Opportunity and Inequality in Cuba's Changing Economy:
Housing as a Means or Barrier to Social Mobility

By

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I examine the role of housing in social mobility in post-2010 Havana, Cuba. The economic restructuring that started in Cuba in the 1990s and especially the most recent wave of reforms since 2010 have radically transformed opportunities for social mobility available to Cubans, and housing, I argue, has become a key means or barrier to social mobility. Drawing on ethnographic data that I collected in 2015-16, I look at how Cubans in Havana are navigating the economic restructuring, and specifically how they are using their homes for both social welfare provision as well as social mobility, which used to be largely provided and structured by the state. I find that the key ways that Cubans are doing so is by selling their homes in the newly emerging real-estate market or using them for income-generating opportunities in the growing private sector, but that their ability to pursue these strategies is highly uneven. I interrogate the factors that shape whether one's housing serves as a means or a barrier to social welfare provision and mobility, in an effort to discern the winners and losers of the economic reforms introduced since 2010. This dissertation consists of six empirical chapters, which I summarize below.

In chapter two, I look at housing policy in Cuba from 1959 to 2017, as a lens to trace changes in the meaning and role of housing in Cuban society as well as shifts in the societal division of labor between the state, the market, and individuals and families. Housing underwent a transformation over the course of this period, from serving a primarily social function and having only a use value to becoming an asset with exchange value. Social relations were also transformed during this time period: by highlighting how rights and responsibilities with respect to housing were reconfigured over time I show how housing legislation impacted social relations by both instigating and reflecting shifts in the societal division of labor between the state, the market, and private citizens and their families. After an initial period of establishing and entrenching the central role of the state in not only the housing needs of the population but also its social well-being more generally, in later decades the state began to share, and, more recently, shift this responsibility to the private sphere. These two transformations–the (re)commodification of housing and the shifting of responsibility for social welfare provision from the state to individuals and families–are key to understanding how housing came to occupy a central role in the new structure of opportunity in Cuba.

In chapter three, I examine the various factors that determine the exchange value of a home, or simply what makes a home more or less valuable in Havana's emerging real-estate market. I find that given the importance of international tourism in the Cuban economy, a decisive factor that determines value is whether one's home is located in an area of high tourist interest. Another important variable is whether the home is a "capitalist" construction or whether it was built after 1959. I argue that while the Cuban state provided many Cubans with a place to live, those Cubans living in units built by the socialist state and/or outside of tourist areas generally find themselves more limited in using their housing for social mobility in a context in which housing has become (re)commodified.

In chapter four, I establish the central role that housing plays in welfare provision and social mobility in contemporary Havana and outline the mechanisms by which it does so. In emphasizing the ways in which housing can serve as a means to social mobility, this chapter supplements a more traditional understanding of housing serving as a reflection of social class and/or an expression of social mobility. I specify two overarching ways in which Cubans use

their housing to ensure their welfare and to pursue social mobility strategies. The first is by converting the wealth stored in their home into cash through selling. The second is by using their home to generate sustained income, either by setting up a home-based business or by renting space for commercial purposes or other amenities to consumers. I argue that this reliance on housing for social welfare provision and social mobility is a response to the selective retrenchment of the state, which has led individuals and families to take over responsibility for their own welfare from the state.

In chapter five, I examine how people came to live in the homes they were living in when those homes suddenly became recommodified and started to serve as the basis for a new system of stratification. I outline the different avenues for acquiring housing available to Cubans between 1959 and 2011, distinguishing between avenues available through the state sphere and those available through the private sphere. I show that each sphere was ruled by distinct logics: housing need, and "merit" (i.e., service to the Revolution) structured access to housing in the state sphere, while economic capital and social capital structured access in the private sphere. In present-day Cuba, access to housing occurs primarily through the private sphere, requiring high amounts of economic capital and also social capital and/or is dependent on family inheritance.

In chapter six, I attempt to answer the elusive question of which social groups are better positioned to use the (re)commodification of housing for upward social mobility, and which social groups are systematically limited or excluded from doing so. While data limitations preclude a clear answer, I piece together available evidence that suggests that racial and economic inequalities that the Revolution fought hard to eliminate were reinscribed through housing in some ways but disrupted in others. With respect to the "winners", the distribution of housing after the Revolution benefited a relatively small group of prerevolutionary elites (who were able to retain their homes) and Revolutionary leaders (who were assigned some of the nicer homes), but also some families of more humble origins who acquired housing in neighborhoods that today command higher prices. To the extent that these groups remained in these homes, they were well-positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities for social mobility that became available when housing was (re)commodified, but at least some evidence suggests that those with access to hard currency in the 1990s (through remittances, small private businesses, work in tourism or for foreign companies), who some scholars argue tend to be predominantly white, may have (illegally) purchased some of these more desirable properties in the 1990s, thus further reinforcing their advantage with the new opportunities presented by the latest wave of economic reforms. The "losers," I argue, are those who are excluded from homeownership, and those who live in tenements, who tend to be largely Afro-Cuban and poor, and find themselves largely unable to use their housing as a means to social mobility.

In chapter seven, I explore the highly stratified nature of the emerging real-estate market in Havana. I look at who is buying residential properties in Havana, arguing that the lack of mortgage financing in Cuba and the generally low salaries that Cubans earn have created a situation in which most Cubans must first sell their own home before being able to purchase another one, creating long chains of dependency that depend on an initial injection of capital, which usually comes from one of three groups outside of Cuba: foreigners, repatriating Cubans, and Cuban emigrants with family on the island. As these buyers purchase medium- to high-valued properties, the sellers of these properties generally purchase lower-valued properties, and those near the bottom of the chain tend to find their housing options very limited, while those who do not own properties (young people in particular) find themselves generally excluded from the market altogether. In addition to concerns over the extent to which the real-estate market is

stratified, I draw attention to the tendency for buyers from outside of Cuba to purchase properties in order to convert them into tourist-oriented private businesses such as short-term room/home rentals and restaurants, which I argue is exacerbating the already dire housing shortage in Havana and potentially re-stratifying neighborhoods along the lines of income and race.

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DEDICATION

Za moju mamu, za njezinu beskrajnu podršku i ljubav

To Leo, who puts this whole thing into perspective

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The economic restructuring that started in Cuba in the 1990s and accelerated with the more recent wave of reforms since 2010 has radically transformed opportunities for social mobility for Cubans. In a marked departure from the traditional pathways to mobility available to Cubans following the 1959 Revolution, housing, I argue, has become central to this new structure of opportunity, and now serves as an important axis of social stratification in Cuban society. That housing has become so central to the structure of opportunity is both a direct outcome of the re-commodification of housing and a response by Cubans to the state's selective retrenchment in social welfare provision. In this dissertation, I draw on ethnographic data to examine how Cubans are navigating these processes and specifically how they are using housing for both social welfare provision as well as social mobility. I also supplement my ethnographic data with primary and secondary historical sources to look at what sorts of factors determine who is better and worse positioned to be able to do so–in other words, the factors that shape for whom housing tends to act as a means to social welfare provision and social mobility and for whom it acts as a barrier. The answers to these questions illuminate how state-led reforms and retrenchment reverberate in the lives of individuals and families, how people navigate these changes, and the often unexamined and underappreciated role housing plays in these processes.

The changing role of the state and changing structures of opportunity

Opportunities for mobility in Cuba, 1959 to early 1990s

Soon after what Cubans still refer to as the "Triumph of the Revolution," Cuba's new Revolutionary government, led by a young Fidel Castro, began introducing a series of policies

meant to reduce the socioeconomic, racial, gender, and rural/urban inequalities that had infamously characterized the period preceding Cuba's 1959 Revolution. The socialist state[1] took on the responsibility for social welfare provision, universally offering free healthcare and education (including post-secondary education); reducing rents and making many tenants homeowners;[2] making a ration system available to control prices and ensure universal access to basic goods; heavily subsidizing prices of all consumer goods, including housing; readily making available and accessible cultural activities to all citizens. Too numerous to enumerate here, these wide-ranging policies were widely successful in lifting the masses out of poverty and providing a standard of living previously unattainable for many. Economic disparities were also greatly reduced because many if not most elites fled the country following the Revolution,[3] and the businesses and landholdings of those that remained were nationalized.[4]. Prior to the Revolution, economic capital structured access to opportunities, consumption, and power, but after the state leveled the playing field through universal provisions and compressed the socioeconomic ladder

[1] Fidel Castro officially declared Cuba a socialist state on April 16, 1961, over two years after ousting dictator Fulgencio Batista and coming to power on January 1, 1959 (see Castro 1961 for the full speech he gave on May Day in 1961 declaring Cuba socialist).

[2] I provide much more detail about housing-related measures undertaken by the Revolutionary government in chapter two.

[3] Between 1959 and 1962, 248,100 Cubans fled to the United States alone (Duany 2017). This first wave of Cuban emigrants, the "historic exiles," were overwhelmingly upper and middle class, light-skinned, well-educated, white-collar workers from urban areas (especially Havana), fleeing out of fear of political and religious persecution (Duany 2017).

[4] The Revolutionary Government nationalized land belonging to foreign companies and to large Cuban landowners with the first Agrarian Reform Law of May 1959; a second Agrarian Reform Law in October 1963 nationalized the land of medium-sized farmers (those with more than 67 hectares) in October 1963, bringing 70 percent of land under government control (Alvarez 2004). In December 1962, the Castro government nationalized 4,600 large- and medium- sized commercial enterprises under law 1076, but continued to allow family and microenterprises (Henken 2002: 372). In April 1968, the Revolutionary Government expropriated all of the remaining private retail businesses (55,000 to 58,000 in total) and banned self-employment (Henken 2002: 153, 372).

through measures that lifted up those at the bottom and cut off the top rungs of the ladder, economic capital no longer wielded such influence.

One of the main routes to social mobility in Revolutionary Cuba until the 1990s was education, which in turn led to occupational mobility (Bastian 2018: 30-31). In 1961, the "Year of Education," the state launched a national literacy campaign ("Campaña Nacional de Alfabetización en Cuba") in which a quarter million volunteers taught 707,212 Cubans–many of them peasants living in the countryside without running water and electricity– how to read and write, reducing the illiteracy rate to a mere 3.9 percent (Prieto 1981a), down from approximately 23.6 percent in 1953 (Prieto 1981b: 31).[5][6] Subsequently, the state introduced a variety of measures to raise the level of education across the country: it expanded the number of primary and secondary schools, allowing access to a greater number and wider swath of the population (Martuza and Prieto 1981: 268; Paulston 1971: 386); offered higher education at no cost, which resulted in a huge uptick in enrollment;[7] implemented adult education programs to help workers, farmers, and housewives elevate their level of schooling (Martuza and Prieto 1981: 268); set up worker schools for workers to upgrade their technical skills and prepare them for vocational or university studies (Castro 1972); and offered housing and scholarships to students from the

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[5] The illiteracy rate was much higher in rural areas, an estimated 53 percent (Gomez and Webster Hare 2015).

[6] To learn more about the Cuban literacy campaign, see a detailed account by Cuba's former Minister of Education, Abel Prieto Morales (1981a and 1981b), and Catherine Murphy's (2013) documentary *Maestra*.

[7] While students at Cuba's post-secondary institutions are not charged tuition, they are expected to complete three years of (remunerated) "social service" upon graduation, which consists of working at a state workplace related to the students' field of study. (For additional details, see https://www.mtss.gob.cu/noticias/cumplimiento-del-servicio-social). Thus, some argue that post-secondary education is not actually free, since these students "repay" the cost of their studies through their subsequent (mandatory) service to the state.

countryside wishing to study in the capital (Martuza and Prieto 1981: 262; Gómez no date: 82, 85; Bastian 2018: 30). Equipped with the necessary education and training, Cubans of humble origins filled the white-collar positions left vacant by the professionals who had fled Cuba in the early waves of emigration.[8] Anthropologist Hope Bastian (2018) notes that "Women and people of color benefited disproportionately from this brain drain, overcoming economic, racial and gender barriers which had previously prevented occupational mobility from manual to intellectual labor (Blue 2010, 37)" (Bastian 2018: 30). Bastian provides examples from the health care system to support this claim: "In the 1950s, only 6 percent of Cuban doctors were women, but by 1990, 48 percent of doctors were female (Smith and Padula 1996, 57). By 1981, 31 percent of Cuban health workers were black or mulatto, close to their representation in the population at large (34%) (de la Fuente 2001, 309)" (Bastian 2018: 30-31). In her analysis of the changing configurations of capital that proved dominant during different periods of post-1959 Cuba, Bastian (2018) argues:

> As in many other socialist societies, education was a major mechanism through which members of the pre-revolutionary working class and peasants (and their children) previously excluded from paths to mobility, were able to move into positions as skilled technicians and professionals. These positions provided them with increased social status and salaries that provided a higher quality of life and opportunities to satisfy basic consumption that would have not been possible for them under the previous system. (P. 30)

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[8] Quoting historian of Cuba Louis Pérez, Bastian highlights the massive brain drain that occurred when Cuban professionals left Cuba: "approximately half of all teachers emigrated. Of an estimated total 85,000 professionals and technicians in Cuba, approximately 20,000 immigrated. More than 3,000 physicians out of a total of 6,000 and 700 dentists out of almost 2,000 parted. The senior medical faculty at the University of Havana was reduced from two hundred to seventeen…no less important was the flight of almost all of the 6,500 North American residents, many of whom had worked in important technical and managerial capacities in both the US and Cuban enterprises" (Pérez 2006: 261-262, cited in Bastian 2018: 30).

Indeed, by facilitating occupational mobility, education was a key route to improving one's socioeconomic position. The salary scale in socialist Cuba was rather compressed,[9] so the social mobility experienced by much of the population was largely based on prestige or status rather than economic capital per se. Moreover, upward mobility had less to do with a person's position relative to their contemporaries, who were more or less on an even playing field, and more to do with their current social standing compared to their social standing (or the standing of their parents or their social group (e.g., Afro-Cubans, women, peasants, etc.)) prior to the Revolution. Up until the early 1990s, when the logic of stratification was turned on its head, education was a principal pathway to social mobility for the masses in Cuba.

In addition to education, loyalty and service to the Revolution was another key pathway to social mobility in the decades following the Cuban Revolution. Bastian (2018) argues that a concept she calls "revolutionary cultural capital," which she defines as "a particular hybrid of political capital specific to socialist states that includes specific forms of cultural capital which were valued and promoted by the Cuban Revolution" (p. 29), "determined access to power, consumption, and opportunities" during this period (p. 27). Bastian points to those who directly participated in the rebel army or the underground urban struggle fighting against the Batista regime, arguing that their loyalty to the Revolution and their trustworthiness led to their being appointed to leadership positions in Cuba's new revolutionary government, despite the fact that many of them :came from very humble backgrounds without formal education" (Bastian 2018: 31). One could also accrue revolutionary cultural capital, Bastian argues, by being a "good revolutionary" or by being "integrated in the Revolution," which involved participating in the

[9] A salary reform implemented in the 1980s ensured that the highest salaried state-sector employee was paid no more than 4.5 times the lowest salaried state-sector employee (Espina Prieto et al. 2003: 23).

Revolution's social projects, such as being involved in local neighborhood watches (*Comité de Defensa de la Revolución* or CDR) to protect against counter-revolutionary activities; participating in the Federation of Cuban Women (*la Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* or FMC) to integrate women into revolutionary campaigns; donating blood; volunteering to help achieve the state's agricultural goals, such as cutting sugar cane, harvesting potatoes and coffee, or planting trees; participating in the national literacy campaign; joining the civilian militia to defend the country if it comes under attack; being part of the microbrigade movement; and participating in international military missions, such as Cuba's intervention in Angola (Bastian 2018: 31-32, 48-50). The examples Bastian provides are similar to those that fall under the folk/local category called "merit," which was a key criterion used by state entities (such as workplaces) in deciding to whom to distribute housing, as I discuss in chapter five. Loyalty and service to the Revolution produced a variety of material benefits beyond housing. While many goods and services were provided universally, Bastian (2018) argues,

> When there were significant differences in access to goods and services, it was an individual's commitment to the Revolution and successful adoption of a new revolutionary habitus which provided the advantage. Revolutionary cultural capital was rewarded with access to consumer goods and was distributed based on the recommendations of union and party officials (Pérez 2006, 269). In the 1970s, material incentives were linked to work outcomes, and consumer goods like motorcycles, cars, televisions, washing machines, refrigerators, and bicycles were distributed through the workplace to 'outstanding workers' (Pérez 2006, 269). According to Pérez, in 1973, 100,000 television sets were distributed to vanguard workers through labor assemblies on the recommendation of party and union officials (Pere 1998: 269). (P. 33)

In sum, service to the Revolution–either through participation in military efforts to overthrow the Batista regime or subsequent participation in the Revolution's social projects–was a key pathway to social mobility, which could be converted to both power (as was the case with leadership positions in government) and material, consumption goods. Beginning in the 1990s, however,

loyalty and service to the Revolution began to wane in importance vis-a-vis other routes to social mobility, which I turn to next.

Opportunities for mobility in Cuba in the 1990s

With the onset of Cuba's "Special Period" that followed the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, traditional routes to social mobility through education and service to the Revolution (or "merit" or "Revolutionary cultural capital") became secondary to economic capital and social capital, which now structured access to consumer goods and services.[10] After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), Cuba's principal trading partner[11] and ideological ally, Cuba experienced a prolonged economic crisis in the 1990s euphemistically called "the Special Period on Times of Peace" ("*Período especial en tiempos de paz*"), which was characterized by severe shortages of oil, food, and consumer goods that were previously plentiful, making daily life a struggle for many Cubans. The Cuban state, which had readily supplied the population with basic goods and services at no or low cost since the Cuban Revolution, was no longer in a position to provide many of those goods and services (de la Fuente 2001: 317), and individuals and families increasingly took on responsibility for their own

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[10] In this section, I make a temporal argument about the importance of economic capital and social capital vis-a-vis service to the Revolution as a route to social mobility. In chapter five, when explaining the routes to acquiring housing, instead I foreground routes through the sphere of the state and the private sphere of individuals, families, and the market. The temporal aspect is still present in my analysis, with the state sphere being more dominant in earlier decades and the private sphere ascending in later decades, but my analysis also makes clear that the private sphere–which is dominated by the logic of economic capital and social capital–was still very much present even in the early decades of the Revolution, evident, for example, through self-building efforts and the rise of informal real-estate agents.

[11] The Comecon trade bloc comprised approximately 80 percent of Cuba's foreign trade, provided preferential prices for Cuban exports (e.g., three times the world market price for Cuban sugar), and provided financing to cover the country's current account deficit (Morris 2007: 37).

social welfare provision. Bastian (2018) describes a few of the ways families started to provide what was previously guaranteed by the state:

> Whereas "before" family members might stay with a sick relative at the hospital for sentimental reasons, after the Special Period it was necessary to have someone with you to supplement meals, draw water to flush the toilet, and help maintain the cleanliness of the room. Whereas "before" children received morning and afternoon snacks and a substantial lunch at school, now parents packed their kids lunches to supplement the meager offerings provided by the school. "Before" school teachers were highly trained and experienced, but during the Special Period, many of these professionals left the classrooms to look for better paying work in the emerging sectors of the economy. They were replaced with young teachers, just out of high school, trained to guide students through a series of recorded lessons on video cassette. Today, the education of younger members of the household depends more on the home-based educational efforts of the older generations than "before."" (P. 3)

In my conversations with older generations of Cubans, many would nostalgically recall their relatively high standards of living before the onset of the Special Period—when the state played a robust role in social welfare provisions—contrasting those "good times" to the deprivation that characterized the 1990s. They described an era of abundance, recalling all the things the state used to provide them but has since discontinued, giving examples of gifts for newlyweds that included a case of beer, a wedding cake, and a honeymoon at a hotel, and a chance to purchase everything a person would need for their new household at heavily subsidized prices.[12] This was in addition to free healthcare and post-secondary education, low-cost housing, and other no- or low-cost goods and services such as utilities and cultural activities, which the Cuban state continues to provide to this day. They told stories about stores and markets being plentifully stocked with high quality, imported items at affordable prices during the golden decade of the

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[12] One interviewee, a woman in her 60s, recalled her experience as a newlywed in the early 1980s. She recounted how the fourth floor of the popular Havana department store Fin de Siglo (which still existed at the time of my fieldwork) was reserved for newlyweds, who were issued an appointment time to be able to enter the store and purchase everything from furniture to bedsheets to luggage to shoes and clothes for "very cheap."

1980s, in contrast to the largely empty shelves and high prices they grew accustomed to in the 1990s. They remembered being able to freely purchase items whose distribution later became restricted to the state-issued ration card. They contrasted the generous quantities and variety of items that once characterized the ration card to its much more limited nature today, which covers only a small portion of a family's diet, leaving families no choice but to rely on the "*chopin*" ("shopping", referring to hard-currency stores), where prices are prohibitive for many. They spoke about being able to live and support their families from their state salary alone, something that became next to impossible as the cost of food and essential items is disproportionately high compared to official state salaries.

In response to the state's selective withdrawal of goods and services and faced with shortages of goods to purchase through official channels, Cubans leveraged economic capital and social capital to acquire the goods that they needed, often through the burgeoning black market. Access to hard currency (American dollars in particular) structured access to consumption, creating a new division between those Cubans who had access to dollars and those who did not (Togores Gonzáles 2007). The former category consisted of those who received remittances from family living abroad; those who worked in tourism (through tips) or the emerging private sector (either legally with licenses or informally, particularly those renting rooms and operating home-run restaurants); those employed by foreign firms in Cuba or workers in select industries who receive part of their wages in dollars; those Cubans who tour, perform, or otherwise work abroad under short-term contracts (e.g. musicians, athletes, visiting university professors, medical professionals on international missions). Cubans with sufficient dollars could acquire the goods they needed through the black market, despite the inflated prices.

Social capital was also increasingly important for accessing opportunities and resources starting in the 1990s. As Bastian (2018: 34) points out, the so-called "dollar stores" that the state opened in the 1990s–in which certain goods unavailable in regular peso stores were available for purchase in hard currency–were initially limited to foreign diplomats, visitors, and Cubans holding foreign passports. Thus, she notes, even those Cubans could afford to buy the products in the dollar stores still needed social connections with those permitted to enter in order to have access to those products. Having contacts with the "right people" (or people that could put you in touch with the right people) helped Cubans solve a range of problems, from procuring goods and services through the black market to obtaining employment[13] to navigating Cuban bureaucracy. The local Cuban category of "*sociolismo*"[14] captures the crucial role that buddies or "socios" play in accessing goods, services, and resources, often through unofficial channels but also through official channels but using unofficial means.[15] This clever wordplay implies that Cuban socialism ("*socialismo*") is actually a system of "socio-lismo," in which who you know is crucial to navigating daily life and getting ahead. Scholars have noted the importance of *sociolismo* even before the Special Period (e.g. Ritter 1974), but this reliance on well-connected friends for access

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[13] For example, Cuban social scientists have found that personal contacts facilitated information about vacancies and provided favorable references for qualified contacts to obtain economically advantageous positions in companies with joint foreign ownership that paid salaries in dollars (Espina and Togores 2012 cited in Romanó and Echevarría-León 2015: 41). Connections were also important in the state sector, in order to enter the labor market, move companies, and in order to be re-hired after being let go (Echevarría León and Díaz 2014, cited in Romanó and Echevarría-León 2015: 41).

[14] While it started as a folk category, the concept of "*sociolismo*" has since been adapted by scholars on and off the island alike to describe the importance of social connections in Cuba in varying contexts (e.g. Leon 1997; Tankha 2013; Romanò and Echevarría León 2015).

[15] Some academics have noted that *sociolismo* is equivalent to "blat" in the former Soviet Union. Social scientists Romanò and Echevarría León (2015: 41) argue that *sociolismo* is consistent with the theory of strong ties.

to resources seems to have taken on increased importance since the 1990s, when resources were more scarce and traditional routes to obtaining them were less effective.

While they did not disappear entirely, routes to social mobility through education and service to the Revolution waned somewhat in importance in the 1990s (Bastian 2018: 29, 35). In a context in which access to dollars or hard currency structured opportunities, Cubans holding low-skilled service jobs in tourism or in the emerging self-employment sector found themselves in a more economically advantageous position than highly educated professionals working in the state sector. The inverse relation between occupational status and income that emerged in the 1990s in Cuba is commonly known as the "inverted (social) pyramid."[16] While higher levels of education were still associated with higher occupational status, higher occupational status was no longer correlated with higher income, thus devaluing education as a route to social mobility. In fact, many professionals exited their positions in the formal, state sector in favor of higher-paying jobs in the informal sector, including for example doctors and teachers who took up jobs as taxi drivers and tour guides (Pérez 2006: 310, cited in Bastian 2018: 35).[17] Service to the Revolution also became less relevant as a path to social mobility during this time, superseded by the dominance of social and economic capital to secure resources as well as status.

Before the Special Period, Cuba was considered relatively egalitarian, but scholars have noted that economic inequalities (re)emerged during this period, based primarily on the cleavage

[16] Cuban sociologist Mayra Espina Prieto (2005: 95) says the concept of the inverted pyramid is useful in drawing attention to the downward mobility of those previously high up in the pyramid "not because they changed their social or employment situation, but rather because of the economic devaluation of their position due to the decline in real earnings and the decrease in available options for meeting their material and spiritual needs."

[17] Other professionals did not exit formal sector employment, but moonlighted in the informal sector to supplement their meager formal wages.

between those who have access to hard currency (through remittances, jobs in tourism, the nascent private sector, etc) and those who rely primarily on state-sector employment in the devalued local currency (Espina Prieto 2001, Valdés Paz 2005, Blue 2007; de la Fuente 2001; Mesa-Lago 2002), and this cleavage had racial implications (Blue 2007; de la Fuente 2001: 318-29). While Cuba mostly recovered from (the worst of) the Special Period by the end of the 1990s, the social inequalities[18] that emerged in Cuba during the decade-long crisis continued and have further intensified with the most recent wave of reforms since 2010, which I turn to next.

Opportunities for mobility in the post-2010 period

In late 2010, the Cuban government announced an "updating" of the country's social and economic model and released a document titled "Draft Guidelines of the Economic and Social Policy of the Party and the Revolution" (*Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social del Partido y la Revolución*) containing 291 guidelines for reform in areas relating to fiscal policy, employment and salaries, sports and culture, transport, and housing. After being widely distributed and debated by the public, Cuban leaders gathered at the Sixth Community Party Congress in April 2011[19] and settled on 311 guidelines for reform, which were to chart a revised economic development strategy for the country while "guaranteeing the continuity and irreversibility of Socialism."[20] Longtime resident-journalist Marc Frank (2013b) identifies three

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[18] While the term inequality ("*desigualdad*") seems to be more frequently in use now, it was common for Cuban academics examining societal equalities to euphemistically refer to them as "social heterogeneity."

[19] The Sixth Community Party Congress was the first such meeting of the Party in over one dozen years, and the principal agenda item was a discussion of the proposed reforms.

[20] In his opening speech to the Congress, Raul Castro explained the process that took place between the release of the draft guidelines on November 9, 2010 and the Congress in April 2011. According to him, the guidelines were widely discussed and debated between December 1, 2010 and February 28, 2011 in over 163,000 meetings, and involved the participation of 8,913,838 people (the island's population is over 11 million). This widespread participation led to a revised document containing 311 guidelines. The

key themes in the wide-ranging guidelines: (1) plans to shift the state's role from administering the economy to regulating it; (2) intentions to decentralize economic decision-making to more local levels (provinces and municipalities), and (3) the emphasis on the role that small private businesses, cooperatives, and farms—referred to collectively as the "non-state" sector—would play in the country's economy. Taken together, this plan for the future of the country signaled a marked transformation in the role of the state and the division of labor between the public and private sphere, continuing and intensifying the process that had begun as a response to the economic crisis in the 1990s.

The state has continued to scale back its dominant role in social welfare provision, providing a basic safety net for those most in need rather than universal provisions, and expecting individuals and families to play a larger role in securing and paying for the necessities previously guaranteed by the state. These changes can be seen through a variety of measures. The Cuban government reduced spending for social welfare by $386.2 million between 2008 and 2011 and was providing social welfare to 399,568 fewer recipients in 2011 as compared to 2008 (ONEI 2012, cited in Bastian 2018: 13). The state also gradually cut back on the quantity of items provided through the monthly ration card and has discussed eliminating it altogether. Previously employing upwards of 85 percent of the workforce and guaranteeing job security in the Constitution, the Cuban Federation of Trade Unions announced in September 2010 that the government planned to lay off 500,000 workers in the following six months—or one in ten workers—and 500,000 more in the coming years. The plan was for many of these employees to

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content of 181 of the 291 original guidelines was modified, 94 remained the same, 16 were combined with other reforms, and 36 were added. At the Congress, further changes were made, such that the final version of the document contained 313 guidelines.

become employed in a then barely existent "non-state" sector[21] (which encompasses self-employment and cooperatives), whose growth the Cuban government has actively encouraged, in stark contrast to attitudes in the 1990s, when limited private employment was regarded as a "necessary evil" to weather the Special Period. Although the plan to lay off state employees unfolded slower than initially announced,[22] the growth of the private sector has been impressive: 250,000 new self-employment licenses were issued in 2011 alone (Frank 2013b: 218) and by late 2013 there were more than 450,000 people operating or working in small businesses, as well as over 200 cooperatives (Frank 2013a), the number of permitted areas of self-employment has expanded,[23] and self-employed workers were permitted to hire (non-family) employees (Peters 2012: 11).

In addition to a dramatic expansion of private employment, the other noteworthy and extremely consequential reform was a lifting of restrictions on housing sales. On November 10, 2011, a new property law allowed free market sales of residential real-estate for the first time in over fifty years.[24] Cubans living on the island as well as permanent residents could now freely

[21] At the close of 2009, government figures reported 143,000 self-employed (non-farmers; if farmers are included, the total number of private workers swells to 591,000) (Frank 2013b: 218).

[22] Marc Frank (2013b) reports that Marino Murillo, who he calls "Raúl's point man for reform" had announced in an unpublished speech to the new National Cadre School on Sept. 19, 2011 that 127,000 jobs were eliminated in the year following the announcement and that Economy Minister Adel Yzquierdo said in a speech at the end of 2012 that state payrolls had been cut by an additional 5.7 percent, equivalent to 228,000 jobs (Frank 2013b: 219).

[23] Shortly after the announcement, in November 2010, the state allowed for 178 areas for self-employment, including seven trades previously not permitted, and 29 occupations for which licenses had been temporarily suspended (Harnecker 2011: 71). The number and type of permitted occupations fluctuated in subsequent years, as some were added, others removed, and still others suspended. In 2021, the Cuban government did away with a list of permitted, one-off activities and instead allowed self-employment generally, with the exception of a list of banned activities, which consisted of 124 activities in February 2021 (MTSS 2021).

[24] There was a very brief period in the mid-1980s when housing sales were legalized, but this was quickly retracted. I discuss this more in chapter two.

decide on the sales/purchase price of their home, and arrange purchases/sales directly with one another, then pay the associated sales tax to the state and have it approved and registered by a notary. Previously, the state had rights of first refusal and sales prices were limited to an artificially low "legal price" determined by the state. Virtually overnight, previously unvalued or undervalued property assets became a potential source of wealth, which could be used for both social welfare provision as well as social mobility. In sum, the reforms introduced since 2010 increasingly shifted responsibility for social welfare provision that had been guaranteed by the state prior to the 1990s to individuals and families, who rely in turn on economic capital and social capital and a growing market to meet their basic needs as well as to get ahead.

As can be expected, this most recent wave of reforms has led to increased economic inequality in Cuba. Bastian (2018) makes a case for why it is important to examine the role of different forms of capital to understand social stratification in Cuba:

> In order to understand stratification in contemporary Havana, …rather than looking solely at inequalities in income and the gap between those who have access to [hard currency] and those who do not, it is also important to consider how distinct configurations of capitals (social capital, cultural/political capital [revolutionary cultural capital], and economic capital) structure opportunities for mobility, access to consumption, and power. (P. xvii)

Bastian argues that in contemporary Havana, economic capital is the most dominant route to social mobility, and that social capital is secondary, while what the author calls "revolutionary cultural capital" "has lost much of its power" (p. 47) and is "largely irrelevant unless accompanied by social capital, which connects the subject to centers of power" (p. 42). In this dissertation, I look more closely at one particular form of economic capital–housing–which I argue has been crucially important in structuring opportunities for social mobility since housing was recommodified, initially with the ability to rent rooms and set up small businesses inside one's home beginning in the 1990s, but especially with the emergence of the real-estate market

in 2011. While other scholars studying social inequality in Cuba have focused on the role of remittances, participation in the emerging private sector, as well as participation in the informal sector and black market, the role of housing in structuring opportunities for social mobility has been left largely unexamined. This dissertation fills this void, providing a detailed account of the role of housing in (re)producing social inequality in Cuba. Beyond the context of Cuba, it highlights the important role that housing plays in structuring opportunities in the wake of state retrenchment, where individuals and families increasingly take on responsibility for their own social welfare provision as well as social mobility. Finally, this dissertation contributes more broadly to sociological understandings of housing not only as a reflection of social class, but as a means or a barrier to social mobility.

Housing in Cuba: A primer

In a few short decades, Cuba was transformed from a country of renters to one of homeowners: the homeownership rate rose dramatically from 36 percent in 1953 (Oficina Nacional 1953: 260-76) to 85 percent by 1990 (Hamberg 2017: 190; Peters 2014: 6), and as of 2018 stood at 88 percent (Bustamante Molino and Castro Morales 2018). Cuba's homeownership rate dwarfed that of countries across Latin America and the Caribbean and was significantly higher than rates in OECD countries in the 1990s.[25] Not only did the Cuban government extend the right to homeownership to countless Cubans, it did so at heavily subsidized prices.[26] Despite widespread homeownership, homes were primarily a place to live rather than a source of wealth

[25] For homeownership rates in OECD countries in the 1990s, see Table 1 in Andrews and Caldera Sánchez (2011).

[26] Monthly payments to amortize the purchase price of newly built homes amounted to no more than 3 to 7 percent of family income (Hamberg 1990b: 239).

until recently. Some Cubans had started using their homes for income-generating opportunities beginning in the 1990s, when the Cuban state allowed for some limited small businesses in order to weather the Special Period, but it was really since the most recent wave of reforms in 2010—which expanded the (small-scale) private sector and allowed for a real-estate market—that housing became a key axis of social stratification in Cuban society.

Within the new structure of opportunity since 2010, the ability of Cubans to use their newly recommodified homes for social welfare provision and social mobility—either by selling their home in the newly emerging real-estate market or using it for income-generating opportunities in the growing private sector—has been highly uneven. Tenure status has become a crucial marker of difference, with homeowners generally better positioned to take advantage of new opportunities vis-à-vis people holding other tenure statuses. Moreover, Cuba has suffered from a chronic housing shortage, which totaled over 929,695 units by the end of 2018 (Bustamante and Molina 2018; Jiménez Guethón 2020: 8), a startling number on an island of 11.2 million inhabitants and with a housing stock of 3.8 million units. In addition to the housing shortage, the widespread lack of maintenance has led many homes to fall into a state of disrepair: between one-third (35 percent) and close to two-thirds (59 percent) of dwellings in Cuba are in need of some degree of repair.[27] Lack of mortgage financing and generally low salaries has created a situation in which average Cubans must first sell their own home before being able to purchase another, which largely precludes those who do not already own a home from entering

[27] According to Cuba's 2012 census, 15 percent of the dwellings in Cuba were in "poor" condition ("*mal estado*"), 20 percent were in regular condition ("*estado regular*"), and 65 percent were in good condition ("*buen estado*"). A 2014 survey that asked residents to characterize their dwellings painted a more pessimistic picture: 26 percent were characterized as in poor condition, 33 percent in regular condition, and 41 percent in good condition (Acioly et al. 2014, cited in Mesa-Lago 2017). The "poor" and "regular" condition categories are often reported in combination both within and outside of Cuba, suggesting that even dwellings in "regular" condition are in need of repairs.

the market, and, among homeowners, makes especially consequential differences in the exchange value of homes. While the Revolution made many people homeowners, those who live in “capitalist” homes (built in the first half of the twentieth century) and those with homes located in tourist areas of the city are generally finding themselves better positioned to use their homes to take advantage of new opportunities, while others, including many young people, are finding themselves stuck in place both physically and in terms of social mobility. Some Cubans with access to hard currency are indeed able to buy into the housing market, but medium- and high-valued properties are primarily being purchased by foreigners with ties to Cuba, repatriated Cubans (Cubans officially regaining residency on the island), and Cuban emigrants with family on the island. This had created a highly stratified real-estate market, in which Cubans with genuine housing needs are unable to compete with those with access to hard currency. Moreover, those in a position to purchase properties in desirable tourist areas are converting them into tourist-oriented private businesses such as short-term room/home rentals and restaurants, which is exacerbating the already dire housing shortage in Havana and potentially re-stratifying neighborhoods along the lines of income and race.

Methods

This dissertation relies on a combination of in-depth interviews and participant observation carried out between February 2015 and April 2016, as well as primary and secondary historical sources and official government statistics to examine the role that housing plays in the (re)production of social inequality in contemporary Cuba, and specifically the way that housing acts as a means to social mobility for some groups and a barrier to mobility for others. The ideas and arguments developed in this dissertation are also informed by multi-month

pre-dissertation fieldwork from May to June 2011, February to May 2013, and again from December 2013 to May 2014, and month-long follow-up trips in August to September 2016 and December 2017 to January 2018.[28]

Participant observation

Over the course of 13 months of continuous[29] dissertation fieldwork between February 2015 and April 2016, I witnessed first-hand Cuba's shifting landscape and the ways in which Cubans attempted to navigate it. Given my focus on housing, I observed how people navigated the emerging real-estate market and housing transactions and how they used their homes for income-generating activities. I positioned myself in such a way as to gain insight into both the formal and informal aspects of these processes, from the vantage point of different key actors involved: buyers, sellers, licensed real estate agents employed by established agencies, independent real estate agents operating with and without a license, and functionaries such as lawyers, notaries, and so forth. I accompanied interested buyers visiting houses for sale; once a sale was informally agreed upon, I accompanied the parties to the notary, the bank, the lawyer's office, the notary once again, and witnessed the exchange of payment in cash between the buyer and seller; I visited the new owner in their newly purchased home and witnessed the structural and aesthetic changes they made to it. I listened to people's conversations about selling/buying, as they pondered and debated the worth of their home, discussed purchases, sales and plans that were never realized, hatched new plans and strategies, and more.

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[28] These trips did not include formal data collection, but the informal conversations and my own observations during these visits certainly informed my ideas.

[29] This longest stretch of fieldwork was interrupted by a 5-week trip to Canada and the United States to solve student visa issues unrelated to my fieldwork in Cuba. I don't count this time towards the total number of time I spent doing fieldwork in Cuba.

I also wanted to gain an understanding of the role of intermediaries such as real estate agents in the emerging real-estate market. To do so, I visited the offices of a dozen real estate agencies operating in Havana, observing who entered and exited these offices and overhearing conversations between potential clients and real estate agents. I followed one particular real estate agent more closely, watching him interact with clients as well as ‘free-lance’ real estate agents (“*corredores*”). I was invited to and attended the anniversary party of one of these agencies at a private restaurant, meeting the entire staff and watching the celebration, which included a presentation telling of the history of the agency and highlighting its accomplishments. I embedded myself more deeply among the ‘free-lance’ real estate agents (“*corredores*”) who gathered on the benches of a particular section of a public promenade that has historically served as a market for housing transactions. I got to know the regulars, hanging out and conversing with them during the slow weekdays, and observing their interactions with one another as well as potential clients. I visited some of their homes, in their “down time”, and they filled me in on street gossip and ‘how things really go’. On Saturday mornings and early afternoons the market would be bustling with large crowds of buyers and sellers gathering with cardboard signs and papers advertising what they were selling or buying, which I observed and took notes on as well.

Finally, I wanted to take into account the vantage point of state functionaries involved in the formal process of housing transactions, I though I had few illusions of getting deep under the surface of the government bureaucracy in Cuba. I relied primarily on interviews to gain insight onto this vantage point, though I was able to carry out some limited observation of a lawyer working at a municipal housing registry office meeting with and attending to the public, processing requests to inscribe property titles. I was permitted to observe and take notes during the entire length of the shift. This was mostly repetitive work, though I got to see a wide variety

of cases and circumstances. The highlight of this session was witnessing a member of the public attempting to "incentivize" the lawyer to expedite his paperwork with a monetary bribe. Though I was present as an observer for a single full shift, I made regular visits to the lawyer in question both at her office and her home.

In addition to observing people as they navigated the real-estate market and housing transactions, I also observed people as they used their homes for income-generating activities and as they navigated daily life more generally. For example, over the course of four months, I was involved in the daily operations of running a room rental business for foreigners (a "*casa particular*"), and I also casually observed how several other room rental businesses functioned over the course of my multi-month stays in Havana. I became a fixture in numerous households and observed how they used their homes as nail and beauty salons, informal retail shops, a center for gambling operations, and so forth. I also accompanied household members as they went about their daily tasks: I accompanied people as they made purchases in state stores, private businesses, and the black market; waited in lines and dealt with bureaucracy (e.g., picking up remittances, exchanging currency, paying telephone bills, withdrawing money from the bank, etc.); went about household tasks, such as preparing meals; prepared for and celebrated birthdays and holidays; engaged in recreational activities; visited family and friends, and more.

Interviews

In addition to many dozens of informal, unstructured interviews that provided useful information and ideas to further explore in a more formal setting, I carried out 68 semi-structured, in-depth interviews in Havana between 2015 and 2016. To get as broad a picture as possible of the real-estate market in Cuba and housing more generally, I interviewed Cubans (and two foreigners) who either had or were in the process of selling, purchasing, exchanging, or

building their homes as well as Cubans who were living in tenements or shelters (n=34); owners, managers, and employees of licensed, brick-and-mortar real estate companies in Havana (n=15); licensed and unlicensed "free lance" real estate agents who work "*en la calle"* (in the streets, unaffiliated with an agency) and regularly frequent the historical, open-air real-estate market on the Paseo de Prado promenade in Havana (n=11); housing-related bureaucrats, including the register/subdirector of a municipal housing office, a notary who carries out housing transactions, a community architect, a lawyer that helps people with their housing transactions, and an official in the City Historian's Office (n=5); and Cuban experts on housing (n=3). In the cases of buyers and sellers, I attempted to interview as many people participating in the same transaction as possible. In interviews with people who had previously or were in the process of buying/selling/exchanging/otherwise transferring/building their homes, I asked about their housing history since birth (i.e. where they lived, with whom, descriptions of their home(s), their tenure status(es), chronology/timeline, etc.), their motives for buying/selling/exchanging, details about the process (e.g. the formal and informal steps involved, challenges they encountered and how they overcame them, social networks and other resources they tapped, how they went about advertising the sale/exchange or searching for homes to buy and why, etc.), pricing (e.g. how the list and/or sales price was determined, how much they paid/were paid, what they did/purchased with the money from a sale, the source(s) of the money for the purchase, whether they paid a lump sum or arranged a payment plan, etc.), in addition to sociodemographic data (age, race, sex, level of education, occupational history/how they earn their income, whether they have family living outside of Cuba). These interviews were about their personal experiences, in contrast to the key informant interviews that I conducted with formal or informal real-estate agents,[30]

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[30] Interviews with real-estate agents were actually both key informant interviews and also asked about their direct personal experience in their profession. In this dissertation, I only use the data that relates to

bureaucrats, and experts served as key informant interviews, which provided a broad overview of trends in the real-estate market, estimates and observations of sociodemographic data of clients, laws and regulations on the books versus actual practice, and pertinent issues in housing. For expositional purposes, I highlight approximately one dozen of the interviews in this dissertation, but the arguments and conclusions I present are based on the whole set of data that I describe.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees in my study was roughly representative of the Cuban population more generally. The sample was evenly split across sex, with 37 men and 34 women.[31] Approximately two-thirds of respondents self-identified as white, while the other one-third self-identified as either black ("*negro/a*"), mixed race ("*mulato/a*") or "*indio/a*," which approximates the racial composition of the island.[32] The ages of the interviewees ranged from 23 to 93 years old, with most of the interviewees being middle-aged. The participants lived in various neighborhoods across Havana, and lived in a range of different housing types (shelters, tenement buildings, microbrigade apartments, capitalist apartments, self-built homes, homes in multi-family dwellings, single-family homes), although I did not have access to people living in mansions. Most of them owned their homes, reflecting the high homeownership rate in Cuba, but some were also long-term leaseholders ("*usufructuarios*,"

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informing on trends and their observations about the real-estate market, rather than their direct personal history and experience.

[31] Three of the 68 interviews I conducted were joint interviews with married couples, so the total number of interviewees was 71.

[32] The census measures "skin color" rather than race per se. The 2012 population census reported the racial composition of the Cuban population as follows: 64.1 percent white, 9.3 percent black, 26.6 percent mixed ("*mulato/a*"). Two respondents in my sample self-identified as "*india*," which is not an official racial category in Cuba but would likely be categorized under the "*mulato/a*" category. "Indio/a" is used colloquially to describe those with copper-colored skin and dark, straight hair. The racial composition of the interviewees in my sample represents the ratio of white to non-white in the 2012 census, but among the non-white interviewees in my study, there is an overrepresentation of black respondents and an underrepresentation of *mulato/a* respondents.

explained later in the project), and a few rented informally from a private landlord. They represented different kinds of households: many lived with multi-generations of family, some households were nuclear and others were extended, and in a few cases the person lived alone or with only a romantic partner. A substantial number were immigrants "from the provinces," while others were born and raised in Havana. Most of the interviewees had at least a high school education, usually with a supplementary diploma, certificate, or other kind of certification of some kind, and a smaller portion of the sample had university degrees. Outside of the real-estate agents I interviewed, all of whom worked in the private sector or informally, the work history of the other participants included a mixture of state sector, private sector, and/or informal employment (not just over time but concurrently, both at the individual and household level[33]), and several were retired. Some received remittances, and a few had traveled outside of Cuba.

I used a network strategy to identify and recruit most of the interviewees in my study, relying on introductions and referrals from contacts in my personal and professional networks, who could vouch for me.[34] Being referred by someone who they trusted was absolutely crucial in getting interviewees to feel comfortable discussing personal and sensitive topics with me–which often involved semi-legal or illegal activities–for a research study. However, no one in my existing networks had contacts with certain actors I wished to interview, such as licensed and unlicensed real estate agents, as well as some of the housing bureaucrats, so I had to make these inroads myself. In these cases, my strategy was a mixture of cold calling and showing face, the

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[33] Bastian (2018) argues that households–not individuals–make decisions about how they participate in the labor market (p. 91) and that they often pursue a mix of private and state as well as formal and informal employment (p. 91-92).

[34] Sometimes network sampling is used as a synonym for snowball sampling, which is misleading in my case. Most of the interviewees that participated in my study were my direct contacts or the direct contacts of people in my personal or family network. My sample generally did not continue to "snowball" through continuous referrals by those I interviewed.

latter of which involved spending extended amounts of time with or around those I wished to interview before requesting an interview. For the real-estate agents who worked in the public market on Prado, the task was relatively easy, since the open-air real-estate market itself takes place in a stretch of the public promenade, which is lined with benches and where many people pass by. I too would occupy a spot on one of those benches, going day after day for weeks and months on end, so the familiar actors grew accustomed to seeing me, and suspicions about my being a journalist for a quick story faded. Even in the early days and weeks of hanging around the Prado real-estate market, not a day passed without one of the real-estate agents approaching me and starting up a conversation. Often we ended up conversing for long periods of time, especially during weekdays when the real-estate market was slow, and I got to build a relationship with numerous real-estate agents this way, eventually growing comfortable enough to ask them for a recorded interview. In the case of brick-and-mortar real estate companies, it would have been difficult to simply “hang around” their offices, and I never wished to misrepresent myself by feigning to be a potential client, so I approached them directly, explaining that I was carrying out research for my thesis, a concept that Cubans are very familiar with. Much to my delight, all but one of the owners or managers agreed to an interview.

In other instances, this sort of cold calling approach did not get me far, but was instructive nonetheless. For example, I wanted to interview a community architect but had no one to refer me, so I walked into the local office, presented myself as a researcher (along with my introductory letter from the research institution sponsoring me), and requested a brief interview. The man who attended me politely complied and in that initial interview I tried to stick to “safe” questions, not pushing too far, hoping to gain some rapport in order to later request a follow-up interview. He gave me formal answers, as I expected. I tried to ask for any

documents he could share, so as to triangulate some of the official data. He gave me one document, then took it back, and tore off the top half of it, saying I only really needed the bottom half. The most useful part of the interview was not his answers to my questions, but rather a comment he made at the very end of the interview: "You know that none of this goes the way I told you," without providing any additional detail. This is one reason why it is so important to pair in-depth interviews with observation, another method that I used.

To protect the identity of study participants, I kept all interviews and notes encrypted, on secure hard drives, and used pseudonyms both in my research notes as well as in writings being prepared for public dissemination. All but four interviews were audio-recorded, with the permission of the interviewee(s); those interviewees who opted not to be recorded agreed to my taking written notes of their answers while the interview was in progress. I conducted all interviews in Spanish, except for two interviews with foreigners interested in purchasing property in Cuba, which I carried out in English. Interviews typically took place in the interviewees' home, while interviews with real-estate agents, housing officials, and experts generally took place at the offices where they worked, and in the case of real-estate agents who worked in the street, interviews usually took place on public park benches lining the Prado market, during slow periods of market activity. Interviews typically lasted for approximately 90 to 120 minutes, and often featured interruptions by other household members or, in the case of real-estate agents, their co-workers or clients. Rather than distracting or detracting from the interview, these interruptions often provided good opportunities for observation, such as when clients would inquire about sales or real-estate agents would discuss details about deals.

Some of the people I formally interviewed were people I was referred to by mutual contacts for the purposes of the interview (especially experts and bureaucrats but also some

owners/managers of real-estate agencies), but in most cases I had established a relationship and built rapport with the interviewee before our interview. There is significant overlap between the people I interviewed and those I observed on a regular basis over the course of months, although there are instances of people who I exclusively interviewed without observing them as well as cases of people I observed without formally interviewing them.

Document analysis: historical sources and official government data

This dissertation is grounded both in extensive fieldwork and document analysis, including primary and secondary historical sources, news coverage, and official government data. I collected various primary and secondary documents related to the real-estate market and housing more generally. In order to understand how housing policy has changed throughout Cuba's Revolutionary period, I collected housing-related laws and policies[35] from 1959 onwards from the archives and digital database of Cuba's Ministry of Justice, as well as Cuba's National Library (*Biblioteca Nacional*), and, for more recent laws, the Official Gazette (*Gaceta Oficial*), in which all laws must be published before taking effect. To further help me understand state involvement in housing as well as its discourse surrounding housing, I collected relevant newspaper articles from the Cuban press from the 1990s onwards, many of which were compiled and made available to me by a very helpful librarian at the *Instituto Nacional de Investigaciones Económicas*. I collected copies of property titles, bank forms and other legal forms relating to housing transactions, and other primary documents. Finally, I also tracked and kept a digital record of sales listings of homes advertised on websites that Cubans use to sell/swap listings, in particular *Revolíco*, but also the websites of official real-estate agencies operating in Havana.

[35] I use "laws" as a broad term to refer not only to laws but to other legal instruments, including *decretos, decreto-leyes, acuerdos, resoluciones, resoluciones conjuntas, circulares, instrucciones*.

To get a "big picture" perspective on housing and the real-estate market in Cuba beyond my qualitative sample, I collected official government data–no easy task in a context in which there is little publicly available data on housing in general and even less on housing sales. I was fortunate to gain privileged access to official government data on housing transactions, rentals of rooms/spaces in homes, and licensed real-estate agents and their employees. The Property Registry of Havana (*Registro de Propiedad*) provided me with population-level data on the number of housing transactions registered in Havana from 2012 through 2017, broken down by sales, exchanges/swaps (*permutas*), and donations. For some periods, the distribution of these different types of housing transactions is available across municipality and is broken down by month. This data provides insight into the quantitative size of the real-estate market in Havana and its growth in the initial years.[36] I do not draw on this data in the dissertation itself, but I include it in the appendices of the dissertation. The *Dirección de Trabajo* in Havana provided me with aggregate data on the number of houses, rooms, spaces and "mixed-use" (rooms and spaces) being rented in each of the two currencies (CUC and CUP), per municipality in Havana, as of February 29, 2016. The *Dirección de Trabajo* in Havana also provided me with individual-level data on licensed real-estate agents (*gestores de permuta y compra-venta*) as well as their registered contracted employees (*trabajadores contratados*), starting from when the licenses initially began to be issued through February 29, 2016. The data includes information about their sex, age, municipality where they reside, declared occupation at the time they requested the license, the date the license was approved, and the date they relinquished their license (when

[36] It must be noted that changes in ownership that do not involve official paperwork are not included in these data, but my ethnographic work leads me to believe that this accounts for a small proportion of all housing transactions, since people are eager to have legal title to their property.

applicable).[37] I draw on only a limited amount of the official data that I collected in this dissertation; the other privileged data will be used to inform future work.

Outline of Chapters

In chapter two, I trace the evolution of housing policy in Cuba between 1959 to 2017. The descriptive overview of housing policy provides necessary historical background to better understand the recommodification of housing since the 1990s, which I argue is an important axis of stratification in contemporary Cuba. This chapter shows how the meaning and role of housing underwent redefinition, with emphasis placed on its use value in the early decades of the Revolution before housing became increasingly (but not entirely) commodified in more recent years. In addition to providing necessary historical background, examining changes in policy allows us to trace in detail the shifting societal division of labor between the state sphere and the private sphere (comprised of the market as well as private citizens and their families) in one important realm of Cuban society.

In chapter three, I shift my focus to contemporary Havana, and examine what makes a home more or less valuable in the emerging real-estate market. I focus on two variables in particular–whether the home is a “capitalist” or “socialist” construction as well as the location of the home in an area of tourist interest–and argue that these variables must be understood in terms of the recommodification of housing and the rise of international tourism in the Cuban economy. With this local and historical understanding of the value of homes in Havana’s emerging real-estate market, we are better able to understand how housing can facilitate or impede social mobility, which is a question I take up in the following chapter.

[37] Unfortunately but unsurprisingly, the dataset does not contain information on race.

In chapter four, I establish the central role that housing plays in welfare provision and social mobility in contemporary Cuba and outline the mechanisms by which it does so. I specify two overarching ways in which Cubans use their housing to ensure their welfare and to pursue social mobility strategies. The first is by converting the wealth stored in their home into cash through selling. The second is by using their home to generate sustained income, either by setting up a home-based business or by renting space for commercial purposes or other amenities to consumers. I situate this reliance on housing for social welfare provision and social mobility as a response to the selective retrenchment of the state, which has led individuals and families to take over responsibility for their own welfare from the state.

Given the central role of housing in social welfare provision and social mobility in contemporary Cuba, in chapter five I examine the historical processes through which people acquired the homes they are living in. I look at the different avenues for acquiring housing through the state sphere and through the private sphere, and outline the distinct logics that rule each sphere. Equipped with a historical understanding of how people came to live in the homes they were living in when those homes became recommodified and started to serve as the basis for a new system of stratification, we are better able to understand the origins of present-day inequalities expressed through housing, which is the question at the center of the following chapter.

In chapter six, I examine which social groups were better positioned to use the recommodification of housing for upward social mobility, and which social groups were systematically limited or excluded from doing so. While representative data is not available to answer this question definitively, I piece together available data to show that the racial and

economic inequalities that the Cuban Revolution fought hard to eliminate are once again being reinscribed through housing.

In chapter seven, I tackle the question of winners and losers from a different angle, by looking at who is buying residential real-estate in Havana. I show how inequalities between different segments of Cubans are expressed and (re)produced in the housing market. I also highlight the role of foreign capital in Havana's residential real-estate market, and the social implications of the tendency towards business-oriented investment.

In chapter eight, the conclusion, I review the main arguments presented in this dissertation, specify the contributions of knowledge, and suggest possible directions for further study.

