

“I Have Been Formed in This Revolution”: Revolution as Infrastructure, and The People It Creates in Cuba

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R E S U M E N

¿Cómo forman personas las revoluciones? Basado en un total de nueve meses de trabajo etnográfico realizado en la Habana, este trabajo toma como punto de partida la narración de una mujer de mediana edad sobre su involucramiento con estructuras e instituciones estatales durante el curso de la construcción de la casa en la que vive. Al describir etnográficamente las formas en que estos involucramientos personales con el estado se entrelazan con otras áreas de su vida, sugiero que su sensación de haber sido “formada dentro de la revolución” es, en parte significativa, debida a la forma en que el proceso revolucionario penetra o “fluye” profundamente en las facetas más íntimas de su vida. Contrastando esta forma de subjetivación con el programa más explícito de transformación moral de Che Guevara, sugiero que la inmanencia del tal proceso de ‘penetración infraestructural’ nos permite articular una conceptualización alternativa de la formación de la subjetividad revolucionaria. [Cuba, vivienda, infraestructura, revolución, subjetividad, estado]

A B S T R A C T

How do revolutions form persons? Based on nine months of ethnographic fieldwork in Havana (2015–17), this article takes as its point of departure the trajectory of a middle-aged woman’s involvement with state structures and institutions during the course of constructing the house in which she lives. Describing ethnographically the ways in which these state involvements intertwine with other areas of her life, I suggest that this woman’s sense of having been “formed in the revolution” is owed partly to the

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way in which the revolutionary process penetrates (or “flows”) deep into the minutiae of her life. Contrasting this manner of subjectivation with Che Guevara’s conception of *conciencia* and the formation of a “New Man,” I suggest that the immanence of this process of infrastructural penetration may enable us to articulate an alternative way of understanding how revolutionary subjects are formed. [Cuba, housing, infrastructure, revolution, state, subjectivity]

I’ve been formed in this revolution—I am revolutionary, but in my own way. I don’t agree with lots of things in this. This thing is becoming harder and harder. The other day I took a taxi, and there was a guy inside speaking horrors. I couldn’t help it, and just told him, “Why don’t you just get yourself on a raft and leave us all in peace!”

This was told to me over an afternoon coffee in summer 2015 by Clarita, one of the many friends I have made in Havana over almost twenty years of visiting Cuba as an anthropologist. It is a statement that I take to be entirely commonplace, chosen more or less arbitrarily from the many conversations I have had or have overheard other people having over the years. Obviously, not everyone I know, and certainly not everyone in Cuba, would agree with it. There are those who “speak horrors” of what Cubans refer to as “the revolution,” and those, particularly among the younger generations, who seem to treat the whole question of being revolutionary as pretty much irrelevant. My ethnographic stance, however, is that, notwithstanding well-documented differences in experience relating to different gendered and racial positionings, for adults who still remember times of state-socialist normalcy in the 1980s or before, and who lived through the trauma of the so-called Special Period of the 1990s and are still in Cuba to tell the tale, this notion of “having been formed in the revolution,” and of still—in some way or other—caring about it, is commonplace—even normal. The statement is normal enough, at any rate, to justify asking what process of “formation” is at stake when people declare themselves to “be revolutionaries” in this way, and how relations between persons (such as Clarita) and political processes (such as the Cuban revolution) that such statements express might be conceptualized. This is the topic of the present article, and I shall be using Clarita’s story—one of many I have been collecting intensively during a period of nine months’ fieldwork in Havana in 2015–17—as my ethnographic basis for addressing it. As with extended case studies in the Manchester School tradition, Clarita’s case has not been selected as a representative “apt illustration” (as a Cuban saying goes, “each person is a world”), but rather for the way in which it reveals “social and political forces

engaged in the generation or production of social life” (Kapferer 2015:2). In its near-humdrum normality—almost everyone in Cuba has one—Clarita’s story, as we shall see, provides an analytical perspective on the pervasive force of revolution in particular, and its power to generate people, such as Clarita, in particular ways.

Raising the question in this way invites some immediate answers that ought to be avoided. For, certainly in the Cuban context, when people speak of their “formation” as “revolutionaries,” the temptation is to assume that what they are speaking about are the diverse and highly institutionalized structures for the moral and political formation of citizens that are so characteristic of state-revolutionary societies such as Cuba: from the consciousness-forming aims of the state education system or the Communist Party (Medin 1990), to recurrent mass mobilization initiatives (Kapcia 2005), as well as the ubiquitous presence of revolutionary ideology through the state media (Gropas 2007). Indeed, in the case of Cuba it may be particularly appropriate to associate the idea of “forming revolutionaries” with an explicit program for the inculcation of revolutionary values, given the central and distinctive role given to the formation of revolutionary “consciousness” in the thinking of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro: the notion of the New Man (*Hombre Nuevo*) distills the ideals, if not necessarily the practical consequences, of this explicit program for the revolution (Martínez Herédia 1989; Guevara and Castro 2009). We might also note here that, with its Pauline connotations, the notion appears to have become fashionable again among theorists of the Left such as Giorgio Agamben (2014) and Alain Badiou (2003), eager to articulate revolution as a Messianic event capable of bringing about not just a new person, but also a New Time of sorts.

