

**Representing Cubanness: Time, Space and Cultural  
Identity in the Work of Leonardo Padura Fuentes**

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

September 2014

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Acknowledgements

It would not have been possible to write this doctoral thesis without the help and support of the people around me, to only some of whom it is possible to give a particular mention here. First, I would like to thank my supervisors, Thea Pitman and David Frier; I am sure each one of them is aware of the role they played towards the completion of this Ph.D. project.

Thanks are also due to the University of Leeds for awarding me a Postgraduate Research Scholarship, without which I would not have been able to take up my doctoral research.

I would like to express my gratitude to Leonardo Padura Fuentes for agreeing to be interviewed for this project and allowing me to include the interview material in this thesis.

I would like to thank all the Hispanists and Latin Americanists from the UK and around the world who have contributed directly or indirectly to this thesis. I am indebted to all those academics and postgraduates who responded to papers and presentations I have given on subjects covered in this thesis at conferences and seminars.

The post-graduate students in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies at the University of Leeds also played an important role in shaping my research through both formal meetings and informal conversations, and, for this reason, I am extremely grateful. I am also thankful for the guidance and support given by Prof. Manuel Barcia Paz, Dr Gregorio Alonso and Dr Ben Bollig, in the first stage of my Ph.D.

Completing this work would have been all the more difficult were it not for the support and friendship of my fellow postgraduate students and colleagues at the University of Leeds: Cara Levey, Léa Pilsner, Danny Evans, Kristina Pla, Marco Brunello, Maddalena Ottonello, Chris Bartle and Jenny Nelson.

My research has not led to the loss of links with my former home institution in Catania thanks to the help of Prof. Domenico Antonio Cusato and Dr. Sabrina Costanzo.

On a personal note, I would like to express my warmest thanks to my parents, Olga and Santi, for their support and encouragement throughout my studies, and also to my lovely sister Chiara, your good humour and contagious laugh provided a much needed form of escape from my studies, and helped me in carrying out this project.

I am equally delighted and grateful for the patience of my flatmates who experienced all the ups and downs of my research.

The final acknowledgement belongs to Daniel Mourenza. Thanks for 'feeding' me and my project with continuous encouragement, support, endless energy, love and so much more.

## Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the representation of Cubanness in a selection of Leonardo Padura Fuentes's detective novels by analysing the different identity aspects which appear in his work. I argue that Padura's representation of Cuban identity is interesting because it challenges any essentialist and homogenising model, in favour of a wider and more complex interpretation of contemporary Cubanness.

My analysis is framed around the relationship between time, space and identity, taking into account the different social elements that inform identity construction, and analysing how they interact with the spatio-temporal context and change accordingly in response to it. Considering identity as the result of a set of positions shifting across time and space, each of the chapters of the thesis compares official imaginaries of the Cuban nation and national identity with alternative and different representations of Cubanness, in order to demonstrate the arbitrariness of any rigid identity classification. Thus, in the chapter on *Pasado perfecto* and *Vientos de cuaresma*, I analyse how Padura, thanks to a multidirectional approach to memory, contests the monolithic image of the Cuban past and proposes a summative and not exclusive approach to identity construction. In the chapter on *La neblina del ayer* this multiple approach to Cuban history, space and identity is expanded and incremented through the concept of the palimpsest. The chapter on *Máscaras* uses the concept of gender and identity performativity to show how Padura describes the multiple and conflicting facets that coexist within this definition of contemporary Cubanness. Finally, the analysis of *Paisaje de otoño* expands Padura's challenge to any essentialist and exclusive approach to Cuban nation and identity, including the diaspora community in his representation of contemporary Cubanness. The goal of this analysis is to shed new light on Padura's work and on his representation of Cubanness as a de-territorialised, impure, complex and fluid form of identity.



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## Introduction

Defining national identity is never easy because the very concept of identity is problematic in itself. Identity construction, in fact, is a complex and delicate process that involves different social elements and actors as well as imaginative and symbolic components. The Cuban case is not an exception; on the contrary, defining Cuban identity is a complicated task since, in a relatively short amount of time, the country has undergone significant historical and political changes which have profoundly affected the representation of national identity. In contemporary Cuba, the construction of a national narrative has become a field of negotiation and confrontation between ideologies and cultural traditions and in the recent past different national identity images have been promoted and modified. The aim of this study is to compare the official imaginaries of the Cuban nation and the Cuban national identity constructed by the Revolution, with the alternative and plural definitions of Cubanness and national belonging proposed by a selection of Leonardo Padura Fuentes's novels. I will argue that Padura's fiction proposes a different representation of Cubanness – one which is heterogeneous, unstable and hybrid. This literary representation not only reflects, but also actively takes part in, the evolution and transformation of contemporary Cuban identity, setting the ground for a re-discussion of institutional identity models.

The Cuban search for identity has been a constantly evolving and almost obsessive theme of Cuban political life, culture and historiography, from the nineteenth century struggle to achieve independence to the twentieth century, when it acquired a new form as a central theme of revolutionary politics and culture (Kapcia, 2005, p. 5). Thus, Cuban national identity has been continually defined and re-defined in a constantly evolving political context. Even after 1959, the concept was perceived to be confusing or controversial, and during its first years the Revolution set itself the task of defining Cubanness. In the mid-1960s and 1970s, the Revolution, by means of different political acts and

cultural norms, created an institutionalized identity model: namely, the New Man, in order to propose an image of unity and stability for the Cuban revolutionary nation. This model was supposed to be a homogenising force that would be able to impose itself over the social and cultural heterogeneity of Cuban society. In theory, the new Cuban nation was absorbing the different ethnic heritages and cultural elements that coexisted on the island, mixing them and dissolving their differences in order to become an integrated nation without majorities or minorities (Antón Carrillo, 2012, p 14). These integrating and homogenising tendencies posited unity as a fundamental component of the revolutionary nation and a necessary condition for preserving Cuban independence.

However, as I will show in this study, the production of Cuban identity was not concluded in the first decades of the Revolution, and, concomitantly, the following revolutionary period can be re-interpreted as a process of identity definition. In line with the tradition of cultural studies, which sees identity as socially constructed and continually contested, this study will analyse the ways in which Cuban identity has been interpreted and re-interpreted by Leonardo Padura in his novels, considering both the official model for Cubanness and its alternative and non-conformist manifestations.

This research will explore how Leonardo Padura Fuentes interprets this identity shift in the post-Soviet period through an analysis of five of his Mario Conde novels. Starting from the idea that identities are anchored in imaginative time and space and are constantly re-shaped in relation to these two categories, this thesis will show how the image of Cuban national identity shifted according to specific historic-political necessities. I will do so by exploring how Padura's fiction connects different temporal dimensions and spatial images with the intention of representing this identity shift and elucidating its causes and its effects.

Since the 1990s, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the economic crisis, the debates on nation and emigration (1994-1995) and the growing crisis of faith in the revolutionary project, the definition of national unity and integrity has been questioned, and with it the idea of de-centralization and inner

fragmentation was introduced into Cuban identity discourse. Padura's fiction is a product of this historical period and, as such, it affirms the need for a change in the official definition of Cuban national identity. I will argue that Padura considers the revolutionary model to be too centralized, homogenizing and hegemonic and that he instead stresses the dialogical nature of contemporary Cubanness, presenting it as the encounter between different cultural values, symbolic images and social experiences. Thus I will read Padura's novels as a conscious attempt to pluralise the definition of Cubanness and thereby allow it to accept its different forms and internal contradictions.

