

## Small-Scale Urban Agriculture in Havana and the Reproduction of the ‘New Man’ in Contemporary Cuba

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The phrase ‘Special Period in Times of Peace’ was introduced by the Cuban government in 1990 to refer to the series of economic adjustments and related deprivations brought about in that country by the acute economic crisis that followed the break-up of the Soviet Bloc. Special Period reforms of various sectors of the economy – from tourism to agriculture – led to a decentralization of state services with their effective transferral to the private or non-state domain. Echoing the official rationale for these reforms, General Sio Wong, veteran of the revolutionary war and leading figure in Havana’s urban agriculture movement, commented: ‘Some foreigners label these measures “economic openings” but we say that they are measures we had to take to save socialism. We do not like some of them but we had to prioritize survival.’<sup>1</sup> Despite the stated desire to ‘save socialism,’ however, analysts such as Susan Eckstein suggest that these policies have had the effect of encouraging individualistic<sup>2</sup> practices and values more in tune with an ideal ‘capitalist’ society than with a socialist one (1994, xvi).<sup>3</sup>

This article investigates this purported dynamic by examining the processes involved in the social production of specific spaces (Lefebvre 1998 [1974]) associated with the post-1989 ‘privatization’ of agricultural land and agricultural activities; namely, the *parcelas* or urban vegetable garden lots of the city of Havana.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the article poses the question: is the ‘privatization’ of food production and related spaces in Cuba contributing to a transformation of the civic ethos from one that is more communitarian to one that is more individualistic?

Through its focus on the spatial production of *parcelas*, the paper follows Henri Lefebvre’s insight (1998 [1974]) that space is not just an innocent container of social processes but is both constituted by, and constitutive of, such processes. Thus, we will find that to explore the way *parcelas* in Havana have been produced as foci of individual activity and social interaction and as meeting points of citizen and state, is to explore the dynamic of ideological and behavioural change anticipated by Eckstein in a particular arena of private initiative. In this context, especially inasmuch as space represents, in Lefebvre’s words, ‘a means of control, and hence of domination, of power’ (1998 [1974], 26), its production deserves particular attention. Indeed, a history of food and agriculture in post-1959 Cuba would be incomplete were it to overlook the spatial re-configurations that have attended changes in related policy and practice.

## Food security and agricultural production in post-1959 Cuba

In his famous defence speech during the court proceedings against him for his leading role in the failed 26 July 1957 attack on the Moncada Barracks (meant to be the opening salvo in a struggle to overthrow the Batista dictatorship of the time), a young Fidel Castro stated that ‘it is inconceivable that people should go to sleep hungry when there is still land [in Cuba] left to be cultivated’ (1993, 65). In 1959, when the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Revolutionary Movement (named after that failed first attempt) finally came to power under Fidel Castro’s leadership, the attainment of national food security was central to the new government’s agenda. Over the years, this concern has been reflected, in part, in government policies that changed the tenure status of agricultural land as well as the organizational forms of agricultural production. This concern has also been made evident in those Cuban state policies pertaining to food distribution and commercialization.

In terms of agricultural land tenure and production, the first 30 years of pertinent revolutionary policy are encapsulated in the slogan: ‘more state property, more socialism’ (Burchardt 2000, 171). Although the first Agrarian reform, launched in 1959, gave land title to approximately 110,000 small peasants, it also transferred 44 per cent of agricultural land – in the form of large landholdings – to the state. The Second Agrarian Reform, carried out in 1963, further raised the proportion of state-owned and managed agricultural land to 63 per cent. In the 1980s, this trend culminated in a series of measures that transferred additional land to the state so that it ended up with 80 per cent of the country’s agricultural land (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 1986, 162).

The objectives of these reforms were to nationalize agricultural production and to ensure the most rational allocation of resources towards satisfying domestic food needs while maximizing the production of export crops such as sugar, which remained Cuba’s main source of revenue. For decades, the revolutionary leadership appeared convinced that larger territorial units and rational state management would lead to higher agricultural production. In this context, ‘the individual small farmer – characterized by low-levels of technology and social isolation’ was perceived as ‘the most backward form of production,’ cooperatives were ranked second best,<sup>5</sup> and state farms (known as people’s farms) – owned by ‘the people’ and worked by salaried workers – were considered the ‘superior’ form of production (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 1986, 167).<sup>6</sup>

