989). All participants were given a nickname as a pseudonym to protect their identities. Nicknames are very common in Cuba, so their use in this study was reflective of that cultural practice.

Consent was given by participants before interviews were conducted. They were given a document describing the study, research process, reasons for the research, and information about their rights as participants. These rights included the ability to withdraw from participation at any time, to refuse to answer any and all questions, and to withdraw previous participation data from the study up until the time of publication.

As compensation for their participation, participants were given a refill of the phone minutes or data on their cellphones to offset any potential costs associated with connecting to the internet. This form of compensation was chosen because it is a common way for friends and family who live outside of Cuba to help those living on the island keep in contact with others.

Interview Questions

Interview questions were asked in Spanish, and as such I will provide the Spanish version of the questions after their English translation. Following each question, I will provide a brief explanation of why the question was chosen. Interview responses were given in Spanish and were then translated to English by me for the purposes of the thesis.

1. Was or is there anyone in your life that influenced your sense of humour? Who are or were they? (¿Fue o hay alguien en tu vida que te haya influenciado tu sentido de humor? ¿Quiénes son o fueron?)

This question was asked in order to learn about the social processes involved in learning about humour and forming a sense of humour in Cuba.

2. Did you have a nickname when you were growing up, and was it funny? Do you use nicknames with your friends, and are they funny? If you still have a nickname, why did you keep it? (Durante tu desarrollo/crecimiento tuviste algún apodo? ¿Era gracioso?

¿Usaste algún apodo con tus amigos? ¿Cuán gracioso eran? ¿Todavía tienes algún apodo? ¿Si o no y porque la mantienes?)

This question was chosen based on my personal experience in Cuba, where I learned that nicknames are common and often humorous. I hoped to learn more about the role that humour plays in giving and receiving nicknames. I also hoped to learn more about the impact that nicknames have on individuals as they progress through their lives.

3. Are there any groups of people who are popular topics for jokes (ex. Groups based on race, sexuality, political, social, or economic)? (Conoces algún grupo de personas en general que sean más populares para las bromas (ejemplo de grupo: raza, sexualidad, ¿económico, social, político?)

This question was also chosen in order to learn about social dynamics in Cuba, and in order to learn whether humour reflects beliefs about social groups found in Cuba.

4. Can you think of any words that are unique to Cuba? If yes, do you use these words? Are they serious, or humorous? (¿Puedes pensar en palabras únicas solo de Cuba? ¿Te encuentras a ti mismo usando esas palabras? ¿Son palabras serias o de bromas?)

This question was chosen based on my personal experience in Cuba, where I learned that there are many words with meanings specific to Cuba, which are often used in humorous exchanges.

5. Do you think that most Cubans share a similar sense of humour, or do you think it is based more on other factors such as region, social class, religion, political beliefs, etc.? (¿Tú crees que todas las personas en Cuba tienen similar sentido de humor o se basa en su región, clase social, religión, creencias políticas, etc.?)

This question was chosen to address the personal beliefs of participants regarding Cuban identity and the role of humour in connecting with others. This question was also chosen in order to look at the personal conceptions of participants regarding cultural identity, class, and other social categories.

6. Have you seen humour used in political situations? (¿Alguna vez has visto el humor usado en eventos políticos para conectar con el pueblo?)

This question was chosen in order to learn about the role that humour plays (or does not play) in political situations and political narratives.

7. Is there a time in your life where your joking habits or sense of humour changed? If yes, do you know why? (A través de tu vida, puedes pensar en un tiempo donde los hábitos de juegos/bromas cambiarán? ¿Tienes idea de por qué se realizaron estos cambios?)

This question was chosen in order to learn about the role and use of humour across the lifespan of participants.

8. In a normal day, who do you joke with? Please list people or situations. (¿En un día normal, con quien haces bromas? Haz una lista y/o describe personas o situaciones tanto como quieras.)

This question was chosen in order to learn about how participants experience and use humour in their daily life, as well as to learn about which situations commonly involve humour. This question was also chosen to learn about who participants were influenced by in the development of their sense of humour.

9. Are there circumstances where humour is not permitted or socially acceptable in Cuba? (¿Dime situaciones donde las bromas no eran permitidas o socialmente aceptadas en Cuba?)

This question was chosen to learn about social dynamics, beliefs, and potential prohibitions or taboos surrounding humour.

10. Has COVID-19 changed or influenced your joking habits? (¿El COVID-19 ha cambiado tu forma de bromear? Si tienes algún ejemplo de bromas sobre el COVID-19 puedes describirlas.)

As this research occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, this question was chosen to address the influence of COVID-19 on Cuban life, social interactions, and the potential social changes that may have occurred as a result of a global pandemic.

Chapter IV: Results and Discussion

The purpose of my research is to explore the social functions that are addressed and interacted with through the use of humour in Cuba. Through interview responses, I looked at the themes that emerge in the lives of everyday Cubans, which reflect the various intentions of their humour. This topic is important as it relates to the body of literature on Cuban communication, social networks, and the ongoing Cuban Revolution, as well as the anthropological body of knowledge and literature on the study of humour within different cultural contexts. The themes generated in the interview data provide a picture of the social functions of humour based on how humour impacts and is employed by Cubans as they navigate their sociopolitical circumstances. In this chapter, I will discuss the responses provided by participants and draw connections where possible between interview data and the concepts discussed in Chapter II.

Identity

The first theme to emerge from the interview data was "Identity." This label relates to humour as a distinguishing character or personality of people. Cubans claim humour as a personal trait. I personally have heard an ongoing narrative of Cubans described as "outgoing, fun-loving, happy people" by foreigners who have visited Cuba in the past. This reflects a consistent impression left by Cubans that jokes, play, and fun are central parts of their interactions.

Codes include identity (which became a theme), national unity, and humour as a trait. Humour is a primary form of social interaction in Cuba. It indicates a sense of national unity around humour both as a common personal trait and a way to cope with shared circumstances as a country. "Laughter, banter, and kidding around have functioned as a form of group therapy

where…frustration and dissatisfaction is exorcised by humour" (Sanchez 2010). While there are serious Cubans, as personality varies in Cuba as with all societies, participants identified Cubans in general as having a good sense of humour. Most participants identified a sense of humour as important to Cuban identity in some way. I will start with quotes that reflect having a sense of humour as a characteristic of Cuban identity.

Zurdo said that "the sense of humour in Cuba is part of our roots and we are all very similar in this sense." The sentiment that humour is part of Cuba's roots speaks to the long historical presence that has left humour deeply embedded within the culture. Bruji confirmed this sentiment, explaining that "the Cuban generally is 'jaranero' (someone who is always joking and smiling) or a joker, independent of their religion, region, social class, or politics."

From my conversation with Peludo, I was able to obtain a story of his life experience in Cuba. He said:

> From my point of view, everyone has a similar sense of humour, whether they are from Pinar del Rio, from the other side of Cuba, from wherever, everyone always has a bit of the same. They express it in their own way, they might be dreamy, or to say those who laugh at and for everything. There are those who are a bit more serious, but at the end of the story, almost all have relatively the same sense of humour."

Even participants who did not consider themselves particularly funny engaged in creative projects involving humour. Tito said, "I have never been funny, even though with a work friend we made a humoristic bulletin in the museum where we were working," which was created out of newspaper clippings. Similarly, participants also spoke about the evolution of their sense of humour, noting that as they got older, they became more serious. Zurdo explained, "After turning 20, I became more serious. Age makes one mature and jokes are left to the side." Bruji expressed a similar sentiment, saying, "When I started to work, the life of a student was completely

different from the life of a worker. The first is more happy, joking, and relaxed, the second is more serious and repetitive." Pocha also felt that "the more you grow up, the more you see things differently."

