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Cuba's Diasporic Children of the Revolution: Betwixt and Between Cosmopolitanism and the National Slot

We live in a cosmopolitan world where people move about. The good thing is to have a choice. That is what I always claim for Cuba, the capacity to decide. What makes me angry is that they [the Cuban government] take that right away from you ... Cuba has become very small in that respect. (Maida, architect, in her thirties, living in Madrid since 1996)¹

I was born in Cuba, but I don't feel I am a Cuban ... I feel I am fundamentally transnational. We can't keep talking about Cuban culture from this narrow territorial mark.

I think the important thing is the possibility we have of identifying with something that goes beyond the country we live in. Inevitably we come from a place and inevitably we carry a culture, but apart from that we are what we see ... it's this transglobal sense where culture and identities aren't borders, but rather road crossings (Alexis, conceptual artist, in his thirties, living in Barcelona since 1991)

Since the revolution in 1959, the Cuban government has pursued a body politic that conflates political project, nation and territory. It has maintained a rigorous control over exits from the island; those leaving Cuba have been excluded from the nation and been branded variously as *gusanos* (maggots), *escoria* (scum or dregs), *traidores* (traitors), *quedados* ('stay-abroads'), etc. depending on the context of their exit. They have not been allowed to return

¹ All names are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of my informants, unless otherwise indicated. All interviews were carried out in Spanish. All quotes originally in Spanish have been translated by the author unless otherwise indicated.

even to visit close family. Notwithstanding the efforts of the government, current estimates put the number of diasporic Cubans well over a million people. With an island population of approximately eleven million, this means that few Cuban families have been untouched by post-revolutionary emigration from the island. Although travel restrictions have eased since the 1990s and communication between Cubans on and off the island has become relatively easier, diasporic Cubans are severely constrained in the ways in which they can engage with their homeland. They are not allowed to invest in Cuba or to own property, nor do they have any political representation on the island. To further complicate the fraught relationship between the government and the diaspora, the enduring US embargo poses its own restrictions in particular for the approximately one million Cubans who live in the US. Spain by contrast has always maintained a relatively open policy towards its former colony. Yet this does not necessarily make it easier for the 50,000+ Cubans living in Spain to establish transnational social fields nor to develop and maintain border-crossing familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political relations such as those anthropologists have identified for other migrant groups (see e.g. Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Restrictive Spanish migration policies and the necessity of *papeles*, papers or documents, for anything from finding a job to signing a lease for a flat, and of course travelling, add up to effective restraints on border-crossing transnational practices. It is in this context of territorial nationalism, jealous body politic, antagonistic relations between the government and dominant exile groups, and practices of exclusion in host societies that cosmopolitan ideals exert a certain attraction to people like Maida and Alexis, as evident in the above quotes.

While cosmopolitanism used to be associated with Western, elite practices, it has in recent years been used to describe a wider array of practices by non-elite and non-Western groups (see e.g. Cheah and Robbins 1998; Clifford 1997b; Vertovec and Cohen 2002; Wardle 2000). This new literature explores how cosmopolitan practices and discourses relate to specific cultural contexts and particular experiences and trajectories; it invites us to think in terms of cosmopolitanisms in the plural (Clifford 1997b; Robbins 1998) and rejects the supposed opposition between cosmopolitans and locals (Beck 2002). Cosmopolitans after all, also have social ground under their feet; they also speak and act from a somewhere. This article is about the cosmopolitanism of Cuba's 'children of the revolution' living in Spain. They are those now young adults who were born in Cuba after the revolution and who were brought up to become the socialist *Hombre Nuevo* or New Man, envisioned by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara. As a generation, they benefited from investments in education, healthcare and

culture. They attended Cuba's new selective schools and many went on to study at universities in the Soviet Union and East European socialist countries. There was a world of socialist cosmopolitanism, which nonetheless simultaneously was infused with commitment to a national, territorially-based political project: an independent, socialist Cuba. As the opening quotes suggest, however, some of these New Men and New Women now embrace ideals of cosmopolitan individualism rather than the patriotic socialism they were inculcated as children. The article seeks to answer the question of what identity work cosmopolitan discourses do for these children of the revolution.

Although they themselves have turned away from the current government, their former privileged status in Cuba as a generation destined to fulfil and embody the ideals of the revolution continues to shape the way the Cuban state interacts with them. Some have consequently been branded as *traidores*, 'traitors', by the government and even by their own families. Although they see themselves as loyal to the original aims of social equality of the revolution, they nonetheless find it impossible and stifling to live in Cuba in the current political and cultural environment; having been excluded from the territory-based national project on the island they forsake nationalism. In diaspora they are foremost identified as Cubans and are expected to embody classed, racialised and gendered stereotypes of Cubanness; yet their compatriots who left Cuba in the 1960s and '70s denounce them as an *exilio de terciopelo*, a 'velvet exile', or as *conversos*, 'converts', and chastises them for their lack of patriotism. This generation of Cubans are in short caught in multi-layered paradoxes of disjuncture and rupture between here and there; then and now; belonging and not-belonging.