Over the years, the portion of state land used for food production varied as Cuba’s international political and economic alliances changed. Beginning in 1972, trade agreements with the Soviet Union led the Cuban government to emphasize production of sugar and citrus fruits to be exchanged for cereals and other food products from the Soviet Bloc (Burchardt 2000, 172). While some analysts note that this arrangement allowed the Cuban government to ‘provide a greater quantity and variety of foodstuffs to its population’ (Rosset and Benjamin 1994, 12), it also clearly encouraged a dangerous reliance on export monocrops. In the late 1980s, only 40 per cent of cultivable land was dedicated to the production of non-export food crops (Burchardt 2000, 172). Despite intense efforts in the early 1960s and the late 1980s to achieve self-sufficiency in foodstuffs, import dependency remained high.<sup>7</sup> Prior to 1989, two-thirds of Cuba’s foodstuffs came from socialist

countries (Funes et al. 2002, 6). In the early 1990s, 55 per cent of the calories, 50 per cent of the proteins, and 90 per cent of the fats consumed in Cuba were imported (Burchardt 2000, 173).

The attainment of national food security, however, remained explicitly central to the government's project. This project entailed more than the management of agricultural land and production; it included the equitable distribution of basic food products, national or imported, at affordable prices through the rationing system. Regardless of its various flaws (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 1986, 80-81; Dumont 1970), the ration, instituted on 12 March 1962, more than any other Cuban institution instilled in citizens the notion of national food equity while recreating the state as its guarantor (Premat 1998; Díaz Vázquez 2000, 55). Except for a brief period of experimentation with the Farmers' Free Market in the 1980s, for decades the state remained the primary food provider – it was in charge of the ration, the parallel markets, and the allocation of food to schools and workplaces. It was also the official buyer of agricultural products from independent farmers.

This situation changed radically in 1989 with the onset of the Special Period. As imports of food, oil, and agricultural inputs from the Soviet Union dropped drastically, the Cuban government found itself both unable to produce sufficient food on its large state farms and unable to efficiently distribute to the cities what little food was produced. Encouraging food production in general, and localized food production in particular, became a governmental priority. As Chief of the Armed Forces and leading revolutionary figure Raúl Castro Ruz put it: 'Today, we are affirming that beans are more valuable than guns' (1994). Food production was no longer the prerogative of a specialized sector of the population; it became the duty of all 'good revolutionaries', the means through which the current struggle against adversity would have to be waged.

Among the measures taken to deal with this severe food crisis were a series of reforms that resulted in the transfer – through usufruct rights – of 70 per cent of Cuba's agricultural land, then under state ownership and management, to independent individuals or to producers organized in peasant associations and cooperatives (Burchardt 2000). This situation represented an abrupt reversal of the trend that had defined the previous 30 years of state agricultural policy.<sup>8</sup> The reforms not only affected traditional agricultural land but also land without any previous agricultural history insofar as, beginning in 1991, urban plots in places like Havana were converted to agricultural production (Funes et al. 2002; Rosset and Benjamin 1994; Murphy 1999).

In general, these measures led to an atomization of food production and a decreased reliance on the state as primary food provider – a situation furthered through a series of additional reforms, such as the opening of agricultural markets and agricultural produce stalls (*puntos de venta*), that made it possible for agricultural producers to market part, if not all, of their outputs independently from the state.

Such commercialization was not only legalized but was presented in a positive light in official discourses. For example, asserting the need to overcome ideological resistance to the linkage of agricultural labour with individual material reward or profit, Raúl Castro commented: 'It is imperative to undo the knots that are stopping productivity,' further stating that 'he who earns 1,000 pesos honestly is wel-

come to do it' (in Pages 1997). In sharp contrast with the rhetoric of the prior period, known in Cuba as the 'Period of Rectification of Errors and Negative Tendencies,' when moral rather than material incentives were emphasized in government discourses, these measures and pronouncements signified an official seal of approval for private solutions to problems, such as food insecurity, that until then had been the responsibility of the state.

This was the general context out of which there emerged, in urban Cuba, the small-scale agricultural sites today known as the *parcelas*.<sup>9</sup> It is to these sites that the analysis now turns.

### **Parcelas and the privatization of public land**

The *parcelas* of Havana are urban lots of no more than 1000 m<sup>2</sup>, given in usufruct to private citizens who work them primarily for the purpose of family self-provisioning, although sales are allowed either on-site or through agricultural stalls. These sites, which numbered 26,000 in 1996 (Chaplowe 1996), are usually located near the producer's home and their use is relatively free of explicit restrictions from the state. The only requirement for the maintenance of usufruct rights is that the lot be used for agricultural production. Prior to their creation, *parcelas*, as abandoned public land, were open spaces freely and informally used by members of the surrounding community for some other purpose, whether as garbage dumps or meeting grounds for children or youth. Their projected long-term function, according to the urban planning sector, was and still is, in the majority of cases, to house multi-family residential units to alleviate the crowded living conditions endemic to the city.