No one could deny the significance of this aspect of the formation of revolutionary subjectivities in Cuba. Still, it would be wrong to assume that this is all that lies behind people’s sense of being “formed” by the revolution. In fact, a great many of the people who see themselves in this way are, in a host of contexts, inclined to express deep ambivalence about the relentless ideological output of what they often refer to in an objectifying way as “the state” or “the government,” or even just in the third person as “them” (*ellos*). Clarita is hardly unusual in this respect. While, as she says, she has no time for people who “speak horrors” of the revolution, she dreams of the possibility of having “antenna” TV in her house in the working-class district of Marianao—referring to contraptions that are used illegally in homes across Havana to receive the signal of U.S.-based TV channels. When asked why, she explains that state TV is “always the same old thing” (*lo mismo con lo mismo*) and in her mind entirely identified with “ellos.” Conversely, when we discussed what she perceives as the current “loss of values” (*perdida de valores*) a propos *Conducta*, a popular and critically acclaimed 2014 Cuban film depicting the ailing realities of life in a secondary school in contemporary Havana, Clarita explained that she owes her values to her family and the strict upbringing they gave her. School was important, and she was a good student, but as in films such as *Conducta*, she says, school is not enough. The family, as far as she is

concerned, is where your values are ultimately formed. Similarly, having worked in logistics for a construction company since the early 2000s, she has never had the inclination to join the formal Party structures. “I do my job well and don’t need anyone to tell me about work values—I have that from my family already . . . I’m not interested in advancing in this way; these things are far from me,” Clarita says, with an expression of distaste on her face.

We have, then, an apparent paradox. As we know from Che Guevara, state-sponsored structures for the ideological and moral formation of revolutionary citizens seek to overcome the ontological separation between state and subject, by molding subjects that make the revolutionary project their own (Guevara and Castro 2009:16–17; see also Holbraad 2014). Subjective consciousness and objective sociopolitical transformation are meant to be fused, such that creating the New Society implies, as a direct corollary, also creating the New Man. However, from the point of view of people like Clarita, this state-sponsored program for the transformation of consciousness is often the object of great distaste, and the most obvious point of people’s *alienation* from the project of the revolution. More than in any other area of daily life, perhaps, it is the relentless and seemingly repetitive “oficialismo” of the media, the political rituals, and other spaces that are officially designated as “political” or “ideological” that are most likely to induce a feeling that the revolution is *not* “our” project but “theirs.”

So, if the formation of revolutionary subjectivity were to be understood as a matter of transforming consciousness, then people like Clarita are either lying when they say that they are revolutionaries, or deeply confused about it. However, this would be unfair (see also Holbraad 2014; Gold 2015). As I will suggest, the project of revolution involves a process of “formation” that in some ways runs deeper than questions of “values,” “morality,” or “consciousness.” In a nutshell, this deeper level of formation pertains not so much to the manner in which the state can inculcate particular ways of thinking among the population, but rather to its attempts to shape particular *forms of being*. In particular, the focus here will be on the revolutionary project of state provisioning and infrastructure, the primary task of which is to constitute the revolution as an all-encompassing totality that, in its deliberate unfolding, flows into the subjects it seeks to “contain,” shaping their lives at their very core. Viewed from this perspective, the question of revolutionary formation turns on the manner in which this current of revolutionary infrastructure, understood as a process rather than an entity, is articulated in relation to the people on which it operates. Indeed, as we shall see with reference to Clarita’s story, such an approach enables us to conceptualize the limitations of revolution as a formative force, since it posits infrastructure as inherently incomplete—a force that has to interact not only with its own limitations, but also with other forces and fields that have a claim on people, such as kinship or neighborhood, which render the dynamics of their conformation as subjects far more precarious than official revolutionary discourse seems to imagine.

Of course, studies of how material forms of state power generate particular subjective effects are hardly new. For example, this analysis of the Cuban state's (limited) capacity materially to mold its subjects can be seen in light of the role of varied ideological state apparatuses (Althusser 1971) as well, perhaps, as being an embodied *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) in the reproduction of ideology or hegemony (Gramsci 1971). Material regimes of power, discipline, and governmentality (Foucault 1998) are also relevant, and questions about how state rationality is imposed through the territorial organization of infrastructure are pertinent as well (Lefebvre 2009). Here, however, my focus is on how questions about "state," "infrastructure," "subject" (and the relationships among them) feature as *local concerns* within, and for, the state-revolutionary process in Cuba—a project of sociopolitical transformation that, as we shall see, is staked explicitly and deliberately on the transformative potentials of material infrastructure. In other words, the very questions that Althusserian, Foucauldian, Lefebvrian, and other such frameworks address theoretically are here "indigenised" and turned into objects of ethnographic inquiry. Indeed, given the heavy theoretical freight of these frameworks (replete as they are by their nature with specific and critically differentiated tenets, premises, and assumptions about what states, infrastructures, and subjects are, and how their relationships are to be understood), adopting one or more of them as the prism through which to understand how similar concerns are configured in Cuba runs the risk of ethnographic distortion: trumping Cuban ethnography with French theory, so to speak, risks foreclosing the capacity of the former to generate conceptual possibilities of its own (see also Holbraad 2017). Hence, this article is limited to the task of working up its argument about infrastructure-as-process from the Cuban ethnographic materials, leaving for the future the more theoretical task of specifying how this anthropological conception might relate to more general theoretical frameworks, such as the aforementioned, and even whether, in its contingency, it could provide a critical vantage upon them.