James Clifford has invited us to see experiences of cosmopolitanism as 'worldly, productive sites of crossing; complex, unfinished paths between local and global attachments' (Clifford 1998: 362). Such sites or 'road crossings' in Alexis' wording are inevitably exposed to specific historic forces. As I shall argue, the cultural tools the children of the revolution employ in their narratives of cosmopolitanism point back to revolutionary Cuba, while the narratives themselves transgress the national. I focus on two nodal points where contesting ideas and understandings of subjectivity, belonging and identity meet and crystallise. One is in meetings between diasporic children of the revolution and Cuban Embassy officials. These are unequal encounters between citizens and representatives of the state. Embassy officials label and categorise Cubans living abroad with important implications for those being labelled. Defected members of the Communist Party or former employees in strategically

important sectors are likely to be considered *traidores* or *desertores*, ‘traitors’ or ‘deserters’. As such they are subject to punitive measures, often a five-year ban on return visits to the island, even if close family members still reside there. Much is therefore at stake in meetings with these officials, but diasporics can do precious little to influence their outcomes. The other nodal point is constituted by public and private narratives of cosmopolitanism in which diasporic children of the revolution reclaim agency for themselves and tongue-in-cheek subvert officialdom. Although my focus here is on the children of the revolution, a brief comparison with an earlier generation of political exiles who settled in Spain in the 1960s and ’70s provides contrast and context for their narratives.

The article is based on seventeen months of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, which I undertook in 2001-2002. During this period I was based in Madrid, but also travelled to Barcelona and Cádiz in southern Spain, as well as Miami and Havana. The fieldwork focused on the relationship between memory and politics among Cubans in Spain.

Cuba’s *Hombre Nuevo*

That Cubans of Maida and Alexis’ generation are attracted to cosmopolitan ideals is both ironic and entirely logical. After the Cuban revolution in 1959, the government set out to create a new kind of political subject, the *Hombre Nuevo*, or New Man (note the gendering), who was to be a socialist *and* a patriot. For Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, Fidel Castro’s close collaborator, constructing the *Hombre Nuevo* was as important a part of constructing communism, as was the transformation of the material base of Cuban society (Guevara 1977: 7). The New Man was to sacrifice his personal life for the revolution; he would be cooperative, hardworking, morally pure and disinterested in personal gain; in short ‘untainted’ by the ‘original sin of capitalism’ (Guevara 1977: 14). Although women were seen as important to the revolutionary project, patriarchal beliefs and patronising attitudes towards them as political subjects dominated in the revolutionary government (Smith and Padula 1996). Implicitly the New Man was understood to be male and heterosexual and repression of homosexuality was soon initiated (Lumsden 1996).

Education was centrally important to bring about the New Man. Indeed, Guevara envisioned that ‘society as a whole should be converted into one giant school’ (Guevara 1977: 7). The government made primary education free and universal and soon created mixed-sex

boarding schools. Illustrative of the modernist zeal of the revolution and the desire to break with the tradition of religious education, the boarding schools prioritised scientific and technical skills. In 1961 all private schools were nationalised, signalling the closure of the private Catholic schools hitherto frequented by the middle and upper classes (Smith and Padula 1996: 85). In the new boarding schools, which were often located in the countryside, pupils would spend half the day studying, the other half doing manual, agricultural work. The schools were named after ideological or revolutionary heroes or battles in the revolutionary struggle; hence the ‘V.I. Lenin Vocation School’ or the ‘Battle of Jigüe School’. The boarding schools, some of which opened in former army barracks and guerrilla camps, put emphasis on austerity, discipline and obedience (Smith and Padula 1996: 83). They were designed to minimise the influence of parents’ pre-revolutionary values on the children and to discourage ‘individualism’ (Smith and Padula 1996: 87): The new Cubans were truly to be the children of the revolution. In the accounts of my informants it was clear that the new educational system did socialise Cuban children into a distinct generational outlook. Mirta, who eventually left Cuba for Spain when she was twenty-one in 1993, told me how she as an eight-year-old child of the revolution resisted her family’s plans to emigrate to the US in 1980:

My family talks to me about it ... they told me that there was a lot of ice cream. They tried to tempt me with material conditions, but of course I was a child at that moment, I had my friends and I said no. I said I wasn’t going to leave my *Patria*, my palm trees, and my Martí [patriotic hero of the independence struggle].

Equally, Pablo, like many of this generation spent most of his childhood in a boarding school. As an adult he felt that he did not really know his parents, who remained on the island while he had settled in Sweden after studying in the Soviet Union. The distance in his relationship with his parents was underlined by his belief that his parents and others of their generation were incapable of understanding what he called the ‘promiscuity’ of his boarding school. By this he implied not only sexual promiscuity, but also the disregard for pre-revolutionary racial and class hierarchies encouraged and enabled by the boarding schools. The restructuring of the educational system, the at times considerable physical distance from kin and family in boarding schools, and the bringing together of children from across the island in short combined to succeed in producing a new political subject who valued the *Patria* and the revolution above the family.