In spite of their prior definition and use as 'public' land, once brought under agricultural production, *parcelas* became absorbed into the private domain in both appearance and function.

One of the most important founding acts in the creation of *parcelas* involves the clearing and cleaning of the lot. Informants often characterized this as an act of *saneamiento* (sanitization) of a place that, left to the community at a time when the state was unable to exert control over it, had become a site for disease-breeding and social disorder. Many producers commented that the local authorities had actually asked them to 'recuperate' these areas, turning useless and unhealthy sites into good, productive ones. That this was accomplished primarily through the effort (and expense) of the would-be producer was highlighted in many interviews,<sup>10</sup> as was the notion that personal labour invested on the site somehow secured private rights over it. As a particularly confident producer stated: 'Who is going to take this away from me, after all the work I've done on it?'<sup>11</sup>

This *de facto* appropriation of a public, common space by private citizens is reflected in the physical appearance of the sites. *Parcelas* are usually fenced off. Although the fences no doubt serve to protect the lot from theft or damage, they also re-create the space as private. This trend contrasts greatly with experiences of the early years of the revolution when, as I was told, fences were torn down to create a uniform and open landscape out of the agricultural lands surrounding Havana, as these were converted into 'people's farms.' Physical links that underscore the connection between *parcelas* and the private residences of producers are not un-

common. Thus, one of the urban vegetable gardens studied is connected by a climbing plant to the private home of one of the main producers across the street. Another garden will soon be connected by a staircase to the terrace of the producer's house.<sup>12</sup> Gardens of this type are also appropriated by private producers as they stamp their identity on the space through their personal choice and organization of crops and animals,<sup>13</sup> and through idiosyncratic decoration. Thus, in the garden of an artist one finds, hanging among the vegetables, pieces of coloured glass, discarded toys, and other artefacts of personal significance (for example, a teacup given him by his last lover). In this sense, parcels are constructed as an extension of the producer's home, a site for cultural accumulation and display of individual or family identities, intertwined with acts of home-making – a characteristic noted of gardening practices more generally in various parts of the world (Chevalier 1998; Mukerji 1990).

The re-creation of parcels as private domestic sites, separate and distinct from the public domain, is also reflected in the discourses and actions of producers. One producer described the parcela as a personal refuge; another asserted: '[the parcela] is like the patio of my home.' These sentiments, echoed by others, were confirmed through the actual use given such spaces. Only the producers in charge have access to the lot and decide who can enter it and how the land and its outputs are to be used. Aside from their agricultural dimension, parcels are frequently used for other personal ends, such as the storage of household property, hanging of family laundry, 'private' gatherings with friends, and quiet individual reflection. In these private functions, parcels again appear to signal social atomization following from the partition of previously 'public' space.

In their self-provisioning function, parcels seem to exemplify the transfer of state responsibilities (and resources) to the private domain in a manner that can be linked to individualistic attitudes differing greatly from the revolutionary government's previous emphasis on self-sacrifice for the greater good. For example, one of the producers interviewed explained:

The parcela benefits me 100 per cent. Look, now my hen is roosting and I have three eggs guaranteed. Eggs have not come through the ration in a while but I have my eggs. While others don't have any, I have mine. Why? Because I raise chickens in my lot.

In this manner, the parcels are also linked to a feeling of independence for producers who, through them, 'free' themselves from the stresses of being 'forced' to shop at the expensive agricultural markets and from anxiously waiting for ration items whose provision dwindled during the Special Period.<sup>14</sup>

This linkage of parcels with strictly private ends has other dimensions that are considered more disturbing from the perspective of the government. The overarching sentiment expressed to me in interviews by employees and decision-makers in the Urban Planning Sector and the Ministry of Agriculture, is that there is an urgent need to order the small urban agricultural spaces of Havana so as to arrest a 'disturbing' tendency toward chaos. For these officials, this tendency results in part from a growing distancing of *parcelas* from the state and its regulatory apparatus.<sup>15</sup> One of the founders and current member of the Urban Agriculture Group of Havana told me: 'There has to be legality in the use of the parcela land and the re-

sources used for its exploitation because everything has to have order. It cannot degenerate into barbarism.’ Interestingly, by ‘barbarism’ he referred to the misuse of public land for non-agricultural activities aimed strictly at profit making or for production based on exploitative relations. He explained:

The *parcelero* is given the land but he must undertake some kind of agricultural production; it is not meant for him to generate a second source of income unrelated to agricultural production, or for him to hire labour to work on it.