This study can thereby be situated within the context of debates on the representation and definition of contemporary Cuban identity. The crucial questions it addresses are threefold. (a.) How has the concept of Cubanness evolved in the post-Soviet era? (b.) To what extent does Padura's narrative discourse criticise and deconstruct the official image of Cuban national identity proposed by the Revolution? (c.) How does Padura's work propose a new representation of contemporary Cubanness, and what are the main features of the new national identity image that Padura claims for Cuba?

This project draws together two fundamental lines of development: a re-definition of Cubanness and an analysis of the narrative production of Leonardo Padura Fuentes. In the following section, I will briefly present these two elements to show how they are linked in my work and why I think it is valuable to study Cubanness in connection with Padura's work. I argue that to fully understand the original and innovative component of Padura's work it needs to be studied in conjunction with his representation of Cubanness. At the same time, Padura's understanding of contemporary Cubanness can shed new light on the debate on Cuban identity and on its continuing evolution.

## 1. Cubanness

Among the existing scholarly literature that addresses the concept of Cubanness, there are canonical texts such as Fernando Ortiz's "Los factores humanos de la cubanidad" (1939) and Jorge Mañach's *Indagación del Choteo* (1928), as well as more recent publications that have already become cornerstones for scholars working on Cuba, such as Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (1994) and Ruth Behar's *Bridges to Cuba* (1995). However, the majority of the recent studies in this field are concerned with re-defining Cubanness from an external perspective and proposing definitions which could allow a re-inclusion of the exile community into the Cuban national identity image. Consequently, these studies have not treated in much detail the evolution of Cuban national identity from an internal perspective, and have not investigated the consequences that this evolution has had on the perception and image that Cubans on the island have of themselves. My reason for analysing the development of Cuban identity through Padura's work is thus determined by the need to approach the question from a different perspective and consider a critical representation of this phenomenon from inside the island.

I consider the study of the representation of contemporary Cuban identity in Padura's literature important for different reasons. The first one is the importance and privileged position that culture and literature had in the revolutionary system. Identity-shaping was one of the main preoccupations of the Revolution and literature had an essential role in the reflection and creation of this new revolutionary cultural identity. During its first decades in power, the revolutionary government extensively discussed the role of literature in the shaping of a new society and a new identity<sup>1</sup>, and considered it a key vehicle for ideological hegemony. In this period, literature had a primarily pedagogical purpose and was aimed at forging a new national consciousness. A clear example of this is what happened with the detective genre, which became

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<sup>1</sup> "Palabras a los intelectuales" (Castro, 1961) and Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura (1971).

highly popular in the 1970s. Despite this later success, there was no distinctive detective novel production in Cuba until 1972, when the Revolution promoted a competition organized by the MININT (*Ministerio de Interior*) to reward the best Cuban police novels. As Persephone Braham reminds us, the competition aimed to promote an autochthonous genre that would have a clear didactic function and serve as a prevention and deterrent against anti-social and anti-revolutionary behaviours (2004, p. 29). The Revolution thereby practically created a new literary form, which was a mixture of the crime genre structure with a highly propagandistic and apologetic content. This new genre was called the 'revolutionary crime novel' or the 'Socialist crime novel'.

If it is true that literature promoted the revolutionary identity discourse and contributed to the construction of the New Man during the first years of the Revolution, it is also true that, in a more recent period, literature has contested the New Man by pointing out the different aspects of Cubanness that remained excluded from the official identity model. The purpose of my analysis of Padura's work will be to show how his narrative discourse can be used – firstly, to deconstruct the official image of Cuban national identity and point out its limits, and secondly, to reconstruct a wider and more complex definition of Cubanness.

The reasons why I focus exclusively on Padura's production are multiple. Padura is possibly the best-known Cuban critical voice of the period: his work has been translated into several languages and he is internationally known for his socially-committed crime fiction. Indeed, he is a former investigative journalist and critic who also wrote several studies on Cuban and Latin American literature, especially on the works of Alejo Carpentier and José María Heredia. Padura has been awarded the *Café Gijón* Prize and the Hammett Prize for the best crime novels written in Spanish. Furthermore, and more importantly, his fame and the importance of his work have been officially recognised inside Cuba: in 2012, for example, he was awarded the Cuban national prize for literature, and *Casa de las Américas* dedicated its *Semana de Autor* to him. Padura's work, then, has been validated internally and internationally. The popularity of the author has also greatly increased in the

last few years and his name has become well-known and familiar to the European and American public. Padura has attracted quite a lot of attention from both the general public and the specialised audience and a few studies have been produced on his crime fiction.

Padura's production has normally been studied in the context of Latin American detective fiction as an example of the evolution and diffusion of a politically-committed form of crime literature in the Spanish-speaking part of the continent. Padura's work, then, has been discussed in the wider context of the *narrativa neopolicial latinoamericana* and compared with the Mexican variant of the genre, as in the work of Persephone Braham (2004). In other cases, Padura's crime fiction has been interpreted in relation to the Cuban genre tradition and it has been compared with other Cuban and Cuban-American detective writers, as in the work of Helen Oakley (2012); or in the criticism of Stephen Wilkinson (2006), in which it is presented as the last evolution (and revolution) of the canonical crime genre produced on the island. Thus, much attention has been devoted to researching the presence and use of specific crime genre features in Padura's novels, but there have been few projects that have aimed to take a broader look at the author's output.

This study will plug this gap by addressing a selected *corpus* of Padura's novels from a different critical perspective. The thesis recognises the influence and connections between Padura and other Latin American *neopolicial* writers, but it moves away from the usual readings of Padura's work described above and instead focuses on the ability of his novels to represent and shape identity images. My research suggests that the importance of Padura's work goes beyond a study of the crime genre or popular fiction, and I argue that his novels can be read as a wider form of cultural production – one which crosses genre boundaries, and which mixes popular literature with historical novel and journalism.

The author has stated many times that his literary work assumes more ambitious and complicated roles than those for which crime literature is normally recognised. In this sense the author has often acknowledged his intellectual debt to and bond with important international figures (such as



Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Chester Himes, Jean Patrick Manchette, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Leonardo Sciascia), who established a tradition of detective stories which do much more than merely relate a crime investigation. Padura, in fact, considers his work to be an instrument for socio-historical inquiry and a testimony to the cultural shift which affected post-Soviet Cuban society and identity. Therefore, the author assumed the task of writing about what Cuba has been and *is*, and thus described what Cubans of yesterday and today *are*.

This focus on the socio-historical setting of the novels, as well as Padura's concern with the identity crisis, indicate the relevance of studying identity representation in Padura's novels. In line with the critical approach I will adopt, which interprets cultural identity as an unfixed and unstable social product, Padura problematises the construction and definition of Cubanness, considers it as an evolving production, and confers on literature a primary role in the creation and identification of the different identity elements, as he expressed in an interview I had with him in Cuba:

El hecho de ser y sentirse cubano puede ser muy complicado por muchas razones [...] Creo que la identidad cubana es todavía un proceso en creación a partir de elementos muy disímiles, muy distintos que proceden de diversas partes del mundo, tanto en el plano económico-político como en lo social, filosófico o cultural. (Padura, 2013)

According to Padura, then, Cuban identity is a complex and unfinished product. Its creation is ongoing and it takes the form of a negotiation between different components at different levels. Literature plays a primary role in this ongoing process. In fact, Cuban literature has always explored the plural cultural origins of Cuban identity in order to define its features:

Yo creo que la literatura siempre tiene un papel fundamental en la creación de una identidad, en la fijación de los elementos constitutivos de una identidad. De Heredia para acá, en la literatura y en la poesía cubana, comienza a construirse la imagen de lo cubano, de los tópicos de lo cubano, incluso hay la

construcción del imaginario físico cubano en novelas escritas en los años 30 y 40 del siglo XIX. [...] En todo el siglo XIX la literatura cubana está construyendo este elemento de fijación identitario, incluso con una participación política muy espesa. [...] Este proyecto sigue hasta el presente. (Padura, 2013)