Pocha continued, explaining that "Cubans reflect their problems through humour according to their changing circumstances," indicating that as she grew up, her humour adapted with her. Although Zurdo and Bruji felt that the responsibilities of adult life had caused them to become more serious, their responses indicated that they also maintained an appreciation for humour, expressing their enjoyment of Cuban comedy groups. Zurdo said, "Here in Cuba there are various comedy groups…which are very good." Bruji echoed this sentiment, saying, "The comedy groups in Cuba are very popular—their humour is part of Cuban history and Cuban culture."

Turner's concept of liminality describes a space between the norms and values of everyday life, a "time…when anything *might*, even should, happen" (Turner 1979, 465). Liminality often involves "reflexive commentary interwoven with…descriptive narrative" (Turner 1979, 486). Communitas is the shared experience of a liminal state or space. Comedic performances utilize liminality and communitas to induce suspense and laughter in their audiences. Within liminal space, comedians are able to joke about aspects of life that under usual circumstances would be unquestioned or uncomfortable, providing audiences with comedic release as they laugh with others about their shared experiences, and often their shared difficulties. In Cuba, people have been conditioned to communicate publicly with discretion. The liminal space of public comedic performance provides a unique opportunity to laugh openly and to briefly acknowledge aspects of life that are often left unsaid or unexamined. Comedic groups often perform on public television and radio broadcasts in Cuba, providing a similar sense of

camaraderie as audiences laugh with their family about the joys and frustrations of daily life, knowing that others across the country are doing the same.

Making themselves the target of their own jokes seems to go hand-in-hand with having a sense of humour in Cuba. The full range of humour goes both ways, not only poking fun at others and their situations but also at themselves and their own circumstances. Referring back to the central characteristic of Cuban choteo, which involves the ridicule of everyone and everything, Gallego said, "All people in Cuba have a good sense of humour…the Cuban laughs at his disgraces and deficiencies, all things can be taken advantage of."

The popularity of self-directed jokes and mockery was reinforced by Pocha, who described the popularity of the Cuban television show "Vivir del Cuento," (Living From The Story). The show uses humour to make fun of common facets of Cuban life. Pocha said, "With the humour [of the show] we are connected with the reality that our people live in." The show is so popular with Cubans that it has been allowed by the Cuban government to run on national television stations, even as it highlights the struggles and hardships of Cuban life. The popularity of the show indicates how deeply this type of self-focused humour resonates with Cubans across the nation. Pocha summarized, saying "Cubans are characterised as jokers because even with the weight of our difficulties, we are content and we laugh at our own faults."

Resilience

This label relates to the use of humour for recovery or adjusting to misfortune. Cubans live with difficult circumstances every day, including repression and material shortages. Flaco told a story about being in the military, which is a common experience for Cuban men, as military enlistment is mandatory for nearly all men after high school. The soldiers in Flaco's unit

would become hungry while on duty, and to deal with this, they would often sneak off of the military base to visit a local farm at night. Once at the farm, they would milk the cows and drink the milk. Each morning, the farmer would go to milk his cows and wonder why they never produced any milk, assuming he had purchased defective cows.

Codes under the theme of resilience included coping, reframing of experience, resistance, and self-deprecation. Tito commented that "...in the case of Cuba, humour has saved the country and its inhabitants from many difficult and uncomfortable situations, it has helped us to survive and reinvent ourselves." Jefe echoed this sentiment, saying, "Sadly, a frequent theme of our jokes is the difficult life of the Cuban." Cubans choose to laugh at everything that makes them sad, uncomfortable and afraid (Arriaga 2016). There is a joke that asks why there are no swimming pools in Cuba, the answer being that everyone who knows how to swim has left the island (Arriaga 2016).

Multiple participants explained that black humour, or dark humour, is a common form of coping in Cuba. Jefe said that he considered black humour to be the most predominant form of joking in Cuba and provided an example of a joke that he had heard from a friend. The joke described how many Cubans are currently leaving the country, most for the United States. Once they arrive successfully in the United States, it is common for Cubans to post about it on Facebook where their friends and family congratulate them. The punchline of the joke was: "If the ones who leave the country get congratulated, for those of us who stay, will they give condolences?"

Blanquito explained that "in today's day, the main jokes are about electricity problems. For example, we say that we don't know whether they are putting the electricity [back] or taking it away." I have experienced the hours-long blackouts that have become increasingly frequent in

Cuba of late. What Blanquito's quote does not explain is the snowballing effect that one inconvenience, such as an electricity blackout, can have on Cuban life. While living in Cuba, I experienced a summer where we often would have limited or no electrical power overnight. This meant that any equipment running off electricity did not work for hours at a time. Food, already scarce and expensive, was left to thaw in fridges and freezers. You could not open the doors of either appliance in the hope that the cold air would stay inside and preserve the food for as long as possible.

Fans and air conditioners also stopped working. This would mean sleeping with the windows open in an attempt to combat the sweltering heat. When the windows were open mosquitos would come inside. All night I would get itchy bites from mosquitos wherever I was uncovered by a blanket. Because of the heat, oftentimes I would sleep without a blanket, as did many others, so that the mosquitos had a full-body feast. Cuba is a location where dengue is fairly common, especially in the summer months during the rainy season, where mosquitoes breed in excess. Fuel shortages have meant that the country's usual mosquito fumigation has been limited. The COVID-19 pandemic and economic troubles have left hospitals without many forms of basic medication. Once someone contracts dengue, medical care is difficult to obtain (Gómez Torrez 2023). I personally know of two people who were infected with dengue in 2022, both of whom had to self-treat at home with whatever medications they could find from friends and family.

This example highlights the absurdity that Cubans deal with daily. Someone from the Western world might hear about a blackout and consider it an inconvenience because our televisions or microwaves will not work for a while. Meanwhile in Cuba, a blackout is not simple at all. When Blanquito described joking about whether the electricity was coming or

going, the implications of his jokes are much deeper than initially understood at first glance. Only someone who has lived in Cuba and experienced the snowballing effects of misfortune can understand the complexity of the joke. Not only does a joke of this manner create closeness through shared experience and commiseration but it highlights the resilience of Cubans as they find laughter in the face of adversity.

These jokes provide further evidence of the importance of culturally specific analysis of humour. In analyzing jokes about scarcity and hardship, I have referred back to Douglas and Irvine, who spoke about the need to look at the "interactional and societal histories…the regimes of language, truth, and knowledge" from which humour emerges (Irvine 2011, 35). The jokes described by Jefe and Blanquito, when told to other Cubans, both share the illocutionary act of joking, with the perlocutionary effect of laughter and bonding. Without understanding the historical context of choteo and self-mockery in Cuba, the illocutionary act might be misinterpreted as a complaint, while the resulting perlocutionary effect would be sympathy or another form of condolence.

The examples in this section also reflect Apte's concept of humour as a coping mechanism. Jokes reference personal and shared difficulties. While these jokes often critique social, political, and economic conditions, they don't create systemic change. Instead, these jokes function as a "cathartic release" from the stresses of daily life (Apte 1985, 141). When Cubans tell jokes about the ongoing and unpredictable blackouts, they likely don't expect any tangible change in their physical circumstances to come from their humorous critique. Instead, these forms of humour create personal change, as joke tellers and listeners are able to let out their frustrations and change their personal affect and emotions.

Another contemporary topic of resilient humour is COVID-19. I asked participants whether COVID-19 had impacted the way that they joke. Zurdo expressed that "COVID-19 changed everything about life and has conditioned our jokes." I initially expected to hear about restrictions on physical forms of humour due to social distancing. Instead, I heard how jokes about COVID-19 had been incorporated into the repertoire of many Cubans. Bruji explained that many aspects of her life were impacted by COVID-19, "but not [her] form of humour." Gallego summed it up in the following quote:

> COVID has been incorporated into the flow of jokes in the country, the newspapers in their comic section collect them, the population in their daily walks incorporate masks and ways of acting in the panorama. Some with their nose on the outside and others where you can hardly see their faces, and some using it in the form of handkerchiefs on the throat. The musicians creating songs, and poets in their decimas, the common citizen talking about the horrors of this annoying rag.