In other words, there are state-defined limits to the private use of parcels. While it is clear that from the government’s perspective more is at stake than the loss of producer’s solidarity with his/her fellow citizens in the arena of food security, this solidarity appears as a central concern in recent governmental practices involving the sites in question. The official *movimiento de patios y parcelas* (movement of patios and parcels), launched on 24 February 2000, by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, serves to illustrate this point.

### **The movimiento de patios y parcelas: reinforcing the social and the public**

The official Movement of Patios and Parcelas began with the stated aim of promoting agricultural production in every potentially suitable urban space. It was also designed with the explicit goal of assisting in the organization of already existing small-scale urban agricultural producers to serve them better since, as the current national delegate of urban agriculture explained, their patios and parcelas constitute ‘the most popular and widespread expression’ of urban agriculture.<sup>16</sup> The fact that parcelas are lumped together with privately owned patios in a single ‘movement’ underscores the degree to which they are perceived to be private spaces, despite their distinctive public land tenure status. The inclusion of the privately-owned patios as part of the same state-endorsed movement, on the other hand, underscores how the target of the movement is not merely public land gone private, but an increasingly de-socialized domestic sphere over which the government is perceived to have lost considerable power during the Special Period. In this respect, the movement of patios and parcelas can also be seen to serve other political aims. Of interest here, however, is how the movement – through two of its central activities, a census of small-scale agricultural sites and the selection of model gardens – can be read as an attempt by the government to re-create parcelas as sites that must play a social function.

The founding action of the movement was a census, still ongoing. This census has entailed more than noting the location of, and type of production taking place in small-scale urban agricultural sites; it has also involved the literal labelling of these sites through the physical application of stickers, usually on the door of the producer’s private residence. The stickers read: ‘This house participates in the Popular Movement for Agricultural Production of the Neighbourhood, by the Neighbourhood and for the Neighbourhood. United we will win this battle as part of the war of the people.’ While this message coincides in some respects with earlier Special Period slogans pertaining to urban agriculture, its effect is quite differ-

ent. Earlier propaganda was of a generalized nature, an example of this being a poster appearing in the official newspaper *Granma* in 1993 showing a generic garden being tilled by a woman and a man with the accompanying message: ‘The contribution of each for the good of all. In these times of resistance, a *huerto* (garden plot) also means Revolution.’<sup>17</sup> The stickers now being applied differ in that they re-assert the connection (and integration) of specific private or semi-private sites with the revolutionary goals that emphasize the community over the individual.

Hence, the stickers publicly label the sites (and, by extension, the private households and citizens associated with them) as fulfilling a social rather than a private function. Particularly in the case of *parcelas*, the stickers thus mark the power and jurisdiction of the state over the spaces in question and denote their proper function with respect to the surrounding community.<sup>18</sup> This public demarcation also seems to invite surveillance not just by state functionaries but also by local residents who now have official sanction to assert their expectations over the use of this ‘public’ land.

To the extent that the *parcelas* are counted as part of the movement, these expectations are reinforced in yet another way. Inclusion in the census means entering the competition for the title of model garden, known as *patio de referencia*. The status of model garden is not granted in perpetuity but is re-assessed by Ministry of Agriculture officials every year, with gardens being re-ordered in a hierarchy that ranges from the level of the neighbourhood to that of the nation. This competition further encourages producers to conduct their activities in state-sanctioned ways. This not only means refraining from illegal activities on the lot, but living up to expectations that the *parcela* should somehow serve the community. In this respect, it is no coincidence that, although the official criteria for selection focuses on the garden’s productive dimension (particularly the quality and diversity of production), the majority of those chosen in 2001 were also exemplary in the way they contributed to, and connected with, the surrounding community.

In this manner, the census and the selection of model gardens act as what Foucault (1979) would call disciplinary technologies that, through the counting, labelling and ordering of spaces, indirectly mould the individual subjects who occupy them – in this case, after the image of the Guevarist ideal of the *Hombre Nuevo* (New Man) who puts collective goals ahead of individual ones. Indeed, such official emphasis on the communitarian dimension of the *parcela* connects nicely with some of the discourses and practices of *parceleros* who, while re-creating *parcelas* as private land used to meet private needs, are quick to point out the communitarian dimensions of these same spaces.