According to Padura, then, literature is a fundamental component in the shaping and understanding of Cuban identity. It not only reflects identity formation and transformation over time but also promotes, triggers and actively shapes identity, identifying and reproducing its main components. According to Padura, this involvement of literature in identity-shaping and social representation in Cuba became even more significant from the 1990s onwards. In fact, Padura argues that in this delicate historical period of economic and ideological crisis, the official discourse did not evolve accordingly and remained anchored to rigid, crystallized symbols, which were no longer representative of the historical and social imperatives of the Cuban population:

El país va cambiando en todo. Toda la evolución con respecto al fenómeno de la homosexualidad o de las creencias religiosas, la emigración o el entramado de las relaciones sociales e ideológicas de las personas con respecto a la sociedad ha ido cambiando, pero la retórica oficial sigue igual. Porque la retórica oficial es la emanación de un poder que en su esencia no ha cambiado. Ha cambiado fenoménicamente, ha cedido espacio que consideraba que podía ceder, pero esencialmente no ha cambiado. Ha conservado los espacios esenciales y con ellos ha conservado también su retórica con respecto a lo que significa su manera de ejercer su poder. (Padura, 2013)

Thus, the official discourse often appears to Padura as a stagnant rhetoric that does not address or represent the complex socio-political context of contemporary Cuba. At the same time, the government has remained in control of the essential elements of public life, such as the press and the media. In this context, then, the role of interpreting new social visions and

representing the different nuances and aspects of Cubanness is passed on to artists and writers:

Lo que ocurre a partir de los años 90, en los que hay un cambio en el desarrollo de la literatura cubana, es que si antes el reflejo de la identidad y la crónica de la realidad tenía un sentido de fundamento sobre el cual se desarrollaba un ejercicio estético, a partir de los 90 ocurre un acercamiento entre dos exigencias: el ejercicio estético y el ejercicio testimonial. Porque, sobre todo en el caso de la narrativa, se comienza a contar una historia que no tiene otro espacio donde ser representada. La narrativa empieza a ser narrativa y periodismo, narrativa y testimonio de la realidad de la época. Y los fenómenos que están ocurriendo en la identidad cubana y en el conjunto de la sociedad tienen más reflejo en la narrativa que en otras manifestaciones. (Padura, 2013)

Literature, and novels in particular, become the tools with which to reshape and expand the limits of the official discourse. This responsibility confers upon the Cuban writer a civic responsibility that adds a more transcendent dimension to his work. Padura, as a Cuban writer who lives in Cuba and is constantly confronted with the reality of the changing country, is well-aware of his important testimonial role and of his civic responsibility. Therefore, his work becomes a repository of the present and the past memories and experiences of his generation. For this reason, it can be considered to be representative of some of the changes affecting Cuban identities in the contemporary period.

## **2. Defining the *corpus* and the study's objectives**

The *corpus* I am using for my analysis is formed by the four novels of the tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones*, to which I will add a fifth novel, *La neblina del ayer*, which Padura wrote some years after the tetralogy. These novels feature the same protagonist, Mario Conde, and follow his life and the lives of his group of friends from 1989 onwards. These novels are all part of the so called Mario Conde series which also comprises another novel *Adiós, Hemingway*

and a short story *La cola de la serpiente* published together in 2001<sup>2</sup> and, finally, the last novel of the series: *Herejes*, published in September 2013, Padura's most recent work to date. In order to analyse the selected material in detail I have limited my study to the five novels previously mentioned. I have excluded *Adiós, Hemingway* and *La cola de la serpiente* from the present study because each of these novels has a specific focus which goes beyond the scope of my current investigation.

*Adiós, Hemingway* (published in 2001 and set in 1997) to a certain extent can be considered a 'commissioned' novel. A Brazilian publishing house invited Padura to write a novel based on the life of an important writer and Padura chose Hemingway, because he was one of his literary inspirations and because Hemingway spent the last part of his life in Cuba. Therefore, the novel explores the life of Hemingway and Conde's (and Padura's) relationship with the North American dead writer. However, it is more a study on Hemingway, and on the last part of his life, than a study on Cuban identity and society and, as such, it does not serve the purpose of my study.

In *La cola de la serpiente* the lieutenant Conde has been commissioned to solve a murder in the *barrio chino* of Havana. *La cola de la serpiente* was published in 2001 but it is set in 1989, hence, it is a kind of appendix to the tetralogy and represents a step backward compared to *Paisaje de otoño*, where Conde decides to leave the police force. The text is focused on the representation of the life conditions of the Chinese-Cuban characters, which is certainly an interesting topic for further investigation but which would inevitably need to be linked to issues of ethnicity and race, which I am not touching on in this analysis of Padura's novels. Therefore, considering both the specificity of the focus of this novel, and the complexity and importance of the racial elements in the Cuban context I decided to exclude *La cola de la serpiente* from current study and I identified it as an area for future investigations which might explore the ethnic discourse in Padura's production, starting precisely from *La cola de la serpiente*. Finally *Herejes* is not included

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<sup>2</sup> *La cola de la serpiente* has been subsequently expanded and published as an individual volume in 2011.

in this investigation because it was published when the current project was already near to its completion.

These exclusions, however, do not affect the coherence and validity of this project. On the contrary the five texts of the *corpus* have been selected because they allow me to better represent the socio-historical evolution of Cuban identity in Padura's work. In fact, the tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones* and *La neblina del ayer*, when my project was first conceived, represented the two temporal poles and furthest points in the identity trajectory of Conde and his fellow Cubans.

The tetralogy is set in 1989, a critical year for both Cuba, where the so called Ochoa case unfolded<sup>3</sup>, and for the Eastern bloc, which was shaken by the fall of the Berlin Wall at the end of that year. This is the year in which the Cuban population lost much of its faith in the revolutionary project and in the possibility of building a better future for the collectivity. *La neblina del ayer* is set in 2003 and, therefore, both the historical situation and the characters' condition have changed. Therefore the four novels of the tetralogy allow me to investigate a turning point in Cuban history and the beginning of the identity crisis; while *La neblina del ayer*, thanks to its temporal distance from 1989, allows me to have a look at a more contemporary moment of Cuban life, showing another step in the evolution of the characters' identities and marking the distance from the official model of Cuban identity. In 2003, in fact, the characters live to a much greater extent the disillusion, alienation and identity fragmentation which started in the late 1980s and worsened after the disappearance of the Soviet bloc. In the narrative present of *La neblina del ayer* the crisis of the institutionalised model of Cuban identity reaches its climax and the New Man ideology is substituted by a new set of values wherein cynicism, pragmatism and individualism are the hallmarks of the Cuban post-Soviet generation.

Each of the novels examined in this study will be considered as a narrative of identity, which contains elements of transgression or subversion of the prescriptive revolutionary model. For each of the texts analysed, I will show

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<sup>3</sup> Arnaldo Ochoa was a high-ranking official, who was accused of corruption, treason and drug-trafficking together with other military and Interior Ministry officials.

how they challenge the identity discourse of the Revolution and how they testify to the existence of many alternative Cuban identity performances. The study of Padura's non-conforming characters is based on the analysis of two main categories: time and space. Starting from the idea that identities are anchored in symbolic times and spaces and are constantly re-shaped in relation to these two categories, this thesis will analyse how Padura uses specific temporal devices and spatial images to provide a new representation of contemporary Cuban identities. The starting point for this thesis was precisely my interest in the strategies Padura uses to forge a specific time-space narrative dimension. In the novels, both categories are imagined as plural and palimpsestic dimensions, which interact with each other and re-define Cubanness as a complex, unstable product which is constantly evolving and shifting between a number of different temporal and spatial positions. I thus argue that the image of Cubanness emerging from this time-space representation disrupts essentialist readings of cultural identity and national belonging because it is fundamentally ineffable, constantly changing and impossible to fix. One of the key questions my study addresses is thus: how does Leonardo Padura Fuentes's fiction use temporal and spatial images to first represent and then to criticize the revolutionary government's model of Cuban identity? My analysis of the selected texts hopes to offer some conclusions regarding the way in which Padura's literature contests the New Man by pointing out the many aspects of Cuban identity which were repressed or at least underrepresented in the official identity.

