

Post-ordenamiento in Cuba and currency exchange: an exploration of institutional waiting for dollar purchases.

Post-ordenamiento y cambios de moneda en la Cuba: explorando la espera institucionalizada para comprar de dólares.

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Summary

This paper analyses the institutional process of purchasing American dollars and other foreign currencies in Cuba, against the backdrop of socio-historical transformations marked by the monetary and economic reorganisation known as “Tarea Ordenamiento,” implemented in Cuba since 2021. The theoretical framework proposed in this study views these social waiting phenomena as objective institutional occurrences, examined through the lens of Discontinuous Materialism in the analysis of social institutions. This paper introduces a novel theoretical perspective for analyzing these social processes, encompassing operational, spatial and temporal dimensions present in the process of purchasing foreign currencies in Cuba. This perspective is further elucidated through an empirical case study conducted in the Cuban city of Camaguey during the summer of 2022. Data was collected via in-depth interviews, brief surveys, participant observations, and content analysis. The conclusions drawn provide elements for a general characterization of these processes in Cuba.

Keywords: Tarea Ordenamiento, Cuba, CADECA, Institutional Waiting, discontinuous materialism.

Resumen

Este artículo examina la espera institucional para adquirir dólares estadounidenses y otras monedas extranjeras en Cuba. Estos procesos se desarrollaron en el contexto de transformaciones sociohistóricas derivadas de la reestructuración monetaria y económica, conocida como “Tarea Ordenamiento”, llevada a cabo en la isla desde 2021. Se propone un marco teórico que percibe estas esperas como fenómenos institucionales objetivos, atribuyendo igual relevancia a los componentes temporales, espaciales y operativos en su análisis. Dicha perspectiva se investiga mediante un estudio de caso empírico del proceso de espera en la compra de divisas en una casa de cambio (CADECA) en la ciudad de Camagüey, durante el verano de 2022. Los datos se obtuvieron mediante entrevistas en profundidad, cuestionarios semiestructurados, observación participante y análisis de contenido.

Palabras clave: Tarea Ordenamiento, Cuba, CADECA, espera, espera institucional, materialismo discontinuista.

Introduction

The dawn of the 21st century in Cuba has been characterized by an uninterrupted series of socio-historical transformations and events, that have greatly impacted every facet of life on the island. Cubans and international observers alike have characterized this dynamic period as one of profound uncertainty, but also of expectation and even hope. In this context, the *waiting* has emerged as a common idea related to “everything that is going

on in Cuba”, thread weaving through diverse processes and circumstances of the social life.

Though exact statistics remain elusive, it can be inferred that, in the past five years, the concept of *waiting* has been intrinsically tied to both the lives of Cubans and the national sociocultural landscape. This epoch has been defined by the emergence of several sociohistorical miniperiods that have significantly influenced Cuba’s social milieu, substantially contributing to its current image.

Significant among these phases include the economic crisis that began in 2018-2019, locally referred to as “la Coyuntura”; steps taken to mitigate the Pandemic; and finally, the comprehensive reorganization of the country’s economy and financial systems in early 2021, dubbed “Tarea Ordenamiento” or simply “Ordenamiento”.

Central to this paper’s theme is the observation that many of these processes have been construed as *waiting* processes –ones that induce states of waiting or are inherently based on waiting–. In this interpretative context, acclaimed Cuban singer-songwriters Silvio Rodríguez (2020) and Carlos Varela (2019) have created music during this period using *waiting* as an analytical framework.

In his album titled “Para la espera” (For waiting), Rodríguez explores the notion of waiting as a form of hope. Varela, on the other hand, ventures directly into the sociopolitical sphere with his song “El bostezo de la espera”, subtly alluding to the melancholy and passivity often synonymous with waiting in Cuba.

These cultural expressions mirror the prevalent belief that waiting is a meaningful phenomenon in the Cuban sociohistorical and cultural context. This phenomenon transcends intellectual discussions, taking on tangible form in the everyday life of the island, as evidenced in various institutions that define Cuba’s socioanthropological landscape. This materialization is reflected not just in scholarly treatises but also in narratives, proverbs, humor, music, and with the advent of the digital age in memes, gifs, postcards and social media posts.

It is, therefore, apt to assert that these processes of waiting in Cuba are viewed as social, and potentially historical, institutions. This categorization promotes the emergence of narratives and discourse around the waiting processes, seen in popular philosophy, humor, proverbs, and aphorisms. Various art forms, including literature, cinema, and music, have depicted the waiting in Cuba. Organizationally, a plethora of rules, political declarations, norms, and empirical studies underscore this social reality while strive to explain, comprehend, and manage it effectively.

This paper will not attempt to analyze all the waiting processes that have emerged or been reinforced during this period. Instead, it will focus on a single prototypical waiting process experi-

enced by Cubans during this historical era, particularly investigating the complexity of this process and the social dynamics at play. The analysis will be grounded in the hypothesis that the waiting processes related to the purchase of dollars and foreign currencies in Cuba constitute a social institution, influenced by various social classes and their interactions. This view aligns with the institutional perspective propounded by Spanish philosopher Gustavo Bueno (1984; 2005).

The institutional nature of waiting, as analyzed by social and human sciences, lies at the heart of the theoretical perspective employed in this paper. This hypothesis contends that a reformulation of the analytical perspective used in studying waiting is necessary, a sentiment echoed by other scholars (Bailey, 2019; Correa et al., 2013; Janeja & Bandak, 2020; Lindón, 2019). Our approach to the social waiting processes involves not just viewing these phenomena as institutions, but also transcending the emphasis on their temporal dimension. We propose an analytical perspective that views waiting processes as objective (institutional) phenomena, articulated through a tri-dimensional form encompassing temporal, spatial, and operational aspects with equal significance. This analytical perspective is based on Gustavo Bueno’s discontinuous materialism (DM) (Pérez Jara, 2022).