### **The re-enactment of communitarian values**

Contrary to the private *patio* producers interviewed, most *parceleros* are eager to point out how their *parcelas* also contribute – albeit in a small way – to the community through the sharing of produce or the utilization of the site in ways that meet other community needs. Some producers even go so far as to describe their *parcela* as ‘a communitarian garden’ – a pointed contrast to the conception of the site as the *patio* of one’s home. The same producer, who spoke of having eggs guaranteed while others have none, indicated: ‘We *parceleros* benefit and those

around us benefit also. You yourself have just witnessed how many children drop by to ask for guava fruit. I reap the benefits of my sacrifice and so do those around me.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of *parcelas* geared towards household self-provisioning, production outputs that exceed household needs are indeed often shared freely with local residents who frequently visit the lot in search of condiments, fruits, and other products. Not infrequently, outputs are shared not just with known neighbours but also with total strangers<sup>9</sup> and entire neighbourhood institutions, such as schools and hospitals where the donated produce contributes to the preparation of meals for children and the infirm.

Even in the case of *parcelas* where the outputs are commercialized, the producers underscore their contributions to the community as vital. Thus, for example, a model gardener in attendance at the Annual National Meeting of Patios and *Parcelas* in 2001 made the point that on his lot they had prioritized the production of less profitable crops because these were more needed by the community. He explained:

It is nice to speak of the variety of production in a patio or *parcela*. I would add that it is also nice to speak of production thinking about it in relation to our pockets, but it is even more important to prioritize the population more than our pockets. We must think in which ways we are going to better benefit the population and better serve its needs. We benefited more economically being a fruit tree nursery than producing vegetables. However, we realized that the surrounding population benefited more from the latter and hence we have turned to that ... This is what I want to share with the comrades because here in attendance are many new producers ... and I think it is important that they gear their production towards this concept of ours. And it should be added that [we function also as] a school, we have the privilege in our municipality of sharing our knowledge with state enterprises, private producers, and even schools.

Through these and similar discourses, *parcelas* re-emerge as community-centred – if not community managed – sites, a dimension which, as with the private functions and uses, is also inscribed in space.

Gardens associated with community development projects in particular bear the physical markings of their ‘public’ and communitarian dimension. Thus, a garden used by neighbouring schools for educational purposes permanently features a circle of small benches around the avocado tree located near the centre of the garden.<sup>20</sup> In another, often used for educational workshops with adults, didactic signage indicating the qualities of certain produce and the value of an edible garden also underscore the garden’s public educational function. The portraits of revolutionary heroes such as Che Guevara that also appear in gardens with a public function can be read as a statement of the producer’s commitment to revolutionary ideals. In these ways, the decoration of the garden by producers, while allowing for the expression of individual identity, may also signal the connection of the site with the community – a connection that is not necessarily the product of mere ‘image management.’



## Between material incentives and moral imperatives

The motivations behind some of this sharing and community participation may well be unrelated to government pressures. With the sharing of agricultural produce, for example, it could be argued that this represents a form of reciprocity associated with traditional neighbourly relations discussed by other anthropologists (Rosendahl 1997, 41-50). After all, local residents can and often do assist in guarding the site and sometimes even contribute to production by sharing kitchen leftovers for animal feed or composting.

Yet the sharing with strangers and with community institutions is less easily attributed to tradition. My research suggests, rather, that this kind of sharing is linked in part with a desire to fulfil governmental expectations. Since the inception of the Special Period, sharing in this context has been depicted in the official media as ideal behaviour and upheld as a sign of good citizenship in a socialist society.<sup>21</sup> It has been further reinforced by slogans and practices associated with the patio movement as well as by discourses of urban agriculture professionals<sup>22</sup> who, consistent with the Ministry of Agriculture's slogan that urban agriculture is production 'of the neighbourhood, by the neighbourhood, and for the neighbourhood,' also publicly emphasize the contribution such spaces can make beyond the private household of the producer.

This desire to fulfil the government's expectations, in turn, appears to connect with a desire to legitimate the producer's claim to the land. This interpretation was first suggested to me by the account of a producer who, after telling of his donation of condiments to a neighbourhood home for the elderly, added that the manager of this institution had given him several documents acknowledging his generosity, 'just in case [he] ever needed them.' The logic of such a strategy of legitimization was further confirmed by the comments of an urban planner in charge of organizing urban agricultural activities at the level of the city, who told me that once a garden becomes embedded in the territory through its active linkage with community-based activities, it is 'more difficult to remove, showing a tendency towards permanency.'

These comments suggest that the communitarian acts of parceleros may be inspired in no small way by an awareness of the government's ultimate power over the land in question and its uses – a fact that brings us back to Lefebvre's statement that space is 'a means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (1998 [1974], 26). Parcelas, after all, are ultimately dependent on the state for their creation and continuity. Authorization for their use is the prerogative of government representatives as is the maintenance of usufruct rights. These rights can be revoked at any time if it is determined that the place has been misused or that the land is needed for higher priority functions (for example, residential housing or tourist development).