CHAPTER 2: RECONFIGURING PROPERTY RIGHTS, RESHAPING SOCIAL RELATIONS: HOUSING POLICY IN CUBA, 1959-2017

Introduction

In a few short decades during the latter half of the twentieth century, Cuba transformed from a capitalist country comprised overwhelmingly of renters in urban areas to a socialist one comprised of homeowners. By the 1990s, over 85 percent of housing units on the socialist island were occupied by their owners (Hamberg 2017: 190; Peters 2014: 6)—compared to just 36 percent in the mid-twentieth century.[38] Despite the fact that the vast majority of Cuban families owned their home, they were unable to exercise what in modern Western thought is held as a fundamental right of private property: the right to sell their property at a free-market price. While growing numbers of Cubans were becoming homeowners, the very meaning of being a homeowner—including the rights and obligations associated with homeownership—was undergoing transformation. The reconfiguration of the rights and obligations of owners and tenants both reflected and instigated a broader transformation in social relations in Cuban society, as the boundaries shifted between the sphere of the state, the market, and private citizens/families—all of whom, at different points over the past half-century, were assigned a role in addressing the challenge of housing in Cuban society. In this chapter, I trace the evolution of housing policy during Cuba's Revolutionary period, examining key housing legislation introduced between 1959 and 2017. Beyond providing a descriptive overview of historical housing legislation that informs the more recent changes that I focus on in this dissertation, in

[38] Calculated from raw figures reported in the 1953 census, the last census taken during the Republican period. See Oficina Nacional 1953: 260-76 for raw ownership numbers, and Oficina Nacional 1953: XXVII for definitions of different tenure types.

doing so I also offer a lens to understand social relations on the island–particularly the balance between the state, market, and private citizens/family–at particular moments in time during the past six decades as well as continuities and discontinuities across these moments.

The story that emerges by tracing housing policy over the life of the Revolutionary perio--d in Cuba is one in which the meaning, value, and role of housing change in notable ways, as do the expectations and understandings of which actors/spheres hold which rights and responsibilities related to housing vis-à-vis the others. Within months after coming to power on January 1, 1959, the Revolutionary Government introduced legislation that would define housing policy for decades to come, based on the tenet that housing was not a commodity—housing was to serve a social function, rather than a means of speculation, enrichment, and exploitation. This initial housing legislation was comprised of laws that prohibited evictions, reduced rents, ordered the sale of vacant urban land, capped and made uniform the prices of urban properties, and transformed the Cuban lottery into a vehicle for financing new housing; the following year, in 1960, subsequent legislation went so far as to abolish the private rental market altogether and turn tenants into owners. These measures had dramatic effects on social relations: they altered the balance of power between tenants and landlords, and then rendered the relationship null and meaningless by erasing the figure of the landlord; most significantly, they firmly entrenched the state—not the market, nor private citizens/families—as responsible for addressing the housing needs of the population. In the mid-1980s, comprehensive housing legislation shifted some of the responsibility with respect to housing from the state to other spheres, by recognizing the role of private citizens, families in constructing houses, and by allowing for some space for the market, including private rentals and—for a limited time—housing sales. Through some of these and other measures, housing was partially re-commodified. However, those measures that went too

far in threatening the "social function" of housing were quickly repealed, and the state once again stepped in to overshadow these other spheres, especially the market. More recently, newly introduced legislation in 2011 allowed the free-market purchase and sale of homes, thus transforming the meaning, value, and role of housing from serving a primarily social function with a use value to becoming an asset with real exchange value. Considered in the context of other housing policy, it is clear that the role of the state has undergone significant transformation compared to earlier decades, as it has increasingly ceded responsibility to the private sphere of citizens, families, and the market.

Theoretical Framework and Contributions to Knowledge: Property as Social Relation

My analysis in this chapter is rooted in an understanding of property as a set of social relations between and among actors, and of property law, by extension, as governing these relations. Such an approach stands in contrast to a material understanding of property as a "thing" (e.g. a house) or an absolutist understanding of property as the sole dominion of a person over a thing.[39] As the legal scholar Morris Cohen famously put forth in his 1927 essay, "Property and Sovereignty," property "denotes not material things but certain rights," and these rights, in turn, are "a relation not between an owner and a thing, but between the owner and other individuals in reference to things" (Cohen 1927: 11-12). An approach that underscores the social nature of property provides more analytical leverage to the social scientist than do material or absolutist understanding of property, in two key respects.

[39] The absolutist view of property as "that sole and despotic dominion" by one person over a thing is often credited to William Blackstone ([1765] 1768: 2).

First, such an approach invites us to examine the power dynamics wrapped up in property. As Cohen acutely and provocatively argued nearly a century ago, "dominion over things is also *imperium* over our fellow human beings" (Cohen 1927: 13). That is, given that "the essence" of private property is the right to exclude others from it, and to the extent that others depend on this thing (e.g. a house, land, food, etc.) for their livelihood, owning property thus confers "power over the life of others" (Cohen 1927: 13). Cohen acutely argues that the "sovereign power" of property owners over others, which was obvious and direct during feudal times, is still very much present under capitalism, though somewhat obscured. The modern landlord, much like the feudal lord, holds power over the tenant, a power based on the property owner's essential right to exclude others (including the tenant) from the thing he owns. While the right to exclude others is an important part of ownership, it should not be conflated with it. In fact, a second way in which a social approach to property is more useful than a material/absolutist one is precisely because it pushes past a flat understanding of property rights as consolidated in a single owner who can exclude all others from a thing. Instead, it recognizes that property rights—and obligations that accompany those rights[40]—are multiple and can be subdivided among different actors. Using the metaphor of a "bundle of rights (or sticks),"[41, 42] in which each stick represents an individual right to a thing (e.g. the right to use, the right to sell,

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[40] I heed anthropologist Katherine Verdery's (2004) call to pay attention not only to property rights gained through private ownership but also to the debts, obligations, and liabilities that are assigned through private property ownership.

[41] The "bundle of rights" metaphor was the predominant way in which legal academics conceptualized property through much of the twentieth century, though its dominance has been challenged more recently (Baron 2014: 58-59). Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper and for social scientific approaches to property more generally, the "bundle of rights" metaphor remains useful.

[42] For a detailed but concise history of the intellectual development of the "bundle of rights" metaphor, see Baron 2014: 62-66.

the right to alter, etc.),[43] we can understand how property rights can be separated and held by different actors and in different configurations. Such an approach complicates the very notion of ownership, and exposes the ways in which the distinction between state-, collective- and private-property can be unproductive or even misleading. Instead, it invites us to examine the ways in which different actors are bound together; which rights to the thing in question each actor can claim vis-à-vis the others; and how responsibilities and obligations are assigned, shared, or shifted from one actor to another.

Grounded in an understanding of property as a set of social relations imbued with power dynamics and whose contours are defined by particular configurations of rights and obligations in relation to a thing, I focus my attention on housing ("the thing" in question) in post-1959 Cuba. I consider and characterize the meaning, value, and role of housing at different moments over the course of the Revolutionary period, tracing its de-commodification and re-commodification. While my focus in this paper is housing, my overarching concern is the social relations that housing engenders and reflects, and the shifting boundaries between the public and private sphere in particular. Applying the framework I described earlier to housing policy in Revolutionary Cuba, I examine what the configurations of rights and obligations—and therefore relations among the constituent actors—look like at particular moments in time and how they change over course of six decades. I go further by examining how these (re)configurations of rights and obligations map on to the shifting boundaries between the state, the market, and

[43] In his influential essay "Ownership," Honoré (1961) specified 11 sticks (or "incidents," in his words) that comprise the core bundle of rights that constitute property ownership. This essay does not adopt Honoré's 11 "sticks," but does find them useful for specifying some of the different dimensions of ownership. This essay makes clear that other dimensions need to be further disaggregated, such as the right to sell, the right to give away, and the right to modify, which, under Honoré's scheme, are all encompassed in a single stick.

citizens/families. This work thus adds to a rich and growing literature that examines how the societal division of labor has shifted between the public and private spheres, and the role that law and policy has played in initiating, further propelling, and reflecting such shifts.[44] This chapter finds a familiar trend—that the state has increasingly shifted responsibility for housing to the private sphere—but distinct motivations for this shift, which have little to do with the neoliberal transformations propelling such shifts elsewhere.

In addition to adding to the literature on the shifting boundaries between the public and private spheres, this chapter makes two additional contributions—one to our understanding of property, and another to the historiography of Cuba. By treating property as a set of social relations and analyzing it in terms of the configuration of multiple rights and obligations that comprise it, this chapter complicates our understanding of the distinction between private, collective, and state property. By blurring these boundaries, it calls for a reexamination and more nuanced understanding of property in socialist, post-socialist, and capitalist contexts—one which shifts the emphasis from the question of "Who owns what?" to "Who has what rights (and obligations), vis-à-vis others?"

At the same time, studying housing in this way advances the historiography of Cuba. Many scholars of the Cuban Revolution explain changes in state policy in the post-1959 period

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[44] My reference to shifts in and between the public and private spheres is meant to encompass a variety of formulations that parallel and further specify the public/private division, such as the state, market, civil society, workers, and family. For example, political scientist Jacob Hacker (2008(2006)) persuasively argues in *The Great Risk Shift* that the government and corporations in the U.S. have been shifting economic risk on to workers and families, who face increasing insecurity and are expected to take personal responsibility for provisions such as healthcare and retirement savings, which were once part of the safety net provided by public social programs and workplace benefits. Sociologists Jane Collins and Victoria Mayer (2010) compellingly show in *Both Hands Tied* how welfare reform and the shift in responsibilities between the state, firms, and families adversely effected poor, single mothers in particular.

in terms of a back-and-forth—a sort of "pendular swing"—between socialist idealism on the one hand and economic pragmatism on the other.[45, 46] While this approach captures an important tension at play in the historical evolution of state policy, it leads to the downplaying and omission of other important features. An approach to state policy that focuses on the tension between idealism and pragmatism can be useful for understanding changes in the ideological realm, which in turn are useful for understanding possible motivations and reasons for changes in policy (often only ex-post facto, however). I put forward a different, complementary lens—one that examines state policy in terms of changes in the societal division of labor. Such an approach considers the ways in which the boundaries between state, and the private sphere of not just the market but also citizens and family are (re)constructed by and reflected in changes in policy, thus allowing us to understand not only the evolution of official policy, but also the evolution of social relations. Moreover, by including citizens and family in the analysis, this approach adds an important axis that remains overlooked by the other approach, in which the poles of idealism versus pragmatism map on to the central planning (by the state) versus market mechanisms, respectively.[47]

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[45] The first to employ the idea of tensions between pragmatism and idealism to explain shifts in state policy was the eminent Cuba scholar Carmelo Mesa-Lago (1978). Since then, other scholars have also employed the concepts to both explain and characterize shifts in state policy, including Henken (2002); Martínez-Fernández (2015); Martínez-Fernández (2014); Mesa-Lago (2000); Mesa-Lago (1988); Pérez-López (1995); Ritter and Henken (2014).

[46] Another camp of scholars hold that the Cuban state invoked ideology to justify shifts in policy that were actually economically (pragmatically) motivated (see Henken (2002): 127 for references). In fact, the respected Carmelo Mesa-Lago, who can be credited as the first scholar to write about this tension between idealism and pragmatism, admits in a piece published in 1990 on the causes of the Rectification Process in 1980s Cuba that "it is impossible to determine how far purely ideological considerations motivated the [Rectification Process] and how far ideology could have been used by Castro to oppose liberalization and decentralization of decision-making because these would have reduced his own power" (Mesa-Lago 1990: 99-100).

[47] For a summary of key differences between ideology and pragmatism, outlined by the scholar who coined this concept in the analysis of state policy in Cuba, see Table 4.1 in Mesa Lago (1988): 81.

Existing studies of housing and housing policy in Revolutionary Cuba tend to be either largely descriptive, overtly celebratory, or focus on architecture, urban planning, or technical aspects of housing. This chapter, in contrast, adopts an analytic approach, a dispassionate stance, and a sociologically-informed, historical understanding of housing policy. It is the first to analyze housing policy in Cuba in terms of the societal division of labor and the evolution of social relations. Moreover, it is the first study to analyze housing- policy in Cuba over the entire life of the Revolutionary period (to date), from 1959 to 2017.

Shifting Relations Between the State and the Private Sphere

The "Tragedy of Housing" During the Republican Period

On trial for leading a failed attack on the Moncada military barracks on July 26, 1953—the first armed action of the Cuban Revolution—a young lawyer named Fidel Castro presented his own defense statement, a four-hour speech in which he identified "the tragedy of housing" as one of the six key problems facing Cuba.[48] Subsequently known as Castro's famous "History Will Absolve Me" speech, this statement served as the manifesto of the 26th of July Movement, which would, within five years time, overthrow the dictatorship led by Fulgencio Batista and assume power on January 1, 1959. With respect to housing, Fidel decried the deplorable conditions in which many Cubans lived, exorbitant rents of urban properties, exploitative landlords interested only in the profit motive, and the relative complacency of the state in these affairs despite the material suffering of the people:

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[48] The six problems that Fidel Castro ([1954] 2007) laid out in the *La Historia Me Absolverá* speech were: land, industrialization, housing, unemployment, education, and health. This speech called for the reinstatement of the 1940 Constitution, which had been suspended by Fulgencio Batista following his coup d'état in 1952, and a series of other reforms.

> Just as serious or worse [as the industrialization problem] is the tragedy of housing. In Cuba there are 200,000 huts and shacks; 400,000 families from the countryside and from the city live crowded in cabins, tenements and other sub-standard housing without even basic hygiene and health conditions; 2,200,000 people of our urban population pay rents that account for between one-fifth and one-third of their income; and 2,800,000 of our rural and suburban population lack electricity. The same happens if the state proposes to reduce rents: the landlords threaten to stop all construction; if the state refrains from taking action, they [the landlords] build as long as they can receive a high rent, and after that point they don't put even one rock [i.e. they stop building], even though the rest of the population lives out in the open. Others form a monopoly with electricity: they extend the [electric] lines up until where they can receive satisfactory profits; beyond that point it does not matter to them that the people live in darkness for the rest of their days. The state crosses its arms [i.e. does nothing] and the population continues [to live] without houses and without electricity. (Castro [1954] 2007: 39-40)

Fidel's words resonated with much of the population because they found themselves living in the very conditions that the future *comandante* so aptly described. In Oscar and Ruth Lewis' classic oral history of Cuba, *Four Men* (1977), one Afro-Cuban man born in 1900 to parents who had been born into slavery recalls the poor conditions in which he lived before finally being evicted for non-payment of rent in 1933:[49]

> The *solar* where [my first wife] and I first lived was a mess, and we were in danger of being evicted any minute. Our rent came to 2 *pesos*, and in those times, when you paid 2 *pesos* a month for rent you were as good as out in the street. Like many landlords, the owner of the *solar* was only interested in profit. There was no running water and the place wasn't even sanitary. It had two patios and in the middle of each was a tank where all the tenants got their water. The rooms were shanties made of any kind of wood that was handy. Anybody who turned up and said, 'Hey, I've got a bit of wood,' could sell it to the landlord, and he'd build another room out of it. He didn't care who he rented to as long as they paid him. (P. 51)

[49] These details about his personal biography and about being evicted is mentioned in Lewis et al. 1977: xli-xlii.

Stories like this man's were not uncommon. While there was a small section of the population who was extremely wealthy and lived in lavish mansions,[50] a large section of the Cuban population lived in the sorts of poor housing conditions described by this man and by Fidel.

The 1953 census documents the country's serious housing problems, and the especially grave conditions in the countryside. For example, 46 percent of urban dwellings and 74 percent of rural dwellings were classified as exhibiting signs of deterioration or not providing adequate protections against the elements or being at risk of collapse,[51] and a subsequent reclassification of these data declared that 53 percent of the population lived in dwellings deemed "absolutely inhabitable" (García Vázquez 1968: 45). Over 90 percent of rural homes and 13 percent of urban ones had no electricity; another 90 percent of rural homes and 35 percent of urban ones had no bath or shower.[52] While many dwellings were in poor shape, the Republican period also saw much construction of new dwellings: over one third of dwellings on the island had been built since 1946, and three quarters since 1920 (Oficina Nacional 1953: 209). However, virtually all

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[50] For a peek into the lavish mansions that the wealthy lived in during the Republican period, and some insight into their lives, see Mallea 2011.

[51] To be more specific, 8.6 percent of urban dwellings and 25.9 percent of rural dwellings were classified as being in "bad" condition, while 37.6 percent of urban dwellings and 48.4 percent of rural ones were classified as "regular" condition. The 1953 census used three categories to classify the condition of the dwelling: "good" for those that were conserved in approximately their original condition; "bad" for those which, either due to deficiencies in the construction or subsequent deterioration, did not provide adequate protection against the elements or were at risk of collapse; and "regular" for those dwellings that fell between the two categories. For urban figures, see Oficina Nacional 1953: 211; for rural figures, see Oficina Nacional 1953: 213; for definitions of the different classifications, see Oficina Nacional 1953: XXVI.

[52] Another 15 percent of urban dwellings but only 1 percent of rural dwellings shared a bath or shower with other dwellings. See Oficina Nacional 1953: 211 for urban figures for both electricity and bath/shower facilities; Oficina Nacional 1953: 213 for rural figures; Oficina Nacional 1953: XXVII for definitions.

housing construction was in private hands. The private hegemony over housing construction formed one of two pillars of housing policy in the Republican period, the other being the largely unregulated rental market—two practices that left the citizenry in a rather precarious position (Vega Vega 1986: 38). According to the 1953 Census, tenants occupied over half of urban homes and nearly three-quarters of homes in urban Havana.[53] Lacking tenure security and adequate protections from the state, many urban families found themselves subject to the whims of landlords, precariously positioned between the option of paying exorbitant rents or facing eviction.[54] Before the Revolution of 1959, an estimated 70,000 forced evictions, on average, took place annually in Havana alone (Carneado 1962: 14; Hamberg 1994: 21; García Vázquez 1968: 78).[55] In sum, the housing situation in pre-Revolutionary Cuba was characterized by inadequate living conditions, both within the city but especially in the countryside; a largely unregulated rental market that exposed families to exploitative landlords, who charged rents disproportionate to incomes and held eviction as a ready playing card; and utility services and housing construction dominated by private interests, motivated by the profit principle.

[53] To be specific, tenants occupied 57.1 percent of dwellings in urban Cuba (or 52.9 percent, if we include the "unoccupied" or "undeclared" categories, rather than count them as missing data) and 72.5 percent of dwellings in urban Havana (or 67.2 percent, if we include the two categories considered missing data above). To put this in perspective, over 3.3 million (or 57 percent) of the island's population of 5.8 million lived in urban areas, including 1.4 million (24 percent of the total population) in urban Havana (Oficina Nacional 1953: 20-21).

[54] "The business of renting homes was one of the most serious forms of exploitation the people endured because of the exorbitant prices imposed, always out of reach for the working class. Falling behind on a month's payment lead to eviction trials that had only three outcomes: 1) the complete payment of the debt; 2) moving out; 3) throwing the family and its belongings out on the street" (Rodríguez Saif et al., 2004: 190).

[55] To put this number in context, the number of rental units in urban Havana at the time was approximately 250,000 (Oficina Nacional 1953: 274).

This is not to say that Republican governments (1902-59) were entirely silent or complacent with regards to the housing issue. As architect Patricio del Real and anthropologist Anna Cristina Pertierra write, "the period between 1902 to 1959 saw a growth in ideas, projects, solutions, and laws (albeit poorly implemented) to resolve, if not address, the housing question in Cuba" (del Real and Pertierra 2008: 79). In the tradition of scholars who question "the great divide" between the Republican and the Revolutionary period in Cuba's history, historian Jesse Horst argues that as early as the 1930s "a progressive consensus" was taking shape "among diverse social and political actors that adequate housing [was] a citizenship right and a state responsibility" (Horst 2014: 701). Indeed, during times of severe distress such as the depression of the 1930s, evictions were not allowed under any circumstances (Hamberg 1994: 47). Decree 2005, dating to September 30, 1933, regulated the eviction process by implementing an extension in the eviction process. In December of that year, evictions as well as orders of eviction were capped at 10 per day. In 1939, rents were frozen. Furthermore, the right to housing and the right to stay—which provided a degree of tenure security—were legally recognized. Moreover, some eviction moratoriums introduced since 1940 also disallowed evictions for non-paying tenant farmers or sharecroppers (Hamberg 1994: 47).[56] Even in the final years of the Batista government's rule, in the 1950s, laws were introduced to regulate rentals (Vega Vega 1986: 38). However, despite this existing legal framework, in practice the laws were poorly enforced, and clever landlords found ways around them.[57] Thus, while the state didn't simply

[56] For a fuller discussion of eviction moratoriums during the Republican era, see Hamberg 1994: 47-48 and Hamberg 1994: 20 (footnote 5) for further reading suggestions.

[57] For example, some landlords availed themselves of the lack of regulation on rent payments for subleases, making use of sublease contracts in place of regular leases.

"cross its arms," as Fidel described, neither did it effectively implement nor enforce a comprehensive framework to deal with the dire housing problem its residents confronted.

After decrying the "tragedy of housing," Castro went on to describe the actions that a revolutionary government would take to address the housing problem.

> A revolutionary government would solve the housing problem by decidedly reducing rents by 50 percent, exempting homes in which the owners live from paying any tax, tripling the taxes on rented houses, demolishing the infernal tenements in order to build in their place modern, multi-story buildings, and financing the construction of housing throughout the island on a scale never before seen, following the criterion that if the ideal in the countryside is for every family to have its own plot, the ideal in the city is for every family to live in its own house or apartment. There are enough rocks [i.e. materials] and more than enough arms [i.e. humanpower] to construct for each Cuban family a dignified home. (Castro 2007(1954): 43-44)

The Revolutionary Government would indeed make good on many of these promises, starting in the very early days of the Revolution.

Establishing the Centrality of the State: Housing Legislation in the First Year of the Revolutionary Period (1959)

In the first weeks and months following the rise to power of the Revolutionary Government of Cuba on January 1, 1959, the state introduced several housing laws that sought to address the problems identified by the Moncada program. This early legislation outlined an initial housing policy agenda of the Revolutionary Government, and it also reshaped the contours of social relations. By rearranging the bundle of property rights in the early housing legislation, for example, the balance of power between tenants and landlords/owners shifted towards the former group, who saw their rights expanded while landlords/owners saw theirs circumscribed. These early housing laws, both individually and taken together, also firmly established the central role of the state vis-à-vis the market and private citizens/families, by assigning it the primary responsibility of ensuring adequate housing conditions for the people—as well as their

social well-being more generally. In addition to reshaping social relations, these initial measures redefined the meaning, role, and value of housing by stripping it of its role in processes of speculation, exploitation, and profit-making, thus initiating the transformation in housing from a commodity to a good serving a "social function."

On January 28, 1959,[58] barely one month after the Revolutionary Government had come to power, Law 26 suspended evictions from urban residences—even if occupants were unable to

[58] Throughout this chapter, the dates that I provide in reference to specific laws are the dates that the law went into effect, which usually coincides with the day that the law was published in the Official Gazette, unless the text of the law specifies otherwise.

pay rent.[59, 60, 61] A few weeks later, on March 11, Law 135 reduced rents by up to 50 percent.[62, 63] These laws addressed harsh realities that large portions of the population faced during the Republican period, in which rents represented a disproportionately heavy financial burden on families and evictions were common. By prohibiting eviction and reducing rents, the state delivered a clear message: the social well-being of tenants would trump potential profits by landlords, and housing would not be used as an instrument of exploitation. Both of these two

[59] More specifically, Law 26 placed a moratorium on evictions from urban residences for 45 days, effective January 28, 1959. According to the text of the law itself, the temporary suspension of evictions was meant to redress the economic fallout caused by the country's paralysis during and immediately following the armed political transition from the Batista regime to the Revolutionary Government, which affected the "less moneyed" classes ("*las clases menos adineradas*") the most, impacting their ability to pay rent. The moratorium was extended for another 30 days effective starting August 25, 1959, under Law 503. This extension was motivated by a proliferation of demands on municipal courts to order evictions on the basis of a failure to pay rent, stemming largely from disputes between landlords and tenants over the correct amount of rent payments following the rent reduction law of March 1959 (more details below). Similar to the earlier moratorium, this law applied to cases of nonpayment of rent (see Article 2). Evictions were permanently banned on October 14, 1960 under the Urban Reform Law (see next section of this chapter). Though there were lapses of time between the initial suspension and the permanent outlawing of evictions—during which no legislation protected against evictions—several sources claim no evictions took place (e.g., Carneado 1962: 16; Hamberg 1994: 47, citing Sánchez 1962: 10; Horst 2016: 193).

[60] The Revolutionary government's moratorium on evictions wasn't entirely without precedent on the island, as discussed in the previous section. It did, however, go further than legislation under the Republican government by prohibiting evictions even if tenants did not pay rent. Still some further caveats are warranted. For example, during times of severe distress such as the depression of the 1930s, evictions were not allowed under any circumstances (Hamberg 1994: 47). Moreover, some eviction moratoriums introduced since 1940 also disallowed evictions for non-paying tenant farmers of sharecroppers (Hamberg 1994: 47).

[61] Law 26 and its subsequent extension via Law 503 refer to urban residences, termed "fincas urbanas," which were subsequently defined in Article 3 of Law 135. A separate law, the Agrarian Reform Law of May 1959, prohibited rural evictions (Carneado 1962: 16).

[62] More precisely, Law 135 reduced rents by 50 percent for tenants paying rents of up to 100 pesos per month, 40 percent for those paying over 100 but no more than 200 pesos; and 30 percent for those paying over 200 pesos (Article X). The peso was equivalent to the US dollar at the time (Acosta and Hardoy 1971: 106 (footnote 103), Hamberg 1994: 49).

[63] For a detailed discussion of rent control during the Republican period, see Horst (2016: 155-68).

laws elevated and prioritized the rights of tenants and considerably limited the rights of landlords/owners, transforming the nature of the relation between the two actors by tipping the balance of power in favor of tenants. The rights of owners were further circumscribed by legislation that ordered the forced sale of vacant urban land and regulated its price, first introduced via Law 218 on April 13, 1959, and subsequently modified and superseded by Law 691 on December 14, 1959, and then further extended and better specified by Law 892 on October 14, 1960.[64] This measure was designed to root out speculation on urban land, which had driven up lot prices, and to put vacant land to use, both towards the construction of houses in order to ameliorate the serious shortage of housing in urban centers and towards the construction of industrial, commercial, and office buildings in order to spur the country's economic development. It capped vacant urban land prices—which had reached as high as 150 pesos per square meter in certain areas (García Vazquez 1968: 105)—at a uniform four pesos per square meter.[65] Urban land technically retained an exchange value, but the value was regulated by the state rather than determined by market forces. Both the exchange value of vacant urban land and the rights of these landowners were constrained by and subordinated to the (future) use value of the land—which was now tied to a social function (housing for citizens or national development) rather than profit considerations of the title holder.

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[64] Urban planner Jill Hamberg argues that the fact that the law was revised twice in a relatively short period of time "reflected the fact that the first law was drawn up in haste, did not have the intended effect of immediately stimulating construction—in part, because accompanying regulations were delayed—and was frequently evaded by landowners. The changes also reflected the rapid transformation in thinking about land, development, and pricing from early 1959 to late 1960" (Hamberg 1994: 55).

[65] Law 892, Article 4. The earlier incarnations of the law also regulated the price of urban land, but allowed for some variation based on factors such as location. Law 892 capped the price at a uniform 4 pesos per square meter.

Another measure aimed at ending exploitation[66] as well as extending housing with secure tenure came through Law 86, which established, on February 20, 1959, the National Institute for Savings and Housing ("Instituto Nacional de Ahorros y Vivienda", or INAV). INAV replaced the infamous national lottery, which it converted into a mechanism to encourage savings among the population,[67] and whose earnings were to be used to extend credit to low- and middle-income families and to finance the Institute's construction of homes for the population, which its new occupants would then pay off over time, with low interest.[68] Indeed, INAV completed the construction of 8,533 units in the 27-month period before its construction department was absorbed by the Ministry of Public Works in June 1961, which continued the work of constructing homes for the population (Hamberg 1994: 74; Muñoz Hernández and Zardoya

[66] The relevant legislation that I will discuss refers to ending exploitation of those who do not own a home of their own, as well as exploitation by government leaders of the vices of the population (gambling, in this case) for either personal profit or government revenue (see Law 86, preambles).

[67] It did this by maintaining the basic structure of the lottery, but replacing tickets with "bonds," whose value was not lost in case the purchaser did not win the lottery draw. Instead, losers could redeem their "bond," whose value was determined inversely by the length of time that passed, starting with 40 percent of its value if redeemed within one year of purchase and working up to 110 percent of its value if the purchaser waited at least five years before redeeming the bond. For the full sliding scale, see as outlined in Article 5, Law 86. Note that the sliding scale was revised on March 1, 1960, after it was found that over two-thirds of losers redeemed their bonds within the first year (Hamberg 1994: 71-72).

[68] See Hamberg 1994: 69-77 for further details on INAV, including how exactly it was structured, challenges it faced, subsequent modifications, the number and type of units constructed, how units were distributed amongst the population, and more.

Loureda 2016: 41; Segre 1980: 33).[69, 70] It must be noted that INAV was as much an anti-gambling measure as it was a pro-housing one, as evidenced in the Law's heavily moralistic language condemning gambling as a "vice" that "impoverishes citizens materially" and "prostitutes" them morally" (Law 86, preambles 1 and 2)[71] [72] Law 86, then, appeared to be a

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[69] Coyula (2000) cites a figure of 10,000 units. At the time that its construction unit was absorbed, INAV reportedly had additional units under construction, which the Ministry completed. Carneado (1962: 26), cites the number of units underway as 914; Hamberg (1994) gives an estimate of 900 to 1,600, citing three sources, including Carneado; Muñoz Hernández and Zardoya Loureda (2016: 41), cite the figure as 1,594 units underway. The Ministry also undertook additional residential construction efforts, having completed and assigned over 5,000 units by mid-1962 (Carneado 1962: 26). By most accounts, the majority of the built units were located in Havana. One such housing complex, Unidad #1 in what is now the Ciudad Camilo Cienfuegos, consisted of 1,306 apartments in four-story walk-ups and eleven-story slabs, was named a National Landmark in 1991 (Coyula 2000).

[70] While its construction unit was shifted to the Ministry of Public Works, INAV continued to operate the lottery until the agency was disintegrated on March 31, 1968, at which point the lottery was also extinguished (Hamberg 1994: 75; Muñoz Hernández and González González 2015).

[71] A contemporary publication issued by INAV offers insight into the heavily moralistic Revolutionary attitudes towards gambling. It attributes society's ills to gambling: "The Cuban apathy toward making plans, the love for luxury, the laziness, the lack of respect for civil officers and government leaders, as well as so many other unhealthy aspects of Cuban society can all be linked directly to the habit of speculating on the lottery" (Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda (n.d. [c. 1961]): 9). The INAV was seen as the solution, for it "would create homes over the ruins of gambling dens, would make gardens where misery had reigned before" (Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda (n.d. [c. 1961]): 13). Moreover, the document tied the destiny of INAV to the morality of the people, saying the "triumph or failure of INAV would be the triumph or failure of the people of Cuba on whose moral and economic strength the INAV would depend" (Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda (n.d. [c. 1961]): 12-13).

[72] The same contemporary publication by INAV traces the origins of gambling on the island back to the Spanish Conquistadores of the sixteenth century, and discusses its subsequent development, including the establishment of the Royal Lottery in 1812 to its brief suspension following independence from the Spanish crown in 1898, to its reinstatement in 1909. The document places emphasis on the central role of state authorities (both colonial and republican) in organizing and supporting gambling, which served as a lucrative source of income. It notes that while gambling was prevalent throughout the centuries, "the real saturation point was finally reached in the 1950's [sic] in the dictatorship of Batista" (Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda (n.d. [c. 1961]): 8). Most fascinating about the document is the way in which it characterizes gambling during the Batista regime in terms of exploitation and greed, whereas it relies on racialized presumptions to characterize the colonial period. The following quote is illustrative of the latter, "Gambling offered an outlet for the arrogance of the Spanish and served as a vehicle for the superstition of the Africans…Gambling satisfied the adventuresome Spanish temperament and the magic-loving mentality of the Africans" (Instituto Nacional de Ahorro y Vivienda (n.d. [c. 1961]): 8).

solution that killed two birds with one stone, and in both cases enlarged the scope of the state in housing and other social problems facing citizens.[73]

Each of these measures expanded the role and the reach of the state in the lives of its citizens vis-à-vis the market, private citizens, and families—with respect to housing, but with implications beyond the realm of housing.[74] In fact, the opening text of Law 135 says as much: "It is the duty and responsibility of the Revolutionary Government to procure the social well-being of the people, especially with respect to their basic necessities, among which is housing" (Ley Num. 135, 48-49). This was not entirely new. Even during the Republican period, the state recognized affordable housing as a citizenship right, going so far as to formalize this right in the 1940 Constitution, though in a limited way (Horst 2014: 701).[75] However, the laws introduced in the first months of the Revolutionary period went further in entrenching the role of the state by universalizing this citizenship right, extending it beyond workers (obreros) to the pueblo more broadly.[76] Moreover, these laws defined a certain form of state-citizen relations that reached

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[73] As much as the Revolutionary Government condemned gambling and saw it as the root of many social ills, Law 86 reformed rather than eradicated the national lottery. The preambles to Law 86 offer insight into why this was the case, noting that the gambling habit was so deeply ingrained that it was unrealistic to abolish it by decree, and that it was preferable to replace the habit of gambling with one of savings through incentives rather than force. (See especially preambles 11-20 of Law 86). However, the idea was to eventually eliminate gambling (see preamble 8). The National Lottery was indeed eliminated in 1968, though gambling itself was not eliminated, and underground gambling—betting on numbers through "la bolita," for example—continues even in 2017.

[74] For a discussion of other consequences of 1959 housing legislation in terms of income redistribution, see Hamberg (1994: 114-16).

[75] Article 79 of the Constitution of 1940 declares that the state will encourage the creation of affordable housing for workers, by obliging companies who employ workers outside of populated areas to provide adequate housing, among other provisions, to these workers and their families.

[76] It should be noted that the "Fundamental Law," which was instituted on February 7, 1959, shortly after the regime change from Batista to the Revolutionary Government, adopted much of the language of the 1940 Constitution—verbatim—including Article 79 regarding the state's responsibility with respect to housing (see earlier footnote). Despite adopting the same language, the role of the state in housing was now much larger, as evidenced through the housing laws that followed very shortly after the introduction

beyond the sphere of housing, positioning the Cuban state as the guarantor of "the social well-being of the people" more generally. This sometimes extended beyond basic material necessities to include moral reform, as was the case when the state turned the infamous national lottery into a vehicle for savings and a mechanism to finance housing construction. The early housing legislation—the eviction ban, creation of INAV, rent reform, and the vacant lot law—foreshadowed a more radical piece of housing policy which was to come the following year, which would further expand and entrench the state's reach in the lives of its citizens as well as transform the relation and the figures of tenant and landlord. It would also go further in decommodifying housing by stripping it of its exchange value and establishing that housing was to serve a social function—an idea that was already present in a nascent form in this early legislation, which condemned the exploitation and speculative uses of housing and prioritized social well-being of residents over the profits of owners and landlords.[77]

Further Entrenching the Role of the State: The Urban Reform Law of 1960

The next landmark piece of housing legislation came in the form of the Urban Reform Law (URL) of October 14, 1960, a law so important and consequential that it retroactively

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of the Fundamental Law, which I discuss in this section. The language of Article 79 would eventually be shed and replaced when Cuba adopted a new Constitution in 1976, which declared that the state works to ensure that no family is left without a comfortable dwelling (Article 8c).

[77] This does not mean, however, that these measures were void of economic consideration by the state. After all, by reducing the amount of money tenants expended on rent, this measure ensured that people would have disposable income, which they could either reinvest in the local economy or save, which itself could be used as capital to spur national economic development (Hamberg 1990: 48). Moreover, while the forced sale of vacant urban land was a way to increase the housing stock, it was also a means to contribute to the industrialization of the country.

formed part of the nation's constitution.[78] The URL was a more comprehensive response to the housing problems that plagued the country and were inherited by the Revolutionary Government than the piecemeal housing legislation issued in the months following the Revolution. The URL declared housing an essential and inalienable human right,[79] leaving no doubt that housing was squarely the responsibility of the state. The opening article of the URL outlined the state's three-stage plan for ensuring "dignified housing" for all citizens: in the "current stage," convert tenants into owners by converting rent payments into a mechanism to amortize the purchase price of their dwellings; in the "near future," construct housing and confer it to families in permanent usufruct, at a price that will not exceed 10 percent of the family's income; and in the "medium future," construct housing and confer it to families in permanent usufruct at no cost.

The URL initiated the first stage by nullifying existing leases and subleases, declaring it illegal to rent urban property,[80] and converting current tenants into owners. Landlords, who during the previous year had seen limits placed on the amount of rent they could collect and their ability to evict tenants, now had their rental property expropriated, though not without compensation.[81] By abolishing the private rental market and making tenants into owners, the

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[78] URL, "Disposición Final." More precisely, the URL formed part of the nation's "Fundamental Law," adopted on February 7, 1959, which acted as the country's constitution until 1976, when the Constitution of 1976 took its place.

[79] See URL, last preamble and Article 1.

[80] There were some exceptions to the ban on private rentals, such as rooming houses as well as boarding houses, but these too would be banned during the 1968 revolutionary offensive (Hamberg 1994: 201). Landlords as well as renters who violated the private renting prohibition (or other parts of the URL) could be punished by fines of 30 to 180 pesos or jail time of one to six months (or six months to three years, under the Criminal Code), and title holders could even have their property confiscated, though it's unclear how often these punishments were enforced (Hamberg 1994: 201).

[81] Landlords whose properties were expropriated were compensated the full legal price of their properties through monthly payments for the length of the time the tenants amortized the purchase price (Article 21; Hamberg 1994: 102), but with a cap of 600 pesos per month (Article 22). Landlords of tenement properties, however, did not receive compensation (Article 25). Nevertheless, approximately 500 low-

URL effectively erased the figure of the landlord as well as tenant and therefore the landlord-tenant relation. Former tenants now possessed additional rights, principally the right to own the space that they resided in, so long as they continued to make payments,[82] which they would now pay to the state as a way to amortize the property in order to assume full ownership after a period of five to twenty years.[83] In reality, the URL made about half of urban tenants homeowners, affecting 200,000 households (Hamberg 1990b: 235, 239). The other half of tenants lived in tenements, which became government property with the introduction of the URL, and by the mid-1960s the former tenants were given long-term, rent-free leases (Hamberg 1990b: 235; Hamberg 1994: 104).[84] [85]

At the same time that the URL converted hundreds of thousands of tenants into owners, it limited what it meant to be an owner by reconfiguring the bundle of rights that previously comprised ownership.[86] Specifically, owners were denied a right that is often considered essential to ownership: the right to sell their home or otherwise freely transfer ownership, if they

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income, former tenement landlords received monthly payments of 50 or more pesos as state assistance (Carneado 1962: 19). For details on how payment actually played out, see Hamberg 1994: 109-11.

[82] The amount of the payment was determined by the monthly rent payment at the time (recall that rent had been reduced by up to 50 percent the previous year) and the year the building was constructed (See URL, Article 13-17). For more information, see Hamberg 1994: 100-101.

[83] For details on how the length of time was calculated, see Hamberg 1994: 100-101.

[84] Initially, however, these tenants continued to pay "rent," which was regarded as payments to amortize the purchase price of their soon-to-be-built home (Article 26); Hamberg 1994: 104).

[85] For a detailed discussion of differences between these two forms of tenure, see Hamberg 1994: 128-129 and 196-200.

[86] The rights that I discuss excluded foreigners who were not residents of the island: "Quedan excluidos de los derechos y beneficios que esta Ley concede los ciudadanos extranjeros que no tengan la condición legal de residentes" (Ley Constitucional de Reforma Urbana: 31).

so desire.[87] Moreover, the URL limited ownership to one residence and one vacation home. With the introduction of the 1960 URL, owning a property in Cuba encompassed residing in it and making improvements to it (with proper permission by the state). The URL did not ban home sales outright, as it had private rentals, but it effectively abolished sales by, first, granting the state the right of first refusal (*derecho de tanteo*), or, in other words, first option to buy, and, second, limiting the purchase price to the "legal" price of the home, which was determined by the URL—and was far lower than the free-market could fetch. Even if the state chose not to exercise its right to buy the property, sales between individuals were also restricted to the legal price. In fact, changing ownership through any means—not just sales, but also swaps/exchanges (*permutas*), donations, or other transfers—required authorization by the state.[88, 89] While the state tended to authorize swaps, housing sales were effectively prohibited, if not altogether banned in the legal framework.[90] By stripping landlords of rights, expropriating their rental properties, obliging owners to seek authorization from the state to realize any kind of transfer of ownership, and limiting the sale price of housing, the state entered into the lives of citizens in new ways—ways that were intrusive from the perspective of former landlords and even new owners.

The state also played a central role in the construction of new housing and distribution of vacant units, part of the second stage of the ambitious plan outlined in the URL.[91] New housing

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[87] Here I refer to permanent property titles, rather than ownership in usufruct.

[88] See Article 22 of the Urban Reform Law.

[89] The URL did not explicitly address the question of inheritance (Hamberg 1994: 107, 131), so the prerevolutionary Civil Code regulated inheritance (Hamberg 1994: 131).

[90] In practice, housing sales continued without the authorization of the state, on the black market. These illegal sales often left new owners without proper titles (Hamberg 1990b: 240).

[91] The text of the URL itself does not refer to distributing vacant units—mainly those left behind by emigrants—as part of this second stage, but other sources do, including Hamberg 1994: 100; Vega Vega n.d.: 17.

made available to citizens was heavily subsidized, with occupants making monthly payments of between 3 to 7 percent of family income—rather than the 10 percent originally outlined in the URL (Hamberg 1990b: 239).[92] The third stage of the plan called for free housing, motivated by the idea that "Housing is a social service which must be free of commercialism, and the state has similar obligations in providing it as it does with other social services such as health and education" (quoted in Hamberg 1994: 307).[93] This stage, which was expected to begin by 1970,[94] never came to fruition, but those living in tenements enjoyed rent-free leases, as did families in rural new towns, and beginning in the early 1970s also very low-income households (Hamberg 1990b: 239); by then, many families had completed their amortization payments and were full owners as well.

Despite not being entirely free, there is no doubt that housing was no longer a commodity, as it had been for much of the Republican period. By limiting ownership to a single residence and vacation home, dismantling the private rental market, outlawing evictions,[95] establishing a low, "legal" price above which properties could not be sold, and de facto prohibiting housing sales, the URL effectively decommodified housing. The fact that upon the death of the owner of a home, (co-)residents were permitted to remain living in the home regardless of the inheritance claims of non-resident family members (Acosta and Hardoy 1971:

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[92] This discrepancy exists because rent payments tended not to be adjusted despite increases in family income due to salary increases or another household member taking a job (Hamberg 1990b: 239).

[93] For Spanish version, see García Vázquez 1968: 71.

[94] The plan to begin the third stage in 1970 was announced in 1966 (Hamberg 1994: 100).

[95] See earlier footnote on temporary suspensions of evictions during 1959; Article 11 of the URL, however, permanently outlawed evictions.

70)[96] provides further evidence for the transformation of the role, meaning, and value of housing initiated by the URL. In the language of the URL, housing was now to serve a "social function"[97] rather than a means of enrichment or speculative purposes; in the language of Marxist academics, housing was stripped of its exchange value, assuming only its use value; or, to put it most simply, "housing [became] for people to live in, not to live from" (Peters 2014: 1).

Partially Limiting the Role of the State: The General Housing Law of 1984 & 1988

Over the next two decades, reality clashed with the URL, exposing its shortcoming, contradictions, and negative side effects,[98] and making necessary a major examination of housing policy in 1982, which led to new, comprehensive housing legislation. Nearly a quarter century after the landmark 1960 URL, the General Housing Law of 1984 (Law 48) rearranged the bundle of property rights yet again, in ways that limited the role of the state and expanded the private sphere—both the market and citizens/families—reflecting in many ways realities that were already present on the ground. Moreover, while the Law retained the language of the "social

[96] It is important to acknowledge that the law established a difference between the right to occupy and ownership (title). While co-residents possessed the right to occupy, they were required to make monthly payments to the heirs of the home, who possessed the right of ownership and, by extension, the right to be compensated the "legal price" of the home, as established in the URL.

[97] See URL, first "Whereas." Historian Jesse Horst (2014) argues that, following the lead of progressive constitutions across Latin America, Batista's 1937 *Plan Trienal* declared private property to have a "social function." Horst argues that political parties latched on to the phrase in debates leading up to the Constitutional Assembly, although, he points out, in a deliberately vague way (Horst 2014: 703). Article 87 of the 1940 Constitution recognized "the existence and legitimacy of private property in the broadest conception of its social function and without limitations beyond those that may be established by law due to public necessity or social interest" (quoted in Horst 2014: 703). Thus, while the notion of the "social function" of property already existed within Cuban law, the Cuban state of the Republican period seemed mainly to only pay it lip service, deliberately leaving the meaning of 'social function' vague and failing to implement concrete measures that would support the idea of the social function of housing.

[98] For a detailed discussion of the various factors that impelled new housing legislation, see Hamberg 1994: 361-68.

function" of housing, several of the new measures contributed to the partial re-commodification of housing. Those changes that went too far in threatening the social function of housing, however, were soon reversed as part of the "Rectification of Errors" campaign initiated in the mid-1980s.[99] By late 1988, a revised version of the GHL was released (Law 65), which "retained the essential elements of the 1984 law, but severely clamped down on what had been seen as 'liberalism' that had 'corrupted the social function of housing'" (Hamberg 1994: 374, quoting a newspaper from December 17, 1988). This revised version of the GHL continues to serve as the primary law legislating housing, though it has been modified in the three decades that followed.[100]

While the GHL departed from the URL in several momentous ways, it also built on the earlier legislation in some ways, most significantly by quantitatively expanding ownership. The GHL extended ownership rights to most tenants who had not already become homeowners through the 1960 URL;[101] it also granted ownership to others confronting illegal or ambiguous housing situations. As a result, by the close of 1988, 450,000 former tenants had become owners, continuing to make payments to the state in order to amortize the purchase price of the dwelling (Hamberg 1990b: 238); approximately 300,000 more individuals, primarily those who had built their homes themselves, were given proper title at no cost (Hamberg 1990b: 238). Beyond the

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[99] For more information on rectification and the rumored initiating incident, see Hamberg 1994: 43-44 and 373; also, Mesa-Lago 2000; Mesa-Lago 1990.

[100] Given space limitations, I don't go into detail of the modifications, such as Decree Law 211 of 2000 and Decree Law 233 of 2003.

[101] Those who lived in tenements did not become owners, but they did retain rent-free leases, as did shantytown residents (Hamberg 1990b: 238). Those living in units owned by or otherwise tied to workplaces, which accounted for approximately 145,000 units, did not become owners, but did receive special treatment by the law (Hamberg 1990b: 238).

numerical increase in homeownership, the GHL also expanded what it meant to be an owner by rearranging the bundle of sticks involved in homeownership. Being an owner now encompassed more than just living in the dwelling and making improvements to it;[102] owners now had expanded rights with respect to the transfer of ownership of their dwelling. In a marked departure from the 1960 URL, owners no longer required the prior approval of the state in order to swap their units. However, in the revised 1988 version of the GHL, the state retained the right to challenge suspicious trades, such as those that involved disproportionate exchanges, which were interpreted as being based in "lucrative operations" that involved the exchange of money or other goods to compensate for the difference (Article 69), and in a subsequent modification the requirement of prior approval was once again reinstated. In another marked departure from the past, the GHL granted owners the right to sell their homes at free-market prices, rather than the legal price established by the 1960 URL. While the state's right of first refusal remained in place, it was now to be exercised in a more limited way, namely for land-use control purposes and acquiring land for future public projects (Hamberg 1990b: 240). The latter measure was very short-lived, however, and the state began obliging sellers to sell their dwellings to the state (Hamberg 1990b: 240), effectively ending private home sales once again—with the state reoccupying the space that it had temporarily ceded to the market.

The GHL also included several other reversals to practices previously banned or restricted by earlier housing laws, notably in the area of private rentals. It allowed for short-term private rentals, thereby resurrecting the categories of landlord and tenant and the tenant-landlord

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[102] Regarding the question of maintenance and repair, the 1984 GHL made clear that it was the responsibility of the owners, except in the case of multi-dwelling buildings The responsibility for maintenance and repair in multi-dwelling buildings depended on the size of the building. In both cases, families would contribute fees for repairs. A residents' council was responsible in cases of low-rise structures, which numbered around 33,000; in high-rise elevator buildings, the residents' council was to consult with the municipal authorities (Hamberg 1990b: 238).

relation. Though private renting had been abolished by the URL of 1960, with the aim of preventing its exploitation for the enrichment of landlords, it became apparent over the next two decades that private renting was necessary in order to address inevitable demographic realities such as family formation, family conflict, divorce, internal migration, overcrowding, and so forth (Hamberg 1990b: 245, 514). While the GHL re-introduced private rentals and even granted to landlords the right to freely set the price (Article 94), it limited landlords to renting to no more than two families (Article 95)—in keeping with the idea that housing should not serve as a means of enrichment.

Yet another way the GHL broke from past legislation was in recognizing that the state alone could not be expected to meet the housing needs of the population. Up until the GHL of 1984, despite the fact that self-built constructions greatly outnumbered state-built constructions,[103] in the eyes and the official discourse of the state, it was still wholly responsible for ensuring dignified housing for citizens. This changed with the GHL of 1984, which "marked the first official recognition that it was unrealistic to expect all the dwellings needed to be provided by the state sector alone. At this stage, self-help practices obtained explicit recognition and support" (Mathéy 1989a: 70-71).[104] In fact, as early as 1970, the state recognized the huge

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[103] The 1970 census showed that only one-quarter of houses and apartments built since 1959 could be attributed to central government agencies—meaning three-quarters were self-built (Hamberg 1990b: 236).

[104] Mathéy describes how individual self-help construction, which "for a long time…was not accorded much attention within official programmes and policies" (1968a: 68) came to receive "explicit recognition and support" in the 1984 GHL (1968a: 70-71): "[S]elf-help was not accorded significant professional attention until the National Architects Conference in 1984. At this event, data from the 1981 housing census were analysed, and the figures revealed that between 1976 and 1980 only 164,000 dwellings had been constructed officially, either directly through the state or through the 'microbrigades'…At the same time, the net increase of the housing stock amounted to 246,000 units…. This discrepancy was accounted for by 'informal' constructions, most of them built by their occupants in self-help efforts. The census also revealed that a large number of these houses had serious structural problems, undoubtedly reflecting in part a lack of access to good quality building materials and professional expertise. To remedy this weakness the 1984 Housing Law laid down particular provisions in

disparity in the demand for housing and its ability to construct it, and called on citizens to participate in construction efforts. In a speech on the symbolic 26th of July, 1970, Fidel Castro proposed that workers form teams to build housing for themselves and their colleagues (Máthey 1989b: 69). Castro's call spurred the famous "microbrigade" movement,[105] in which some workers in a given workplace were released from their work duties (with pay) in order to form building brigades, while others maintained production in the workplace.[106] The dwellings completed by the microbrigade would be distributed amongst work colleagues according to need but also merits (i.e. job performance but also positive social behavior)[107]—and not necessarily to those who had participated in its construction.[108]

With the explicit support for self-building in the GHL, the state's role in ensuring dignified housing for its citizens shifted from primarily constructing units to providing technical assistance as well as standard quality building materials, both of which, it was hoped, would minimize the structural problems resulting from informal, self-built constructions (Mathéy 1989a: 68).[109] Support also sometimes came in the form of financing: the GHL introduced

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support of self-help housing, namely technical assistance and official outlets for standard quality building materials" (Máthey1989b: 68).

[105] For an excellent summary of microbrigades in Cuba, including its origins, structure, function, and evolution, see Mathéy 1989b.

[106] In 1971, 12,715 workers were participating in 444 micobrigades; by the following year the numbers had more than doubled, to 28,178 workers in 1,073 microbrigades (Mathéy 1989b, endnote 6).

[107] Social and work merit, in addition to housing needs, were requirements to be granted a building permit up until February of 2010 (Trefftz 2011: 37).

[108] By 1978, microbrigades had completed 82,000 dwellings (Mathéy 1989b: 69-70).

[109] The GHL of 1984 also cracked down on uncontrolled constructions (Hamberg 1990b: 244), most likely at least partly motivated by the structural problems that resulted from informal constructions. Since the mid-1980s, reports Hamberg, local authorities have "more actively policed and have even demolished" some dwellings in their early stages of construction that violated regulations (Hamberg 1990b: 244).

financing in the form of personal loans—not mortgages—to build or purchase new units or to repair existing units, but not to buy existing units or land (Hamberg 1990b: 239). Despite the new emphasis on self-help building, the state did not entirely bequeath its responsibility to ensure adequate housing for its citizens. It too continued to construct housing, but its main focus was different: it would now take on a supportive role, in the form of technical assistance, subsidized materials, and financing.

Another way in which the GHL differed markedly from earlier housing legislation was in the meaning and value that it attributed housing. Two measures in particular re-introduced the idea of the exchange value of housing, which had been erased by 1960, in favor of an understanding of housing not as a commodity but rather serving a purely "social function," defined primarily by its use value. Firstly, those who had become (or were in the process of becoming) owners of new housing constructed by the state saw the structure of their monthly payments change from income-based to value-based payments.[110] While the income-based system set payments of new, state-built housing to no more than 10 percent of family income (with the "rent" amortizing the purchase price of the home), the value-based system ushered in by the GHL of 1984 took into account the size, location, quality, and depreciation of the unit in determining the monthly payments. Secondly, whereas previously those exchanging houses would carry their personal debt with them, with the 1984 law parties to the transaction were permitted to exchange their debt or one party could assume the debt on both houses (Hamberg 1994: 427). In a related measure, tenure status was now tied to the unit rather than the parties

[110] Hamberg argues that while income-based rents seemed fair on the surface, it came to be regarded as unjust since some families paid low rents for large, centrally located homes while others paid high rents for small, poorly located ones (1990: 239).

involved in the swap, such that if a homeowner swapped residences with the occupant of a government-owned tenement, they would become a rent-free leaseholder, and the former occupant of the tenement would become a homeowner (Hamberg 1994: 54). These measures, then, now tied the value of housing to the dwelling itself, rather than the individuals that occupied them. In so doing, this new legislation now explicitly acknowledged that housing possessed a value beyond its use value. But it would be wrong to conclude that the exchange value of housing supplanted the idea that housing was to serve a social function. In fact, using housing as the basis for speculation, enrichment, or exploitation was still very much condemned, as we saw with the quick reversal of policy following the brief opening of the real estate market in the mid-1980s.

Not long after the revised GHL was issued, the Soviet Bloc collapsed and Cuba entered the euphemistically named "Special Period," characterized by severe material shortages that affected all aspects of daily life. Facing oil, electricity, and food shortages on a massive scale, housing construction and repair became even less of a priority, and microbrigades also dwindled.