Under this theoretical lens, this paper will outline the temporal structure of an empirical waiting process associated with purchasing American dollars or other foreign currencies at a currency exchange outlet (CADECA) in the city of Camagüey during the summer of 2022. Methodologically, the paper takes the form of a descriptive case study. The situations and materials presented were compiled using research techniques such as in-depth interviews, brief surveys, participant observations, and content analysis.

Theoretical framework

Waiting for buying dollars, a social institution in Cuba.

Examined through discontinuous materialism (DM), waiting processes can be conceptualized as social institutions¹. These processes can be situated within what Gustavo Bueno (1978; 2009) identifies as the “anthropological space” –a broader realm of human interaction with their environment–.

In viewing these phenomena through an institutional lens, we pinpoint “cumulative characteristics”

(Ongay, 2008) delineated by Bueno's DM. This theory identifies six keys aspects: 1) a hylemorphic structure; 2) morphological cultural units of a systemic order; 3) recurrence or coexistentiality; 4) rationality; 5) normativity, and 6) axiology (Bueno, 2010).

From this perspective, waiting processes that social sciences focus on extend beyond their common temporal associations. In alignment with Bueno's institutional approach, some waiting processes can be viewed as "totalities in which matter and form can be distinguished" (Bueno, 2005, p. 21). This perspective provides an external (etic) observation, revealing an inherent internal logic (emic) for those participating –satisfying the first two cumulative characteristics–.

Moreover, considering waiting processes as institutions allows us to assert that they exist because of their "coexistence with others" (Bueno, 2005, p. 23), as is typical of institutions. This coexistence becomes particularly evident in institutional waiting processes, often manifesting as rational and normative structures due to their inherent internal logic. Lastly, these processes often assume the form of axiological phenomena –bearing ethical or moral significance–, typically tending towards negative connotations.

I will utilize this theory to analyze the institutionalized waiting processes of purchasing American dollars and other foreign currencies in Cuba. These processes occur within the larger context of sociopolitical and historical transformations reshaping the country's monetary structure. Referred to as "Tarea Ordenamiento" (monetary ordering task), these changes began in 2021.

During this period, Cuba eradicated its dual currency system², eliminating the convertible peso –largely targeted at tourism and foreign transactions– and transitioning all transactions to Cuban pesos (Rodríguez, 2022). The onset of waiting to buy foreign currencies followed the Central Bank President's television announcement of a new exchange rate of 120 pesos to the dollar in August 2022 –contrasting the official fixed rate of 24 pesos and 115 pesos on the informal market (Frank, 2022)–.

In response to these changes, people thronged the 37 official exchange shops (Cadeca) to buy foreign currency, as Minister Alejandro Gil³ announced on state television (Espinoso, 2022). The limitations in

currency supply and high demand led to multiple instances of waiting, which soon became a regular occurrence tied to the currency purchase process. As a result, Cubans often queue for days, facing numerous challenges, organizational forms, and even social conflicts (Rodríguez & Izquierdo, 2022), as shown in the following customer testimony.

I was there almost an hour before they handed out the day's shifts and thought I would probably have to buy tomorrow Friday [...]. Then, [...] the Cadeca colleague who gives out the slots tells the queue that, as of today, [the queue] is no longer in effect [...], as of 8 December, [...] the day I thought I was close to my 100 dollars, they will only attend to the slots assigned by TICKET⁴, [...]. Indignation, anger, deceit? Altogether, I feel. (Calzadilla, 2022)

Using the institutional theory outlined earlier, the waiting process and its temporal structure depicted in the example display several institutional characteristics. For instance, we see the hylemorphic structure: "I arrive almost an hour before the day's shifts are distributed"; systemic morphology: "I'm sure it will be my turn to buy tomorrow, Friday"; coexistentiality and normativity: "as of 8 December, [...] the queue is no longer in effect", as well as its axiology: "Indignation, anger, deceit...".

These waiting processes and their associated times occur within the anthropological space, so they can be classified as anthropological and institutional time –distinct from physical, astronomical, or biological time–. This label implies that waiting processes and their temporal structures imply concrete operations regulated by norms, emerging from routines established within Cuban socio-anthropological space. In the following section, we will discuss how to categorize these temporal peculiarities from our analytical perspective.

Temporality in the Waits: A New Analytical Proposal for Time in Waiting Processes.

Approaching from the standpoint of discontinuous materialism, this paper posits that it is crucial to examine the specific time frame exemplified by individual waiting processes, as opposed to treating the act of waiting as a type of time or temporality. Essentially, it is not that waiting is a mere facet of time; rather, waiting processes innately embody a unique temporal structure, which dialectically interacts with other features. To put it differently, these processes not only present a distinct

temporal architecture, but also a specific spatial context, and certain operational characteristics. The interplay of these dimensions is what shapes a waiting process into a distinct and recognizable phenomenon.

However, a significant limitation continues to persist despite multiple empirical studies exploring a wide range of cases. This limitation is the partial perspective resulting from an approach that views waiting processes exclusively through a temporal lens. This narrowed perspective restricts the incorporation of various elements and phenomena from the gnoseological field of waiting, which cannot be simply reduced to time, mainly because many of them are linked with the other two dimensions (space and operations) included in my analysis. The proposed approach seeks to offer a viewpoint that permits the analysis of any of these dimensions, including the temporal one, without losing the fundamental interconnection each dimension shares with the others.