To set the present argument from ethnographic contingency on track, then, we may begin by outlining the salient characteristics of the project of revolution in Cuba as it has been articulated by its protagonists. Of particular interest is the way in which the total sociopolitical transformation that the idea of revolution evokes has been presented officially from the outset of the process, after the initial Triumph of 1959. This discussion will focus on Fidel Castro's perhaps most famous and influential attempt to convey the guiding principles of revolutionary transformation, namely, his famous "Palabras a los intelectuales" speech (Words to the Intellectuals), delivered in summer 1961 to a group of leading artists and writers who had assembled in the José Martí National Library in Havana to debate their worries about apparent incursions by the new political leadership on their freedom of expression.

“Words to the Intellectuals”: Revolution as Total Current

Fidel’s¹ notorious speech, which has achieved an almost sacred status in Cuba over the years, was most immediately a message from the Cuban leader to intellectuals and the population at large about the limits of the newly installed revolutionary government’s tolerance for dissent. Certainly, as is often pointed out in the extensive scholarly commentary that has centered on it ever since (e.g., Martínez Pérez 2006:36–42), the speech served to set the coordinates of the relationship between art and politics in the country’s still evolving revolutionary project. With an eye to my argument about the totalizing effects of the state-revolutionary project of infrastructure, however, and in view of the speech’s abiding role in defining the character of the revolutionary process as a whole (see Holbraad 2014), here the focus is on the manner in which Fidel’s words enunciate the very *shape* of revolution as a political form:

[Even artists and writers who are not revolutionary] should have the opportunity and freedom to express their creative spirit within the revolution. In other words: within the revolution everything; against the revolution, nothing. Against the revolution, nothing, because the revolution also has its rights, and the first right of the revolution is the right to exist, and no one can oppose the revolution’s right to exist. Inasmuch as the revolution embodies the interests of the people, inasmuch as the revolution symbolizes the interests of the whole nation, no one can justly claim a right to oppose it. This is not some special law or guideline for artists and writers. It is a general principle for all citizens. It is a fundamental principle of the revolution . . . [T]he revolution has one right: the right to exist, the right to develop, and the right to be victorious. (Fidel Castro Ruz, in a speech delivered in Jose Marti National Library in 1961)

Thus, in the course of defining the most basic characteristics of revolution as a constituent of the world (something that exists, by right, as he puts it), Fidel delineates its form with reference to particular coordinates, dimensions, and principles of motion and transformation over time. Two features are of particular interest here. First, the revolution is presented as a *container*, as something that has an “inside” that, in a certain sense, is all-encompassing.² It is a totality, an all-containing “everything,” *against* which nothing can exist. Note, however, the explicitly normative nature of the binary: contrary to frequent misquotations, it is not so much inside as opposed to an “outside” with which Fidel is concerned, but rather inside as distinct from *against*. Nonrevolutionaries, he says, should be allowed to exist and express themselves within the revolution, but what must be annihilated (so, therefore, in some sense, must also *exist* in the first place) is whatever goes *against* the revolution. The nonrevolutionary exists within the revolutionary, while the counterrevolutionary is left with no right to exist—nullified, “nothing.”

The second feature of the shape Fidel's words give to the revolution is that it takes the form of motion—a vector of “development.” This is hardly original, since the notion of a forward-moving thrust has long been recognized as a central element of revolution understood as a peculiarly modern political form (Kosellek 2005). Still, Fidel's rendering of this idea is interesting for the way in which it links a sense of development to the normative idea of revolution as a container of everything. Forward motion, here, is not just the shape revolution marks over time, but a *right* that the revolution has, as *against* the putative rights of people, and particularly the counterrevolutionaries that this forward motion of development is meant to nullify. Effectively, this is an image of revolution that realizes its *telos* as a totality, or completes itself, through its own movement: it is a container of everything, which takes the form of a *totalizing current*, we might say, mixing the metaphor.