When Cuba became an ally of the Soviet Union, its highest achieving New Men and New Women were given the opportunity to study at universities of the socialist bloc countries

free of charge, supported by government maintenance grants. Between 1961 and 1982 more than fifty-six thousand Cubans studied in the Soviet Union alone. In the academic year 1984-1985 thirty-eight percent of them were women (Smith and Padula 1996: 90). However, with the breakdown of the socialist bloc the possibilities and outlook for this generation were radically changed. From participating in a transnational socialist world, Cuba's New Men and New Women found themselves living on a small, impoverished island where the anticipated opportunities for social mobility were rapidly contracting. Yet the perspectives gained, relationships entered into, and friendships forged in the boarding schools and during studies abroad, were to prove crucial in the future trajectories of these Cubans.

The Children of the Revolution in Spain

In the aftermath of the euphemistically named 'Special Period', i.e. the severe economic crisis which engulfed Cuba after the breakdown of the Soviet Bloc, the New Men and New Women have chosen in large numbers to desert the island. Their motivations for leaving have been a combination of problems of censorship and repression, disappointment with the policies of the government or direct opposition to its ideology, and personal or career frustrations, exacerbated by Cuba's economic crisis and isolation from international intellectual and artistic circuits after the breakdown of the socialist bloc. Maida, the architect living in Madrid, who I quoted at the beginning of the article, gave an illustrative account of when and why she decided to leave Cuba:

In 1994 ... the situation in the whole country was disastrous, economically speaking ... The moment in which I said to myself "I want to leave," was when I was standing on the beach in Guanabo [east of Havana] and I saw rafts and rafts of people leaving the country and the police were just standing there. Fidel [Castro] was saying that anyone who wanted to leave could leave. People were dying and nobody said anything. Absolutely nobody said anything at all.²

Honestly, I never decided *not* to go back, but I needed so badly to live somewhere else, I needed another place. I think it was also to do with being caught up in the maelstrom of my generation. Everyone wanted to leave and the ambience was getting ever more asphyxiating. My possibilities were suddenly very limited.

² Maida is referring to the *balseros* crisis of the summer of 1994 when tens of thousands of Cubans took to the sea in fragile, homemade rafts. An unknown number perished at sea (see Ackerman 1996).

The gradual opening of the island to global capitalism in the 1990s through tourism and joint ventures revitalised old links to Spain, the former colonial power, and invitations and grants from Spanish universities and cultural institutions began to offer a new connection to the outside world. In the early 2000s a number of Cuba's young intellectuals, artists and writers had accordingly settled in Spain, where apart from the benefits of a shared language, they also avoid the political stigma associated with living in the US. In Spain they are however confronted with a romance of Cuba in which imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1993) mixes with capitalist expediency to produce representations of Cuba as the lost and beloved colony fixed in time, newly available again through sexual and economic conquest by Spanish tourists and companies. While such expectations bespeak the history of conquest, colonialism and migration between Cuba and Spain, they are clearly incompatible with the ideal of the socialist New Man and are often a cause of frustration.

When the children of the revolution started settling in Spain, there was already an established community of Cuban immigrants, organised in the *Centro Cubano*, Cuban Centre, and through a Catholic prayer group. However, besides their origins in Cuba, the children of the revolution and the earlier group consisting of politically motivated exiles have little in common (in the remainder of this article, 'the exiles' will refer to this specific group of Cubans). Life in diaspora and memories of Cuba are so different for each of these two generations, that it is tempting to use different analytical frameworks and concepts for each of them. Whereas the exiles embody a diaspora infused with mourning, bitterness and loss of a beloved homeland, the children of the revolution playfully engage with postmodern discourses of cosmopolitanism. There is now a growing appreciation that diasporas often contain within them both territorializing, essentialist urges and celebrations of movement and hybridity (Ballinger 2003; Malkki 1995; Werbner 2000). These differences will also be recognisable to anyone familiar with recent scholarly writing about diaspora. On the one hand there is William Safran's conservative definition of diaspora concerned with definitions and boundary marking (1991), resonating with the quest for exilic purity of the first generation of Cuban diasporics. On the other hand, there is Appadurai and Breckenridge's celebration of the fluidity of diasporas (1989), which fits so well with the discourse of the children of the revolution. As James Clifford has noted there is a difference between 'diaspora theories, diasporic discourses, and distinct historical experiences of diaspora', yet some slippage between them is difficult to avoid, as theorising about diasporas is always embedded in particular histories, maps and experiences (1997a: 244-5). While I cannot address it in the

detail it merits, the ethnographic material in this article raises important questions about the relationship between theory building, scholarly writing and the lives and experiences of our informants, particularly in the case of groups whose identity work is informed by the very same discourses that inform scholarly writing (see also Beck 2002; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1994).

The exiles were not from the very upper echelons of pre-revolutionary Cuba who mostly settled in the US. They belonged rather to those sectors of the socially conservative, patriotically minded, Catholic middle classes whose small businesses were confiscated and who felt marginalised by the political restructuring of society. Many were originally Spanish migrants who settled in Cuba in large numbers in the early twentieth century, or their offspring. Although some of them left Cuba individually, many were able to emigrate in family groups. Consequently, few have close family left in Cuba and they therefore rely on second-hand accounts of life in their former homeland. In contrast to the exiles, most of the children of the revolution left Cuba individually, sometimes leaving partners or children behind. Most still have good friends and close family members in Cuba with whom they maintain contact. For the exiles there were no legislative restrictions on settling in Spain; some of them were still Spanish citizens. Many also had close kin ties or even family land and small properties in Spain. Unlike their counterparts in the US, however, the Cubans never became a force in politics; Franco did not allow it. Although many of the exiles had originally been sympathetic to the revolution, in exile they became fiercely opposed to the new government. The differences in politics between the exiles and the Children of the Revolution are neatly summed up by the fact that while the exiles left Castro's Cuba in the 1960s and '70s in favour of Franco's Spain, the children of the revolution often said to me that they would never have entertained the idea of settling in Spain prior to the transition to democracy in the mid-1970s.