Shifting Responsibility to the Private Sphere: Decree Law 288 of 2011

In April 2011, Cuban leaders gathered at the Sixth Communist Party Congress to discuss the "updating" (*actualización*) of the country's social and economic model. This was the first such meeting of the Party in over one dozen years, and the principal agenda item was a document containing 311 guidelines for reform, which were to chart a revised development strategy for the country while "guaranteeing the continuity and irreversibility of Socialism" (*Lineamientos,* 5 and 10). Three key themes emerged from the document: (1) plans to shift the state's role from administering the economy to regulating it; (2) intentions to decentralize economic decision-

making to more local levels (provinces and municipalities), and (3) the emphasis on the role that small private businesses, cooperatives, and farms (referred to collectively as the "non-state" sector) would play in the country's economy (Frank 2013b: 228). In other words, the plan outlined in the guidelines document signified a marked repositioning of the state vis-à-vis the private spheres of the market and private citizens/families. The housing section of the final version of the Guidelines is illustrative of this repositioning and the marked contrast it represented from the role of the state over most of the previous five decades.[111] The new guidelines for housing emphasized the need for "non-state" means, measures, modalities, and actors to solve the housing problem. Strategically avoiding the term "private," these guidelines nevertheless shifted responsibility away from the state, to these other spheres. The guidelines outlined the need to "adopt non-state measures" in the maintenance and conservation of housing (guideline 292), and called for a "significant proportion of self help" (on the part of citizens) as well as "other non-state channels" in the construction of housing (guideline 295). In fact, later the state would sell unfinished state buildings to individuals in order for them to terminate the construction within a specified period. Moreover, the state would no longer sell materials at subsidized prices, for the most part (guideline 299), though it did grant subsidies to those most in need (e.g. those affected by hurricanes) as well as small loans to build or repair homes. The most notable of the eight guidelines relating to housing, and, in fact, one of the most significant of all 313 guidelines, pertained to the free-market sale of residential real estate (guideline 297).

On November 11, 2011, Decree Law 288 (DL 288) broke with over 50 years of housing policy in Cuba by legalizing the free-market purchase and sale of homes by Cuban citizens and

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[111] The section on housing contained eight guidelines (#292-299).

permanent residents.[112, 113] Interested parties no longer require prior government authorization, and can simply go to the notary to complete the transaction They can freely determine the sales/purchase price, rather than have it capped at the artificially low legal price determined by the state. This groundbreaking measure resurrected the exchange value of housing, which had been largely erased by the 1960 URL. It unlocked capital previously unavailable to the over 85 percent of Cubans who by then owned their homes,[114] thus transforming the meaning, role, and value of housing from simply a dwelling to live in to an asset that could be cashed in. Another new measure in DL 288 allowed those exchanging their residences to legally accept payments as part of the swap (for example, in the case of an unequal swap, to compensate the owner with the more valuable housing).[115] Both of these measures served to re-commodify housing, but limits

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[112] Foreigners are still not permitted to buy homes in Cuba (as of 2022), except for in designated developments such as condominiums that were built by foreigners starting in the 1990s.

[113] While not conceived as part of DL 288, a subsequent Supreme Court ruling in February 2013 legalized sales transactions that occurred prior to the legalization of home sales in November 2011: "Following the decision, the Supreme Court sent an instruction (circular) to courts and judicial authorities across Cuba to ensure that the legal standard applied in Bouly's case [the original Supreme Court case that legalized a sales transaction that occurred prior to 2011] would be applied across the board. Buyers and sellers who made transactions before 2011 may thus appear before notarios to update the property title and to put the new owner's name on it and pay taxes. In cases like Bouly's where the seller is not cooperative, the buyer can go to a local court and, upon demonstrating evidence of the transaction, the court is instructed to represent the seller before the notario, relinquishing the seller's rights to the property so that the buyer can obtain title in his or her name" (Peters 2014: 21). For more details on the original case, see Peters 2014: 20-21.

[114] Admittedly, black market housing sales took place in the decades that sales were illegal, but sales were not common; moreover, since sales were illegal and buyers were therefore often left without title, the sale price was relatively limited.

[115] Also significant, potential emigrants gained the right to sell or transfer their home before leaving the country (Article 81.8.). Previously, the state would permanently confiscate the property of emigrants, including their dwelling. Even in cases in which the emigrant had transferred the dwelling (by swap or donation) to someone else before emigrating in order to avoid having it confiscated, the state had the right to nullify the transaction and confiscate the home from the new owner. This too changed with DL 288, which granted emigrants the right to sell their home at free-market prices. Even in the case that they did not manage to sell or transfer the home before emigrating, the state would facilitate the transfer of the home in question to the highest-ranking heir, in a specified order; the state would retain the property only if no potential heirs made claims to the property.

remained to curb speculation. Notably, DL 288 maintained a limit on the number of homes a person could own (one principal residence and one vacation home).[116] It introduced the second mortgage, but only on a second residence or empty lot, thus protecting primary residences from being confiscated for failure to pay. It also maintained the priority of co-occupants to remain in place over non-resident heirs upon the death of the owner. In short, the move to legalize the free-market sale of homes partially re-commodified housing, but with limits that sought to stem housing from serving as the basis of speculation and enrichment and to maintain a balance with the social function of housing.

The reshuffling of rights with respect to selling and swapping homes, as well as the other (non-housing) measures in the Guidelines document, such as a greater role for the private sector in the economy, marks a significant transformation in the role of the state vis-à-vis private citizens and families, and also the market. In the housing realm at least, the state relinquished many of the "sticks" it previously held, including the right of first refusal and the right to limit the monetary value of housing,[117] to name but two of the more noteworthy sticks it once held. Another significant change took place with respect to the state's role vis-a-vis emigrants: with this new legislation, potential emigrants gained the right to sell or transfer their home before leaving the country (Article 81.8.), marking a shift from the previous practice of the state confiscating the property of emigrants, including their dwelling. Even in cases in which the emigrant had transferred the dwelling (by exchange ("*permuta*") or donation) to someone else

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[116] This limit has been in place since the URL of 1960.

[117] The state still determines the "legal value" of housing units, which remains artificially low, but this legal value no longer serves as the limit to the sale price of homes, as it had in the past; rather, it establishes a minimum amount that parties to a sales transaction must declare when paying the 4 percent tax assessed on the sale of a home.

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No longer does the state loom large in housing transactions, deciding who may and may not sell their home, and for what price, but it still retains a place in the question of housing—and in the lives of its citizens—in Cuba. Since 2011, the state's role in housing is much closer to that of regulator of the free market exchange of residential property. For example, the state registers and legalizes the transaction (transfer of ownership), collects appropriate taxes on the sales transaction, and settles legal disputes that may arise from the transaction.[118] One enduring legacy from the prior approach is that the state continues to only grant surface rights to homeowners, and the state remains the owner of the land upon which residential buildings are built. This distinction is largely symbolic–residents of the buildings upon which that land is built are not affected by it, and consider their homes their own–but it does signify some resistance to the idea of fully commodifying property.

In a marked departure from the language of the radical Urban Reform Law of 1960, which declared in its opening article that "Every family has the right to dignified housing," Cuba's *National Plan for Economic and Social Development Until 2030*, approved in April 2016

[118] Changes to the property title (e.g. placing the new owner's name on the property title) requires notarization by a public notary, and the new title must be registered at the municipal property registry. Both buyers and sellers pay a 4 percent tax to the state. (So too do swappers who receive payment.) Moreover, since the actual transfer of money from the buyer to the seller or between swappers must occur via check using bank accounts, and the state owns all banks in Cuba, it is also present in this manner.

during the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, holds that citizens have "the *right to work* for dignified housing, for which the necessary conditions will be created, and social support provided for those who really need it" (Congreso PCC 2016: 6 (my emphasis)). Considered side by side, these statements show the radical transformation of the role of the state over the past nearly six decades. Once the guarantor of not only the housing needs of the population but also its social wellbeing more generally, the state now assumes a much more limited role, increasingly shifting the duties and responsibilities it once assumed to the private sphere, while maintaining a basic safety net for those most in need. Interestingly, this significant change has occurred without an accompanying change in ideology, politics, or ruling party; in fact, the Cuban state maintains that it is firmly committed to socialism. Despite its long-standing and continuous commitment to socialism, the Cuban state has followed a trend similar to countries in the west that have, since the late twentieth century, increasingly shifted the responsibility for the provision of goods and services onto the private sphere.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has traced the evolution of housing policy in post-1959 Cuba in terms of the configuration of rights and obligations contained in landmark pieces of housing legislation, in order to better understand social relations at particular moments during the elapsing six decades and continuities and discontinuities across these moments. By employing the concept of the bundle of rights, this paper makes visible how rights (and responsibilities) are reconfigured over time. By centering our focus on which actors hold which rights/obligations vis-à-vis others, this chapter has implicitly demonstrated why the private/collective/state-property formulation can be misleading, and has offered a more nuanced alternative understanding, one that recognizes that rights are multiple and can be subdivided across different actors. This more relational approach

also provides a lens onto understanding social relations more broadly, both at the level of particular kinds of actors as well as the societal division of labor between the state, the market, and private citizens and families more broadly. In concrete terms, this chapter has shown in detail the ways in which the state has increasingly shifted responsibility to the private sphere of citizens, families, and markets in the realm of housing.

CHAPTER 3: VALUE IN HAVANA'S RESIDENTIAL REAL-ESTATE MARKET

Introduction

As housing in Cuba became (re)commodified, it also served as a new and important axis of social stratification in Cuban society. As we saw in the preceding chapter, the Cuban state (or "*la Revolución*," as Cubans would refer to it) can be credited with providing housing for much of the population as well as converting many tenants into homeowners,[119] thereby reducing some of the more significant disparities that existed prior to the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Disparities in living conditions and in the value of homes continued to exist,[120] but became much more pronounced and consequential with the (re)commodification of housing that began in the 1990s and especially with the (re-)emergence of the real-estate market in Cuba starting in late 2011. When Cubans were permitted to use their home for income-generating activities such as opening

[119] This is not to say that the housing problem was solved in Cuba. On the contrary, "*el problema de la vivienda*" was a major issue throughout the life of the Revolutionary period in Cuba, and remains one of the most significant problems facing the Cuban population to this day.

[120] Even when the use-value of homes predominated, their exchange value was never fully eliminated, except for perhaps in the earliest years of the Cuban Revolution. During the decades that the *permuta* system was the primary instrument through which people could move from one home to another, differences in value of the homes being swapped were both recognized and compensated for in one way or another. Cuban urban expert Ricardo Nuñez (2008: 4-7, 2012: 95-98) outlines different phases of the *permuta* system. For the first decade after the Cuban Revolution, he argues, *permutas* did not involve compensation: instead, housing swaps were based on family needs and wishes. In this brief overview, he does not directly address whether or not there was any attempt to account for differences in the value of the home, such as swapping a smaller dwelling in a more favorable location for a larger dwelling in a less favorable one—a factor that certainly entered the calculus in later decades. Beginning in the 1970s, Núñez says, *permutas* regularly included compensation to account for the exchange of homes of unequal value. This compensation both took the form of money as well as assets and equipment, such as cars, color televisions, tape recorders, CD players, etc. Beginning in 1994, after the Cuban government legalized the American dollar and Cubans searched for ways to access hard currency, there was an increased emphasis on money as a form of compensation for unequal value of homes. Outside of the transfer of housing (through *permutas* or illegal sales), the shifting criteria the state used to determine how much a family would pay for their housing also supports the idea that housing preserved its exchange value. While the state initially used family income as the basis for determining the monthly housing payment, in later periods the state considered the location, quality, and size of the unit (see Hamberg (1994), chapter 12 for details).

up a small business inside their home and/or renting rooms to foreign tourists—a practice that started as early as the 1990s but greatly expanded after 2010, when the state introduced a series of economic reforms that lead to the drastic expansion of the private sector (see chapter four for more details)—disparities in housing conditions took on new relevance, affecting not only the daily life of individuals and families but also shaping their prospects for inserting themselves into a lucrative sector of the emerging economy. Moreover, with the legalization of home sales/purchases at free market prices in 2011, which resurrected the exchange value of homes that had been largely suppressed ever since home sales were prohibited more than a half-century prior, disparities in the exchange value of homes were consequential in terms of their power to (re)stratify the population. After all, a person's or a family's home is their most valuable asset,[121] and the newfound ability to release the wealth stored in that home has important consequences for social mobility, as I argue in chapter four. It follows that the higher the economic value of the

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[121] It is possible that for some Cubans their automobile is their most valuable asset. This may be true even for some homeowners, given the exorbitant price of personal automobiles on the island. Only a small minority of Cubans own cars: it was reported in 2020 that approximately one in 20 Cubans owned a car (Acosta 2020). Up until September 2011, only cars that were already in Cuba before the 1959 revolution could be freely bought and sold. Cubans wishing to purchase a car built after 1959 needed to request a special permit, which tended only to be granted to doctors, diplomats, technicians, those completing foreign missions, and Cubans with bank accounts outside of Cuba (Mosendz 2014). As Miroff (2011) explains, "the Cuban government has long treated car ownership as a privilege and a reward, not a right." As such, the state allowed select doctors who completed missions abroad, military officers, Cuban diplomats, and exemplary workers to purchase a (usually heavily subsidized) automobile from the state (Miroff 2011, Reuters 2013). In 2014, Cuba began allowing anyone to purchase vehicles, either from one of the country's 11 state-run car dealerships or directly from the owner of a used car built after 1959. Despite the opening, only a small proportion of Cubans have actually purchased cars due to the prohibitive sales prices of both new and used vehicles. In the first six months after abolishing the permitting system, only 50 cars and 4 motorcycles were sold (Mosendz 2014). The combined sales for the 11 state-run car dealerships was $1.3 million, which averages to $23,800 per vehicle, most of which appeared to be used (Mosendz 2014). At the time, a Kia Rio that sold for $13,600 in the U.S. was selling for $42,000 in Cuba, and a Peugeot valued at $53,000 in the U.K. sells for $262,000 in Havana (Mosendz 2014). Even run-down Soviet-era automobiles (Ladas, Moskovichs) as well as "almendrones" from the 1940s and 1950s in poor condition can easily cost tens of thousands of dollars. Well-maintained convertibles from the 1950s—the kind newlyweds may rent to parade them down Prado after their nuptials or that tourists take selfies in for their social media—cost upwards of $50,000.

home, the better positioned that person or family is to capitalize on the opening of the real-estate market, using it as an opportunity for upward social mobility, all else being equal. Conversely, the lower the economic value of their home, the worse positioned the homeowner is to take advantage of the new opportunities for social mobility. This chapter aims to understand the factors that make a home more or less valuable on the free market in Cuba.

In this chapter, I outline the factors and characteristics of homes in Havana that make them more or less economically valuable on the free-market real estate market. The list of variables I identify is based on my interviews with buyers, sellers, and real-estate agents; my observations at the informal, open air real-estate market on Prado; and my review of listings of homes for sale on real-estate agency websites as well as general peer-to-peer sales websites such as *Revolíco*, *Porlalivre*, and *Cubísima*. Since my interest is the (differential) amount of wealth Cubans (potentially) gained access to when housing was (re)commodified in 2011, I focus on the price the home is listed for (and the actual sales price, for homes that have been sold), rather than the legal price of homes set by the Cuban state, which are used as a basis to calculate the minimum amount of tax to be paid by buyers and sellers on the sales transaction,[122] or the prices officially declared by buyers and sellers, which usually coincide with or are slightly above the legal price. Both the legal price set by the state and the officially declared sales prices, after all, are usually far lower than the actual amount the home is sold for. Moreover, the legal and declared price is set in the (weaker) Cuban peso ("*moneda nacional*" or CUP) rather than the

[122] Although a legal framework for residential property taxes exists in Cuba, it has yet to be enforced. Effectively, then, there is no property tax in Cuba. The tax I refer to here is, instead, a tax on the transfer of ownership through the sales transaction. The tax on home sales is 8 percent of the declared sales price or 8 percent of the legal price set by the state, whichever is higher. This tax is split by the buyer and seller, such that each party pays 4 percent. In practice, buyers and sellers tend to declare the (minimum) legal price as the official sale/purchase price, or slightly higher than the legal price.

(stronger) hard currency that homes are usually sold in (the convertible peso or CUC).[123] While my focus is on exchange value, I recognize that the value of home encompasses more than how much money a family can extract from its sale. Moreover, while I specifically focus on the objective characteristics of a home that determine its economic value, I recognize that subjectivity and interaction also shape economic value. I first wish to address these two points before turning my attention to the objective characteristics that determine a home's value.

Some caveats regarding value

More than just money: different kinds of value

Given my interest in this chapter in how homes serve as a (potential) source of wealth, and how, through their sale, families can (potentially) achieve upward social mobility, I focus on exchange value rather than other forms of value bound up in a person's or family's home. It is worth explicitly stating what is hopefully an obvious fact: a person's or family's home is valuable for a variety of reasons entirely independent of its economic value on the free market. Gender scholars first drew attention to the fact that home is where much of daily life plays out, and an important site of social reproduction. Home is where memories are made, both pleasant and unpleasant. For some, home is a refuge from the outside world, a safe place to land. Considering specific characteristics of a home rather than the concept of home more generally, objective characteristics of homes such as its size, structural condition, amenities, and location, to name a few, are valuable not just because of how much money they command on the open

[123] While outside of the scope of this chapter, it would be interesting to compare the (weights assigned to) factors and characteristics the state uses to determine the legal price of dwellings to the factors used on the free market (i.e. the ones that buyers and sellers and intermediaries such as real estate agents use to determine the listing price). This analysis has the potential to reveal what the state considers valuable not just in economic but also in moral terms as compared to the market.

market, but also because these factors contribute to the quality of life for the inhabitants of the home. In the terminology of Marxist economists, these characteristics have use value independent of their exchange value. To be clear, when and if the owner decides to sell their home, these characteristics certainly impact the sales price, but even if the owner never sells their home, they hold value in and of themselves. In reality, “use and exchange value are simultaneously bound up for individual housing consumers” (Besbris and Korver-Glenn 2022: 3).

Determining economic value: More than just objective characteristics

Real estate agents that I interviewed spoke about the economic value of a home as grounded in characteristics such as location, size, and structural condition, and the process of determining a home’s value therefore as largely objective, self-evident, and unproblematic. To the extent that they recognized subjective factors that shape the sales price, they portrayed them as corrupting and egregious. This is evident in the comments by the manager of one real estate agency, who expressed his frustration about clients arriving at a list price based on their needs and wants instead of the characteristics of the home, saying, “That’s not a reason why your house is worth that much! A house is worth X amount because it’s located in X neighborhood, because its square footage is X, because its condition is X—but not because you want to buy something later [with the money you earn from the sale]!” (Interview, January 5, 2016). These and other objective factors that I enumerate below undeniably anchor the economic value of a home. They do so in reference to a hypothetical, generalized buyer. This hypothetical buyer is not necessarily the average buyer, I propose, but one that recognizes—and, importantly, is willing to pay for—the value added by each of these characteristics. Objective characteristics of a home are not

equally valued by all potential buyers, which ultimately influences the amount they are willing to pay for the home or whether they put in an offer in the first place. For example, while elderly buyers or people with limited physical mobility may be willing to pay a premium for a ground-floor unit, a young person in full health may not attach the same value to the fact that the unit is on the ground floor.[124] A buyer with intentions of opening a business catered to international tourists heavily values the location of the home, but a buyer simply looking for a family home to inhabit may not accord the same value to that location. It is important therefore to recognize and take into account how both these objective and subjective factors together constitute value.

Objective characteristics that determine home value

The economic value of a home in Cuba is determined by a variety of factors, including:

- size of the home (square footage), number of bedrooms, number of bathrooms;
- type of home (e.g. detached single-family home, apartment, an entire floor of a multi-story building ("*propriedad horizontal*"), a duplex ("*biplanta*"), penthouse, etc.
    - If an apartment building:

[124] Sociologist Max Besbris (2020) has called into question the notion that buyers have fixed preferences, arguing that preferences are shaped in interaction. Based on his ethnography of real estate agents in New York, he notes, "Potential buyers may begin the search process thinking they want one thing, but their preferences, including what they are willing to spend and where they want to live, can change through the course of interacting with agents and the market more generally" (8). Besbris concludes "Interactions are key to understanding how we form preferences and make decisions. Put more plainly, preference—and the decisions that flow from them—are products of interaction. They are formed, re-formed, and acted upon during interaction. To fully comprehend how interaction conditions decisions in economic markets, we should abandon (or at least be extremely suspicious of) accounts that describe individuals as having defined and distinct goals that are transsituational. More radically, we might do away with the notion of preference, or at least any definition that elides the situation and context in which the preference is formed and negotiated" (114). Besbris and Korver-Glenn (2022) similarly underscore the central role that interactions between real estate agents and buyers play in value determination, and introduce the concept of "value fluidity" to describe how "value criteria can change in interaction" (2).

        - the number of apartments that share a floor;
        - which floor, and whether there is a functioning elevator;

- structural condition and overall condition (e.g. water filtration);
- quality of building materials used to build the home;
- location;
    - proximity to and quality of neighborhood amenities (e.g. agricultural markets, grocery stores, access to public transportation, etc.)
    - potential for using (part of) the home as commercial space (e.g. on or near a main street, in a tourist zone, etc.);
    - prestige of the neighborhood;
    - flood risk after heavy rains;
    - views of the sea;
- access to and reliability of public services such as running water, natural gas provided through a municipal line (rather than propane tanks), and electricity;
- suitability and potential for private enterprise inside the home (this is different than above in that it refers to the interior of the home rather than its location, including factors such as the home's size, layout, whether it is on a ground floor or upper floor, etc.);
- whether the residence has direct access to the street ("*puerta calle*") or is down a long corridor that several residences share ("*interior*");
- possibility to build an expansion (e.g. additional rooms or separate residences), including vertically ("*placa libre*" or "*azotea libre*")—especially important given the significant housing shortage in Havana;

- adaptations made to the home (which can either enhance its value or detract from it, depending on the extent to which it preserves/compromises the original design, the quality of the execution, etc.) (e.g. subdividing the home by erecting walls, constructing "*barbacoas*"—a mezzanine, a low second story, often constructed in colonial buildings with high ceilings, and most frequently used as a bedroom, etc.)
- security features such as gates, ironwork doors, and ironwork over windows;
- special and/or luxury amenities that are in limited supply, such as garage/carport, home telephone line, swimming pool;
- original design features such as marble, spanish tilework, special architectural details, and so forth;
- having housing documents (including title) in legal order (as a way to signal that the property is not at risk of being reclaimed by and potentially restituted to original owners).

All of these variables contribute to a greater or lesser degree in determining the sales price, though some factors (e.g. location, size, structural condition) carry more weight than others. Some of the variables that enter the calculus in determining sales price are largely universal (e.g. square footage and location), while others are more relevant in the Global South (e.g. having proper titles, access to municipal services), and still others are particular to Cuba itself. One factor peculiar to Cuba that warrants additional comment, both because it is less familiar to the reader and because it is consequential for my larger argument about how Cubans found themselves differently positioned to extract wealth from their homes when the real-estate market (re-)opened in 2011 is whether the home was built prior to or after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Another variable that I look at more closely is location, and particularly how a once-run down

neighborhood, Old Havana, has become highly desirable in Havana's emerging real-estate market.

Capitalist homes versus socialist apartments

One major marker of economic value is whether or not the home was built prior to or following the 1959 Cuban Revolution, with pre-1959 "capitalist" homes generally commanding significantly higher sales prices than homes constructed post-1959. It is common practice for listings of homes for sale on websites such as *Revolíco* or *Porlalivre* to advertise that the residence is a "capitalist construction." Whatsmore, many listings not only mention that the home was constructed during the capitalist period in the body of the listing, but include the word "*capitalista*" in the very title of the listing. The fact that this characteristic is featured so prominently in listings suggests that sellers (and presumably buyers) regard it as a key selling feature and determinant of value, ahead of other important characteristics. Advertising the residence for sale as "capitalist" is a way to signal the higher quality of the residence being sold—in terms of design, general aesthetic choices, craftsmanship, and building materials used in the construction—relative to residences built after 1959.[125] In the decades leading up to the Cuban Revolution, it was common for upper-middle class families to commission custom-

[125] The distinction between higher-quality homes built pre-1959 and lower-quality pens built from 1959 onwards is a rough one. There is of course a good deal of variation within the quality of housing built during the pre-1959 capitalist era, as a quick glance at the 1953 census report demonstrates. The generalizations tend to hold when comparing residential buildings and single-family homes designed by architects to residences built through a family's own initiative or an organized micro-brigade. There were also self-built and slum-like dwellings constructed during the capitalist era, but these are not referred to as "capitalist constructions" because they do not have the same quality associated with pre-1959 capitalist constructions. With this in mind, the distinction between "capitalist" versus post-1959 constructions figures prominently in terms of the subjective perceptions by buyers and sellers, and therefore is very real in its consequences in terms of perceived value and pricing.

designed, single-family homes[126]—a practice that came largely to an end after the Revolution,[127] when over half of the island's architects emigrated and those that remained were "assigned to higher priority projects" (Hamberg 1994: 88, citing Baeza 1986: 3; Hamberg 1994: 93). According to official estimates published in late 2018, 67 percent of the existing housing stock of 3.8 million units has been built since 1959, a total of over 2.5 million units (Bustamante Molina and Castro Morales 2018). After the Revolution, housing was typically constructed either in a piece-meal way through individual self-building, or by the state (including microbrigades), the latter relying heavily on prefabricated or semi-prefabricated materials to make large-scale, monotonous housing projects.[128]

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[126] For examples of custom-designed and otherwise grandiose homes built before the Revolution, and to see their interiors as they are found present-day, see Cuban American architect Hermes Mallea's (2011, 2017) impressive collection of photographs, accompanied by short histories of the homes, their original owners, and, in some cases, current occupants.

[127] There is evidence that architect-designed homes were indeed constructed in the earliest years of the Revolution: during the first five years following the Revolution—especially in the first three years—approximately 7,500 architect-designed units were built (Hamberg 1994: 88, citing Arrinda 1964: 16, IUA 1963: 80).

[128] Havana was not unique in this regard; socialist cities across Central and Eastern Europe commonly featured "[A]ustere residential district[s] composed of seemingly endless repetitions of identical pre-fabricated high-rise buildings" (Hirt and Stanilov 2007: 230). In their study of Sofia, Bulgaria, Hirt and Stanilov (2007) draw attention to the ways that individuals and families made adaptations to their units in these otherwise uniform buildings, in modest ways during socialism and more significantly in the post-socialist period. They note, "In the absence of coordinated governmental strategy and policies for maintaining and upgrading the quality of the built environment in those districts, residents have begun to rehabilitate their dwellings on their own….[T]he variety of materials and colors used in this process adds a touch of frivolous individuality to the ascetic look of the pre-fabricated high-rises, serving as a visual symbol of both the efforts of the individual residents to improve their environment and the failure of the government to address coherently their needs" (2007: 233-34).

Figure 3. 1: Photographs of microbrigade buildings

Photograph taken by author in December 2017 of a typical five-story microbrigade building, located in the municipality of Diez de Octubre in Havana.

Photograph taken by author in January 2016 of a microbrigade building in the city of Cienfuegos.

Photograph taken by Alexander Berezhnoy in July 2014 of microbrigade buildings in Alamar, Havana (CC BY 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>, via Wikimedia Commons)

The prototypical residence built in the post-1959 period is a multi-family apartment building made of pre-fabricated materials, often referred to as a "*micro*," short for "microbrigade," referring to the collective self-help groups of largely unskilled workers with no experience in construction who built these buildings (see chapter five for more details on microbrigades, and figure 3.1 for an example of a microbrigade building). As Hamberg (1994) explains:

> The microbrigade-fostered building boom of the early 1970s brought with it a new crop of large-scale housing projects on the outskirts of most Cuban cities, characterized by endless rows of four-and five-story walk-ups in enormous superblocks. Walk-ups also started to appear in rural new towns. High-rise prefabricated buildings began springing up in several provincial

> capitals and with greater frequency in both central and outlying areas of Havana. These trends in city planning and design continued well into the 1980s. (P. 159)

Microbrigades were responsible for erecting entire satellite cities around Havana like Alamar, Altahabana, Cotorro, San Agustín, and Reparto Eléctrico (Mathéy 1989a: 69). The largest concentration of large-scale housing complexes is found in Alamar, which houses around 100,000 (and by some estimates between 120,000 and 150,000) of Havana's 2.1 million inhabitants, making it one of the largest if not the largest public housing project in the world. Alamar is located approximately 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) east of Havana's city center,[129] and is composed of 25 "zones" with no central plaza. One of its districts is so "isolated, poorly built, and bereft of services" that it earned the informal name of "Siberia" (Hamberg 1994: 158). The microbrigade movement was successful in constructing a large number of housing units,[130] and in so doing providing housing to countless Cuban families, but the quality of the units tended to be poor:

> End-of-the-year round-the-clock buildings "marathons" produced poor-quality structures, causing innumerable maintenance problems later. Quality was also affected by the general "de-skilling" of the construction labor force. Many craftsmen left construction in the early 1960s since other jobs paid more and were less grueling. Microbrigade workers were largely unskilled in construction, and did not attain competence until the end of their stints…Waterproofing of roofs and other joints remained an issue. (Hamberg 1994: 158)

The overall poor quality of microbrigade buildings, especially those located in peripheral areas of the city (as is the case for the majority) translates into low market value in Cuba's emerging

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[129] Alamar was originally envisioned as a suburb of Havana, and a tunnel that connects the rest of Havana to Alamar was constructed in 1958. There is indeed public transportation that transports people from Alamar to Havana, but it is considered somewhat remote from the rest of the city.

[130] Microbrigades, which were initiated in 1970, had built 100,000 units by 1983, which accounted for almost half of all state-built housing during this period (Veiga 1984, cited in Hamberg 1994: 172-73).

real-estate market. At the time of my fieldwork in 2015 and 2016, two- or three-bedroom apartments in Alamar were listed for sale for approximately 8,000 to 12,000 CUC. A May 2015 *Washington Post* article suggests an even lower price range, stating, "Alamar apartments list for $5,000 to $10,000, a tenth of what they would be worth in parts of the city that attract tourists" (Miroff 2015). The Revolution provided many families with a place to live, but the families that live in these microbrigade buildings as well as some other homes built after 1959 are finding that the exchange value in the emerging real-estate market is relatively low, and thus their ability to improve their economic situation by cashing in on the wealth stored in their home (by selling it) is limited.

Location, location, location in a tourist-oriented economy

In an increasingly tourist-oriented economy, location is a crucial factor in determining the market value of a home as well as its income-generating potential as a site for business, with homeowners in areas of the city popular amongst tourists much better positioned to take advantage of opportunities in the emerging economy than homeowners in more remote, non-tourist areas of the city. During the 1990s, following the collapse of Cuba's largest trading partner, international tourism became a central component of Cuba's economic development strategy. Long ago Cuba had been a well-known haven for international tourists, welcoming 272,000 international tourists in 1958 (the year preceding the Cuban Revolution), but tourist arrivals fell dramatically to under 4,000 annually between 1959 and 1973 (Taylor 2009: 114). Cuba once again began to promote tourism in 1975, increasing the number of visitors to over 300,000 by 1990, but it wasn't until the onset of the Special Period in the 1990s that the industry

really took off, and by 2003 the number of annual tourists exceeded two million for the first time (Taylor 2009: 114).

Beach resorts like Varadero were a large draw for tourists, but the Cuban government also placed great emphasis on converting the capital, Havana, into a world-class tourist city. Urban historian Henry Louis Taylor Junior (2009) offers insight into the strategy behind making Havana a tourist city:

> Turning Havana into a tourist city was a tricky proposition. Urban tourism is a unique industry in which cities become commodities and sites of consumption for travelers. Thus, to convert a city into an international tourist destination, not only must a tourism niche be identified and developed, but also a sophisticated tourist infrastructure must be developed to support the industry. Colonial architecture provided Havana with a unique niche in the highly competitive Caribbean tourist industry, and this led to the development of urban-heritage tourism as the economy's principal component…Urban-heritage tourism anchored the new tourist economy, and the restoration and renovation of historic buildings and places drove its development. (P. 63)

Taylor goes on to give an excellent description of what exactly was involved in turning Havana into a world-class tourist city, which warrants quoting at length:

> First, with its treasure chest of colonial architecture and fortifications, the restoration of Habana Vieja, the Old City, became the focal point of the city's tourism strategy. Designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1982, Habana Vieja was a living museum with a diverse landscape of narrow streets and plazas featuring Spanish, Moorish, Greek, and Roman architectural styles. It was also a densely populated area that contained numerous dilapidated structures and a largely Afro-Cuban population….Under the direction of [City Historian Eusebio Leal] the northern core of Habana Vieja became a prime tourist site and was restored so that it met the needs, wants, and expectations of tourists. This meant turning historic buildings into hotels, bars, restaurants, entertainment places, museums, art galleries, shops, and stores, and making the place safe….The second key to converting Havana into a tourist city required the development of a sophisticated infrastructure to support the industry. Although Habana Vieja represents only a small part of the city, its conversion into the city's prime tourist destination triggered related historic restoration, renovations, and new construction across the city, especially in Vedado and Miramar. (P. 63-64)

In an attempt to draw international tourists to the city, the Cuban state invested in select areas of the city. In addition to drastically expanding hotel capacity through both construction and rehabilitation efforts,[131] the state invested in infrastructure that could accommodate visitors, including fine-dining restaurants, entertainment venues, retail facilities, and more. This new or rehabilitated infrastructure tended to be concentrated in select coastal neighborhoods, including the historic Habana Vieja as well as the historically bourgeoisie Miramar and Vedado neighborhoods.

Knowing just how lucrative the tourism industry was, Cubans were eager to get a slice of the tourism pie, and found ways to plug into the tourist economy either formally or informally.[132] Cubans began renting out rooms in their homes to international visitors, an option that appealed to travelers on a budget or those who preferred getting a taste of "how real Cubans live" to staying at a hotel. Room rentals had been legalized under the 1988 General Housing Law No. 65 (Article 74), but they were meant to serve the needs of the domestic population and were not envisioned to include international tourists. With growing numbers of international visitors, the Cuban state began regulating rentals in May 1997, lifting the prior restriction on renting no more than two rooms, but requiring lessors to obtain a license.[133] By May 1999, over 8,943 licenses

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[131] Taylor (2009: 64-65) provides figures showing the growth of hotel capacity: "Between 1990 and 2000, the number of hotel rooms in Cuba, keeping pace with arrivals, doubled from 18,565 to 37,178. In Havana alone the total number of rooms increased from 4,682 rooms in 1988 to 12,002 rooms in 2002….By mid-2000, Cuban officials predicted 64 percent of their rooms would be in the four- and five-star categories."

[132] Since my focus is on housing, I do not discuss in detail the numerous other ways that Cubans inserted themselves into the tourist economy, which include working in hotels or tourist establishments, providing transportation to tourists, engaging in sex work, hustling, and so forth.

[133] Decree-Law 171 of 1997 regulated private home rentals.

had been issued for these "*casas particulares"* (Mas 1999, cited in Henken 2001), although the number of rentals was likely much higher, since many Cubans operated rentals without a license.[134] It was common knowledge that "most Cubans who were renting rooms in their homes could make many times the average peso salary of a state employee as they were charging their foreign guests in dollars and not paying any taxes" (Henken 2001).

Those Cubans who lived in areas of high tourist activity were well-positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities for economic gain through room rentals presented by the rise in tourism, compared to Cubans who lived in areas of little interest to tourists. Data that I obtained from Havana's Office of Work (*Dirección de Trabajo*), presented in table 3.1, supports this claim. In the absence of the distribution of rental licenses by municipality in the late 1990s and 2000s, the data presented for September 2010 gives us an approximation of how many people were renting rooms during the time period for which data is not available: as was explained to me by the person providing the data, they use September 2010 as a baseline because it reflects the number of license holders that held onto their rental licenses after the issuance of new licenses was suspended. The highest concentration of licenses for rentals inside residential properties were located in the municipalities of Playa (which contains the neighborhood of Miramar) (19.3 percent of all licenses in September 2010), Plaza (which contains the

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[134] Henken (2001) writes, "Though there are no reliable statistics on the numbers of existing clandestine renters, the numbers provided by [a journalist for the official Communist Party newspaper, *Granma*] do give a clear idea of the extent of underground activity. For example, she indicated that in the province of Ciudad de La Habana, a total of 3,069 persons requested information on rental procedures from municipal housing offices. However, only 1,364 persons actually requested applications to formalize their registration, and just 419 of these became registered once approved. Finally, by the end of August 1997, a mere 92 renters were paying the corresponding monthly taxes." Moreover, Henken (2001) continues, "housing and immigration authorities present statistics to the effect that in only the first third of 1997 (January – April) just over a fifth of vacationers who came into the country stayed in private homes (more than 67,900 persons)."

neighborhood of Vedado) (35.2 percent of all licenses), Habana Vieja (4.2 percent of all licenses), and also Centro Habana (the municipality between Old Havana and El Vedado) (20.7 percent of all licenses). Taken together, 79.4 percent of all rental licenses inside residential homes active in September 2010 were located in these four municipalities–which are the municipalities most of interest to tourists–despite these municipalities only housing 26.4 percent of Havana's population in 2012;[135] just 20.6 percent of all rental licenses were distributed amongst the remaining 11 municipalities in Havana.[136] This pattern in the geographic distribution of rentals persisted after the 2010 measures that greatly expanded self-employment. The four most tourist-oriented municipalities continued to have a strong foothold on rental licenses in February 2016, representing a combined 64.7 percent of all rental licenses in Havana. This data does not distinguish between whether the rental is being used for overnight stays of foreigners or being rented to a self-employed individual for them to set up their small business, but the dominance of Playa, Plaza, Centro Habana, and Habana Vieja is clear in comparison to other municipalities.[137]

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[135] According to the 2012 population census, 8.5 percent of Havana's population lived in Playa, 7.0 percent in Plaza, 6.7 percent in Centro Habana, and 4.2 percent in Habana Vieja. With respect to the surface area of these municipalities, Playa occupies 35.8 square kilometers (4.9 percent of Havana's total surface area), Plaza occupies 12.3 square kilometers (1.7 percent of Havana's total surface area), Centro Habana occupies the least amount of surface area–just 3.4 square kilometers or 0.5 percent of all surface area in Havana–and Habana Vieja occupies the second least amount of surface area, with just 4.4 square kilometers or 0.6 percent of all of Havana's surface area.

[136] Centro Habana was not invested in nearly as heavily as Habana Vieja or Miramar and the housing in this neighborhood is generally considered to be in poor condition, but it's strategic location between Habana Vieja and El Vedado makes it very popular amongst tourists.

[137] Perhaps surprisingly, a slightly higher proportion of rental licenses were located in the municipality of Habana del Este than in the more tourist-oriented Habana Vieja as of February 29, 2016 (8.1 percent versus 7.2 percent, respectively). Habana del Este is not known as a popular destination among international tourists, but given its sandy beaches and homes with swimming pools, it is a popular option among Cubans looking for a beach getaway at a much lower cost than beach resorts geared to international tourists, such as Varadero (a mere hour to hour-and-a-half outside of Havana).

Table 3.1: Number of licenses issued to rent homes/rooms/spaces in residential properties in Havana, by municipality, September 2010 versus February 2016

Municipality in Havana	**Number of licenses active in Sept. 2010**	**Percentage of all licenses in Havana active in Sept. 2010**	**Number of licenses active, Feb. 2016**	**Percentage of all licenses in Havana, Feb. 2016**	**Number of licenses issued, total ("*altas*")**	**Percentage of all licenses issued in Havana ("altas")**	**Number of forfeited licenses ("*bajas*")**	**Percentage of all forfeited licenses in Havana ("*bajas*")**
Playa *(contains the Miramar neighborhood)*	520	19.3%	2,029	16.9%	3,040	16.4%	1,531	16.5%
Plaza (*contains El Vedado neighborhood*)	947	35.2%	2,992	25.0%	3,800	20.5%	1,755	19.0%
Centro Habana	558	20.7%	1,871	15.6%	2,566	13.8%	1,253	13.5%
Habana Vieja	113	4.2%	860	7.2%	1,205	6.5%	458	4.9%
Regla	10	0.4%	107	0.9%	265	1.4%	168	1.8%
Habana del Este	95	3.5%	964	8.1%	1,455	7.8%	586	6.3%
Guanabacoa	23	0.9%	244	2.0%	557	3.0%	336	3.6%
San Miguel de Padrón	16	0.6%	182	1.5%	507	2.7%	341	3.7%
Diez de Octubre	95	3.5%	655	5.5%	1,173	6.3%	613	6.6%
Cerro	46	1.7%	401	3.3%	771	4.2%	416	4.5%
Marianao	40	1.5%	433	3.6%	857	4.6%	464	5.0%
La Lisa	43	1.6%	201	1.7%	432	2.3%	274	3.0%
Boyeros	153	5.7%	488	4.1%	825	4.4%	490	5.3%
Cotorro	4	0.1%	173	1.4%	412	2.2%	243	2.6%
Total	***2,690***		***11,971***		***18,542***		***9,261***	

Source: Based on data provided to the author from the Dirección de Trabajo in Havana.
It was explained to the author by the person providing the data that September 2010 is referenced as a baseline because it reflects the number of license holders that held onto their rental licenses after the issuance of new licenses was suspended (they initially began to be issued

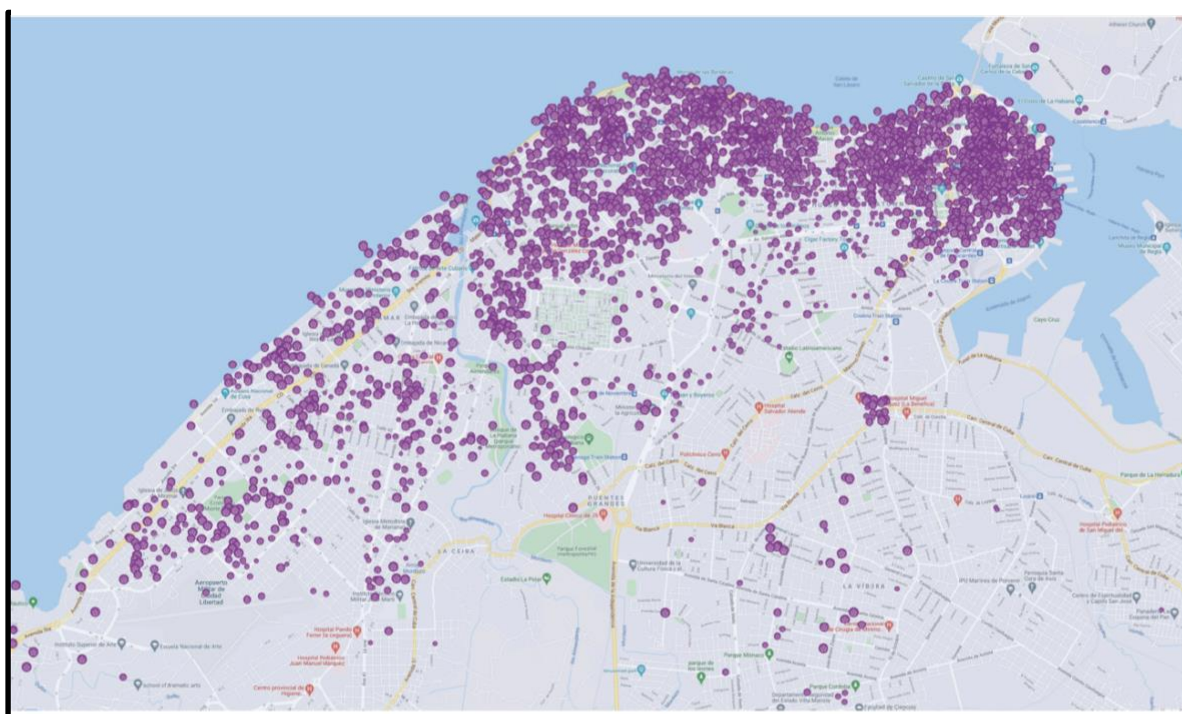
in 1997). It is unclear whether the number of licenses issued in total (labeled in the original data as simply "altas") and the total number of licenses forfeited (labeled in the original data as simply "bajas") is counted since licenses were initially issued in 1997 or since they started to be re-issued after September 2010. The "end date" up to which point the total number of licenses issued and forfeited is calculated is the end of February 2016 ("cierre de febrero 2016"). Reportedly between May 1997 (when licenses began to be issued) and May 1999, over 8,943 licenses had been issued for casas particulares (Mas 1999, cited in Henken 2001), and this is presumably across the island, not just in Havana. The total number of licenses issued in Havana alone, according to the data in the table, was 18,542 by February 2016.

While the data in table 3.1 does not distinguish between room/home rentals and rentals for other types of businesses, a map created by geographers Jolivet and Alba-Carmichael (2021), reproduced in figure 3.1, does indeed give us a sense of the geographic distribution of home rentals for overnight stays, and further supports the patterns evident in the data from table 3.1. Figure 3.1 shows the locations of "entire homes" advertised on the room/home rental platform Airbnb in February 2021. The map does not show the city of Havana in its entirety, but the pattern is clear: the areas with the highest concentration of rentals are Habana Vieja (the easternmost section of the map, with the densest amount of purple dots representing rentals), Centro Habana ((just slightly west of Habana Vieja), El Vedado (slightly west of Centro Habana, near the center of the coastal area depicted on the map and stretching up until the river), and Miramar/Playa (the western section of the map, west of the river) (see figure 3.2 for clearer depictions of where each of these municipalities is located).[138] We can expect that the striking geographic concentration of rentals for foreign tourists depicted in figure 3.1 has been largely similar since tourism started booming in Havana in the 1990s. The residents living in these areas were relatively well-positioned to capitalize on the influx of tourists in their neighborhoods, using their homes to generate much-needed income by renting rooms to tourists or setting up

[138] Habana del Este is located on the top right corner of figure 3.1 (separated by water from the other part of Havana and connected by a tunnel), but is largely cut off from view.

other tourist-related services inside their homes, one of the most popular being restaurants serving authentic Cuban dishes.

Figure 3. 2: Map of the location of short-term rentals in Havana listed as "entire home" rentals on the Airbnb rental platform, February 2021



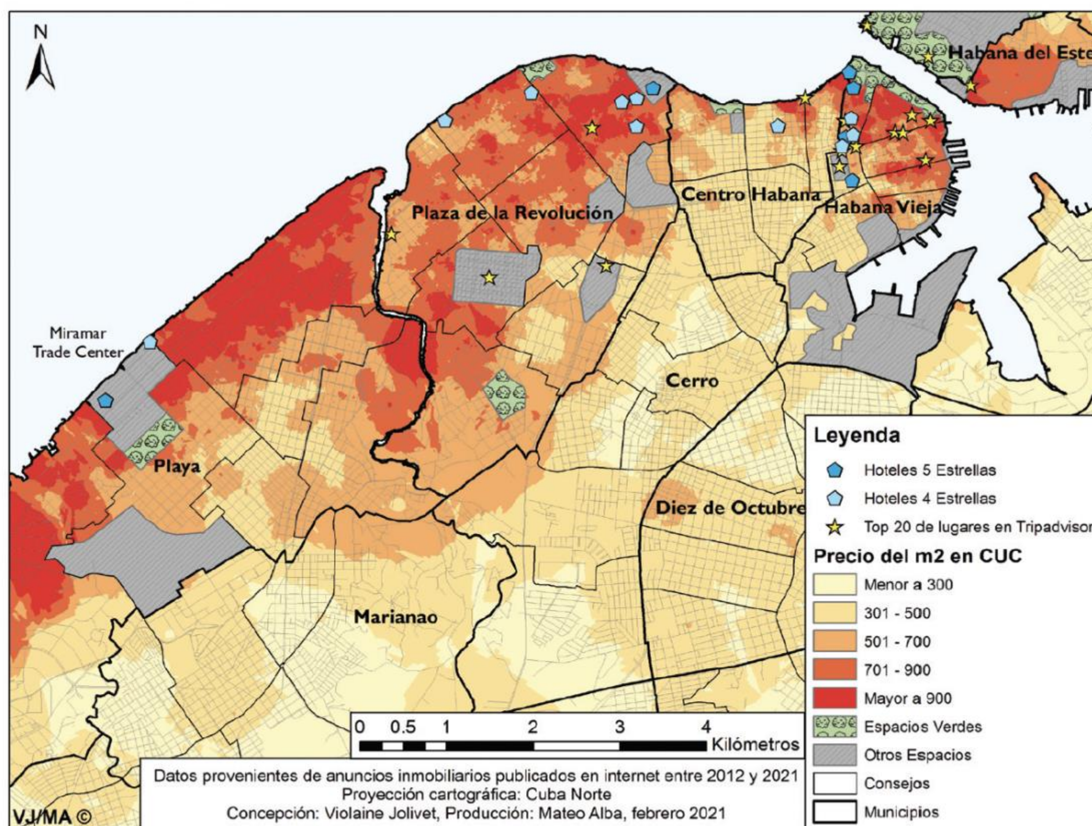
Reproduced from Jolivet and Alba-Carmichael 2021

In addition to renting out space in their homes, with the legalization of free-market home sales in 2011, Cuban homeowners living in areas of high tourist interest once again found themselves in a relatively advantageous position for economic gain: their homes tended to be valued highly in the emerging real-estate market relative to similar houses elsewhere in the city, by virtue of being located in a neighborhood of high interest to tourists. The real estate agents that I interviewed all reported that the homes that commanded the highest prices on the market (as well as the highest-demand areas by their clients) were located precisely in those areas of

Havana with high tourist interest: Habana Vieja, Vedado, and Miramar/Playa.[139] Another map by geographers Jolivet and Alba-Carmichael (2021) corroborates my findings, showing the large disparities in home prices between tourist and non-tourist areas in a very visually striking way. Figure 3.2 shows the price per square meter of homes listed for sale on the internet between 2012 and 2021, with the lighter shades representing lower prices per square meter and the darker shades representing higher ones (see figure 3.2). This map shows that homes in most areas of Havana are listed for a price that equates to less than 500 CUC per square meter, and sometimes even less than 300 CUC per square meter. The areas of high tourist interest mentioned earlier, however, are virtually all valued for above 500 CUC per square meter (see the medium and dark orange areas of the map), and some are even listed for upwards of 900 CUC per square meter (see the dark red areas of the map).

[139] Interestingly, virtually all of the real estate agencies in Havana that had storefronts were also located in these three neighborhoods (Habana Vieja, Vedado, or Playa). There was one exception: one of the branches of a (three-branch) real-estate agency was located in the municipality of 10 de octubre (the other two branches were located in Vedado and Playa).

Figure 3. 3: Map of home prices (per square meter), by neighborhood, in Havana, 2012-2021



Reproduced from Jolivet and Alba-Carmichael 2021

There are of course a host of variables that contribute to higher or lower home values, as I enumerated earlier in this chapter, but the location of these homes in areas of high tourist interest and activity is a decisive factor in the higher prices. The investments the state made in their neighborhoods in order to attract and accommodate international tourists boosted home values in the area. Now that tourism is well-developed in Havana, domestic and foreign investors are interested in buying in these areas, many of them with plans to open a tourist-oriented business inside their new homes, such as a room/home rental or restaurant/bar catering to tourists (as well as Cubans with purchasing power). This too has driven up home prices in these neighborhoods, often far beyond the means of ordinary Cubans (see chapter seven for further details). While

some may argue that it is the quality of the housing stock in Vedado and Miramar, historically bourgeoisie neighborhoods characterized by large homes and mansions, that accounts for higher home values in these neighborhoods compared to more working- and middle-class neighborhoods elsewhere in Havana, this does not explain the case of Habana Vieja.

Habana Vieja, the capital's historic city center, has transformed from a highly undesirable neighborhood to one of the most sought-after areas in Havana to purchase a home, and one whose home values are amongst the highest in the city, as figure 3.2 shows. Large posters displayed in Habana Vieja during the early 2010s showed the now beautifully-restored plazas and surrounding buildings that anchor the historic center of the city in a state of ruins that resembled a war zone. Indeed, before the heavy investment in Habana Vieja led by City Historian Eusebio Leal, Habana Vieja was a largely undesirable place to live, characterized by high density tenements, dilapidated housing, and poor infrastructure that included unreliable access to running water. The majority of residents in Habana Vieja were Afro-Cubans (de la Fuente 2001, Taylor 2009: 63), and many were working class. Some of these residents, such as those living in the buildings directly looking onto the public plazas, had their homes fully restored as part of the city's restoration efforts (e.g. see figure 3.3). Others benefitted from their proximity to newly improved infrastructure and the access to large numbers of tourists. These rehabilitation efforts and the influx of tourists led to an increase in home values, which increased even further with the announcement of the historic detente between the U.S. and Cuba in December 2014. The anticipated influx of American tourists that would come with the loosening of travel restrictions led property prices to rise across tourist centers of the city, and in Habana Vieja in particular, where thousands of cruise-goers would be let out in the Port of Havana,

directly into the streets of the historic center.[140] This expectation largely did not come to fruition, but Habana Vieja remains a hot tourist center and remains highly valued housing market, and (some of the) homeowners in the area have been able to use their housing in a way that leads to their upward social mobility, while others have fallen short—questions I explore more deeply in the following chapters.

Figure 3. 4: Before and after photographs of tenement building facing one of four main plazas in Old Havana, restored by the City Historian's Office

Figura 5: Casa de vecindad en San Ignacio 360 rehabilitada por la OHC. Fuente: Autores varios. La Plaza Vieja de La Habana. Proceso de recuperación. Sevilla: Junta de Andalucía.

Reproduced from Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma 2015: 111.

Summary and Conclusion

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[140] See figure 4 in Jolivet and Alba-Carmichael (2021) to see the change in prices per square meter in select municipalities of interest in Havana between 2012 and 2020. Their line chart shows the significant rise in list prices of homes for sale between 2015 and 2016, precisely the time when there was much anticipation over increased American tourism.

This chapter provides a descriptive overview of the variables that make a home more or less economically valuable in Havana's emerging real-estate market. In this chapter, I highlight two important variables in particular: first, the premium placed on "capitalist" residences, as opposed to those built after 1959, during the socialist era; and second, the importance of location in a neighborhood with high tourist activity in determining value, and the surprisingly hot market that has emerged for residential properties in the previously run-down and largely undesirable neighborhood of Habana Vieja. What makes these factors sociologically interesting is not the way they determine the value of a home per se, but rather the power that they have to economically stratify people in the context of the (re)commodification of housing in Cuba and the increasing centrality of international tourism in the Cuban economy. With the ability to set up lucrative small businesses inside one's home, such as room rentals for foreigners or private restaurants, as well as the ability to sell one's home on the free market, disparities in housing conditions and disparities in the value of housing became especially consequential, shaping one's ability to participate in the emerging economy and real-estate market, which in turn shaped one's social mobility. For example, a "capitalist" home in good condition located in a zone popular among tourists tends to command high value on the real-estate market and is also attractive as a potential site for a small private business, whereas a microbrigade building on the periphery of the city holds much less value on the market and less potential for a lucrative business. Thus, while the Revolution provided many Cubans with a place to live and turned the majority into homeowners, in a context of the recommodification of housing only some of these homeowners are able to use the housing provided to them in a way that leads to their social mobility. With the backdrop that this chapter provides in highlighting some of the significant variables that account for the disparities in the value of housing, I examine in chapter four how exactly Cubans use

housing to provide for their welfare and to achieve upward social mobility, then in chapter five I look more closely at how people acquired more or less valuable homes, and in chapter six I examine whether these differences in home values map onto discernable group differences.

CHAPTER 4: HOME AS SOURCE OF WELFARE AND MEANS OR BARRIER TO SOCIAL MOBILITY

Introduction

Overnight in 2011, homes in Cuba were transformed from places to live in and sites of social reproduction to a form of economic capital with important implications for social mobility and social inequality. For decades, Cubans found themselves in a rather peculiar position: while the homeownership rate has been at least 85 percent since the mid-1980s (Hamberg 2017: 190; Peters 2014: 6), the economic value of homes was essentially "locked" for over a half century, when legislation introduced shortly after the Cuban Revolution of 1959 prohibited the sale of homes.[141] With the introduction of Decree Law 288 in November 2011, which once again legalized the free-market purchase and sale of homes in Cuba, Cubans and permanent residents could freely determine a sales price for their home and carry out the purchase/sale in the presence of a notary, without prior government authorization. Housing thus became a commodity that could be freely traded on the market, and Cuban homeowners suddenly found themselves in a position to extract the wealth that was stored in their homes but inaccessible to them for over a half century. Against a backdrop of low wages in the state sector and limited legal opportunities to earn a livelihood in the newly emerging private sector, the newfound ability to sell one's home on the free market—to cash in on what is for most their most valuable asset—opened up opportunities for upward social mobility that were previously out of reach for many Cuban homeowners. Drawing on ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, in this chapter I

[141] See chapter two of this dissertation for a more detailed discussion of the Urban Reform Law of 1960, which essentially stripped homes of their economic capital, reasoning that homes were meant to be places to live, not means to enrich oneself.

outline the ways in which Cubans pursued social mobility strategies in the context of the recommodification of housing.

