

From “Contrarrevolucionarios” to “Economic Migrants”: Portraits, Perspectives and Meanings of Cuban Emigration Phenomenon

Francesca Piffer

University of Milan-Bicocca

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Abstract

In the aftermath of 1959, Cuban citizens' social behaviour became subject to political interpretation and emigration practice was openly defined as a form of political dissent. Since then, the Cuban Government has maintained a rigorous control over exits from the island and emigrants have been excluded from the nation and been branded as “counterrevolutionary”. This resulted in strict politics of mobility control and in the creation of the juridical category of Emigrado [lit. emigrant], a status defining “counterrevolutionary” emigrants and which implied important restrictions of citizenship rights in Cuba. Nowadays, even if de facto it is a figure no longer considered a political traitor but an “economic migrant”, de jure the Emigrado is still political, because the normative and juridical corpus concerning migration has remained almost unchanged since 1961. Tracing the origin of these divergent interpretations of the Cuban migration - as political or economic act - to the different phases of the Revolution, this paper aims to analyse the polar perspective regarding Cuban exodus and discuss the meanings of this case as a migration phenomenon.

1. Introduction

Migration between Cuba and US originated in the colonial past, but it's only when the Revolution came to power that it could be defined as a mass migration phenomenon¹. If before the Revolution, Cuban mobility to Florida can be read as a migratory process between colonised and colonizer country, even if the United States have “always thrown themselves outside casting off all traditional colonialism fatter locks”² (Del Lago, 2005), after the *triumfo de la Revolución* [lit. Revolution triumph], Socialism and Cold War are the framework that define symbolic and material relations between the two countries, fundamental elements in order to understand Cuban migration phenomenon and its diverse meanings.

Along this migratory root, which is a polysemous space, not only because it is a political frontier but also for its worth of real war front (Del Lago, 2005) the US administration represented the Cuban migratory flux as a model of political dissent, using it as a symbolic and material weapon in the discourse on “totalitarianism” of communist system (Verdery, 1996: 8). Spurred by the geopolitical conflict between “Communism” and “free world”, the US Government has provided with unparalleled material assistance those who, emigrated as *traidores* [lit. traitors], were received as *golden exile* (Aguirre, 2006).

The restrictive measures imposed by Cuban Government on emigration in the aftermath of the Revolution must be considered on the same symbolic and material level³. Cuban Revolution was a project of social justice which aimed to overcome racial discrimination, educational and health inequalities; it was a political asset which radicalised independentism and national sovereignty after centuries of colonialism, and centered on *clases populares*⁴ [lit. popular class] interests. Within a political project involving any aspects of social life and establishing participation of the building

¹ From 1959 Cubans in the US took advantage of the particular immigration politics adopted by the US administration towards those people leaving “Communist Bloc” countries and this is why most of Cubans living abroad settled in the US. According to International Migration Organization (OIM) data, 1 million and 300,000 settled Cubans in the United States of America. Most of them left Cuba after the political, economic and social changes carried out by the Revolution (Garcia, in O'Reilly Herrera, 2007: 75).

² Translation of orig.: “sempre proiettati all'esterno senza le pastoie del colonialismo tradizionale” (Del Lago, 2005).

³ In 1976 Ley de Migracion n°1312 [lit. migration bill] established a permission system to regulate exit and entrance mobility practice of Cubans. The permissions are granted by Ministry of the Interior, which reserves the right to deny them (Reglamento Ley de Migración, <http://pdc.cuba.org/derechos-humanos/leyes-cubanas-e-internacionales/447-reglamento-de-la-ley-de-migracion-de-la-republica-de-cuba.html>).

⁴ This term comes from the distinction used in Cuba before 1959 between *clases economica / clases populares*, where the first was used for landowners and the rich people involved in the mainstream of Cuban economy, while the second was used for the working class (Perez-Stable, 1999).

of the Revolution as the main criterion of political and social inclusion, emigration was depicted as a practice of radical rejection of the new shared values and considered a counterrevolutionary act. People emigrating were represented in Fidel Castro's public speeches as *gusanos* [lit. worms] and submitted to governmental practices in order to build their "otherness", the most important of which was the creation of the juridical category of *Emigrado* [lit. emigrated], a category created for all those leaving Cuba after Fidel Castro proclamation of the Revolution socialist path in 1961.