Highlighting the resilience of Cubans in the face of adversity, I heard from Peludo that "whether it was for COVID, H1N1, for whatever sickness", rather than changing their habits, Cubans instead "make fun of the sickness, whether about having or not having it." When asked about COVID-19, Blanquito summarized the essence of this theme, saying that "we Cubans are people who laugh at our own problems, and due to this we overcome many obstacles."

Enrich Relationships

This label relates to the valuation of humour as a desirable attribute or element in relationships. Cubans have vast social networks of family, friends, co-workers, neighbours, and others with whom they interact daily. Humour and joke-telling are prevalent within all of these

relationships, as reported by participants. Codes include teasing, expressing affection and endearment, creating amusement, causing happiness, and exposing children to common types of humour. Gallego said that his father and grandfather never tired of playing jokes on him as a young boy. Flaco has fond memories of spending entire days telling jokes with his friends whenever their spouses were away.

The various relationships of participants are enriched with humour on a daily basis. In answer to my question "On a normal day, who do you joke with?" Flaco said, "On a normal day, I make jokes with whoever is present, it could be a workday, or a day off if I am at home with my wife." Bruji gave a similar response, joking "principally [with] close family or coworkers". Jefe also pointed to family, joking daily with his wife, grandfather, and stepson. Pocha said that she often joked with her dog in addition to her husband and son, highlighting how even with pets, humour is one of the foremost mechanisms for bonding and interaction within the home.

The most extensive story comes from Peludo. He reported, "On a normal day, I always joke with my sister, my father, my mother when she is home, and if not, since I'm always with my friends I would talk to them, make fun of them, they would make fun of me. This is my joking routine. If I were at work, I would joke with colleagues who get along well with me, so something to make them laugh. The same with my family. If I go to visit a family member, I make a joke that has to do with them, or I make fun of myself to make others laugh, because this is something that is done a lot in Cuba."

Many participants spoke about the role that humour played in forming, maintaining, and enriching relationships. In particular, participants spoke about the connection formed by humour between adults and children. Humour appears to be passed through generations within families by involving young children in humour at a very early age. Participants told stories about their

parents and grandparents joking with them during their childhood. For example, Bruji spoke about the influence of her family in the development of her sense of humour. She explained that "there are a few [influences] on each side, my father and my uncles on the playful side, and my mother and my brother on the serious side. There is white humour and black humour. I have a little bit of each."

Teasing was a form of humour that appeared multiple times throughout the interviews. Gallego said of his father and grandfather, that they "never got tired of playing all sorts of jokes on me. They were either tricking me with some story, riddle, or making jokes with me so they could laugh at my reaction." He shared the following childhood memory:

> My father, with my grandfather's complicity, said that if I wanted, they would tell me the story of 'La Buena Pipa.' When I responded, they would repeat the question again, adding what I said to the beginning and saying, 'I didn't say [Gallego's response], I said would you like for me to tell you the story of 'La Buena Pipa'.' When I would respond 'no,' he would repeat the question again and again until… I would walk away, which made them laugh at my reaction.

Peludo's father would sing a classic Spanish bedtime song, but with a humorous twist in order to tease the children. "Go to sleep my baby, go to sleep my love, go to sleep little piece of my heart." The version sung by his father went "Go to sleep my baby, go to sleep my love, go to sleep now or the Coco will come and eat you." While singing it, his father would rock the child slowly up until the line about the Coco, where he would start to swing his arms rapidly so that the child would laugh or scream.

Sapir theorized that folk characters are often linked to humour. The Coco is a Cuban myth character that eats children who misbehave, particularly at bedtime and is a part of teasing

relationships between caretakers and children. Through the changed lyrics and sped-up tempo, Peludo's father drew on the mythic character to humorous effect, creating a funny caricature of the lullaby. Apte explained that children learn humour through the adults around them. This example demonstrates the young age that children not only observe adult humour but are involved in humour in Cuban culture. Children begin learning the importance of humorous interactions when bonding with loved ones through early interactions with caregivers.

Peludo spoke at length about his grandfather, saying he "always scratched my face. He would let his beard grow and say, 'Come here so I can give you a hug,' and when I got to him, he would scratch my face with his stubble and say 'yes, yes, this is for you.' From him I learned to do humour with my body, how to express myself in different ways." Jefe also pointed to the influence of his grandfather, explaining that "my grandfather influenced my sense of humour, he always says that he is not handsome, but he is likeable." Radcliffe-Brown explains that the relationship between grandparent and grandchild frequently involves a form of ritualized joking, in which "grandchildren make fun of their grandparents and…these [grandparents] reply in kind" (Radcliffe-Brown 1940, 201). Through the joking relationship, grandchildren learn humour from their grandparents. Peludo explicitly mentions that he learned physical humour from his grandfather, and through Jefe's comment we can infer that one of the forms of humour that he learned from his grandfather was self-deprecation, or the ability to laugh at oneself.

The interactions above were described fondly as bonding moments that were enjoyed both by children and adults. Flaco explained that as an adult, he would spend time playing with the neighbourhood children as a way to relax. He described the "increasing responsibilities" of adult life, but that he continued "liking games and sports very much." When the chance arose, he would play "ball, marbles, and [dance] with the kids from the neighbourhood." He continued, "I

feel like one of them even when I am already 41 years old and have been joking all my life in spite of everything."

Flaco exemplifies the ongoing process of enculturation where children learn joking habits from the adults around them. Children adopt "the same techniques…genres and categories" of humour as their caretakers, as described by Apte (Apte 1985, 83). Flaco's story shows how the use of humour as a coping mechanism is observed by children through intergenerational play, as he continues to joke "in spite of everything." Many of the stories told by participants focus on the adults who influenced them in the development of their sense of humour. In Flaco's story, he provides an alternate perspective, as the adult playing with children and modeling humour and play to the next generation.

Group Bonding

This label relates to humour as a binding element among people. Social groups that were mentioned in interviews included work, sports, school, and the military. Gallego reported observing members of groups making fun of other people's perceived deficiencies or differences, playing tricks on them, and "never [ending] the evils that made everyone there laugh." Bonding also occurs among people living in specific regions of the country, who make jokes about people from other regions. Codes in the interviews include ridicule, disrespect, amusing the group, mocking, and discrimination.

Humour creates bonds between people. Those who have shared experiences, knowledge, and frameworks are able to understand jokes that others do not. Humour and group bonding can also be used to exclude others. In some cases, this involves stereotypes and discrimination of those outside of the social group. Some participants described social groups that were common

targets of humour but did not elaborate on why or when these groups were joked about. Both Pocha and Blanquito noted homosexuality as a common topic of humour, and Jefe mentioned people from low economic classes.

Gallego spoke of his time in the army when a Russian flight was taking place. On this flight, there were two pilots, one of them was a Black Cuban colonel. Among the people that Gallego was standing with while this flight occurred was an old Cuban lieutenant, who said to the group: "I don't know why the fuck they took a Black man to space, if there are no chickens up there." In this example, all members of the story were part of the same social group as members of the military. However, through the use of humour, the lieutenant was able to create a social distinction between the white members and Black members through a joke based on racial stereotypes.

This joke draws on two stereotypes found in Cuba. The first is the assumption that all Black Cubans are fast runners, and the second is the assumption that they are thieves. If a chicken goes missing, Black Cubans are stereotyped as the only ones fast enough to catch and steal one. The joke draws on the question, if there is nothing to steal in space, why would a Black Cuban go? The joke also draws on a well-known religious practice from the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería. Santería, a syncretic religion combining African and Catholic religious practices, utilizes the sacrifice of chickens in many ceremonies.