The question arises, then, as to how such an image of revolution may fare in political practice, and what it might be like for an ordinary citizen such as Clarita to be part of this totalizing current. My thesis is that the state project of infrastructure is the prime mechanism through which this notion of revolution as an all-containing and all-conquering motion is enacted, rendering the revolution an immanent and thus also constitutive part of citizens' lives. The revolution in this sense seeks deliberately to constitute its own people, becoming part of the very fabric of their being, containing them by being contained *by them* in the most literal sense. “Revolution is to construct” (*revolución es construir*) as one of the recent state-sponsored slogans has it. The story of Clarita's house exemplifies how infrastructural considerations of this kind relate to the constitution of revolutionary subjects, who see themselves as having been formed “in” the revolution, as she put it. Recounting Clarita's story as typical serves to demonstrate the pervasive manner in which the revolutionary project seeks to implicate itself in the core of the most ordinary aspects of its citizens' lives, and thus, to “form” them as parts of that project.

Clarita's House

Born in the early 1970s, Clarita grew up on the outskirts of Havana, in San Francisco, in a two-bedroom apartment built above her maternal grandfather's single-story house by her stepfather, who has since lived there with her mother. At that time, construction by individual citizens was subject to strict planning regulations, and construction materials were to be procured only from state agencies, which were in a chronic state of shortage due in part to systematic theft by state employees. So, as was (and remains) entirely commonplace, Clarita's stepfather opted to procure the materials illegally on the black market. The flat itself, which remained a work in progress for much of Clarita's childhood and adolescence, was

formally “legalized” (*fue legalizado*) in 1982 by amending the original ownership deeds to make it appear as if the second floor was part of the original building owned by Clarita’s grandfather—a common (although illegal) bureaucratic process, aided substantially by the fact that Clarita’s mother at that time held an administrative post at the offices of the municipal housing authority (*oficina municipal de viviendas*), which allowed her to use her connections to facilitate the needed paperwork.

As Clarita describes it, the family was particularly united (*unidos*) and Clarita’s childhood was good. Entering her twenties, however, and having graduated from a technical apprenticeship in gastronomy, the cohabitation arrangement became more difficult. Everyday conflicts began to fester, and as she reached her later twenties she felt it was time to leave the family home. However, while she had a number of serious relationships during this period, none of them provided the conditions for her to move, and she was in any case wary of depending on a man. On the other hand, her salary as a logistics administrator in a state construction company, in which she has worked from the late 1990s, was far from being enough to acquire a home of her own. In 2003, however, a scheme was agreed upon between her construction company and her area’s *Poder Popular* (local government), allowing the company to construct houses for its own workers provided they also constructed a house for the *Poder Popular* to house families in need: Clarita seized the opportunity. Having excellent relations with her coworkers in general and her boss in particular, Clarita made sure her name was put forward for the scheme.

Having been provided by the *Poder Popular* with an empty plot in the densely populated municipality of Marianao, from 2005 she became involved in overseeing the construction works, coordinating shifts, ordering, and guarding the company materials, feeding the workers, and so on. This, she explained, meant developing a variety of relationships with her new neighbors: for example, she needed to use their kitchen and bathroom facilities for herself and the workers; she also often asked for neighbors’ help in transporting materials, keeping an eye on the works’ progress, and in ensuring that materials were not stolen either by some of the workers (although she felt she could trust most of them since they were her coworkers and she had chosen people she knew well) or by other neighbors. Her sense of obligation to particular neighbors who had become involved over the years in the house’s construction, as well as the frictions and arguments that inevitably occurred in the process, increased with the long delays resulting from successive restructuring and relocations of the construction company.

An added source of stress occurred from 2010 onwards because a new *Poder Popular* delegate began to resist Clarita’s claim to the home-to-be, arguing that a coworker with more urgent family problems, who at that time was completing a state mission in Venezuela, should be given the house instead—a house that

Clarita had by now spent more than five years constructing. Indeed, much of Clarita's account of the house construction centered on her conflict with this government delegate. Things came to a head when Clarita's mother, making good use of her strong track record as a member of the Communist Party, confronted the Poder Popular delegate, arguing that depriving her daughter of the house she had worked so hard to build under the terms of the Poder Popular's own scheme was an example of the kind of behavior that serves to "alienate the youth of this country," as she put it, making them "indifferent to our revolution." Combined with some personal lobbying on Clarita's behalf by her boyfriend at the time, who worked in the higher echelons of state construction as a civil engineer, Clarita's mother's intervention is recounted as a turning point in the affair. The issue was resolved by giving the two houses under construction to Clarita and her rival and then, in 2011, very quickly constructing two further houses on a different plot in order to comply with the terms of the scheme. With all four houses completed in 2012, Clarita and her coworker and his family are now neighbors and, as it turns out (Clarita was anxious about this and anticipated conflicts), they get on well.