This chapter makes three contributions to the understanding of housing and social mobility. First, in outlining the ways Cubans used housing to improve their economic standing and pursue social mobility, I emphasize the ways in which housing can serve as a means to social mobility, thereby supplementing a more traditional understanding of housing serving as a reflection of social class and/or an expression of social mobility. Second, I argue that housing in Cuba is becoming an increasingly important source of welfare and a means of achieving upward social mobility, as individuals and families increasingly take over responsibility for their own welfare from the state. Third, I highlight the increasing trend towards profiting from housing not just through its sale but by using one's home as a site for profit-generating activities, and I draw attention to the important distinction between those who are positioned to do so and those who are not.

Shifting responsibility for social welfare provision from the state to individuals and families, and the role of housing as a source of welfare and means to social mobility

Before turning to specific ways that people use housing as a means to social mobility, it is important to understand the broader context in which they do so. The ways in which Cubans use their housing to pursue social mobility are all the more meaningful when situated within and understood as a response to the larger shift in responsibility for welfare provision from the socialist state to individuals and their families. As the state scales back many of the provisions it once provided universally to its citizens, individuals and families have developed a variety of

strategies to make up for what has been lost. They have turned to the market to do so, and are increasingly using their housing as both a source of welfare as well as a means to social mobility.

In my conversations with older generations of Cubans, many would nostalgically recall their relatively high standards of living during the initial decades following the Cuban Revolution—when the state played a robust role in social welfare provisions—contrasting those "good times" to the deprivation that characterized the euphemistically called "Special Period," a period of severe economic crisis in the 1990s brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, as well as the daily struggle to make ends meet ("l*a lucha*") that continues to this day. They described an era of abundance, recalling all the things the state used to provide them but has since discontinued, giving examples of gifts for newlyweds that included a case of beer, a wedding cake, and a honeymoon at a hotel, and a chance to purchase everything a person would need for their new household at heavily subsidized prices.[142] This was in addition to free healthcare and post-secondary education,[143] low-cost housing, and other no- or low-cost goods and services such as utilities and cultural activities, which the Cuban state continues to provide to this day. They told stories about stores and markets being plentifully stocked with high quality, imported items at affordable prices during the golden decade of the 1980s, in contrast to the largely empty shelves and high prices they have grown accustomed to in more recent years. They

[142] One interviewee, a woman in her 60s, recalled her experience as a newlywed in the early 1980s. She recounted how the fourth floor of the popular Havana department store Fin de Siglo (which still existed at the time of my fieldwork) was reserved for newlyweds, who were issued an appointment time to be able to enter the store and purchase everything from furniture to bedsheets to luggage to shoes and clothes for "very cheap."

[143] While students at post-secondary institutions are not charged tuition, they are expected to complete three years of (remunerated) "social service" upon graduation, which consists of working at a state workplace related to the students' field of study. (For additional details, see https://www.mtss.gob.cu/noticias/cumplimiento-del-servicio-social). Thus, some argue that post-secondary education is not actually free, since these students "repay" the cost of their studies through their subsequent (mandatory) service to the state.

remembered being able to freely purchase items whose distribution later became restricted to the state-issued ration card. They contrasted the generous quantities and variety of items that once characterized the ration card to its much more limited nature today, which covers only a small portion of a family's diet, leaving families no choice but to rely on the "*chopin*" ("shopping", referring to hard-currency stores), where prices are prohibitive for many. They spoke about being able to live and support their families from their state salary alone, something that has become next to impossible as the cost of food and essential items is now disproportionately high compared to official state salaries.[144]

An entire vocabulary has emerged to describe the different ways Cubans try to close the gap between low official salaries and their daily needs: "*resolver,*" "*luchar,*" "*inventar*," "*raspar*" (literally, to solve, to struggle, to invent, to scrape). Much literature has documented how Cubans, much like residents of other socialist states, have developed a patchwork of strategies to make ends meet, including pilfering and a variety of black market activities. Every so often, Cuban officials condemn and crack down on re-sellers ("*revendedores"*) who purchase items in bulk at the low prices offered by the state, and re-sell them for higher prices. Some Cubans travel abroad to countries that do not require a visa, such as Guyana and Russia, to purchase goods that they later re-sell in Cuba for a profit. These are among some of the common strategies Cubans have been using since the 1990s to "*sobrevivir*" (survive).

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[144] In 2015-16, a pair of pants could easily cost between 10 and 20 CUC, and upwards of this amount for name-brand clothes. In comparison, in 2016 the average monthly salary in Cuba was 29CUC (ONEI 2017). Young people who I knew often purchased items they needed on credit, through an informal honor system (since credit cards are not issued in Cuba). For example, one young woman showed me her new purse, and said it was named "November," adding after she saw my puzzled face that she named it such because her upcoming November paycheck is going towards the purchase of the purse, which a co-worker sold to her with the agreement that she would pay her upon receiving her next paycheck.

That Cubans and their families are increasingly responsible for the type of social welfare provision the state once provided is not new; what is relatively new is the increasingly important role that housing plays in the repertoire of strategies individuals and families use for welfare provision as well as social mobility. In some ways, what I observed to be underway in Cuba parallels what Slovenian sociologist Srna Mandič (2010) observed about post-socialist countries in Europe:

> Contrary to the robust, all-encompassing state-dominated welfare system under socialism, a new, thoroughly retrenched welfare system emerged, one that left considerable space for individual deprivation and risks. Under socialism, benefits based on housing assets could generally represent only a minor addition to those provided by the formal robust welfare state. But this has been radically altered, and many new generators of deprivation and insecurity have emerged and need to be dealt with individually. So there is more room—and greater need—for housing assets to be used in individual risk coverage and in individual welfare improvements. (P. 223-224)

Mandič specifically focuses on how housing has the potential to act as a "wealth reservoir," noting, "There is an obvious need and a great potential for wealth stored in housing, to be used as a complementary source of welfare not only in old age, but also earlier in life" (Mandič 2010: 217).[145] I found this to be the case in Cuba: with the legalization of home sales between private parties in late 2011, Cubans had a legal and legitimate way to access a potentially large sum of money,[146] which some used to "*resolver*" (take care of) daily needs and others to pursue social

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[145] Reflecting on the relationship between welfare regimes and housing tenure, Kurz and Blossfeld (2004: 7-8) draw attention to Kemeny's (1981) research and subsequent studies that show a negative correlation between homeownership rates and state spending. Relevant to our purposes, they note that homeownership can serve as an "alternative rout[e] to social security in old age (Castles 1998; Castles and Ferrera 1996; Kemeny 1981, 1992)" (cited in Kurz and Blossfeld 2004: 7). Because housing costs for homeowners are high initially but "very low in old age" (one presumes they are referring to conventional mortgages), public old-age pensions can be smaller, they note.

[146] Even within the legal residential real-estate market, plenty of illegal practices exist. One such illegal but widespread practice is underdeclaring the sale/purchase amount of the home, in order to lessen the amount of taxes owed to the state (both the buyer and seller must pay 4 percent of the declared sales/purchase price). This subdeclaration is a practice that I myself witnessed first-hand in sales

mobility projects. In addition to cashing in the equity stored in one's home, Cubans also used housing in other ways in an attempt to provide for themselves and their families and to achieve upward social mobility. I explore all of the ways in which they do so in the next section.

Ways in which housing serves as a source of welfare and means to social mobility

In this section, I outline two principal ways in which Cubans used their homes to secure their welfare and/or to become upwardly mobile: (1) by selling their existing home(s), and thus extracting the wealth stored in them; (2) by purchasing a home or using an existing one to convert (part of) it into a small business, or by renting (part of) it to business owners or directly to consumers.

Housing as economic capital: Cashing in on the wealth stored in homes by selling

For most working and middle class homeowners around the world, their home is their most valuable asset, and being able to extract the wealth stored in their home through its sale[147] represents a significant source of revenue. The half-century prohibition on home sales in Cuba closed this option to Cubans, stripping homes of their function as economic capital[148] or a

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transactions, and which my interviewees reported, and which has been documented elsewhere (Peters 2014; Mesa-Lago 2016: 134-35, 149; Bastian 2018: 135-38).

[147] While not the case in Cuba, in other countries there are additional ways to "cash in on" the wealth/equity stored in one's home without selling the home. For example, instruments such as a home equity loan, a home equity line of finance, or a cash-out refinance all take out (a portion of) home equity. While these options involve paying interest on the loans, they still may be profitable insofar as the interest rate on those loans is lower than the interest rate on alternative loans such as a personal loan or credit card.

[148] French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defines economic capital as material assets that are "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu 1986: 242).

reservoir of wealth. With the legalization of free market home sales in November 2011, the wealth in homes was once again restored. Recognizing their newfound ability to cash in on the wealth stored in their homes, many Cubans eagerly put their homes up for sale. For some Cubans, cashing in on the wealth stored in their home eased the daily struggle to make ends meet, allowed them to realize some larger purchases that they could not afford based on their income alone, and even allowed some to build a safety net for future expenses. Meanwhile, others used the proceeds from the sale of their home to fund social mobility projects, such as emigration or a small business in Cuba's growing private sector. I look more closely at each in turn.

Selling to ease economic insecurity and have a safety net

All of the real-estate agency staff I interviewed reported that the primary motive among their clients for selling was to downsize ("*reducirse*") in order to extract some of the equity in their home into much needed cash to ease their economic problems.[149] The owner of one real-estate agency, a white man in his mid 40s, estimated that 70 percent of his agency's clients are Cubans—primarily seniors, who, he claims are the bulk of the property owners—looking to downsize and walk away with some money (Interview, February 10, 2016). The manager of another real-estate company, a woman in her early 40s who previously worked in a research center, reported, "Many times the clients want to sell their current home and buy another one, but keep some of the money to continue living" ("*para seguir viviendo*") (Interview, February 3, 2016). An owner of another real-estate agency expanded with a hypothetical example: "[They're

[149] Another less common motive for selling was to purchase a larger property in order to accommodate a growing family or provide more space to a large family that was living in tight quarters. Yet another motive among sellers was to emigrate, which I will discuss later in this section.

looking to] downsize to extract an economic benefit, because of the way life is—they don't have resources. So they say, "Why do I need such a big house?" Or "Why do I need so many rooms? My son went to live with his wife, my grandson is living with his girlfriend, I don't need such a large house [anymore]. My spouse and I are going to [sell our home], move into a one-bedroom apartment and net $20,000. And with $20,000 I'm happy." That's how seniors think" (personal communication, February 10, 2016).

The hypothetical example provided by the owner of the real-estate agency was actually very similar to the reason a retired couple in their late sixties gave in response to my question about their motives for selling their 4-bedroom home in La Sierra, Playa, for which they were asking 80,000 CUC. They were looking to downsize to a 2-bedroom apartment in Vedado (the wife's sister lived with them and would continue to do so), explaining that they no longer needed such a large home given that their son had emigrated, and her mother (who also lived with them) passed away, and they preferred to move to a smaller one that would be easier and less costly to maintain. Given their age, they also preferred to move to a ground-floor or first-floor unit,[150] so as not to have to climb so many stairs, and wanted to live closer to the hospital they frequent for appointments. "We would also benefit economically," the husband explained. "Of course," the wife chimed in, "because we would walk away with some money." The husband made explicit what the wife implied: "We would buy a less expensive home and be left with money for whatever we need." Though their son lived in Europe and sent them remittances, it was important for them to have a pot of money to draw on. "There has to be a way to pay for things,

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[150] In Cuba, the first floor refers to what people in the U.S. consider the second story, rather than the ground floor.

and everything keeps getting more expensive!" the wife explained, voicing a sentiment that was echoed by many Cubans I spoke to.

In fact, economic need was so closely tied to motivations to sell that sellers would often decide on the sales price of their home at least in part based on their current and future economic needs and aspirations, rather than solely on the objective characteristics of the home. This tendency frustrated licensed real-estate agents that I interviewed, who complained that clients unfamiliar with the way that real-estate markets function allowed their needs and desires to drive the sales price, which often led them to overprice the house, with the result being that it sat on the market unsold. A manager of one of the real-estate agencies I interviewed, an architect in his mid-thirties, explained: "Cubans still are not accustomed to this kind of market. Many Cubans still don't know real-estate, and so clients arrive [to our real-estate agency] and say they want to sell their house for, for example, $100,000, because they want to buy two cars and another house. That's not a reason why your house is worth that much! A house is worth X amount because it's located in X neighborhood, because it's square footage is X, because its condition is X—but not because you want to buy something later [with the money you earn from the sale]! That's not how price is determined! I'm telling you, it's really complicated because I'd say that 80 percent of sellers in Cuba are selling because they want to buy something [with the proceeds of the sale], and that's a mistake!" (Interview, January 5, 2016).

My interviews with sellers partially supported this real-estate agents' description of how economic needs and desires enter into the calculus of the sales price. When I asked sellers how they arrived at the list price for their home, they often made reference to comparable sales and objective characteristics of the home (these were not entirely absent, as the real-estate agent's comments may suggest), but sellers also highlighted their need to extract enough money from the

sale of the home in order to make specific planned purchases. For example, sellers mentioned their plans to make pricey purchases such as buying a vehicle. Some sellers indicated that they needed to sell their home for an amount that would allow them to purchase two homes, so that a multi-generational family living under one roof can form their own independent households, each in their own separate space. I found that sellers were looking not only to access money to make specific, planned purchases, but also to have money on hand for more general needs or for savings that they can rely on for an extended period of time. Carmelo Mesa-Lago et al.'s (2016: 150) small qualitative interview study of people in Havana who had sold their home since the 2011 reform (n=10) lends further support to my findings. When asked how they used the money from the sale of their home, the respondents in Mesa-Lago's study reported that they bought necessities (n=5), purchased another home (n=4), saved the money (n=3), traveled outside of Cuba (n=2),[151] and invested in a business (n=2). (I too found that sellers used funds from the sale to invest in a small business—a point that I discuss below.)

In sum, it was common for sellers to sell their home and purchase a less expensive one, thus extracting the wealth stored in their homes and netting a lump sum of money that could go towards daily expenses, necessary or discretionary spending in the short-term, and also be used as a source of savings for future expenses. The amount of money sellers netted from the sales transaction varied greatly with the value of the home and the particular economic needs of each family, drawing attention to just how variable this strategy for social welfare provision is. In fact, despite her observations, the Slovenian sociologist Srna Mandič whom we met earlier in this chapter ultimately concluded based on her empirical analysis that the potential for

[151] The wording Carmelo Mesa-Lago uses is "*viajar al extranjero*," meaning "travel outside of Cuba," which implies temporary travel rather than permanent or semi-permanent emigration.

homeownership to act as a "'wealth reservoir' to be used by homeowners as a shield against…sources of deprivation and insecurity" is "very limited" (224). Mandič came to this conclusion based on two factors: first, the high incidence of unfit housing which limited the wealth stored in the dwelling and signaled the inability of households to sustain the wealth in housing due to lack of maintenance (219-220), and second, the material deprivation and hardship experienced by homeowners, which limited their "ability to accumulate and sustain the wealth contained in their housing" (219; also see 221-222). Both of these conditions can generally be said to apply in the Cuban context as well, and yet I arrive at a different conclusion. It is true that many homes in Cuba are valued on the low end of the price spectrum and the potential to extract wealth from them is limited or nonexistent, especially if the homeowners plan on purchasing another home in which to live. Moreover, I witnessed would-be sellers who were unsuccessful in selling their homes (as I discuss further in chapter seven), and others who were successful in selling but were not left with any or much money after purchasing another home. And yet there were also many cases in my fieldwork of Cubans who were indeed able to extract wealth from their homes (even though they were not in the best of conditions) and use it to secure their welfare or even make welfare improvements. For many Cubans, being able to cash in on the wealth stored in their homes that was previously inaccessible to them provided at least some degree of reprieve from the daily struggle that most Cubans face to make ends meet. However, this reprieve tended to be temporary in nature: the lump sum they netted from downsizing would run out sooner or later–unless, that is, it was invested in a way that would continue to generate profits.

Selling to pursue social mobility strategies: emigration and small business

As we saw, extracting the wealth from one's home by selling it has the potential to afford sellers some degree of reprieve from economic insecurity, but the reprieve tends to be temporary in nature unless the profits from the sale are reinvested in a way that continues to generate revenue. Through my fieldwork, I discovered two broad ways that Cubans "invested" (as opposed to consumed or saved) the proceeds from their home sales in hopes of achieving upward social mobility. The first involved Cubans using the proceeds from the sale of their home to fund their emigration journey and/or for start-up funds in their destination. The second involved investing the funds from the sale in a small business on the island which they hoped would be a sustained source of revenue.

A common motive among Cuban sellers for selling one's home was to be able to fund their project to emigrate in search of better economic opportunities abroad. I encountered numerous Cubans who were selling their home with intentions to emigrate,[152] and my informant interviews with real estate agents also revealed this as a common motive for selling (much less common than downsizing, however).[153] Ironically, despite the much heralded social and

[152] In Carmelo Mesa-Lago's (2016: 150) small interview study of people in Havana who had sold their home (n=10), no interviewees reported that they used the money from the sale of their home to emigrate. However, this is likely because of the research design: the fact that they conducted the interviews in Havana and that the (small number of) interviewees had already sold their home (as opposed to currently selling their home) may explain why emigration was not amongst the responses given by interviewees. Given the study design, those who used the money to emigrate would not be available to interview precisely because they emigrated.

[153] Some sellers that I met and conversed with were not forthcoming about their motivation to sell in order to emigrate, but certain characteristics of the conditions of sale strongly pointed to emigration as a motive. One identifying marker of sellers wishing to emigrate is that they were strictly looking to sell their homes for cash and were not open to a swap ("*permuta*") (which was still a common practice)—even in cases where they would be compensated with cash in addition to swapping units. The reason was obvious: they intended to permanently relocate and no longer needed a residence in Cuba; what they needed was to gather as much cash as possible to pay for the costs involved in the migratory journey and hopefully have some money left over to start up a new life in their destination. Another identifying marker of sellers with plans to emigrate is when sellers advertise that the home is being sold fully furnished. While sellers who downsize will often sell some of their excess furniture and furnishings, it is highly unusual to sell everything, given the scarcity and expense of buying furniture for the new apartment. Finally, many of

economic reforms announced in 2010 that appeared to present Cubans with more domestic opportunities, the rate of emigration continued to increase in the post-2010 period. With the newfound ability to sell their homes at free-market prices and thus access potentially large sums of cash, funding migration journeys becomes more accessible to a wider swath of Cubans, beyond those with family, friends, or lovers willing and able to fund their migration. Not only does the ability to sell one's home allow Cubans to more easily fund their migration journey, but it also allows them to avail themselves of safer but more expensive ways to get to their destination–namely by plane to South or Central America and perhaps paying smugglers along the way to reach the U.S. border, rather than by makeshift rafts by sea.[154] Beyond funding the

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those looking to emigrate request that the buyer pays them in a foreign currency, such as USD or Euros, and sometimes even request that part or all of the payment be deposited into a foreign bank account (registered to a relative or friend). This practice allows emigrants to avoid numerous problems. First, Cuba's hard currency, the CUC, in which sales are usually transacted, can only be exchanged on the island. Official exchange places (the CADECA or banks) require identification, and exchanging large sums of money would draw unwanted attention and scrutiny as to the source of the funds. After all, it is common practice to declare a sales price far below the actual sales price, in order to minimize the amount of tax owed to the state (the buyer and seller each must pay 4 percent of the declared sales price). There is a black market of currency exchange, which offers more favorable rates than the official exchange places, but exchanging large sums of money on the black market is risky: one runs the risk of falling victim to counterfeiting or theft/robbery, with strong disincentives for reporting these crimes. Even if the emigrant successfully exchanges the money on the black market, they encounter the problem of how to get the money off the island without inviting unwanted attention by customs officials at the airport.

[154] By 2015, Cubans wishing to reach the U.S. were opting in larger numbers for the longer overland journey through South America and Central America rather than the more traditional way, by sea. Though the overland journey also involved a level of risk, it was generally considered safer than a homemade vessel at open sea. During the time of my fieldwork, in 2015, Cubans were permitted to travel to Ecuador without a visa, from which many continued their journey north until they reached the U.S. border and availed themselves of the special status Cubans have within the U.S. immigration system. This added security came with a cost: passport fees, airfare, ground transportation, fees charged by smugglers, bribe and extortion money, and accommodations and food. One could avoid the long journey and go directly to Mexico, also at a cost: advertisements on Revolíco, a classified website similar to Craigslist, promised those willing and able to pay $3,000 the necessary paperwork to enter Mexico, a country that required Cubans to have a visa to enter. (In November 2015, Ecuador reinstated visa requirements for Cubans, prompting protests outside the Ecuadorian Embassy in Havana (Trotta 2015). In the subsequent months and years, Cubans turned to other countries that lifted visa restrictions for Cubans, such as Guyana and Nicaragua.)

migration journey itself, many migrants use the money leftover from home sales as start-up funds in their new destination.

Though not as common, some Cubans used the proceeds from the sale of their home to either open or expand/further invest in a small business, with the expectation that the business would be a sustained source of revenue and lead to upward social mobility. For example, one participant purchased a taxi ("*almendrón*"), known to be one of the more lucrative of the permitted self-employment activities. Another purchased additional equipment for his bakery business, which would allow him to expand his operations. Other participants sold their homes and purchased another one that would be more conducive to the type of business they intended to open–for example, one closer to a main street with high pedestrian traffic, one on the ground floor with a direct entrance from the street, one with an area that could be easily converted for the purposes of their business or, ideally, had already been converted. In fact, knowing the high demand for opening up home businesses in the post-2010 era, many sale listings were tailored to would-be business owners, emphasizing the features that made the home an excellent site to set up a home business. In the next section, I discuss using home as a site for business in greater detail.

Housing as generator of income: Home as a site for business and renting out space and amenities

Aside from extracting the wealth from one's home by selling it, another way in which Cubans use their housing as a source of welfare as well as a means to social mobility was by using the home itself and its amenities for profit-generating activities, including (1) using their home to run a small business; (2) renting out space within their home for others to use as a site

for their small business; and/or (3) by renting out amenities in their home such as a swimming pool or parking spot(s) or extra space.

In recent history, Cubans have been setting up businesses in their homes since at least the 1990s, when the Cuban government permitted a limited number of small-scale forms of self-employment[155] as a temporary measure[156]—a "necessary evil" ("*mal necesario*")—to weather the economic crisis brought on by the collapse of Cuba's largest trading partner and ideological ally, the Soviet Union and Comecon.[157] Cubans began renting out spare rooms to tourists (*casas*

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[155] For a list of legalized areas of self-employment from that period, see Henken 2002: 367-371.

[156] As social anthropologist Elena Sachetti (2009: 178) explains, the law permitting self-employment "was understood by the State as a subsistence activity that served as an alternative to state-sector employment, a transitory situation in times of crisis (the ongoing 'Special Period in Times of Peace')..."

[157] In the post-1959 era, Cuban government policy towards small-scale private enterprise has been characterized by a cyclic vacillation between encouragement and censure, liberalization and retrenchment, which I summarize briefly here. In his 1961 May Day speech, barely two weeks after having declared the Revolution socialist in nature, Fidel Castro assured Cubans that "The revolution has no interest in nationalizing [little businessmen and little industrialists]," explaining that whereas "the interests of the big landholders, bankers, and industrialists were eliminated[, n]o social interest of the lesser levels of society is to be condemned." In fact, he added, "[t]he little industrialist and little businessman can coexist with the revolution," and can even "collaborate" with it. In December 1962, the Castro government nationalized 4,600 large- and medium-sized commercial enterprises under law #1076, but continued to allow family and microenterprises (Henken 2002: 372), as promised in the May Day speech delivered nineteen months earlier. For a period it would seem that the Revolutionary Government did indeed support "little businessmen." This changed by April 1968, when the Revolutionary Government expropriated all of the remaining private retail businesses (an estimated 55,000 to 58,000 in total) and banned self-employment (Henken 2002: 153, 372). One decade after banning self-employment, the government again legalized it with Decree-Law #14 in the summer of 1978, in an effort to curb the black market, mitigate unemployment, and improve the quality of goods and services (Henken 2002: 372). It repealed self-employment once again in 1986, after the Third Party Congress launched the "*proceso de rectificación de errores y tendencias negativas*" ("rectification of errors and negative tendencies"). The Rectification Campaign, aimed at dismantling market-oriented mechanisms and promoting economic centralization (Pérez-Lopez 1990), was interrupted by the onset of the "Special Period" that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the Fourth Congress in 1991, the Party approved self-employment in principle, but did not enact any legislation that would legally permit it in practice—not until September 1993, with Decree-Law #141, "*Sobre el ejercicio del trabajo por cuenta propia*" (literally, "Regarding the exercise of working for one's own account" [self-employment]) (Henken 2002: 372). Through the rest of the 1990s, the Revolutionary Government introduced a patchwork of reforms relating to private enterprise. The initial list of 117 permitted occupations of self-employment published in *Granma* on September 9, 1993 was expanded in October (18 new occupations

particulares), opened up restaurants ("*paladares*") in their living rooms or patios, and converted garages or front rooms into nail salons and workshops.[158] Despite being intended to act as a form of subsistence in very difficult economic times, and in spite of the many restrictions placed on those operating in the private sector, many of these private sector entrepreneurs managed not only to subsist and support their families but to ascend the socioeconomic ladder, representing a small but powerful emerging middle class. To be sure, there was a good deal of heterogeneity among them, with some closer to the subsisting end of the spectrum while others garnered lucrative incomes. In the latter category, high earners tended to be those whose primary audience was foreign tourists (who generally had a much higher purchasing power than most Cubans), including those who operated room rentals for foreign tourists (*casas particulares*) and restaurants ("*paladares*").[159] There is no systematic data collection on the income of those working in the private sector, but several qualitative studies published by researchers at Cuba's Center for Psychological and Sociological Research (CIPS) in the early 2000s estimated household incomes for private sector employees to be between four and ten times the household

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were added), reduced in December (five occupations were suspended), and further augmented in subsequent months and years (Henken 2002: 373).

[158] For detailed examples of the physical adaptations that Cubans made to house small businesses within their home, see Sachetti 2011: 76-80.

[159] Social anthropologist Elena Sachetti (2009: 187-188) distinguishes between two groups of employees in the private sector: those who engage mainly in "self-employment" activities ("actividades de autoempleo") aimed at a small sector of the domestic market and those microenterprises that have achieved a medium to high level of development, are well-inserted in the market, have a consolidated stream of clients, and sometimes also a more professional workforce, among which she includes the groups I mention earlier: most restaurants, room rentals to foreign tourists, some large-scale cafeterias, and some artisanal producers who operate at a medium- to-large-scale or make products destined for the hard currency market. Sachetti does not explicitly address the differential earnings between the two groups, however. In light of the lack of systematic data collection on earnings in the private sector, my own claim of which groups tend to be high earners is based on common understandings among average Cubans, based on formal interviews and casual conversations.

incomes of average state-sector employees (Espina et al. 2002 and 2004; Espina et al. 2003: 35; Iñiguez et al., 2001; Díaz Tenorio et al. 2000, all cited in Sachetti 2009: 187).

Numerically, the number of licensed self-employed workers was rather small—only 112,900 at its lowest and 166,700 at its highest between 1995 and 2004 (Sachetti 2009: 185)[160]—but regardless of their size, this group was regarded as a threat to the socialist project. Representing a sentiment shared by many officials, Cuban official Raúl Valdés Vivó denounced self-employed works in a 1997 article in the Cuban Communist Party's official newspaper, *Granma*, likening domestic capitalists to "piranhas" and warning that allowing Cubans to have private businesses "would introduce a social force that sooner or later would serve the counterrevolution" (quoted in Henken 2002: 375). Unsurprisingly, without banning self-employment outright, the government ceased granting new permits for self-employment in many occupations after 2001, when the worst of the economic crisis had passed (Henken 2007: 8). By 2005, the government had stopped granting new licenses for 40 occupations, shrinking the total number of occupations eligible for permits from 158 to 118 (Henken 2007: 9). The dampening effect of this practice can be seen in the precipitous decline of registered "*paladares"* (private restaurants) across the island, from 1,562 in 1996 to 416 by August 1998 and only 253 in 2000 (Henken 2007: 9). The numbers of registered (licensed) self-employed individuals stagnated in the range of 150-160,000 in the early 2000s (Sachetti 2009: 185), representing a small fraction of the labor force (between 4.5 and 4.75 million during the early 2000s (World Bank 2021)), and an even smaller fraction of the overall population of 11.2 million.

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[160] These numbers do not take into account those operating without a license or "family helpers" (which are permitted in the gastronomic industry). Cuban economist Viviana Togores González (1999) estimates that for every licensed employee, there are actually three working, while Cuban sociologist Lilia Nuñez Moreno (1997) estimates the number to be closer to 3.5 (cited in Sachetti 2009: 185).

In October 2010, as part of a larger package of social and economic reforms, the state shed the tentative and pejorative language about self-employment that characterized their approach during the Special Period and started to actively promote the growth of the small-scale private sector. The number of Cubans employed in the private sector grew from roughly 156,000 in 2010 to over 400,000 in 2012 (Prensa Latina 2012), reaching 535,000 by the end of 2016 (Agencia EFE 2017). Some of these business owners require no fixed location (such as taxi drivers and party clowns engaged in ambulatory activities). Others rent commercial spaces from the state (e.g. those who sell artisanal goods typically rent a booth at a market designated for such things). But many businesses are run directly out of people's homes, including the more lucrative private businesses such as room (or entire home) rentals for foreign tourists, restaurants, bars, and cafeterias/eateries.

In the next section, we look at how some of the macro changes detailed here played out in the life of one Cuban woman, and how she used her home to operate a room rental business that led to her upward social mobility.

A case of upward social mobility: Alicia and her casa particular business

Alicia was the youngest of three sisters, born in 1962, just three years after what Cubans still commonly refer to as "the Triumph of the Revolution" in 1959. Her father was a construction worker, her mother a stay-at-home mom. Alicia does not remember much about the first home her family lived in except that the conditions were not very good, and the family of five eagerly accepted the state's offer to move them to a small room where they shared a bathroom and makeshift kitchen with neighboring families. It was 1965, and the Barreras were one of nine families assigned a room in a nine-room "*solar*" (tenement building) in Old Havana,

the historic center of the city. Before the Cuban government nationalized the building and assigned it to families in need of housing, the small rooms were reportedly used for prostitution.[161] While the Cuban state secured the Barrera family and countless others a place to live, however humble, the families were not property owners but rather long-term leaseholders. Under the concept of "*usufructo gratuito*" (free usufruct right) they could live rent-free for as long as they desired, but they could not transfer or sell the property and could only swap it for a similar unit with an equivalent tenure status.

After marrying at the age of 24, Alicia left her family home to live with her husband, his mother and his stepfather. When the marriage dissolved six years later, in 1992, she had no other choice than to move back in with her parents. Their humble family home felt even smaller now than it did when she had left. "I was clear that I didn't want to grow old—I couldn't—living like that, crowded ["*agregada"*]. Living crowded ["*agregada"*] is like having a corpse among you—three days later it has a stench. This was very clear to me: I wanted my own [house]." By then she had joined the microbrigade movement that had blossomed in Cuba during the 1980s, where civilians with no particular expertise in construction erected 4 or 5-story walkup buildings.[162] All the while, there was no guarantee that she would be assigned one of the 25 apartments in the building she was helping to construct.[163, 164] She certainly hoped so—she didn't have many other

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[161] Other "*solares*" or "*cuarterías*" had previously served as tenement housing for workers. Originally, many solares were colonial mansions that housed a single family and their servants.

[162] Unlike those working on other microbrigade projects, Alicia and her teacher colleagues continued teaching their classes during the day, and would head to the construction site in the afternoons and weekends to lay brick, tile floors, and more.

[163] I look more closely at the criteria used to determine who received the housing built by the microbrigades in chapter 5.

[164] Of the twenty-five available units, five were designated for the state: two destined for those in need of shelter ("*los albergados*"), two that would serve as homes for medical doctors, and a medical clinic on the ground floor serving the public.

options, after all. At the time, buying and selling residential property was not legalized, not that she earned enough or had anyone that could lend her the money even if it were legal. Given her tenure status as "*usufructuario*," a long-term leaseholder who had the right to occupy the unit perpetually but did not own it, she was limited to swapping for an equivalent unit. Appealing to the State was likely a fruitless exercise, since so many Cubans encountered themselves in similar or even worse conditions than she did. So she hoped that her double-shifts and working weekends for years on end would result in her having her own home one day.[165] "It was ten years of my life working "*al pulmón*."[166] Ten years avoiding getting pregnant—I don't have any kids—because I needed to be there. The goal was to obtain a home" (Interview, February 6, 2016). The fruits of her labor certainly paid off. It took about a decade since she first joined the movement, but finally in 1998 she moved into a 3-bedroom apartment on the second floor of a 4-story walk-up building in Centro Habana that she and her work colleagues—all teachers, with no special training in construction—had constructed.

Shortly after she moved in in 1998, the Cuban state approached the building's inhabitants with a proposition: the Institute of Linguistics was hosting foreign students wishing to learn Spanish, and those students were to live with Cuban families during their month-long course. The families were to provide room and board for the students, and were paid about 500 CUC,

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[165] As the diary that she kept during this time attests, often there would be nothing to do because necessary construction materials didn't arrive. After all, this undertaking was taking place during Cuba's infamous "Special Period," the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union during which Cubans endured severe shortages. It was a donation from Spain that financed the tiles and materials for their bathroom and kitchen.

[166] "*Al pulmón*" is not a term I came across in academic accounts of microbrigades (e.g. in Jill Hamberg's or Kosta Mathey's work, perhaps two of the most prominent individuals writing about microbrigades), but it was a term used by my participants. "*Pulmón*" literally means lung, and it was used by my participants to describe the type of microbrigade where workers continued working in their workplace and worked on the microbrigade building after-hours, in contrast to most microbrigades that were dedicated solely to construction.

Alicia recalls, for the month. Before the first group of students arrived, the building's residents received an orientation: what type of foods to serve at breakfast, how often to change the sheets, and other basics on what international students expected from a room and board arrangement. She recalls receiving four groups of students under this contract.

When the contract with the state ended, Alicia continued to rent to international tourists occasionally, all the while maintaining her full-time teaching job. Renting rooms to tourists had become legalized in 1997, but she was one of many that operated in the shadows. In 2004 she applied for a license to rent one bedroom in her apartment. She recalls the rigorous screening process, which included an inspection of her house to ensure it was suitable for renting to tourists as well as an in-depth character check by the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. These days, she says, referring to the post-2010 period, you just pay 100 CUC and you're issued a license – a reflection of the state's move away from seeing self-employment as a "necessary evil" and towards embracing a small private sector (within limits).

For two years she juggled running her bed-and-breakfast, working full-time as a teacher, and caring for her mother with Alzheimer's, who had moved in with her. In 2006, she realized she had to leave her teaching job and dedicate herself fully to her business. "Teaching fulfills me," she says all these years later, but it simply became too much to balance–and, quite frankly, the earnings from her teaching job did not compare to those from her rental business. Alicia began renting out the second bedroom in her apartment in 2010, after her mother died. In 2012, just months after the legalization of home sales, she purchased the apartment next door from a friend who was emigrating to the United States. By acquiring this additional apartment, she was able to expand her rental business from 2 rooms to 4 rooms, effectively doubling her income. By the time I met her in 2015, she was renting out 4 bedrooms, for a total guest occupancy of 11

individuals (if all of the beds were filled), charging between 20 CUC and 30 CUC per room, per night.[167]

Hers was not a large operation by any measure, but the earnings from Alicia's *casa particular* allowed her to enjoy a standard of living that she never imagined as a teacher, and that far exceeded that of the average Cuban. Her automatic washing machine, 2 plasma televisions, home internet connection, and the fact that she had completely changed her living room set on multiple occasions were visible signs of her upward mobility. Other aspects of her lifestyle hinted at this, too: she accompanied the tourists who stayed at her home to restaurants, drinks, even multi-day getaways at beach resorts—paying her own share, a point of pride for her. In 2015, she traveled to Europe for three weeks, visiting her cousin in Paris, and former guests who had become friends in Berlin and Madrid. She took with her 5,000 Euros in spending money, all from her business earnings. Just months after returning from Europe, she purchased yet another apartment, this time as a gift for her oldest sister.[168]

With her economic success, Alicia supported a wide ring of people around her, generously sharing the fruits of her labor with her family, church, and community. She financed or heavily subsidized functions or activities, including her nephew's wedding, the quinceñera dress for a young girl from her church congregation, catering and supplies for church activities. She even sent her nephew in the United States money when he fell on hard times. In 2016, she

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[167] She had a flexible pricing model, sometimes charging by room, sometimes by bed (for guests willing to share a bedroom with others, as is typical in a hostel), and sometimes renting the entire second apartment as a stand-alone apartment. She adjusted her prices depending on whether the guests rented the room, a bed in a shared room, or the entire apartment, but also on a series of other factors, including whether it was high-season or low-season, whether she herself had high or low occupancy, whether she owed commission to an intermediary who had referred the client, and whether the guest was a returning guest or a new one, to name a few factors.

[168] Alicia borrowed 1,500 CUC from a friend to finance the house purchase, but repaid the loan in less than three months.

loaned her niece and her sister approximately 2,000 CUC each for a trip to Guyana, a country in South America for which no visa was required, where Cubans would travel to buy goods (clothes, shoes, etc.) and sell them in Cuba for marked-up prices on the black market. When her sister returned from the trip with 800 CUC, which she meant to repay her with, Alicia told her to keep it. Oftentimes she provided her family with cash, small gifts of 10 or 20 CUC, sometimes more. Every month, she gave 20 CUC for the groceries of her elderly father, whom her eldest sister was caring for. At Christmas, she would give each of her sisters 35 CUC to buy a good cut of meat to enjoy with their families. She distributed the gifts that tourists brought her and the goods they left behind amongst the family and sometimes also members of her congregation. Not only did Alicia support those around her, but through her own success she facilitated their own (much more limited) social mobility by employing them in different aspects of her business. All of her sisters and nieces worked in her business at some point or another, cleaning, preparing the rooms for arriving tourists, shopping for groceries, or cooking meals for tourists. Her nephews offered walking tours of Old Havana and salsa lessons to tourists, keeping all of the earnings for themselves. She sometimes also tasked them with procuring goods for her business (e.g. traveling across town in public transport when a shipment of toilet paper arrived), always compensating them for their troubles. When she was at maximum occupancy, she would send tourists to stay with friends, some of whom had a rental license and others who didn't, and she would not collect the commission owed to her from some of her closest friends.

In sum, Alicia had come a long way from her humble beginnings growing up in a cramped "*solar*" in Old Havana. Through her involvement in the microbrigade movement, a program largely sponsored by the socialist state, she became a homeowner. As a homeowner – with a home in a central location of the capital and with bedrooms to spare, moreover – she was

able to take advantage of the newly legalized opportunities to rent rooms to foreign tourists, a particularly lucrative economic activity. Through her *casa particular* business, she ascended the socioeconomic ladder, and enjoyed a standard of living far better than those her parents ever achieved, a lifestyle unimaginable to her when she was a teacher, and one well above that of average Cubans, especially those working in the state sector.

Through the particulars of Alicia's case, we saw how she was able to ascend the socioeconomic ladder by using her home to operate a successful *casa particular* business. In the next section, I lay out more systematically the many benefits of running a *casa particular* and the ways these many benefits can lead to socioeconomic mobility.

Why casas particulares are so lucrative

Running a *casa particular* is among the most—if not the most—lucrative type of private enterprise one can legally engage in in Cuba. While no official earnings data is available (nor would it be reliable, since people routinely under-report their earnings in order to avoid paying taxes on the income),[169] my observations, interviews with *casa particular* owners, and casual conversations with Cubans all suggest that it is the most financially rewarding legal opportunity

[169] *Casa particular* hosts must pay 10 percent of their earnings to the tax authority on a monthly basis. This is in addition to the monthly license fee of 40 CUC. Hosts are issued official receipt booklets with original and carbon copy receipts, which they are required to fill out and have the guest sign. In my experience as a guest in several dozen *casas particulares* and my observations of Alicia's business practices as well as the direct training I received from her on how to fill these out, hosts tend to have the guest sign the receipt before filling in the price, and later list a lower rate on the receipt. Or, if the guest arrives late in the day or at night, sometimes hosts will avoid registering them until the following day in order not to have to report the income from that night. This was always risky, not only because of potential issues with the tax authority, but more so because immigration officials routinely visited hosts unannounced to inspect the documentation and ensure all foreign visitors were registered. (This registration was a separate process that involved keeping written records in a notebook as well as going to or calling the local immigration office over the telephone to register new guests and indicate the dates they will be staying.)

available to Cubans. *Casa particular* owners can earn more money renting out a room in their home for one night than an average Cuban worker on a state salary earns in an entire month. According to Cuba's National Statistics and Information Bureau (ONEI), the average monthly salary of Cubans in 2012 was 466 pesos (CUP), the equivalent of 20 CUC or $22 USD, and in 2016 it was 29 CUC. (Admittedly, few Cubans live exclusively from their official salary, finding creative ways to supplement their meager earnings, commonly through black market activity,[170] and also through remittances.[171]) In comparison, *casa particular* owners can easily earn this sum—and often double or triple the official salary—in a single day. Based on my observations between 2011 and 2018, standard rental rates for a basic, private room in a shared home in Havana ranged from 20 CUC to 40 CUC per room, per night, with 25 CUC being the most common rate.[172] There also exists a high-end market of rentals, including mansions with exclusive amenities such as private swimming pools and oceanfront views, which rent for hundreds or even upwards of 1,000 CUC per night.[173] Even in comparison to other self-employed workers ("*cuentapropistas*") and certainly their contracted workers, *casas particulares*

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[170] Cubans use a variety of strategies to supplement their meager earnings. One common strategy is to sell items on the black market, including goods pilfered from state workplaces or surplus items they receive for a subsidized price through their monthly ration basket. It is also common for professionals like doctors, architects, and notaries to be gifted cash or in-kind goods such as cooking oil, prepaid internet cards, or other goods sold in hard currency (CUC).

[171] As Luis Luis (2019) notes, Cuba does not make public data on remittances received, so estimates are based on data from the sending/source country.

[172] If the guest(s) were referred by someone, it was common for hosts to pay the person who referred them a commission of 5 CUC per night, per room.

[173] Easily identified by a standard, white-and-blue sign that all registered rental properties are required to display, I knocked on doors in the Miramar neighborhood of Havana, reputed for its exclusivity, and toured approximately one dozen mansions with imported furnishings and swimming pools that rented for several hundreds of dollars per night. For the most part, however, I did not have access to very high-end properties, though I was able to view many through online listings on websites such as https://www.havanacasaparticular.com/

have the reputation for being among the most economically lucrative legal business opportunities in Cuba. In fact, as we will see in chapter seven, foreigners and Cuban emigrants are purchasing residential property with the intention of converting it to a *casa particular*, recognizing just how economically lucrative it can be.

Moreover, *casa particular* hosts are paid in hard currency, the convertible peso or CUC, and sometimes even accept U.S. dollars or Euros,[174] rather than the less powerful Cuban peso or CUP. The literature on economic inequality in Cuba has noted the disparities between Cubans who have access to hard currency, most often through remittances and/or jobs in tourism, and those Cubans who primarily have access to the devalued local currency, *moneda nacional* (CUP). Cubans would often express their frustration to me about the 1 CUC: 24 CUP exchange rate, emphasizing just how devalued the Cuban peso (and their salary) was and how little it stretched. Thus, being paid in the more valuable CUC was highly advantageous, especially during the time when certain state stores only sold desired items in the hard currency (in 2015, state stores began allowing customers to pay with either currency). It could also be advantageous if they chose to sell the CUC for the CUP, or, for that matter, USD or Euros for CUC, earning money on the conversion. There was always a steady market for currency exchange among Cubans taking trips abroad or emigrating. Travelers could avoid scrutiny by state authorities by exchanging currency outside of the official exchange houses (CADECAs) and sometimes receive a more advantageous rate, and people like Alicia could earn a small profit. Conversely, in the

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[174] Interestingly, there were separate rental licenses for Cubans renting "*en divisa*" (convertible peso or CUC) and those renting "*en moneda nacional* or *CUP*" (the less valuable local currency) and the signs they were required to display at the front of their property distinguished one from the other with distinctive color schemes: white and blue for those who rented in CUC "*arrendadores en divisa*" and white and red for those who rented in CUP "*arrendadores en moneda nacional*." I inquired about renting rooms at some places with the red and white signs, but was told that those were meant for Cuban nationals from out of town or, more commonly, were used as hourly rentals for sexual encounters.

months leading up to her upcoming European vacation, Alicia encouraged her clients to pay in Euros, which ultimately saved her money in the conversion process.

Running a *casa particular* allows for additional income-generating opportunities, supplementing the earnings from the nightly rental rate. It is common for *casas particulares* to offer "a la carte" services for an additional cost, including breakfast or dinner, salsa lessons, tours of the city, taxi services to and from the airport, and sales of bottled water, beer, and soft drinks.[175] Sometimes these services are provided "in house" by the host or a family member, or sometimes they are contracted out to people in the hosts' wider network for a commission or as an act of goodwill, with the norm of reciprocity attached. *Casa particular* owners also commonly refer clients wishing to travel to other popular tourist destinations across the island to contacts within their network of *casa particular* owners, earning a commission of 5 CUC per room, per night for the referral. Alicia had been operating her *casa particular* for nearly a decade when I met her, and she provided a full range of services to meet her clients' needs. The woman she hired to clean her homes would also serve a breakfast to tourists: a simple breakfast of coffee, bread, and spreads for 3 CUC or an upgraded breakfast that included eggs and fresh fruit for 5 CUC. Her sisters, nieces, and friends all prepared traditional Cuban dinners for clients over the years for an agreed-upon price (approximately 10-20 CUC per person, depending on the menu). Her nephew offered beginner salsa lessons in her living room and gave tours of different parts of the city, keeping all of his earnings. Her former long-term boyfriend arranged airport transport and earned a healthy commission for each ride—a fact that her sisters and nephews openly and frequently complained about, saying she was missing out on significant earnings, to which Alicia

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[175] Airbnb launched in Cuba in 2015, and introduced Airbnb "Experiences" in 2016, which allows users to pre-arrange activities such as salsa lessons, walking or taxi tours, cooking lessons, and more. Thus, there are more opportunities for people who do not have *casas particulares* to offer such services.

reminded them that he was by her side through a serious health battle and that was her way of repaying him. When internet access was restricted to hotels and costly (6 CUC per hour), Alicia allowed tourists to use her in-home, dial-up connection, sometimes charging them a nominal fee and other times, when it was particularly slow or when they only needed to check something quickly, doing it as a favor. If a tourist wanted to purchase Cuban cigars, she called up a friend who had a connection at the cigar factory and could get boxes of authentic cigars with the official seals needed to pass customs at the airport. Using code language to avoid detection over the phone, she would order the "package" or "coffee," for which she earned a commission which varied with the sales price. By offering this wide range of services, she both fulfilled the needs of her guests, increasing the likelihood that they would become repeat visitors or refer her business to others, and secured additional income streams for herself or those close to her.

In addition to being economically lucrative, owning a *casa particular* puts owners in a position to come into regular contact with international visitors in private, intimate spaces, encouraging the formation of both strong and weak ties that could be activated to access opportunities, difficult to procure goods, or information. Existing literature has drawn attention to the ways in which Cubans who work in the tourism industry are advantaged because of their access to hard currency, but less attention is paid to the non-economic benefits of access to international tourists, which I found to be significant in my research. Alicia had formed very close friendships with several tourists, and had warm relations with countless others. An entire 10-foot wall of her living room was covered with messages from past guests expressing their gratitude for her hospitality, many of them referring to her as their "Cuban mama." Quite early on in her business, it was one of her guests who she had formed a close relationship with that registered her *casa particular* on various websites advertising accommodations in Cuba, which

really helped her further grow her clientele. During her month-long vacation to Europe, Alicia first went to Paris to visit her cousin, who had arranged for the letter of invitation necessary to be granted a visa to the Schengen area, then traveled to Madrid and Berlin to visit (and stay with) friends who she initially met when they were guests in her *casa particular*. Alicia recounted how two clients of hers approached her with business propositions. They were interested in investing in Cuba and wished to put the legal paperwork in her name (given that foreigners were not permitted to own property or businesses in Cuba) and have her oversee the business. These business propositions ultimately did not come to fruition, but it is telling nevertheless of the opportunities presented from ties formed through her business.

Alicia used both strong and weak ties with international clients to procure goods that were difficult to obtain in Cuba. Even with first-time clients, I witnessed Alicia request that they bring with them sheet sets, oatmeal, granola, dry fruit, nuts, tea, multivitamins, and various other goods, offering to credit the cost of the items towards their accommodations. I wish to underline just how vital and advantageous this access to goods that are difficult or impossible to come by locally is. Often faced with empty store shelves and/or prohibitive prices, Cubans dedicate a significant portion of their week to procuring food and other basic necessities, and often have to simply go without. It is quite common to wait for hours in long lines under the hot sun or travel far distances on crowded public transit only for the item to be sold out by the time your turn comes around. Alicia was always worried that she would run out of toilet paper for her visitors, while other participants in the study who did not have *casas particulares* lamented that as soon as a store received a large shipment of toilet paper, the *casa particular* owners would purchase it in bulk (they had the means to do so), and regular Cubans often had to go without. Cubans, *casa particular* owners or not, relied on their networks to procure goods, whether to learn when a

shipment of high-demand items such as chicken or toilet paper had come in or to circumvent the limits on the quantity that could be purchased by any one consumer, or to obtain a cut of meat or seafood not sold in stores.[176] In addition to these local networks, *casa particular* owners like Alicia could tap into networks of international visitors to source items that were difficult or impossible to get even through their local networks.

It was also very common for guests to come with (unsolicited) gifts for their host and also to leave behind additional personal items such as shoes, clothes, bags, perfume, shampoo, lotions, and other personal care items. This was so common and significant, in fact, that Alicia only occasionally needed to purchase personal care items for herself, and often had enough to share with her nieces and nephews as well as her sisters.

Importantly, *casa particular* owners not only had regular contact with foreigners by virtue of their business, but this close contact was legitimized and occurred in a private space, away from scrutiny. For many years in Cuba, and still to a certain extent in the 2010s, personal relations between Cubans and foreigners were regarded with suspicion by the state, both for the potentially corrupting ideas that could be introduced by foreigners as well as sexual exploitation of Cubans and for the potential harassment or swindling of foreigners by Cubans which could potentially compromise Cuba's reputation as a popular tourist destination, a major pillar of the Cuban economy. Though much less common than it was in the 1990s, Cubans who are with foreigners in public spaces are still sometimes stopped by police and questioned, under suspicion that they may be hustling the foreigner. This occurred approximately a half-dozen times to my Cuban friends when we were walking around town, especially in Old Havana or Centro Habana,

[176] While it wasn't widely used during the time of my fieldwork in 2015-16, when mobile internet access was still geographically limited to public parks, Cubans now regularly use WhatsApp message groups to inform one another and stay up to date on which items are available in which stores.

two areas of town that are high in tourist activity. It occurred exclusively to my male friends, and, among them, those of Afro-Cuban descent, and usually when there were just two of us rather than a larger group of us. From my conversations with Cubans, this pattern is not exclusive to Cuban males, but rather when the foreigner and Cuban are of opposite sex. *Casa particular* owners, on the other hand, were always an exception in this regard, permitted to interact with foreigners and able to do so within their own home, away from the watchful eye of state authorities. Moreover, the setting of the interaction—home, an intimate private space—further facilitates meaningful interaction and the formation of ties.

The many benefits of running a *casa particular* that I detail above—both economic and noneconomic—position *casa particular* owners in a relatively advantageous position in Cuban society, and often facilitate their social mobility, as was the case with Alicia. There are many factors that go into operating a successful *casa particular* or any home-based private business, but the most basic one is having adequate housing to run such a business. Starting from the bare minimum, one's home should be in good structural condition and have sufficient space to house the business (in the case of *casas particulares*, having spare bedroom(s) to host guests and ideally a separate bathroom for guests). It is also important to be centrally located. For *casa particular* owners or other businesses whose target clientele are tourists, this means being in one of the desirable tourist areas, which tend to be concentrated along the coastal regions of Old Havana, Vedado, and Miramar/Playa. Not having adequate conditions in one's home is not necessarily an insurmountable obstacle for those wishing to operate a private business, though it does limit the options with respect to what kind of business (it is unheard of to operate a room rental business in a home other than one's own, for example). People who do not have adequate conditions in their own home but wish to operate a private business are able to rent space from

people whose homes are better suited for business but have no interest in operating it themselves, although as with any rental situation, it was somewhat precarious since they could be asked to leave at any moment. In the section that follows, I look more closely at how people rent out extra space or other amenities in their homes as a way to secure their own welfare and to make welfare improvements.

Renting out space in one's home

Another way in which people used their homes to secure their welfare or make improvements to it, in addition to setting up a business inside their home, was to rent out space in their home to others who wished to use it for commercial purposes. People rented out space in their front rooms, front porches, driveways, garages, windows facing the street, and even stairwells to business owners who did not have the adequate conditions in their own home to house their business.[177] This earned them a steady stream of income, without having to juggle the work of running a business. Yet another way in which people used their homes for welfare provision or improvement was to rent out amenities in their home directly to domestic consumers with the purchasing power to consume. It was common for people with a garage or extra parking space on their property to rent it out to neighbors who owned a car but did not have a secure place to store it overnight (parking on the street in Cuba is not common because of concerns over theft). It was also common for people who owned homes with swimming pools to rent out their pool for a half-day or full day to groups of domestic consumers with sufficient purchasing

[177] In some cases, they simply allowed the business owner to set up a table and station that could easily be dismantled, such as a manicure table in a front room or on a porch. In other cases, the homeowner allowed the business owner renting the space to make permanent or semi-permanent installations or alterations to the space.

power. Others with no special amenities but with extra space in their home might rent out storage space–for example, a secure location to store a bicycle while running errands or perhaps goods for sale for ambulatory sellers for whom it is difficult to lug their wares home, especially if they live in a distant part of the city and rely on public transport, as many do. These ventures in renting vary in terms of how economically lucrative they are, but in any case they were at least a welcome supplement to household income and, for some, a substantial one.

Karl Marx famously drew the distinction between those who own the means of production and those who do not and are therefore relegated to selling their labor. I wish to draw attention to and underscore another stratifying distinction relevant not only in Cuba, but in societies around the world: the distinction between those who own property/space that they can monetize (mainly through rent) and those who do not and must rent it from those who do. The most obvious example of this distinction is between homeowners and people who rent the home in which they live, but it applies much more broadly. Although the phenomenon of renting has existed throughout history, within the last decade or so, we have witnessed the increasing popularity of websites and applications that aim to connect people that own desirable properties or amenities on their property with people who need or desire the things being rented, including rooms or homes to stay in (Airbnb, Vrbo), swimming pools (Swimply), parking spots or garages (DriveWayz, SpotHero), storage space (StoreAtMyHouse, Neighbor.com), and backyards to be used as private dog parks (SniffSpot).[178] These are just some of the ways that people utilize their home to generate income, and they represent a potentially important household revenue stream,

[178] This same model of connecting private owners to would-be renters exists for a much wider market than just residential property-related things, including automobiles (e.g. Turo) and RVs. There is even a generalized website that allows people to rent just about anything they own, including things like coolers for camping.

especially as states retrench social welfare provisions and wages are not sufficient to cover household expenses. With the rising popularity of residential property rentals of all forms, it is important to consider who tends to be the owners of such income-generating property and the implications for social inequality.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined two ways in which Cubans use their housing to ensure their welfare and to pursue social mobility strategies: first, by converting the wealth stored in their home into cash through selling, and second, by using their home to generate sustained income, either by setting up a home-based business or by renting space for commercial purposes or renting other amenities to consumers. This chapter makes three principal contributions. First, in outlining the ways Cubans used housing to improve their economic standing and pursue social mobility, I emphasize the ways in which housing can serve as a means to social mobility, thereby supplementing a more traditional understanding of housing serving as a reflection of social class and/or an expression of social mobility. Second, I argue that housing is becoming an increasingly important source of welfare and a means of achieving upward social mobility, as individuals and families increasingly take over responsibility for their own welfare from the state. As such, it is also serving as the basis for a new, housing-based system of stratification in Cuba. Third, I highlight the increasing trend towards profiting from housing not just through its sale but by using one's home as a site for profit-generating activities, and I draw attention to the increasingly relevant distinction between those who own property that can generate revenue and those who do not.