The exiles organised themselves in the *Centro Cubano*, Cuban Centre, which, although now in decline, continues to serve as a social meeting place. It looks to Miami for political leadership and clout and is otherwise a relatively inward-looking place located on a first floor in the exclusive and bourgeois *Salamanca* area of Madrid. The *Centro's* volunteers offer advice to newly arrived Cubans two mornings a week, but there is otherwise little contact between these exiles and Cubans who have arrived subsequently. The *Centro* is decorated with patriotic insignia and symbols of pre-revolutionary Cuba. A large map of Miami showing Cuban dominated neighbourhoods fills an entire wall in the entrance hall testifying to the importance of Miami as a site of identification for the exiles. For them Miami

has become *el otro barrio*, ‘the other neighbourhood’, a place that embodies their memories of Cuba better than contemporary Havana, which in turn has become an almost entirely alien space to them. By contrast, the children of the revolution often claimed that they found Miami utterly uninteresting. They were more likely to ironically invoke official slogans or refer to significant relationships and experiences when they reminisced about ‘home’ than a national territory, such as that conjured up by the national insignia exhibited in the *Centro Cubano*. Consider for example this excerpt from an essay published in the Madrid-edited *Encuentro de la cultura cubana* by Iván de la Nuez, who lives in Barcelona:

It’s not that I have no memory of the years I lived in Havana, but I see no reason to give in to a fundamental nostalgia ... Among other things because my memory – vital, erotic, intellectual – has been extended and has strayed into an alleyway in Managua, an instructive encounter on the banks of the Mississippi, in certain nocturnal itineraries of Miami Beach, on a boat during a strange early morning in Acapulco, in almost all the bars of Barcelona and in other intimate but somewhat decadent bars in Madrid (1999: 126).

Similarly, when I asked an author in his late twenties living in Madrid how Cuba figures in his fiction, he said it was ‘coincidental’. He happened to have been born in Cuba and to have spent his childhood in the island, it was therefore only logical that Cuba should figure in his fiction. While the exiles relate emotionally to Cuba as a beloved and sacred homeland, claiming ‘coincidence’ is especially significant for what it omits to evoke, e.g. belonging and affection. Not for the children of the revolution the ‘crippling sorrow of estrangement’ as Said has described exile (2001: 173), instead merely ‘coincidence’.

As for settling in Spain, the exiles arrived with skills that were then in short supply, such as English language skills whereas the children of the revolution have had the misfortune of arriving at a time of mass-unemployment, and after the introduction of laws discriminating against foreign nationals in the labour market. Those who are undocumented survive through casual jobs hoping to gain residence permits and waiting to have their qualifications officially re-validated (a precondition for access to many professional jobs), both of which are protracted and uncertain processes. This situation is of course similar to that of other immigrant groups. However, many of the children of the revolution do succeed in finding professional jobs after some time, often through social networks forged at their boarding schools or at university. Such networks also provide emotional support, help with finding a place to live, sponsorship for residency applications, etc. Cuba’s erstwhile incorporation into the socialist world also turned out to have equipped some of the children of the revolution

with relevant language skills. Maida for example arrived in Spain in 1996 to join her then partner who was doing a doctorate at a Spanish university and who had left Cuba a short time earlier. She already had several good friends from Cuba in Madrid, who she had known since she was a child. Maida was born in Havana, but she spent most of her childhood in the Soviet Union because of her mother's studies. Maida continued her education in a Russian school in Havana and did not enter the Cuban educational system until she matriculated at the University of Havana. Unexpectedly, her knowledge of Russian helped her when she arrived in Madrid as she found work as a translator and tourist guide. She found the threat of downward social mobility particularly hard to cope with:

The first year was horrible; it was terrible ... in the end I didn't have to work in a bar like so many architect colleagues of mine, somehow or other I found a way to make a living doing other things and in the end with a huge effort I found a job as an architect ... For me the two first years were like a world collapsing ... I went for a very long time without finding a stable job, without possibilities of legalising my situation here. I was turned down for work and residence permits three times.