Humour in Cuba serves as a signifier for in-group and out-group status and for regional identity. Cuba is often described as being made up of three major regions, which are based on historical administrative regions (Verdejo, Funo, and Yamada 2008, 24). The western provinces are the "Occidente," the central provinces are "Centro," and the Eastern provinces are the "Oriente". The participants interviewed for this thesis are located in the Occidente region. Peludo

explained that “for regions in Cuba, they always [make jokes]...the Central part always makes fun of the Oriental or Occidental parts, and it goes like this from all regions.” He continued, “They always say that the Pinareños are brutes, that Orientales don’t know how to talk,” referring to populations from opposite ends of the nation.

Pinareños come from the western province of Pinar del Rio, in the Occidente region of Cuba. The term “Orientales” refers broadly to those living in the eastern provinces of Cuba. Both the province of Pinar del Rio, and the general region of the Oriente have historically been among the most impoverished areas of Cuba (Hernández Mondejar 2014, 17)**.** Both areas are heavily reliant on agriculture and have large rural populations, as well as limited educational and medical resources in comparison to more urban areas (Hernández Mondejar 2014, 19-20; Olmsted and Gannett 1909, 176).

Peludo said, “About Pinar del Rio, they say they are brutes because when they made a church, for example, they left the concrete pourer and the materials inside of the church…you have to break the wall to take it back out.” He continued, “They also made a disco next to a cemetery…*gente boba* (dumb people) as we say, how do you build a club next to a cemetery where it should be tranquil?” These jokes harken back to choteo, where no topic is off limits. In Peludo’s examples, the dead and the holy are invoked through humour. A church is built and then immediately destroyed, and the dead are refused a peaceful rest while Cubans dance next door.

These types of jokes, while common, are understood to be inappropriate in some circumstances. Tito said that jokes about “natives of the province of Pinar del Rio, or as they are called the Pinareños…are not accepted, most of all in schools and workplaces.” However, Peludo also commented, saying “If you are closer to bosses or executives, yes, I think that humour is a

bit more restricted, but if you are in a location that is less close to those executives, then it's more flexible", indicating that these types of humour still occur within most circumstances. These comments point to Goffman's theory of frames. Distance from bosses and executives creates a shift in frame from formal to casual, which then broadens the range of accepted topics for jokes. Here we see again how in Cuba there are relatively few topics of joking that are truly taboo or forbidden, one just needs to find the correct frame and language for their use. Irvine discusses how euphemistic language and footing create flexibility for communicating socially inappropriate topics, such as those described by Tito. For example, Peludo utilized footing to establish distance "between the referent and the current speaker" when describing jokes about Pinareños being *gente boba* (dumb people) (Irvine 2011, 18). He started his jokes by first attributing them to an undefined "they," indicating that these were jokes he was repeating from someone else and creating ambiguity about whether he personally thought that Pinareños were dumb.

Peludo gave the example of Cubans who work in tourist areas laughing at those who live elsewhere. He said that people from Havana and Varadero will laugh at people from the Oriente, calling them *guajiros* (peasants or country bumpkins) because "they are the ones who work the most in the farms", while those in tourist areas "consider themselves more civilized because…they are closer to foreigners from outside the country". Bourdieu's forms of capital are invoked in this example. Cubans from the cities utilize the lower social and cultural capital of those living in rural areas as the basis of their humour, while also highlighting their own higher social and cultural capital, obtained through access to urban resources and connections to foreign people and products.

Gallego spoke about terms such as *escoria* (scum) and *gusano* (worm), which refer to Cubans who left the island after the revolution. These terms are used by government officials in public discourse, and by Cubans in their personal conversations. While the government uses "worm" as an insult, often Cubans will take these terms and flip their meaning to humorous effect. I heard the following joke during a gathering of friends while in Cuba: "The government calls Cubans who leave the country 'worms,' but those worms eat better than we humans on the island do!"

Leach wrote about the use of animal categories within humour. The use of the word "worm" by the government is not inherently funny by itself and is instead insulting by connecting humans to a creature associated with dirt and decay. Leach theorized that animals which are too socially distant from humans (wild animals that we do not eat) do not evoke a humorous response, and in Cuba worms are never eaten and never considered a possibility for food (Leach 1966, 31, 50-51). This concept explains why comparing a human to a worm would be insulting. Douglas notes that a successful joke relies on the subversion of dominant norms (Douglas 1968, 364-365). When Cubans joke about how worms eat better than humans living on the island, they utilize self-mockery. A humorous effect is created by turning the government's insult onto themselves, and onto the government as well, through the insinuation that the government has created conditions where Cubans on the island are forced to eat something worse than dirt and decay. They also create humour through the inversion of dominant beliefs about the hierarchy of animals, bringing the socially distant worm into a state of closeness, and in fact locating the worm as higher on the social hierarchy than themselves. The essence of the joke is that it is better to be a worm outside of Cuba than to be a human inside of Cuba.

The examples above describe jokes that distinguish the speaker from the other group. They also serve the purpose of creating bonds between those who share the same regional or personal circumstances, as they share in laughing at outsiders. Jokes allow Cubans to comment on their own social conditions, through comparison with others. Humour serves as a way to determine and display group affiliation, and to create social distinctions.

Nicknames

This label relates to the pervasiveness of nicknames in Cuban culture, which serve many purposes. Codes include affection, endearment, discrimination, being derogatory, and reference to physical and personality characteristics. Bruji reported that almost all her friends had funny names. Blanquito described that nicknames often permanently replace real names, saying "I know friends who were given [a nickname] in their infancy and still use them so much that no one calls them by their real name." Over the course of data analysis, it became evident that nicknames are a common and pervasive form of humour in Cuba. Nicknames are created and given often based on physical and personality characteristics, some kind and some unkind.

Nicknames, according to Gallego, have been part of the social fabric of Cuban society for at least a century and a half. He described the 1895 War of Independence where "Cuban soldiers gave nicknames to their companions, and no one could escape these names." Examples of prominent Cuban military figures with nicknames were General Maximo who was called "el Chino" (the Chinese) and General Maceo who was called "el Titan de Bronze" (the Bronze Titan).

The tradition of military nicknames continues to the present. Flaco spoke about his experience in the military where he was given a nickname by his companions. The nickname that

he received was “Pepito el Fuerte” or “Pepito the Strong”. He spoke about how he and his friends in the army would get together to eat at night. His friends always had delicious snacks while Flaco had “gofio.” Gofio is ground wheat, but he explained that, with a bit of water and sugar, it became a decent-tasting and very filling snack. Every time he took out his packets of gofio, the others would laugh and talk about how they did not want to share any of his snacks. Eventually, his friends ran out of their snacks, and they began to ask Flaco if he would share the same snacks that they had made fun of before. He earned the name Pepito the Strong because he bought a cheap and filling snack rather than a tasty but non-nutritious one and he was strong to stomach it.

Flaco was able to accumulate what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital. While his friends enjoyed their short-lived tasty snacks but were eventually left hungry, instead of giving in to their mockery Flaco continued to eat his less appetizing but nutritious gofio. His resoluteness and strength, both respected qualities within the frame of the military, resulted in a humorous nickname that alluded to his positive characteristics and prestige among his companions, resulting in symbolic capital.

Participants spoke of nicknames that they had received from family members. These nicknames often evoked feelings of affection or nostalgia. Gallego spoke about his childhood, saying that he missed the days when his father and grandfather would refer to him as Gallegito, a diminutive form of his name. Diminutive forms of names are a common type of nickname in Cuba. They often imply closeness between the giver and receiver. Other participants spoke about affectionate nicknames given to them by aunts and uncles, family friends, neighbours, and schoolmates. When Bruji was young, her uncle playfully teased her for being argumentative by giving her the nickname “Resabio” (grumpy). Tito was called “Chiviri" by a neighbour, alluding

to the Cuban sweet “chivirico”. Pocha was called “la Puchi" by family friends, a nickname used for someone with a quick temper, because of her childhood hyperactivity. Peludo was called “Dormilon” by classmates. The nickname translates to “sleepyhead,” in reference to always being sleepy during school.