In this regard, it can be asserted that the dimensions involved in waiting processes are dissociable but not separable since each is equally pivotal in comprehending these processes. In the upcoming sections, I will introduce some of the principal characteristics that form my perspective for analyzing the temporal aspects of waiting, drawing from the institutional and multidimensional stance maintained here. This framework will later be employed to examine the temporal structure of the empirical waiting processes associated with purchasing foreign currency in Cuba, as will be demonstrated in the specific case study presented herein.

Waiting as a finalistic time

One of the defining characteristics of waiting is its inevitability of reaching a conclusion. Several authors, including Crapanzano (1986), Dwyer (2009; 1998), Rotter (2016), and Turnbull (2016), have delved into this topic from various viewpoints. Many of these scholars propose that waiting processes possess an internal temporal structure with a recognized beginning and, at least presumably, an end or conclusion. This endpoint is often anticipated and frequently related to the operations of the process. In other words, waiting should not only have a chronological end, but the actors involved in waiting must also, to some degree, anticipate (or act towards) this end. I have described this particular end using Gustavo Bueno's (1992) category of *referent*, this time in relation to the

conclusion of the waiting process, i.e., the target towards which all the *intentional objectives* (aims, plans, and programs) pursued by those waiting are directed.

From this vantage point, in any empirical waiting process, it becomes immediately clear that the time under scrutiny is invariably imbued with intentions. In other words, it's a timeframe that encapsulates certain operations occurring within a space, all directed towards a goal. In my perspective, I have termed the intended endpoint as the "proleptic goal", referring to the temporal/spatial point towards which all operations are directed. To better comprehend this teleology, consider the institutionalized waiting process examined in this paper as an example. The waiting process for buying foreign currency in Cuba, as illustrated in the brief description of one particular case explored in the media, serves as an instructive instance.

Various individuals are present in the queue, but the majority claim they purchase foreign currency 'to travel.' Others, like Lázaro, mention they will use the dollars to deposit in their Moneda Libremente Convertible (MLC) accounts, a virtual Cuban currency exclusively used for shopping in well-stocked state-run stores. (CEST, 2020)

In this example, the goals of those involved in the wait ["to travel" [...] to deposit in MLC accounts] are taken into account. The temporal structure of waiting interplays dialectically with these objectives, consequently shaping the formation of adaptive plans and programmes. "Nobody wants to be here," one customer admits, "but everybody needs the money quickly to purchase tickets. I came with my family: 100 dollars a head, and we're still short" (Rodríguez & Izquierdo, 2022, para. 17).

Chronology, Chronographies, Chronometry and Time Demarcation Referentials within the Waits.

Alongside the notion of waiting times possessing a goal-directed nature, I have also introduced other categorial tools that could prove useful in studying different aspects of the temporal structure of these processes. My aim is to address certain facets of the temporal characteristics of waiting processes, utilizing a methodological approach that allows for the categorization of elements briefly investigated⁵ in existing research, but from a multidimensional perspective.

In this regard, I propose a tripartite division to differentiate among the multiple temporal materials present in waiting processes. These categories are the chronology, chronometry, and chronography of waiting. Each of these could correspond to a set of notions, ideas, and concepts such as pause, delay, protraction, suspense, pending, and many others. All of them form part of the gnoseological field of waiting and collectively create what we might term the “semantic constellation” (Pearson & Johnson, 1978) of waiting time.

Additionally, it's worth mentioning that these categories not only encapsulate ideas related to temporal sequences within waiting processes, but they also encompass objectual materials frequently overlooked in existing analyses. This is primarily due to a hypostatic approach to temporality and its connection to subjective experience. In this context, using the DM category “referential”⁶ I suggest also including the physical materials that influence the division of sequences, moments, logics, etc., within the temporality of waits. Consequently, referentials of temporal demarcation have been established, categorized according to various characteristics, and analyzed in relation to the aforementioned dimensions, as I will discuss in the sections that follow.

The chronology in the temporal frame of the waiting

The initial category I propose is the “Chronology of Waits,” which aims to analyze the constituent parts or stages of waiting time and their interrelations to comprehend the significance and logic of these connections. While previous authors such as Bendixsen and Eriksen (2020), Hall (1959), and Schwartz (1978) have touched on similar aspects, my approach deviates as I do not divorce the psycho-phenomenological dimension of waiting from the material or objective components, be they social, physical, or biological. Instead, I recognize that waiting time takes on various forms depending on the perspective of analysis and its objectives. Furthermore, I highlight the multiplicity of waiting time based on the behavior of phenomena, which, when interrelated, facilitate the identification of patterns and transformations.

To scrutinize how temporal sequences are articulated within waits, it's necessary to observe their objectively apprehensible structure. For instance, waits can be categorized into three degrees of temporal structure: a) high, b) medium, and c) low,

depending on the institutional organization of the operations demanded by the process. To establish a temporal classification of this waiting architecture, I propose to consider the dialectics between established forms (logics, norms, sequence organization, etc.) and the material matters observed in the processes (the actual timeframe).

Other proposed classifications pertain to the delineated areas of analysis or the parts that organize certain sets of temporal aspects of waiting. To do this, I utilize a category proposed by Edward Hall (1959) to analyze the “temporal patterns” that social phenomena present. Hall suggests these patterns can be formal or informal and manifest themselves explicitly or implicitly.

Consequently, the temporal structure of an institutional wait might be established formally (by an organization) or informally (by the waiters) and could be manifested implicitly (with unrecognized logics) or explicitly (with formally recognized norms and rules). Similarly, these waiting patterns can be placed in any of the three gradations mentioned before: a) high, b) medium, and c) low temporal structure.