The networks of the children of the revolution have not resulted in organised political groups such as those set up by the exiles. The children of the revolution have however set up a number of Internet sites. One such is www.lalenin.com, organised for and by alumni of the *Escuela Vocacional V. I. Lenin*, the 'V. I. Lenin Vocational School'. Known as *la Lenin*, it is one of the selective boarding schools set up by the revolutionary government in the early 1970s. Located outside Havana, it has capacity for 4,500 children between the ages of 11 and 18 and specialises in science subjects. Pupils are admitted on the basis of academic merit. Lalenin.com functions like a yearbook and features photographs of the school buildings, depicts the school uniform, and solicits anecdotes about the school from former pupils. The website introduces itself in the following way:

The site is nourished by the collective contributions of everyone of us ... [T]he physical place of residence is ... not singular. We can think of the locale of this site as being located in the vault of memories inside us, in the nostalgias, the good moments we have lived, in friends and teachers. This space is gigantic and has enough room for all of us.³

While lalenin.com locates memories in a very specific time-space and draws on a shared frame of reference – often by ironically invoking revolutionary slogans – it does not territorialise or nationalise memories. Its sociality in cyberspace welcomes all regardless of

³ <http://66.34.237.194/lalenin/modules/news/index.php?storytopic=56>, consulted 21/11-2003.

place of residence. This avoidance of nationalist rhetoric is clearly not incidental. Yet what is particularly striking about the website is the seeming fondness that former alumni have for their old school and the way they identify with it whether they live in Cuba or elsewhere. *La Lenin* has become the locus for feelings of belonging that transcend the physical space of the school and the island of Cuba. Diasporic alumni of *la Lenin* have even held several reunions in Madrid and Miami since the 1990s.⁴ In a reportage from the most recent of these reunions, held in Miami in 2005, Zunilda Cantelar, herself an alumna writes: ‘It was truly an accomplishment to have reunited so many people, some of whom had travelled from abroad and from other states; recent graduates who like everyone else share this feeling of identity which makes us feel special’.⁵

In summary, the children of the revolution grew up in a transnational socialist world, which is no longer. They do not feel that they belong in Cuba, but nor do they belong in Spain or with their nostalgic-nationalist exile compatriots. Cosmopolitanism, with its rejection of exclusive claims to loyalty has in this situation become an attractive position to identify with. Through social and discursive practices the children of the revolution claim subjectivities and personhoods that transgress and subvert the nationally-defined slot they are otherwise assigned by the Cuban and Spanish states. However, as already alluded to, the children of the revolution are not free to live outside the national order of things, and the Cuban state continues to treat them as its ‘children’ however wayward.

Becoming and Feeling Like a ‘Traidor’

For Cubans living in Spain whether *sin papeles*, i.e. undocumented, or with residence permits, there is no escaping some interaction with the Cuban state if for nothing else to renew their passport, which may be their only valid form of identification. Even Cubans who have nationalised in Spain are only allowed to visit Cuba on Cuban passports, so they must also queue at the Cuban Consulate if they wish to visit.⁶ As a small space of Cuba on Spanish soil the Cuban Consulate in Madrid is ironically situated not far from the exiles’ *Centro Cubano*. The Consulate occupies a sixth floor apartment; a small travel agency is adjacent to it. On the two occasions I went to apply for a visa for myself, long queues were snaking down

⁴ Unfortunately I have not so far been able to attend any of these meetings.

⁵ <http://www.lalenin.com/modules/news/article.php?storyid=283> accessed 01/09-2006.

⁶ Only pre-1970 émigrés are exempted (Eckstein and Barberia 2002: 811).

the dimly lit corridors of the building. Most people in the queue were Cuban, although there were also several suit-clad Spanish men with their Cuban wives. The atmosphere was subdued and tense and nobody seemed to want to talk. Inside the waiting room people were sitting on the floor along the walls for lack of chairs. Every time somebody left the room, the receptionist shouted after them to close the door, while people on the outside were trying to get inside. Sometimes the receptionist would refuse to work until somebody closed the door. If anyone annoyed her, she would blank them out. A young mother with a toddler was turned down. When she protested that she had travelled 200 kilometres the receptionist said that everyone has a long way to come.

Scenes of waiting long hours in a queue and of bureaucratic patronising and disdain do not of course distinguish themselves from similar scenes in so many other consulates around the world. A consulate is a site of encounters between citizens and servants of the state and as such a site where ideas of belonging and nationality crystallise. In these encounters, consular officials fix trajectories and draw exclusive borders around the nation state. In effect they produce diasporic subjects. This is not the only site where diasporic subjects are produced, nor the only process worth considering, but an ethnography of encounters between consular officials and Cuban citizens would arguably be fascinating. Carrying out such fieldwork was however not possible. Instead I solicited narratives about consular encounters from the Cubans I knew in Madrid. What follows here is the account of Iván and Ana María of how two particular encounters with consular officials made them into different categories of persons with different possibilities for relating to Cuba.

In 1989, when all Cuban students abroad were called to Cuba, Iván was studying in the Soviet Union. Prior to his studies abroad he had been a pupil at a selective boarding school specialising in science. Unlike many of his peers who decided to defect at this time, Iván went back to Cuba as requested. He soon found himself struggling to survive in Havana during the harsh years of the ‘Special Period’. When his partner Ana María graduated as top of her from the University of Havana, but had no shoes to wear for her graduation ceremony, and when he himself had to do clerical work in the tourist sector to earn dollars on top of his full-time job as a researcher, Iván started to think that he had made a mistake in coming back. He worried that he might never have another chance to leave Cuba. Then, in 2001, he was invited to participate in a conference in Spain. After the conference, he was offered a short term teaching position at a Spanish university and obtained permission from his research centre in Cuba to stay a couple of months longer than planned. But this time he was not