The examples above demonstrate how interpreting the intention of a nickname is not always straightforward. Bruji’s nickname pointed out her tendency to argue, which could be interpreted as highlighting a negative trait and therefore being an unpleasant nickname. However, using Goffman’s theory of frames we can infer that the nickname was used and understood through the frame of a close familial relationship. Because she experienced the nickname through this frame, the ascribed meaning became an expression of closeness through humorous teasing, as is common in Cuba.

Gallego described how during his childhood he received a nickname from the children that he played baseball with. They played baseball under the hot Cuban sun and, as a result, Gallego’s cheeks would get red from sunburn. The other children called him “Manzanita” or “Little Apple” in reference to his cheeks. Gallego explained that he enjoyed the nickname and happily let it continue. Jefe also received a nickname from his friend, saying that during university “a friend called me ‘Intenso’ (intense), and as the word signifies, I was really intense, I consumed a lot of caffeine, studied, did exercise, and was at the maximum all the time.”

Goffman’s theory of facework is useful for understanding why some nicknames are received well and others are not. Both Gallego and Jefe were given nicknames that were consistent with the face and line that they were using at the time. Gallego’s nickname pointed to the rosy cheeks that he earned through his hours on the baseball field, so the nickname was “internally consistent” with his beliefs about himself as a committed baseball player, and

"supported by the judgements…[of] other participants." Similarly, Jefe admitted to being intense in all of his activities, so the nickname fit his internal narrative about himself and indicated that others accepted his face line as true and accurate.

In contrast to nicknames given affectionately, some participants spoke about nicknames that they had heard or received which were less kind. Peludo described how during his school years, he was made fun of for the size of his nose or his head. He was given the nicknames "Narizón" and "Cabezon" which mean "big nose" and "big head." Peludo explained that "they weren't nice nicknames and they always bothered me, sometimes it would end up with arguing or fighting with someone because of it."

This is an example of Butler's injurious speech, as the insulting nicknames created a "loss of context" around who he perceived himself to be, and who he wanted others to perceive him as (Butler 1997, 1). This example also relates to Goffman's concept of face. Through injurious speech, Peludo was denied an acceptable line on which to base his face. His classmates denied him an acceptable line by negatively highlighting his physical characteristics and ensuring that he was uncomfortable or embarrassed, leading him to become "out of face." Peludo's admission of fighting over his nickname indicates that he likely did not have enough poise to recover from the loss of face, in turn becoming "shamefaced", where he "was perceived in a flustered state by others" (Goffman 1955, 214-215).

Humorous nicknames can also provide freedom from restrictive social norms. As is common in much of Latin America, Cuban men face pressure to show *machismo*, an exaggerated form of masculinity. Peludo spoke about joking with another male friend through nicknames. In these jokes, he would refer to his friend as "mi costillita" (my little rib) and "manguito" (little mango). Both nicknames provoke effeminate connotations. Without the frame of humour, using

these types of nicknames with another man could be seen as disrespectful, demeaning, or worse. Humour provided Peludo with the ability to indicate affection and intimacy between two men that would normally be socially unacceptable. Nicknames allow Cubans to navigate relationships with one another. Through giving and receiving nicknames, Cubans are able to express affection and indicate closeness to one another. Nicknames also serve as status symbols in some cases, particularly when given as the result of a personal quality or action held in high esteem by the community, such as in the context of the military. Some nicknames are unwanted and because of the pervasiveness of nicknames in Cuba, these can be particularly irritating or problematic. In all cases, nicknames provide insight into the social dynamics of users and receivers and are an essential component of communication in Cuba.

Creativity

Humour is used in imaginative and original ways marked by wit and ingenuity. Humour is one of the most salient examples of verbal creativity in everyday life (Nusbaum et al. 2017). Codes in the interviews include metaphor, wordplay, double meanings, decimas poetry, and unique words. Humour is just one of many Cuban creative forms. Cuba has a long history of creative arts, including music, dance, painting, sculpture, cinema, and architecture. Some responses referenced the connection between humour and art. Gallego commented that his father wrote "*decimas* (countryman's poems) with lots of double meanings and it was very spicy, so when someone read them, it would make anyone who heard it laugh." Tito spoke about the forms of art that he encountered when he was younger. He felt that his dark sense of humour had been influenced by the "little stories, comic strips, [stories] about vampires and termites" that he had

read as a child. Outside of "official" art, the joking habits of Cubans illustrate the constant creative process that takes place within everyday interactions across the country.

In Cuba, creative language is particularly suited for humour. Throughout the interviews, participants spoke about the many unique words and phrases that are used in Cuba. There are whole dictionaries solely made up of Cuban slang (Guerrero Ruiz, et. al. 2003; Paz Pérez 1996). The use of some of these words and phrases, such as *yuma*, *yankee*, and *que bola, aseré?* are immediate signifiers of Cubanness to other Spanish speakers.

While all cultures and nations have their own slang words, Cuban speech is particularly full of wordplay, double meanings, puns, and other humorous and creative language. Everyday activities are often referred to with seemingly unrelated terms, often in a humorous manner. Jefe gave the example of the phrase *coger botella*, which translates to "take the bottle," but in Cuba refers to the action of catching a taxi, bus, or other form of transportation for free. Gallego described that when someone has too much to drink and begins walking in a zigzag motion, others will say *tremenda nota* (tremendous note), which refers to the stick that is waved back and forth by a maestro in a concert. Bruji listed Cuban terms used to describe others in a humorous manner, such as *jamaliche*, which refers to someone who will eat anything, and *fula*, which describes someone who is really bad at something. As previously mentioned, the Cuban government has historically and contemporarily used terms such as *escoria* (scum) and *gusano* (worm) as derogatory terms for Cubans who have left the island.

The historic surveillance and suppression of speech in Cuba has resulted in the need for careful and calculated communication strategies. While many Cuban words are not political or covert, the tradition of veiled language has led to slang being extremely common within Cuban vocabularies. Even before the revolution, years of colonialism, slavery, and dictatorial rule have

led to the creation of phrases and terms which allow for euphemistic communication, many of which incorporate terminology from Cuba's different cultural influences. As humorous language creates social immunity for its users, the prevalence of humorous slang in Cuba provides escape routes within communication which might otherwise have left them vulnerable.

One of the best-known examples of a Cuba-specific phrase is the common greeting, "Que bola, aseré?" The words "que bola" directly translate to "what ball," but in common usage means "what's up?" When discussing the word "aseré", Peludo explained: "In the dictionary, you won't find the word or definition." He described the use of the term, saying that the phrase could be used with "a work colleague…could be a friend, even your sister you could say it to," highlighting that humorous language is utilized across a variety of social situations and groupings in Cuba. I have personally heard the word "aseré" described as a term for "a group of monkeys," though this definition itself is said as a joke. The true origin of the word comes from the Abakuá language, where the word "aseré" means "ritual brother" (Miller 2000, 168). The Abakuá language comes from the Abakuá secret society, which is composed entirely of men and was founded in 1836 by Africans, particularly those from Nigeria, who were brought to Cuba (Miller 2000, 163-164). The term was adopted by others and moved into the Cuban vernacular. Over time the origins of the phrase have been lost from popular knowledge and have been replaced by humorous definitions with no relation to the Abakuá.