This chapter emphasizes the ways in which housing can be used as a source of welfare and upward social mobility, but it is important to recognize that housing can also act as a barrier to these things. Far from a universal source of welfare or means to social mobility, many Cuban families could not leverage their housing in a way that led to upward social mobility. Those families who did not own residential property[179] found themselves at a significant disadvantage relative to homeowners, unable to cash in on the wealth stored in their homes. While the Revolution had provided them a place to live, it would remain just that—a place to live. For some homeowners, their housing, while meeting basic needs for shelter for their family, was not valued highly in market terms and the wealth stored in the home was limited. For those whose homes were priced on the low end of the market, they had few options, since they still needed a place to live. Some families were able to solve a particular need or issue their family was facing, such as splitting a multi-generational household into two separate households, which certainly made a big difference in their daily lives, but this did not translate to gains in social mobility. An alternative way to use housing for welfare provision and improvements is by using one's home as a site for a small private business, but this requires a home with adequate conditions to support the desired business, as discussed earlier. Generally, those with low-value housing tended to strike out on this second front as well, because the same characteristics that made their housing less valuable in market terms were those that made them less conducive to setting up a lucrative home business. This raises the interesting and consequential question of how people came to live in the homes that they found themselves in when housing became (re)commodified, and whether

[179] Those excluded from homeownership included not just those renting from a private party but also long-term leaseholders leasing from the state ("*usufructuarios*") and people assigned a dwelling through their workplace, so long as they were working for that workplace ("*medio básico*" or "*vivienda vinculada*"). I look more closely at these tenure statuses in chapter six.

the differentials in home values map onto discernable group differences as well, questions I take up in chapter five and six, respectively.

CHAPTER 5: HOW PEOPLE CAME TO LIVE IN THEIR HOMES: AVENUES AND CRITERIA FOR ACQUIRING HOMES

Introduction

Housing is serving as the basis for a new system of stratification in Cuba, which raises questions about who the winners and losers are in this new system. In this housing-based system of stratification, those with more valuable homes are able to use their home for social welfare provision as well as social mobility, either by selling it and cashing in on the economic capital in their homes or using it as an ongoing source of income through a home-based business. This in turn raises the question of how people or families came to occupy the homes they found themselves living in when those homes became recommodified–in particular, when the economic capital in those homes suddenly became unlocked in November 2011. What were the avenues through which they acquired their housing as well as the criteria for acquiring housing? By tracing the historical processes through which people acquired their homes, we can begin to understand which social groups were best positioned to use the recommodification of housing in Cuba and the emerging real estate market in particular for upward social mobility, and which social groups are limited or entirely excluded from cashing in on the new opportunity to sell homes at free-market prices, a question I take up in the following chapter.

How people came to live where they did when homes became re-commodified

How did Cubans come to live in the homes they were living in when those homes were recommodified, first in the 1990s and especially in 2011, when the economic value of those homes was unlocked and homeowners found themselves in a position to extract the wealth stored in their homes through sale on the newly legalized residential real-estate market? Based on my

interviews with Cubans on their housing history, together with secondary sources, I outline the various avenues through which people acquired their homes in the post-1959 period, as well as the predominant criteria used to allocate/acquire housing. I consider these questions through the lens of the public versus private sphere, looking at the role of the state in providing housing to its citizens vis-a-vis the role of individuals, families, and markets in securing housing, and the competing logics that rule each sphere.[180] I summarize this schema in table 5.1. With an understanding of the avenues and criteria for acquiring housing through these different spheres in the pre-2011 period, I then consider the implications for the post-2011 period in terms of social equality and social mobility strategies.

Table 5. 1: Avenues and criteria for acquiring housing, 1959-2011

Sphere	Avenues through which people acquired housing, 1959-2011	Predominant criteria for acquiring housing, 1959-2011
Public sphere of the state	• Assignment of vacant homes (e.g. nationalized homes of émigres/exiles) • Newly-built housing by state entities • Workplace-related housing ("*medio básico*," "*vivienda vinculada*") • (Temporary) shelters ("*albergues*")	• Need • Merit • Membership in trade unions or employment in particular workplaces

[180] In contrast to my emphasis and categorization, which highlights the role of the state versus that of individuals, families, and markets in acquiring housing, Hamberg (1994: 262) distinguishes between what she calls the "primary" market, which consists of "administrative allocation of housing by workplaces, government agencies, or other entities" and the "secondary market,, which involves "redistribution of units and resources through sales, exchanges, subletting, and succession." The author also notes the important role of self-building, which incorporates elements of both the "primary" and "secondary" market.

	● Exchanges/swaps ("*permutas*"), primarily in the 1960s	
Private sphere of individuals/ families and markets	● Individual self-building ● Relationship-based avenues: ○ Inheritance ○ Elder care ○ Romantic relationships ● Exchanges/swaps of housing ("*permutas*"), 1970s-2011 ● Illegal home sales/purchases ● Renting from a private landlord ● Squatting in unoccupied homes	● Economic capital (remittances, private sector earning, black market earnings, missions abroad, etc.) ● Social capital (connections)

Acquiring housing through the state: need and merit as key determinants

The avenues through which Cubans acquired housing through the state in the post-1959 period varied, but the criteria used by the state to distribute or assign housing were fairly consistent: "need" and/or "merit" were the primary criteria used to distribute housing, with members of trade unions and employees at particular workplaces having favored access because these were the primary mechanisms through which housing was distributed.[181] In stark contrast

[181] I provide a general overview of the criteria used here. For a full account, see Jill Hamberg's (1994) nearly 600-page doctoral dissertation on housing in Cuba, which provides the most comprehensive account of how housing was distributed after the Cuban Revolution, with details on how exactly criteria shifted over the years, and different contingencies and exceptions.

to the chief criteria that structured access to housing in the private sphere, the economic capital of individuals or families did not determine access to housing in the state sphere.

Ninety-three year old Esperanza recalls when she first moved into her spacious two-bedroom apartment in a centrally located art deco building in Centro Habana some 54 years prior to our interview, given to her by, in her words, "the Revolution." She had come from humble beginnings, her Afro-Cuban mother a domestic worker for a wealthy white family in Havana, and her Afro-Cuban father a construction worker. After Esperanza gave birth in early 1962, she appealed to the state for housing, making a case that her cramped apartment could not accommodate a crib and was infested with rats, and that she needed more adequate housing to raise her baby. Before her infant turned one, she, her husband and their daughter were given an apartment that had been left empty when the occupants purportedly moved to another province. Over half a century later, she still lived in this apartment, now with her two granddaughters and each of their daughters. "It was very humane," she reminisces, "They took care of all of our problems."

The primary criterion for acquiring housing through the state was a family's "need" for housing, although the definition of need morphed over time. "Need" was initially defined in the early 1960s as large families whose income was below 150 pesos per month (regardless of their housing situation), but soon housing conditions (particularly families living in tenements and deteriorated buildings) came to be the primary consideration, together with the size of the household (Hamberg 1994: 266-67). By Hamberg's (1994) account, "'need'…was the overwhelming criteria in urban housing distribution throughout the 1960s" (p. 278), with an estimated four-fifths of units allocated based on need (p. 268).[182] Need also encompassed the

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[182] Hamberg (1994) estimates that during this same time period, only approximately 10 percent of units were assigned to "accommodate migration of high-priority sectors" (p. 268), which refers to domestic and

housing needs of "*albergados*," those living in shelters because their homes had become uninhabitable (because of a building collapse or other dangerous conditions, for example), who were often prioritized for housing, at least in official policy if not always in practice. Given that so much of the population was in need of housing, and demand seemed to always exceed supply, adjudicating on the basis of need was a difficult proposition.

Another important criterion for housing distribution in the state sphere was "merit," which encompassed a wide variety of things, including job performance, as well as "political, social, and moral factors" (Hamberg 1994: 277). Hamberg (1994: 277) argues that merit first began to be considered in the late 1960s, and became a "determinant" after 1970. Merit was still a determining factor in 1992, when Santiago was finishing construction on the microbrigade building he and 34 other workers from his company had been working on for years, and the question of who the 20 apartments would be distributed to was being debated at his workplace. He was competing for apartments not only with those who had labored alongside him building the apartment, but all of his other co-workers at the company where he worked. He proudly tells me that he had the most merit out of all of them, citing 32 merit points in total. His chief merit was that he had served on two international missions to Angola. He also donated blood regularly, was involved in his local Committee for the Defense of the Revolution, completed overnight neighborhood watch, and had many hours of volunteer work. Based on his merit, he was allowed to choose which of the 20 available apartments he wanted, and he chose a three-bedroom

foreign technicians, professionals, diplomats, and returning exiles (from before the Revolution) (p. 267, 275-76), concluding, "That technicians, managers, and high officials received some coveted units, and favoritism and corruption occasionally occurred, was probably much more important politically than quantitatively" (p. 278).

apartment on the top floor of their five-story walkup, which had a welcome breeze and an excellent view.

Hamberg (1994) argues that the tendency to use political, social, and moral behavior when adjudicating who gets housing extended beyond the worker to the entire household:

> When the microbrigades started, behavioral criteria were used to exclude families, even if the individual worker ranked high on the merit scale and the family lived in miserable conditions. The use of such behavioral criteria for housing allocation in the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with efforts to foment "new men and women," and with a high degree of intolerance of, and overt discrimination against, perceived "deviants" and "dissidents." Such practices eased a bit in the middle to late 1970s and to a much greater extent in the 1980s. Some examples illustrate these policies. Jehovah's Witnesses and *santeros* were excluded from Alamar, the massive development on the outskirts of Havana where most of the city's microbrigade housing was built in the 1970s. (P. 282)

In fact, this practice of considering behavior that was desirable under socialist ideology began earlier than the era of the microbrigades, and had been applied to decide which residents of shantytowns would be given housing in new developments. As Hamberg (1994: 283) explains, “The emphasis on "merit" and to some extent family conduct in the early 1970s may have contributed to a process of creaming the most active and hard-working families from the worst slums, leaving behind those in low-priority workplaces and those believed to have social problems.”

While the main criteria for acquiring housing in the state sphere were need and merit, housing was distributed mainly through unions and workplaces, thus favoring members of trade unions and employees of particular workplaces (such as those with microbrigades) over the general population. Initially, the Urban Reform Agency took on the task of distributing units, but when in January 1961 it received over 150,000 for just 7,000 vacant units, it found itself against an impossible task, and reportedly ended up drawing names like a lottery (Hamberg 1994: 265). On May 1, 1961, the task of distributing urban vacant units was turned over to the central labor

federation (Central de Trabajadores de Cuba) for allocation to union members (Hamberg 1994: 266). Within months, a quota system was implemented, with unions receiving 60 percent of units, the Armed Forces receiving 10 percent, the Ministry of the Interior receiving 7 percent, self-employed workers receiving 6 percent, 4 percent going to Cuban citizens who were in exile before the Revolution, 2 percent assigned to professionals and technicians, 1 percent to foreign diplomats, and the remaining 10 percent to those displaced by imminent building collapses, fires, and slum and shantytown clearance, as well as war victims and "state needs" (i.e. high-level officials and managers needing relocation for job or security reasons) (Hamberg 1994: 266). There was reportedly a six-month period in 1966 where all vacant units were allocated to families living in uninhabitable structures, and after that allocation was split evenly between those living in hazardous buildings and the other half given to trade unions and other entities for distribution (Hamberg 1994: 274). With the workplace-based microbrigade movement that started in 1970, urban housing in the 1970s and 1980s was overwhelmingly distributed through workplaces with microbrigades,[183] thus leaving out large swaths of the population in need of housing (Hamberg 1994: 171). In rural areas, government ministries such as the agriculture and sugar ministries built their own housing and distributed it to their workers, as a way to ensure a steady labor force in these important sectors (Hamberg 1994: 288, 402). The military also built housing for its personnel (Hamberg 1994: 289). In the 1980s, municipal housing departments also distributed some housing, setting as their priority those who lived in shelters, uninhabitable units, shantytowns, tenements, those who did not have access to self-building or microbrigade housing, and families displaced by private projects (Hamberg 1994: 400-01). In sum, the

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[183] A certain percentage of units built by microbrigades were allocated for housing for people outside of the workplace-based microbrigade, such as doctors or nurses that would service the local clinic to be housed on the ground floor of the microbrigade building, for example.

mechanisms through which housing was distributed tended to favor union members and employees of particular workplaces, as well as workers in particular government ministries that built their own housing, leaving a much smaller proportion of housing to be distributed amongst the rest of the population.

Vacant homes: How the state assigned homes left vacant my Cuban émigres/exiles

When Cuba's upper and middle classes fled the island following the Cuban Revolution, the homes they left behind were nationalized by the Cuban state and converted to buildings for public use or assigned as residences. Between 1959 and 1962, 248,100 Cubans fled to the United States alone (Duany 2017).[184] Between 1959 and 1975, 135,000 housing units were left empty because their occupants had emigrated (Pérez 2006: 279). This first wave of Cuban emigrants, the "historic exiles," were overwhelmingly upper and middle class, light-skinned, well-educated, white-collar workers from urban areas (especially Havana), fleeing out of fear of political and religious persecution (Duany 2017). In December 1961, Law 989 nationalized the property (as well as vacant lots) of those who had left Cuba.[185] Those who had been living with the emigrants/exiles and remained in Cuba were permitted to remain in the home, with the exception of domestic workers and those who moved in after the Urban Reform Law of October 1960, who would apparently be relocated to other units, purportedly as a measure to prevent collusion between them and emigrants seeking to recover their property upon their return to the island

[184] Estimates vary somewhat. According to Eckstein (2009), 225,000 people emigrated from Cuba within the first two years of the Revolution.

[185] Some would-be exiles sought to avoid this fate by selling their home, vacant lot, businesses, or other real estate, but any such sales that the state learned about were revoked (Hamberg 1994: 304).

(Hamberg 1994: 304).[186] Vacant homes were assigned as residences and transformed into public buildings serving social functions. Smaller homes were distributed to families in need of housing, and squatters took up residence in others (Hamberg 1994: 267-268). Some of the larger, luxury homes were given to high-ranking officials, including government, party, and military leaders, while the state retained others to use for lodging foreign technicians and diplomats (Hamberg 1994: 120, 268).[187] Some homes in the previously exclusive Miramar neighborhood were given as rewards to soldiers and literacy campaign volunteers (Scarpaci 1996: 200), and vacant units in "good" neighborhoods were also assigned to low-income residents or migrants to Havana (Coyula and Hamberg 2003: 6), which led neighborhoods to become more economically and racially heterogeneous. Many of the grandiose homes were converted into schools, health clinics, state offices, government ministries, foreign embassies, daycare centers or student dormitories for scholarship students from the provinces studying in Havana, but also for former maids and sex workers in retraining programs (Hamberg 1994: 120, 130, 268; Scarpaci 1996:

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[186] In contrast, journalist Nick Miroff (2015) writes that "many" of the expropriated homes of wealthy and middle-class Cuban exiles "went to poorer Cubans or the caretakers that the wealthier families had left behind." In my conversations with Cubans on the matter, several claimed that the empty homes were indeed left to the domestic employees ("*críadas*"), but I could not triangulate this information reliably.

[187] Hermes Mallea, a Manhattan-based architect whose family are Cuban exiles in Miami, features in his *Havana Living Today* (2017) various luxurious former private residences that came under control by the state-led Palco agency, saying that the "list of the former owners of Palco's houses is a who's who of Pre-Revolution Havana's wealthiest families: Gomez Mena, Aguilera, Falla, Suero, Santeiro, Tarafa, Fanjul, and Batista" (59). Mallea reports that Palco is in charge of renting more than 1,500 houses and apartments to foreign diplomats and Havana's international residents (p. 67). He reports that four houses in the Country Club district of Havana were controlled by the state beginning in 1960, which had expanded to include 100 official diplomatic guesthouses ("*casas de protocolo*"), including a dozen beach houses, in some of Havana's "most high-security areas" (p. 59). In addition to these guesthouses, Palco coordinates short-term rentals for international tourists, which Mallea says "is a unique opportunity for the visitor to experience the Pre-Revolution lifestyle of the elite Havana neighborhoods rarely visited by tourists today" (p. 59).

197).[188, 189] According to a 1996 land-use survey of the Miramar neighborhood in Havana carried out by urbanist Joseph Scarpaci, since 1994, some of the homes that had been used as housing for students from the provinces studying in Havana or for migrants from the eastern provinces were transformed by Cuban and joint venture firms into office spaces, sales rooms, dining areas, and apartments for foreigners (Scarpaci 1996: 201).[190]

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[188] In a different volume titled *Great Houses of Havana,* Mallea (2011) showcases the interiors of grandiose private homes and the stories of their original owners as well as their present-day use in his impressive book. While he does not explicitly discuss nor specify which homes were expropriated in this volume, he does mention in several instances that the owners "left" in the early 1960s (for example, see pages 186, 217, 257), leaving it understood that these private residences were expropriated. (The fact that he explicitly mentions that the Canadian ambassador's residence had been purchased from the owners in 1949, which clarifies that it had not been expropriated, further suggests that the author's silence about the other residences featured indicates that they were expropriated.) Examples of the current-day use of the impressive residences featured in Mallea's volume include: the Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos, UNESCO's Caribbean headquarters, the Casa de la Amistad de los Pueblos, the Casa de la Cultura de Centro Habana, the Casa del Vedado (a house museum run by the City Historian's Office), various government operated diplomatic guesthouses ("*casas de protocolo*"), the Swiss ambassador's residence, and the British Ambassador's Residence, and a center for distribution of textiles (which was initially a workshop for artistic ceramics after the revolution). In a subsequent book, Mallea (2017) states, "The majority of Havana's hundred-odd foreign ambassadors rent their top diplomatic residences from Palco, the state agency that manages a portfolio of state-confiscated houses in the city's exclusive neighborhoods" (p. 41).

[189] One of the grandiose homes featured in Mallea's *Great Houses of Havana* (2011) is a French-style palace built in 1927 by French architects P. Virad and M. Destugué for sugar baron José (Pepe) Gómez Mena and his first wife. It became Havana's Museum of Decorative Arts in 1964 and still operates at the time of this writing. At the time of the Revolution, the palace actually belonged to Pepe's sister, the Countess of Revilla de Camargo, who resided in the Vedado mansion, known for hosting extravagant parties and hosting international visitors, including European royalty. She left Cuba in 1961, reportedly hiding valuable paintings and silver in a walled up room in the palace. The room was discovered, and many of the paintings as well as her collection of eighteenth-century French furniture were displayed in the museum, which opened in 1964. While Mallea does not explicitly say so, the timeline and details of the story point to the fact that it was confiscated by the state after the Countess left Cuba in 1961.

[190] A foreign correspondent for the Chicago Tribune reported in 2005 on the recent trend of renting "some of the finer homes" left by exiles to foreigners, giving the example of a Spanish reporter living in the home originally designed by famous Cuban architect Frank Martinez for Stanley Wax and his family, who fled Cuba in 1961, after Stanley's textile store had been taken over and he was briefly jailed (Marx 2005).

While anecdotes about the redistribution of vacant homes of emigrants abound,[191] reliable, representative data about how/to whom they were distributed is harder to come by. Hamberg (1994) provides the best such estimate, but for later waves of emigration:

> At the time of the Mariel boatlift [in 1980], Havana housing agencies had been distributing the few vacant units left by emigrants according to a formula: 50 percent to albergados [those living in shelters], 20 percent to people displaced by public projects and related activities, (e.g., airport and port expansion, clearing shantytowns, and relocating residents of hotels and illegal occupants), and 30 percent for "state needs" (e.g., diplomats and high-level officials). Within months of the exodus, it was determined that units left vacant by marielitos - more than half of which were located in Havana - would be distributed in Havana almost exclusively to albergados, given that their number had grown by then to more than 8,000 families. (P. 291)
>
> Other provinces established priorities for the Mariel units according to their own local conditions. For instance, in Las Tunas the order of priority for vacant units was (1) collective social uses (e.g., schools, cultural centers, restaurants, and other public services), (2) medical personnel for the new provincial hospital, (3) families of war casualties, and (4) municipal waiting lists (Bohemia, May 29, 1981). In Pinar del Rio, units left vacant by exiles were distributed by the CDRs (BCRCHSG, 1981). (P. 293)

The "*marielitos*" differed significantly from the first wave of emigrants: the 124,800 Cubans boatlifted to Key West "were primarily young, single, working-class men with little education. Approximately 20 percent were Black or mulatto, compared to just 7 percent of the Cubans who arrived between 1960 and 1964" (Duany 2017). Hamberg does not address the quality of the

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[191] One such anecdote was told by a journalist for the Chicago Tribune: "Jose Santiago remembers the day in early 1960 when a young Che Guevara, dressed in fatigues and trademark black beret, came to his family's new home for dinner. Like many wealthy Havana residents, the Santiago family had recently moved into its dream home, designed by a hot young architect and featuring shiny terrazzo floors, geometric stained-glass windows, floor-to-ceiling shutters and a whimsical, wing-shaped roof….Guevara was there to speak to Santiago's father, a powerful businessman who headed the Tobacco Exporters Association of Cuba. Santiago, now 62 and living in Midlothian, Va., remembers Guevara sitting at the dining room table and bluntly telling Santiago's dad, Mardonio, "The mission of this revolution is to get rid of people like you." Several years later the Santiago family was gone, having joined hundreds of thousands of Cubans who fled into exile and left behind scores of magnificent modernist homes. Today four families--more than a dozen people in all--live in the old Santiago house, which like many 1950s residences has been subdivided because of the island's housing shortage" (Marx 2005).

housing left behind directly, but we do get a sense from the following comments that it was likely much more modest than the homes of the first wave of primarily upper and middle-class migrants: "Vacated units located in agricultural areas, and "special areas" (e.g., "frozen zones," tourist areas), and rooms in [tenements] were not distributed pending further study. If the available unit were located in a shantytown and in good shape, it was assigned to another member of the same community, whose house was demolished. Albergados who had joined together in special microbrigades to build housing were eligible to receive either vacant units or the microbrigade units once it was completed. Eligible families usually received units in their same neighborhoods or municipalities, although in some cases they were located in other areas." (1994: 291).

State-built housing

According to the most recent Cuban census conducted in 2012, the housing stock consisted of 3.8 million units on an island whose population is 11.1 million (ONEI 2012). According to official estimates published in late 2018, 67 percent of the existing housing stock has been built since 1959, a total of over 2.5 million units (Bustamante Molina and Castro Morales 2018). The state constructed between one quarter and one third of all homes built between 1959 and the late 1980s, while the remainder were built by individuals and families, (though official figures tend to greatly undercount private construction) (Hamberg 1994: 145-46, 154, 189-190, 522).[192]

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[192] For totals of state versus private housing construction between 1959 and 1988, broken down by time period, see table 8-1 in Hamberg 1994: 522.

What I denominate "state-built housing" was constructed through a variety of entities, some more centralized and directly tied to the state and others less so, but all fall under the umbrella of the state sphere because they share some common characteristics: the state provided them with the land, materials, equipment, and/or technical assistance for building, the projects were budgeted by the state, the workers undertaking the construction efforts were on state payrolls, and state enterprises organized the production process.[193] Some such entities included the National Institute of Savings and Housing (INAV) (1959-60); the Ministry of Public Works (1959-63); local governments; the Ministry of Construction "state brigades" (early 1960s to late 1980s); workplace-based microbrigades (beginning in 1970); various ministries not directly related to housing, such as the sugar, agricultural, and defense ministries; and agricultural cooperatives (Hamberg 1994: 149-150, table 5-2 on 521 figure 4 on 535, figure 5 on 536).[194] As a general rule, the state preferred to construct multi-family dwellings, which was more efficient in terms of infrastructure support.

The beneficiaries of state-built housing varied, often dependent on which state entity was constructing the housing, with preference often given to the employees in the particular industry or workplace undertaking the construction. The National Institute of Saving and Housing (INAV) created in 1959 was tasked with building low-cost housing for workers, and it also built homes for residents of shantytowns and slums (de la Fuente 2001: 275). For example, the

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[193] I share much of the same understanding of what counts as state construction as Jill Hamberg (1994), in contrast to others who count microbrigades as a form of self-help construction outside of the sphere of the state, most notably Kosta Mathey (1989: 67).

[194] Hamberg (1994: 160) writes, "In Havana, and possibly a few other places, microbrigades functioned as independent entities with their own equipment and tools. Some established their own plants to produce materials or prefabricated elements. But in other provinces, microbrigade members were directly integrated into [Ministry of Construction] brigades."

residents of Las Yaguas, one of the most infamous shantytowns in Havana, were transferred in 1961 to a new housing complex built in a traditionally middle-class neighborhood (de la Fuente 2001: 275). The ministries of sugar, agriculture, and defense (armed forces and police) constructed homes for their own workers. The Ministry of Construction (MICONS) built high-rise dwellings in large cities as well as units in labor-scarce agricultural and industrial new towns (Hamberg 1994: 150). Other non-housing ministries produced their own housing for those under their purview: the defense ministry built units for officers as well as civilian employees, while the sugar and agricultural ministries built units in sugarmill towns and agricultural communities and gave loans and assistance to agricultural cooperatives to build settlements near their farms (Hamberg 1994: 150-151). Microbrigades, which first sprung up in 1970, were a major part of state-building efforts, estimated to have built approximately half of all government-built housing between 1971 and the early to mid-1980s (Hamberg 1994: 173). Microbrigades were generally comprised of a team of workers from a specific workplace who were typically released from their normal work duties in order to labor full-time constructing homes,[195] which were later distributed to workers from those workplaces (and not necessarily those who built them). A portion of the units they built were also destined for storm victims and local governments for uses like clinics or for distribution to the population (Hamberg 1994: 173).[196] A significant

[195] Some microbrigades, however, were structured in such a way that the participants continued to labor at their usual jobs and worked with the microbrigade after hours. This was the case for Alicia, whom we met in chapter 4, who together with many of the fellow teachers at her workplace continued to teach classes during the day, and worked on the microbrigade in the afternoons and weekends.

[196] Hamberg (1994: 73) states that microbrigades "turned 30 to 50 percent of their units over to local government for distribution." Several of my interviewees who participated in microbrigades reported that one unit in their 4- or 5-story building of approximately 25 apartments was made into a health clinic, one or two additional ones were given to workplaces as "*medio básicos*" and occupied by doctors or nurses, another one or two would be given to *albergados*, and the rest distributed amongst workers at their workplace.

proportion of Cubans acquired housing through microbrigades. The number of beneficiaries of microbrigade-built housing is difficult to decipher, but Havana's Alamar neighborhood alone, which has a large concentration of microbrigade buildings, houses upwards of 100,000 residents (and by some estimates was home to between 120,000 and 150,000 residents).

Workplace-related homes

Some Cubans found themselves living in "workplace-related housing," some of which were homes and others which were spaces such as empty warehouses being used for residential purposes. By 1991, there were 172,388 workplace-related units – approximately 6 percent of the housing stock and one third of all units built by the state since 1959 – of which the vast majority (142,064) were "tied" to workplaces ("*viviendas vinculadas*") and the remaining were fixed assets owned by workplaces ("*medios básicos*") (Porras 1991, cited in Hamberg 1994: 418). Almost half of the 150,000 workplace-related units in existence in 1988 were part of the agriculture and sugar ministries, who assigned this housing to their own workers (Hamberg 1994: 402), while others were assigned to doctors and nurses or other workers in other sectors. In fact, workplace-related housing seemed to be used as an incentive to stabilize the workforce in certain industries and areas in which labor tended to be scarce (Hamberg 1994: 241), and was thus generally assigned based on strategic needs of a workplace rather than a family's housing need or merit *per se* (Hamberg 1994: 401). As such, continued occupancy in such units was generally conditional upon continued employment in the workplace providing the housing.[197] The occupants tended to be long-term leaseholders paying a nominal amount to the state, though

[197] Some exceptions exist that allow people to remain in the housing even after employment with the workplace has ceased, depending on length of service, among other considerations.

mechanisms were later introduced to allow occupants in *viviendas vinculadas* (and in more restricted cases, *medios básicos*) to become homeowners.

Shelters (albergues)

Other Cubans whose homes had been destroyed either by natural disasters or were condemned because of threat of or actual structural collapse lived in shelters ("*albergues*"). Approximately 116,000 people lived in 120 shelters across Havana in 2017 (Mesa Lago 2017). Not designed for long-term occupancy, shelters – some of which are schools or warehouses improvised for housing – are notorious for their living conditions. People living in shelters tend to be those who were already living in precarious housing, such as the tenement housing that often suffer collapses. With few other options, people living in shelters wait to be re-housed by the state, but it is common for people to remain living in *albergues* for years or, in some cases, upwards of two decades. This is despite the fact that many housing programs or plans over the years have named *albergados* among the top priorities for receiving housing. For example, following the 1980 wave of emigration, provincial and municipal commissions reviewed waiting lists of *albergados* for consideration for the redistribution of homes left by emigrants in the Mariel exodus. Those living in shelters clearly met the state's criteria for need, but the "priority" list among the *albergados* "consisted of those with the proper 'political, labor and social conditions'" (Hamberg 1994: 292). Needless to say, while *albergues* solved the immediate need for shelter for many, people living in shelters found themselves at a distinct disadvantage when housing was recommodified. Their homes would only ever have use value, never exchange value, and they found themselves continuing to rely on the state to provide a longer-term solution to their housing needs.

From state to private sphere: The permuta system

During the period that free-market housing sales were prohibited, those wishing to move to another home could do so by exchanging their existing homes with one another, a system known as "*permuta*."[198] The *permuta* process was largely facilitated by the state in the form of local housing authorities in the early years of the Revolution, but rather quickly individuals and market intermediaries started arranging the swaps outside of the sphere of the state, though *permutas* still needed to be approved by local housing authorities carrying out the regulations set forth by the state. Need was the primary criteria for housing exchanges in the 1960s, when *permutas* were still largely under the control of the state, but economic and social capital started to play a crucial role starting in the 1970s, when *permutas* increasingly became the domain of the private sphere.

The Urban Reform Law of 1960 established that those exchanging their homes needed to obtain the state's permission in order to swap units, but the state's role was initially much greater than simply granting (or denying) permissions and registering the trades: initially, it facilitated the exchanges by establishing itself as a central real estate broker. The urban reform agency set up the Office of Available Space and Exchanges, which took on as its mission "organizing and coordinating supply and demand," publishing applications in newspapers and magazines, and connecting families with one another through their office (Hamberg 1994: 301). "Need" was the defining criteria for swaps coordinated by the state, with need referring to finding housing that was better suited to a particular family's needs than their current home. For example, an

[198] *Permutas* are still an option for transferring ownership and/or switching residences, as of the time of this writing. At the time of my fieldwork, buyers and sellers would often advertise their apartments as "for sale or swap," specifying whether they expect compensation with the swap.

expanding family may need to move into a larger home, while a family with aging members may need to move from a walk-up to a lower floor, and a divorcing couple may wish to swap their unit for two smaller ones. According to Cuban urban expert Ricardo Núñez (2008: 4-7, 2012: 95-98) the 1960s were a time in which *permutas* did not involve compensation and were instead rooted in the needs of families. In subsequent decades, changing family needs often still motivated exchanges, but social and economic capital became indispensable to successful exchanges as *permutas* increasingly took place in the private sphere.

While the state continued to offer its services to facilitate the exchange of homes between families, *permutas* soon came to be increasingly coordinated by individuals themselves or brokered by market intermediaries. In response to the ineffectiveness of the housing exchange office and the lack of advertising outlets, people wishing to exchange homes started placing notices in public places like bus-stops and utility polls in order to connect with others directly and started using the services of a new actor that emerged in the market, informal brokers known as "*permuteros*" or "*corredores*" (Hamberg 1994: 301). In exchange for an under-the-table commission, *permuteros* arranged sometimes long chains[199] of families wishing to exchange their homes, and, just as importantly if not more importantly, they leveraged their contacts with local housing officials to have exchanges that did not meet official criteria approved. Not only did they save their clients from the time-consuming task of finding a suitable home to swap with, but their social capital was indispensable in many exchanges that would otherwise likely not be approved.

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[199] One of the longest chains of *permutas* reportedly involved 24 households, and was organized by a *permutero* (Hamberg 1994: 301-02).

Access to economic capital increasingly structured *permutas* starting in the 1970s. Economic capital was needed to hire *permuteros*, who were growing increasingly important because of their access to information and officials. Economic capital was also necessary to 'incentivize' key actors such as local housing officials, as "...payment for *ad hoc* legal or illegal services necessary to avoid bureaucracy, to receive more information, to complete the necessary documents, to avoid technical obstacles, or even to shorten a queue" (Núñez 2012: 109). Finally, beginning in the 1970s it was increasingly common for *permutas* to involve some form of (informal) compensation as a way to account for the exchange of homes of unequal value. Núñez (2012) notes that compensation during the 1970s and 1980s took the form of money as well as assets and equipment, such as cars, color televisions, tape recorders, CD players, and so forth, but that money became central to exchanges beginning in 1994, after the Cuban government legalized the American dollar and Cubans searched for ways to access hard currency. Not only did access (or lack of access) to economic capital structure *permutas* in the 1990s and beyond, but it began to differentiate people through housing:

> For the first time in the history of the Revolution, the precarious economic situation [of Cuba's Special Period in the 1990s] exacerbated the inequalities among population sectors, namely between those with dollars and those without. Many families, including the original owners of houses, started to leave their houses to the *nouveau riche* in exchange for hard currency. The revenue sources of the newly rich are family remittances from abroad, profits from small private businesses such as *paladares* and room renting, second salaries from foreign firms, and tips from the tourism sector. (Núñez 2012: 96)

In short, we were starting to witness through the *permuta* market in the 1990s a pattern that would become even more pronounced with the legalization of free market home sales in 2011. Those who had access to economic capital in the 1990s were already able to use it to secure better housing for themselves and their families, which in turn positioned them well to take advantage of further opportunities in the new economy that were structured by housing.

Acquiring housing through the private sphere: Where social and economic capital rule

Whereas need and merit/political capital were chief criteria for acquiring housing in the public sphere, economic capital as well as social capital were key to acquiring housing in the private sphere of individuals/families and the market. We saw this in the case of *permutas* arranged outside of the state sphere, and it is also the case for individual self-building, inheritance and other relationship-based avenues for acquiring housing, as well as illegal home sales/purchases and renting from private landlords, each of which I examine in turn in the section that follows.

Individual self-building

Despite official discourse in the early decades of the Revolution proclaiming the state as primarily responsible for providing (including constructing) housing for the population, in reality an estimated two thirds to three quarters of all homes built in Cuba between 1959 and the late 1980s were built by individuals (Hamberg 1994: 145-46, 154, 186, 189-190, 522), with the help of their families, friends, neighbors, and hired private laborers (Hamberg 1994: 186).[200] The surprising extent of individual self-building ("*construcción por esfuerzo propio*") was revealed by the 1981 census, which showed that the population had built twice as many homes as the state in the preceding decade (Hamberg 1994: 183).[201] What also came to light were the serious

[200] These figures for self-building include new constructions, additions, subdivisions, and conversions from non-residential uses (Hamberg, 1994, 2001, cited in Coyula and Hamberg 2003: 2). Hamberg writes, "During the early 1980s, a third of self-built units replaced others (CEE-IDC, 1983: 26). Nearly a fifth of the units created during the 1970s were conversions, subdivisions, and other types of adaptations of existing units (Medina Perez, 1984: 1, 13)" (1994: 147).

[201] A reason the extent to which self-building was unknown and unacknowledged was because, as Hamberg explains, "There has been general reluctance when counting units to include "substandard"

structural problems that resulted from these improvised and informal self-building efforts, reflecting both the lack of professional expertise and issues with access to standard building materials (Mathéy 1989a: 68). Concerns also arose around "disorderly urban growth" (Hamberg 1994: 184). This led the state to introduce certain measures in support of self-building in its 1984 housing law, such as technical assistance and outlets for standard quality building materials (Mathéy 1989a: 68). Building codes started being enforced in the mid-1980s as well (Hamberg 1994: 189). Nevertheless, in the 1990s and beyond, home building in Cuba has continued "in an improvised and informal manner, without the involvement of architects, planners, or government officials" (del Real and Pertierra 2008: 85).

There was a good deal of variation in terms of the quality of the structures built through self-building efforts as well as the access to infrastructure these units had, factors that affected both the quality of life of the residents and, when homes became recommodified, prospects for using their homes for social mobility, either through sale or by using them to generate income through business. Hamberg (1994) describes the nature of the building:

> Self-builders erected new structures on their own land, or that of relatives. They built second and third stories on roofs, or extended existing dwellings into back, side, or front yards. They built replacement units in the form of envelopes around older dwellings or, conversely, bred new homes within the walls of existing structures, only to burst forth like a butterfly from a cocoon. Self-builders were allocated plots by local governments or workplaces, with or without some degree of infrastructure. They bought land from private landowners legally or informally.…And finally, they squatted in state-owned—and sometimes privately

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dwellings as "real" units. The 1983 census of self-built units built from January 1981 to September 1983 found a whopping 182,000 units "completed"- or 66,000 per calendar year - and another 88,000 under construction (CEE-IDC, 1983: 21). However, the number of self-built units reported annually in statistical yearbooks and other official reports was only 39,500 (CEE-DCIT, 1990: 117) because *bohíos* [Rural housing built of thatched roofs and walls of royal palm] and other lower-quality units were excluded. Moreover, the 1983 self-built housing census did not even tabulate subdivisions of existing units, dwellings created by expansion, or conversions of nonresidential structures. Similarly, the 1970 and 1981 population and housing censuses asked for period of construction only of occupants of "houses" and "apartments" but not of other kinds of dwellings such as *bohíos*" (1994: 145).

> owned—land, usually without even a rudimentary subdivision into a street grid and lots… (P. 188-89)

This resulted in a good deal of heterogeneity: "In relatively few cases, subdivisions were created, infrastructure installed, lots assigned, and good-quality dwellings built. More frequently, a basic subdivision with streets and lots existed, but with little or no infrastructure. Dwellings range from good-quality, durable structures to precarious ones, often mixed in the same neighborhood" (Hamberg 1994: 190).[202] Infrastructure was typically "provided or 'acquired' over time,[203] and even shantytowns characterized by an anarchic layout and an absence of services underwent some upgrading, with units made of durable materials replacing earlier iterations but still located amidst "a jumble of houses with no discernable layout" (Hamberg 1994: 191). To get a sense of the scale of these shantytowns, roughly 3 percent of Cuba's population (300,000 residents) lived in 82,800 units in 416 "*barrios insalubres*" (the name given to these shantytowns by Cuban officials) (cited in Hamberg 1994: 191). Unsurprisingly, shantytown residents tended to have lower levels of education, income, and occupation (Hamberg 1994: 191) and tended to be darker-skinned (de la Fuente 2001).

Social capital was key to overcoming the many obstacles facing self-builders, notably

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[202] For example, of the self-built units built with building permits between 1981 and 1986 in provincial capitals, "only 4 percent were erected in deliberately planned subdivisions, 42 percent were located in areas that had not been contemplated by building authorities (some of which were formally divided into lots), 32 percent were 'in-fill' units on lots within the city, and 25 percent were second or third stories of existing homes" (Hamberg 1994: 189-90).

[203] Hamberg explains the process of adding infrastructure to those settlements built in areas without infrastructure: "Except in the fully serviced lots, infrastructure in self-built settlements was provided or 'acquired' incrementally, though usually not through deliberate plan. Once established, residents would pressure their elected officials and other leaders for services, which they would often build themselves with materials provided by enterprises or local government. In 1979, there were 300,000 illegal electrical hookups (one-sixth of all dwellings receiving electricity), which had been reduced by 1987 to 85,000 (half of them in the eastern provinces). Wells and water trucks would provide water until water mains could be put in, and latrine and septic tanks or sewer lines provided" (1994: 191).

challenges of sourcing land to build on, and materials and equipment with which to build. Relatives would often allow those who did not have other options to build on their property. In the absence of readily available building materials for purchase, self-builders often sourced materials as well as equipment from their friends or "contacts" (del Real and Pertierra 2008: 86), who often pilfered the materials from official workplaces and sold them on the black market. In fact, people sometimes hired craftsmen "not so much for their skills as for the materials they could 'divert' from their workplaces" (Hamberg 1994: 186). Outside of hiring skilled craftsmen, it is common for family, friends, and neighbors to help with the actual construction process. In their study on inventions in self-help housing in Havana and Santiago de Cuba, Patricio del Real and anthropologist Anna Pertierra (2008: 85) estimate that 90 percent of self-construction efforts have no official technical assistance and only 5 to 10 percent have building permits, relying instead on informal assistance from family and friends or professional services they pay for. In the realm of self-building, economic capital is important in order to pay for materials needed in the construction process as well as labor costs, but social capital is arguably just as important.

Inheritance and other relationship-based avenues (elder care, marriage)

In a context of a chronic and severe housing shortage, where the production of new housing remains far below the needs of the population, as is the case in Cuba, inheriting property is a key avenue–and sometimes the only viable avenue–through which people acquire housing. Before housing became recommodified in Cuba in the 1990s, and before the emergence of the real estate market in 2011, inheritance was an important avenue to secure a place to live for oneself and one's family, and it became even more consequential in the post-1990 period, when housing structured certain opportunities in the new economy. While regulated by the state,

inheritance is part of the private sphere of individuals and families, since it is based on a social relationship between the homeowner and the heir(s), who are usually next of kin. This raises the issue of inequality between families and particularly how inequality is transmitted across generations of families, given that children of families with fewer or less desirable/valuable homes in their family network are at a distinct disadvantage compared to those who form a part of a family network with multiple and/or more desirable/valuable homes. It is thus important to look more closely at how inheritance functioned in Cuba in the post-1959 period.

Inheritance is a powerful motor for the intergenerational reproduction of inequality, but this motor of inequality was partially disrupted in the decades following the Cuban Revolution. On the one hand, middle and upper-class Cubans who remained in Cuba after the Revolution were permitted to stay in their homes, and could pass these homes down to future generations, a factor contributing to the reproduction of inequality across generations. Unlike other socialist countries, Cuba did not requisition primary residences, even in cases where small families lived in large mansions,[204] nor were households forced to share their homes with other households (Hamberg 1994: 120). On the other hand, the state's distribution of homes based on need and merit–at heavily subsidized prices, moreover–allowed many poor and working-class families to acquire housing that would likely remain out of reach to them if they had to rely solely on the market. In addition, the transmission of inequality through inheritance was also partially disrupted by a change to inheritance laws, in which the right to inherit the value of the home was separated from the right to occupy it. Occupants living in the home at the time of the

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[204] Given the absence of a *per capita* livable space standard, the opposite was also true: large families residing in cramped quarters also often remained there. However, according to my interviews, people often used their family size to petition the state to grant them a larger dwelling, and this was seen as a legitimate need.

homeowner's or leaseholder's passing had the right to remain in the home and some occupants even gained ownership of the home, whereas heirs of homeowners (but not leaseholders) would be compensated the (artificially low) legal price of the home (Hamberg 1994: 304-305; Hamberg 2012).[205] In fact, even in cases in which the home was vacant at the time the homeowner passed, the state had the right to the property, and would compensate the heirs their share of the legal price (Hamberg 1994: 305). There was a way around this: a homeowner could donate the home as a gift to another household member while they were still alive (Hamberg 1994: 305). Inheritance in Cuba in the post-1959 period acted both to reproduce patterns of intergenerational inequality but it also disrupted them at the same time, in cases in which heirs were not actually living in the home.

Because of the priority of occupancy rights over the more general rights of heirs, inheritance functioned in a nuanced way in Cuba, but one constant was the centrality of social relationships. Inheritance, including inheritance through occupancy, is based on a social relationship between homeowners and their heir(s), who are usually next of kin but sometimes also extended family. In cases of multiple viable heirs to a single property, the question of who

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[205] Hamberg provides additional details about how inheritance works, and particularly the right to occupy versus the right to inherit value: "Ordinary inheritance law soon came into conflict with various Urban Reform Law provisions. Heirs who had not lived with the deceased were prohibited both from renting the dwelling to its remaining residents and from evicting them, making inheritance on empty right (Vega Vega, 1985: 203). Therefore, the 1966 and 1967 regulations controlling sales and exchanges also regulated succession. The right to occupy the dwelling was separated from the right to inherit its value. Homeowners' (and home buyers') heirs were entitled to receive their share of the legal price of the dwelling. But the right to remain was restricted to people living with the deceased at least one year before death – whether related or not – although no minimum period was required if the occupant was the deceased's spouse or offspring, or had lived there before the Urban Reform Law. Remaining residents could purchase the dwelling – by amortizing the share due the heirs, with the state acting as intermediary – if they were (1) spouses of the deceased with common children or had paid at least half the property's legal price (2) were linearly related to the deceased, or (3) had lived there before the Urban Reform Law. Otherwise, they became rent-paying leaseholders. If the remaining occupant was also the only heir, he or she immediately received title or paid off any remaining debt" (1994: 304-05).

will inherit the property becomes a delicate one. Destremau (2018: 21) argues that "family housing and real estate ownership strategies have been closely entangled with care arrangements," explaining that live-in care arrangements have favored daughters or granddaughters to inherit property, since they are more likely compared to their brothers to remain in the home or return home to provide caregiving for their aging parents, while male siblings typically move into the homes of their partner. While care arrangements typically occur among family, sometimes an acquaintance or even a stranger agrees to care for elderly homeowners, with the understanding (sometimes verbal and sometimes in a written will) that the homeowner will leave them their property upon their passing in exchange. This occurs especially in cases where the elderly person does not have children, or those children have emigrated, or perhaps when the children remain in Cuba but already own a home and are therefore barred from owning a second one by legal limitations in place. None of the participants in my study acquired housing via such a caregiving arrangement, but several gave examples of acquaintances that had, and Destremau (2018: 23) reports that several individuals and couples from her sample had managed to move from rural areas and settle in Havana through such a care arrangement. This anecdotal evidence suggests that elder-care-for-housing has been an avenue to housing for some Cubans, though it is unclear just how common such an arrangement is between non-family members. Whether through a care arrangement or simply by virtue of being family, social relationships are at the heart of inheritance, rather than other criteria such as merit or economic capital.

In addition to inheritance based on the family one is born into, another relationship-based avenue to housing if not (co-)homeownership per se, albeit more precarious, is romantic relationships and marriage in particular. As I discuss in further detail in chapter seven, young

couples often find their housing choices limited: those who could afford it may informally rent from a landlord, but many must live with their parents or their partners' parents. Destremau (2018) suggests that it is more common for men in heterosexual relationships to move in with their female partners, who tended to stay at home or return home to care for their aging parents. In contrast, Carrie Hamilton (2009: 622) notes an "inter-generational pattern of women attaining housing through formal or informal heterosexual relationships," though the author admits that more detailed studies are needed to substantiate her thesis. In my own fieldwork, I did not identify a strong gendered pattern, but rather one in which young people made decisions about which set of parents to live with depending on which of the homes had (more) space to accommodate them, where they could have some privacy, location and proximity to work, and the relationship between the partner and their in-laws. Middle-aged and older-couples had often managed to secure housing through one of the previously outlined avenues, with one person in the couple potentially benefiting from housing granted to them because of their partner's merit or workplace. However, access to housing through romantic relationships is precarious because romantic relationships so often come to an end. After breaking up, the person who went to live with their partner may seek to go back to their parents' home, but sometimes find there is no longer space for them because their siblings' spouse and children are now occupying their room. Some married couples who managed to secure housing independent from their parents through one of the previously outlined avenues may attempt "one-for-two" housing exchanges upon divorcing, but with the high demand and short supply of housing, this is often not feasible. There have even been reports of divorced couples continuing to live together because of lack of housing alternatives (Associated Press 2007). This was the case with one participant in my study, whose first husband lived in an improvised unit off of the patio of her house, the two of them

sharing a common entrance to each of their separate homes. Thus, while some people came to live in the homes they live in through romantic relationships, this avenue tended to be less secure than other avenues, both in the public and private sphere.

Market-based avenues: illegal sales and private renting

Outside of the sphere of the state, market-based avenues to acquiring housing such as illegal sales/purchases, *permutas*, and private renting also accounted for how people came to live in their home. Like the other avenues to acquiring housing in the private sphere, economic capital especially and social capital to a certain degree were important criteria for securing housing through these market-based avenues. In the case of private renting, some people lived in properties as renters/tenants of private landlords, usually in an informal, verbal arrangement, and without the landlord being registered for renting (recall that while renting spare rooms became legal in 1988, in 1997 it became a regulated activity that required registration and a license.) I already discussed how the *permuta* system worked in the private sphere, and how increasingly people offered cash in order to compensate for the difference in value of the units being traded. On other occasions, some people with a larger lump sum of economic capital purchased homes outright using cash, despite the fact that free-market home sales/purchased were prohibited in the pre-2011 period. Given that home sales were illegal at the time, sales were either carried out informally and not registered or the change in ownership/occupancy was registered under a different type of transaction, such as a donation or a *permuta* (sometimes with a fictional property),[206] or people entered into sham marriages or living arrangements for the purposes of

[206] Núñez (2012) describes some of the ways in which housing sales were disguised as *permutas*, principally through mechanisms where a property title was issued for a property that did not actually exist.

the transaction. These avenues to housing were based on social capital, but more precisely trust among the parties involved, because of the illegal and often informal nature of these avenues. Arguably even more important was economic capital, since private renting, *permutas*, and illegal home sales/purchases all required varying sums of money that often exceeded official salaries in the state sector. Instead, sources of economic capital tended to come from remittances, illicit earnings, or formal or informal employment in tourism or the self-employment sector in the post-1993 period. Access to these sources of economic capital thus structured access to market-based avenues to acquiring housing. This inequality became further pronounced when home sales were legalized, as I discuss in later chapters.

Acquiring housing in post-2011 Cuba

As I outline in the previous section of this chapter, people came to acquire their homes through a wide variety of avenues, with those acquiring homes through the state largely doing so largely on the basis of (housing) need and "merit", and those acquiring homes outside of the state sphere utilizing their social and economic capital to do so. While my focus in this chapter has been on how people acquired the housing they found themselves living in when housing was recommodified, initially in the 1990s and especially with the legalization of free-market home sales in 2011, these criteria continue to define how housing is acquired in the state versus private sphere. The state continues to provide housing to selective segments of the population, prioritizing social and work-related merits, those who homes were affected by natural disasters, people finding themselves in precarious housing conditions and coastal settlements, people with the most serious need for housing, and those who have been waiting longest to solve their housing problems, such as those living in shelters (Periódico Granma, 19 de diciembre de 2018,

cited in Jiménez Guethón 2020: 13). In reality, the need for housing continues to greatly exceed the supply, and the state is limited in its capacity to provide housing for all those who need it, either through new construction or in its provisions of subsidies to encourage self-building. As a result, the only real option for many is to turn to the private sphere, which requires social capital and, above all in the nascent residential real-estate market, economic capital.

Since people must rely increasingly on the private sphere to solve their housing needs, the result is that access to housing in Cuba is increasingly structured by a family's access to economic capital, as I examine in greater detail in chapter seven. As housing was recommodified, the homes one was already living in served as sources of economic capital, and the value differentials between them became especially consequential, especially in terms of their ability to use housing for social welfare provision and social mobility (see chapter four). Given just how consequential housing is to social welfare provision and social mobility, it is important to examine whether there are discernable group differences in terms of who tended to have the most valuable homes when housing was recommodified, in order to know which social groups were better positioned to use the recommodification of housing for upward social mobility, and which social groups were systematically limited or excluded from doing so.

A note on the role of legislation

I wish to acknowledge the role of housing legislation vis-a-vis the schema I outline in table 5.1. By housing legislation, I refer to the various housing related laws I describe in detail in chapter two, most notably the Urban Reform Law of 1960 and the General Housing Laws of 1984 and 1988. At first glance, legislation clearly falls in the sphere of the state rather than the private sphere, and yet it does not fit comfortably with the other avenues outlined nor does it

share the same logic/criteria that characterize other avenues in the state sphere. Legislation concerned itself with granting certain rights and obligations to residents, and can shed light on how people acquired the status of homeowner; the other avenues, in contrast, outline how people came to live where they live (and not necessarily their tenure status). Moreover, the rights and obligations assigned through legislation applied broadly to citizens, regardless of the particular avenue through which they came to live in their homes, whether that avenue was within the private sphere (such as individual self-building) or the state sphere (such as being assigned a vacant home). In this sense, it supersedes the public versus private classification that I have delineated. Moreover, legislation granted certain rights and obligations to people based on where they were already living (e.g., converting those who were tenants at the time the legislation was introduced into homeowners), whereas the other avenues describe the ways in which people came to live in homes in which they were living in 2011. While acknowledging the important role that legislation played in the housing trajectories of individuals, particularly in terms of whether they became homeowners or held a different tenure status, I do not include it as an "avenue" through which people acquired housing *per se*. Instead, I discuss legislation in a later section with respect to tenure status and the implications that tenure status has for inequality in the context of the recommodification of housing.

In a few short decades, Cuba was transformed from a country of renters to one of homeowners:[207] the homeownership rate rose dramatically from 36 percent in 1953 (Oficina

[207] For my purposes, I group both those homeowners who have completed the payments on their home and those homebuyers who are still making payments to the state to amortize the price of their home under the category of "homeowner." It should be noted that in order to sell one's home in Cuba, the seller must have paid the home off in full (to the state). Home prices for state-built homes have historically been quite low (because the cost is heavily subsidized by the state), as are monthly payments, and even paying off the remaining sum is usually not prohibitive for Cubans.

Nacional 1953: 260-76) to 85 percent by 1990 (Hamberg 2017: 190), and as of 2018 stood at 88 percent (Bustamante Molino and Castro Morales 2018).[208] This transformation occurred through a series of legislative steps introduced by the Revolutionary Cuban government, starting with the Urban Reform Law (URL) of 1960, which made about half of urban tenants homeowners, affecting 200,000 households (Hamberg 1990b: 235, 239). The other half of tenants lived in tenements, which became government property with the introduction of the URL, and by the mid-1960s the tenants living in these tenements were given long-term, rent-free leases (Hamberg 1990b: 235; Hamberg 1994: 104).[209] The 1984 and 1988 General Housing Law converted "virtually everyone" into homeowners, including those confronting illegal or ambiguous housing situations, but excluding residents of tenements and slum housing (who retained rent-free leases) as well as those living in workplace-related units (Hamberg 1994: 223; Hamberg 1990b: 238). As a result of these measures, by the close of 1988, 450,000 former tenants had become owners, continuing to make payments to the state in order to amortize the purchase price of the dwelling, and approximately 300,000 more individuals, primarily those who had built their homes themselves, were given proper title at no cost (Hamberg 1990b: 238). Not only did the Cuban government extend the right to homeownership to countless Cubans, it did so at heavily

[208] Another news article from an official Cuban source, CubaDebate, published just four months later cited the homeownership rate as 90 percent (CubaDebate 2019). It does not, however, provide raw numbers upon which this was calculated nor name a source of this data, so the 88 percent figure cited above seems to be more precise. Other sources published even earlier have also mentioned the 90 percent homeownership rate figure (e.g. Piccone 2014), although it is unclear what original source this figure is based upon. Moreover, Piccone (2014) seems to make the common mistake of misreporting the unit of analysis: the author claims that 90 percent of Cubans own their homes, whereas the correct unit of analysis, based on other seemingly more accurate estimates, specifies that homeownership figures refer to the number of housing units that are owned rather than the proportion of people that own them.

