Donde Crece la Palma

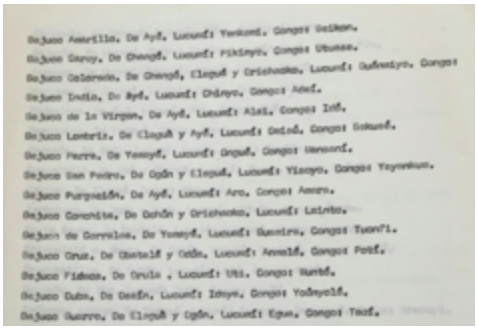
One of the things that first struck me upon entering the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection is the many ways "Cubanness" is written onto the space of the archive itself. The glass doors that separate the lobby from the reading room are emblazoned with the Cuban coat of arms. Protective glass cases house bejeweled statues of Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre, the patron saint of Cuba. The scent of *café cubano* regularly seeps from the kitchen. The Cubaness of the space is further heightened by the university's architectural features and geographic location. Oversized windows fill the reading room's southern wall with views of the sprawling U Miami campus. One plant in particular dominates the landscape: the royal palm (*Roystonea regia*). One of the most enduring symbols of Cuba, perhaps this was the variety of palm Cuban poet and founding father José Martí envisioned as he composed the famous lines that have been forcibly recited by countless generations of Cuban schoolchildren: *Yo soy un hombre sincero/de donde crece la palma/y antes de morirme quiero/echar mis versos del alma*. As the national tree of Cuba, the royal palm decorates the same Cuban coat of arms that is reproduced on the doors of the CHC.

Coat of arms of Cuba

In addition to embodying Cubanness in its spatial makeup, the Cuban Heritage Collection serves as a site dedicated to the collection and study of texts of Cubaness. The archive houses many of the best known works of Cuban history, such as the papers of renowned anthropologist Lydia Cabrera, as well as countless lesser-known gems such as the Hady López papers. I had the opportunity to explore some of the CHCs offerings as a Goizueta Foundation Pre-Prospectus Fellow, one of two fellowships the CHC offers to graduate students. I arrived at the CHC with a fairly broad research focus: Cuban healthcare practices in the twentieth and twenty-first century. The CHC's extensive collection proved an ideal means of narrowing that focus. I began my time in the archive with one of the CHC's best known collections, the Lydia Cabrera papers. Specifically, I looked at research materials from two of Cabrera's works on Cuban religious-medicinal plants, *Ewe: Yerbas de Curandería* (n.d.) and *La Medicina Popular de Cuba: Médicos de antao, curanderos, santeros y paleros* (1984.) I next examined the less famous Hady López Papers, which contain the work of Hady López, a Cuban pharmacist who researched the nutritional content of Cuban plants in works such as the 1956 "Nutrient Composition of Cuban Plant Foods." While both Cabrera and López focus broadly on the role of healing plants in

defining Cubaness, the authors diverge in the specific routes they take to arrive at their understandings of Cubaness through exploring the use of "healing" plants.

In *Yerbas de Curandería* and *La medicina popular en Cuba* Lydia Cabrera presents popular "Afro-Cuban" religious-healing practices as emblematic of a Cuban identity. Cabrera specifically focuses on the plants used in these practices, but emphasizes her interest in the "cultural" element of those plants. She asserts her identity as an anthropologist interested in uncovering the cultural facets of a Cuban identity through her use of language. Cabrera lists the plants by their names in vernacular Cuban Spanish and Lucumi, two distinctly Cuban dialects that reveal her interest in uncovering a distinctly Cuban identity. Cabrera employs descriptive prose to detail how the plants are utilized in "popular" Cuban healing practices, asserting herself as an ethnographer concerned with reaching an understanding of Cuba through "cultural" expressions of health. Cabrera's exploration of Cubaness also extends to culturally specific ailments, such as nervios and empacho. Throughout *Yerbas de Curandería* and *La medicina popular en Cuba,* Lydia Cabrera thus ties the cultural and physical health of Cubaness to the geography of the island.



Cabrera presents "Cuban" "religious-medicinal" plants using Cuban Spanish and Lucumi and descriptive prose

In "Nutrient Composition of Cuban Plant Foods," Hady López presents her data on "Cuban" plants in the form of charts and tables in which she lists the plants by their "common" Spanish, "scientific," and English names. López attempts to better understand these "Cuban" plants and their significance to the health of Cubans by examining them on a chemical level, breaking the plants down into quantities of nutrients such as amino acids and carbohydrates. In employing the "universal" languages of chemical and numerical data, López transcends linguistic and geopolitical borders to place her work into an international conversation. At the same time, López asserts her interest in distinctly Cuban questions through her use of vernacular Spanish and her focus on plants that she explicitly labels as "Cuban." Like Cabrera, López also expresses interest in specifically "Cuban" ailments. The pharmacist presents these distinctly Cuban ailments as consequences of cultural and environmental aspects of being Cuban. López describes certain nutritional deficiencies as distinctly Cuban, arguing they stem from the particular combination of plants that do or do not form part of a standard "Cuban" diet. López recognizes these dietary decisions as based on the interrelated economic and geographic factors availability as well as the cultural factor of which plants Cubans viewed as essential to a Cuban diet. In

"Nutrient Composition of Cuban Plant Foods," Hady López thus presents Cuban cultural and physical well being as tightly interwoven with the geography of the island.