Today, the perception of emigrant as social figure has changed towards an economic interpretation but the legal framework defining emigration practice is almost unchanged because *Emigrado* is a still existing category in the legal framework concerning Cubans mobility practices.

Based on my ethnographic research among the meanings of Cuban migrants mobility paths in Milan, this paper aims to discuss the evolution of Cuban migration representation from counterrevolutionary practice to economic act, assuming this shift as coming from different politics of the gaze, pursued by the different actors involved in it.

2. The "*Emigrado*": the *contrarrevolucionario* Cuban emigrant

The category of *Emigrado* is not just an element belonging to common lexical or a figure of the social sphere, but it is a civil and juridical status which entails severe restrictions in the full enjoyment of citizenship rights. These restrictions are based on *Ley no. 989, de 5 de diciembre de 1961* [lit. law n° 989, 5 December 1961], a law issued after the huge migratory flux in the two first years of the Revolution which marks a distinction in Cuban citizenship between *Residentes* and *Emigrados*; a juridical distinction based on the political one between *revolucionarios* (i.e. those who embrace Revolution values and stay in Cuba) and *contrarrevolucionarios* (i.e. those emigrating to US as political exiles) (Aguirre, 2006; Pedraza-Bailey, 1985).

The *Ley no. 989* is based on the principle of residence - resulting from *ius soli*⁵ adopted by Cuba - which is the criterion through which those who fully enjoy citizenship rights are differentiated from those who are partially deprived of them.

The *Ley no. 989* provides that the citizen who leaves the country unlawfully or who doesn't come back within 11 months must be considered an *Emigrado* and be deprived of permanent residence rights in Cuba. Under article 1, the law says that exit and entrance permits are given by the *Ministerio del Interior* [lit. Ministry of the Internal Affairs] and that the citizen not coming back within this time limit will be considered a definitive emigrant. In that case, the only possibility of coming back for the *Emigrado* will be submitted to the obtaining of an entrance permit as temporary visitor (granted for 30 days).

Besides the impossibility of coming back in order to settle in Cuba permanently, the *Emigrado* is prevented from the enjoyment of others citizenship rights. Article 2 declares that all his immovable and movable properties, every kind of rights and shares will be nationalized by confiscation in favour of the Cuban State⁶. At last, it is established that the *Emigrado* can't exercise his political and civil rights, his paternal authority, inherit properties and obtain food aids (*libreta*) from the State. Italian law considers *Emigrado* status comparable to a stateless person (an *apolide*) since both of them can't exercise all rights connected with citizenship, beyond the criterion it is based on (*ius soli* o *ius sanguinis*).

Originated from the very first beginnings of the Revolution, this law passed through the evolution of emigration as social practice without alteration. It is possible to say that in spite of the decreasing social stigmatization of *Emigrados*, a parallel evolution in their juridical status hasn't taken place (Pedraza, 1985; 2007).

In my fieldwork research in Milan, *Emigrados* I interviewed judged this juridical mismatch as a deep contradiction. In order to understand how it was determined and in which terms this mismatch represents a contradiction, we need to consider the emigration history and the emigrant figure representations in the social background along the Revolution.

3. Cuban emigrant's portraits: from "political" to "economic" emigration

For the political and cultural reasons outlined above (Socialism and Cold war), Cuban Government kept a severe control on mobility over the national territory since 1959 and those who moved from Cuba to the United States have been cut off from the nation and they have been called in different ways such as *gusanos* [lit. worms], *escoria* [lit. scum], *traidores* [lit. traitors], *comunidad* [lit. community] or *quedados* [lit. those left out], according to the historical and political phases of the Revolution within emigration had place (Mette, 2006: 302).

⁵ Lying on *ius soli* principle, Cuba citizenship is assigned to those born on the territory of the State, beyond their parents' nationality.

⁶ Bertucci, Moretti, 2008 (<http://immigrazione.aduc.it>).