These classifications could shed light on a temporal aspect of waiting, often unfamiliar to certain actors in the process, thereby empowering the waiting subjects with greater temporal control. Let's examine how this is possible by applying these categories to some examples related to the waiting process to buy foreign currencies in Cuba.

In the case of Xetid's⁷ development of a queue management application in 2022, this initiative in Cuba aimed to streamline the process of waiting in foreign currency exchange shops known as CADECAS. The objective was to reduce the need for physical queues and transfer the longer waiting times outside the physical stores, all while maintaining the same operational efficiency inside the CADECAS.

From a comprehensive viewpoint, this waiting process exhibits a temporal chronology with a medium degree of institutional temporal organization. We can verify the existence of instruments and technologies used for planning and organizing the process's operations. However, the organizational dynamics function through a duality of explicit (formal) and implicit (informal) programming. The formal aspect is manifest in the organized structure of the system, while the informal

component emerges from the spontaneous operations undertaken by the waiting actors. This observation could be a focus of inquiry if we were exploring the correlation between organizational mechanisms and their management of specific waiting processes.

Yet, it's worth noting that the chronological organization of this queue management process demonstrates significant efficiency when compared to the initial days of sales. During this period, according to various sources, "hundreds of Cubans queued up from the early hours of Tuesday morning to get the first slots in banks and 'Casas de Cambio' or CADECAS throughout the country in order to buy dollars from the Government" (CEST, 2020). Here, the organization recognized the waiting process and began taking steps to manage it in a more formal manner. This example highlights the progression from a lower to a higher degree of institutional temporal organization within the waiting process.

Monochronic and polychronic waits.

Another facet of the chronology of the waiting process to be considered involves its temporal morphology—that is, the temporal sequences into which a process can be divided. Here, I propose two straightforward classifications for the temporal structure of waiting processes: 1) monochronic waits⁸ and 2) polychronic waits⁹.

Monochronic waits refer to morphologically simple processes, that is, those exhibiting a single overall temporal sequence. In contrast, polychronic waits refer to temporally complex processes where the wait manifests a temporal structure split into different segments or sequences. These sequences present varying operational patterns and often necessitate distinct spatial positioning for each of these segments or moments.

I have further divided the complex temporal structure or *polychronic waits* into two types, according to the functioning of their parts: a) *synchronic* and b) *diachronic*. Synchronic waits are characterized by the simultaneous¹⁰ articulation of multiple processes within the same temporal sequence—in other words, two or more processes that form part of the same global wait occur concurrently. On the other hand, diachronic waits are typified by sequential, non-parallel temporal sequences that are co-dependent and consecutive within all or specific parts of the same process.

Let's illustrate these categories with real-life examples related to the waiting time for buying foreign currencies in Cuba.

According to one of the national managers of CADECA, referring to the above-mentioned mobile application, each shop branch would have its "Virtual Waiting Room", where "clients [...] only need to present their ID card when visiting the offices [...] if they miss the appointment, the online reservation is automatically forfeited," explained Alonso Velázquez (Diario de Cuba (DDC), 2022b, para. 2).

In this case, the temporal structure isn't strictly monochronic, as it involves two distinct temporal, spatial, and operational segments. Still, it leans towards diachrony. The application's "virtual" waiting room aimed to simplify the process to only two consecutive temporal sequences. The first sequence concluded when the application notified the user to visit the office on a specific date. The second sequence began when the user arrived at the office and had to wait on-site for the staff to perform necessary operations, which couldn't be timed like the first sequence.

Despite potentially extended waiting times, this organization tried to streamline the process operationally and spatially. However, user testimonials indicated that the actual chronological structure was evidently polychronic and diachronic. A service shop user's testimony illustrates this through her experience:

I registered on 30 November [...] at the CADECA at 21 and 42 street. Today is 28 December, and I have only moved 31 places. Each time I pass by, CADECA is vacant, with the workers chatting inside with no customers. I hope to complete my purchase before the end of 2024. I recommend a closer examination of CADECA's operation and response time to a user's failure, and how the queue is managed. (CubaDebate, 2022)

Here, a conflict exists between the organization's prescribed temporal structure, the objective operations that the process demands of those waiting, and a variation in the perceived chronology. The temporal morphology that users objectively observe has become *polychronic*, manifesting more parts than initially intended. "Every time I pass by CADECA, it is empty, and the workers are chatting... no customers." Both these operations and spaces (passing through CADECA) are extraneous

to the organization's planning. Consequently, the time spent is not accounted for. These actions accumulate, adding *synchronous times* within the overall process, and thereby increase its complexity beyond the organization's anticipated limits.

Chronography of waiting times and their demarcation referentials

Another aspect of my analysis focuses on the specific mechanisms actors use to collect information, enabling them to structure temporal logic and plan their actions or operations. These mechanisms allow actors to develop strategies and plans based on known or assumed temporal sequences. To account for these communication mechanisms reflecting the logical structure of time in waiting processes, I introduce the concept of "chronography of waiting."

The *chronography* of waiting emphasizes both the objective material structure of the waiting process and the subjective "experience of time." It seeks to describe the transmission and communication mechanisms of the temporal logic embedded in a waiting process, as interpreted by the operating subjects interacting with them. The central question involves identifying the means or mechanisms through which these norms are communicated within each institutionalized waiting process. In other words, how is the temporal logic of the waiting process conveyed and made apparent to the actors engaged in the process?

Chronographic aspects play a vital role in the internal dialectic of waiting processes within institutions, as well as in the relationships between actors and the waiting process itself. In other words, dialectical relations within the chronographic dimension of waiting are critical for both the subjective perception of time and the objective material structure of institutionalized waiting time.