The focus of Clarita's retrospective accounts of that stressful period—told on various occasions in the living room of the now completed two-story house, in which she has been living alone ever since—are the relationships into which the building process propelled her. On the one hand, ending up with a home of her own enabled her to extricate herself from the daily problems she had with her stepfather, with whom she now has a much warmer relationship than in the past. Furthermore, the move served to deepen her relationship with her mother, who stood by Clarita throughout the period of construction, not least by doing much of the informal cooking for the workers on the construction site. Indeed, their relationship has also become closer since Clarita moved into her house. As Clarita explains, while she enjoys finally having her own home, and feels that this gives her a strong sense of independence (particularly when it comes to her relationships with men), she is not happy spending nights there on her own, since the neighborhood is a rough one and, in any case, she is accustomed to sharing sleeping quarters. Thus, most nights her mother comes down from San Francisco to sleep on a foldaway bed that Clarita keeps in the bedroom, and leaves in the morning, when Clarita has gone to work, to run errands and then return to her own house. Mother and daughter spend more time together now than they ever did in the past, and, as they both often say, they depend on each other for everything.

On the other hand, the building process created a somewhat rugged terrain of relationships with a whole series of neighbors. Emphasizing the importance of getting on with people in general, Clarita thinks of herself, rightly, as an easy-going person: "I respect everyone around here," she says, "and greet them: 'How are you?' 'And the family?'—or help them with things if someone in their family is ill; that kind of thing." But for her this is also an aspect of a more pervasive concern

with establishing and maintaining the right distance from her neighbors. This, she admits, is always a consideration. One must live “*juntos pero no revueltos*,” she says, invoking a refrain heard repeatedly in Cuba when discussing people’s preferred living arrangements, which literally translates as “together, but not scrambled.” The problem for Clarita, however, is that many of the people in the neighborhood who helped her during the years of the construction are precisely of a kind that tend to live in a “scrambled” state: in and out of each other’s houses, not to mention beds as well as pockets, with no sense of privacy, everyone knowing everyone else’s business, and, inevitably as she sees it, mired in frequent arguments and conflicts. “They are not bad people and, when they need to, they come together. But I need to be alert with them always, and can’t be giving them coffee, rice, or money all the time, as some of them think I will. Sometimes I do, but I don’t let everyone in—I just give it through the railings,” she says, referring to the dense metal structure that she, like some of the other better-off neighbors, has installed to render the porch at the front of her house impenetrable to intruders. The danger, she explains, is that people will think she is too good for them, adding: “Sometimes they call me *la turista* (the tourist) when I get home from work. But there’s no problem, they know I respect them, and they respect me too; we help each other, but everyone in their own space” (*cada uno en su espacio*).

Infrastructure and Revolution

In view of the recent increased interest among anthropologists in the notion of infrastructure (e.g., Harvey 2012; Larkin 2013), it is noteworthy that the anthropology of socialist and postsocialist societies has been at the vanguard (e.g., Humphrey 2005). This should come as no surprise, since, as Caroline Humphrey (2004:91) observes, in socialist societies the question of infrastructure—indeed the very term—is deliberately marked in line with the political ontology of Marxism, in which infrastructure refers to “the foundational structure of a social formation.” As Humphrey suggests with reference to the Soviet case, state-run projects of infrastructural provision—“the basic equipment, facilities and services necessary for the functioning of a community” (2004:91)—stand in a metonymic relationship with the socialist sociopolitical arrangements that they are meant, perforce, both to promote and to enact. Indeed, infrastructure on this account serves not just as a means to manage the vital arrangements and needs of the population, but rather to *orchestrate* them through state planning. Soviet planners, then, advanced “the radical biopolitical proposition that the adjustments between processes of population, processes of production, and apparatuses of social welfare could be programmed by the state” (Collier 2011:38).

Historically, it could be argued that there have been elements of such a totalizing approach to housing in revolutionary Cuba as well. In his prerevolutionary tract, *History Will Absolve Me* (1983:49), Fidel Castro set up the chronic shortage of decent and affordable housing for the people as one of the principal problems of social justice to be solved by his nascent revolutionary movement. True to those programmatic words, a major legislative watershed following the 1959 revolution was the Law of Urban Reform (henceforth, “LRU”—*Ley de Reforma Urbana*) of 1960. While the law upheld the principle of personal (as opposed to private)³ ownership, the state authorities took effective control of the entire population’s living arrangements.⁴ Dwellings of different types were distributed by the state housing authorities—particularly the all-powerful *Instituto Nacional de Viviendas*—according to a plethora of regulations whose aim was to ensure an equitable distribution according to need. For example, each “family nucleus” was entitled to a single residence, and moving house could only be done by “swapping” one’s home for one of equivalent value under the close supervision of the housing authorities. While informal cash payments were in such cases typically made as part of the transaction, “on the left side” (as Cubans say: *por la izquierda*), to compensate for inevitable differences in value, the state’s ultimate say in people’s living arrangements remained firmly in place through a series of legal reforms of the housing laws in the 1980s, up until the ban on the sale and purchase of housing was lifted in 2011 as part of Raul Castro’s broader raft of market-oriented reforms.