Humorous language sometimes references elements of Cuban culture or geography. Gallego said that when a person is robbed, they might say, "They left me like a rooster from Morón, without feathers and crowing." This phrase references a large statue of a plucked rooster that can be found in the Cuban town of Morón. The phrase and statue are based on a well-known Cuban story about the early days of colonial rule, where an official in Morón told villagers that

he was the only rooster who could crow there, indicating that his word was the only one that mattered. The villagers then stripped him naked and beat him. This phrase utilizes the comedic effects of animal categories. Leach explained that animals that fall between distinct categories of pet and livestock, such as pigs, become taboo through the ambiguity of their social classification. Roosters and chickens also inhabit an ambiguous space as they are not quite pets, but they live in closer proximity to humans than most farm animals. By referring to themselves as a rooster from Morón, Cubans evoke the humorous imagery of the loud and annoying crowing of a bird when depicting the yells that they themselves made when they were robbed.

Peludo also provided a reference to Cuban culture. He spoke about a time when people in Cuba would refer to their parents as "puro," saying "They would say 'I'm going to see the puro,' which meant 'I'm going to see my father or mother.' Puro is a Spanish word to refer to a cigar. Cigar smoking is common in older generations of Cubans, while younger Cubans prefer to smoke cigarettes. Cigars are often seen in depictions of politicians and war heroes from the time of the Cuban Revolution, and cigars have come to be associated with generations of Cubans who were alive at that time. In calling one's parent a "puro", Cuban youth are creating a humorous insinuation that their parents are old. Similarly, a young Cuban calling a friend of the same age "puro" would indicate that the friend is acting too mature for their age or being otherwise boring. When a young Cuban refers to their parent or friend as a "puro," they are "safe within the permitted range of attack" as they imply through teasing that the target of their joke is getting old (Douglas 1968, 372). While commentary about advanced age or personal characteristics could have caused a threat to the face of their target, the threat is negated because the comment is framed as humour.

The terms described by participants demonstrate how deeply ingrained humorous language is within everyday conversation in Cuba. Humorous language is often used to describe others, creating humorous connections between people as they highlight physical or personality characteristics through teasing and mockery. Cuban slang and terminology is influenced by the Afro-Cuban roots of the nation, and Cuban phrases often draw on historical events and cultural imagery in order to evoke humorous responses. Cuban life is filled with imagination and creativity, in art and language.

Undermine Authority

Humour often intends to subvert various forms of authority or eavesdropping in subtle ways. Cubans, particularly post-1959 revolution, but pre-revolution as well, have lived for decades under socially and politically repressive conditions. Public discourse has been closely monitored by informants working for the Revolutionary Government, and anti-revolutionary commentary, particularly focused on the Castros, could result in jail time. Humour and jokes became private, but Cubans kept laughing at the dictator's expense (Arriaga, 2016). Codes in the interviews include insult, ridicule, derogatory and demeaning comments, and displacement.

Gallego told a story about his grandfather, a farmer, who had a bull to work the fields on his farm. As a child, Gallego saw his grandfather name the bull "Comandante." Comandante, which translates to "commander," is the title used by Fidel Castro. Gallego described how his grandfather would call the bull names such as "shameless commander," or "son of a bitch commander". In this story, the explicit illocutionary intent of naming the bull "Comandante" was to honour Fidel Castro, which would have been considered a revolutionary act. However, the perlocutionary effect of the act was to associate Fidel Castro with a farm animal, insinuating

stupidity and stubbornness. Drawing on Irvine, he used footing to maintain that his intention was innocent, as his "alignment…[and] projected self" were that of a revolutionary (Irvine 2011, 18). This is also an example of the social immunity provided by humour, described by Douglas, as if he was overheard calling the bull "son of a bitch commander," there was ambiguity about whether he was yelling about the animal itself, or its namesake.

Tito explained that there are restrictions on joking, saying "Political jokes,…[jokes about] Fidel or Raúl Castro, the revolution, etc. are not accepted." These types of jokes are actually very common but are only told within the confines of the home or through Irvine's concept of "containment strategies" and "escapes routes." While in Cuba I showed a friend some of the music I had on my cellphone, and she saw that I had the song "Y En Eso Llegó Fidel" (And Then Fidel Arrived), which is a classic Cuban song about the triumph of the Cuban revolution (Carlos Puebla Y Los Tradicionales 1994). When she raised her eyebrow at me questioningly, another friend said jokingly about me, "Ella es toda una revolucionaria" (She is a complete revolutionary). In response, the friend who had initially raised her eyebrow said "Nunca dije que no era" (I never said I was not), while smirking. Both her smirk and eyebrow raise were containment strategies which, without verbally saying anything, indicated her disdain for the Cuban leader while maintaining her innocence through verbal language.

Cuban life is modulated by an ongoing series of encounters with police, military, government and local surveillance, and other forms of authority. Peludo provided an example from his time in school. His experience demonstrates the way that the Cuban government teaches Cubans from childhood that their lives are constantly being monitored and molded by higher powers. While in high school, Peludo was a member of the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas, or the Young Communist League (UJC). The UJC is a youth organization connected to the Communist

Party of Cuba. Peludo explained that while most school groups allowed joking and play between students, the UJC was much stricter. He said the following: “In the UJC, normally no one made jokes unless the meetings were only students. If it was students and professors, they would tell you what you had to do, how to do it, the meetings were very direct and after they finished you would leave.”

Humour has historically been used to undermine positions and structures of power within Cuba. The professors who supervised the UJC ensured that the meetings were strict and serious, teaching students that revolutionary activities required an attitude of respect and austerity. In doing so, students were conditioned to associate the frame of government and other official contexts with compliance and solemnity. Whether this attempt was successful or not, this example demonstrates the ongoing battle between authority and irreverence within Cuba.

I have lost count of the number of times that I have been riding in Cuban vehicles that have been stopped by the police. These vehicles are meant for Cubans, not foreigners, giving me insight into the daily experiences of Cubans in non-tourist spaces. Often, police will pull cars, buses, and trucks to the side of the road. They will then make all passengers exit the vehicle and provide their *carnet*, or ID card. If Cubans are caught without their ID cards, they are generally either detained in place until someone can come and confirm their identity, or they will be taken to jail until their identity can be confirmed. By simply forgetting a piece of ID and being on a truck that passes the checkpoint at the wrong time, one can end up in jail. This is an example of the type of surveillance and government-sanctioned control that Cubans deal with daily.

While living in Cuba, I heard the following story while driving in a car full of Cubans. After passing through a payment booth on a toll road, the conversation turned to the police officer stationed at the booth. The officer had been eyeing our car and looked like he was going

to pull us over and give us trouble. A friend turned to the rest of the car and said, “I have an ID signed by Fidel!” Of course, the rest of the car was in disbelief. He went on to explain how he had founded the Flora and Fauna Club of Matanzas. In recognition of his role as founder of the club, he received a card that on one side indicated his role as founder. The other side of the card had a quote attributed to Fidel Castro with Fidel’s name at the bottom. Everyone in the car laughed because the card was not signed by Fidel, though it did have his name typed and printed on it.

The storyteller continued, explaining that one day he had been stopped by the police and asked for his government ID card. He did not have his card on him, and knew he was about to face a hassle for it. He told the police officer, “I don’t have my ID card, but I do have this one,” and handed the police his Flora and Fauna Club card. The police looked at the back of the card, saw Fidel’s name, and his face immediately went pale. He handed the card back to the storyteller, apologized, and sent him on his way. The police officer, seeing Fidel’s name on the card, was likely frightened that he had stopped a member of Castro's secret police or another high-ranking security official.

The fellow who told this story is well known for being a joker. That same day he showed up to the airport, which is another government-controlled and police-patrolled location, with a water bottle filled with vodka. He told anyone who questioned him that it was for his cold, pointing to the lemon wedge that he had shoved inside the bottle. Both of these stories highlight the ways that Cubans use humour to undermine authority.

Mañach identified choteo as emerging out of Cuba’s struggle for independence from colonial powers. Post-independence, Cubans continued to face subjugation, first by dictators, and then from the restrictions created by the revolutionary government. A rejection of authority has

become ingrained in Cuban culture, through centuries of protest. At the national level, Cuba continues to reject interference from the United States. At the individual level, Cubans reject authority from government and social institutions, such as the police and military. This deeply ingrained rejection of any sort of "limitation on the individual's freedom of action" is seen throughout the responses above.