The term "referential" is reused here in the context of waiting chronography, but it refers to the physical objects or phenomena that signify the links between different temporal moments or spaces within a waiting process. These reference points, organized in a specific order, can take various forms. While I've provided some basic classifications, actual practice may reveal others. The chronographic referentials can be categorized as: *a) visual, b) auditory, c) audiovisual, and d) rhetorical.*

Examples of *chronographic referentials* include information boards, written documents, films,

computer software, images, maps, signs, symbols, information provided by organizational agents, customer service windows, bureaus, and more. Other referentials, such as narratives, testimonials, verbal communication, stories, anecdotes, and songs, can also be utilized concurrently.

These categories can be understood more clearly when applied to cases related to the waits I have been analyzing. For instance, consider the testimonies of customers, reflected in a media article about the first day of selling foreign currencies, following the authorization for Cubans to sell dollars in August of 2022.

When people lose track of time, CADECA opens its doors, and an official appears. He is holding an inspector's tablet in his hands and pauses before pronouncing the first name (...), the customers rush towards him and shout to the stragglers: "Come on, they're calling, get up!" (Rodríguez & Izquierdo, 2022, para. 10).

In this scenario, the chronography reflects both *formal* temporal patterns—"CADECA opens its doors"—and informal ones—"Come on, they're calling, get up!". In another testimony, another user says:

Cadeca at 23 y J. Thursday 8 December 2022. 8:30 am. I have been queuing for almost 20 days [...]. I dialed unsuccessfully at 4:30 in the morning several times until the day arrived [...] when they gave me my turn, [...] Then, [...] the CADECA colleague [...] tells the queue that, as of today, it is no longer in effect [...] I turn around and ask a lucky woman waiting for her digital turn, and she tells me that just yesterday, several Cadecas had already collapsed within a short time of starting the new system. (Calzadilla, 2022, pp. 1-3)

In both cases, *chronographic referentials* exhibit a chronology, which can be either formal or informal: (a) Visual: [formal] 'CADECA opens its doors', 'an official appears', 'a tablet'. (b) Rhetorical: [formal] (the official) "pronounces the first name", "the CADECA colleague [...] tells the queue" [informal] 'shouting' "Come on, they're already calling, get up!" ('a fortunate person') "she tells me that just yesterday, several Cadecas had already collapsed within a short time".

In another testimony, (c) audiovisual chronographic reference points are evident in the mobile application used to manage the process. "When

you enter the application [...], you have to go to the waiting room and wait for a ticket that arrives the day before with an SMS” (CubaDebate, 2022).

Here, the signal in the application, both visual and audible as the phone emits an alert sound, serves as the chronometric referential that delineates a time structure, indicating the operations to be carried out at each moment.

Chronometry and demarcation referentials of waiting times

The final dimension of analysis concerns the objective measurement of time segments in waiting processes. It seeks to answer: How many years, days, hours, minutes, seconds, etc., does a waiting process entail? To operationalize this dimension, I propose the category *chronometry of waiting processes*. As with previous categories –*chronology* and *chronography*–, the *chronometric* structure of waiting processes is denoted by *referentials*, elements that signify or organize the objective rhythms in each time segment and measure the durations of the sequences present in the waits.

Chronometric referentials in a waiting process can include a wide variety of phenomenal cycles, the patterns of which schedule the rhythm of the temporal segments of a given process. These can range from mechanical, biological, atmospheric, and astronomical bodies to logical-behavioural conducts related to operations, actions, ceremonies, etc., executed by specific operative subjects that indicate specific durations. Additionally, chronometric referential points may include sounds, images, clocks, apps, mobiles, electronic devices with light or sound (or both), sirens, bells, human operations, voices, animal behavior and operations, among many others.

These sequences denoted by *chronometric referential*, can be classified as either a) *ordinal* or b) *cardinal*. The *ordinal* sequences (a) are established in a fixed linear order, while (b) *cardinal* sequences are manifested from specific events or moments and do not follow a fixed linear order.

Let’s analyze this classification taking the example of Lazaro’s waiting experience, a 57-year-old man who recounted his experience at a currency exchange in Havana, in the summer of 2022. “I’ve been waiting since 3 a. m.,” he told the notice agency EFE, and I have received “number 37” in the queue. The CADECA opened at 8:00 local time, five hours Lazaro arrived (Espinoso, 2022, pp. 1-5).

This scenario illustrates the presence of both *ordinal* and *cardinal* sequences in this waiting processes. Lazaro’s testimony illustrated an *ordinal* structure, from his arrival at 3:00 a.m. until the moment he conducted his transaction. However, the process could also present a *cardinal* waiting time which have internal rhythms, that aren’t stable or mathematically regular. They are governed by various factors, including specific events, random chains of operations, organizational measures, spatial translations, and other factors.

‘It’s taking a long time’, one customer reluctantly noted. The CADECA is supposed to provide information on how much currency it has available at the moment to open the shop, since the number of people who come into the shop depends on the amount of dollars, they have¹¹. However, it conceals this information so that the “awake” people refrain from making calculations and drawing political conclusions about the economic situation of the country. (Rodríguez & Izquierdo, 2022, para. 8)

According to the testimony, at least in the *informal chronology*, one of the referentials used by the waiters is the number of dollars the office has for sale that day. This number is used as a *referential* to calculate the waiting time for the transaction. This discussion on duration, or the temporal length of waits, leads us to consider whether the wait is *monochronic* or *polychronic*. Monochronic waits are mono-segmental (TS=1), while *polychronic* waits are multi-segmental (TS>1).