[209] Initially, however, these tenants living in tenements continued to pay "rent," which was regarded as payments to amortize the purchase price of their soon-to-be-built (rather than current) home (Hamberg 1994: 104). In other words, the idea was that they too would become homeowners one day. However, in the mid-1960s, the government granted them long-term leases at no cost (Hamberg 1994: 104).

subsidized prices, with monthly payments to amortize the purchase price of newly built homes amounting to no more than 3 to 7 percent of family income (Hamberg 1990b: 239).

Significant gains have been made in converting Cubans into homeowners, but a sizeable portion of the population continues to be excluded from homeownership–and thus the access to opportunities in the emerging economy that only homeowners have access to. As of 2018, 88 percent of the 3,824,861 homes in the total housing stock were owned by Cubans, and the remaining 12 percent of homes (458,983 units) that were not owned consisted of workplace-owned housing (34 percent),[210] rent-paying leaseholders who perpetually pay a rent to the state ("*arrendamiento permanente*") (22 percent);[211] rent-free leaseholders who live in housing owned by the state ("*usufructo*") (20 percent); or they lacked any form of title (24 percent) (Bustamante Molino and Castro Morales 2018). To put these figures in more meaningful terms, a conservative estimate of 1.3 million people and likely closer to 1.56 million people–a sizeable portion of the island's population of 11.2 million–lived in homes in which neither they nor anyone else they lived with owned the home in which they were living in 2018.[212] This significant portion of the

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[210] This distribution does not perfectly translate into tenure status/type per se. Hamberg (1994) says that workplace-related housing ("*medio básicos*" and "*viviendas vinculadas*") are not a tenure status per se and that they "cross-cut" the different tenure types. Hamberg gives the example of a "*medio básico*," saying, "The tenure and payment arrangement for workplace-related housing also varied considerably. They included rent-paying leaseholders (6% for microbrigades, 10% for others), rent-free leaseholders (pre-1971 rural new towns, military housing), and 'short-term residents' (free or up to 10%)" (Hamberg 1994: 213).

[211] Hamberg (1994: 207-210) describes in detail all of the different tenure types that existed at the time of her writing. She identifies two different categories of usufruct: "*usufructos gratuitous*," which she translates as rent-free leaseholders, and "*usufructos onerosos*," which she translates as "rent-paying leaseholders." In present-day Cuba, these categories no longer seem to be used. To the best of my knowledge, what the Cuban state now refers to as "usufruct" seems to refer exclusively to those with long-term, rent-free leases (those who were previously "usufructos gratuitos"), while the term "arrendamiento permanente," literally translated as "permanent renting," which I refer to as rent-paying leaseholders, seems to have replaced the earlier category of "*usufructo oneroso*."

[212] These estimate are based on my own calculations, using official data on housing stock and percentage of units not owned (458,983 units) reported in Bustamante and Molina 2018 and multiplying it by the

population find themselves at a distinct disadvantage vis-a-vis their counterparts that are homeowners. Cubans have enjoyed a high degree of tenure security in the post-1959 era—regardless of their tenure status—thereby minimizing one of the major and most consequential differences between homeowners and those with other tenure types.[213] [214] Some differences between tenure statuses continued to exist, notably that homeowners were permitted to renovate and remodel their dwellings themselves (so long as they abided by zoning regulations and obtained the necessary permits), whereas leaseholders could only make limited repairs and could not change the 'form or substance' of their unit (MINJUS 1974: 178, cited in Hamberg 1994: 199-200).[215] While differences existed between homeowners and those with other tenure

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average occupancy rate per unit. The more conservative number uses the average occupancy rate of 2.87 individuals per housing unit reported in the 2012 census, whereas the higher estimate uses the average occupancy rate for tenements in the 1990s, which Coyula and Hamberg (2003) report to be 3.4 per housing unit. The higher percentage is more likely to be accurate, since properties that are "usufruct" tend to be characterized by overcrowding and multiple generations living with one another (Tamayo Batista 2014).

[213] One of the earliest measures of Cuba's Revolutionary Government was a suspension on evictions, and evictions were subsequently severely restricted (e.g. only in cases of deliberate nonpayment when occupants are indeed capable of paying). Moreover, evictions are very rarely if ever carried out in practice, and there are no reports of families being put out on the street, but rather offered alternative housing (Hamberg 1994). Aside from eviction, there is indeed legislation that allows for the confiscation of residential property on moral grounds. In 2003, Decree-Law 232, regulating "the confiscation of living places and locales for acts related to drugs, acts of corruption or other illicit behavior" entered into effect. It allows the state to confiscate residential property or locales that have been used to produce, traffic, acquire, store, consume, or hide illicit drugs; or to practice acts of corruption, prostitution, procuring [pimping], pornography, corruption of minors, human trafficking, or related acts.

[214] Another measure that helped to solidify tenure security was the prohibition on using primary residences as collateral on bank loans, which meant that homes could not be confiscated for failure to repay the loan. (This prohibition has remained in place even after housing was (re)commodified in 2011.) Second homes, however, can be used as collateral for bank loans.

[215] Leaseholders nevertheless carried out unpermitted modifications, and usually no action was taken against them. Hamberg (1994) writes, "Indeed, any action by a leaseholder — of commission or omission — that could damage the unit or building could theoretically lead to fines or even jail time. This measure was hardly enforced, except for exceptional cases, such as when some tenants removed and sold off bathroom fixtures. But many occupants still resented not being able to modify their residences to their liking, or having to do it illegally." (Hamberg 1994: 199-200).

statuses, the difference really became consequential when housing started becoming recommodified, since only homeowners were permitted to sell their homes or use them for a *casa particular* business or otherwise rent them out. I examine more closely the ways in which tenure status became an important stratifier in chapter six.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced the historical processes through which people acquired the homes they were living in when those homes suddenly became recommodified. I have outlined different avenues of acquiring housing in the state sphere as well as in the private sphere, as well as the different logics ruling each of these spheres. Those who acquired their homes through the state sphere did so predominantly on the basis of housing need and merit, while those who acquired homes through the private sphere required a combination of social capital as well as economic capital. In post-2010 Cuba, the primary means of acquiring housing is through the private sphere, thus favoring those with greater economic capital. Equipped with a historical understanding of how people came to live in the homes they were living in when those homes became recommodified and started to serve as the basis for a new system of stratification, we are better able to understand the origins of present-day inequalities expressed through housing, which is the question at the center of the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: WINNERS AND LOSERS: WHICH SOCIAL GROUPS WERE BEST POSITIONED TO USE THE RECOMMODIFICATION OF HOUSING FOR SOCIAL WELFARE PROVISION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY?

Introduction

Given how central housing became to social welfare provision and social mobility when it became recommodified, which social groups were best positioned to benefit from the recommodification of housing and which were more limited or excluded from doing so? The answer to this question is far from straightforward. There is a lack of systematic data on who acquired different kinds of housing, let alone data on variables of interest to sociologists, such as race, class, and gender. Given this limitation, we are left to piece together a puzzle from policies that were often not carried out as written, broad statements from official and secondary sources that make us susceptible to a sort of ecological fallacy (e.g., claims that neighborhoods became more diverse across racial and socioeconomic lines, but do not offer detail), and anecdotes that raise questions about representativeness and generalizability. Despite these challenges, I formulate some tentative answers based on the data that is available, which points to the (re)emergence of economic and racial inequalities that the Cuban Revolution worked hard to eliminate.

Who are the winners?

Anthropologist Hope Bastian (2018) argues that the descendants of pre-revolutionary elites who remained in Cuba (those whose elite status was based on class) as well as the descendants of Revolutionary elites (those leaders of the Cuban Revolution whose elite status was based on political power) live in the most expensive properties in Havana, and are "us[ing]

the capital in their newly re-commodified homes to reestablish themselves at the top of an emerging social-economic hierarchy in Cuba," made possible through the reemergence of a real-estate market in the country in 2011 (p. 125). Bastian goes on to argue that the "The re-commodification of housing has contributed to reproducing pre-revolutionary class structures that were temporarily disrupted from the 1960s to 1980s when widespread access to opportunities for education and technical training and stable employment made social mobility possible for the majority of Cubans. The changes which took place in Cuba during the economic crisis of the 1990s put an end to this period of social mobility through education, once again reconfiguring Cuban social structure and laying the groundwork for a new system of social stratification in Cuba" (Bastian 2018: 125-6). Like Bastian, I too argue that the recommodification of housing—not just the re-emergence of the real-estate market, but also, under my formulation, the ability to use housing for potentially lucrative income-generating activities in the private sector—is serving to stratify Cubans in new and consequential ways. However, I argue that the story of the winners and losers in this new stratification system is more nuanced than Bastian suggests.[216] It is not a straightforward story about the reproduction of inequality. After all, as we saw in chapter five, both the avenues through which people acquired housing and the dominant criteria for acquiring housing were numerous, thus serving to (re)produce inequalities in some ways but disrupting these patterns in other ways.

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[216] While Bastian's (2018) hypothesis about the pre-Revolutionary elite who remained in Cuba as well as the Revolutionary elite having the most valuable properties is quite plausible, the author does not furnish evidence to support such a strong claim, and only makes two brief mentions to explain the basis of her claim. Regarding the pre-revolutionary elite who remained in Cuba, she says, "the absence of sufficient state production of new housing stock for newly forming families, [leads] the grandchildren of elites to have a great advantage over their peers" because they have more properties in their family (p. 132). Regarding the Revolutionary elite, she says, "Many revolutionary leaders were originally from Eastern Cuba, and when they moved to Havana they were given the abandoned properties of the pre-revolutionary elites" (p. 125).

It is true that pre-revolutionary elites who remained in Cuba were indeed able to retain their homes and pass them down to future generations (so long as those generations were also living in the home when the homeowner passed), but just how many families from the upper classes remained throughout the Revolutionary period is unclear and the number is likely not significant compared to the number of families of more humble origins that acquired housing.[217] It is also true that high ranking officials were assigned some of the nicer properties left vacant by Cuba's upper class who had fled the island following the Cuban Revolution, though there is evidence that the most impressive houses were used for non-residential state purposes or as guesthouses for foreign diplomats. Even if they did not receive the most lavish of the properties left behind, the point certainly remains that Revolutionary leaders were assigned some of these

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[217] Cuban-American Architect Hermes Mallea features the homes of several of the upper class families who stayed in Cuba after the Revolution in *Havana Living Today* (2017). For example, he features a 1950s Miramar apartment, saying that the unnamed owner is a "descendant of one of the city's founding families," and that the apartment "became a meeting place for the bourgeois families that remained after the Revolution," many of whom have since departed, leaving an artifact behind for this homeowner who has chosen to stay (154). Mallea also gives the example of Canadian-born Mary McCarthy, who had become a member of Havana's high society after marrying a Spanish-born Havana businessman in 1924. The author gives more detail on the original occupant and her heir, explaining that the home is "maintained as if it were a shrine": "Mary taught piano and was a founding member of the Havana Philharmonic Orchestra. When her husband died in 1951, Mary took over the management of their leather goods factory, which had made great profits during World War II. But Mary is best known for her life after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. While all her society friends left in exile, Mary stayed put in her Country Club villa–even after the state seized her factory and other property…Today, Mary's home is occupied by her heir, a Cuban said to have been among the many young boys aided in the Ciudad de los Niños, the Havana orphanage Mary founded. A talented pianist and a larger-than-life figure himself, he venerates Mary and the home she left behind when she died" (137). In an earlier volume, Mallea (2011) features at least two private residences in which the original owners or their descendants remained after the Cuban Revolution. One is sculptor Rita Longo's home, which she had built in Miramar in 1941, where she lived with her husband, Cuba's representative to the United Nations in the 1960s, and their two sons (241). Longo remained in Cuba, in her home, and after her passing in 2000, her granddaughters "preserved" the home (242). The second example, mentioned in passing, was one of three homes built on the same street by the Tarafa family, whose patriarch was an officer in the War of Independence and later controlled the sole point of export for all the sugar mills on the northeast coast of Cuba (184). While the fate of his home is not mentioned, his sister's home was apparently expropriated after she "moved to Italy soon after the revolution" (186), but his nieces home–the third on the street–seemed to have remained in the family–the author mentioned that she "remained in her own house across the street, splitting her time between Havana and Rome" (186), but he does update how long she stayed and whether the current occupants are descendants.

homes, and that these homes are likely much more valuable than the average dwelling in Havana, so this group can indeed be said to be well-positioned vis-a-vis other Cubans in terms of taking advantage of new opportunities created by the recommodification of housing. Even so, this only tells part of a much more nuanced story. As we saw in chapter five, some of the homes that were left vacant, probably the more modest ones, were given to low-income families, soldiers, and volunteers from Cuba's famous literacy campaign, while others were overtaken by squatters. These groups of more humble origins, therefore, also stood to gain when housing became recommodified. Available data does not give us a sense of how many families were assigned to the homes left vacant by Cuba's upper and middle classes, nor if they remained in these homes or exchanged them through the *permuta* system at some point in subsequent decades (the same is true, however, about high-ranking Revolutionary leaders). Yet another factor complicates the straightforward story about the reproduction of pre-Revolutionary and Revolutionary power: Cuban urban expert Ricardo Núñez (2012: 96) has argued that the economic difficulties of the Special Period of the 1990s led "[m]any families, including the original owners of houses...to leave their houses to the nouveau riche in exchange for hard currency," and that those who came to occupy some of these homes were those with "family remittances from abroad, profits from small private businesses such as *paladares* [small restaurants] and room renting, second salaries from foreign firms, and tips from the tourism sector." Given the work by scholars such as historian Alejandro de la Fuente (2001: 318-19), we know that those who receive remittances, form private businesses, and work in the formal tourism sector are predominantly white, which, combined with Núñez's observations, would suggest that white Cubans own some of the more valuable properties in Cuba. Scholars have also commented on the fact that those who work in tourism or others jobs where they receive a

stimulus in hard currency, work in the emerging private sector, or have family abroad who send them remittances are in an advantageous position to "invest in their housing through repairs and construction, to purchase and sell their homes, to improves them, and therefore improve their quality of life" (Jiménez Guethón 2020: 10). Thus, this suggests that the middle class that emerged beginning in the 1990s, which was predominantly white, lived in some of the higher valued homes when the real-estate market re-emerged in 2011 and/or have been able to improve their homes, and were thus better positioned to use the capital in their homes for further social mobility.

Those living in areas of high tourist interest have also been "winners" in the recommodification of housing, generally speaking. As I discussed in greater detail in chapter three, location in an area of high tourist interest has been a crucial factor in determining the value of one's home since the 1990s, with homes in the Havana neighborhoods of Habana Vieja, Miramar, and El Vedado generally commanding higher market value compared to similar homes in other areas of the city (see figure 3.2, which illustrates differences in the price per square meter for different areas of Havana). It is difficult to deduce how these locational advantages (residing in an area of high tourist interest) map onto social groups, however, and who exactly benefits. Post-revolutionary Havana has often been held up as an example of a city in which neighborhoods are relatively heterogeneous, both racially and socio-economically. "Class, race, and occupational skills mattered little when it came to assigning housing," urban expert Joseph Scarpaci (1996: 200) once noted. Hamberg (1994: 130) argues, "Spatial segregation by social class and race [that existed before the Cuban Revolution] was partially disrupted by two measures: (1) conversion of mansions in exclusive areas to student dormitories, day care centers, and clinics; and (2) relocation of families from slum dwellings to smaller units in these areas." In

this regard, Havana is unlike other Latin American cities, where “socio-economic inequality is tangible and flagrantly evident in spatial terms” (Macedo 2012: 139), with cities “sharply divided into luxury enclaves and sprawling peripheries” (Angotti and Irazábal 2017: 4). In Havana, neither are the urban poor contained in informal settlements or slums nor are the upper classes segregated in fortified enclaves, relying on walls and new security technologies for protection, as anthropologist Teresa Caldeira (2000) documents of the rich in São Paolo, Brazil. Even if we accept that neighborhoods in Havana are relatively heterogenous in terms of racial and class composition, it should be noted that the quality of the housing stock varies to a good extent even within these neighborhoods, and the sociodemographic data that we have on residents is generally at the neighborhood level, so it is difficult to know who actually occupies the higher value homes within these neighborhoods.

Some scholars have challenged this longstanding narrative, calling into question just how racially and socioeconomically integrated Havana’s neighborhoods really are. Historian Alejandro de la Fuente (2001), argues:

> ...despite efforts to the contrary, a strong correlation between race, the regional distribution of the population, and the quality of the housing stock persisted through the 1980s. A traditional geography of race and poverty had not been dismantled, largely because of the government’s failure to provide adequate housing to all the population. No neighborhood was racially exclusive—that was true, for the most part, in prerevolutionary Cuba also—but in the most dilapidated areas of the big cities, the proportion of blacks and mulattoes was greater than that of whites. In Havana, the municipalities of Havana Vieja and Centro Havana exemplify well the persistence of these residential patterns. Blacks and mulattoes represented 36 percent of the city’s population in 1981, but they amounted to 44 and 47 percent, respectively, of the residents of the aforementioned municipalities. Whereas 13 percent of city residents lived in tenement houses, in Havana Vieja and Centro Havana the proportion of tenement dwellers was three to four times higher. Only 14 percent of the city’s population lived in these municipalities, yet they contained 47 percent of the houses in the city with structural damages. The proportion of houses in which sanitary services were collectively used was also three to four times higher in

> Havana Vieja (36 percent) and Centro Havana (24 percent) than in Havana as a whole (9 percent). (P. 313)

The case of Habana Vieja is a curious case to consider. On the one hand, as we saw in chapter three, the neighborhood has home values amongst the highest in Havana; on the other hand, it contains a large number of dilapidated tenements whose value is generally low (and many of which cannot be legally sold). What can we make of this seeming contradiction? The tenement dwellers in Old Havana may be in a better position relative to tenement dwellers in other areas of the city–they may manage to sell their units for more than other tenements located outside of tourist zones--but they certainly are not amongst the "winners." Those residents of Old Havana with apartments along or near the main thoroughfares of Old Havana are in a relatively better position, especially if those apartments are well-maintained (either through their own efforts or through reconstruction efforts by the City Historian's Office, as we saw in chapter three), but even those whose dwellings are in a state of disrepair can often find investors who are willing to overlook this factor if the unit is well-situated for a tourist-oriented business and to renovate these homes for investment purposes (see chapter seven).

Overall, the answer to the question of who are the winners remains far from clearcut, offering mixed evidence that points both to the disruption and reproduction of preexisting inequalities. The distribution of housing after the Revolution benefited a relatively small group of prerevolutionary elites (who were able to retain their homes) and Revolutionary leaders (who were assigned some of the nicer homes), as Bastian (2018) argues, but available evidence also suggests that some families of more humble origins were also in a position to benefit from the recommodification of housing after acquiring housing in neighborhoods that today command higher prices on the real-estate market. We do not know whether these people remained in the homes they were assigned or subsequently exchanged them, but at least some evidence suggests

that those with access to hard currency in the 1990s (through remittances, small private businesses, work in tourism or for foreign companies), who some scholars argue tend to be lighter-skinned, may have (illegally) purchased some of these more desirable properties in the 1990s, and thus found themselves in a position to take advantage of the new opportunities for social mobility through housing as housing became increasingly (re)commodified.

Who are the losers?

Those who are worst positioned to take advantage of the opportunities for social mobility provided by the recommodification of housing are those who are not homeowners and particularly those who live in tenements, amongst which dark-skinned and poor families are overrepresented.

With the commodification of housing, first with the right to rent rooms or spaces in one's home and later with the legalization of home sales in Cuba in 2011, one's tenure status became a crucial factor in whether or not they could use their housing to capitalize on new market opportunities. In other words, tenure status stratified the Cuban population in new and consequential ways. Renting rooms or spaces inside one's home or renting the entire home is restricted to homeowners. That is, in order to be issued a rental license, one has to show that they own the home they wish to rent. Outside of these legal restrictions, the types of homes that tend to be "usufruct"–for example, one-room tenements with shared bathrooms and kitchens–are not well-suited for most types of rentals. As I argued in chapter four, being able to rent spaces in one's home–and particularly being able to rent to foreign tourists–is lucrative both economically and in other ways, and is a pathway to upward social mobility for many. While not all homeowners are able to capitalize on this opportunity, or at least not to the same degree as those

homeowners located in areas of high tourist interest (see chapter three), this potential pathway to social mobility is entirely closed to those holding an alternative tenure status. Effectively, then, non-homeowners are cut off from an important stream of revenue that many Cuban families who are homeowners use to secure their welfare or make welfare improvements.

Yet another way people with tenure statuses other than homeowners find themselves disadvantaged in a context where housing is a commodity is in terms of extracting the wealth stored in their homes. Only homeowners are permitted to sell their homes on the free market, and thus cash in on the wealth stored in their homes. My fieldwork revealed that some *usufructuarios* found a way around this restriction, usually by paying off bureaucrats with the power to issue the necessary paperwork to make them a homeowner or simply by selling their homes illegally. However, the value of their homes tended to be far lower, for reasons I will explore shortly. Moreover, homeowners can pass their home (and thus the wealth stored in it) to future generations through inheritance, whereas those with other tenure statuses are prevented from doing so, since the property is not theirs to bequeath (although they could inherit the lease if they were currently occupying the property (Hamberg 1994: 199-200)). These differences have made tenure status a very consequential marker of difference in post-2011 Cuba, with homeowners much better positioned to take advantage of economic opportunities that could potentially result in their ascending the socioeconomic ladder, whereas those in other tenure statuses are left behind.

In the years that have elapsed since the legalization of home sales in 2011, the Cuban state has taken steps to reduce this disparity between homeowners and those holding other tenure statuses by creating a pathway to homeownership for people with other tenure statuses. A pathway had technically existed on the books, but many could not take advantage of it because

they found themselves in a catch-22: spaces classified as usufruct could be converted into "owned" if they were a minimum size of 25 square meters and included a bathroom and kitchen inside the unit, and yet the occupants of usufruct spaces were not authorized to make these sorts of modifications to their units themselves. Requesting that the state do so was an exercise in vain for many, and many went ahead and made such modifications illegally in order to improve their living conditions, but the illegality of their action prevented them from later converting the property from usufruct to owned.[218] In April 2019, the Cuban state introduced a new regulation (Acuerdo 8574) that would allow families living in units categorized as "*arrendamiento permanente*" or "*usufructo*" as well as those who built their homes "without following legal formalities" to become homeowners.[219] In order to do so, the homes would have to comply with urban and territorial regulations, but the occupants would be able to undertake construction efforts themselves to bring them into compliance, and everyone would be given 6 years from the date the new regulations came into effect in order to do so.[220] These new measures allowing those historically excluded from homeownership to become homeowners were a major step towards reducing disparities between people with different tenure statuses, but significant disparities nevertheless continue, with *usufructuarios*-turned-homeowners still findings themselves limited in the extent to which they can use their home in a way that leads to social mobility.

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[218] For a discussion of the obstacles standing in the way of *usufructuarios* wishing to become homeowners through the process known as "change of concept," see Tamayo Bastista 2014.

[219] Those living in workplace-owned units were excluded from this new regulation (acuerdo 8574). That said, between 2015 and 2017 the state had allowed workplaces to decide whether to allow the occupants of the units they owned ("*vinculadas*" or "*medios básicos*") to become homeowners, and apparently thousands did become homeowners (CubaDebate 2019).

[220] For a more detailed explanation of the new regulations, see CubaDebate 2019.

One reason they find themselves limited is that the type of housing that has historically been granted in usufruct was some of the least desirable housing because of the poor living conditions associated with such units, which translates to low exchange value in the real-estate market and makes it difficult to rent or otherwise use as a site for business. After all, the types of dwellings that were not conferred ownership titles historically through the Urban Reform Law of 1960 or the General Housing Laws of 1984 and 1988 tended to be housing deemed unsuitable because it lacked certain minimum standards of habitability, such as a bathroom and kitchen inside the unit.[221, 222] This included many buildings that I collectively refer to as "tenements," that are commonly known in Cuba (often interchangeably) as "*casas de vecindad*," "*ciudadelas*," "*solares*" or "*cuarterías*," all terms that describe a type of housing typically characterized by individual rooms (occupied by distinct families) that surround a common patio or corridor and

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[221] Hamberg (1994) provides a more nuanced picture of how building type and tenure status do not necessarily align: "Building type by no means determined tenure. The vast majority of single-family homes were privately owned, but those distributed by the state after May 1961 were leased. The Urban Reform Law essentially turned all existing rental multifamily structures into condominiums — except, of course, for *cuarterías* and rooming houses. …. [A]t the time of the Urban Reform Law, residents of some apartment building were primarily condominium owners, while in others mostly tenants. Immediately after the law was promulgated, tenants became owners (or at least home buyers), but their management responsibilities varied, depending on whether former tenants were the majority or not….The next change came in May 1961 when state-built or distributed apartments were leased rather than sold. Many, if not most, buildings eventually wound up with a mixture of homeowners and leaseholders. Even new 'state-built' and 'owned' buildings had 'homeowner' residents, since households retained their previous tenure status after a housing exchange." (Hamberg 1994: 205-206). Note that Hamberg's comments acknowledge that "cuarterías and rooming houses," what I (and she elsewhere in her work) refer to as tenement buildings, were excluded from homeownership. Thus, while it was not guaranteed that all people in other types of buildings were necessarily homeowners, it was a given that people living in tenements were not granted homeownership. My analysis here focuses on people living in tenements because they were categorically excluded from homeownership.

[222] With the 1984 General Housing Law, tenure status became tied to the unit rather than the parties involved in swaps (*permutas*), such that if a homeowner swapped residences with the occupant of a government-owned tenement, they would become a rent-free leaseholder (*usufructo*), and the former occupant of the tenement would become a homeowner (Hamberg 1994: 54). It is unclear the extent to which people of dissimilar tenure statuses actually swapped units, both before and after this legislation.

share services such as cooking and bathroom facilities (at least historically, if no longer in present-day, as adaptations were made within individual units to add bathrooms and kitchens).[223] Residents have made various adaptations over the years, most commonly adding bathrooms and kitchens to their units, a mezzanine level ("*barbacoa*") typically for sleeping, and water tanks. While these modifications helped to meet individual needs, the haphazard building, lack of technical expertise, and expansion into common areas often resulted in "spatial and aesthetic chaos" (Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma 2015: 111), and in some cases have compromised the structural integrity of the building. Many of these tenements were constructed in the 1800s[224] and have not been adequately maintained, resulting in a state of disrepair that has rendered some tenements partial ruins, with missing pieces of floor, roof, staircases, balcony, and corridors.

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[223] These different terms for tenement housing are often used interchangeably, both in classic works on the topic (e.g. Bay y Sevilla (1924), Martínez Inclán (1925), Challioux Cordona (1945), Venegas (2002), all cited in Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma 2015: 110) and in colloquial language. The Municipal Office of Physical Planning distinguishes between *ciudadelas* and *cuarterías* based on their original use, categorizing *ciudadelas* as homes that were originally occupied by a single family and later subdivided and transformed and occupied by multiple families sharing common areas and services, and the latter being dwellings that were designed as multi-family dwellings, with rooms generally surrounding a common patio and sharing sanitary, washing, and cooking facilities (cited in Iñiguez 2014: 95). Others have attempted to come up with a typology that distinguishes them, but there is no common criteria (e.g. Diego Tamayo 1904, Zardoya 1993, Coca 1993, all cited in Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma 2015: 110. Hamberg (1994) provides the following definitions of each in the glossary of her dissertation: "Casa de vecindad: Small house subdivided into rooms with shared services (twelve rooms or less)"; "Ciudadela: Large mansion or hotel divided into rooms with shared services (often over 100 rooms)"; "Cuarteria: Rooms built along a long passageway, with shared services (also used here to apply to ail single-room-with-shared-services situations, including ciudadelas, solares, and casas de vecindad)"; "Solar: Subdivided house with twenty to thirty rooms and shared services; smaller than a ciudadela, but larger than a casa vecindad." For my purposes, these distinctions are not particularly relevant, and instead what unifies these housing types is more relevant.

[224] According to the legal subdirector of Housing of the Municipality Cerro, Arlen Caraballo Chibás, the majority of the dwellings that were given in usufruct were constructed in the nineteenth century (Tamayo Batista 2014).

Partial or full building collapses are a frequent occurrence throughout Havana–for example, over 100 partial collapses were reported in Havana along following heavy rains in 2018 (CubaDebate 2018)–but tenements are especially vulnerable to such collapses, due to a combination of age, lack of both preventative and reparative maintenance, modifications that have been made that compromise structural integrity, and overcrowding that puts a severe strain on the structure itself. In late 2018, the official newspaper *Granma* reported a total of 60,975 collapses since 1959 (Bustamente Molina and Castro Morales 2018). On too many occasions, such collapses have led to injuries and loss of life.[225] The ruins of many of these collapses are out in plain view: during my fieldwork in 2015-16, I stumbled across the sites of three major, recently collapsed buildings along streets that I would walk along on a near daily basis, and well over two dozen others that had been there for years, one memorably with a tree growing amidst the rubble of what was left of an upper floor. I was advised by study participants in the tenements I visited in Old Havana that it was safer to walk in the middle of the narrow street instead of on the sidewalks, lest a piece of concrete crumble from a balcony overhead at the wrong moment. One of the tenements I regularly visited in Centro Habana had a wooden plank covering a hole in the corridor's floor approximately one foot in diameter, which was difficult to avoid since it was directly in front of the entrance door to the unit. One woman whom I interviewed in her home in a tenement near one of the main plazas of Old Havana lived with her husband and two children on the second floor of a building whose other half had collapsed

[225] To name just a few recent examples of deaths resulting from building collapses that were reported by official Cuban media: three girls ages 11 and 12 were killed in January 2020 when the balcony of their building collapsed in Jesús Maria, a neighborhood in Old Havana infamous for its high density of tenements (Fuentes Puebla and Francisco 2020); a man died in December 2021 when the wall of the second story of a building in Old Havana partially collapsed (CubaDebate 2021); in October 2022, a little girl died and three more were injured when a piece of a roof of a three-story building collapsed in Old Havana (CubaDebate 2022).

entirely in on itself. The image was a shocking one: the apartments that used to be across the corridor from hers had caved in, leaving a large pile of rubble visible from her apartment. There was a corridor connecting her unit to the staircase leading to the ground floor, but it was lacking a guardrail separating it from the ruins below. The building has been declared uninhabitable and the residents ordered to evacuate to a shelter, but she and her family, along with two other families remained in place. When I asked her why she and her family had stayed, she explained that despite the poor living conditions, it was still preferable to a shelter (*albergue*), where many of those affected by building collapses or natural disasters are housed, supposedly temporarily until they can be relocated but they often remain there for years or their entire lives. Moreover, she explained, she could walk to work and preferred living in the center of the city rather than in some remote periphery. And so they continued to live amongst the ruins, as many Havana residents do. Needless to say, such places are unsuitable as sites of business, as potential clients are reluctant to enter out of safety concerns, real or perceived. Moreover, their exchange value tends to be low in the emerging real-estate market, although those that are centrally located in areas of high tourist activity–there is a high concentration of tenements in Old Havana, for example–are of interest to investors with the resources to completely remodel them, as I touched on in chapter three and explore in further detail in chapter seven.

Additional obstacles stand in the way for residents of tenements to use their housing in a way that could lead to their social mobility, including poor living conditions and the moral associations attributed to tenements. Classic works written during the Republican period decry the awful living conditions in these tenements, including overcrowding, poor hygienic conditions, lack of drinking water, and poor ventilation and natural light, and the authors of these works tend to pass moral judgment on the residents, associating them with criminality,

prostitution, and overall low morality (Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma 2015: 107). Many of these same associations persist to this day, making tenement housing largely undesirable amongst Cubans and a last resort for those with few other options. Residents of tenement buildings still live in precarious conditions to this day: overcrowding is still a hallmark of tenements, as is poor structural quality, and while there have generally been improvements with respect to access to drinking water and hygiene, these still remain issues for some tenements (see Reguera Figueredo 2018: 95, specifically Annex 3, Table 6). Cuba's official newspaper, *Granma,* reported in 2018 that a total of 84,452 individual dwellings exist in 9,823 tenements (Bustamente Molina and Castro Morales 2018), a much higher estimate than the 2012 census numbers that report the number of rooms in tenements to be just 11,000 in Havana and 19,000 across the entire island (ONEI 2015, cited in Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma 2015), and higher than the estimates of one expert who estimated in 2003 that 60,000 tenement rooms existed in Havana.[226] Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma (2015: 112) suggest that the discrepancy in the number of tenement units between the 2003 estimate and the 2012 census numbers may be because people have successfully converted their units inside tenements into "owned" units, and thus they are no longer counted as tenement units in the census. It seems highly unlikely that such a large number of units were successfully converted by 2012, but even if the occupants succeeded in becoming homeowners, the conditions of many of these properties preclude them from using their housing in a way that could lead to upward social mobility, either through its sale or the conversion of (part of) their housing to a business.

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[226] The expert was Orlando Inclán Coca, who based his estimate on data provided to him by the municipal offices of architecture and urbanism (cited in Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma 2015: 112, who appears to be citing an 2006 interview study of national experts that was an undergraduate thesis (Herrera Domínguez, Yoanny. 2006. "Solar, colectividad ¿Identidad?" Facultad de Arquitectura, Instituto Superior Politécnico José A. Echeverría. La Habana. Tesis de diploma. Tutora: Eliana Cárdenas).

Tenements have historically been home to low-income, black and mulatto Cubans.[227] In his famous 1945 work titled, "The Horrors of Havana's Solar," Juan Manuel Chailloux Cardona describes the deplorable living conditions that residents of tenements endure, and cites a 1919 census of the City of Havana that shows that the 1,548 *solares* existing in Havana at the time were populated primarily by black and mestizo residents. Of the fifty *solares* in Havana that he surveyed as part of his study, he found that 95.7 percent of the tenants were black or mulatto—the same percentage that the National Convention of Cuban Societies of the Colored Race estimated in 1936 (cited in de la Fuente 2001: 115). Chailloux describes the occupations of the tenants as predominantly manual workers, day laborers, servants, street vendors, and unemployed. Collado Baldoquin and Matamoros Tuma (2015: 106) argue that tenements housed a disproportionately growing sector of the population "dispossessed of property," which included freed slaves, foreign immigrants, peasants moving to cities, and an emerging working class. Approximately 40 to 50 percent of all urban renters lived in tenements around the time of the Cuban Revolution, which amounted to approximately 200,000 households, half of whom lived in Havana (Hamberg (1994: 105; de la Fuente 2001: 114). About 6 percent of the population lived in shanty towns at the time of the Cuban Revolution (Zapata Campos et al. 2022), an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 residents in Havana, and black and mulatto Cubans were once again "greatly overrepresented" amongst these slum dwellers (de la Fuente 2001: 114). Black and mestizo Cubans continue to be disproportionately represented amongst the tenement population to this

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[227] Originally, many of the tenements were single-family homes for the bourgeoisie and their servants. As these bourgeoisie families opted to move out of the walls of the city (now Old Havana) and into newly developing areas of Havana with more space and garden areas (e.g. Vedado), their former homes were adapted to be rented out to numerous families (while often having a commercial character on the ground floor). Other tenements were designed for multiple families from the start, with shared bathing and cooking facilities.

day, as well as in precarious housing more generally. As one unnamed Cuban expert explained, "black and mestizo/a persons are overrepresented in the types of housing and neighborhoods that are most precarious in terms of their state of construction, basic services, hygienic and sanitary conditions, the state of the sidewalks and streets, and the security of the citizens, among other [forms of precarity]. The case of tenements is a recurring example, as are some neighborhoods from the center to the periphery of the capital" (quoted in Fundora Nevot et al 2021: 9). In his review of 13 studies that looked at inequalities in housing in Cuba between 2008 and 2018, Cuban expert Reynaldo Jiménez Guethón (2020: 15) notes the link between poor families and precarity, in large part due to their housing conditions, and notes that black and mestizo populations are overrepresented amongst poor families.

The residents of tenements and slums, who we learned were disproportionately black and poor, benefited from housing-related measures introduced in the early years of the Revolution, but are now unable to use their housing as a means to social mobility. The Cuban Revolution decried the exploitation of tenement residents at the hands of greedy landlords, first reducing rents by up to 50 percent, then through the Urban Reform Law of 1960 expropriating tenement buildings and converting tenants into *usufructuarios*, who by the mid-1960s were given long-term, rent-free leases (Hamberg 1990b: 235; Hamberg 1994: 104).[228] These measures provided residents of tenements with a great deal of financial relief while also ensuring tenure security, neither of which was guaranteed to them previously. The National Institute of Housing, created in 1959, built houses for residents of the largely black slums, and as early as 1961 the residents

[228] Initially, however, these tenants living in tenements continued to pay "rent," which was regarded as payments to amortize the purchase price of their soon-to-be-built (rather than current) home (Hamberg 1994: 104). In other words, the idea was that they too would become homeowners one day. However, in the mid-1960s, the government granted them long-term leases at no cost (Hamberg 1994: 104).

of one of Havana's most infamous shantytowns, Las Yaguas, moved to newly built housing in a traditionally middle-class neighborhood (de la Fuente 2001: 275). Together with other opportunities offered by the Cuban Revolution, such as education and training, poor, black and mestizo residents were able to improve their socioeconomic standing in society, even though their housing conditions in tenements were poor. However, in the context of the recommodification of housing, where housing acts as a powerful means or barrier to social mobility, the residents of tenement housing are finding themselves left out of the lucrative economic opportunities that housing extends in the new economy. Racial and economic inequalities that the Revolution fought hard to eliminate are once again being reinscribed through housing in this new context of the recommodification of housing.

Summary and Conclusion

As housing was recommodified and started to serve as the basis for a new system of stratification, the differences in value between homes became especially consequential, raising the question of which social groups were better positioned to use the recommodification of housing for upward social mobility, and which social groups were systematically limited or excluded from doing so. I argue that the "winners" include among them not only the pre-revolutionary and Revolutionary elite, as another scholar has argued, but also a largely white Cuban middle class that emerged in the 1990s, and some families of more humble origins who acquired nice homes during the early years of the Revolution and remained living in them. The "losers" include those who are excluded from homeownership, and those who live in tenements, whose residents tend to be overwhelmingly poor Afro-Cubans. The result is that racial and

economic inequalities that the Cuban Revolution fought hard to eliminate are once again being reinscribed through housing.

CHAPTER 7: BUYERS IN HAVANA'S HIGHLY STRATIFIED RESIDENTIAL REAL-ESTATE MARKET

Introduction

The recommodification of housing in Cuba presented exciting new opportunities for social mobility for Cubans, but the reality is that many Cubans are unable to capitalize on these new opportunities, and find themselves stuck in place, both physically and in terms of social mobility. In this chapter, I examine the residential real-estate market that has emerged in Havana since 2011, one that I argue is a regime of property with a highly stratified, bifurcated market, to put a twist on a phrase used by sociologist Jane Zavisca to describe housing in post-Soviet Russia. Zavisca (2012) argues,

> ...what has emerged [in post-Soviet Russia] is not a housing market, but a regime of property without markets, in which housing is privately owned but incompletely commodified. In this peculiar stratification order, housing status bears little relationship to wages. Post-Soviet housing allocations result mainly from state redistribution and familial reciprocity, not market situation. (P. 87-88)

In Cuba, many Cubans are indeed shut out from the emerging real-estate market, and must rely instead on the increasingly limited support from the state or simply continue to live with family members and hope to one day inherit the property. For these Cubans, housing has remained simply a place to live, not a means of welfare provision or social mobility. But there is indeed an active real-estate market in Cuba, albeit a highly stratified one. Absent mortgage financing, Cubans fortunate enough to be homeowners first need to sell their existing home before being able to purchase another one. This results in chains of dependency that require an initial injection of money, which oftentimes comes from outside of Cuba. In a context in which buyers must purchase their homes with cash, I interrogate who exactly is in a position to purchase residential property in Cuba. I find that select segments of the Cuban population with access to hard

currency, but mainly small investors from outside of Cuba—foreigners, Cubans who repatriate, and Cuban emigrants with family on the island—are the ones purchasing mid- and high-valued residential property on the island. Those living in these desired and valuable properties generally purchase less expensive properties and the process continues, with those at the bottom of the chain finding their options very limited. In most cases, the purchases being made by foreigners/repatriated Cubans/Cuban emigrants are targeted towards business-oriented investment: these buyers purchase homes in order to convert them into businesses geared towards tourists, which raises a series of concerns relating to the local housing market and inequality. In this chapter, I explore the social implications of the trends in the emerging real-estate market, including efforts to rehabilitate housing but also concerns over exacerbating the housing shortage, displacement, and renewed residential segregation along socioeconomic and racial lines.

Unrealized potential: Challenges to buying and selling

Excited by the newfound prospect of extracting the wealth in their home into cash, many Cubans eagerly put their homes up for sale, but found their efforts to sell their home stalled for months and years on end. In 2015 and 2016, it seemed that every few blocks that I walked down in Havana featured at least one home with a "for sale" sign, often perched in a window or tied onto the entrance gate or balcony, sometimes even written directly on the facade of the building itself. Some of these signs became semi-permanent fixtures, the lettering fading with the passing months under the unforgiving Caribbean sun. I started noticing the same homes for sale being advertised with each new iteration of *El Paquete*, a weekly digital collection of television shows, music, movies, classified ads, and other digital content circulated by USB/microSD transfer on

the underground market—a key source of information (and digital entertainment) for Cubans on an island with limited internet access.[229] Despite all of the talk and international media coverage of a real-estate boom in Cuba, I found plentiful examples of Cubans who were unable to sell their home, a reality that was often overlooked in these largely celebratory accounts.

Stuck in place: Anecdotes from would-be buyers and sellers

After one year on the market, Maira still had not sold her 4-bedroom home in La Sierra, Playa, even after she lowered the price from 85,000 CUC to 75,000 CUC. "Numerous people called us," she recounted, "But hardly anyone came to see it…We always said, 'if you are interested after we tell you about the house—we described the house in detail—and if you have the money, perfect. If not, don't come! Why waste our time?…And really hardly anyone came to see the house." Maira's home is priced well above the means of most Cubans, and those who are able to afford the pricepoint, she explains, expect the home to have a garage, which it does not. "Something that really worked against us is the house does not have a garage. Everyone asked, 'Does it have a garage?' ….If a person has 85,000 CUC, which is the price we were initially asking, they have a car. Always. Anyone who has 85,000 CUC to buy [a home] has a car."

After months of searching, Elena and her family finally found an apartment that was well suited to their needs and within their budget, around 15,000 CUC. Elena, her husband, their

[229] Internet access in Cuba has long been difficult and expensive. During my pre-dissertation fieldwork in 2011 through 2014, I would access the internet by visiting the lobbies of tourist hotels in Cuba and purchasing access to the internet, which cost approximately 6 CUC per hour. In June 2015, Cuba began offering wireless internet access in some public parks across the city, which could be accessed by purchasing scratchcards from the telecommunications company ETECSA (these were often resold for marked up prices at the parks themselves). Some people were permitted to use dial-up internet in their homes. For example, Alicia had a dial-up connection in her home, which she purchased from a friend, a Colombian leftist living in Cuba, to whom this internet connection was initially assigned. Another Cuban friend of mine, who worked in radio and television, could access the internet from his home.

daughter Lucía, and the daughter's boyfriend Fran lived together in a small, two-bedroom apartment in Centro Habana, and space was tight for four adults. Initially, the family had planned to purchase two apartments, so that Elena's daughter and her live-in boyfriend could form their own nuclear household. However, once they embarked on their housing search in earnest, they realized their budget did not stretch far enough to purchase two separate units, at least not in the more central neighborhoods they desired. Despite pulling in three official incomes from the state sector, including their daughter's income as a dentist, the family was barely getting by. They supplemented their official salaries with a series of informal activities, like selling food items their son would obtain from the warehouse he was in charge of keeping inventory for, but this income went towards daily expenses and the occasional, hard-earned discretionary purchase, like a case of beer and a good cut of meat around the holidays. Their only hope to purchase a home was by selling their current one, which they had acquired in 2011 through a *permuta* by exchanging a larger apartment that they had been "given" by the state after Elena requested it, making sure that the housing officials knew that not only was her family in need of a larger apartment, but that she was the daughter of one of the "martyrs" of the Revolution. That was during a time when political capital still had some currency, but Elena felt that the family's only option now was to turn to the market. They figured they would be able to sell their current two-bedroom apartment, an interior apartment with little natural light but located in a central area of Havana, for around 17,000 CUC.

When they came across an apartment for sale for 15,000 CUC just a few blocks away, with a layout that would give both couples sharing the household more privacy, they were eager to purchase it. Elena asked the seller of the property her family was interested in purchasing to give them some time to first sell their apartment. Eager to close any sales transaction quickly,

Elena and her husband borrowed money from a friend to pay off the 90 CUC that they still owed to the state on their current apartment. They had been paying the state nominal amounts on a monthly basis since moving in in 2011, but the remaining balance needed to be paid in full before the family was legally able to complete the sales transaction. Now all that was left was to find a buyer. Plenty of people inquired after seeing the hand-written "for sale" sign posted outside the apartment building, and people went to see the apartment, but this interest and activity did not convert to a sale. Many of the people told her they liked the apartment but were in the same position as she was: they were interested in the apartment, but needed to sell their own apartment first. Weeks and months passed. Elena and her family did not buy the apartment they felt was a great fit for them, and became so discouraged that they stopped searching for properties to buy altogether, reasoning that they first needed to sell their own. As of late 2022, they still had not sold their apartment, which felt even smaller when Lucía and Fran welcomed a baby in 2020.

"A house? I'll never be able to buy one!" Reyniel exclaimed, with equal doses of resignation in his voice and surprise at the naivete of my question. "I could work all my life and I'll never be able to afford a house. I can't even let myself dream about it. The most I can hope to buy one day, maybe, is a *split* [air conditioning unit]." Reyniel had called a three-bedroom apartment on the top floor of a microbrigade building his father helped to construct "home" for his entire life, twenty-five years at that point. He had lived with a couple of girlfriends (and their parents) for brief periods of time, but when they were on the outs or the relationship dissolved, he would always return home to his parents' apartment in Arroyo Naranjo. He was the only one of three sons still living at home, but he wasn't confident that he would inherit the apartment from his parents, nor where he would live in the future, once he settled down and was ready to

begin a family. His oldest brother had emigrated via marriage eight years earlier, and had no interest in inheriting the family apartment. His middle brother, however, was married, and in a precarious living situation: after living with his in-laws and his own parents for periods of time, the couple was now renting an apartment from a private party under the table, based on an informal verbal agreement, but the owner/landlord had recently advised them that they needed to move out within the next couple of weeks. This was the third time they found themselves in this situation, and they were desperate to find more stable housing, and ideally a home to call their own as they planned to expand their family. Affording rent, which cost them between 30 and 40 CUC for a small (unregistered) apartment in a working class neighborhood, was challenging enough; saving up to buy a decent home seemed next to impossible. Neither Reyniel nor his brother could imagine both of their families, hopefully with kids one day, cohabiting in the apartment. Selling it and splitting the profits between them was a hypothetical possibility, though the questioned how much the apartment was worth (perhaps 20,000 CUC, they figured) and whether they would be successful in finding a buyer willing to live in a microbrigade building in the first place, on the top floor of a 5-story walkup with no elevator. In any case, with their parents still in their 50s and in good health, these sorts of questions seemed to belong to the distant future. Unsure of how they could come into a home of their own, Reyniel continued to live in his childhood bedroom, now more spacious that he no longer shared it with his brother, and his brother and sister-in-law searched for another under-the-table rental.

What to make of these anecdotes

Maira, Elena and her family, Reyniel, and his brother and sister-in-law are among the Cubans that find themselves stuck in place, eager but unable to insert themselves in the emerging

real-estate market, and therefore unable to improve their current living situation and/or use their housing for social welfare provision, let alone to achieve upward social mobility. The limiting factor for all of them is economic in nature: given that there is no mortgage lending in Cuba, would-be homebuyers have no other option but to purchase a home with cash, something that is in chronic short supply for average Cubans, especially those employed in the state sector. Except for the most affordable properties–those under 5,000 CUC and perhaps up to 10,000 CUC, which some Cubans who work abroad, self-employed workers in Cuba's emerging private sector, or people in lucrative areas of the black market may be able to purchase using their earnings–most Cubans first need to sell their own home before being able to purchase another one. Generally speaking, then, homeowners are in a relatively advantageous position—at least in theory.[230] However, as we saw in the case of Maira as well as Elena and her family, both of whom are homeowners, it can be challenging to find buyers, who themselves generally lack the sum of cash necessary to purchase a home before first selling their own. For these people, their homes are "a frozen asset," as Zavisca (2012: 100) described in the case of post-Soviet Russia. Indeed, the lack of mortgage financing has created a situation in which people first need to sell one's own home before being able to purchase another one. This has created chains of dependency that need an initial injection of money from somewhere to activate the chain that links buyers and sellers. In this chapter, I look at this dynamic and interrogate where the initial injection of money that sets off the chain comes from. But first, it is important to get a sense of the price distribution of homes in Havana, in order to be able to better understand the affordability issue most Cubans face.

[230] There is a significant amount of variation within this group of homeowners, of course, with some commanding much greater purchasing power than others, depending on the value of their home, as I discuss in chapter three.

The cost of homes in Havana

To get a broad sense of sales prices of residential real estate in Havana beyond my sample of interviewees, I analyzed the listings of all homes for sale advertised on the websites of licensed real estate agencies in Havana in mid-July 2017. This snapshot of home prices in Havana gives us a sense of how much capital sellers can (potentially) cash in, and it paints a necessary backdrop of housing affordability for would-be buyers. I summarize and present my findings in Table 7.1, which shows the number of residential properties for sale, the lowest and highest priced home, and a distribution of homes for sale broken down by price range. I present these and other summary descriptive statistics for each of the seven real estate agencies, and a total for all of the agencies combined. I will go over the results momentarily, but first a word on the analysis itself. Data on actual sales/purchase prices are not available, so listing price is the next best estimate of home value. Real-estate agents reported in my interviews that sometimes homes were sold below list price, and in a few cases where homes had multiple interested parties they sold over list price, but the amount did not seem to vary dramatically in either direction (usually by no more than 5,000 CUC). Listings on the websites of real estate agencies does not capture the entire population of homes for sale in Havana, since many sellers opt not to contract the services of a licensed real estate agency, especially on the lower end of the price spectrum. However, it can give us a good sense of the offerings on the real estate market in Havana, especially when looking across all of the agencies combined.

One limitation of focusing on the website of real estate agencies to get a sense of the real estate market is that the data underestimate the amount of properties for sale on the lower end of the price spectrum. This is likely an artifact of the fact that (a) real estate agencies are largely

commission-based,[231] which provides a disincentive to take on low-value properties, and (b) sellers of these low-value properties may also be reluctant to pay a commission to the real estate agency given their already tight margins and/or beliefs that clients searching for low-value properties are less inclined to use the services of a licensed real estate agency, and therefore choose not to list their property with a real estate agency. I nevertheless chose to focus on the websites of real estate agencies rather than popular classified websites such as Revolíco and/or Porlalivre, principally because the advertisements were vetted by the agency and therefore included more complete pricing information (oftentimes listings on classified websites did not actually list the price, encouraging interested parties to inquire with the contact provided in the ad) and they largely avoided duplicates (whereas people advertising on classified websites often re-posted the same listing every day). I analyze all of the homes listed for sale on the websites of seven real-estate agencies in Havana. While there were nine websites with listings of properties for sale in total (there were additional licensed real estate agencies in Havana, but not all of them had developed their websites), I excluded two of the nine websites from my analysis because one was obviously very outdated and the other, which had over 2,000 listings, had too many misclassified or misleading listings (for example, houses listed for sale for under 100 CUC).

[231] Some real-estate agencies also charged an "inscription" fee to take on the property and advertise it.

Table 7. 1: Distribution of prices for homes for sale in Havana, mid-July 2017

	# of properties for sale in Havana	Lowest priced	Highest priced	<10,000 CUC		10,000 - 29,999		30,000 - 49,999		50,000 - 99,999		100,000 - 299,999		300,000 - 499,999		500,000 +	
Inmobiliaria 1	491	11,000	650,000	0	0%	44	9%	35	7%	179	36%	**194**	**40%**	30	6%	9	2%
Inmobiliaria 2	4,075	4,500	1,000,000	58	1%	**1275**	**31%**	1056	26%	987	24%	597	15%	72	2%	30	1%
Inmobiliaria 3	3,138	4,725	1,070,000	58	2%	**911**	**29%**	774	25%	814	26%	494	16%	61	2%	26	1%
Inmobiliaria 4	109	65,000	850,000	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	12	11%	**72**	**66%**	19	17%	6	6%
Inmobiliaria 5	564	6,500	700,000	6	1%	119	21%	147	26%	**152**	**27%**	126	22%	11	2%	3	1%
Inmobiliaria 6	193	16,000	1,000,000	0	0%	19	10%	38	20%	60	31%	**63**	**33%**	5	3%	8	4%
Inmobiliaria 7	1,161	5,500	905,000	3	0%	177	15%	217	19%	**402**	**35%**	292	25%	55	5%	15	1%
Total	**9,731**	--	--	**125**	**1%**	**2545**	**26%**	**2267**	**23%**	**2606**	**27%**	**1838**	**19%**	**253**	**3%**	**97**	**1%**
Average (Mean)	1,390	16,175	882,143	18	1%	364	16%	324	17%	372	27%	263	31%	36	5%	14	2%
Median	564	6,500	905,000	3	0%	119	15%	147	20%	179	27%	194	25%	30	3%	9	1%
Min	109	4,500	650,000	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	12	11%	63	15%	5	2%	3	1%
Max	4,075	65,000	1,070,000	58	2%	1275	31%	1056	26%	987	36%	597	66%	72	17%	30	6%
Standard Deviation	1,575	21,930	159,004	28	1%	513	11%	419	10%	385	8%	210	sale	26	6%	10	2%
# of years a Cuban earning a median salary (29CUC/mo) would have to work to buy a house on the lower end of each price range						28.74		86.21		143.68		287.36		862.07		1436.78	

Based on author's analysis of all homes for sale advertised on the websites of seven licensed, brick-and-mortar real estate agencies in Havana

My analysis of listings of homes for sale in Havana shows that in mid-2017, 9,713 homes were advertised for sale across seven real estate agencies,[232] and the prices of the homes ranged from a low of 4,500 CUC to a high of upwards of one million CUC. Looking at the distribution of prices across all real estate agencies that I analyzed combined, we see that sales prices were fairly evenly distributed between the range of 10,000-29,999 CUC (26 percent), 30,000-49,999 CUC (23 percent), 50,000-99,999 CUC (27 percent) and 100,000-299,999 CUC (19 percent). Listings for properties valued at 500,000 CUC or higher represented only 1 percent of all listings, as did listings for properties valued under 10,000 CUC. Although the distribution was

[232] This dataset most likely contains some duplicate entries, since the same residential property may be listed by multiple real estate agencies. Even so, the total number of houses listed for sale across the seven real estate agency websites is surely an underestimate of the number of residential properties for sale in Havana at the time, since not all sellers list their home with a real estate agency.

fairly even overall, there were notable differences between real estate agencies:[233] whereas all seven real estate agencies had several very high-end properties in their repertoire, three of the seven agencies did not have a single property for sale under 10,000 CUC. My fieldwork suggests that there is indeed a market in low-valued properties (under 10,000 CUC), including an underground market of "*cuartos*" (rooms in tenements) for sale for approximately 4,000 CUC, which I will discuss later in this chapter. The underrepresentation of low-valued properties in the sample of online listings can most likely be attributed to the nature of the sample itself: as I explained above, commission-based real-estate agencies face a disincentive in taking (and expending resources) on low-valued properties, since the return on these properties is minimal, and people who own low-priced properties are less likely to use the services of a brick-and-mortar real estate agency.[234]

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[233] Some real estate agencies (*inmobiliaria* 1, 4, and 6) very clearly targeted higher-end buyers. None of these agencies had listings for under 10,000 CUC, and all three had the highest concentration of listings in the 100,000-299,999 range (40 percent of listings for *inmobiliaria* 1, 66 percent of listings for *inmobiliaria* 4, and 33 percent of listings for *inmobiliaria* 6). In fact, the lowest-priced property listed with *inmobiliaria* 4 was 65,000 CUC. Interestingly, the website of that particular *inmobiliaria* is exclusively in English (most other websites have both Spanish and English versions), and a closer look at the marketing and the characteristics of the properties reveals that this particular *inmobiliaria* has a very clear niche: luxury properties targeted to foreigners.