Through the analysis of these portraits we can discuss Cuban emigration and the emigrant moral figure evolution in the Revolution context. The aim of considering the Cuban emigrant as moral figure comes from anthropologist Aiwa Ong's research (2003) on the construction of moral deviance of Cambodian refugees in the United States⁷. In relation to the specificity of the Cuban cultural context - depending on what the Revolution considers positive or deviant moral models - I analyse the changing representations of emigrant as moral figure along the Revolution in order to highlight that emigration practice meanings – from political act to economic act – result from different perspectives and politics of the gaze.

The political project of the Revolution pursued a body politic that conflated nationalism, territory and socialism in order to build a new society model and "*los que se van*" [lit. those who leave] (Fidel Castro, 27/7/1961) to the United States or somewhere else, were labelled *vendepatria* [lit. selling homeland], *latifondista* [lit. landholder], *parasitos* [lit. parasites] or *gusanos* [lit. worms], the most famous and used epithet.

In the first twenty years of Revolution, emigration was seen in a political way and stigmatized as a *contrarevolucionario* [lit. counterrevolutionary] act; emigrants themselves defined their choice as a political exile (Aguirre, 2006; Pedraza-Bailey, 1985). In that phase, the representation of emigrants as *gusanos* in the Government's public speeches encountered high social consensus and not only emigrating was a moral deviance act but also keeping relation with relatives abroad was a practice subjected to strong forms of social exclusion.

In the '80s, a brief period of political dialogue between Cuba and the United States led to the rebuilding of family ties and to an increasing circulation of commodities and consumer goods brought by emigrants to those living in Cuba⁸. At all once, the counterrevolutionary *gusanos* of yesterday, respectfully became *personas representativas de la Comunidad Cubana en el exterior* [lit. members of the Cuban community abroad] (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985: 21) and in 1979, for the first time after many years of absence, over 100,00 Cubans returned to Cuba.

The return visits of *Emigrados* spread objects and images in the social imaginary which fostered an afterthought of emigration practice from anti-social act to improvement in living conditions and economical advantage. Familial reunifications and *Emigrados* visits consequences, conjointly to economic recession started in 1976, were immediate and relevant. In April 1980, after the Peruvian Embassy mass occupation by asylum seekers, the Government announced the possibility of emigrating from Mariel harbour, north of Havana, and 125,000 *marielitos*⁹ sailed for the United States; "these antisocial elements, this 'scum', as the Government called them, represented a large public slap in the face: no longer the immigrants of the transition from capitalism to communism, but of communism itself" (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985: 22).

These events lead to a gradual failing of a homogeneous agreement on emigrant moral deviance and on emigration as antisocial practice among population. Furthermore it's important to highlight how this phase saw emigration meanings sliding from a public to a more private dimension. In that phase, Cold War and *Fidel-patria-Revolución* (Perez-Stable: 1999) logic ruled daily life and prevailed over family ties.

When socialist field fell down and the '90s economic crisis spread, a new phase of pragmatism – which subordinated the Revolution political project to the necessity of facing daily economic difficulties – took place. These dynamics favoured a drastic change of emigration meanings in the social sphere, deeply contrasting the one sustained by the Government.

The hard reality of the *periodo especial* determined a shift of emigration interpretation from political practice to economic practice and of emigrant representation from negative moral figure to positive one; as Teresita Sanchez sarcastically stated – a woman interviewed by the sociologist Silvia Pedraza-Bailey – for Cubans the *gusanos* had transformed into *mariposas* [lit. butterflies] (Pedraza-Bailey, 2007: 152).

The comprehension of the economic possibilities deriving from the act of emigrating started to turn into a strong counterpoint vision not only towards the Government's negative approach to emigration, but also towards the

⁷ Making use of notions coming from Michel Foucault's thought in the analysis of Cambodian refugees reception practices and politics in the United States, Aiwa Ong argues that moral deviance is used as technology of subject production in relation to the American racist meanings of racial bipolar view for which whites citizens are considered as positive moral models (Ong, 2003).