The experiential psycho-phenomenological approach often used in the literature states that the wait is long or short based on the waiting individual’s perspective (Auyero, 2012; Gasparini, 1995; Gell, 2021; Hall, 1959). While acknowledging the importance of individual perspectives, I propose prioritizing the institutional perspective. I hypothesize that the objective reference elements used to establish the length of waits are given at two different levels: *internal* to the wait itself, and *external*.

Internally, the relevant question is, “relative to what is the wait long or short?” This aspect is often determined by specific plans, programs, and their associated prolepses that actors and institutions carry out from their respective positions. Externally, the relationships that waits establish with intersecting institutions, both within and outside

the process, should also be considered. Context is key. Waiting cannot be analyzed in isolation without considering their institutional context.

Using the example of the waiting processes for buying dollar in Cuba for explain these categories we could say that in 2022, Cuban CADECAS experienced complex institutional waiting processes with the onset of foreign currency sales. The authorities launched an electronic application for buying dollars, eliminating the physical queues with all their associated challenges (DDC, 2022a). However, in some cities, these *formal* mechanisms of waiting organization were not implemented, leading to inefficiencies and stressful 30-day waits. By contrast, in the capital, these mechanisms were successful, according to the testimony of some users.

This app was very useful for me at CADECA yesterday. I made a purchase at the CADECA of 23 avenue and J street, and everything was very easy and fast. Yes, I had to wait 20 days to buy, but in the end, I could make the purchase since the waiting room guarantees your turn. It's slow, but at least it's secure. (CubaDebate, 2022)

This testimony points to a *polychronic wait* divided in two segments: a long external wait of 20 days and a short one of just a few minutes, taking place once the person's turn in the app was reached.

In summary, the proposed classifications—Chronology, Chronography, and Chronometry of Waiting—provide a valuable framework for understanding timeframes within waiting processes. As demonstrated in the case of currency exchange in Cuba, the Chronology of Waits introduces monochronic and polychronic dimensions, unveiling the diversity of temporal structures in waiting periods and shedding light on discrepancies between projected and actual temporal organizations. Similarly, the Chronography of Waiting underscores the significance of referentials as tangible indicators that assist individuals in managing and strategizing their waiting times. The Chronometry of Waiting further enhances our understanding of these timeframes, illuminating their segmentation and fluctuating rhythms, thereby highlighting the intricate interplay between individual and institutional perspectives. Upon examining these categories, we will apply their functionality to an empirical case study of waiting to exchange foreign currency in Camagüey, Cuba, during the summer of 2022.

Development. Waiting for Dollars at the CADECA on 'República Street': General characteristics of the Case Study.

The Cuban government's decision to allow the purchase of foreign currency sparked waiting processes that have deeply influenced and have been influenced by, the societal context. I employed participant observation techniques between September 5th and September 21st, 2022, and undertook open-ended, in-depth interviews with key informants to gain an enriched understanding of this reciprocal relationship. My field observations were primarily conducted in one of two authorized CADECAs (currency exchange bureaus) in Camagüey city, specifically, "La CADECA de República," situated at Calle República #353, nestled between San Esteban and Santa Rita¹².

In this case study, I could discern the temporal characteristics of this waiting phenomenon and the organizational efficiency with which its underlying procedures were managed. The resulting institutional dynamics showed sophisticated and structured systems adept at organizing all operations, whether formally or informally necessitated by the process.

The observed waiting demonstrated a "polytopic" distribution, with its locations varying in response to the operational and temporal demands of the process. In terms of time, the waiting process unfolded polychronic, segmented into several distinct periods, each exhibiting a high degree of temporal structuring. Starting with the individuals waiting in queues at locations different from where the actual transaction would occur, the process encouraged waiters to identify the most queue-intensive operations at that moment and join in accordingly. Operationally, these segments manifested in three or four different locations, determined by various factors such as weather conditions, the stage of the process, police regulation of informal dynamics, and other contextual factors, which will be discussed in greater depth later.

During the observation period, the initial segment of the waiting process was situated in an urban park, approximately 808 meters from the studied CADECA, locally known as "El Parque de los Gatos" (The Park of the Cats). Here, the informal organizer of the queue recorded lists and assigned numbers to registered participants. The operations during this initial phase could

be relocated as necessary. When such a relocation occurred, another urban park, “Parquecito de Bobes,” near “El Parque del Gato,” served as the alternate initial waiting area. This park was 573 meters from “El Parque de los Gatos” and 696 meters from the CADECA, both equidistant from the final point of reference for the waiting process, situated inside the CADECA.

Following these initial locations, two other sites were involved, each with unique operations and temporal structures. The first, known as the “Parque del Amor” (The Park of Love), was located in the vicinity of the CADECA, approximately 1200 meters from “El Parque del Gato,” and about 50 meters from the CADECA, on the same street.

After this penultimate waiting area, the process nearly concluded on the immediate perimeter of the CADECA, along its front side. From here, individuals reached the process’s final point of reference, located inside the bureau, demarcated by the chronometric reference of the window glass where the final segment of waiting (typically a matter of minutes) would occur. This confined space accommodated around 20 to 25 people who would make their purchases on a given day.

Operationally, the first temporal segment of this process involved registering waiters on a waiting list informally managed by a small group of administrators. Unlike other lists employed in Cuban queuing processes, which are informally managed on a rotating basis, this process had fixed administrators. These individuals appointed themselves within hours of the government’s announcement in the summer of 2022, which marked the commencement of foreign currency sales. This information was disclosed to me by one of the key informants.

In this initial segment, each individual in the waiting process could register once per day, listing up to 9 additional names along with their own, thus allowing for ten names each day. This specific limitation was since, as previously mentioned, CADECA just to sell only an equivalent of 100 USD per day. Individuals would need to return on a subsequent day if a larger amount was required.