planning to return. Iván moved into a flat in central Madrid with a friend of Ana María's from university and found work relatively fast through friends from his school and student days, benefiting from his scientific training to maintain and develop a diasporic Internet website. He started to remit money to his family including his sister and brother-in-law from the first months in Madrid. Meanwhile, Ana María, who was still in Havana applied for permission to participate in a conference in Spain. The waiting time was nerve wracking and at one point Iván's and Ana María's line-managers from work were in contact with each other discussing whether it would be wise to let Ana María leave since Iván was already abroad. Fortunately Ana María obtained her permission to attend the week-long conference and joined Iván in Madrid six months after they said goodbye to each other in Havana's José Martí airport. Ana María had never been outside of Cuba before. One of her brothers had studied abroad and another had been an internationalist in Nicaragua. However, as the only daughter, and the youngest, Ana María had not wanted to leave her parents behind in Cuba, although many of her friends from La Lenin did study abroad. Within a week of arriving in Madrid, she had to make up her mind about staying or going back. She decided to stay.

Iván managed to get a residence permit in Spain within a year of arriving when a general amnesty was given to undocumented migrants in 2002. Yet in the autumn of 2002, Iván's Cuban passport expired and he therefore had to go to the Cuban Consulate, which he had otherwise avoided. At the Consulate an official interviewed Iván about his reasons for not returning and about his life in Spain. Iván avoided any mention of his work for a diasporic journal. He had never told his parents about it either, although he thought that his father, who works for the Communist Party, might know anyway through party intelligence. The consular official asked Iván to sign a declaration in which he renounced the right to go back to Cuba again. At first he refused, saying that in fact he would like to go as soon as possible. Not much earlier, his grandfather had become poorly and had asked for Iván to come home. However, the official interviewing him indicated that he would have to sign if he wished to have his passport renewed. Iván gave in. He was not given a copy of 'his' statement. The same official then informed him that he had become a *traidor*, a 'traitor' to the revolution. Since the revolution had 'given him everything,' including his education, it was ungrateful of him to leave. Being a *traidor* carries a five-year ban as a minimum on visiting Cuba. When his grandfather died in the winter of 2002, Iván was therefore unable to attend the funeral.⁷

⁷ Regrettably, it has proved impossible to obtain any information on how many Cubans are officially considered *traidores* or what the gender distribution is.

At around the same time that Iván was told he had become a *traidor* in the eyes of the state, Ana María found out that she was considered a *migrante*, a migrant, a category that does not entail punitive measures or bans on visiting Cuba. She was therefore not asked to sign a declaration when she applied for a new passport. Ana María was however unable to visit Cuba as long as she was in Spain undocumented. In 2005, after several failed attempts and after living in Spain for four years without a residence permit, Ana María applied successfully for a permit and in February 2006 was able to visit her family and that of Iván in Cuba. Iván was still serving his five-year penalty for being a *traidor*. Her sponsor was Diego, a student friend of Iván's from his days in the Soviet Union who had never returned to Cuba.

For both Ana María and Iván migrating to Spain was enabled by their university studies and subsequent professional careers. Once in Spain they found accommodation and work through school and university friends. It was however the very same social capital which caused Iván to be labelled a *traidor*. Such labelling is however not the exclusive domain of the Cuban state. Like Ana María, Maida, who came to Madrid to study in 1996, had avoided the *traidor* label and had therefore been able to go to Havana to visit. Maida's mother lived in South America but the rest of her family continued to live in Cuba. Maida herself was a keen member of the Young Communists until shortly before leaving Cuba and her relatives remaining in Cuba continued to be dedicated communists and party members. Maida's visit had therefore been awkward:

I didn't relax for a single moment. There were all these family things. I had never said to them that I wanted to leave ... because I thought I might just go for a while and I never wrote a letter to them saying "Dear friends, I have decided never to come back ever again," you know, because I never saw it like that. I thought to go back the day Fidel [Castro] dies and so ... it was very hard and very sad ... I wanted to come back here [Madrid] at once, it was very strange.

I am a *quedada* ['stay-abroad'] and ... it was very uncomfortable for me to talk about. In fact it wasn't talked about at all. But [her sister-in-law] sent me a letter saying that she couldn't believe that I had become a *traidora*.

I have the feeling that she, in her most profound being, considers me a *traidora*, because I have committed treason to the *Patria* [giggles]. I stayed, I am a *quedada*, and many Cubans still think like this. They believe firmly that you have to stay in Cuba and fight ... This has nothing to do with the fact that their kids have clothes and food thanks to all the *traidores* who are not in Cuba.

However, what was perhaps most painful for Maida about her sister-in-law's accusation was that she also felt herself that she was a *traidora*: 'In my most profound being perhaps I also felt a bit inferior, a little bit like: Yes, I was a *traidora* and I didn't fulfil expectations'.

This commitment or complicity with the revolution – in spite of leaving – constitutes a difficult emotional conundrum. For both Iván and Maida, as for many others of the children of the revolution, parents or other close relatives remaining on the island are members of the party or sympathetic to the party line and do not understand their children's decision to leave, let alone agree with it. At the same time, many of these families today subsist on remittances from their children abroad. In many cases the younger generation feel incapable of explaining to their parents what they are doing in Spain and why they chose to leave the island. Some confess to feeling slightly guilty about having left and avoid telling their parents if they are involved in diasporic politics.