Throughout the revolutionary period, the state’s totalizing role has been evident in the construction of new housing stock. Having taken over the production and distribution of all building materials in 1960, the Ministry of Construction (thus renamed in 1963) took effective control of all housing construction in the national territory, subjecting citizens’ personal construction projects to tight regulation. During the tellingly called “grey” period of 1971–1985, when the influence of the Soviet Union became pervasive, there were a number of major impetuses toward state-planned “total” housing in Cuba, epitomized by the development of such huge housing projects as the emblematic Alamar district, built on the eastern outskirts of Havana in the early 1970s. This was also the time of the notorious *microbrigadas* (microbrigades) campaign through which state-employed workers were provided with the means to construct new buildings on empty plots of land, using prefabricated materials provided by state outlets, and following mainly Soviet and Yugoslav blueprints (De Las Cuevas Toraya 2001). The *microbrigadas* scheme was one of many victims of the so-called Special Period of the 1990s, in which Cuba was thrown into dire financial straits following the withdrawal of Soviet debt financing. The aforementioned Poder Popular sponsored initiative from which Claritra benefited, which was rolled out in the 2000s and again in the 2010s, when the economy started finding its feet again (partly with the support of

Chávez's oil-rich Venezuela), are proof of the Cuban state's enduringly pervasive role as provider of housing for the population.

Nevertheless, it would be hard to argue that the Cuban revolutionary government's investment in housing ever reached the quasimetaphysical heights of the Soviet model of total planning. Fidel's notion of revolution as a totalizing "everything" may correspond more closely to the way infrastructure was conceived by Soviet planners than to his own government's manner of addressing "the problem of housing" (*el problema de las viviendas*), as the chronic and still acute shortage in habitable housing is referred to. According to the model adopted by the "teleological" school of planning in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s, "population, economy, and society [were 'discovered'] not as autonomous domains but as fields that could be reshaped by the state through total instrumental intervention" (Collier 2011:39). In contrast, in Cuba, the state's involvement in housing has always been premised on realities that lie beyond the realm of state planning, and to which state initiatives must respond. On the one hand, the project of state-sponsored redistribution that the LRU set in motion has been premised on the prior existence of prerevolutionary housing stock: the shabby-chic buildings of the colonial and postcolonial era that tourists so love to photograph, the more recent (and solid) of which Cubans today call *edificios capitalistas* (capitalist buildings). On the other hand, the newer buildings constructed after 1959 (*edificios socialistas*—"socialist buildings") have responded to the preexisting needs of the population. The very notion that the state must address itself to the population's "housing problem"—a phrase that has become almost phatic in official pronouncements after almost sixty years of essayed solutions—seems to entail the existence of a reality that remains beyond the all-embracing containment the revolution likes to imagine for itself: an "outside" after all (see also Butterworth 1980).

Still, if this preexisting order of human needs is an outside with which the process of revolution has to reckon, and upon which it is meant to operate, then it is an outside that is also somehow *within*. To use an expression suggested to me by Morten Nielsen (personal communication, 2016), it is an "inner outside"—what the outside looks like when you look at it as a limit from within, as one might see the inner surface of a balloon or the outer limits of an expanding universe. Indeed, the condition of possibility for this was set up at the beginning of the revolutionary period with the legal and administrative framework of the LRU. While upholding the principle of "personal property", this new framework effectively distinguished it from "private property" by encompassing it *within* the revolutionary state's sphere of influence, giving state authorities the ultimate control, through legal jurisdiction, over individual citizens' living arrangements. The very notion of personal (as opposed to private) ownership, in this situation, nigh reverses the logic of the market-based practices to which the LRU sought to put an end. Rather than marking out a realm of transactions taking place beyond the state, or in relative freedom

from its “interventions” (e.g., transactions the state may act to “guarantee,” “legally enforce,” or “regulate” from the outside), personal ownership becomes an effect, and thus an index, of the state’s encompassing role as both provider of property and the ultimate controller of its destiny. The forced redistribution of property in 1960, then, and the legal framework of state jurisdiction it set in place, created a situation in which homes were owned by people by virtue of being always already the state’s. Staying with the cosmological metaphor, one can therefore think of the event of the revolution and the momentous legal ruptures that rapidly issued forth from it as a Big Bang of sorts: one that generated the outer reaches for its own process of becoming, marking out the sociopolitical coordinates within which the transformations that it put in motion could then unfold.

Housing policy constitutes the prime marker of this cosmogonic act inasmuch as it renders its own material and sociopolitical coordinates coterminous in the most tangible way imaginable. By the same token, however, housing becomes the prime site on which the *problem* established by such an act of revolutionary transformation must then be solved. Rendering the living arrangements of the population internal to the process of revolutionary transformation serves to define the revolution as a current that is always already “total” in line with Fidel’s original cosmogonic dictum. But this is not enough in itself. For the forward thrust of this revolutionary current must then gain, and show, its purchase on those living arrangements that, by this token, come to occupy the ambiguous position of an “inner outside,” as we saw: “within” the revolution, but also an “outside” upon which its current must operate, insofar as the status of housing as personal property has been ratified. Having been rendered total by legal (*cum cosmogonic*) fiat, in other words, the revolution must then proceed to *enact* this totality in order to continue as a current. Clarita’s story illustrates how this unfolding dynamic of infrastructure provides a prime way in which the fine balance—or, as we shall see, coimplication—between state control and people’s personal life-projects is enacted.