The chapters of this thesis address, from a variety of perspectives, a range of issues pertaining to identity representation. Indeed, they mutually inform and complement each other in order to create a complex study on the representation of contemporary Cubanness in the above-mentioned novels. The study has six chapters. The first one: "Setting the conceptual framework: Cultural identity, space and time" will lay out the theoretical dimensions of the research, and will discuss the key terms and concepts underpinning the research project, using the existing scholarly literature as a departure point. The themes that comprise the focus of this chapter will be the definition of cultural identity and national identity and their creation in relation to the

categories of time and space. I will provide an overview of different identity models and explore the socio-cultural mechanisms and power strategies involved in the process of identity formation.

The second chapter: “Cuban Identity after the Revolution” will apply the terms and concepts I have presented in chapter 1 to the description of Cuban national identity. This chapter is divided into two main sections, each of which presents a different model of identity representation, to compare the revolutionary Cuban identity model, created in the 1960s, with a more recent representation of Cubanness that emerged in the 1990s. My aim will be to show how the idea of Cubanness moved from an essentialist, homogeneous and hegemonic position in the early revolutionary period, to a more fragmented, anti-hegemonic and unstable notion during the 1990s. I will examine different components of Cuban cultural and national identity to finally approach, in the last section, this more unstable and hybrid definition of Cubanness – the features of which, I argue, can be observed in Padura’s novels.

The third chapter “Memory and Identity in *Pasado perfecto and Vientos de cuaresma*” will examine how the category of time informs the shaping of collective identity, taking into account the influence of collective memory and generational perspective in the construction of different kinds of Cuban identities. I will focus on Padura’s use of memory as a critical tool to compare Cuba’s past and present and to re-evaluate the national past in the light of present circumstances. The chapter will show how Padura confronts Cuban official memory with alternative forms of memory: in fact, I will argue that starting from Conde’s autobiographical memory, the author reconstructs first a generational and then a wider trans-generational memory which often position themselves as counter-memories. This journey into the Cuban collective memory sets the ground against which Padura traces the historical development and transformation of contemporary Cuba and Cubanness. Therefore, starting from the premise that the creation of a national identity is a continuous process that finds its basis in a shared past and in a collective history, this chapter will examine different kinds of memories (generational,

affective, geographical, trans-generational) and their influences on the construction of the new Cuban identities described by Padura.

The fourth chapter, “Havana: the Palimpsestic City. Time, Space and Identity in *La neblina del ayer*”, studies the representation of Havana as a heterotopic and heterochronic place where a plurality of times and spaces coexist. Associating this representation with the image of the palimpsest this study describes the geographical and cultural stratification of contemporary Cuba. The palimpsest concept will be applied to Padura’s narrative representation of time and space in Cuba, to the geography of the city and, more importantly, to the identity-construction of Cuban people. In particular, the palimpsest metaphor will be used to understand the construction of Cubanness as a series of erasures and superimpositions and, at the same time, to represent the different identity performances emerging from the fractures of the dominant text. Therefore, drawing on Foucault’s concept of heterotopias, De Certeau’s city-text metaphor and Quiroga’s palimpsest model, I will present Padura’s Havana as a multilayered city in which official spaces and counter-spaces coexist as well as official and alternative identity performances. This chapter will consider Padura’s depiction of the geographical and cultural stratification of Havana as a contestation of any essentialist and homogenising reading of Cuban identity, history and culture.

Taking into account the main characteristics of the Revolutionary model of gender identity performance, the fifth chapter: “Gender identity, inner exile, and social masquerade in *Máscaras*”, will examine the presence of alternative forms of gender expression in Cuba. I will consider gender, in Judith Butler’s terms, as performative and I will link this approach with Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical model of social interaction. I will, then, read *Máscaras* as a multi-layered novel in which Padura uses the idea of a performative gender identity as a synecdoche for a wider phenomenon: the construction of a social masquerade. The social mask will be read, through a spatial and theatrical metaphor, as a superficially desirable identity performed on stage that hides a plurality of different, multiform identities performed behind the scenes. The chapter will describe different forms of masking and unmasking in post-



Revolutionary Cuba and I will argue that the possibility of performing one's identity and playing a role or different roles on the public stage problematises the definition of Cuban identity and challenges any essentialist view of identity construction.

The final chapter: "Imagination, Displacement and Exiled Identities in *Paisaje de otoño*" explores the connection between space and identity. The chapter will first explore the role of temporal and spatial imagination in the definition of national identity, to then study how the perception of these two dimensions can be altered in the exile experience. I will investigate how Padura uses real and imaginary spaces to express the feeling of identity dislocation and uprootedness experienced by Cubans living inside and outside the island. I will look at Padura's representation of Cuba and Miami as two parallel spaces that are opposed and complementary. My aim will be to compare these different mental constructions and bring together the elements that characterise the psychic condition of Cubans living in and outside the island. I will first look at the imaginary mental construction of Miami, made by Cubans seeking to escape from the island, to then expose how this utopian construction can transform itself into a dystopia for the Cuban émigrés. I will conclude my study with the representation of the exiles' perspective on Cuba and Miami, showing how, as a result of a difficult exile experience, the émigrés in Miami often transform Cuba into a utopia and Miami into a dystopia. The final theme that runs throughout the chapter is a fundamental sense of physical absence, material deprivation and emotional loss, which is one of the hallmarks of contemporary Cubanness.

Finally the conclusion recaps the characteristic features of post-Soviet Cubanness as described by Padura, and by tracing Mario Conde's development through the tetralogy and *La neblina del ayer*, it reiterates the significant contribution of Padura's fiction to the construction of a new form of contemporary Cubanness, which is evolutionary – and which is still evolving.



# Chapter 1

## Setting the Conceptual Framework: Cultural Identity, Space and Time

### 1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conceptual theoretical framework for my study: using the existing scholarly literature as a point of departure, it will discuss and define the main ideas and key terms that comprise the focus of my research project. As stated in the introduction, my work is primarily concerned with showing the way in which Leonardo Padura Fuentes represents different kinds of Cuban identities in his detective fiction. Through the analysis of narrative practices and socio-political junctures, I will describe the way in which Cuban national identity has been interpreted and reinterpreted in his work in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While a variety of disciplines suggest different definitions of the term identity, my analysis focuses on the concept of ‘cultural identity’ and considers it as socially constructed and contested, rather than historically fixed and geographically bounded. Thus this first section of the thesis provides a brief overview of different models of cultural identity, in order to stress the importance of a non-essentialist identity model for my study.