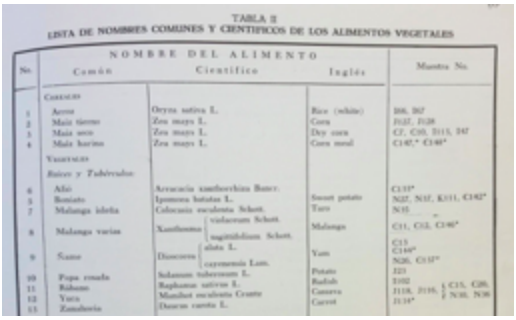


TABLA II

LISTA DE NOMBRES COMUNES Y CIENTIFICOS DE LOS ALIMENTOS VEGETALES

No.	NOMBRE DEL ALIMENTO Común	Científico	Inglés	Muestra No.
	CEREALES			
1	Arroz	Oryza sativa L.	Rice (white)	106, 207
2	Maíz tierno	Zea mays L.	Corn	3137, 3138
3	Maíz seco	Zea mays L.	Dry corn	C7, C10, 3115, 347
4	Maíz harina	Zea mays L.	Corn meal	C140,* C140*
	VEGETALES			
	Raíces y Tubérculos			
6	Ajíe	Arracacia xanthorrhiza Bancr.		C135*
5	Boniato	Ipomoea batatas L.	Sweet potato	N27, N37, E311, C142*
7	Malanga isleña	Colocasia esculenta Schott.	Taro	N35
8	Malanga varias	Xanthosoma violaceum Schott. / sagittifolium Schott.	Malanga	C11, C12, C140*
9	Name	Dioscorea alata L. / cayennensis Lam.	Yam	C15 C140* N26, C137*
10	Papa criolla	Solanum tuberosum L.	Potato	325
11	Rábano	Raphanus sativus L.	Radish	3102
12	Yuca	Manihot esculenta Crantz	Cassava	3118, 3195, } C15, C26,
13	Zanahoria	Daucus carota L.	Carrot	3139* } N30, N36

TABLA IV

TABLA PROVISIONAL DE COMPOSICION DE ALIMENTOS (1955)

(Los resultados corresponden a 100 Grs. de parte comestible de la muestra analizada)

No. de Orden	ALIMENTO	No. de Muestra	Humedad	Calorías	Grasas	HIDRATOS DE CARBONO Total	HIDRATOS DE CARBONO Fibra	Proteína	AMINO ACIDOS Triptofano	AMINO ACIDOS Metionina	AMINO ACIDOS Lisina
			Grs.		Grs.	Grs.	Grs.	Grs.	Mgrs.	Mgrs.	Mgrs.
	CEREALES										
1	Arroz integral	1	13.8	346.7	.97	77.22	.62	7.26	76	145	269
2	Arroz descascarado a máquina	1	13.0	347.5	.23	79.64	.67	6.72	74	117	200
3	Arroz pilado a mano	1	12.9	350.5	.95	75.14	1.02	10.35	97	214	389
4	Arroz pilado en molino	1	13.1	346.4	.26	79.66	.81	6.36	65	126	212
5	Arroz pulido	9	11.1	364.2	.40	81.67	.56	6.99	60	126	211
6	Arroz, polvo de	3	9.5	384.4	4.88	75.55	2.73	11.56	107	213	531
7	Maíz, harina de	2	7.5	393.1	3.99	79.55	.88	8.52	50	206	207
8	Maíz seco	15	8.8	367.7	3.95	76.03	2.02	9.85	44	141	252
9	Maíz tierno	3	61.6	150.9	1.52	31.23	1.02	4.49	26	91	166

López presents "Cuban" "nutritional" plants using Spanish and scientific names and chemical compositions

Though renowned anthropologist Lydia Cabrera and less recognized pharmacist Hady López may not seem the most obvious choice of authors to put in conversation, their work speaks to each other in interesting ways. In spite of their divergent academic backgrounds, both women sought a greater comprehension of "Cubaness" through examining the significance of plants in Cuban physical and cultural health. Cabrera and López's focus on botany ties Cubanness with the physical space and conditions of the island. The women's ability to express notions of Cubaness through plants was facilitated and likely inspired by their geographic locations. Both authors present a tropical climate as an integral part of Cubaness, making Havana and Miami's significance as sites of Cubaness stem as much from geographic features as political or cultural ones. This focus on botanical aspects of Cuban identity further presents the women with the option of laying claim to a certain "permanence" and "a-politicalness" in their work that was often in direct contrast to the condition of the Cuban nation state and of Cubans on and off the island. Rooting their conceptions of Cubaness in plants and natural landscapes allows Cabrera and López to give those conceptions an air of permanence, not unlike the one that emanates from the royal palms that dominate the landscapes of Havana and Miami alike.

royal palms (Roystonea regia)