⁸ The stigmatization of emigrants as *gusanos* decreased with Jimmy Carter election as Us President and the re-establishing of regular communication between the two countries. Above all, an unexpected meeting between Fidel Castro and representatives of Cubans in Miami took place in Havana in 1987. This meeting amounted in the possibility for emigrants to visit Cuba and in a familial reunification politic which permitted Cuban citizen to reach their relatives settled in the United States.

⁹ The so called *marielitos* (the negative term with which they were labelled by American mass media, didn't were received as escaping from the "Communist Bloc" and they were denied of the refugee status. For them the Us administration created the category of entrant: status pending, a political compromise between the image of communist refugee host country and the need of regulate illegal immigration (Wasem, 2009).

stigmatization of having relations with the *Emigrados*. Isa – a woman I met in Milan and who had migrated to Italy in 1996 - told me that keeping in touch with a relative settled in Miami didn't mean to be "blemished" but to be "privileged" (Isa, 10 November 2011) in facing daily economic shortages.

If it is possible to trace the origin of this evolution in the '80s and in the events of Mariel as well as in the coming back of Cuban exiles from the United States, it's with the *periodo especial* and the *balseros* crisis that this dynamic emerges definitely.

Balseros crisis¹⁰ - referring those who try to sail through the Florida Strait to go to the United States with a *balsa* [lit. raft] – raised its peak in August 1994 when more than 22,000 Cubans landed on American coasts.

A documentary about this migratory episode is *Balseros* (2002), a film by two Spanish film makers, Carlos Bosch and Josep Maria Domènech. It tells the stories of life, hopes and travel of 7 Cubans trying to reach the United States coasts, just at the peak of the crisis. Besides the different migratory and reception politics within these emigrants move and the harshness of this experience of mobility - swinging time and again between frustration and hope, imaginary and reality - *Balseros* unveils a Revolution phase in which emigration ended up being considered a counterrevolutionary act in the social fabric. One the most revealing scenes is caught during the departure of a young Cuban named Oscar del Valle; it is described through the words of his sister, Lirio, a young and beautiful dancer. Lirio is astonished by the crowd following Oscar to say goodbye to him; "it seemed" she says "that he was a celebrity going away"¹¹. The image of "celebrity", used by Lirio to indicate the huge interest generated by his brother's departure, is in conflict with the idea of emigration as a political betrayal. Even if in *Balseros* it is still possible to see public demonstrations of consent towards the Government stigmatization discourses of emigrants, emigration is increasingly seen also as a way to succeeding and gaining better life conditions.

Analysing the measures adopted by the Cuban Government in this period is a way to highlight how relevant is the economic element is in the semantic redefinition of emigration meanings. Cuban Government carried out some relaxation in the migratory restrictions adopted till '90s and started to represent emigration in the public speeches as an economic act.

The crisis of '90s - after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 - pushed the Cuban leadership to launch reforms motivated by economical pragmatism.

The most important reforms for the redefinition of emigration practice and relations with *Emigrados* were the introduction of the double currency system, the promotion of international tourism in Cuba and the development of a legal system to reap remittances from emigrants abroad. When the remittances system was legalized in 1993 in order to compensate the economic national situation, again those who had a family member abroad were privileged in facing daily shortages. Playing sarcastically at semantics, the sociologist Ted Henken says that *Emigrados* shifted from being *traidores* [lit. traitors] to *trae-dolares* [lit. bring-money]. (Henken, 2006: 3), where these two terms concern a transition from a politicized vision of emigration practice to an economic one; they are not considered to be against Revolution and Government anymore.

Another relevant element for discussion about emigration meanings is the *Programa especial de emigracion cubana* [lit. Cuban emigration special program], an agreement in which the United States guarantees 20,000 immigration visas a year to Cubans citizens. In Cuba this program was known among people as *el bombo* [lit. dicebox] and it was a sort of visa lottery that every two years allowed thousands Cubans to settle in the United States, a unique immigration system in the world (Henken, 2006: 144). *El bombo* brought more than 200,000 Cubans to the United States legally. The Cuban Government stopped it in 1998. Henken says that these numbers could appear remarkable but they are not to be seen as Cuba were a different case from other Latin American countries. If a visa lottery were implemented for Mexico or Colombia we could observe a greater immigration phenomenon (Henken, 2006: 146). Besides the existence of clear as well as ambiguous migratory politics adopted towards Cuban immigrants by both countries, what *el bombo* shows us lies in the failure of the politicization of emigration as *counterrevolutionary* act, in favour of its representation as economic practice in the Cuban Government discourse too.