The chapter begins by briefly presenting the different socio-cultural mechanisms and power strategies involved in the process of identity formation and analyses how these mechanisms work in the construction of a collective national identity. It will then explore the role that the categories of time and space have in the process of identity creation and cultural representation. As suggested by the title, my thesis uses these two categories as starting points for the analysis of Cuban cultural identity in Padura’s work. The third part of this chapter describes in greater detail different models of cultural identity,

providing an historical excursus which spans from the Enlightenment to the post-modern period. My aim here will be to show how historic-economical evolution and the changed perception of time and space affect the construction of the self. Finally, in the last section, I will focus specifically on the post-modern conception of identity and on its main features: dislocation and fragmentation. These terms are key concepts for the discussion of contemporary cultural identity and are particularly useful tools with which to understand Padura's discourse on the evolution of Cuban identity in the post-Soviet era. The characters of the novels written by Padura and set in post-Soviet Havana experience a deep identity crisis as a result of the changed historical and geopolitical situation of the late 1980s and 1990s. As I will explain in greater detail in chapters 2 and 3, the crisis of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of Cuba's main economic partner inevitably brought into question the stability and validity of the Cuban socialist project and identity model, triggering the explosion of polarized social tensions. Padura's Cuban subjects, in the post-Soviet world, find themselves dislocated and decentralized because the core of the revolutionary project has been undermined. Consequently, in all the novels, the characters try to make sense of their historical experience and face a multiple and fragmented Cuban reality.

## **2 Cultural identity: a definition**

I will start my theoretical overview by focusing on different definitions of cultural identity and their relevance to my analysis. In the following paragraphs I will present first an essentialist approach to cultural identity, which I will compare later on with the revolutionary definition of Cuban identity, and then a non-essentialist approach, which will be the one used to analyse Padura's production. This study thus considers identity as a social and cultural construction, formed differently in different cultural contexts. It is a matter not only of self-description but also of social ascription. Starting from this definition my study will pay particular attention to the relationship between the process of identity production and the spatial and temporal context in which this process takes place. I consider identity to be a social interface which

constructs the link between the subject and its cultural context, provides anchorage and location in the world and allows the subject to interpret and adapt to social and historical changes.

## **2.1 Two approaches to cultural identity construction**

As mentioned earlier, for my definition of cultural identity I will follow a distinction, articulated by Stuart Hall (1990), between two models of identity production: the essentialist and the anti-essentialist models. The essentialist identity model assumes that there is some intrinsic and essential content to any identity:

The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. (Hall, 1990, p. 223)

Thus, in the essentialist model, the identity core is considered natural and innate: beneath the different superficial manifestations of the self there is this authentic self, this oneness that people with common origins share. This 'ontological' model of identity is constructed around some distinctive elements (language, territorial location, history, etc.) which are supposed to create the unity and uniqueness of cultural identity. According to this conception, then, each person has a timeless essence that is commonly called identity, which remains fixed and stable during the course of our whole life. This model has frequently been used to support hegemonic discourses, which see identity as a fixed entity, single rooted, centralised and constructed according to logics of exclusion as much as inclusion. The cultural and political debate on Cubanness has often been constructed around this essentialist conception of identity. In fact, many approaches have attempted to define the uniqueness of

*lo cubano*<sup>1</sup>, searching for an innate core or trying to identify a Cuban ‘essence’ rooted in a kind of primordial cultural character.

In opposition to this approach, the second model of identity construction proposed by Stuart Hall emphasises the impossibility of such homogeneous and distinct identities. It denies the existence of pure and original cores we are born with: identity is not something which already exists, or that remains always stable and anchored in some fixed origins. On the contrary, cultural identities go through continuous transformations; they are always relational and incomplete, always in process:

Cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

Here Stuart Hall is not completely rejecting the essentialist model, but recognising that, as well as unity and continuity, in the construction of identity there are also critical points of fractures, changes and discontinuity. This is precisely what the anti-essentialist position acknowledges: identity is continually being produced from points of similarity and difference. The anti-essentialist position, widely held within cultural studies, stresses the dialogical nature of cultural identity: it is a social production, resulting from continuous negotiations. The points of confrontation around which cultural identities could form are multiple: age, nationality, class, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, political position, religion, etc. and these discursive positions are themselves unstable. The result of this negotiation is what the Panama born Ticio Escobar calls “plural identities”:

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Jorge Mañach *Indagación del Choteo* (1928).

It is an unstable notion formed (and deformed) through confrontations that simultaneously take place in different settings. (Escobar, 2002, p. 148)

According to this predicament, identity does not involve an essence of the self but rather a set of continually shifting descriptions of ourselves so that the meaning of identity categories – Cubanness, blackness, masculinity, etc. – is subject to continual deferral through a never-ending process of re-signification in the present. Both Stuart Hall and Ticio Escobar stress the existence of mutability and plurality of identity. For both, the emphasis is on the multiplicity of identity sources, rather than on a unique singular root, and on the connections or articulations of different constitutive parts. The articulation of a model of multiple identities posits the existence in every subject of different and potentially contradictory identities at different times and places. Thus, persons are best understood as being composed of not one but several identities that are not integrated into a unified coherent 'self'. No single identity acts as an overarching, organizing centre; rather, identities shift according to how subjects are addressed or represented. Thus, adopting an anti-essentialist approach, this study considers identity as a plural cultural construction, based on social practices, and constantly undergoing a process of formation and transformation. Therefore, the term cultural identity will be used to identify the shifting result of continuous reassessments and negotiations between plural terms.

### **3 Politics of identity**

#### **3.1 Agency, representation and power**

The argument that individuals result from negotiations of different elements, that can be articulated together in a variety of ways, points to the idea that these negotiations can be influenced and regulated by political as well as

social factors. The process of construction and representation of identities is, then, a 'political' issue and is intrinsically bound up with questions of power and agency. My work is concerned with investigating the mechanisms of identity representation and the strategies put in place in revolutionary Cuba to direct and shape the social perception of identity and Cubanness. The combination of these strategies and social practices constitutes the core of the revolutionary politics of identity and identity representation. Politics of identity work as a form of social regulation that enables some kinds of identity performances while denying others. That is why it is of primary importance to keep in mind that no identity representation can be considered neutral or objective. On the contrary, each representation results from the confrontation between different political actors, socio-cultural factors and historical-geographical conditions. Hence, the focus of this section is on questioning how identities are produced and taken up through logics of power and practices of representation.

Stuart Hall stresses the important role representation plays in the production of identities:

We should think of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (1990, p. 222)

Representation includes the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced. Through this process of signification we make sense of our experience and validate a particular identity image for ourselves. Using the resources of history, language and culture we create a coherent symbolic self or group image that can be accepted and shared by the community. Cultural identities, then, are always social and imaginative productions constructed through representation and positioned in a specific context.

Hall devotes particular attention to the idea of identity positions, stating that cultural identities are not an essence but a positioning (Hall, 1990, p 226) and that the 'position' from which an identity is enunciated shapes the very character of that identity. People always experience the world and represent it



from specific social positions and these positions inscribe identities within the vectors of time, space and social power. Hence, beyond any discourse on cultural identity and representation there is always a politics of positions. Such positions are not fixed. On the contrary, they are the result of a combination of many factors that may change during the course of one's life. Consequently, cultural identities are not fixed either but are constantly in transition between different positions. Thus a theory of cultural identity needs to analyse the reasons for this positioning. Hall claims that identity positions and representation respond to specific historical processes and socio-political relations and are created through specific discursive practices and enunciative strategies (1996, p 5-6). Therefore, questioning how identities are produced through practices of representation means questioning: (a) who is doing the representation; (b) from what position; (c) what is the historical moment that informs the representation; (d) what are the implications of the representation; and (e) why are they engaging in the process of representation. All these questions can be summarised in one: the question of agency.