Clarita’s Infrastructure

Clarita’s case illustrates how the revolution’s infrastructural current becomes a constitutive feature of people’s everyday lives. It illuminates the sense in which her claim to “have been formed in the revolution,” with which this article opened, can be understood as a question not of political consciousness or ideological positioning, but rather of participating in the most concrete sense in the forms of life that the state-revolutionary project has deliberately sought to format for people. Exemplifying principles that have remained pervasive in the state’s approach to housing throughout the revolution, Clarita’s house is built on state land, released by the state, using state resources and labor provided by the state construction

company. To the extent that Clarita's life since 2005 has unfolded with reference to this plot of land, and since 2012 has been lived literally between walls made out of state resources and labor, Clarita's very existence has state infrastructure built into it. In a sense that is as deep as it is literal, Clarita lives *within* the revolution, a life shaped by the concretely material arrangements of its infrastructure.

This process of infrastructural concretion can be understood in relation to the political ontology of the "inner outside" that revolutionary housing policy sets in place. If the encompassing role of the state, enacted at the outset of the revolution, renders the "outside" of the preexisting housing stock and the housing needs to which state policies were meant to respond "internal" to the revolutionary process, then the concrete arrangements for the construction and material maintenance of housing constitute a prime manner in which this outside is co-opted by the revolutionary current, and is thus, again in a literal way, incorporated by it. Be they an empty plot of land or a preexisting building, housing arrangements that initially mark the outer limits of the revolutionary process are gradually converted into integral *parts* of the revolutionary current. Clarita's finished house, built under the material auspices of the state, but also her mother's apartment, duly legalized (albeit retrospectively), are figured as extensions of the revolutionary process initiated in 1959, and acknowledged, not least by Clarita and her family, as revolutionary "achievements" (*logros de la revolución*, as is often said in official discourse). As such, they now feature as properly *within* the process of revolution, and thus instantiate it materially.

Properly, but not necessarily entirely: one of the immediate consequences of conceiving of the project of revolutionary infrastructure in this verbal, current-like way is that it renders the process inherently incomplete. Indeed, at least in part, this is very much how its power is to be understood: the process of infrastructure—and, by that material token, of the revolution—is measured on the scale of achievement only insofar as it has by its very nature to (be seen to) continue to operate upon its inner outsides, which constitute the horizon of its current-like unfolding. Clarita's story illustrates this vividly. Referring to it sometimes jokingly as her *calvario* (calvary), Clarita's evolving relationship with the building of her own house takes the form of a series of difficulties to be solved: getting herself selected for the Poder Popular program, navigating the construction company's multiple restructurings, procuring the materials and guarding them from theft, feeding the workers, fending off the delegate who tried to take the house away from her, and so on. Comprising what to her, at the time, seemed like an endless series of small, "everyday" acts (Das 2018), this is the form that the realization of the revolutionary current of infrastructure takes in people's lives. Indeed, the current's power as a co-optive, incorporating force lies in the manner in which it is implicated in the minutiae of people's daily lives, rendering personal life projects, such as Clarita's desire to live alone, a direct and abiding function of the larger sociopolitical project of the

revolution and, just as importantly, vice versa. Procuring a house, becoming close with one's mother, and calibrating relationships with neighbors are all concerns in which relations with state authorities (e.g., the Poder Popular, the construction company), their legal framework (e.g., ownership deeds, or the legalization process in the case of Clarita's mother), their personnel (Clarita's bosses, Clarita and her coworkers, the hostile delegate), and their material provisions, as we have seen (the construction materials, their means of transport, the food with which the workers, and Clarita and her mother, are fed), are deeply coimplicated. Here, the personal is the political in the most elaborate of senses, such that the process of infrastructure renders the revolutionary current an immanent force in people's lives and, by the same token, constitutes those lives as the arena in which the revolutionary current can be realized, always as a precarious and inherently incomplete achievement, full of effort for all involved.

Conclusion

Understood as coimplicated, state infrastructure and people's personal life-projects mark out the limits—indeed the limitations—of the revolutionary process, even as they constitute the field in which its power operates. This follows directly from the argument presented here about the inherent incompleteness of revolution conceived as a total current that “achieves” itself through processes of infrastructure. If Clarita's case illustrates how the effort required for an achievement—such as building a state-sponsored house—is a way for the revolution to implicate itself into the minutiae of her life, thus “forming her” by co-opting her in the revolutionary process, it also demonstrates how precarious and imperfect this process is. After all, Clarita's is just as much a story of hindrances, frustrations, delays, and apprehensions as it is one of “revolutionary achievement.” There is indeed a prosaic sense in which her epigrammatic statement that she is “revolutionary” but *in her* “own way” describes the nature of her experience with the house. The myriad ways in which the state process of infrastructure came up short are proof positive, for her, that “the system doesn't work,” as Cubans so often say these days, or not at least in the way that the official discourse claims it does.