There is another important material dimension to the sharing and community-based activities of parcelas. Having one's plot integrated into an official community development project further increases one's chances of accessing government or NGO-managed<sup>23</sup> funds and donations that can be used to better the infrastructure of the site and to increase production.

Such material benefits, however, do not appear to outweigh the producer's per-

sonal investment in the project. In the case of one producer, for example, the integration of his parcela as part of a community development project did translate into the improvement of the site, as a small water tank and irrigation hoses were purchased through the mediation of NGOs involved in the promotion of the project. However, the organized visits of children from neighbourhood schools four times a week during the harshest hours of the tropical afternoon not only interfered with his informal ‘paid’ work at a neighbouring carpentry workshop, but signified an additional cost since he insisted on offering the children homemade soft drinks prepared with sugar he had to purchase at his own expense. In his perception, the project and the site itself offer him no material advantages. But in spite of the additional work involved, he, like other producers, expressed a great deal of pride at the public recognition of his activity.

This recognition often came in the form of announcements at neighbourhood meetings and certificates given by government authorities. While such recognition constitutes a kind of ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1977) which, in turn, has its material dimension in further re-enforcing the producer’s claim over the parcela, it should be stressed that producer’s pride in this recognition as well as in his/her community-oriented actions may in part be grounded in the hegemonic (Gramsci 1971) belief in the right of all citizens to food and the ideal of self-sacrifice for the greater good. All material benefits aside, many producers seemed to contribute to their community out of a genuine conviction in the correctness of their actions. The sharing of outputs, particularly when it involves total strangers, is striking when one considers that sale of these products is legal and could supplement the income of producers many of whom are already obliged to work after retirement to make ends meet.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, it would seem that Che Guevara’s ideal of an *Hombre Nuevo* who ‘would become a stranger to the mercantile side of things, working for society, and not for profit’ (Dumont 1970, 52) is embodied in many of the producers with whom I worked. In several of the interviews I conducted, the pleasure (and personal choice) involved in giving to those in need was emphasized. Thus, one producer commented:

There are times when people don’t leave me in peace, asking for linden, for oregano but with my heart at ease, *being very humane*, I go and give it to them because that does not work against anyone. On the contrary, it helps. That is my *personal* feeling ... They have told us we could sell this [produce] but we do not. Why should we? Some elderly meet their needs this way ... We are not going to charge them.

That the choice of sharing in this context is not experienced as something prescribed by the government, but rather as something dictated by one’s humanity, once again underscores the extent to which people have incorporated the notion of food security as a universal right and the correctness of contributing towards the well-being of all. A producer explained:

I made that garden with the purpose of giving to neighbours what I could, free of charge ... My dream is everyone’s dream. If you ask my wife, she will tell you the same thing: the dream is to have a beautiful garden that everyone comments on it [for] it serves to meet everyone’s needs. Because remember

that this is all communitarian, which means it is for everyone ... and serving others is the most important thing you can do.

This producer's wife seconded his views, telling me: 'One of the greatest satisfactions one can have is to see the children [in the garden], ... to serve a person who comes with a specific need.' Having lived with some of these producers, I had the opportunity to confirm that such words were not mere rhetoric. While the practices of sharing and contributing to the community may be encouraged by material incentives, they appear also to be embedded in beliefs that have become hegemonic after over forty years of revolutionary government, as illustrated by the universalizing statements cited above.

## Conclusion

Space production in Cuba, as elsewhere, is a composite of social processes involving the physical, conceived, and lived dimensions of space. As I have shown, space is not just the stage where power struggles are played out but is often the medium, the means, and the end of such struggles. The case of the parcela is no exception and helps illustrate the complexity of contemporary Cuba and the structural changes it has undergone over the last decade.

As illustrated, in this case the 'privatization' of land (and agricultural production) cannot be too readily equated with the rise of 'individualistic' or 'capitalistic' purpose or attitudes. Whereas Special Period reforms in other sectors of the Cuban economy may indeed be leading to the re-construction of 'Capitalist Man,' government institutions and policies affecting small-scale urban agriculture appear to be keeping in check the individualistic behaviour associated with capitalist societies. As shown, the continuing dependence of producers on the state – particularly as pertains to access to the means of production, such as land – partly explains why, while showing definite signs of 'privatization' and segregation, the parcelas turn out to be closely linked to an ideal notion of community where sharing and cooperation are underscored as vital, even when individual needs and dimensions are acknowledged and practiced.