Here I understand agency as the socially constructed capacity to act. Each social subject is potentially a powerful and knowledgeable agent. However, this capability to act is differentially distributed: some actors have more access to social resources and domains of action than others. For the purpose of my work I will consider human agency as a collective, historical dynamic, rather than a function arising out of individual behaviour. As I anticipate above, precisely because identities are not natural or innate but are socially constructed, their creation can be regulated by hegemonic forces and political actors powerful enough to articulate visions of the collective self and of 'the Others'. This links the question of agency and the production of identity to a political dimension. The social constitution of a cultural identity and its representation are the effects of "specific modalities of power" (Hall, 1996, p. 4); in fact, as one of the central arguments of cultural studies suggests, meanings are always constituted within patterns of power and subject to processes of contestation. Starting from this argument, in the following chapters, I will describe the specific politics of identity put in place by the Cuban government after 1959 as an attempt to represent a desired identity

model and to make that particular description legitimate and durable. The case of revolutionary Cuba proves that it is precisely in the symbolic nature of identity and in its plasticity that its political significance lies. Identity formation takes place at a conjuncture of internal and external processes that emerge within distinctive political-historical conditions. Individuals can thus be considered as specific historic-geographical articulations of discursive elements that are contingent but also socially determined. These different discursive elements could, under other historical and cultural circumstances, be combined differently and create different identities, hence the importance of studying cultural identities in relation to their context of production. A critical study of identity needs to take into account how particular social structures, historical experiences and concrete social spaces condition the creation of a cultural identity. Every identity discourse needs to be contextualised to consider who is talking, from what position and for what purpose. Therefore in the next chapter, which discusses questions of agency and power in relation to the construction of the Cuban revolutionary identity, I will contextualise my analysis in its historical and spatial setting, considering the different social factors and political imperatives that interweave in the official representation of contemporary Cubanness.

### **3.2 Identity and difference**

One of the most important discursive strategies for identity representation is the confrontation with 'the Other', 'the different'. In fact, identities, like all signifying practices, "are constructed through, not outside, difference" (Hall, 1996, p. 4). Lawrence Grossberg, when referring to identity construction, defines 'difference' as "a particular constitutive relation of negativity in which the subordinate term (the marginalized Other or subaltern) is a necessary and internal force of destabilization existing within the identity of the dominant term. The subaltern here is itself constitutive of, and necessary for the dominant term" (Grossberg, 1996, p.90). This implies that:

It is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its

constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term - and thus its 'identity' - can be constructed. (Hall, 1996, pp. 4-5)

These discursive strategies of identity production result in what Ticio Escobar defines 'Inverted identity': "Each identity is not considered statically but in an antagonistic relationship to another" (2002, p. 147). According to this confrontational model, identity is a structured imaginative representation which only achieves its positive definition through the comparison with the negative, with what is outside of the subject. It needs the negative, the Other to construct itself. Similarly, the Russian linguist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin argued that meaning is established through a dialogue with the Other (1981). According to him, meaning does not belong to any one of the speakers; it is created in the interaction with the Other and is fundamentally dialogic. The Other is essential to meaning since meaning arises through the difference between the participants in a dialogue: every participant relates him/herself to the other participants who are then perceived and defined as different. Meaning is thus created through difference (Hall, 1997, pp. 235-236). This implies that it cannot be fixed and that one single person or group can never be totally in charge of meaning, even if they claim the right to be. Meaning always needs to be negotiated in the dialogue between different positions. Thus, the creation of a 'constitutive outside' and the negotiation between the different elements forming the 'inside' and 'outside' of identity is an essential part of the process of self-definition. Thus, cultural identities are never fixed and unified, they are, instead, the result of continuous negotiations between different and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions.

This confrontational mechanism of self-identification functions only through the capacity to exclude, to leave out, to identify an 'outside' (Hall, 1996, p. 5). Herein lies the importance of the concept of identity boundaries to separate the self from the Others. In fact, the limits of one's identity are established through the marking of symbolic boundaries that leave the Other outside. The presence of the Other is fundamental to establishing the margins of the self and to consolidating one's 'inner' identity. Every identity is in fact defined by its 'margins' and its opposition to what is 'outside' (Escobar, 2002, p. 27). The original unity, the internal homogeneity claimed by the first model of cultural

identity, then, does not exist naturally; it is constructed through the play of difference with the 'outside'. In this sense, identity is never natural; it is always the result of a selective social process of 'closure' and exclusion (Hall, 1996, p. 5). That is why identities are usually constructed in terms of binary oppositions such as male/female, straight/gay, normal/deviant, and through a rigid hierarchy of power.

Escobar, defining his notion of inverted identity, affirms that the binary structure is a model of representation that helps to establish order among the multitude of symbols and conflicting power forces coexisting in human society: "The game of oppositions allows us to place in binary order realities hitherto undefined" (2002, p. 147). Binary oppositions are, then, crucial to any system of signification and classification, however they are also a rather reductionist and crude way of establishing meaning and classifying reality. What is more, as Jaques Derrida has argued, the binary structure is rarely a neutral system of classification. In fact, since identities are connected to specific modalities of power, the definition of opposed categories is regulated by the powerful social agents who reinterpret the classificatory system according to their needs:

Derrida has shown how an identity's constitution is always based on excluding something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles - man/woman, etc. What is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first. It is the same with the black-white relationship, in which white, of course, is equivalent to 'human being'. 'Woman' and 'black' are thus 'marks' (i.e. marked terms) in contrast to the unmarked terms of 'man' and 'white'. (Derrida glossed in Laclau, 1990, p. 33)

Thus, Derrida argues that there is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition. One pole of the dichotomy is usually the dominant one, the one which defines itself and the other term from its specific position; the one which marks the other with some specific connotations. I will explore the dynamics involved in the binary representation of the self and of the Other in greater depth later on in this chapter, in the section devoted to Edward Said's theories on Orientalism. What is important to stress here is that cultural

identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out and to render 'outside'. Consequently the 'unities' which identities proclaim are, in reality, constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are the result of a naturalised, predetermined process of 'closure' (Hall, 1993). The representation of the self and of the Other and the setting of the borders between inclusion and exclusion are always political decisions: in order to maintain social stability, symbolic boundaries are set between identity categories. Nonetheless, as I will discuss in chapter 5, hybridity and performativity disrupt the social order, resisting classification and exposing the constructed political nature of the binary system. Later on, I will discuss in greater depth the validity and consequences of a binary model of identity representation in Cuba. The second chapter, in fact, suggests that at the core of the revolutionary idea of identity there is an imaginary notion of unity, constructed precisely through a play of difference, power and exclusions. To sum up, the aim of this section has been to show that the representation of identity is a dialogic process and that the recognition of difference is an essential part of this process. The unfixed nature of identity, its relation to power, and its capacity to constantly redefine itself are essential aspects that will be explored during my investigation of Cuban identity construction. Keeping in mind the concepts of identity positioning and social agency, in the rest of my thesis I will explain how different dynamics of power, exclusion and (re)inclusion work, inside Padura's Cuban world, to create a peculiar image of contemporary Cuban identity.

#### **4 National identity and collective representation**

In the previous sections I have already stated the collective and social nature of cultural identities; the prominence on the collective aspect emerges clearly in the case of revolutionary Cuba. The official rhetoric of the Revolution, in fact, placed great emphasis on terms such as collectivity and *pueblo*. The revolutionary discourse had to promote a communitarian attitude and a sense of collective responsibility in the construction of a new Cuban world. Therefore, individuals were conceived through their participation in collective

experiences, their affiliation with specific groups and their location in a wider network of social relations. Consequently, in my thesis, when I take into account the specific cultural identity of an individual (as I will with Mario Conde in chapter 3), I will consider that subject as strongly influenced by her/his belonging to a group. The specific individual, then, will be examined as an archetypical example of the behaviours of the national, social or generational group to which he or she pertains.

One of the central ideas of this work is to analyse the representation of a particular kind of collective cultural identity: national identity. I will start, in the next chapter, by discussing the re-formulation and re-shaping of national identity in Cuba in the 1960s; then, in each one of the other chapters I will show how the different categories of this institutionalised identity model have been re-discussed, criticised and modified in Padura's literary production during the post-Soviet era.