One might say, then, that the myriad ways in which Clarita has had to compensate for the dysfunctional operations of the revolution-as-infrastructure, which often make its putative current seem stagnant, are indices of the fact that a great deal of her life has had to remain “outside” the revolution that has in so many ways failed to consummate its promise to incorporate “everything” that, according to its own logic, it always already contains. Stolen materials, food cooked privately with meager resources, or neighbors who help but then encroach on one's space to make daily demands, are just a few of the ways in which the limitations of a poorly

funded and over-burdened state housing system become apparent for Clarita and everyone else involved. If infrastructure is a prime expression of a revolution that is meant to be moving toward realizing its inherent nature as a totality, it is also, by the same token, the site in which the failures of such a project become painfully apparent.

Seen in this light, the apparently momentous reforms of housing policy introduced by Raul Castro's government in 2011, which for the first time since 1960 permitted the purchase and sale of properties by individual citizens at market prices, could be seen as an admission on the part of the state of its own failure, ultimately, to transform housing into a prime arena for its revolutionary realization. This is certainly how the move has been interpreted by commentators who assume that the much-advertised reform process taking place in Cuba in recent years constitutes a "transition," with the country finally "opening up" to the market, and so on. To be sure, these reforms have created an apparently buoyant real estate market, particularly in areas where the nascent world of private enterprise (much of it focused on tourism) is taking hold. Furthermore, while statistics are hard to come by, carrying out fieldwork in Havana today, one gets the sense that many people have put their homes on the market, and even those who have not done so fantasize about it, seeing this as a prime way to obtain the kind of money needed to launch a dreamt-of business initiative (a cafeteria, say, selling street food), or, just as commonly, to pay what it costs to take the plunge and move abroad. In this sense, the reforms represent a significant erosion of the principles of redistribution that have undergirded the totalizing, everything-within logic of the original LRU. At the level of principle, housing policy seems in one fell swoop (again) to have rendered people's homes vehicles for exploring what might, in the ever-shifting horizon of the future—after President Obama's emblematic visit in 2016 and then Trump's election—lie *beyond* the revolution.

Still, while it is perhaps too early to tell where this new situation may lead, it is easy to overestimate the difference the recent reforms are making in practice. On the one hand, the reforms have not really sought to dismantle more than half a century of legal, administrative, and material arrangements for the state's control of housing: the regulatory framework remains in place, in line with the government's abiding insistence that these reforms are meant to "guarantee the continuity and irreversibility of Socialism" (Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba [Congreso PCC] 2011:5). On the other hand, this may be just as well, since the vast majority of Cuban citizens remain resolutely excluded from the nascent housing market. With foreign investment still tightly curtailed and controlled, and state salaries remaining roughly at the same aching low levels as ever, only very few people have the resources to participate in a market that commands prices ranging from a few thousand dollars for a small apartment in an undesirable outskirts, to many hundreds of thousands for the kinds of properties foreigners

are increasingly eyeing up in more affluent and central areas of Havana, such as Vedado or Old Havana. Respondents living in different parts of the city told me repeatedly that the reforms made little difference to them personally, since no one they knew had the kind of money they would like to sell their own home for, and they themselves did not have the money to buy anyone else's.

The coda to Clarita's story is indicative of the current situation. In 2015, having continued to improve her Marianao home after moving into it in 2012, relying heavily on the help of a partner who at the time earned money working abroad, Clarita left her job at the state construction company and started working as a waitress in a private cafeteria in the center of town, earning eighty to one hundred dollars per month, which was more than six times her salary in the state sector. The following year, she decided to sell her newly built house in order to move closer to the center, and put it on the market for just under thirty thousand dollars. Still waiting for takers when I last spoke to her in summer 2017, she described her prospects:

The house is big enough, and in good condition . . . But who wants to move to Marianao? Only people from the East [referring to the steady stream of internal emigration to Havana], but they don't have money. If it were in Old Havana or Vedado it would be different. But the neighborhood is bad. No one pays thousands of dollars to live here. I'm hanging in there, waiting maybe for someone from the center who needs to move into something bigger. But nobody's asking.

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Notes

¹In what follows, I adopt the habit of my Cuban interlocutors to refer to Fidel Castro by his first name—a prime marker of the popular, not to say populist, character of the socialist project in Cuba, as well as of the importance of his personality in leading it.

²Elsewhere, Che Guevara said as much: “there is no life outside [the revolution]” (Guevara and Castro 2009:25).

³For example, Marx and Engels (1969:24) and Trefftz (2011).

⁴For a detailed history of the hopes and the realities of housing in socialist Cuba, see Scarpaci, Serge, and Coyola (2002).

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