[234] On the other hand, there are reasons why some real estate agencies list low-priced properties. The owner/manager of one real estate agency whose clientele base is almost exclusively foreigners explained to me, "I sell homes that are worth over 40,000 CUC. I'm not interested in selling cheaper homes—although I do have a few under that amount, because sometimes in order to complete a chain of sales I need those cheaper options" (Interview, February 3, 2016). Here she is referring to the fact that sellers of more expensive properties often need to purchase another home in which to live, and they usually downsize to a smaller and less expensive home. In order to be able to sell the more expensive home—or, really, several more expensive homes (she refers to the "chain"—a phenomenon I will describe in greater detail later in this chapter)—she needs to have some more affordable options for the sellers to move into. By her definition, these are homes under 40,000 CUC—well above the price-range that I refer to, but the logic that she offers can be applied to make sense of why some real estate agencies list low-priced properties, even though the returns on such properties are minimal.

Most reports on home prices in Havana are anecdotal,[235] but there have been a few more comprehensive studies that can give us an idea of how home prices have fluctuated in Havana in the initial years after the legalization of home sales between private individuals. A 2013 study[236] by Miami-based The Havana Consulting Group found the average price of a home in Havana (n=763) to be 38,849 CUC, slightly higher than the national average (n=1,227) of 31,489 CUC[237] (Morales and Scarpaci 2013). The same study found a good amount of variation among the municipalities in Havana, with the average price of a home for sale reaching as high as 59,191 CUC in the highly desirable municipality of Playa and 52,050 CUC in Vedado, yet another highly desirable municipality (Morales and Scarpaci 2013). A follow-up study in 2014 found the average price of homes in Havana dropped to 31,157 CUC, but the average price of homes in the municipality of Playa rose by 15 percent, and over one dozen homes for sale were priced above 1,000,000 CUC (Morales 2014, cited in Mesa-Lago 2016: 127).[238] Prices once again rebounded after the announcement of the normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States in December 2014, such that homes listed on the classified website Revolico.com on February 23rd,

[235] For example, many journalistic stories on the real estate market in Cuba give one or a few examples of individual homes for sale, or make reference to an outrageously expensive home currently on the market.

[236] The conference proceedings, from summer 2013, do not specify the date, but do refer to a "recent" study. In Mesa-Lago et al.'s (2016: 127) reporting of this study, the authors indicate that the study was conducted in 2013. The second part of the study's title is different, but the authors are the same, and it is safe to assume from other data (sample size, etc.) that we are referring to the same study.

[237] The Havana Consulting Group's analysis of housing prices actually only included eight of Cuba's fifteen provinces. I could not locate the original study, and the conference proceedings in which the study results are reported do not detail the methodology of the study, including the source of the sample.

[238] I could not locate the original publication cited by Mesa-Lago, so I am reporting on Mesa-Lago's summary of the study's findings.

2016 ranged from a low of 7,000 CUC to a high of 900,000 CUC (Morales 2016a, reported in Mesa-Lago et al. 2016: 127),[239] similar to the range that I uncovered in my analysis in mid-2017.

The overall distribution of prices of homes for sale in Havana has two very different sets of implications, depending on whether one takes the perspective of the seller or buyer. The value of homes for sale in Havana—close to three-quarters of the homes listed for sale are priced at 50,000 CUC or higher, and over one-fifth of homes are priced at 100,000 CUC—attests to the amount of wealth that sellers can tap into by selling their home. As I discussed in chapter four, the money from the sale of a home can be used to ease *la lucha,* fund larger purchases that were previously far out of reach, emigrate, or start up or expand a business in the growing private sector. From a buyer's perspective, however, these prices can be prohibitively expensive, especially considering that buyers must pay the full sales price at the time of the sale, since no mortgage financing is available in Cuba. This raises the question of who exactly has access to the amount of capital needed to purchase a home in Havana. For most Cubans, the answer is those who already have a home to sell—one with sufficient economic capital to be able to put towards the purchase of another home. Even then, however, they often struggle to find buyers. There are some select segments of the Cuban population, however, who are indeed able to finance the purchase of a home, even without selling their current one. I turn to these Cubans next.

Which Cubans can afford to buy a home in Cuba?

Many would-be buyers looking to address their immediate housing needs and/or potentially build wealth by purchasing their first home found themselves limited in their ability

[239] To the best of my knowledge, Mesa-Lago et al. (2016: 127) are referring to a study conducted by Morales for the Havana Consulting Group, which they refer to in the sentence prior to reporting these figures. However, the original source no longer appears to be available to verify.

to do so. In this section, I examine which segments of Cubans are able to purchase into the emerging real-estate market, and which segments are excluded from doing so.

Not Cubans working in the state sector

Most Cubans cannot afford to purchase a home with savings accumulated from their official salaries alone. Workers in the state sector find official salaries to be too low to afford even the basic necessities of life,[240] let alone to make discretionary purchases, and definitely not a purchase as expensive as a home.[241] To put things in perspective, a Cuban earning the average monthly salary of 740 Cuban pesos (CUP) per month (ONEI 2016: 173),[242] the equivalent of 29

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[240] Bastian (2018) accounts for how Cuban families tend to use their state salaries, which are paid in Cuban pesos (CUP): "Many who work in the state sector use their CUP salaries to pay their utility bills (gas, water, telephone, and electricity) and to pay for their rations….If there is anything left after basic services are paid for in Cuban pesos, most households use their Cuban pesos to buy food at the agricultural markets. The remainder of the household's basic necessities are sold in CUCs, and that money generally comes from the family's other sources of income, which are more likely to be in CUCs" (p. 110). The "other sources of income" that Bastian refers to often come from a patchwork of informal and oftentimes illegal activities that may "var[y] on a monthly or even daily basis" (p. 109), and are characterized by their precarity. "State salaries, far from solving [a household's] problems, gave households a minimum that they could count on since all of the other strategies were so dependent on opportunities that may or may not appear," the author explains, going on to say, "These informal opportunities for income generating are so 'touch and go' that they are often talked about as *me cayó algo*. Literally, an opportunity, *something* fell (from the sky?). But since these income-generating opportunities in the informal sector are often temporary, not fully legal, if things get too hot then the opportunity disappears ["*se cae*" *it falls down, losing its foundation*]" (Bastian 2018: 109-10).

[241] Bastian (2018) explains the reasons why Cubans continue to work in the state sector in spite of low remuneration: state sector employment is generally more stable than self-employment/employment in the private sector (p. 109-10); opportunities to pilfer goods from workplaces for personal consumption, resale on the black market, or for a monetary profit (p. 111-13); access to co-workers to whom they can sell goods such as baked goods or clothes (the author notes that co-workers provide the "right balance of trust and social distance" necessary for safe transactions) (p. 116); they can leverage the legitimacy and professional credentials afforded by their state jobs for other forms of higher-paid work (e.g. university professors who are hired to give guest lectures to paying tour groups) (p. 116-17); opportunity for temporary labor migrations (e.g. doctors on missions abroad) (117-120); gifts and favors by patients supplement the meager salaries of doctors (p. 120); connections with state institutions provide opportunities to study abroad (p. 121); and free access to internet at work (p. 121).

[242] For salary figures, Cuba's national statistics agency, ONEI, reports the "average monthly salary in state-owned and mixed entities" as a single figure in its statistical yearbook, which it published annually.

CUC, would have to work for 29 years without spending a cent on any other expense in order to be able to buy a home for 10,000 CUC, which is on the lower end of the price spectrum. They would need to work 86 years for a home priced at 30,000 CUC, and 144 years for a house priced at 50,000 CUC.[243] Even in households with multiple earners, relying on state salaries to purchase a home is far-fetched. Reyniel's comment about never being able to afford to buy a home, and only allowing himself to dream as big as buying an air conditioning unit attests to this reality.

Mixed entities refers to those that are owned in part by the Cuban state and in part by a foreign (non-Cuban) entity. Workers in these mixed enterprises generally have higher salaries than those in fully Cuban-owned ones, but the existing data does not disaggregate between the two.

[243] The state salary system has undergone changes in recent years, including new incentives in the "enterprise" sector since 2014 and an overhaul of salaries in the "budgeted" sector in July 2019. Helen Yaffe (2019) explains: "Cuba's budgeted sector incorporates organisations and entities which operate with a state budget and mostly provide services free to the population without returning revenue to the state. This includes public health, education, culture and sport, public administration, community services, housing and defence….Every one of the 1,470,736 workers in this sector will receive the pay rise, at a cost to the Cuban state of over seven billion Cuban pesos annually….Of the state sector workforce, 52 per cent – or 1.6 million workers – are in the "enterprise sector", consisting of productive and commercial entities which sell, trade, and receive revenues. Since 2014, many workers in the enterprise sector [which consists of productive and commercial entities which sell, trade, and receive revenues] benefited from incentives to increase production, linking pay to performance, removing salary caps, and providing payment in hard currency (Cuban Convertible Pesos are received by 60 per cent of workers in the sector). The new salary rise does not apply to them, but to the 48 per cent of state sector workers in the budgeted sector. Some groups of workers in the latter, including healthcare workers, received a pay rise in recent years, but others, including the education sector, were left behind. Workers in the political organisations of People's Power and a group in public administration had not received a pay rise since 2005. The new salary scale both raises the incomes of the lowest earners (the minimum monthly salary rises from 225 pesos to 400, up from 125 in 2005) and expands the wage differential between these and the highest earners from between 2.9 to 7.5 times. This aims to "invert the pyramid" so that jobs of greater complexity and responsibility, requiring higher qualifications, receive substantially higher remuneration and provide an incentive to work towards leadership positions. The average monthly salary in the budgeted sector has risen from 634 pesos in June, to 1065 pesos in July; above the 2018 average salary in state enterprises, which was 871 pesos (up from 600 in 2014). Salaries in the budgeted sector are capped at 3,000 pesos; only those earning over 2,500 pay individual income tax. All employees will now pay towards social security: 2.5 per cent for those earning less than 500 pesos and five per cent for those above. Social security payments, including some pensions, were last raised in November 2018. Pensions were raised again to a minimum of 280 pesos and all those with pensions under 500 pesos see incomes rise."

Even with the growth of the "non-state" sector since 2010,[244] the majority of Cubans in the labor force are still employed in the state sector: in 2015, nearly three-quarters of all workers (73.4 percent) were employed in the state sector (calculated by author based on data in ONEI 2017: 171); in 2020, a decade after the announced reforms allowing for greater self-employment, two-thirds of all workers (66.6 percent) were still employed in the state sector (calculated by author based on data in ONEI 2021:12).

Few if any Cubans live from their official state salaries alone, finding ways to supplement their meager official earnings through a patchwork of informal and oftentimes illegal activities that may vary from month to month or even day to day and are characterized by their precarity (Bastian 2018: 109). Anthropologist Hope Bastian (2018) notes,

> State salaries, far from solving [a household's] problems, gave households a minimum that they could count on since all of the other strategies [to generate income to make ends meet] were so dependent on opportunities that may or may not appear. These informal opportunities for income generating are so 'touch and go' that they are often talked about as *me cayó algo*. Literally, an opportunity, *something* fell (from the sky?). But since these income-generating opportunities in the informal sector are often temporary, not fully legal, if things get too hot then the opportunity disappears ["*se cae*" *it falls down, losing its foundation*]. (P. 109-110)

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[244] I use the term "non-state" sector because this is how it is officially referred to by Cuban officials and defined in Cuba's statistical yearbook, which distinguishes the two broad categories of "non-state" employment from "state" employment. ONEI's statistical yearbook for 2016 specifies that the categories included under the umbrella of the "non-state sector" include: (1) agricultural cooperatives, (2) non-agricultural cooperatives, (3) "private" (private farmers, usufruct of land ("los usufructuarios de la tierra"), Cooperatives of Credit and Service ("las Cooperativas de Créditos y Servicios"), mixed companies, and self-employed workers, and (4) self-employed workers (this category actually falls under the more general "private" category, but is itemized separately as a sub-category of "private") (see exact definitions in ONEI 2017: 165). (Although they are not specified, presumably workers contracted by self-employed individuals are also counted among "self-employed workers", since they do not appear as their own separate category. Indeed, this seems to be Mesa Lago et al's (2016: 24) understanding, based on their calculations in table 2). Employment figures are itemized for these four categories in the statistical yearbook. Mesa-Lago et al. (2016: 24) attempt to further itemize these categories using 2014 data.

Thus, while Cubans find ways to supplement their state salaries, these additional earnings mostly help Cubans scrape by and make ends meet—they certainly do not suffice to fund the purchase of a home in the new real-estate market.

Cubans who work abroad

There are some segments of the Cuban population whose earnings are significantly higher than those of average Cubans employed in the state sector, for whom purchasing a home using their (hard currency) earnings is a possibility. In my interviews with real estate agents, they reported that while the majority of their clients were looking to downsize, a much smaller proportion were looking to do just the opposite. Using a combination of savings and the proceeds from the sale of their current home, they were looking to upgrade to a more expensive home. Among Cubans living on the island, those who can save up enough from their earnings to contribute towards the purchase of a home are typically Cubans who complete mission trips abroad or otherwise provide their services abroad and are paid in hard currency for doing so and paid competitively. This includes health professionals who go on missions to foreign countries,[245] athletes, artists, and musicians. Morales and Scarpaci (2013), too, found "Cubans who travel abroad to complete mission trips" to be one of six "profiles" of buyers they identified based on their small interview study with four real estate agents and eight people who had sold their home in Cuba. Bastian (2018: 133) argues that while it was not the case during her observations in 2012-13, by 2015 "Cubans on the island with funds saved from work abroad or

[245] For more on Cuba's medical internationalism, especially as a development strategy for the Cuban state, see Blue (2010) and Kirk (2015).

legal work with transnational companies" started to buy homes from Cubans interested in downsizing.

Some Cubans employed in the growing private sector

Through my own fieldwork, I found that *some* self-employed individuals (*trabajadores por cuenta propia*), particularly *casa particular* owners, were able to purchase home(s) using the earnings from their business. Alicia, for example, was able to purchase not one but two apartments using the earnings from her *casa particular* business, in less than four years. We met Alicia in chapter four: she had grown up in a cramped *solar* that she shared with her parents and two older sisters, and only in her late thirties did she finally have a home to call her own: a three-bedroom apartment in a microbrigade building that she herself had helped to construct. In 1998, she began renting a room in her apartment to foreign language students through a unique arrangement with the state, and continued to do so under the table even after the contract ended. In 2004 she applied for and was granted a license to rent one bedroom in her apartment, and in 2006 she left her teaching job to dedicate herself exclusively to her *casa particular* business, which at that point consisted of renting a single room in her apartment. In 2010, Alicia began renting out the second bedroom in her apartment. In 2012, just months after the legalization of home sales, an opportunity to purchase another apartment to expand her *casa particular* business presented itself to Alicia: Alicia's neighbor/friend, a woman who also ran a *casa particular* business on the same floor of Alicia's building, was traveling to Mexico with plans to emigrate permanently to the U.S., and was selling her apartment. The neighbor was in a hurry—she

needed to sell her apartment in one week's time—so she agreed to sell it to Alicia for only 8,000 CUC.[246]

Alicia was not on the market to purchase a property, but, after some convincing from the seller and another neighbor/mutual friend of theirs, she jumped at the opportunity. The issue was she had to pay for the apartment in a lump sum—with less than a week's advance notice, moreover. Alicia had some money saved up, but not the full amount, so she borrowed money from two close friends, whom she repaid in less than one year. One of the friends from whom Alicia borrowed money to purchase the apartment was another neighbor who had recently sold her apartment on the same floor as Alicia's in order to emigrate to the United States, netting over 20,000 CUC. Their long-standing friendship and shared Christian faith (they belonged to the same congregation and referred to themselves as "sisters in Christ") provided a basis of trust for the informal loan, especially necessary given that the lender was permanently leaving the country and would have little recourse if Alicia did not keep her word. More than simply a favor, the loan was also mutually beneficial. Alicia described to me the repayment plan that they agree to, recounting how her friend, now living in Miami, would call her up: "'Alicia, it's so-and-so's birthday, give her 50 CUC.' 'My nephew needs a new computer, send him 200 CUC.' 'Listen, send 100 CUC to [my family in] the eastern provinces, to help them recover from the recent tropical storm.'….And that's how it went, little by little I re-paid the full loan." By having Alicia

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[246] In contrast, yet another neighbor living on the same floor, who was also emigrating to the United States in 2012, had managed to sell her apartment for between 20,000 and 25,000 CUC. Admittedly, the apartment had one additional bedroom and the living room was larger, but otherwise they were very comparable. The large difference in sales price between the two apartments seems to reflect the time constraints the neighbor who was selling her apartment to Alicia faced, rather than a sudden change in prices on the market. The neighbor who sold her home for nearly triple the price was not under the same time constraints as the neighbor who sold to Alicia, so she was able to command a much higher sales price. She sold the apartment a few months before she left the island, and temporarily rented an apartment from another neighbor in the building in the meantime.

send money to family and friends still living on the island, Alicia's friend/neighbor, now living in Miami, was able to circumvent the restrictions, service fees, and unfavorable currency exchange rates involved in sending remittances from the U.S. to Cuba. A win-win situation for both of them. The second friend who leant Alicia money to purchase the apartment was a Spanish woman who had developed a close friendship with Alicia during the year that she spent in Cuba completing a Master's program, during which time she rented a room in the apartment a couple of door's down from Alicia's—the one Alicia later purchased. The two went on beach vacations together to other parts of the island, and Alicia even served as the maid of honor in the Spaniard's wedding to a Cuban man. She came back to Cuba frequently for weeks or months at a time, always staying in that same apartment, and happened to be in Cuba when the apartment went up for sale. She encouraged Alicia to buy it, offering her money to be able to do so, and Alicia paid her back in full in the following months.

Alicia also assumed all of the costs involved in the bureaucracy surrounding the sales transaction, including generous "incentives" to bureaucrats to speed up the notoriously slow process.[247] There was quite a bit of maneuvering to do to get around additional legal obstacles in

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[247] In Mesa-Lago et al.'s (2016: 152-53, 159-60) small interview study of buyers/sellers and real estate agents, interviewees reported the bureaucracy involved in housing transactions as one of the main challenges in the process of buying/selling a home. One of their interviewees stated, "they make [the paperwork] cumbersome to force you to give a 'monetary stimulus', let's call it, if you don't want the paperwork to go on for months" (p. 158). Another interviewee simply said, "if you don't pay someone under the table, you can spend months and months caught up in the paperwork without being able to achieve any results" (p. 158). Indeed, in at least two cases that I observed directly, either the buyer or the seller paid the notary completing the paperwork in order for the process to be expedited. On one occasion, I accompanied a buyer and seller to the notary office, and watched as the seller slipped the notary a 20 CUC bill. The transaction was completed in less than one week. On another occasion, a lawyer who I knew personally allowed me to observe their work at a municipal housing registry office meeting with and attending to the public, processing requests to inscribe property titles. During most of the morning shift that I observed, the work was rather repetitive: people would come drop off paperwork, and she would either accept it or, more often, tell them what they were missing and where they needed to go to get it, instructing them to come back when they gathered all necessary documents. One man, however, tried to give her a monetary bill, clutching it in his hand tightly and extending it to her. Probably because I was present and taking notes, she instructed the man to go see her supervisor in the other room. I did not

place, specifically the limit on the number of properties a Cuban could own—one principal residence and one vacation home—a measure introduced by the Cuban state in the early years of the Revolution and still in place as of the time of this writing. Since Alicia owned an apartment already, she designated her 80-something-year-old father as the owner on the deed of the home and as the license-holder for the *casa particular* business in the new apartment, despite the fact that he was living with his eldest daughter in another municipality. This sort of maneuvering—putting additional residences in the name of family members, including underage children—is a common way that Cubans get around the restriction on the number of properties one can own. Alicia then obtained a power of attorney that allowed her to manage the business that was in her father's name, accomplishing all of this in under one month's time. When immigration inspectors visited her home to ensure that all guests were properly registered, she would show them both sets of documentation (hers and her fathers'), and there was never any issue. It was obvious to everyone what was really going on, but she had all of her papers legally in order, so she was technically abiding by the law.

By purchasing a second apartment, Alicia was able to expand her *casa particular* business from two to four rooms, substantially increasing her income, which allowed her to lead a lifestyle more comfortable than most Cubans and set her up to finance the purchase of yet another home in 2015, this time for her oldest sister. Alicia's automatic washing machine, two

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witness her accepting these sorts of "incentives" during the single shift I observed, but months later she showed me a new tablet, and when I asked where she got it, she replied that it was a gift from one of her clients. This sort of "incentivizing" is quite common in Cuba, outside of housing transactions as well. A dentist friend of mine would regularly receive "gifts" from clients, which sometimes included cooking oil, internet cards, or cash. On another occasion, I accompanied a friend to a doctor's appointment, and when we finally entered the room after waiting over two hours in the waiting room, I was surprised to see the doctor's desk full of gifts, some obscured in plastic shopping bags and others peeking out. My friend gave the doctor 20 CUC in cash.

plasma televisions, home internet connection (a rarity), and the fact that she had completely changed her living room set on multiple occasions were just a few of the visible signs of her upward mobility. She accompanied the tourists who stayed at her home to restaurants, drinks, even multi-day getaways at beach resorts in other parts of Cuba—paying her own share, a point of great pride for her. In 2015, she traveled to Europe for three weeks,[248] visiting her cousin in Paris and former guests who had become friends in Berlin and Madrid. The flights alone cost around 1,000 CUC, and she took with her 5,000 Euros in spending money, all from her business earnings. Five months after returning from Europe, Alicia purchased a modest home for her oldest sister, Yanet, for 8,000 CUC. Given her recent expenditures, she only had 3,500 CUC cash on hand to put towards the house. She borrowed another 1,500 CUC from a friend (a foreigner on a long-term trip in Cuba), paying 5,000 CUC at the time of the sale, and she paid the sellers the remaining 3,000 CUC within two months of the sale (she also re-paid the loan to her friend within three months). Most sellers demand full payment at the time of the sale—after all, there is little legal recourse for sellers who haven't received full payment, given the widespread practice of underdeclaring the actual sales prices on legal documents. However, the sellers allowed Alicia to pay the remaining balance after having completed the sales transaction (and after her sister Yanet had already moved in) because they were family of family, and because Alicia had recently done them a favor by temporarily lending them 2,000 USD just weeks

[248] During the time she was in Europe, Alicia left her sister in charge of her business, and asked me to help make sure things run smoothly, especially with receiving guests, communicating with them, and ensuring payment. I had observed how she ran her business for several months already, and after a brief "training" from her, I got an even closer first-hand look at the financial side of the business, by directly receiving and documenting payments from clients. Based on my previous observations and this direct experience, I am confident that the amounts that Alicia reported earning and spending in our formal interviews are accurate. Moreover, I accompanied her to a travel agency to purchase her flight to Europe, and I counted the cash that she took with her for spending money.

prior.[249] Trust is a key aspect in many housing transaction, though in this case trusting Alicia to pay back the loan was not much of a leap in any case—they knew that the casa particular business generated good income, especially in the current high season.

Unlike much of the Cuban population that has no other choice but to sell their home in order to be able to purchase another one, Alicia was able to purchase not one but two homes using the earnings from her private business. Both homes were on the lower end of the price spectrum (each was 8,000 CUC), but, as I discussed earlier, even low-priced homes are out of reach for the majority of the Cuban population employed in the state sector, earning their salary in Cuban pesos. Moreover, Alicia managed to purchase two homes in a span of under four years,

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[249] Alicia explains to me the circumstances of the loan and how the purchase of the property came about: "My [middle] sister, Maira, calls me and tells me that an acquaintance of hers, the aunt of her daughter-in-law, is planning a trip to Spain and she went to see her to get some advice (because my sister had visited Spain several years back). She wanted Maira to orient her. And my sister tells me that to get an appointment [in the Spanish Embassy] the woman has to pay 10 CUC [to a middle person with internet access] because you can only schedule the appointment online. And my sister told her: "Why pay 10 CUC? My sister has an internet connection at home. I'm going to tell my sister to schedule an appointment for you." So Maira calls me and tells me, and I…. scheduled her an appointment. Then my sister calls me again and says, "The woman needs to bring 2,000 pesos to the interview [to show her financial means], and she doesn't have the money!" You know what happens, Martina? There are people who hang around the Embassy that have 2,000 pesos in hand, and they lend it to you for the 15 minutes you need it for the interview, but they charge you 100 CUC. I think that is unjust and just craziness! So I told Maira, "It's ok, I have the money, I can lend it to her. But you have to be responsible for the money because I don't know them." Later, Maira came to my house with the sellers' two sons to pick up the money. I…went to the ATM, and withdrew 2,000 CUC. When they saw the 2,000 CUC, they said, "But she needs to show American dollars or Euros, not CUC." Right away I started knocking on doors. I knocked on the door of the Chilean tourist who was renting a room from me at the time, and I gave him 600 CUC in exchange for his 600 Euros. I told him I would return his 600 Euros the next day…And I did the same thing with a few other people—I gave them CUC and they gave me American dollars. And so I collected more than $2,040, between dollars and Euros. The next day, the woman went to the interview, accompanied by her sons. My sister went with them—with the money. Yeah, because you have to be responsible! After the interview, they all came to my house [to return the money], and they thanked me profusely. One of them said to me, "I am selling an apartment, but I haven't managed to sell it yet—that's why we needed to borrow the money." And I said, "An apartment?! Where?" And he started telling me about the apartment. I told him I was looking for an apartment for our other sister, but didn't have the full amount that he was asking [8,000 CUC]. And he told me, 'Listen, you did a grand thing for our mom….What you did—lend us $2,000 without even knowing us…that has to be paid back. You trusted us, now we are going to trust you.'" (Interview February 6, 2016)

all while maintaining a comfortable lifestyle and level of consumption, even taking a pricey European vacation just months before purchasing the second home. She did receive loans from friends in both cases, but was quickly able to re-pay them. (She likely would have been able to finance the purchase of the homes entirely on her own had she had more advance notice—both opportunities presented themselves suddenly—and the second relatively recently after a pricey European vacation.) By purchasing her neighbor's apartment, Alicia was able to expand her *casa particular*, leading to even greater upward social mobility. By purchasing the second property, she was able to solve the housing problems faced by multiple family members: her sister and father moved out of their old apartment into the new one that Alicia had purchased on behalf of her sister,[250] and her nephew (the middle sister's son) and his wife moved into Yanet's old apartment (Yanet officially "donated" the apartment to them), finally having a home to call their own after seven years of marriage and moving around from their parents' house to rental after rental.

Alicia was by no means an exception—I interviewed or informally conversed with several other *casa particular* owners who had purchased additional units in order to expand their business, and was informed of numerous other cases that fit this pattern through conversations with participants. In two instances, the *casa particular* owners purchased several rooms in tenement buildings that adjoined their current properties, converting the small rooms that used to be home to an entire family into a stand-alone studio apartment for rent to international tourists.

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[250] Alicia's sister Yanet and their father were living in a humid apartment with persistent water leaks, something that they believed aggravated Yanet's asthma and was the cause of both Yanet's and their father's chronic cough. Though these conditions were less than ideal, the nephew and his wife were happy to move into any apartment they could call their own—where they would not be asked to leave at the landlord's whim. In any case, they planned for this apartment to be temporary: now that they finally had an asset of their own to sell—they figured it was worth around 7,500 CUC—they would start the search to find another home to buy that better suited their needs.

They were reluctant to talk on the record, however. One was quite open with me in casual conversation, even conversing with the woman who he was buying the *cuarto* from in front of me, and he had initially agreed to an interview, but on the day of our interview told me that their family had convinced them not to give the interview because it could put their business at risk and them in legal jeopardy. The other *casa particular* owner, a colleague of Alicia's, granted me an interview, but was reluctant to share any details about how exactly she came to acquire the *cuartos*, in light of the illegal and illicit nature of the transactions. She proudly toured me around her property, showing me several of the *cuartos*-turned-studio apartments that she rented to tourists, each with its own color scheme, split air conditioner, mini-fridge, and bathroom. There were over one dozen such apartments on the ground and first floor of the building, each with its own independent entrance that guests could access from a shared balcony, all overlooking the inner courtyard.

Surprisingly, self-employed workers have not previously been identified as buyers by other researchers writing about buyers in Cuba's post-2011 real estate market (e.g. Morales and Scarpaci 2013; Bastian 2018; Wijburg et al. 2021). While certainly not all self-employed individuals earn sufficient income to be able to purchase a home, I discovered through my fieldwork that some *casa particular* owners have indeed been able to use the earnings generated from their business to purchase additional properties. These properties tended to be on the lower end of the price spectrum, but it is notable that in numerous cases they were able to purchase multiple properties. In the case of *casa particular* owners, they have done so in order to expand their room/apartment rental business, which has in turn positioned them to generate even more income. As the private sector in Cuba continues to grow, we can expect that self-employed individuals will constitute a larger portion of buyers in Cuba's real-estate market.

Locked out or limited: Choices for average Cubans and a closer look at young people

Outside of select segments of Cubans—which include those who have a (valuable) home to sell, work abroad for foreign currency, or run a lucrative private business (e.g. a casa particular), or those with ties to family, friends or romantic partners abroad who are able and willing to purchase property for them (more on outside capital later in this chapter)—most Cubans find their options in Cuba's emerging real-estate market very limited, or they find themselves locked out of the housing market altogether. Hirt and Stanilov's (2007) observation of the housing situation in post-socialist Bulgaria seems to apply to Cuba in the 2010s: "While the actual demand (based on need) for housing is still very high due to housing shortages accumulated over the decades of socialist rule, the effective demand (ability to pay) is still quite low" (221). This is precisely the case in Cuba: while the housing shortage in Cuba is a severe and chronic problem, low wages and a lack of mortgage financing make it very difficult for average Cubans with legitimate housing needs to buy into the housing market. Young Cubans–in particular couples looking to form a household of their own–are a sizable portion of those who desire housing of their own, but are often unable to purchase it. "*Todo el que se casa, casa quiere,"* goes a common Cuban refrain. Playing on the word "casa," which here refers both to getting married (*casarse*) and the physical dwelling in which one lives (*casa*), this refrain literally means that everyone who gets married wants [their own] house. However, many young Cubans have no other choice but to continue living with their parents into adulthood, and it is not uncommon for this to continue when they have children of their own, leading to a situation in which multiple generations share the same home.

There is a long-standing tradition in Cuba of multiple generations of the same family living together, but in present-day Cuba, this living situation seems to be driven at least as much if not more by need and constraints as it is by culture, tradition, or choice. Lack of mortgage financing and low salaries make affordability a key barrier, but there is also the issue of a chronic housing shortage that is exacerbated by both a loss of housing stock on the one hand (due to recurrent natural disasters, building collapses due to lack of maintenance, and social forces I highlight later in the chapter), as well as an insufficient level of production of new housing on the other. The state assumed responsibility for producing housing for the first several decades of the Revolution, but gradually shifted this responsibility largely to individuals. Even after it recognized, allowed, and encouraged the role of individual/family self-building in the 1980s and even more so post-2010, access to construction materials (still largely controlled by the state) stalls or limits many of these construction efforts. Moreover, the Cuban state still does not allow private developers, who have a greater capacity to build on a larger scale, into the residential property market. These factors further contribute to creating a highly stratified property regime with pockets of markets.

Sharing housing across multiple generations of family is both a response to the constraints mentioned above as well as one aspect of a more general strategy to pool economic resources across generations of family as family takes on increasing responsibility for its welfare vis-a-vis the state. This is a trend that is being seen around the world, including in rich OECD countries. Flynn and Schwartz (2017) call attention to the trend towards “re-familization” in rich OECD countries over the past three decades, noting that it occurs “at both ends of the age distribution, as income-constrained children remain in or return to the parental home, and as aging and income constrained parents either move in with children or rely on children’s income.

This income pooling sustains a given standard of living for both groups" (p. 473). While physical co-habitation is one aspect of re-familization, the authors expand the concept to include financial dependence in the absence of co-habitation, particularly the financial dependence on parental resources and to a lesser extent dependence on adult children's resources. Flynn and Schwartz (2017) argue, "Re-familialization is clearly a Polanyian response to the increasing pressure of market-generated risks that are no longer buffered by the modern welfare state" (p. 474), explaining:

> ...state policy shifted away from the socialization of risk and encouragement of mass homeownership and toward the privatization and individuation of risk. People reacted to employment and welfare policies desocializing risk by repooling risk abatement inside family units. Put simply, the recent squeeze on the state and market parts of the welfare balloon has caused the family side to bulge outward. Much of the action here occurred through the housing market. (P. 473)

As I have argued in earlier chapters, families have taken on increasing responsibility from the state for their social welfare provisions and improvements. While multi-generational housing has a long history in Cuba, part of the reason it continues to this day–in addition to the constraints mentioned above–is that it forms one of a host of strategies that families use as they have taken over increasing responsibility from the state for ensuring their own welfare.

"*La convivencia es difícil,*" goes another Cuban refrain, recognizing that living together in shared quarters often leads to interpersonal problems. And yet for many young couples, living with family or in-laws is their only feasible option. Elena's daughter, Lucía, and son-in-law, Fran, continue to dream about having a home they can call their own one day. Between her dentist salary and his income in the informal economy (which at that moment in time involved selling digital entertainment), they make enough money to get by, pooling their resources together with those of Elena and her husband, with whom they continue to share a home. For a

while, they had moved into Fran's mother's home, which is a little larger and afforded them more privacy. However, less than one year later, problems between Lucía and her mother-in-law forced them back to Elena's house, to Lucía's bedroom, which barely fits a twin bed and a small desk. After welcoming a baby, the space feels even smaller, but they have no other prospects than to continue living with Lucia's parents.

Originally from Holguin, a province in the east of Cuba, María first came to Havana for university, staying in the student dorms even after she finished her studies and was completing her three years of mandatory social service. She had been dating a young man from Havana for years, but was unsure about the future of their relationship, in large part because she saw no possibility of them actually living together. Her student dorm had restrictions preventing him from living with her, and her boyfriend lived with his mother, sister, and two nephews, in an already crowded apartment. She wanted to stay in Havana, but wondered if she should simply move back to her parents' house in Holguin in the eastern provinces, where her housing was guaranteed. Shortly after she dissolved her relationship with her boyfriend, she met another young man and became pregnant. She would not be allowed to live in the student dorms with a child, so she moved together with her partner into her in-laws' house, and, a few months after the baby was born, they found a one-bedroom apartment to rent, paying about 60 CUC per month. Renting provides María and her family a space for themselves, but she does not see this as a long-term option. They already had to move twice in three years, and she is well aware that they can be asked to leave by the landlord at any point in time. Moreover, a sizeable amount of their salary goes towards rent.

Lisset and Alejandro married when they were 18, and lived with Alejandro's parents for the first approximately five years of their marriage. There they occupied one of three bedrooms,

Alejandro's parents occupying another, and Alejandro's high school-aged brother occupying another. Lisset's mom and stepdad as well as her elementary-aged sister were crammed into one bedroom at the back of Lisset's grandparents house, and there was no room for them there. After approximately five years of living with Alejandro's parents, they began renting a small apartment in a working-class neighborhood, paying about 40 CUC per month, which they earned by selling products "*por la izquierda*" through the bodega (ration store) that they administered. Like María and her partner, they moved from one rental apartment to another several times over the course of three to four years, never feeling like they could put down roots. They did not see an end to this situation in the near- or medium-term future, but in 2016 they finally moved into a home they could call their own. Alejandro is Alicia's nephew, and when Alicia purchased a home for her sister Yanet using the earnings from her *casa particular* business, she directed Yanet to give the home she had been living in to their nephew, Alejandro. Since Alicia's money was funding the purchase of Yanet's new home (8,000 CUC), she felt within her right to demand that her sister officially "donate" the home to their nephew rather than sell it. Despite the dampness and water leaks that motivated Yanet's move, Lisset and Alejandro were happy to own a home, after eight years of marriage. Over time, the persistent water issues did indeed impact them, and they ended up selling the house in 2019 for approximately 6,000 CUC, and using some monetary inheritance left upon Alicia's death to purchase an apartment for 7,500 CUC in the neighborhood they grew up in and where both of their families still lived. They have been slowly renovating it since then to make it more habitable for themselves and the daughter they welcomed in 2021.

Among my study's participants, one young couple purchased a *cuarto* just a few blocks from the Capitol, and a little distance further from the Prado market where they both informally

worked as real-estate agents (*corredores*). Through the commission that they made on various sales,[251] they were able to save up 7,500 CUC to purchase a small *cuarto* right in the center of Havana, and they paid another 700 CUC to "legalize" the *cuarto* (a euphemism for bribing a bureaucrat to put the papers in order). They proudly toured me around their studio apartment, furnished simply but with care. They then took me down an exterior passage to the area of the shared bathroom (they shared with one other of the four *cuartos* on the floor), and showed me the makeshift kitchen, composed of just a stove, which was located outside of their apartment, behind a locked door. They were happy to have a place for just the two of them, but they shared that they hoped to move elsewhere at some point, since the two steep flights of stairs to reach their apartment were taking a toll on them. They hoped to find a place with fewer stairs, but knew their options were limited, especially if they wanted to remain within walking distance of the Prado real estate market, where they earned their livelihood. This young couple was one of a minority that managed to buy *cuartos* with their earnings (in the informal market).

Taken as a collection, these vignettes lay out the options available to most young couples in Cuba. For many young Cubans, their only feasible option is to continue living with their parents and/or grandparents–many of whom became homeowners in the decades following the Cuban Revolution–with the hope that one day the home will be passed down to them. Some young couples turn to renting, but this is hardly a long-term solution, both because of the precarity of renting (they can be asked to leave at any moment by the landlord) and cost. Although not common, some young people do manage to purchase a home at the low end of the

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[251] This young couple both worked as informal (unlicensed) *corredores* in the Prado market. They reported that he had sold 14 homes in 2017, and she had sold 7 homes that same year. With the savings from these sales, they were able to purchase an apartment of their own. He earned 4,000 CUC commission on a single sale, and with that money purchased a motorcycle for 2,000 CUC, spent another 300 CUC customizing the motorcycle, paid approximately 700 to legalize the home they purchased.

price spectrum (under 10,000 CUC) whose low price reflects the home's sub-optimal living conditions. Through my research, I discovered that there is an underground market in Havana in the sale of *cuartos*—rooms in tenement buildings, often with a shared bathroom and kitchen (though some constructed bathrooms and kitchens inside their own unit). Though illegalities permeated virtually all sales in one way or another, the sale of *cuartos* was an especially delicate subject, since the sellers are long-term lease holders (*usufructuarios*) rather than property owners per se, and are thus prohibited from selling their units. Nevertheless, given the high need for housing and the low price of these properties in Havana—they were generally selling for around 3,500 to 5,000 CUC in 2015—there was indeed a market in cuartos. In some cases, the occupants were able to acquire legal title by constructing bathrooms and kitchens inside their units and requesting a "change of concept" ("*cambio de concepto"*), thus allowing them to sell it legally. Others paid necessary housing authorities to grant titles for their *cuartos*, even though the homes did not meet the basic requirements necessary to "change concept" from a *cuarto* to a home with a title. In many cases, the current leaseholders came to an informal arrangement with would-be occupants to allow them to inhabit the property in exchange for cash. In addition to some young people, internal migrants coming from the eastern provinces of Cuba typically purchase these cuartos, according to my interviews with *corredores*.

On a whole, young people in Cuba typically find themselves locked out or severely limited in the emerging residential real-estate market in Cuba. Much like the young Russians that Zavisca (2012) writes about in *Housing the New Russia*, living with family is common among young Cubans, and is often a result of constraint rather than choice. Moreover, young Cubans too "face mobility constraints that neither education nor earnings help to overcome" (p. 100). In fact, Zavisca (2012) argues, "Privatization carried forward extant Soviet inequality, while introducing

a glaring element of chance—prospects for inheritance—into young Russians' housing trajectories" (p. 87-88). As I discussed earlier, inheritance also seems to be the only realistic prospect for housing for many young Cubans. Zavisca goes on to say, "Many young Russians do manage to acquire apartments with the help of family transfers of privatized assets, particularly if they marry or have children. Nevertheless… dependence on family and inability to earn housing leads young Russians to experience the post-Soviet housing order as arbitrary and unfair" (Zavisca 2012: 100). A sense of despair over their current housing situation and future prospects for housing permeated the conversations I had with young Cubans about housing and life in Cuba in general. Despite the reforms introduced by the Cuban government in recent years, allowing for more private enterprise, many young people felt the changes were too slow, and their life was passing them by. Many did not see a future for themselves on the island, and dreamed of emigrating to the United States or elsewhere–a place where they believed they would not have to struggle to meet daily needs. They emphasized that they were aware that people in the United States needed to work hard, and sometimes even have multiple jobs–but, unlike Cuba, they highlighted, that hard work would be compensated, and they would be able to see the fruits of their labor in the form of a comfortable home, a car, and vacations back to Cuba where they could enjoy the island 'like a tourist.'

Influxes of capital from outside of Cuba

Given that most Cubans rely on the money from the sale of their home in order to be able to purchase another one, and considering that even Cubans who are able to save up enough cash to buy into the market (without selling another property) tend to purchase homes on the lower end of the spectrum, who then is buying the medium- to high-value properties? Put differently,

where is the initial injection of money coming from—the one that sets off a chain of purchases, as sellers of higher-valued properties then purchase less expensive properties, who in turn purchase even less expensive properties, and so forth.[252] The answer, I discovered, is that the initial injection of capital that sets off the chain of purchases to follow almost always comes from outside of Cuba: foreigners, Cubans returning to live in Cuba (part-time), or Cubans living outside of Cuba with friends and family still remaining on the island purchase the medium- to high-value properties, usually with the intention of starting some kind of business on the property, while also having a place to stay/live for themselves and/or their Cuban spouse/romantic partner, family, or friend/business partner. They see purchasing real estate in Cuba as an excellent investment opportunity: prices are still relatively affordable by international standards and they expect to see both short- and medium-term returns through the profits of the business as well as long-term returns as property values continue to grow—both tied closely to Cuba's anticipated "opening" to global markets. They tend to be motivated by investment decisions rather than a need for housing per se, although sometimes they are indeed able to improve the living conditions and overall economic conditions of their family and friends on the island by purchasing a home for them and setting them up with and/or employing them in the business they intend to run inside of the home they purchased.

Foreigners buying into the Cuban market

[252] Recall from earlier in this chapter that the majority of sellers are looking to downsize—that is, to purchase a smaller/less-expensive property after selling the home they currently live in. This generally creates long chains of dependency. These chains can be cut short if, for example, one of the sellers is not looking to purchase another property—usually because they intend to emigrate.

Foreigners—as well as Cuban citizens who are not residents of Cuba—are generally not legally permitted to own residential property on the island (except in select condominiums designated for foreigners).[253] Nevertheless, many in fact do. In fact, the real estate agencies in Havana clearly oriented themselves towards foreign buyers. This was evident in the language of their websites (all had webpages in English in addition to Spanish, and some even offered additional languages, such as German or Italian),[254] as well as the frequently asked questions on their websites which often clarified questions about foreign ownership. An owner of one of the real estate agencies I interviewed told me she exclusively hires bi-lingual or multi-lingual staff, precisely because her clientele are overwhelmingly foreigners. With the exception of one Cuban, all of her buyers thus far were foreigners, usually married to Cubans (Interview, February 3, 2016). (This was not the case for all real-estate agencies, however, many of which had a substantial amount of Cuban clients as well.) According to my interviews with real-estate agency staff, foreigners who were buying into the market were primarily Europeans (in particular Italian, French, German, and Spanish) and looking to establish a business in Cuba.

During my observations in the informal, open-air real-estate market on Prado, I observed countless foreigners inquire about how they could purchase property in Cuba. The *corredores* would explain to them the legal limitations on foreign ownership, but assure them that there are ways around these restrictions. The most straightforward is to marry a Cuban, which is one of

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[253] Sales of residential property to foreigners must be handled through one of the state's real-estate agencies, such as PALCO (rather than a private real-estate agency or agent). These condominiums tend to be significantly more expensive per square foot than homes sold on the open real-estate market.

[254] In fact, the website of one real-estate agency was exclusively in English, with no Spanish-language option.

very few paths to gain permanent residency on the island,[255] which would then allow the foreigner-turned-Cuban-permanent-resident to appear on the title of the home. Another option is a more informal arrangement wherein the foreigner puts the home in the name of a Cuban they trust, who acts as a "*testáferro*" or "*prestanombre*," literally meaning "lend your name." Both of these options are risky for all parties involved in the event that the relationship deteriorates. Several foreigners told me they would not consider purchasing a property under either of these arrangements, saying it was a sure-fire way to lose their investment.[256, 257] I witnessed one such arrangement fall through at the last minute: a Canadian man had agreed to buy an apartment in Havana and put it in the name of his Cuban friend, a young Afro-Cuban man in his twenties, with the understanding that the Cuban man would live in and look after the apartment while the Canadian man was abroad, and the Canadian man would have a place to stay during his frequent visits to Cuba. They had even decided on a particular apartment, but the next time I saw them the young Cuban man informed me that the two friends had gotten into an argument over a woman

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[255] Even in the case of marriage to a Cuban, the foreigner still must meet certain residency requirements to become a permanent resident.

[256] One foreigner, a man in his seventies, had stopped to ask a question about purchasing property to one of the *corredores* I was interviewing on Prado. He then went on to tell a joke, first acknowledging my presence and apologizing for the joke to follow: "What is the difference between a woman and a hurricane? There is none! They both take your house and leave you with nothing." This seemed to be a common sentiment among many of the foreign men I spoke to in Cuba, who explained that despite the fact that they had Cuban lovers, they were weary of purchasing a property in their name, convinced that the relationship would not last and they would likely lose the home.

[257] One real-estate agent explained to me one potential way the person financing the purchase could legally protect their financial investment, even if they do not appear on the title of the home. The interviewee explained that if they deposited the money for the purchase through a bank, and the funds used in the purchase of the sale of the home could be traced to their personal account, they could have legal recourse. While this seems plausible hypothetically, I do not know of any legal cases that have been brought or settled to resolve this kind of dispute, and I would anticipate many more complicating factors, including the routine subdeclaration of the purchase price of the home and the fact that in the case of a lawsuit, it is unlikely that the party will be able to repay the financier (and, even if ordered to sell the home to come up with the financing, sales can take a very long time).

and were not on speaking terms. The deal was not moving forward, and the young man who was looking forward to improving his living condition was resigned to continue living with his mother in a dilapidated apartment. Alicia too had been approached by past clients about the possibility of entering into an arrangement where she lends her name as property owner, but nothing resulted, largely because she already owned a property in her name, and was not permitted to have a second one in the city. While legal restrictions on foreign ownership and the somewhat precarious ways (both formal and informal) around these restrictions deter some interested investors, plenty of foreigners have forged ahead despite the risks involved.

While official data does not exist, and estimates are difficult to ascertain, it is common knowledge amongst Cubans that foreigners own homes—and often businesses—in Cuba (outside of the condominiums designated specifically for foreigners). As I would walk around neighborhoods with Cuban friends and participants, they would point out which houses were owned by foreigners: "That house is owned by an Italian man"; "A German owns that *casa particular*"; "The restaurant on the corner and the entire house is owned by an Iranian man," and so forth. What they meant was that the foreigner is the one who financed the purchase of the home as well as the business and is the "real" owner, despite the fact that in some of those cases they do not appear on any official paperwork[258]—the legal owner and, in the case of homes with businesses, license-holder of the business, is a Cuban family member, friend, or romantic partner.

Other researchers writing about the post-2011 real estate market in Cuba have also noted the influx of money from outside of Cuba into Cuban real estate. Bastian (2018: 133) argues that

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[258] A foreigner may legally appear on the title of a residential property as a (co-)owner if they are a permanent resident of Cuba, which is possible if they are married to a Cuban and maintain residency on the island, together with their Cuban spouse.

"most sales take place between mixed foreign-Cuban couples buying and Cubans on the island reducing [downsizing]," explaining that "foreign-Cuban partnerships snatch up the big valuable properties, often in the desirable coastal areas of Vedado and Playa, setting off a chain reaction providing the Cuban sellers with the capital to move down to smaller dwellings, often in the same neighborhood." Morales and Scarpaci (2013) do not name mixed-nationality romantic couples among their six profiles of buyers in the Cuban real-estate market, but they do indeed identify "foreigners who want to invest in a restaurant business or house rental for tourists, buy a house to have a place to stay when they visit the island, or simply invest in the real-estate sector with a post-Castro Cuba in mind." García Pleyán (2019) argues that housing priced above 50,000 CUC tends to be purchased by "foreign capital, whether family members of resident Cubans or investors from other countries who operate in Cuba illegally through "*testáferros*" (Cubans who lend their name). My research further confirms the presence of capital from outside of Cuba, and builds on this previous work by moving beyond a description of the buyers to also consider the implications of this influx of outside investment. Before I turn to this analysis, however, I wish to delineate two additional segments of outside capital that is entering the Cuban market.

Cubans who "repatriate"

Capital from outside of Cuba is also entering the Cuban market in the form of Cuban emigrants who have "repatriated"--that is, legally re-gained residency on the island and, with it, the right to own residential property, amongst other rights reserved for Cubans living on the island, such as owning a business, having access to the public healthcare system at no cost, and

paying import fees in local currency rather than hard currency.[259, 260] The Cuban government allowed for repatriation effective January 14, 2013,[261] as part of a larger migratory reform (officially encompassed in Decree-Law No. 302, which amends Cuba's 1976 law on migration).[262] Among the key features of the reform, Cubans who had lost their residency status on the island were permitted to recoup their residency (and thus the rights as well as responsibilities related to residency)[263] and Cubans were permitted to retain their residency while spending longer periods of time outside of Cuba. Specifically, the reform extended the amount of time a Cuban can remain outside of Cuba without losing their residency from 11 to 24

[259] Cubans who travel abroad for work or leisure often bring back with them items that are altogether unavailable or otherwise difficult to obtain in Cuba (due to low supply/high demand or prohibitive cost). Some Cubans travel abroad to countries like Guyana or Russia (neither of which require Cubans to obtain a visa prior to travel) with the purpose of importing goods to sell on the black market. Cubans who live on the island (including repatriated Cubans) are permitted to pay in *moneda nacional* (the local currency) for their first importation in each calendar year. Non-resident Cubans and foreigners, on the other hand, pay in hard currency, which is much more expensive.

[260] Cubans who have repatriated have a big advantage in so far as they are permitted, upon repatriating, to import a container full of household goods without paying tariffs, allowing them to circumvent many of the obstacles Cubans living on the island face in terms of sourcing furnishings for their home and business, and generally giving them access to additional comforts as well as a much greater choice in how they furnish their homes.

[261] A process for repatriation had existed on the books prior to 2013, but the terms were much more restrictive. After 2013, a much wider swath of Cubans was permitted to apply, so long as they did not openly oppose the Cuban government. The new process costs around $100 USD.

[262] The text of the migratory reform was published in the Cuban daily newspaper, *Granma,* on October 16, 2012, and the decree-law came into effect on January 14, 2013.

[263] It is important to clarify that Cuba does not recognize dual citizenship. Thus any Cuban that travels to the island must enter with a Cuban passport and is subject to the same laws and punishment as any Cuban, regardless of their foreign citizenship. While subject to these obligations, they do not have access to certain rights afforded to Cubans who live on the island, most notably access to free public healthcare, education, the ration card, as well as the right to own a home in their name and establish a private business.

months.[264, 265] According to official reports, 60,655 Cubans had repatriated between January 2013 and January 2022 (Mesa Redonda, cited in Periódico Cubano 2022).[266] Further descriptive statistics on repatriated Cubans are not publicly available, but anecdotal evidence suggests that repatriated Cubans tend to be those who emigrated for economic reasons (as opposed to political ones) during later waves of emigration (i.e. primarily the 1990s onwards) and are now returning to Cuba to purchase property and set up small businesses in the homeland they still have emotional and cultural ties to and in which some of their family members still live.[267] Some of

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[264] It is notable that many Cubans who leave the island and go to the United States are able to become U.S. permanent residents (green card holders) in less than a 24-month period. Cubans who are admitted to the United States at a port of entry are eligible to adjust their status under the Cuban Adjustment Act after continually being in the United States for one year and one day, regardless of whether they entered with a non-immigrant visa (such as a tourist visa) or have overstayed their initial visa). Except in cases of very long wait times (that extend beyond one year), these Cubans are able to obtain a green card and, if they return to Cuba within a 24-month period—even if just for a short visit—also retain their Cuban residency on the island.

[265] Another notable aspect of the migratory reform was the elimination of the letter of invitation as well as the much-hated exit permit (known amongst Cubans as the "*tarjeta blanca*"). Prior to the January 2013 migratory reform, each time Cubans wished to travel abroad, for whatever reason, and for whatever length of time, they needed to obtain permission from the Cuban government to leave the island (Peters 2012: 2). After January 14, 2013, Cubans simply need to obtain a passport and an entry visa from the country they will be traveling to. Some groups of Cubans are still required to receive clearance before leaving the island. For example, in 2015 Cuba reinstated the requirement for doctors to obtain special permission to travel outside of Cuba (Trotta 2015). Article 23 of the migration law also lists people who may be prevented from obtaining passports, including those who are subject to military service and those "deemed unfit for travel because of one's work in the 'economic, social, scientific, or technical development of the country, as well as for security and the protection of official information'" (quoted in Peters 2012: 2).

[266] Moreover, 1,264,257 Cubans have traveled outside of Cuba but returned within 24 months during this same time period (Periódico Cubano 2022). Without the distribution of how long they stayed outside of Cuba, and without data on how many Cubans made a single trip versus multiple trips in a given year, it is difficult to interpret this figure meaningfully. The reasons Cubans travel abroad are varied: some travel for pleasure ("*para conocer*"); more commonly, Cubans travel to visit family (and sometimes to provide childcare for extended periods of time); others travel frequently in order to bring back merchandise to sell in the domestic black market; some travel for work-related reasons; others who may be counted in this number are people whose efforts to emigrate have failed and they are returned to the island.

[267] For news reports profiling Cubans returning to the island, see for example AFP 2018, CiberCuba 2018.

these repatriated Cubans are indeed returning to live in Cuba, while others are planning for their retirement there, and still others are taking advantage of the new rules in order to gain the benefits associated with repatriation (in particular the right to own residential property, run a private business, and access free healthcare) while continuing to live and/or work primarily outside of Cuba.