National culture is often considered one of the principal sources of cultural identity. Here I will support Hall's argument and consider national identity not to be natural or inscribed in our genes. On the contrary, as with every other kind of cultural identity, the national is also an historical and cultural construction formed and transformed through representation and imagination. In fact, nations are not simply political formations but systems of cultural representation by which national identity is continually reproduced (Hall, 1992, pp. 291-293). Often nations are marked by deep internal divisions and differences and therefore a unified image of national identity is constructed through discursive practices that cover over differences. Each nation creates its cultural discourse, which influences and organises both the actions and self-conception of its citizens. People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture. Precisely this symbolic idea of the nation has the "power to generate a sense of identity and allegiance" (Schwarz, 1986, p. 106 quoted in Hall, 1992, p. 292). Benedict Anderson has argued that a nation can be defined as an 'imagined community', and that consequently national identity is mainly an imaginary construction. The difference between national identities therefore lies in the different ways in which nations are imagined:

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community [...] It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. [...] Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. (Anderson, 1983, p. 6)

Thus, Anderson reinterprets nation and national identity as cultural artefacts based on specific systems of signification that constitute "the cultural roots of nationalism" (1983, p. 7). Historical, religious and political symbols can act in the process of imagining a nation as cultural roots for its mental construction. These different symbols are combined together to create a narrative of the nation, which is then told and retold in folkloric histories, literature, media, and popular culture. This national narrative provides a set of stories, images, landscapes and historical events which represent the shared experiences, sorrows, triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation. As members of such an 'imagined community' we perceive our lives as inscribed into this wider narrative: it gives significance and importance to our existence, connecting our everyday lives with a national history that pre-existed us and will continue after our death (Hall, 1992, p. 293).

Anderson's definition stresses once more the importance of the cultural component in the creation of a national identity and poses it as one of the central elements of nationalism. According to Anderson, the sense of cultural belonging and identification with the national image is so strong that, for centuries, it has been a valid justification for murders and wars. Often nationalism conceals an intention to mobilize the people of a country to 'purify' their nation and to expel the Others who threaten their cultural identity as a nation. The logic of binary opposition, then, applies to national identity as much as (and possibly more than) to any other form of cultural identity. Nationalism, in fact, creates a sharp separation between what is part of the nation and what is other to it. This division is emphasized by one of the features which Anderson ascribes to nations which is its limitedness:

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. (1983, p. 7)

I will explore in greater depth the consequences of this imagined limitedness of the nation in the next section in which I will explain the importance of spatiality in the construction of cultural identities. Furthermore Anderson's observation on the significance of the cultural roots of national identity will be pivotal for my discourse on the negotiation and re-shaping of post-revolutionary Cuban identity. In fact, in chapter 2 I will show how, after 1959, the revolutionary government established a new national imaginary using symbols that were carefully selected and strong enough to reinforce the idea of a coherent Cuban political community. Finally in the last chapter of my thesis, I will go back to Anderson's definition and I will use it to explore the different representations of Cubanness and national identity proposed by the Cuban diaspora and the exiled characters of *Paisaje de Otoño*.

## **5 Contextualising cultural identity: space and time**

Considering cultural identity in general, and national identity in particular, as the result of a social and imaginative construction or positioning implies that identity cannot be defined in and of itself, but rather must be seen within the context of its construction. In fact, identities are discursive constructions that constantly change their meanings according to time, place and usage. Thus, Hall's definition of cultural identity as a positioning automatically implies the importance of historical and geographical context for identity formation:

We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', *positioned*. (Hall, 1990, p. 222)

It is important to point out that even though identities are inscribed into a historical and spatial dimension, this specific spatial and temporal framework



does not provide an essential stability; on the contrary, it puts cultural identity through a continuous process of transformation and reassessment, in which culture and power play an essential role: “Cultural identities are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power” (Hall , 1990, p. 225).

Thus, the process of identity representation involves the recovery of the spatial and temporal coordinates which frame the specific identity, and the following re-elaboration of these coordinates into a new mental picture. An important part of the imaginative construction of identity is the representation of what, quoting Edward Said, I would call the ‘imaginative’ geographical and historical coordinates of cultural identities (1985, p. 55). These are mental abstractions that acquire an important figurative value and help the subject to intensify its own sense of itself and its sense of belongingness to a specific territory, history and culture. For Said, in fact, there is an intimate connection between the imaginative representation of spaces and times and the production of identity. I will propose an in-depth analysis of this relation in the next section on space, identity and imaginative geographies. For now it is essential to understand the importance of imaginative geographies and histories for the construction of a national identity. As stated above, a nation is commonly represented as a community of people sharing a common history and based on a specific territory. Hence, nationalism understands the cultural relation between the individual and the collectivity through history and territoriality. In addition, a national culture is constructed through common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide a stable, unchanging and continuous frame of reference and meaning for its population. Nation states construct narratives of nationhood that emphasise the traditions and continuity of the nation. Many cultures have created a foundational myth to explain their historical origins and produce the linkage between the national identity and this mythical past. This common heritage is what, in theory, allows people to overcome their differences and constitutes nationhood.

The concepts of nationhood and nationalism were important elements in the re-shaping of national identity by the Revolution in the 1960s. As I will discuss further in chapter 2, the official rhetoric of the Revolution constructed a new nationalist discourse based on specific Cuban historical traditions (such as the

struggle for independence from Spain) and spatial images (such as insularity). Territory and history, then, are some of the pillars around which the revolutionary Cuban identity has been constructed and they contribute to creating an identification of the idea of Revolution with the nation. Before exploring this Cuban identity model further, I will introduce some key terms for the understanding of the relationship between space, time and cultural identity.

### **5.1 Space and identity: Edward Said's imaginative geographies**

As previously stated, a cultural identity is always created in relation to a spatio-temporal context. However, since identity construction is an imaginative process, the spatio-temporal categories to which it relates must also be understood as imaginative constructions. Edward Said introduced the concept of imaginative geographies (as well as imaginative histories) in his seminal work *Orientalism*, first published in 1978. In this book Said comments on the importance of spatiality in the construction of the image of the self and the Other: space, subjectivity and otherness are mutually constitutive. In fact, the subjects define a particular space, and, at the same time, a given space produces particular subjects (Said glossed in Al-Mahfedi, 2011, p. 124). This interplay between space and subjectivity take place at a symbolic level: it is the interaction between mental abstractions of space and identity. Therefore, imaginative geographies can be seen as forms of social and imaginative constructions and can be pared up with Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, explored above.

These social constructions are intrinsically arbitrary, in fact Said says that all we know about time and space, or history and geography, is imaginative (1985, pp. 54-55). Consequently *Orientalism* argues that Western culture produced a view of the 'Orient' that was not generated from facts or reality, but based on a particular imagination, infused with stereotypes and colonial practices. Imagining thereby becomes a device and expression of power. This power is the ability of colonizers to construct and objectify the non-West and construct their version of Oriental reality. Using again a binary structure of classification, the East is fundamentally conceived as dissimilar and

antithetical to the West and at the same time is used to define the West's identity against its negative outside. What is other to the West is marked with values and connotations imposed by the West itself. Said's and Anderson's arguments converge in presenting the construction of the East as a social and imaginative process; on the other hand, however, Said stresses that the construction of the Orient does not come from the people within the country, rather it comes from without, from the colonizers and from other countries. Therefore the representation of the Orient is strictly related to colonial logics and hegemonic discourses.