Significantly, my research also suggests that loyalty to communitarian values is not merely imposed by official authorities – although, as discussed, the state certainly employs 'disciplinary technologies' to this end. Rather, these values emerge as part of the ethos of ordinary citizens in Cuba. That these values even condition behaviour grounded in private, domestic spaces, furthest removed from the state apparatus, pays greater tribute to the achievements of the Cuban revolutionary project. In the current context, when much of the revolutionary optimism of the past has vanished and some Cubans complain that fellow citizens are becoming *metalizados* (money-obsessed), there still seem to be spaces where the ideal of the New Man (and Woman) survives and is routinely recreated in the practices of ordinary citizens.

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**Adriana Premat** has been conducting research in Cuba since 1997 on topics related to the political economy of food and the social production of space. Her paper ‘Between the Map and the Ground: Shifting Perspectives on Urban Agriculture in Havana, Cuba’ is to appear in *The Social, Political and Environmental Dimensions of Urban Agriculture*, 2004, Ottawa, International Development Research Centre (IDRC). <apremat@yorku.ca>

## Notes

1. Excerpt from interview (16 February 16 2001).
2. ‘Individualism’ refers to attitudes and behaviours that prioritize individual needs and desires over those of the larger community.
3. The fact that reforms in both Russia and China, which in some ways can be likened to Special Period changes in Cuba, have given rise to the atomization of society, a vicious kind of individualism (Holmstron and Smith 2000), and even the re-emergence of exploitative hierarchical social relations (Verdery 1996 ; Zhang 2001), only reinforces this reading of developments in Cuba.
4. The data upon which the analysis is based derives from ethnographic fieldwork in the city of Havana extending from 1999 to 2001. This research was facilitated by financial support received from the Agropolis Program (IDRC), as well as from York University in Canada. The fieldwork encompassed interviews with 30 small-scale urban farmers (19 men, 11 women), as well as 41 interviews (21 women and 20 men) with representatives of 27 pertinent official bodies, including agencies of the state and NGOs. Included were the Ministry of Agriculture, the Institute for Fundamental Research on Tropical Agriculture (INIFAT), the Agricultural Supplies Industry, the Agricultural Goods and Services Stores, the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (neighbourhood-based organization), the municipal assembly of Popular Power (government body), the Cuban Association for Animal Production (ACPA), the city’s Peasant Sector, the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR), the Provincial Urban Planning Office (DPPF), the Group for the Holistic Development of the Capital (GIDIC), Habitat Cuba, the Foundation of Nature and Humanity (FNH), the Cuban Council of Churches, the Ministry of the Food Industry, the Office of the City Historian, and the Cuban Botanical Association. The findings presented here also come from archival research involving newspaper articles on the subject published since 1989 and personal field notes based on participant observation at institutional meetings, urban agriculture sites, and producer’s homes and neighbourhoods. It should be noted that the data presented specifically in relation to the usufruct plots that constitute the subject of this paper come primarily from observations conducted in six gardens located in three different core municipalities of Havana, and from interviews with the twelve producers associated with them.
5. The support of the Cuban revolutionary government for agricultural cooperatives was minimal until the mid-1970s when peasant farmers were strongly encouraged to cooperatize. Even then, the cooperative forms encouraged were those, like the CPAs (Agricultural Production Cooperatives), that involved the pooling of land and resources and aimed towards collective as opposed to private responsibility (Kay 1987).
6. René Dumont (1970, 53-56, 66-68) discusses various obstacles faced by state farms, including the problem of gigantism, a shortage of adequately trained managerial staff, production planning errors derived from inexperience, and the lack of proper correlation between wages and worker productivity.
7. Before the 1959 revolution, imported food constituted a third of all the food consumed in Cuba (Benjamin, Collins, and Scott 1986, 9) and seventy percent of imported foodstuffs came from the United States (Boorstein 1968, 63).
8. Referring to the transferral of land from state farms to cooperatives, Richard Levin argues that this shift ‘was no abandonment of socialism but a reorganization within socialism to meet socialist goals better’ (Funes 2002, 278).
9. *Parcela* is the generic term for a plot of land and was not always used to refer to small agricultural usufruct plots in the city. At the beginning of the Special Period, these same spaces were known as *huertos populares* (popular gardens). I use the term *parcela* here following current usage by the