One of the elements of choteo that makes it an effective form of resistance is the refusal to take anything seriously. In rejecting the control and commands of authority figures, Cubans reduce the influence that those in positions of power can exert. When the police attempted to stop the storyteller without his ID card, rather than comply or even attempt to explain the situation, he chose to use humour to resolve his problem. In doing so, he undermined the authority of the police, of Fidel Castro, and made a fool of the police officer in the process, all common components of choteo. Each of these elements added to the humorous effect when the story was retold, as the Cuban listeners delighted in the subversion and undermining of those who attempted to restrict the storyteller's freedom.

While certain topics may be formally off-limits to humour, these prohibitions tend to be disregarded within daily life. Tito mentioned race as a forbidden topic of humour, particularly in schools and workplaces. In actuality, references to race are often found within Cuban jokes, and humour is also utilized to discriminate based on race. Gallego told a story about his time in school whenever "someone made a joke, the professor always pinned the blame on a Black jokester who said a very old Cuban phrase, 'all the parrots eat rice, and the Toti (a type of black bird in Cuba) carries the blame.'"

This story provides an example of Bourdieu's concept of capital. Age, race, and occupation all influenced the low capital of the student in relation to his professor, putting him in

a position where he was an easy target of blame and where he had little social power to refute the accusation. Drawing on Irvine, the student protected himself from further blame by utilizing an "escape route". His response was attributed to another source, in this case a historic Cuban phrase, which "[dissociates] speaker from author" (Irvine 1993, 125-126). We also see evidence of Apte's theory that humour serves as a form of protest for oppressed groups. While the student could not openly rebuke his professor, he was able to express his displeasure by invoking a humorous phrase. Though he faced discrimination from his professor, the student was able to utilize racial humour to undermine the authority figure.

Cubans utilize humour to undermine the systems of power that restrict their freedom of expression. Humour allows Cubans to express their true feelings without facing repercussions. While official narratives may prohibit joking about certain topics or within certain environments, Cubans find ways to subvert restrictions. Rather than comply with the limitations imposed by the government, police, and other social institutions, Cubans use mockery, footing, and other escape routes to undermine the authority of those in positions of power.

Expression of Freedom

Humour can provide liberation from restraint or from the power of another. The prevalence of private humour in Cuba is found in contrast to the public suppression of humour since the time of Fidel Castro, when public joking and laughter became suspicious (Arriaga 2016). Blanquito said that after the "Special Period," which was the decade following the fall of the Soviet Union, people found ways to camouflage jokes with other words. Codes in this section included discretion, camouflage, and comments on grim situations. One joke goes as follows: "A European asks a Cuban, so, how are things? The Cuban replies: 'Well, I can't really complain.'

So, the European replies: 'So, things are good, eh?' The Cuban looks around and whispers: 'No, I *can't really* complain'" (Arriaga 2016). In private, Cubans continued to laugh, because jokes signified freedom from tyranny, hardships, and remembering all that had been lost (Arriaga, 2016). This theme was challenging to discuss using quotes and life stories because there was relatively less offered by participants. It was clear from the quotes provided that people were aware of being discreet with and through their use of humour. Perhaps they were being discreet in their responses to the questionnaire.

Over the span of three days in March 2003, 75 dissidents were arrested in Cuba. They were given prison sentences that ranged between 14 to 27 years (Committee to Protect Journalists 2008, 4-5). This event is now known as Cuba's "Black Spring." In May 2023, Cuban riot police arrested Cuban protestors in the town of Caimanera, who were "demanding better living conditions and freedom" (Oppmann 2023). The Cuban government also "[took] down the internet across the entire island as news of the protests spread" (Oppmann 2023). These examples demonstrate the steps that the Cuban government will take to suppress speech that it considers to be anti-revolutionary.

Blanquito expressed this fact when he said, "jokes and humour about the situation of the country are not allowed, due to the fact that they can put you in jail, so the people find ways to camouflage with other words." Gallego commented that "the authorities have always punished those who use strong humour. The actor Antolin had a popular phrase that said, 'Who makes the shadow needs to go,' and the Cuban people related the phrase to the…government and Fidel, because all the people who got near him were replaced or demoted. Jefe said that "Cuban humour and politics don't mesh well, and with the certain way that Cuban jokes have complaints…" Jefe's comment is an example of the ambiguity that Cubans employ when

commenting on Cuban political affairs. Rather than explicitly stating that Cuban jokes often contain complaints about politics he insinuated the connection through vague language, which is an example of Irvine's communication strategies.

Speaking of humour used by politicians, Peludo explained that "For the political part, it's very strange to see politicians laughing unless they are from the top ranks of Cuba, otherwise none of them laugh. The news reporters you will never see laughing, and in political acts that are directed for upper levels they won't laugh, but if there is a reunion in work or small things, there is also a bit of humour in those places." Bruji provided additional information, saying that "very rarely in the political discourse there is sprinkled some sort of humour." This was confirmed by Tito, who said, "In Cuba, although with discretion, [politicians] use a lot of political humour to connect with the people."

Bourdieu's theory of capital is reflected in Peludo's comment, where only those with the highest social and cultural capital, or those from "the top ranks," are permitted to laugh publicly. Because of their high cultural, social, and symbolic capital, high-ranking politicians are less likely to experience a threat to their face when they engage in public irreverence. Lower-ranking politicians have less capital and are therefore more at risk if they allow their austere public persona to slip. This is likely why Bruji and Tito noted that humour occurs through "[sprinkling]" and "discretion," as only the highest-level politicians can be openly humorous, while the rest must utilize containment strategies when engaging in humour to protect their reputations.

Cubans know that their words and actions are monitored. This monitoring happens at the upper levels of state security agencies, as well as within communities. The Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) were described by Fidel Castro as "a system of revolutionary

collective vigilance so that everybody will know everybody else on the block, what those on the block are doing and what relationship they had with the tyranny [of Batista]; what they believe, with whom they meet, what activities they participate in" (Castro 1960). Gallego commented that "using a joke in Cuba in a social situation or publicly is impossible, you can make a grave error, when the official part finishes, in private one can make fun of the people or the institutions with the condition that one can suffer repression."

In my own time in Cuba, I witnessed the way that Cubans monitor their words in everyday conversations, with the knowledge that neighbours or people in the street may overhear them. One day I ate at the house of someone who was serving beef. They had bought the food on "the street," as they say in Cuba. "The street" refers to a sort of black market where people trade in food, clothing, and other household items that are either restricted by the government or sold at prohibitive prices in government-run stores. Buying and selling food, specifically beef, lobster, and other specialty seafoods outside of government-run stores is illegal in Cuba.

I was instructed to call the meat *pollo* (chicken) when discussing the meal. The Cuban hosts knew that their neighbours could overhear our conversation and report them to authorities for possessing restricted food. They would then likely receive a fine from the government that would take them months to pay, or even face jail time. There is a joke in Cuba that says, "You can get more prison time for killing a cow than a human being" (Frank 2021). The comedic effect of referring to the beef as chicken came from the fact that regardless of the prohibitions placed on them, the only change that my hosts implemented in their lives was giving a new name to the meat. The examples in this section demonstrate how rather than adhering to restrictions, Cubans instead use camouflaged language to protect themselves from retribution.

