

A Phenomenology of a Cuban Street Vendor: A Case Study

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Abstract

The research presents a compelling case study that explores the intricate relationship between lived experiences and emotional states, integrating key insights from the realms of informal economy and shadow economy academic theory. Grounded in the phenomenological approach, the study centers its attention on a singular participant, leveraging this individual as a foundational entry point to delve into the existence and essence of a person within the sociocultural fabric. A middle-aged Cuban woman emerges as a poignant embodiment of the recent Cuban context, a reality profoundly shaped by the pre-, during, and post-COVID-19 era. Her life's journey unfolds within the contours of a rugged Cuban neighborhood, where her livelihood is intricately interwoven with the informal trading landscape - colloquially known as the "black market." Specifically recognized as a "merolica" in the Cuban parlance, she adeptly navigates the dynamic of procuring and reselling goods. The study illuminates the complex interplay of social, economic, and political forces that orchestrate her daily endeavors, and her labor to address her personal aspirations and exigencies. Within this analytical framework, the researcher taps into her inner emotional states and her distinctive world perspective, encapsulating her subjective grasp of meaning. The study draws upon a longitudinal inquiry strategy, harnessing an array of methodologies including unstructured conversations, participant observation during immersive fieldwork, electronic correspondences, and fieldnote documentation. The themes coalesce into a tapestry that encompasses "The Life of Desire and Sacrifice as a Merolica," "Efficacy and Needs," "Navigating Present Crises," and "Contemplating the Future."

Keywords: Cuban informal economy, needs, social cultural phenomena, emotional state, well-being