- Cuban Ministry of Agriculture.
10. In only one of the six usufruct-land gardens considered in this study were people other than the producers involved in the clearing of the land. This exception involved the mediation of the president of the local Committee for the Defence of the Revolution who happened to be one of the interested gardeners. In other cases, producers did mention having received assistance from local government and NGOs, particularly in the transportation of soil or debris, but emphasized that the bulk of the work was theirs alone.
  11. This confidence was underscored by experience. In five gardens where separate claims were made by other members of the community after the site had been cleared and brought under production, the right of the parcelero was re-asserted by local authorities. This, no doubt, boosted producers' confidence about the 'permanency' of their usufruct rights as is expressed in some of their practices, such as the planting of long-term crops and the addition of permanent fixtures to improve the use and appearance of the site.
  12. In the meantime, this connection is symbolically marked by a string of pop cans functioning as scare-crows which dangle from the producer's home terrace down to the garden lot below.
  13. In this respect, the parcelas may come close to what Rotenberg (1995) called 'places of control' where landscape is used to display the ideal relation of person to nature, something he associates particularly with domestic gardens. In Rotenberg's discussion these sites are to be distinguished from public gardens, which he describes as 'places of power' whose landscape enshrines the relationship of person to state. As shall be seen, in the case of the Cuban parcelas, which stand midway between the private and the public, such categorizations have little explanatory power.
  14. According to recent studies today, provisions through the state-subsidized ration in Cuba fill 55 per cent of the nutritional requirements of an individual (Díaz Vázquez 2000, 52).
  15. This distance was particularly great during the early years of the Special Period, when parcelas emerged throughout the city as a spontaneous response to the food crisis. Interestingly, it was at this historical juncture that Cuban scholars (Dilla, Fernández Soriano, and Castro Flores 1997; Fernández Soriano 1997, 1999; Fernández Soriano and Otazo Conde 1996) spoke of the association of these physical spaces with emerging new spaces for social action which significantly re-defined state-civil society relations in Cuba in a way that positively encouraged community participation in the socialist project.
  16. These words, pronounced by Adolfo Rodríguez at the First Annual Meeting of the Movement of Patios and Parcelas on 13 September 2001, allude to the great number of parcelas and patios counted as part of the movement. In Havana alone these numbered 62,200 – a number which represents a considerable increase over earlier statistics (Cruz Hernández and Sánchez Medina 2001, 40) that did not include as many productive private patios.
  17. The association of urban vegetable gardens with nationalistic sentiments during times of crisis is an interesting one which has been discussed by Bentley (1998) in reference to the United States and by Rotenberg (1999) in relation to Austria. The particular configuration this association takes in the Cuban context where, from the inception of revolutionary government, food has been tied to politics, deserves further attention.
  18. These stickers – and the movement in general, of course – also play a role in re-creating private garden sites, yet their impact is considerably different. Given their differing land tenure status, the government has no legal jurisdiction over production activities in patios (except in extreme cases of improper animal raising). Moreover, for the same reason, the government can exert less pressure regarding community use of the site. As a member of the Urban Agriculture Provincial delegation put it, 'These sites are dependent on voluntarism.' In another telling statement, the National President of the CDRs underscored 'persuasion' as key to working with these spaces from a government perspective.
  19. Here my data contradicts the findings of Rosendahl (1997) who, in her discussion of gift giving, stresses that such actions in Cuba involve only friends or acquaintances in reciprocal relations, and asserts that negative reciprocity results in rupture of the relationship.
  20. It is interesting to note that in a recent art competition conducted by the schools in the area, whenever this garden was depicted, the benches around the avocado tree were a central element of the composition, underlining the children's sensitivity to the community-building dimensions of the garden.
  21. A review of articles published on parcelas in official newspapers from 1989 to the present turned up only one case in which a non-communitarian attitude was underscored. This was a 1991 article

- from the official newspaper *Trabajadores* entitled 'My neighbourhood garden.' In it, one of the gardeners quoted explained that the parcela in question operated on 'the principle that he who does not till the land, does not eat' and that, once the crops were harvested, those who worked would decide if they would share the harvest with those who did not participate.
22. The label of 'urban agricultural professional' here refers to those people whose job involves the promotion of urban agriculture.
  23. In Cuba, official NGOs are legally linked to government institutions to which they must report and respond.
  24. Most crops grown in parcelas are usually obtained through the agricultural markets and their price is considerable. Condiments such as parsley, which abound in many parcelas, sell for two pesos a bunch, while plantains, also common, sell for one peso each. To give a sense of how profitable produce sales could be, if one of the gardeners interviewed were to sell just half of the 2400 plantains he harvests in a good year, he would make 1700 pesos (the equivalent of about four average monthly salaries).

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