To circumvent such restrictions, individuals often mobilized friends or relatives to accompany them on the day of purchase to acquire as many dollars as needed. This need explains why so many names were included with each registration. During my

observation, I noticed individuals registering for up to 7 consecutive days, listing the maximum permissible quantity (ten names) each time. By tracking how often a person registered, it was possible to estimate their currency requirements. For instance, a person’s list with 70 slots indicated a need for 7000¹³ USD, considering 100 USD per slot.

One of these waiting lists could contain up to a thousand or even two thousand names, necessitating multiple lists to ensure everything is clear. I observed up to four different lists during my observation period. Upon entering the waiting area of this first temporal-spatial segment, individuals had to write their name, surname, and the names of their accompanying parties clearly and legibly. Precision was paramount when listing names, as mistakes could result in the individual losing their spot on the list due to mispronunciations or misunderstandings. Once lost, a spot could not be reclaimed, compelling the individual to start anew on a different day or list.

The waiting list was updated daily, and individuals were informed about their position in the queue. To keep track of their progress, the waiters were encouraged to note their queue numbers from each list in a notebook or diary. Amid the bustle of the waiting area and ongoing discussions, maintaining an accurate account required considerable focus. Attempts to circumvent the informally established rules were not uncommon but were generally met with pushback from those overseeing the queue.

The dynamics at the second waiting location, “El Parque del Amor,” differed from those at the first. Only 40 to 50 individuals gathered here, including the first 100 on the waiting list. The main operations at this stage centred around “guarding the queue” and monitoring individuals or groups positioned ahead and behind one’s spot. This vigilance was critical, as opportunistic individuals could emerge at this stage, attempting to subvert the process’s informal rules.

At the “El Parque del Amor” stage, seven to ten individuals accompanied the main participant, ensuring queue integrity by countering attempts to breach the process’s informal rules. However, situations arose where disruptive individuals would appear shortly before the purchase and threaten to skip ahead in the queue, arguing that they could not see more than 50 people ahead, thereby asserting a purchase opportunity. Just the collective

effort of one's group thwarted these transgressors, intending to enforce the law of the jungle in the process.

The final segment before the purchase involved a traditional queue, accommodating at most 50 people, typically between 25 and 30. This system was implemented as, on average, the CADECA served between 35 and 40 individuals per day, depending on the availability of dollars, power schedules, and service interruptions.

Temporal structure of the waiting process to buy dollars at the CADECA on 'República Street'

Buying dollars at the CADECA on 'República Street' follows a temporally organized structure consisting of three main chronological stages, or macro-cycles, each associated with distinct activities and spaces. Primarily, we observe a *polychronic* waiting pattern, mostly *informal*, which culminates in a final, *formally* organized segment. Despite the predominantly informal nature of the organization, the temporal structuring of this process is considerably complex.

The first temporal segment involves the annotation and rectification of lists and occurs at designated times throughout the week. Annotation operations begin on the first day and typically last between 30 to 120 minutes per session, subject to various factors. Before the annotation and rectification commence, the regulations and temporal logic are clearly explained. Registration is available from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., Monday to Saturday, and from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon on Sundays. Rectification takes place Monday to Saturday at 7:45 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. and on Sunday morning, after which all lists are confirmed and finalized.

On certain days, I observed rectification extending up to six hours due to the large number of annotations. This extension suggests that the temporal segments of the process are organized both *synchronically*, with multiple activities happening simultaneously, and *diachronically*, in a sequence of structured segments.

In the initial segment, individuals could annotate up to 10 numbers, with a standard interval of 24 to 48 hours between one annotation and the next. This gap was established for two primary reasons: to allow sufficient time for the number of annotations needed to complete the exchange and to align with the number of people the individual can

gather to accompany them on each shopping day once the benchmark is reached. Assuming an individual could rally ten acquaintances to accompany them on the necessary days to procure the desired amount, a schedule of five consecutive shopping days or, at most, a gap of one or two days in between could be set up to obtain the required \$5000¹⁴.

After completing the entire annotation process (in one or two weeks), the waiters typically dedicate 4 to 6 hours on Sundays to rectify all lists comprehensively.

Within this framework of rules and norms, it is critical to note that the *chronological referentials* utilized were typically rhetorical. Through verbal explanations, the participants and those managing the process established the different temporal segments. In other words, the primary *referential points* used to denote each stage or segment were usually *logical-behavioural* factors¹⁵.

The initial stage of note-taking and rectification is extended for about 15-20 days, depending on various factors, featuring *informal* temporal programming of the process. Once this phase concluded successfully according to the system's structure, an individual would typically progress to the penultimate phase or the second macro waiting cycle. This transition commonly occurred when an individual was among the next 100 prospective buyers, shifting the waiting process to the "Parque del Amor."

The second stage, viewed chronometrically, lasted between 48 to 72 hours. While it could shorten to 24 hours under extremely favourable conditions, such instances were rare. On the other hand, this stage could stretch over four days, subject to various factors. The second stage was split into two synchronously closed temporal segments, directed by two chronologically planned ordinal segments.

The first segment started in the morning with "queue care," lasting from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Provided everything proceeded as expected; the queue would be managed from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. the next day, ideally designated for purchasing.

This process relied on the absence of hindrances or unexpected events to delay the proceedings, with an average of 50 people conducting these two care shifts per CADECA's daily attendance rate. Nevertheless, none of the waiters wished to lose their spot in the queue due to unforeseen circumstances that might cause more people to be served¹⁶.