From this moment, those who had left Cuba without respecting the migratory rules, are still categorized as *Emigrados* and a capital "E" marks their passports, but in the social sphere, being an *Emigrado* has lost definitely its negative political connotation as counterrevolutionary figure. When a person doesn't come back to Cuba without the relative's permission of residence abroad (*Permiso de residencia en el exterior*), it is called that "*se ha quedado*" [lit. stay-

¹⁰ Even if being a *balsero* had always been a way to exit from Cuba, we can recognize two main moments: the first one, since 1959 to 1974, when more than 16,000 *balseros* landed on American coasts, and the second one, occurring between 1989 and 1994, when they were more than 45,000.

¹¹ Translation of orig. "parecia que se iba una personalidad" (Lirio del Valle, *Balseros*, 2002).

abroad]. The use of verb *quedarse* [lit. stay], places the emphasise on the choice of not coming back and of staying abroad, expressing a different concept of exclusion - mobility is thought not in political terms but just in spatial terms. Not more *con Cuba o contra Cuba* [lit. with Cuba or against Cuba], as Fidel Castro said many times in his public speeches, but simply *outside* Cuba. Only *quedados* abroad for working mission, such as doctors or athletes, are still judged in a negative way, both politically and socially.

Nowadays, being an *Emigrado*, resulting from the act of *quedarse* or from illegal exit (i.e. without any permission from Cuban State) isn't depicted in a morally negative way in the social sphere, neither in a politicized way in the Government members' public speeches, but for those who are labelled with this juridical category it constitutes a strong rent in their several belongings and a deep contradictory condition in relation to the "economic" character of contemporary Cubans emigration practice.

4. "Economic migrants": the contemporary perspective of Cuban migration

During my fieldwork in Milan among Cuban migrants I met Esteban, a man who was born in Holguin (south east of Cuba) in 1975 and *quedado* with his wife in 2004 in Rome. Esteban told me what being an *Emigrado* has meant to him. He paradoxically felt a stranger in his own country, a stranger in regard to his own national, cultural and emotional belonging¹². He kept on saying how this juridical status was unjust for it derived from a political past that wasn't part of his daily life. Esteban claimed a lot of possible motivations for contemporary Cubans' migration practice, against the political one expressed by Cuban exiles in the early time of the Revolution. Besides love affairs and desire of travelling abroad, Esteban recognized how the first motivation for most of emigrants – as for himself - was an economic one.

It's interesting to highlight that, on one side Esteban seemed to share the perspective that Government adopted on emigration after the *periodo especial*, which represented it as an economic phenomenon and not a counterrevolutionary one, while on the other side he used this dichotomous vision as a starting point in order to argue contradictoriness of *Emigrado* as still existing category in the legal migratory framework. Just because his emigration was not conceived as a political exile, his *Emigrado* condition didn't reflect and respect him as "economic" migrant. He didn't perceive himself as a traitor of the Revolution but the legal framework through which his mobility practice had been defined by the Cuban State was the same as the political exiles and this was a diffused reasoning among both *Emigrados* and legal migrants I met in Milan.

The dichotomous perspective that assumes Cuban migration phenomenon as composed of two distinct phases – those of political exiles and those of economic migrants - concerns not only the Cuban Government and the discourses of Cubans citizens but also scholar's interpretations.