In Summary

Humour is a core component of Cuban life. Based on interview data, humour appears to be a ubiquitous and inescapable aspect of everyday Cuban communication. Rather than reflecting defeat, sadness, or bitterness, joking and humour often appear to function as a method of maintaining cheerfulness and resilience under difficult circumstances. Humour serves multiple social functions in Cuba, with the eight most prominent described in the themes presented in this section. These functions are summarized as follows:

Cubans understand humour to be a core aspect of their personal and cultural identity. Humour is described as an essential aspect of coping with the difficulties of life in Cuba. Cuban humour involves laughter at oneself and others through teasing and mockery. Humour is deeply embedded within the development and maintenance of relationships, and close bonds often utilize humour to express fondness and affection. Humour is often used to signify status within a social group, or to comment on the characteristics of another group. Nicknames are an especially popular form of humour and can be affectionate or unkind depending on the circumstances. Cuban humour utilizes creative language and slang, much of which relates to Cuba's history and culture. Cubans use humour to undermine the authority of the government and police and used to avoid responsibility for subversive discourse. Cubans know that their words may be monitored, and humour is used to express their thoughts and feelings while camouflaging their true meaning.

The constellation of the eight themes provides a picture of the social functions of humour within Cuban life. While there are endless possibilities for the use of humour and the social functions with which humour might engage and impact, the eight themes described in this section were the most clear and prevalent within interview responses.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Conceptualizing Cuban Humour Anthropologically

This thesis has sought to demonstrate how humour functions as more than just a communication tool in Cuba. Humour is an essential part of the development and maintenance of relationships, a tactic for navigating and evading scrutiny by others, and an important piece of Cuban personal and national identity. This thesis has been an attempt to answer the question: What social functions are expressed through humour by Cubans in their daily lives? I have answered this question through the development of eight themes based on the interview responses of Cubans living in the Santa Marta region of Cuba.

In review, the themes are identity, resilience, enriching relationships, group bonding, nicknames, creativity, undermining authority, and expression of freedom. These themes demonstrate the most prominent and consistently mentioned social functions of Cuban humour as discussed in the interviews. The themes developed within this thesis have been formulated and analyzed in using the diverse anthropological and social theories discussed in Chapter II. The jokes and ideas about jokes presented in Chapter IV exemplify several theoretical concepts that, used together, help shed light on how humour works in contemporary Cuba. I have applied these concepts to Cuban humour to help us conceptualize the complex kinds of social action that humour can play. The theoretical concepts are Speech Act theory, Frame Analysis, Facework, and Forms of Capital. These major theories follow as they relate to the themes.

First, humour is an example of a kind of "speech act" that performs various kinds of social work, as discussed by Austin and Butler. Humour at the expense of someone else often involves Butler's concept of "injurious speech." For example, Peludo's classmates utilized

injurious speech when they gave him unkind nicknames, creating a humorous effect for others at Peludo's expense. Manipulating the differences between what Austin calls the illocutionary, locutionary, and perlocutionary aspects of an utterance can have humorous effects. When Gallego's grandfather named his bull "Comandante" after Fidel Castro, the illocutionary act was to honour Fidel, while the perlocutionary effect was to associate Fidel with a stubborn animal and ambiguously suggest that his grandfather was insulting Castro whenever he insulted the bull. Gallego's grandfather used humour to protect his public reputation while also enabling him to express his frustrations.

Second, humour can only be appreciated as humorous if understood in relation to a particular "frame" of humorous speech within its specific historical and cultural context. For example, many of the self-focused jokes and the jokes about the challenges of life in Cuba discussed in Chapter IV require analysis through the frames of the contemporary and historic use of choteo, resistance to authority, and coping through humour. When Bruji's uncle called her "Resabio" (grumpy), the nickname was understood by Bruji through a frame of humour and therefore interpreted as affectionate teasing, rather than an insult.

Third, humorous interactions occur as part of an ongoing process of "facework." Humour can be used to positively or negatively affect one's own face, as well as the faces of others. For example, when Peludo's classmates called him "Narizón" (big nose) and "Cabezon" (big head), they threatened his face by highlighting his physical characteristics in a negative light. This use of humour led him to become "out of face" and "shamefaced" when he was unable to recover from the face threat. On the other hand, Jefe was called "Intenso" (intense) by a classmate because of his extreme habits during university. This nickname created a positive humorous

effect for Jefe as the nickname was consistent with the line that he had taken and the face that he was presenting to others.

Fourth, successful humour use and comprehension rely upon "capital." Cultural, social, economic, and symbolic capital influence one's ability to engage in different forms of humour and to manipulate language and social concepts to humorous effect. For example, Cubans from urban areas utilize the lower social, cultural, and economic capital of those living in rural areas, particularly Pinar del Rio, as the butt of their jokes. These jokes also serve to highlight the higher capital of urban Cubans, obtained through access to social services, products, and foreign connections.

To summarize, this thesis draws upon the approaches of major anthropologists and social theorists to demonstrate the social functions of humour within contemporary Cuba through the intersection of eight themes and four social theories. This study of humour provides a window through which we can see the intersecting social, political, and historical dynamics of a culture. When, where, and what we joke about depends on our cultural context, upbringing, and relationships. Anthropology is especially primed for the study of humour, as it is only through interaction and immersion that we can truly understand the many layers of humour.

As this thesis has sought to demonstrate, humour plays an essential role in addressing eight main social functions within daily Cuban life. These social functions and their connection with humour have emerged from the convergent historical, cultural, and political influences on the island. Humour brings levity to difficult situations, communicates difficult topics, and can create bonds within and across generations. Humour has long been a fundamental component of Cuban life and an essential piece of communication and connection.

Limitations of this Study

A month before I was scheduled to leave for Cuba to conduct research, COVID-19 travel restrictions were put in place. These restrictions meant that it was no longer possible to use my original research plan of face-to-face interviews in Cuba. In order to continue my research, I reformulated my research plan to conduct virtual interviews. These interviews had some limitations.

Because I had to conduct my research online, I was limited to interviews with Cubans who have access to a telephone with WhatsApp installed, which is where the interviews were conducted. Internet access in Cuba is limited. The internet can be accessed either through mobile data or at Wifi parks. Both forms of access are often unstable and cost prohibitive. Wifi parks also require users to travel from their homes, sometimes long distances. In order to ensure participants did not face undue hardship, I provided participants with interview questions and asked them to answer and send their responses when they were able to access the internet. This meant that I was unable to ask follow-up questions. I was able to travel to Cuba towards the end of my interviews and I had the opportunity to conduct one interview face-to-face with follow-up questions. The data from the face-to-face interview was consistent with the rest of the virtual interviews.

Participants needed to have the time available to participate in an interview. Women in Cuba are often responsible for caring for the home, children, meals, elderly family members, while also often holding a job outside of the home. This means that Cuban women have limited free time. Had I been able to conduct my interviews in person, I would have been able to mitigate this barrier by travelling to female participants so that they could have continued their

daily tasks while having a discussion with me. Interview data from the two female participants in my study was consistent with that of male participants.

Directions for Future Research

Future research could address the limitations that my study faced by conducting research in person. Additionally, future research could include forms of humour which focus on physical humour. During my time in Cuba, I noticed the large role that gesture plays in communication in Cuba. Gesture is used both in conjunction with verbal communication, and on its own as a form of non-verbal communication. The connection between humour and humorous body movements is evidenced by the following quote from Peludo:

> If a woman looks very masculine, you call them *consorte* (buddy), if a man looks very feminine you call them consorte as well, and you always do a gesture with your hands at the same time to indicate which type of consorte they are. The gestures, if it's a man with female aspects, you'd say, 'you're a consorte,' and use your hands in the motion of flying, like a *pájaro*, which is a bird in Cuba, but the word is also used to indicate someone is gay. If a woman is very masculine, you open your arms as if you're a gorilla, and say to them 'you're a consorte because you're very strong, you look like a man.'

Peludo's comments highlight the way that gestures can enhance the humorous effect of a joke. Future research could focus specifically on the connection between humour and gesture, or on gesture more broadly as a tool in Cuban communication. I will finish with the words of Blanquito, who captures the essence of Cuban humour. He says, "Humour in Cuba: It is a place where laughter cannot hide and shows the joy and flavour of being Cuban."

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