The final segment of the process took place the day after the night shift, during CADECA's standard operating hours, from 9.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. However, the process typically concluded before the afternoon as sales generally ceased once the available dollar supply for the day, ranging between \$3500 and \$4000, was exhausted.

For those who missed the chance to purchase, they would secure the first spots the following day. Thus, they would have to stay awake through the night or arrive exceptionally early to prevent any mishaps or misunderstandings regarding their position in the queue.

In summary, the procedure for purchasing foreign currency at the CADECA on República Street resulted in a waiting process that displayed all the characteristics of being institutional. This process could be classified as polytopical, polychronic, and multioperational. Temporally, this institutional waiting was structured and divided into three primary stages or macro-cycles. Despite each phase adhering to specific rules, norms, and schedules, a high level of flexibility was preserved, enabling the process and related social actors to adapt to a myriad of interacting factors in the complex contemporary Cuban social environment.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the waiting process to purchase foreign currency in Cuba can be characterized as a social institution. Our study seeks to provide a novel perspective, perceiving waiting as an event bound by time and as a multidimensional social phenomenon. This reconceptualization provides an enhanced understanding of the sociocultural dynamics that underlie these phenomena, paving the way for innovative research opportunities.

The currency reforms introduced in Cuba in 2022, "La Tarea Ordenamiento", created a distinctive context for investigating institutionalized waiting associated with acquiring foreign currency and others. We have concentrated our efforts on a case study in Camagüey, Cuba, providing an intricate examination of the dynamics of these social institutions.

Using participant observation and comprehensive interviews, we have unraveled how this waiting has evolved into a complex system marked by high operational and temporal efficiency levels. The process includes several tempo-spatial and operational segments, each governed by its blend

of formal and informal mechanisms. In this context, the institutional structure of these waiting necessitated a series of operations within a temporal framework, closely associated with specific spaces where these activities logically took place.

My analysis suggests that the waiting time for purchasing foreign currencies in Cuba was elongated, largely due to the high number of individuals involved. My observations indicated that this process attracted between 70 to 80 people daily, and on average, it took between 10 to 20 days to complete the initial purchase. This temporal organization deeply influences the currency exchange process, significantly impacting the experiences and outcomes of the buyers involved.

Finally, the multitude of steps involved, many of which were informally established, served as a means to control and regulate the access of these participants to these limited resources, thus preserving the social order. It is possible to affirm that the process was steered by a logical-behavioural framework, demanding adaptability to unforeseen circumstances and the active participation of those implicated.

Notas

- ¹ For a comprehensive analysis of the institutional nature of waiting processes from a discontinuous materialist perspective refer to: Avila (2023), "Waiting as Institution: Notes for an Institutional Analysis of Human Waiting Processes from a Discontinuous Materialism Perspective".
- ² Formally, in this context, the official monetary duality in Cuba was eliminated. However, as many economists point out, in practice, not only has the existence of multiple currencies been maintained, but their number has also increased. Before the reorganization, there were two currencies, but now up to four different currencies circulate in the country.
- ³ Alejandro Gil is the Cuban Minister of Economy and Planning.
- ⁴ A mobile phone application for queue management that some organisations in Cuba have started to use.
- ⁵ My integrated study of waiting builds on the current research trend that categorizes waiting phenomena. This trend has been shaped by researchers including Catherine Bailey (2019), Auyero (2012), Gasparini (1995), Schwartz (1978), Sellerberg (2008), Lindón (2022), and others. Their contributions have been vital in steering my proposed research direction.

- ⁶ The theory of categorial closure proposes that *referentials* are semantic figures within the gnoseological space. These figures are physical, three-dimensional contents that belong to scientific bodies and gnoseological figures in the field of science. While my use of the term differs from this system, the function of *referentials* in scientific space and the *waiting field* can be coordinated. For more information, refer to the Philosophical Dictionary Handbook of Philosophical Materialism and the analytical introduction at <https://www.filosofia.org/filomat/df196.htm>.
- ⁷ Xetid, a state-owned IT company in Cuba, announced that by the end of January 2023, their queue management application would be operational in all 37 CADECAS branches throughout the country. (Diario de Cuba (DDC), 2022b).
- ⁸ These are one-time waits that occur in a structured sequence from beginning to end without interruptions or segmentation. Examples include waiting in line for a procedure, purchasing a product, entering a cinema, being served in a restaurant, and waiting for a relative's surgery to be completed.
- ⁹ The categories of monochronic and polychronic time, which we use in my analysis, were originally introduced by Edward Hall in his book "The Silent Language" (1959) to describe temporal characteristics of cultures. We are not introducing new categories, but rather, reinterpreting Hall's categories in the context of waiting processes.
- ¹⁰ In this case, we find multiple circular waits, where actors initiate several chains of operations leading to different parts of the process and simultaneously wait for the results of one or more of these segments.
- ¹¹ This shop is only allowed to sell 100 dollars or its equivalent per person each day. If the shop starts the day with 1000 dollars, they will only attend to 10 people that day.
- ¹² <https://www.google.com/maps/dir//21.3854011,-77.9165035/@21.3847022,-77.9186304,17z>
- ¹³ These amounts were often those necessary to carry out the irregular migration process, which Cubans carried out in those days.
- ¹⁴ For example, someone requiring \$5000 might annotate the lists on ten alternate days, with an ideal goal of making ten annotations daily.
- ¹⁵ Here it is important to note that mechanical elements like clocks and natural indicators like sunset were also observed.
- ¹⁶ If only 35 people were served that day, 15 remaining in the queue would resume the night shift, while another 15 would undertake another morning shift. Hence, these queue duty cycles could span over four consecutive days.

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