According to my interviews, most Cubans who repatriate set up a business in Cuba, which provides them a continuous source of income from which to live and re-pays the initial investment in the property itself. In Havana at least, they typically purchase medium- to high-value properties in neighborhoods most frequented by tourists, the target audience for their *casa particular* or restaurant business, two of the most common businesses they tend to set up. One woman profiled by journalist Nick Miroff in the *Washington Post* (2015) serves as a typical example: Magda Mora was a 39-year old woman who returned to live in Havana in 2012[268] after having spent 14 years in Italy and Miami. She purchased a 3,300-square-foot duplex in the heart of Vedado, a historically bourgeoisie neighborhood that is a highly desirable location due to its housing stock, amenities, and centrality, and a neighborhood that receives a lot of tourist activity. Miroff reports that she renovated the home, converting the lower unit into a "mini-hostel" with five rooms that rent for $35 a night each, while she and her family live in the upstairs unit. Although there is no mention of the sales price, the fact that the family who sold it to her purchased "two smaller apartments in a less central part of the city" and a car (a Lada, which the son uses as a taxi) indicates that the sum was most likely upwards of 50,000 CUC, which is a conservative estimate. In another case that I am personally aware of, a Cuban repatriated after

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[268] The date of Mora's return predates the January 2013 migratory reform, and Miroff does not specify whether or not she subsequently repatriated.

more than a half dozen years in Mexico, in part to purchase a two-bedroom apartment in Vedado in his name, with the aim of turning it into a *casa particular*. He continues to live and work primarily in Mexico, managing the bookings for the rental through Airbnb, while family members who remain in Cuba look after the operations on the ground, including receiving tourists, cleaning the apartment, and getting it ready for the next set of guests. This sort of arrangement–where a Cuban emigrant purchases a property for a business and their Cuban relatives still living on the island operate it–is quite common, even in cases where the emigrant has not gone through the process of repatriation.

Cuban emigrants with relatives or friends on the island

Cuban emigrants are also playing a significant role in the emerging real-estate market in Cuba by purchasing residential properties for or through family members who remain on the island and financing the remodeling of existing properties. Cuban emigrants who are investing in Cuba's real-estate market tend to be part of more recent waves of economic migrants and are much more socioeconomically diverse than the political émigres of the 1960s, who were almost exclusively upper-middle class and elites. Unsurprisingly, then, there is a good deal of heterogeneity within this category with respect to the price point of the homes Cuban emigrants finance, ranging from the lower end of the price spectrum to medium- and even high-valued properties. It is also common for Cuban emigrants to send money and/or materials to family members on the island to renovate their existing homes.

Whether they are financing the purchase of another home or the renovation of an existing one, the monetary investments made by Cuban migrants in residential real-estate can be organized on a spectrum, from improving the housing conditions of family members to investing

in a home-based business that will provide their family members and/or them with a continuous stream of income. Morales and Scarpaci (2013) also identify Cubans living abroad as buyers of real-estate, distinguishing between those who help family living on the island solve their genuine need for housing; those who invest in a business on the island together with family living in Cuba;[269] and those who see real-estate as a promising, long-term investment.[270] I have found through my own research that these motives almost always overlap with one another. There are some cases in which Cuban emigrants finance the purchase of a home for relatives (most often parents) in need of housing (i.e. housing that is better suited to their needs, such as ground floor or first-floor homes in anticipation of possible mobility issues as they age), but more often than not they also seek out a property that could be used as a business, and also have expectations that the property will appreciate in value in the future.

Since the onset of the reforms in Cuba in 2010, the remittance economy in Cuba has increasingly been oriented around starting up or funding private businesses (Morales 2019). Before 2009, Cubans receiving remittances primarily used them for basic consumption (food, toiletries, footwear, and clothes), whereas after 2009 remittances were also used for more discretionary spending (e.g. payment of private tutors, beach vacations, internet access in cell

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[269] I combine two profiles listed by Morales and Scarpaci (2013) into one, since they seem to me to refer to the same dynamic, perhaps just foregrounding one actor over another. In their formulation, Morales and Scarpaci distinguish between "(1) People with family abroad who possess the capital to invest in a business" and "(5) Cubans who live abroad and want to invest in a business on the island together with a family member or friend [who lives on the island]."

[270] Morales and Scarpaci (2013) identify 6 buyer profiles in total, four of which pertain to Cubans living abroad. They differentiate amongst Cubans living abroad based on their motive behind the purchase– something they do not do with the other "profiles" they identify. For example, they identify foreigners as one type of buyer, listing disparate motives under this single profile (investing in business, having a place to stay during visits to the island, and an investment in real-estate).

phones), and, importantly, investments for a business (Morales 2018).[271] Cuban-born consultant Emilio Morales (2019) writes, "[Remittances] financed, in an informal but direct way, the reparation and purchase of thousands of homes to be converted into private businesses (restaurants, cafeterias, hostels, beauty salons, etc.). They also financed the sale and repair of thousands of cars which were converted into taxis. In this informal way, they became the principal source of financing that helped start thousands of small businesses."

The shift to a more business-oriented remittance economy since 2010 also mapped onto the difference encompassed in the famous proverb: "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime." More aptly, Cuban emigrants provided "the tools to fish" (sometimes literally sending the goods and other times the money to buy necessary goods) so that their Cuban relatives or friends on the island could make a livelihood and "feed themselves"--and sometimes the emigrants too. Beyond the initial funding of the business, Cuban emigrants are involved in the business to varying degrees, from supportive roles to more managerial ones to (co-)owners or owners. They also share in the profits to varying degrees: some letting the income from the business supplement or entirely substitute for remittances that they used to send, while others may expect to share in the profits generated by the business. Thus, beyond providing a livelihood for Cubans, these private enterprises also

[271] In an effort to capture remittances, the Cuban state and private companies in and outside of Cuba have offered more avenues to send remittances in the form of goods and services, outside of the traditional cash-transfer pathway through Western Union or like companies. Between 2015 and 2020, I have witnessed services set up for Cubans abroad to purchase groceries for family and friends in Cuba from state-run grocery stores (with the option of home delivery). The Cuban telephone and communications (including internet) company, ETECSA, offered special deals for adding phone and internet credit to one's account (e.g. purchase 20 CUC worth of credit and receive 40 CUC worth of credit). Some private businesses in Cuba market their services towards Cuban Americans and other Cubans living abroad, accepting direct payment from the emigrant for services provided directly to family still on the island. One such service offers to cater food for holidays such as Christmas Eve and New Years Eve.

provide a material benefit to the remittance-senders. In fact, "Because the profits of these enterprises partly flow out of Cuba, this recent development exemplifies a change in the supposed one-way direction of (more traditional) remittances; both donor and receiver benefit from shared profit (Sergio & Perez-Lopez, 2003; see also Anderson & Serpa, 2018, cited in Wijburg et al. 2021: 1367).

Lessons from Cuba on foreign capital in real-estate in the Global South

Looking at the ways and form in which outside capital enters the Cuban real-estate market helps us to reconceptualize the role of foreign capital in residential real-estate in the Global South more generally. The Cuban case highlights the important role migrants who send remittances as well as foreigners acting in their individual interests play, in contrast to the larger institutional investors often highlighted in the extant literature. Wijburg et al. (2021: 1364) draw attention to this difference too, noting that the Cuban case shows that "foreign investments in the Global South are not exclusively coming from the super-rich and institutional investors from the Global North. Rather, transnational middle-class investors living in the Global North, but having personal ties with the Global South, play an under-estimated and under-studied role in fueling local housing booms" (Wijburg et al. 2021: 1363). The authors go on to argue, "Our central finding is that in the absence of mortgage markets a significant amount of housing transactions is funded by Cuban migrants and a few foreign investors which provide the monetary resources to locals for buying residential properties. This triggers a pattern of economic globalization where transnational remittances, rather than institutional investments or mortgage finance steer Cuba's emerging property market." While Wijburg et al. focus primarily on Cuban emigrants, and accord a much smaller role to foreigners (and no role to repatriated Cubans), their more general

point can be applied to all three categories of buyers: these are not necessarily elites in their domestic societies, but rather middle-class individuals whose money goes a lot further in Cuba than it does in their home societies. This is an important insight for understanding the globalization of real-estate in the Global South. Also important is understanding how these small-scale foreign investors and transnational migrants are shaping the economies and societies in which they are investing, which is what I turn to next.

Examining the social effects of the business-oriented real-estate market

Havana gets a facelift: rehabilitating housing

Peeling paint and crumbling facades have for decades been among the most iconic images of Havana, but behind these often romanticized images lies a grim reality for the residents of these deteriorated dwellings. According to Cuba's 2012 census, 15 percent of the dwellings in Cuba were in "poor" condition ("*mal estado*"), 20 percent were in regular condition ("*estado regular*"), and 65 percent were in good condition ("*buen estado*"). A 2014 survey that asked residents to characterize their dwellings painted a more pessimistic picture: 26 percent were characterized as in poor condition, 33 percent in regular condition, and 41 percent in good condition (Acioly et al. 2014, cited in Mesa-Lago 2017). Taking these results together, we can estimate that between one-third (35 percent) and close to two-thirds (59 percent) of dwellings in Cuba are in need of some degree of repair (the "poor" and "regular" condition categories are often reported in combination both within and outside of Cuba, suggesting that even dwellings in "regular" condition are in need of repairs). Housing maintenance and repair often fell to the bottom of the list of priorities as Cubans struggled to meet their daily needs during the "Special Period" in the 1990s. Both their constrained household budgets and the general difficulty in

obtaining materials and supplies has led to widespread deferred maintenance that has in turn led to the widespread deterioration of housing in Cuba. While giving us a sense of the scale of the problem, statistics hardly convey just how dire the housing situation is for many residents of Havana, some of whom live in fear that their building will collapse and others who continue to live in partial ruins, preferring their home/location to the crowded government-provided shelters located in peripheral areas of the city.

A positive outcome of the re-commodification of housing and the rise in private, home-based enterprise since the early 2010s has been the (partial) rehabilitation of housing in Havana. As journalist Nick Miroff observed in 2015, "On seemingly every Havana street, contractors are mixing cement, fixing cracks and giving makeovers to moldy facades that haven't seen paint since the -Brezhnev era. New bathroom fixtures arrive in couriers' suitcases from the Home Depot aisles of South Florida. Havana's skilled electricians and plumbers earn more in a day than a doctor makes in a month." The Cuban state has greatly scaled back its role in housing construction and repair, and the efforts it undertakes are generally reserved for the most needy, including victims of hurricanes and people left homeless after building collapses. Instead, the repair and remodeling that could be seen in Havana in the 2010s has been undertaken by individuals ("*esfuerzo propio*") with the means to do so. Many Cubans with money to spare (from missions abroad, earnings in the private sector or tourism, or remittances) re-invested in their homes, either to make them more comfortable for themselves and their families or to increase their value ahead of a sale. A lot of the reparation and remodeling efforts are undertaken by foreigners, repatriated Cubans, and Cuban emigrants that purchase homes in order to convert them into a business. In some cases, business owners have even repaired public sidewalks in

front of their property, assuming what is otherwise the responsibility of the local government.[272] Done on an individual basis, these remodeling efforts have led to a sort of patchwork in many areas in the city, where remodeled homes with in-tact and freshly painted facades contrast sharply with neighboring homes still characterized by crumbling facades and peeling paint, as the photographs in Figure 7.1 so starkly demonstrate.

Figure 7. 1: Photographs of neighboring homes showing stark contrasts between remodeled and deteriorated homes

Photograph taken by Martina Kunovic in March 2016, along the Paseo de Prado in Havana.

[272] This is based on my own observations. For example, the owners of a restaurant near a busy intersection in Centro Habana (Reina and Belascoain) repaired the sidewalk in front of their restaurant, which occupies a corner of the busy intersection.

Photograph taken by Martina Kunovic in March 2016, along the Malecón in Havana. The buildings with repaired facades that flank the deteriorated building in the middle of the picture both display the sign indicating they are rentals "en divisa" (meaning in hard currency), which serve foreigners.

Photograph taken by Martina Kunovic in March 2016, along the Malecón in Havana. The restored building on the right is a private business, juxtaposed sharply to the residential buildings in the center and on the left.

The interviewees in my study tended to celebrate this revitalization, noting (without using this precise terminology) that the “free hand” was at work in Cuba’s emerging real-estate market: people were moving into properties they were capable of maintaining, which was acting as a force against the physical deterioration of the city’s residential housing stock—even leading to its revival and beautification. It is undeniable that many homes around Havana have indeed been restored, in great part because an economic value is now accorded to homes and also because of the growth of private enterprise, much of which is still housed inside people’s homes (as opposed to purely commercial spaces). I will leave architects and urban planners to evaluate and debate the outcomes of individual efforts to restore, remodel, and adapt homes for business purposes in terms of historic preservation. Instead, I wish to focus on the social effects of the geographically selective and business-oriented investment in real-estate in Havana, which I turn to next.

Exacerbating the housing shortage

One of the most notable features of the emerging real-estate market is the tendency to purchase homes in order to convert them into businesses, particularly *casa particulares* and restaurants oriented towards tourists. According to my fieldwork, this seems to be the primary motive for foreigners and most repatriated Cubans buying into Havana’s real-estate market, but it is also common among Cuban emigrants/their families receiving remittance and some Cubans such as successful existing *casa particular* owners. The growth in small businesses, many of which are run out of residential properties (as opposed to designated commercial spaces) has had many benefits for the Cuban economy, but it comes at the cost of exacerbating the country’s already dire housing shortage, as owners convert living spaces to businesses. In 2015, over 130,000 residents in Havana were living in shelters or substandard housing, according to

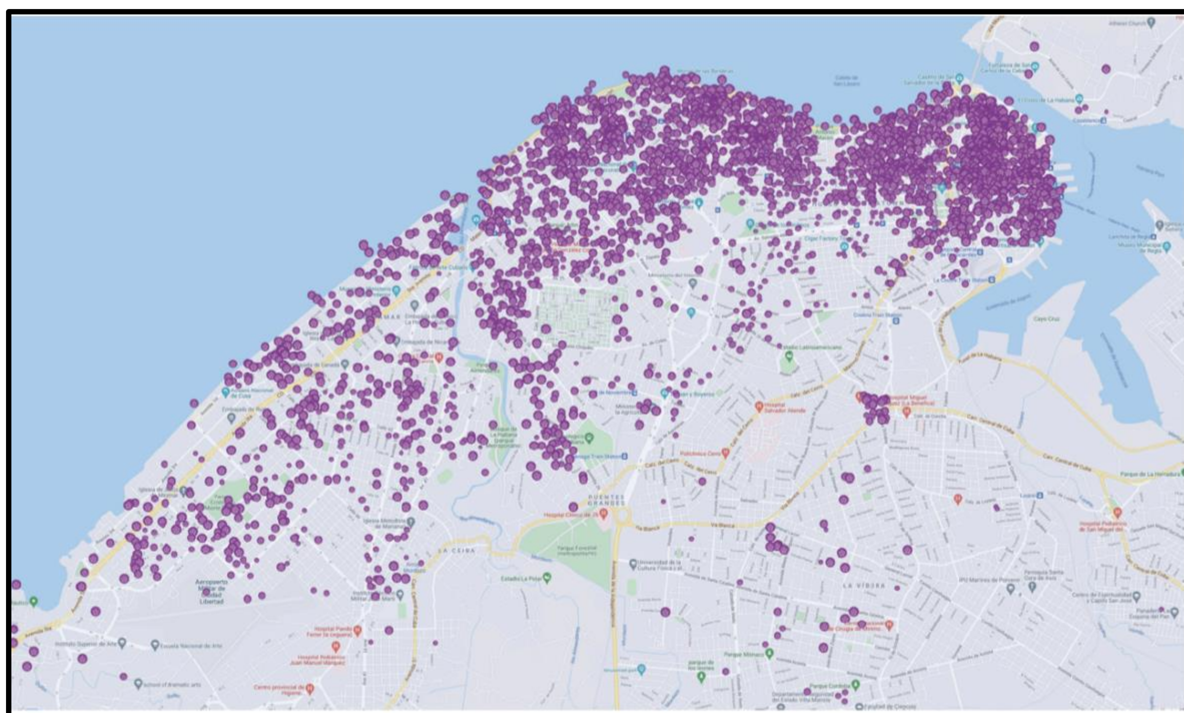
government data (cited in Miroff 2015). In July 2017, during the national assembly, a government representative announced that Cuba faces a housing deficit of over 880,000 units,[273] a number that was revised in December 2018 to 929,695 (Bustamante and Molina 2018; Jiménez Guethón 2020: 8). On an island with a population of 11.2 million, these are truly staggering numbers.

The conversion of living space and entire residences into businesses–many of which are oriented towards the tourist market and largely inaccessible to most Cubans–must be understood in the context of the larger housing shortage. Erich Trefftz, an expert on Cuban housing who studied under the famous Cuban architect Mario Coyula and has lived in Cuba for more than thirty years, observes: "In the [areas of Havana] that are most valued or most central or most apt for tourism, everything that could be transformed has been transformed" (cited in Marqués Dolz 2018). Trefftz goes on to describe an area in Habana Vieja (el Consejo Popular Catedral), as having practically no housing on the ground level, since everything has been converted into businesses (Marqués Dolz 2018). In my own data, I knew of numerous cases where existing *casa particular* owners purchased adjacent units in order to expand their business, in some cases purchasing several *cuartos* that served as a home for an entire family, and converting them to short-term apartment or room rentals. Geographers Jolivet and Alba-Carmichael (2021) show a map of the city of Havana with all of the homes advertised on the rental platform Airbnb in February 2021 as "entire homes" (as opposed to room rentals in shared homes) represented with a purple dot (see figure 7.2). The authors do not provide descriptive statistics, but the sheer quantity of dots on the map of Havana is a strong visual representation of the loss of housing for tourist-related purposes. Even when homes do not lose their residential character altogether–

[273] In a presentation at the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy in August 2017, Cuba scholar Carmelo Mesa-Lago estimated that the housing deficit in Cuba was upwards of one million.

because one part of the home is designated for the foreign or repatriated Cuban owners during their visits to the island or on a more permanent basis for their spouse/romantic partner, family, or friend who remain on the island–there is still reason to be concerned. From the perspective of housing need and shortages, even these residences are being underutilized to the extent that they are not being used as the primary place of residence amidst a greater housing shortage, and to the extent that larger homes are being occupied by fewer residents, in favor of short-term rentals.

Figure 7. 2: Map of the location of short-term rentals in Havana listed as "entire home" rentals on the Airbnb rental platform, February 2021



Reproduced from Jolivet and Alba-Carmichael 2021

The adaptation of living spaces into businesses (including garages, front rooms, etc.) is a phenomenon occurring throughout the city of Havana, but the wholesale conversion of housing to (tourist-oriented) businesses is especially pronounced in the coastal areas of Havana, which receive the highest volumes of tourist activity. In particular, the historic center Habana Vieja, as

well as El Vedado, Miramar, and to a certain extent Centro Habana are seeing significant transformations. Wijburg et al. (2021: 1369) note, "As the potential for tourism services is highly spatialized, this results in deepening uneven development in the Havana metropolitan areas as well as Cuba at large." Indeed, the distribution of Airbnbs represented in Figure 7.2 lends support to the existence of this particular spatial pattern, with areas like Habana Vieja in particular and some areas of Centro Habana and El Vedado so densely populated with Airbnb rentals that it is difficult to distinguish individual dots on the map. Moreover, virtually all of the approximately one dozen brick-and-mortar real estate agencies in Havana operating in 2015-16 had offices located in one of these areas (El Vedado was the most popular).[274] Moreover, they reported in interviews that the vast majority of their listings as well as their business was concentrated in these areas. Jolivet and Alba Carmichael's (2022: 293) analysis of online listings of homes for sale in Cuba between 2012 and 2020 found the highest concentration of listings in these four areas:[275] they represented 54.2 percent of all of the home sale listings in Havana, despite being home to only 25.9 percent of the city's population, and occupying 7.7 percent of the space in the city of Havana. They also found that these four areas tended to be more expensive than other areas of Havana, in terms of price per meter squared (p. 292-93), which I highlighted in chapter three. The real estate agents I interviewed named Habana Vieja in

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[274] Two of the agencies had multiple offices. One of the agencies with multiple offices had a location outside of the highly visited tourist areas, in the municipality Diez de Octubre (the other two locations were indeed located in El Vedado and Playa).

[275] There is a small difference between my naming of specific neighborhoods and Jolivet and Alba-Carmichael's analysis by municipality. For example, Jolivet and Alba Carmichael (2021) highlight four municipalities in particular: Habana Vieja, Centro Habana, Plaza de la Revolución, and Playa. Vedado is one area within the larger municipality of Plaza, and Miramar is an area within the larger municipality of Playa. All of these municipalities are part of the City of Havana, which is comprised of 15 municipalities in total, each of which is further subdivided into neighborhoods (*barrios*) and political administrative units (*consejos populares*).

particular as an area of high interest by buyers, and especially foreigners and those looking to set up a tourist-oriented business, particularly a *casa particular* or restaurant. The historic center of the city in particular, the "*casco historico*," was already a prime spot for tourist activity, and with the warming relations between Cuba and the United States during President Obama's second term in office,[276] Cuban and foreign investors alike were preparing for an influx of American tourists, including cruise ships which would dock in the Bay of Havana, releasing thousands of cruise-goers into the historic streets of Old Havana. In anticipation, they purchased properties in Old Havana and converted them into businesses to serve what they expected to be a growing number of tourists.

Concerns over growing residential segregation and social inequalities

This spatial pattern of business-oriented investment in real-estate raises additional concerns regarding growing social inequalities and their territorial expression in the form of residential segregation and displacement of lower-income residents. As we saw in chapter six, the Cuban Revolution was relatively successful in ensuring that neighborhoods were relatively heterogeneous in terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of their residents. Some neighborhoods certainly retained their upper-class reputation from before the Revolution, but even these neighborhoods were generally not exclusive in terms of socioeconomic class and race. Moreover, an achievement of the Cuban Revolution was to install social services such as health clinics and ration stores in all neighborhoods. The spatial patterns of business-oriented

[276] For a more detailed overview of what the "warming of relations" between the U.S. and Cuba involved, see Kunovic 2020: 63-64. For a broader history of U.S.-Cuba relations between 1959 and 2017, with an emphasis on U.S. policy towards Cuba under the Obama administration (2009-2016) and part of the Trump administration (2017-2019), see Kunovic 2020.

investment in the real estate market in Havana identified above threaten to re-inscribe social inequalities onto the territory of Havana.

With the re-emergence of the real estate market, foreigners, repatriating Cubans, and Cuban migrants with family on the island are purchasing medium and expensive properties in historically bourgeoisie neighborhoods, raising questions about how the social composition of neighborhoods is changing and possibly (re-)stratifying along class and racial lines. It is well-known that "[m]igrants from poorer eastern Cuba settle in shantytowns on the city's edge or crowd into crumbling urban tenements" (Miroff 2015). The generally higher prices of homes in more central neighborhoods (Jolivet and Alba Carmichael 2021) and the lack of mortgage financing in Cuba filters who can purchase residential properties, and certainly who can purchase them in the more expensive areas of town, as we saw earlier in this chapter. While foreigners, Cubans who repatriate, and Cuban migrants may not be super rich (Wijburg et al. 2021), the fact that they have sufficient cash to invest in property in Havana puts them well above the means of average Cubans. Some segments of prosperous Cuban entrepreneurs and Cubans who work abroad can also be added to this group. Finally, Cubans with transnational connections who receive remittances must also be considered, especially in cases where their transnational partners purchase residential property for or through them. Growing inequality between Cubans who receive remittances (in hard currency) and those that must live from their wages in the local currency has been noted since the introduction of the dual currency system in 1993, but takes on new meaning in the context of the business-oriented investment in Havana. Given that transnational connections and remittances are increasingly being used to fund businesses, the inequalities between Cubans who receive remittances and those who do not is growing. While representative racial statistics on business owners are not publicly available, research has shown

that remittance receivers tend to be lighter skinned (de la Fuente 2001), which suggests that there is a racial dimension to this growing inequality, which is now being inscribed on the territory of Havana.

With foreigners, repatriated Cubans, and Cubans with transnational connections to Cuban emigrants increasingly buying properties in the most central and desirable areas of Havana, it raises the issue of displacement of original residents. The co-owners of one real-estate agency that concentrated the majority of its sales in the historic center of Havana, Habana Vieja, admitted that they go door-to-door, encouraging residents to sell their properties. They report that many of those who sell their properties move to more outlying areas of the city, where property prices are generally more affordable. Other informants in my study also noted this trend, based primarily on anecdotal data. Indeed, further down the chain of purchases, sellers with tighter budgets have limited options in terms of both the location and quality of the home they are purchasing. Some scholars have used the term “gentrification” to describe what we are witnessing in Havana (e.g. Jolivet and Alba Carmichael 2021). Certainly the trends that I witnessed during my fieldwork in 2015 and 2016 and subsequent visits to the island in late 2016, 2017, and 2018 raise concerns about increasing income-based and race-based residential segregation as well as displacement. These concerns warrant more systematic study to document the extent to which these phenomena are indeed occurring, and the social groups most affected by them.

Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I have looked at who is buying residential real-estate in Havana, the trend towards business-oriented investment, and the social implications of these patterns. The lack of

mortgage financing in Cuba means that interested buyers must purchase properties with cash, severely limiting the buyer pool. The vast majority of Cubans wishing to purchase property must first sell their own property, though some segments of the Cuban population–primarily those earning hard currency–may be able to purchase homes on the lower end of the price spectrum. In most cases, however, the initial injection that sets off the chain of purchases amongst Cubans comes from outside of Cuba: foreigners with personal ties to Cuba, repatriating Cubans, and Cuban emigrants with family on the island. These buyers tend to purchase homes in the historically bourgeoisie neighborhoods of Havana—those along the coast, which are also the neighborhoods that receive the highest tourist activity and in which housing values are generally higher than other areas of the city—and they tend to convert these homes into tourist-oriented private businesses such as *casas particulares* and restaurants. This spatial pattern of business-oriented investment in real-estate raises concerns regarding growing social inequalities and their territorial expression in the form of income- and race-based residential segregation.

Taken together these observations and trends suggest that what exists in post-2010 Cuba is a regime of property with a highly stratified market, a twist on Zavisca's (2012) characterization of post-Soviet Russia as a regime of property without markets. Zavisca (2012) notes that the shift to homeownership absent "institutions to support exchange" such as mortgage lending—what she calls "conditions of property without markets"—results in housing wealth becoming "a frozen asset,"[277] and she goes on to claim that this "strain[s] the Russian state's

[277] Zavisca (2012) goes on to note that this situation is not unique to Russia: "Russia is not unique in having had a prolonged phase in which housing wealth existed in the absence of fully functioning housing markets. A comparative study of thirteen former Soviet territories found that many countries initially achieved high levels of homeownership, but retained low levels of market-based production, transactions, or mortgage finance (Buckley and Tsenkova 2001). Similar patterns have also emerged in China and Viet Nam (Tran and Dalholm 2005; Davis and Feng 2008, 13)" (p. 100).

legitimacy as well as the economy" (p. 100). In Cuba, housing has not exactly become a frozen asset altogether, or at least not in a way that is evenly distributed across the population. Instead, the highly stratified real-estate market that has emerged has served to highlight and perpetuate socioeconomic differences among Cubans.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

This dissertation helps to illuminate the new structure of opportunity in Cuba, in which housing serves as a means or barrier to social welfare provision and social mobility, and thus also an important engine of social inequality. The basis of social inequality in Cuba during the 1990s was access to hard currency, which remains an important stratifier in present-day Cuba as well. With the recommodification of housing that began with room rentals and home-based businesses in the 1990s and expanded with the growth of the private sector since 2010, as well as the re-emergence of the real-estate market since 2011, I argue that housing has become another key stratifier in the new structure of opportunity in Cuba. Given the challenges to amassing savings in Cuba, and as individuals and families take on increasing responsibility for their own social welfare in the wake of selective withdrawal by the state in social welfare provision, their ability to provide for themselves and their families is very much shaped by their housing: the amount of wealth stored in their home and the suitability of their home for lucrative income-generating activities such as room rentals or restaurants–factors that are largely outside of their control. Instead, homeownership status, the location of their home in an area of tourist interest, and whether their home is a "capitalist" or "socialist" construction are some of the key factors that shape whether their home serves as a means or a barrier to social mobility.

In the remainder of this chapter, I highlight the main findings in each of the empirical chapters of my dissertation, consider the larger contributions of this project beyond Cuba, and suggest possible directions of future research.

In chapter two, I look at housing policy in Cuba from 1959 to 2017, as a lens to trace changes in the meaning and role of housing in Cuban society as well as shifts in the societal division of labor between the state, the market, and individuals and families. Housing underwent

a transformation over the course of this period, from serving a primarily social function and having only a use value to becoming an asset with exchange value. Social relations were also transformed during this time period: by highlighting how rights and responsibilities with respect to housing were reconfigured over time I show how housing legislation impacted social relations by both instigating and reflecting shifts in the societal division of labor between the state and the private sphere of the market as well as private citizens and their families. After an initial period of establishing and entrenching the central role of the state in not only the housing needs of the population but also its social well-being more generally, in later decades the state began to share, and, more recently, shift this responsibility to the private sphere. These two transformations–the (re)commodification of housing and the shifting of responsibility for social welfare provision from the state to individuals and families–are key to understanding how housing came to occupy a central role in the new structure of opportunity in Cuba.

In chapter three, I examine the various factors that determine the exchange value of a home, or simply what makes a home more or less valuable in Havana's emerging real-estate market. I find that given the importance of international tourism in the Cuban economy, a decisive factor that determines value is whether one's home is located in an area of high tourist interest. Another important variable is whether the home is a "capitalist" construction or whether it was built after 1959. I argue that while the Cuban state provided many Cubans with a place to live, those Cubans living in units built by the socialist state and/or outside of tourist areas generally find themselves more limited in using their housing for social mobility in a context in which housing has become (re)commodified.

In chapter four, I establish the central role that housing plays in welfare provision and social mobility in contemporary Cuba and outline the mechanisms by which it does so. In

emphasizing the ways in which housing can serve as a means to social mobility, this chapter supplements a more traditional understanding of housing serving as a reflection of social class and/or an expression of social mobility. I specify two overarching ways in which Cubans use their housing to ensure their welfare and to pursue social mobility strategies. The first is by converting the wealth stored in their home into cash through selling. The second is by using their home to generate sustained income, either by setting up a home-based business or by renting space for commercial purposes or other amenities to consumers. I argue that this reliance on housing for social welfare provision and social mobility is a response to the selective retrenchment of the state, which has led individuals and families to take over responsibility for their own welfare from the state.

Far from a universal source of welfare or means to social mobility, many Cuban families could not leverage their housing in a way that led to upward social mobility. Those families who did not own residential property found themselves at a significant disadvantage relative to homeowners, unable to cash in on the wealth stored in their homes. While the Revolution had provided them a place to live, it would remain just that—a place to live. For some homeowners, their housing, while meeting basic needs for shelter for their family, was not valued highly in market terms and the wealth stored in the home was limited. For those whose homes were priced on the low end of the market, they had few options, since they still needed a place to live. Some families were able to solve a particular need or issue their family was facing, such as splitting a multi-generational household into two separate households, which certainly made a big difference in their daily lives, but this did not translate to gains in social mobility. An alternative way to use housing for welfare provision and improvements is by using one’s home as a site for a small private business, but this requires a home with adequate conditions to support the desired

business. Generally, those with low-value housing tended to strike out on this second front as well, because the same characteristics that made their housing less valuable in market terms were those that made them less conducive to setting up a lucrative home business.

In chapter five, I examine how people came to live in the homes they were living in when those homes suddenly became recommodified and started to serve as the basis for a new system of stratification. I outline the different avenues for acquiring housing available to Cubans between 1959 and 2011, distinguishing between avenues available through the state sphere and those available through the private sphere. I show that each sphere was ruled by distinct logics: housing need, and "merit" (i.e. service to the Revolution) structured access to housing in the state sphere, while economic capital and social capital structured access in the private sphere. In present-day Cuba, access to housing occurs primarily through the private sphere, requiring high amounts of economic capital and also social capital and/or is dependent on family inheritance.

In chapter six, I attempt to answer the elusive question of which social groups are better positioned to use the recommodification of housing for upward social mobility, and which social groups are systematically limited or excluded from doing so. While data limitations preclude a clear answer, I piece together available evidence that suggests that racial and economic inequalities that the Revolution fought hard to eliminate were reinscribed through housing in some ways but disrupted in others. With respect to the "winners", the distribution of housing after the Revolution benefited a relatively small group of prerevolutionary elites (who were able to retain their homes) and Revolutionary leaders (who were assigned some of the nicer homes), but also some families of more humble origins who acquiring housing in neighborhoods that today command higher prices. To the extent that these groups remained in these homes, they were well-positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities for social mobility that became

available when housing was (re)commodified, but at least some evidence suggests that those with access to hard currency in the 1990s (through remittances, small private businesses, work in tourism or for foreign companies), who some scholars argue tend to be predominantly white, may have (illegally) purchased some of these more desirable properties in the 1990s, thus further reinforcing their advantage with the new opportunities presented by the latest wave of economic reforms. The “losers,” I argue, are those who are excluded from homeownership, and those who live in tenements, who tend to be largely Afro-Cuban and poor, and find themselves largely unable to use their housing as a means to social mobility.

In chapter seven, I explore the highly stratified nature of the emerging real-estate market in Havana. I look at who is buying residential properties in Havana, arguing that the lack of mortgage financing in Cuba and the generally low salaries that Cubans earn has created a situation in which most Cubans must first sell their own home before being able to purchase another one, creating long chains of dependency that depend on an initial injection of capital, which usually comes from one of three groups outside of Cuba: foreigners, repatriating Cubans, and Cuban emigrants with family on the island. As these buyers purchase medium- to high-valued properties, the sellers of these properties generally purchase lower-valued properties, and those near the bottom of the chain tend to find their housing options very limited, while those who do not own properties (young people in particular) find themselves generally excluded from the market altogether. In addition to concerns over the extent to which the real-estate market is stratified, I draw attention to the tendency for buyers from outside of Cuba to purchase properties in order to convert them into tourist-oriented private businesses such as short-term room/home rentals and restaurants, which I argue is exacerbating the already dire housing shortage in

Havana and potentially re-stratifying neighborhoods along the lines of income and race–a subject that warrants further scholarly attention.

While the focus of this dissertation is on housing and social mobility in Cuba, the findings help to illuminate questions of broader interest to scholars of economic change, housing, and stratification. By shedding light on how state-led reforms and retrenchment reverberate in the lives of individuals and families and how people navigate these changes, this dissertation contributes to the literature on how people fare amidst large-scale economic changes that has long been the concern of anthropologists, development scholars, historians, and sociologists working on the Global South (e.g. González de la Rocha 1994, Benería and Roldán 1987, Benería and Feldman 1992) and post-Soviet societies (e.g. Gal and Kligman 2000, Humphrey 2002, Verdery 2003, Pavloskaya 2004), and also, more recently, U.S. sociologists with humanistic concerns about how families, especially women, "make ends meet" in the context of increasingly restrictive welfare policies in the U.S. (e.g. Edin and Lein 1997; Collins and Mayer 2010). By emphasizing the importance of material aspects of housing in structuring opportunity, my research contributes to better understanding the understudied role of material characteristics in structuring social life and the materiality of social structure. By drawing attention to the ways that people use housing for social mobility, my dissertation expands on traditional approaches and understandings of housing in the literature on social stratification, which tends to treat housing as an outcome or reflection of one's class position. My research, in contrast, shows the ways in which housing can also serve as a means (or a barrier) to social welfare provision and social mobility, a question that is increasingly relevant across the globe, as people in the Global South and Global North alike use their homes to supplement their income through short-term

vacation rentals such as Airbnb and Vrbo or a variety of other platforms that rent out parking spaces, garages, backyards, and storage space inside their homes.

That home is being used as a site of market activity is not new, as we know from studies of home-based work by women and informal workers in the Global South and as Luis Flores (forthcoming) has drawn attention to in the US context through his work on the monetization of underused home space (specifically the rental of illegal garage conversions in the 1970s and 1980s in Los Angeles). However, given the dramatic rise of such activities in the Global North and the ways in which home-based income-generating activities in the Global South are extending beyond local economies and plugging into international markets (including international tourism), the way in which home is being used as a site of market activity warrants further scholarly attention. Future work may look at points of similarity and difference across the Global North and the Global South, and make cross-national comparisons of home-based market activity in terms of precarity, social mobility, and the (re)production of inequality. Another possible direction of future research is studying how blending home/the domestic sphere and economic activity/the productive sphere in the same space transforms both family life and gender relations as well as work. Future research may also look at home-based work and particularly the monetization of space through rentals in terms of "passive income strategies," and the ways in which it reproduces and/or disrupts traditional patterns of inequality (e.g. "wealth begets wealth").

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Number of licensed rentals in residential properties in Havana, by municipality, type of space rented, and currency, February 2016

Municipality in Havana	Total number of active licenseholders ("Total personas vigentes")				Rentals of entire homes ("Vivienda completa")				Room rentals ("Habitaciones")				Rentals of spaces ("Espacios")				Rentals of both rooms and spaces ("Mixto")				Calculated totals by currency and discrepancies			
	Total	CUC	CUP	COA	Total	CUC	CUP	COA	Total	CUC	CUP	COA	Total	CUC	CUP	COA	Total	CUC	CUP	COA	CUC	DIF CUC	CUP	DIF CUP
Playa	2029	849	1180	0	639	177	462	0	1042	638	404		283	4	279		65	30	35	0	849	0	1180	0
Plaza	2992	1908	1084	0	928	526	402	0	1628	1322	306	2193	305	0	305	409	131	60	71	411	1908	0	1084	0
Centro Habana	1871	1124	747	0	503	300	203	0	1071	820	251	1394	281	0	281	351	16	4	12	0	1124	0	747	0
Habana Vieja	860	569	291	0	222	165	57	0	462	401	61	669	172	1	171	225	4	2	2	0	569	0	291	0
Regla	107	0	107	0	30	0	30	0	23	0	23	0	54	0	54	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	107	0
Habana del Este	964	470	494	0	204	56	148	0	702	406	296	0	40	0	40	0	18	8	10	0	470	0	494	0
Guanabacoa	244	12	232	0	59	4	55	0	67	7	60	74	113	0	113	134	5	1	4	0	12	0	232	0
San Miguel de Padrón	182	1	181	0	34	0	34	0	82	1	81	88	63	0	63	68	3	0	3	0	1	0	181	0
Diez de Octubre	655	55	600	0	189	13	176	0	177	38	139	260	274	1	273	360	15	3	12	0	55	0	600	0
Cerro	401	54	347	0	104	14	90	0	139	40	99	0	144	0	144	0	14	0	14	0	54	0	347	0
Marianao	433	29	404	0	119	3	116	0	124	25	99	0	180	0	180	0	10	1	9	0	29	0	404	0
La Lisa	201	10	191	0	57	1	56	0	83	10	73	122	54	0	54	74	7	1	6	0	12	-2	189	2
Boyeros	488	31	457	0	59	59	0	0	238	29	209	335	175	2	160	179	16	2	14	0	92	-61	383	74
Arroyo Naranjo	371	13	358	0	53	4	49	0	131	9	122	161	183	0	183	207	4	0	4	9	13	0	358	0
Cotorro	173	1	172	0	37	0	37	0	46	1	45	57	87	0	87	99	3	0	3	0	1	0	172	0
Total	11971	5126	6845	0	3237	1322	1915	0	6015	3747	2268	5353	2408	8	2387	2106	311	112	199	420	5189	-63	6769	76

This data was provided to the author from the *Dirección de Trabajo* in Havana, and is a snapshot of licensed rentals in residential homes as of February 29, 2016. I reproduced the table exactly as provided to me (including bold, highlighting, etc.), only adding headers in English. It reflects the spaces that require rental licenses, and thus does not count certain businesses that are hosted in one's own home (although home/room rentals for overnight stays does indeed necessitate a rental license despite being in one's home).

Explanation of column headings in Appendix 1

CUC refers to hard currency, the Cuban Convertible Peso.

CUP refers to the lower-valued local currency, the Cuban Peso or "*moneda nacional*."

COA stands for "*Cantidad de objetos de arrendamiento*," literally meaning number of rental objects. In the case of room rentals, it refers to the total number of rooms in a home, including rooms that are not being rented.

DIF CUC and DIF CUP refers to the difference between the total reported in each currency overall (under the heading "total number of active license holders) and the sum of the totals (in either CUC or CUP) for each type of space rented. In most cases, these numbers coincide, except for the cells highlighted in orange, where there seems to be misreporting or data entry problems.

Appendix 2: Photographs of homes for sale in Havana with different advertising

Photo credit: Martina Kunović

Appendix 3: Number of registered home sales, exchanges ("permutas"), and "donations" in Havana, 2012

For 2012, data was only available for the months of January and February. The data was reported by day rather than monthly totals, likely because this was in the initial months after Decree-Law 288 came into effect in November 201. "Missing" dates most likely represent days the office was closed: almost all of the missing dates (January 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, and February 12, 19, 26) were Sundays. The only other missing date, January 2, was a Monday, but offices were likely closed because of New Years festivities.

A study by the Havana Consulting Group reports that 45,000 houses were sold in 2012 (Morales 2014). I have not seen other estimates of sales for 2012.

January 2012	**Day of the month (January 2012)**																									
Indicator	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**30**	**31**	**Total**
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	435	561	595	540	136	608	622	673	634	595	184	722	685	780	660	666	121	689	637	621	582	428	101	851	553	**13,679**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	247	290	298	281	84	240	348	350	365	229	89	327	286	412	291	382	77	296	356	310	323	235	64	456	278	**6,914**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	18	38	32	34	3	31	24	28	32	38	6	37	41	51	28	34	6	51	35	40	31	22	3	55	36	**754**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	16	40	20	23	8	29	28	32	27	27	8	37	45	38	35	34	8	40	23	40	31	13	7	44	45	**698**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	1	8	4	5	0	3	3	8	10	1	3	9	14	6	4	4	0	8	3	6	8	10	3	13	13	**147**

Source: This data was provided to the author by the Housing Registry of Havana (*Registro de Propiedad*).

February 2012	Day of the month (February 2012)																									
Indicator	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**Total**
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	624	530	510	133	633	602	757	697	573	110	724	588	252	647	546	55	676	683	681	620	528	154	750	571	832	**12,644**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	303	253	239	78	323	320	376	387	293	71	312	348	293	328	296	78	326	336	295	319	249	72	367	284	426	**6,546**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	33	32	33	9	31	46	40	37	23	4	42	22	19	46	36	6	29	44	38	32	30	6	47	31	34	**716**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	34	33	29	9	30	28	42	42	43	4	55	23	42	37	34	11	52	32	54	39	27	4	52	30	58	**786**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	7	10	6	2	5	15	13	12	10	0	11	7	9	5	5	3	11	10	12	8	1	1	22	8	8	**193**

Source: This data was provided to the author by the Property Registry of Havana (*Registro de Propiedad*).

Appendix 4: Number of registered home sales, exchanges ("permutas"), and "donations" in Havana, 2013

2013 (entire year, January to December)	
Indicator	**Quantity**
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	115,316
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	46,393
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	6,074
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	10,173
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	5,664

Source: This data was provided to the author by the Property Registry of Havana (*Registro de Propiedad*)

Note that the data provided to me by the Housing Property of Havana, which reports 5,664 sales in Havana in 2013, stands in stark contrast to the nationwide estimate/figures of 88,000 homes sold in 2013 (of 200,000 transfers of ownership), provided by The Havana Consulting Group (Morales 2014).[278] While it is true that the figures I present from the Property Registry refer only to Havana, Havana's population accounts for nearly one-fifth of the island's population, and would surely account for a much higher proportion of all housing sales than the numbers above suggest. Another source, a media outlet (Mata 2018), cites a specialist in Cuba's Ministry of Justice as saying that by late 2013, the emerging real-estate market had reached 80,000 transactions ("*transacciones*"): "Less than two years after the ban [on housing sales] was lifted, the emerging real-estate market reached some 80,000 transactions, according to data offered at the time by Aniuska Puente Fontanella, a specialist at the *Dirección del Registro de la Propiedad Mercantil y del Patrimonio del Ministerio de Justicia*" (Mata 2018). If Mata correctly reported the original source, this would mean that the 80,000 figure includes data since the ban was lifted in November 2011 through late 2013 rather than 2013 alone. It is unclear whether "transactions" refers exclusively to sales or includes all transfers of ownership, such as exchanges and donations.

[278] This 88,000 figure is sometimes misattributed to Carlos García Pleyán, a Spanish sociologist and urbanist who previously worked for the Institute of Physical Planning in Havana and has lived in Cuba for decades, who writes about housing in Cuba in popular outlets. García Pleyán does indeed cite Emilio Morales and the Havana Consulting Group (e.g. García Pleyán 2019), but other media outlets reporting on figures attribute these directly to García Pleyán himself (e.g. Batista 2018, Durante 2018).

Appendix 5: Number of registered home sales, exchanges ("permutas"), and "donations" in Havana, 2014

The data in this appendix was provided to the author by the Property Registry of Havana (*Registro de Propiedad*).
Data is not available for May, October, and November 2014.

January 2014	**Municipalities in Havana**															
	Arroyo Naranjo	**Boyeros**	**Centro Habana**	**Cerro**	**Cotorro**	**10 de octubre**	**Guanabacoa**	**Habana del Este**	**Habana Vieja**	**La Lisa**	**Marianao**	**Playa**	**Plaza**	**Regla**	**San Miguel**	**TOTAL**
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	700	561	600	786	86	830	280	600	357	1,987	777	852	932	48	632	**10,028**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	280	162	41	438	25	40	16	77	141	1,681	419	195	61	8	322	**3,906**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	43	21	59	32	8	42	12	83	14	25	23	18	210	3	21	**614**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	40	34	65	65	37	132	43	98	33	37	56	42	147	20	34	**933 (833)***
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	35	24	79	46	16	115	12	63	27	31	34	51	123	13	22	**691**

*The first number is reported in the original given to the author; the number in brackets is the total as calculated by the author.

February 2014	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	550	609	602	302	86	748	260	512	497	490	689	759	1,025	46	476	**7,651**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	188	171	63	60	19	30	40	40	322	233	389	125	269	7	150	**2,106**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	50	16	44	25	10	45	40	65	10	16	12	26	43	12	14	**428**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	51	57	47	71	39	119	37	80	40	34	40	62	68	10	32	**784 (787)***
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	32	40	67	47	18	90	20	58	21	30	26	77	104	12	32	**674**

*The first number is reported in the original given to the author; the number in brackets is the total as calculated by the author.

March 2014	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	754	658	700	753	65	180	290	600	525	510	783	797	1,035	44	630	**8,324**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	377	191	69	384	23	40	11	49	300	167	433	58	314	8	263	**2,687**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	58	18	45	21	6	57	21	85	15	21	18	38	58	9	13	**483**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	67	70	86	54	23	67	42	86	27	54	30	64	83	13	35	**801**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	42	31	83	36	13	105	17	66	22	27	34	76	111	5	27	**695**

April 2014	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	904	676	656	808	77	345	300	650	631	420	744	786	985	42	500	**8,524**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	452	201	56	399	17	47	35	148	410	78	393	125	158	9	89	**2,617**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	72	21	38	26	11	38	20	76	11	19	25	31	41	7	13	**449**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	92	74	70	64	23	70	43	77	31	83	47	53	74	10	23	**834**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	51	41	80	53	26	84	19	missing	32	27	28	76	137	13	33	**700**

Data for May 2014 is missing

June 2014	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	844	591	680	694	72	2,055	340	600	500	410	763	622	missing	38	635	**8,844**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	421	138	48	365	18	929	30	86	315	162	309	21	missing	6	240	**3,088**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	59	24	48	24	11	85	16	82	18	11	26	31	missing	9	17	**461**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	82	70	66	53	28	153	67	70	28	34	44	47	missing	19	29	**790**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	43	44	75	55	15	32	22	69	31	25	23	61	missing	7	22	**524**

July 2014	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	510	627	636	711	74	378	260	550	480	408	701	618	790	40	630	**7,413**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	80	177	44	363	12	77	24	50	239	107	393	32	101	7	185	**1,911 (1,891)***
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	64	28	35	23	14	34	21	69	18	15	16	38	36	11	12	**434**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	93	94	79	50	30	72	31	70	37	67	50	63	84	22	28	**870**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	38	53	74	52	18	85	15	50	41	29	40	81	97	10	26	**709**

*The first number is reported in the original given to the author; the number in brackets is the total as calculated by the author.

August 2014	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	624	575	800	693	50	321	300	480	389	450	619	545	650	50	658	**7,204**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	192	160	482	296	11	23	40	442	243	153	351	500	54	8	335	**3,290**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	43	24	34	24	10	56	18	61	9	12	16	25	25	9	14	**380**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	89	76	60	54	16	59	58	67	13	59	55	46	62	22	35	**771**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	41	47	61	43	13	76	17	38	29	19	31	56	82	6	23	**582**

September 2014	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	520	688	700	753	83	405	320	550	532	425	640	756	858	54	750	**8,034**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	123	186	47	445	22	21	52	53	298	124	331	120	126	10	383	**2,341**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	50	26	45	27	12	70	16	90	13	20	16	29	41	9	23	**487**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	72	79	66	56	30	85	41	80	42	43	34	68	90	27	39	**852**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	51	41	62	52	19	95	24	52	29	37	24	71	117	7	31	**712**

Date for October and November 2014 is missing

December 2014	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	656	721	1,036	735	65	960	450	610	527	340	793	716	738	39	600	**8,986**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	108	180	98	471	19	40	146	23	328	100	415	50	943	4	186	**3,111**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	70	17	49	25	13	66	21	82	17	6	13	17	39	6	21	**462**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	123	81	63	57	21	98	52	76	50	44	64	44	71	17	45	**906**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	64	50	84	47	12	119	23	72	45	22	31	57	128	14	35	**803**

Appendix 6: Number of registered home sales, exchanges ("permutas"), and "donations" in Havana, 2015

This data was provided to the author by the Property Registry of Havana (*Registro de Propiedad*).
Data is not available for April and May 2015.

January 2015	**Municipalities in Havana**															
	Arroyo Naranjo	**Boyeros**	**Centro Habana**	**Cerro**	**Cotorro**	**10 de octubre**	**Guanabacoa**	**Habana del Este**	**Habana Vieja**	**La Lisa**	**Marianao**	**Playa**	**Plaza**	**Regla**	**San Miguel**	**TOTAL**
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	521	634	540	710	63	701	300	500	270	420	678	629	835	46	387	**7,234**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	103	169	32	373	22	40	72	19	68	74	389	58	167	5	80	**1,671**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	60	17	42	30	11	53	17	65	17	16	19	26	38	8	50	**469**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	82	89	84	61	19	90	48	73	37	68	41	74	88	22	62	**938**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	40	49	82	54	11	87	27	64	46	42	33	72	118	11	27	**763**

February 2015	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	725	605	518	611	75	303	180	500	391	310	604	578	780	43	384	**6,607**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	311	170	42	322	18		119	48	206	69	296	35	140	6	101	**1,883**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	39	20	31	27	11	51	10	57	14	7	17	24	27	8	28	**371**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	81	81	66	47	28	89	41	61	27	39	58	72	38	14	32	**711 (774)***
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	49	26	89	59	18	87	20	44	38	10	37	91	123	19	25	**740 (735)***

*The first number is reported in the original given to the author; the number in brackets is the total as calculated by the author.

March 2015	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	535	636	551	760	77	750	300	467	511	320	567	605	625	45	625	**7,374**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	104	168	60	395	27	38	166	33	308	76	289	98	85	7	104	**1,958**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	46	30	33	26	12	69	18	68	15	13	18	22	50	16	19	**455**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	80	79	75	46	22	93	43	63	25	40	38	47	54	23	46	**774**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	37	46	86	51	16	109	28	69	50	29	27	66	127	13	17	**771**

Data for April and May 2015 is missing

June 2015	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	325	548	493	509	67	577	250	500	325	310	530	425	823	43	307	**6,098 (6,032)**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	28	173	50	299	22	40	44	71	131	44	193	417	321	6	64	**1,187 (1,903)**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	19	31	72	18	13	42	14	63	14	30	18	58	39	9	19	**383 (459)**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	87	64	58	4	19	71	33	77	22	50	35	30	64	19	30	**629 (663)**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	50	46	82	52	13	117	29	77	57	32	39	29	127	22	35	**726 (807)**

July 2015	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	375	448	463	542	90	750	250	510	410	300	500	344	821	45	311	**6,159**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	73	149	43	297	32	127	30	105	209	70	250	25	307	4	69	**1,790**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	43	19	47	19	12	56	17	67	13	23	22	22	29	11	41	**441**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	53	36	50	32	28	67	36	70	26	37	33	65	65	11	38	**647**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	51	42	86	56	18	117	28	65	58	25	43	33	135	11	46	**814**

August 2015	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	411	514	520	597	95	699	200	550	505	290	486	missing	638	41	287	**5,563 (5,833)**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	87	161	77	361	40	30	8	166	297	64	221	missing	205	4	82	**1,802 (1,803)**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	32	26	65	23	14	58	12	56	14	16	13	missing	32	8	18	**387**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	66	44	54	46	18	67	31	67	32	35	36	missing	56	23	21	**596**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	54	57	92	54	17	111	21	63	49	25	40	missing	134	18	51	**786**

September 2015	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	533	491	510	429	170	657	200	450	328	280	274	414	531	25	328	**5,620**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	199	143	57	76	50	35	20	76	137	53	185	35	178	2	70	**1,316**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	44	21	58	18	13	41	10	41	11	11	18	13	32	7	28	**366**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	73	61	70	56	17	66	29	61	18	36	30	39	66	15	40	**677**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	55	43	81	54	17	126	23	77	68	28	43	55	130	7	43	**850**

October 2015	Arroyo Naranjo	Boyeros	Centro Habana	Cerro	Cotorro	10 de octubre	Guanabacoa	Habana del Este	Habana Vieja	La Lisa	Marianao	Playa	Plaza	Regla	San Miguel	TOTAL
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	528	442	550	490	140	720	256	460	422	350	443	499	878	29	314	**6,521**
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	211	98	52	109	40	29	33	69	207	46	182	15	283	4	94	**1,472**
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	38	14	50	32	15	63	17	48	18	15	12	32	35	2	13	**404**
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	57	58	70	50	28	18	32	49	34	38	53	43	71	4	27	**632**
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	46	69	114	61	26	51	37	95	57	33	47	95	135	5	36	**897 (907)***

*The first number is reported in the original given to the author; the number in brackets is the total as calculated by the author.

	November 2015	December 2015
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	9,011	5,766
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	3,854	1,188
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	360	556
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	672	894
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	453	389

Appendix 7: Number of registered home sales, exchanges ("permutas"), and "donations" in Havana, 2016

2016	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	missing	missing	missing	5,418	6,787	missing	3,847	missing	6,311	6,710	missing	missing
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	missing	missing	missing	1,245	1,596	missing	1,227	missing	1,047	1,673	missing	missing
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	missing	missing	missing	415	438	missing	199	missing	400	384	missing	missing
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	missing	missing	missing	581	615	missing	340	missing	607	585	missing	missing
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	missing	missing	missing	1,167	1,153	missing	700	missing	1,242	1,165	missing	missing

Source: This data was provided to the author by the Property Registry of Havana (*Registro de Propiedad*).

Appendix 8: Number of registered home sales, exchanges ("permutas"), and "donations" in Havana, 2017

2017	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Number of applications for registration of housing titles that will subsequently carry out exchanges, donations, or sales	missing	6,116	6,959	6,418	7,157	6,057	5,091	6,397	4,555	5,836	5,420	missing
Number of applications from the previous that were not filed	missing	1,575	1,566	1,573	1,562	1,453	1,458	1,335	1,191	1,467	1,267	missing
Number of registrations of titles of exchanges ("permutas")	missing	365	410	392	405	344	327	371	275	321	352	missing
Number of registrations of titles of donated properties ("donaciones")	missing	515	579	536	630	516	385	497	320	1,100*	415	missing
Number of registrations of home sales ("compraventas")	missing	1,268	1,495	1,349	1,753	1,405	1,049	1,282	904	461*	1,085	missing

**I suspect that the number of registrations of titles of donated properties as well as home sales for the month of October is a manual input error, given how much these figures deviate from other months in 2017. I suspect that the figures for donations and sales in the month of October may have been swapped with one another.*

Source: This data was provided to the author by the Property Registry of Havana (*Registro de Propiedad*).

Appendix 9: Informational posters about registering a residential property and carrying out a transfer of ownership

Photographs taken by author in January 2018 of posters displayed publicly in the Property Register of Old Havana.