In their study about Cuban immigrants in the United States, the sociologists Nelson Amaro and Alejandro Portes (1972) judged that over time the emigration from Cuba ceased to be a political act and became an economic act. If *de jure* in 1972 Cuban immigrants were still considered political immigrants, they affirmed that *de facto* tended to resemble "the classic immigrants", coming from a lower social class than the one of political exiles, and seeking greater economic opportunities than those provided in a socialist society (Amaro, Portes, 1972: 13). In 1985 the sociologist Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, taking into account Amaro and Portes' study, judged this distinction "the same that for twenty years have framed the debate over the meaning of the Cuban migration" (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985: 29). Pedraza-Bailey affirmed that interpretations of the meaning of this exodus have always polarized into the only two positions that have led discourse on Cuba, but this kind of distinction is a result of the ideological filters used while approaching it:

at one pole, the immigrants, were said to be a manifestation of the loss of legitimacy of the Cuban revolution, discrediting it. At the other pole, the immigrants were said to be propelled by the scarcity of consumer goods (See, Fernandez, 1982). Hence, at one pole the immigrants are political refugees; at the other, economic refugees. [...] Without doubt, the polar answers depend on the different ideological convictions that filter reality. But, in addition, the question is poor. For all societies are simultaneously and inextricably political and economic. [...] But when people grow politically disaffected, even for underlying economic reasons, they can no longer be disposed of as simply economic refugees. Cuba's refugees are and have always been, fundamentally political (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985: 29-30).

After assuming Cuban migration as a fundamentally political phenomenon for the reasons outlined, Pedraza-Bailey addressed the discussion on the role of dissent in society, and recognised it as the main meaning of this case study.

¹² To describe their *Emigrado* condition, other migrants used the image of "the tourist"; like a tourist the *Emigrado* wasn't allowed to stay in Cuba more than 30 days and own real properties or enjoy other residence rights (such as *libreta*).

This debate shows how this polar perspective had been always characterizing the interpretations of Cuban migration since the beginning of the Revolution political process, in the Cuban context as in the scholars' debate.

In accordance with Pedraza-Bailey, I assume this perspective as depending on the politics of the gaze and ideological filters used, a product - as I tried to show through the analysis of emigrant figure portraits - of the different political and cultural phases that framed the Cuban migration.

Furthermore, for Pedraza-Bailey Cuban migration has always been fundamentally political because the economic perspective on emigration can be seen in the end lying in a political disaffection (Pedraza-Bailey 1985: 30). This idea can be connected with Abdelmalek Sayad's thought (2004) about Algerian migratory case and his sociology of immigration. Sayad's reflections constitute an outstanding critic towards those kinds of perspectives that reduce immigration to its economic or demographic dimension. This kind of interpretation fails to consider the political dimension of migration practice and it concerns both the host society as the society of origin. I think that this was the perspective assumed on emigration practice by the Cuban Government after the *periodo especial* but - as Sayad argued - emigrating is a political act, for it is a breaking with a territory, and so with a population, and with a social, economic, politic and moral order (Sayad, 1999 trad. it. 2002: 123). In this sense, although *peculiar* (Geertz, 1973 trad. it. 1998: 16) in its dynamics, I consider the Cuban migration as political as any other migration case, hence, a *normal* (Geertz, 1973 trad. it. 1998: 16) political practice as any other migratory act.

In the end, if Pedraza-Bailey addressed the question about the dichotomous perspective on emigration to the more interesting analytical path of the role of dissent in society, my aim is, instead, of going deeper into the analysis of the *peculiar* (Geertz, 1973 trad. it. 1998: 16) elements that characterize the act of emigrating from Cuba and that show us how and to which extent the act of emigrating from Cuba is a political act and not simply economic. The reasoning emerged primarily from the question of remittances, raised as a fundamental question for most of the Cubans I interviewed during my fieldwork.