Counter Narratives of Cosmopolitanism

Maida, Iván and Ana María had all been loyal to the revolutionary project until the crisis in the 1990s, which struck just as they were reaching adulthood. The 'Special Period' suspended their aspirations and struck them off from the transnational social space, which they hitherto had been part of. Yet Maida preferred to think of her decision to leave Cuba as a private and personal issue, removed from politics:

I also feel that even if the system in Cuba had been different, I would still have left. Perhaps I wouldn't have left definitively, but *not* to see Paris, *not* live in Madrid? ... A friend of mine says it is because Cuba became too small for me after I finished my studies.

While her narrative of cosmopolitan self-realisation is clearly at odds with the ideal of the New Man, it is striking that she avoids political rhetoric to explain her decision to leave. Perhaps therefore Maida did not have any qualms about visiting Cuba. Alexis on the other hand was adamant that he would not go:

I already know that country ... I would go first to, I don't know, Japan, Australia, Samarkand, any place I don't know ... But apart from what it means in the sense of knowledge ... there is one thing I wouldn't like and that is to have to apply for a visa to my own country. I just don't feel like it, to have to pay the same political logic that repressed me.

There are differences between Alexis' political rejection of Cuban nationalism and Maida's project of personal realisation. These differences reflect gendered ways of experiencing and articulating relations to Cuba, which again reflect the different roles men and women were expected to fulfil in revolutionary Cuba. Because of the revolutionary emphasis on male subjectivity, women in effect have a wider conceptual space in which to act and define their subjectivities free of the politics that otherwise has colonised the private sphere. Yet for Maida cosmopolitanism had come at a price:

I think my personal tragedy with Cuba is that I cannot go back to live in Cuba. I know rationally that I will probably not go back to live in Cuba because I'm not interested, I'm interested in other things, but the fact that I cannot go back is painful, very painful, more than anything else related to Cuba, this hurts me.

By contrast, Alexis rejected any thought of missing Cuba:

I don't miss Cuba ... There were so many years towards the end of my time there during which I was so profoundly unhappy that my brain defends itself ... I really don't miss Cuba. Right now for instance I have come back from New York and Miami, and I miss Miami and New York. I don't miss Cuba.

This did not mean that Alexis discarded the idea of longing or missing people and places, but he was determined to overcome it. He did not want to succumb to nostalgia and longing:

If, on the one hand, tradition strengthens a sense of belonging, of identity, on the other hand, we need to structure a new seed that is not rooted in territory but rather in abstract conditions that will above all allow us mental sanity. Otherwise you will live permanently with one foot here and the other there. You have to be where you are and not convert yourself into what you might have lived or what you are going to live.

Like Alexis, other children of the revolution maintain an ambiguous relation to ideas of community and nation and are often keen to distance themselves from the idea of Cuba and Cubanness that has been used to discipline and exclude them. An intellectual and writer told me he finds it difficult to 'exercise as Cuban,' as a lawyer or a dentist practices his or her profession, hinting at the ambivalence that he and others feel toward national identification. Another way of avoiding the 'national slot' is by disclaiming Cubanness altogether. Thus, in a book of essays published in 2001, Iván de la Nuez, a writer living in Barcelona, defines himself as a post-Cuban and an ex-Communist, and a post-Communist and ex-Cuban (2001:

14). In an interview de la Nuez explained to me that he identified with these positions even before he physically left Cuba. Thereby he circumvents the *traidor* category and claims a subject position divorced from territorial moorings, much like some writers, who, while remaining in Cuba, define themselves as the *insilio*, or ‘insile’. Through his playful use of prefixes, de la Nuez distances himself both from the national and the revolutionary project, and simultaneously conflates the two: Cuba becomes the revolutionary project. This conflation is exactly what the earlier political exiles are working to undo. The ambivalence towards ‘Cuba’ and ‘Cubanness’ spills into a discourse of dislike of socialising too much with other Cubans. Said Alexis:

I practically don't hang out with Cubans here. I don't see Cubans, I don't work with Cubans. ... I wanted other stories, other realities. Sometimes when a group of Cubans get together, the only thing we do is talk about Cuba; there is this kind of desperate profusion and need to talk about what was.

Regardless of such statements however, in my experience, many children of the revolution socialised mostly with other Cubans who they already knew in Cuba. At any gathering of children of the revolution ‘the issue’ came up sooner or later. Be it a wedding, a birthday party, a night out, a dinner party. Often the stories revolved around the hardships of the Special Period; at other times the stories were about the agricultural work all school children must participate in, or the futility of the courses in ‘scientific Marxism’ that they all had to do at university regardless of what they were studying. In short, the children of the revolution partake in a sociality based on shared memories and particular generational experiences. Yet theirs is not a conventional exile or diaspora narrative of loss, but a creative and subversive, tongue-in-cheek way of distancing themselves from exclusive nationalisms.