The migrants I met in Milan complained about the Cuban State remittance system because sending cash to relatives in Cuba or bringing there goods (for example clothes or copybooks for students) and technologies are very expensive practices¹³. Furthermore, for those who are excluded from enjoying their citizenship rights, such as Esteban, sending remittances to help his relatives in Cuba was perceived as greater frustration. As Esteban, Isa, who emigrated legally as *residentes en el exterior*, told me she was disappointed by the way in which the Cuban Government had structured the system of remittances. She claimed a different kind of participation in respect to that proposed by the Government, strictly based on residence and physical presence on the national territory and she judged that the remittances system didn't facilitate it. What she aimed for was to help her family by sending goods and cash from abroad, which meant not abandoning her country but participating in the construction of the society in a different way. But this "different participation" is a practice that redefines from below participation to the Cuban society and here - I argue - lies one of the meanings of emigration practice from Cuba. With their remittance practices emigrants subordinate national belonging to the familial one, inverting the values order with which they were educated as "children of the Revolution" (Mette, 2006) and as *Hombre Nuevo* [lit. new man] (Ernesto Guevara, 1977) in order to embrace patriotic socialism instead of capitalist individualism (Mette, 2006: 304). The remittances can be seen as economical practices that amount in an antithetical participation to society in relation to that pushed forward by the Revolution and resulting in a form of change from below which is - in the end - political. The remittances question shows us the peculiar meaning of emigration practice from Cuba and the normal political dimension of the act of emigrating, making evident that approaching migration - not only Cuban - as divided between political and economic dimension is a product of a specific politic of the gaze rather than a character of this phenomenon itself.

5. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to discuss Cuban migration interpretations - from counterrevolutionary act to economic practice - as depending on a politic of the gaze that originates in the changing phases of the Revolution. I tried to make evident that the depiction of the emigrant as negative moral figure (*contrarevolucionario*) within the cultural and political asset established by the Revolution had led to its institution as juridical figure (as *Emigrado*) in the legal framework. I argued

¹³ Coming back to Cuba, a citizen can bring a luggage up to 30 kilos; every exceeding kilo is expected to pay a custom tariff of 20 CUC (10 euro), but there is also the case that the luggage is confiscated.

how this normative framework had been fundamentally unchanged in spite of a progressive moral emigrant figure evolution (as economic migrant) in the social sphere from '80s, and in the Government discourse from *periodo especial*.

Emigrado is a still existing category of the Cuban migratory legal framework and its application to contemporary mobility practices is lived by migrants as a deep contradiction. If today migration isn't seen as a political act anymore, the existence of *Emigrado* status doesn't reflect the "economic character" of the practices of migrants.

I tried to show how this dichotomous perspective on emigration doesn't concern Cuban Government and Cubans citizens only, but also scholars' interpretations.

In their study about Cubans in the United States, Portes and Amaro (1972) affirm that, if *de jure* in 1972 Cuban immigrants were still considered political immigrants, they judged that *de facto* tended to resemble "the classic immigrants" seeking greater economic opportunities than those provided in a socialist society (Amaro, Portes, 1972: 13). I agreed with the idea of partial evolution of emigration practice – in the moral and social dimension and not in the legal framework - but not with the perspective which considers Cuban migration divided into political and economic practices. Instead, adopting the anthropologist Abdelmalek Sayad's perspective on migration and according to sociologist Silvia Pedraza-Bailey's reflections on Cuban migration, I think that Cuban migration is a fundamentally political act (Pedraza, 1985), because emigrating is always a breaking with a social, moral, economic and political order (Sayad, 1999 trad. it 2002: 123). In this sense, even in its *peculiarity* (Geertz, 1973 trad. it. 1998: 16), Cuban emigration is a political practice, as any other migration act. Finally, taking into account the question of remittances raised by migrants in my fieldwork in Milan, I tried to deepen the political peculiar meanings of Cuban mobility practices and show why a dichotomous perspective - between a political and economical dimension - ought not be taken into account only for Cuban migration, but for all other migration cases.

On 14th January 2013 a new migratory regulation was issued, replacing the *Ley de Migración de 20 septiembre de 1976* [lit. migratory bill of 20th September 1976]. It constituted a deep change for Cubans mobility paths. The permissions system was abolished and the temporary limit to stay abroad was extended from 11 months to 24 and other meaningful changes were introduced. What concern our discussion is that *Emigrado* status still remains a juridical figure of the legal framework, even if *Ley no. 989 de 5 diciembre de 1961* was derogated. Those who were *Emigrados* before this date, keep on being categorized with this status and they are allowed to visit Cuba for 3 months, instead on 30 days.

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