Conclusion

Diasporas are created by exclusive nationalisms, but living in exile or diaspora is in itself no guarantee for a cosmopolitan outlook. Indeed, sometimes diasporics themselves create counter-nationalisms every bit as exclusive and inward looking as those that expelled them from their homeland. The dominant discourse of the Cuban exile is in this respect eerily similar to that of the Cuban government, its ideological opponent: both rely on essentialist understandings of nation and belonging to exclude and marginalise dissent. This article has

given an account of an identity project, which self-consciously avoids such territorial and national moorings. This is the project of a new generation who is carving out a cosmopolitan diasporic space, taking cosmopolitanism here to mean a particular mode of managing meaning, ‘an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast rather than uniformity’ (Hannerz 1990: 239). The erstwhile bearers of the future of socialist Cuba, now living in Spain, make use of cosmopolitan discourses to produce subjectivities and personhood free from the constraining labelling practices they have been subject to since they were young children. Life in Cuba has become ‘asphyxiating’ and the island itself ‘too small’. Upon arrival in Spain the increasingly closed-off labour market and expectations that place them in a national slot combine to make cosmopolitan ideals hold appeal and promise to the children of the revolution. This new cosmopolitanism is based on a prior experience of actually existing *socialist* cosmopolitanism and is in part a response to the contraction of the socialist world. It is also informed by Cuba’s colonial history and legacy of slavery and migration, and their encounter with Spain, the former metropole. In Alexis’ words, cosmopolitanism constitute ‘road crossings’ of culture and identity, where Cuba’s New Men and New Women can refashion themselves outside of the national slot. Many of them talked about the joy and excitement of living in a cosmopolitan city.

Some of the children of the revolution have been labelled as *traidores* by the government and are therefore unable to visit Cuba (although not all of them would like to go back anyhow). While the earlier political exiles are recalcitrant enemies of the Cuban government, to the extent that the two sides function as each other’s mirror image, the children of the revolution playfully subvert ideologies of exclusion through irony. At the same time, however, some of them admit to feelings of guilt or complicity with the revolution, which invested so many expectations in them. It is exactly such interior tensions and clashes of loyalties and rationalities, which make their perspectives uniquely cosmopolitan in the new sense of the word. Alexis for example draws on the *mestizaje* (literally ‘miscegenation’) idiom that the Cuban government uses in its discourse on Cuban national identity to invoke the island’s multicultural and multiracial heritage. However *mestizaje* for Alexis relates not to the nation, but to his personal family history, which has included French, Spanish, Chinese and African cultures and peoples. Similarly, Alexis invoked a poem by José Martí (1853-1895), Cuba’s polysemous and contested national hero, when he talked to me about his own trajectory: ‘Yo vengo de todas partes / Y hacia todas partes voy’ (I come from everywhere /

To everywhere I'm bound'⁸). Although Martí's peripatetic life, most of which he spent in exile, lends itself easily to Alexis' reading, his legacy is also eagerly claimed by both the government and exile groups alike for their national projects (see also Belnap and Fernández 1998). However, rather than using the *mestizaje* discourse and the poetic legacy of Martí to claim a space within the nation, Alexis sees these cultural traditions as routes and 'road crossings' as he explains in the opening quote of this article.

It is in response to categorization practices that threaten to freeze them that children of the revolution draw on ideals, which invoke a non-national sense of identity. But the cultural tools they use and the cultural forms they draw on are arguably of their time and space, i.e. late Special Period Cuba, where revolutionary politics has come face to face with neoliberal ideas of individual agency and freedom. Hence Maida's assertion that although she decided to leave Cuba because of a feeling of asphyxiation and the 'maelstrom' of her generation, she would perhaps have left anyway because 'Cuba became too small' for her.

The schooling and further studies that the children of the revolution received have provided them with useful qualifications, from software programming to Russian language skills. Perhaps more importantly, the educational institutions facilitated the creation of networks, which now provide not only emotional sustenance and social contacts, but are also helpful resources for navigating Spanish bureaucracy, finding work and successfully applying for residence permits. This article, then, has given an ethnographic example of how cosmopolitan practices and discourses may be constituted by using cultural tools that bespeak a particular national project; or how the national and the transnational, or cosmopolitan, are mutually implicated in, constitutive of, and entangled with each other, if not in a straightforward manner. I have also implied that gender is an important dimension in cosmopolitan experiences and practices. The state positions men and women differently vis-à-vis the national project and gives them different spaces for constructing subjectivities. In this case, young men have been seen as the principal subjects for reproducing the revolution and have therefore had particular expectations assigned to them. The Cuban case also illustrates the enduring power of states in channelling and restricting transnational practices and therefore also in shaping cosmopolitan discourses.

⁸ From Martí's 'Yo soy un hombre sincero' in *Versos Sencillos*, first published in 1892, here in E. Randall's translation (Martí 1982).

Ultimately, the social and discursive practices of the children of the revolution subvert the closed understanding of identity and nation of the government and claim through travelling – imaginary and actual – a cosmopolitan sociality. In Alexis' words:

The last thing we talk about is our countries. We transcend the discourse of the nation, even gender discourse. ... It's transpolitical, transcultural, transnational, transsexual and I'm fascinated with it, most of all because it gives me a territory of freedom – in quotation marks of course, freedom doesn't exist – but it is a territory in which we talk about what we have in common instead of that which separates us.

It seems then that the new men and new women are heralding a new Cuba after all. One in which belonging is not based on national and territorial exclusivity.

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