In this definition of Oriental and, by opposition, Western identities, imaginative geographies are used to create boundaries, to mark the distance and difference from the Other. Imaginative geographies play an essential role in forming a sense of belonging to a specific space and consequently produce a sense of self and otherness. According to Said, the practice of creating a mental representation of spaces perceived as familiar or unfamiliar, near or far, is what creates a series of arbitrary distinctions and discriminative behaviours:

This universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs" is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word "arbitrary" here because imaginative geography of the "our land—barbarian land" variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for "us" to set up these boundaries in our own minds; "they" become "they" accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from "ours." ... The geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic, and cultural ones in expected ways. (Said, 1985, p. 54)

Here, Said argues that imaginative geographies are never the product of purely cognitive operations. The creation of mental geographical boundaries and distinctions are always connotated with cultural and social values. These mental spatial images carry within them comparative valorisations (Al-

Mahfedi, 2011, p. 123). Said uses the term 'poetics of space' to refer to this mechanism by means of which places are endowed with figurative value:

The objective space of a house—its corners, corridors, cellar, rooms—is far less important than what poetically it is endowed with, which is usually a quality with an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel; thus a house may be haunted or homelike, or prisonlike or magical. So space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here. (Said, 1985, p. 55)

Through such poetics, a range of cultural meanings are attributed to spaces. It seems Said wants to suggest that none of these meanings come to the space naturally and that they are the result of cultural and symbolic processes. To develop this idea further, Said also demonstrates how this same process operates in relation to time and argues that temporal markers such as 'long ago', 'the beginning' and 'at the end of time' are useless unless they go through this process of ascription of meanings (1985, p. 55).

Those figurative values involved in the geographical imagination enter not only into the production of alterity but also into the identity-formation of the viewing subject (Al-Mahfedi, 2011, p. 123). In fact, as the example of the house suggests, the geographical imagination and poetics of space do not apply only to the description and representation of distant, unknown territories (as the Orient). They apply also to familiar territories and sustain images of 'home' as well as images of 'away' or 'abroad'. It is possible to conclude, then, that while creating an idea of otherness, at the same time imaginative geographies create an image of the collective self against which stands the Other, or to use Said's words: "imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (Said, 1985, p. 55).

### 5.1.1 Imaginative geographies and power

Gillian Rose adopts Said's idea of imagined geographies and uses it to stress the link between different organizations of space and the production of different discourses about cultural identity. Different forms of cultural identity are articulated by different imagined geographies: racist discourses, for instance, construct racialised identities in part by erecting supposedly impermeable barriers which depend on an essentialist understanding of difference. What I want to draw from this argument is that cultural identities are constructed around a specific spatial order articulated by logics of power.

The vision of essentialised cultural identities is the result of a spatiality structured according to a binary model. Rose asserts that "the first dimension of the spatiality of power is zonality. Powerful institutions are understood as producing a territory divided into a centre and a margin" (1997, p. 5). The consequence of this division, and the second feature of this spatiality of power, is the hierarchical organisation of space between centre and periphery:

The spatiality that power produces is also understood as hierarchical. The locations of power [can be described] as "high" and the places marginalized by power as "low", and this is the hierarchy produced by the actions of power. Power acts from above. [...] To be marginalized is simply to have parameters binding your actions; it is to be constrained. (Rose, 1997, p. 6)

This kind of spatial logic conveys a series of cultural values that inform the construction of collective identities. In fact, the different territorialisation occurs because power is understood to have an essentially dividing function: to separate the acceptable from the unacceptable (Rose 1997, p. 5). According to Rose this spatiality "was complicit with colonialism, the phallogentric constitution of sexual difference, and the bourgeois construction of classed difference" (1997, p. 13).

According to this dominant binary spatial model, imagined geographies are a tool of power, a means of controlling and subordinating the Other. Power is seen as being in the hands of those who have the right to objectify those they are imagining. Many authors (Bhabha, 1994; Deutsche, 1995; and Nancy,

1991) have recognised the violent consequences of such a spatiality articulated around the notion of essentialism, closure and refusal of the different. Said's imaginative geographies can be inscribed in the same tradition as these three critics. The imaginative construction of the Orient from the Western perspective exemplifies how spatiality and imagination have been used to construct biased views of other regions or societies.

Said suggests that to change such exclusive and reductive definitions of identity and alterity it is necessary to rethink the spatialities which give both material and symbolic structure to those definitions. He speaks of a different spatiality, a dynamic spatiality where nothing is fixed forever, where there are no essentialising inclusions and exclusions, and no hierarchies of power (Al-Mahfedi, 2011, p. 121). This idea of a dynamic spatiality that challenges the rigid, hierarchical organisation of space leads to the creation of non-essentialist identities, which are not structured around a dualistic spatiality of power. As Gillian Rose affirms:

Community must be thought of through a space which does not structure essentialized identities. This rethought "community" must be mapped in a spatiality which can acknowledge partial and changing membership; contingent insiderness; uncertainty, loss and absence. (1997, p. 14)

Hierarchical spatial organization and the separation between the centre and margin, public and private spaces, will be explored in depth in the fifth chapter. There, using Rose's theory in conjunction with Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model of social interactions, I will analyse the social and spatial marginalisation of homosexual characters in *Máscaras* and I will explain how spatial organization in the novel represents the separation between conforming and non-conforming identities. I suggest, moreover, that Padura opposes to this rigid spatial organization a more dynamic and permeable model in his novels: in chapter 4, for instance, I will present Havana as a palimpsestic and heterotopic city in which different forms of spatial organization coexist producing multiple forms of cultural identities.

## 5.2 Time and identity

In his description of the anti-essentialist model, Stuart Hall states that cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being' and it therefore belongs to the future as much as to the past (Hall, 1990, p.225). With this statement Stuart Hall inscribes identity formation into the historical process and recognises that cultural identities have historical roots and that they evolve through history:

Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

Identities, then, are historical constructions grounded in the past and are the unique articulation of specific and contingent social and historical elements. However, as stated above with regard to imaginative geographies and histories, the kind of past involved in the identity represented is not a factual one but an imagined one. As my discussion on Cuban national memory in chapter 3 will show, the past is always re-constructed in the present through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. All these different components enter into the cultural representation of identity:

Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. (Hall, 1989, p. 72)

To show how cultural identity emerges from the interaction between history and culture I will here provide a brief historical overview. I will focus on three different conceptualisations of identity to show how the idea of identity has shifted and changed in different historical and cultural contexts. This overview is based on a simplified system of classification proposed by Stuart Hall in his article "The Question of Cultural Identity" (1992) and integrated with Bauman's reflexion on the evolution of post-modern identity.

The first identity model presented is the Enlightenment subject:

The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action, whose "centre" consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same - continuous or "identical" with itself - throughout the individual's existence. The essential centre of the self was a person's identity. (Hall, 1992, p. 275)

The enlightenment movement sees the primacy of rationality and reason as the basis for the development of the human subject. The enlightenment subject is perceived as a unique and unified agent. Man has been freed from dogmas and uncertainties, his constitutive centre is the mind with its capacity to think and reason. The Cartesian *Cogito, ergo sum* was, in fact, the motto of the Enlightenment period. The mind and its cognitive capacity constitute the rational, stable centre of this Cartesian subject. This conception seems to assert that we can in some way come to view ourselves objectively and that it is possible to disengage the production of identity from the dynamic social context in which we actually live (Hall, 1992, p. 275).

In contrast to this individualistic and 'monocentric' model of identity, in the modern period a more social and collective conception of identity emerged: the sociological subject:

The notion of the sociological subject reflected the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to "significant others," who mediated to the subject the values, meanings, and symbols - the culture - of the worlds he/she inhabited. [...] According to this view, which has become the classic sociological conception of the issue, identity is formed in the "interaction" between self and society, The subject still has an inner core or essence that is "the real me," but this is formed and modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds "outside" and the identities which they offer. (Hall, 1992, pp. 275-276)



Hall argues that the theorization of this second conception of identity is linked to the development of the new social sciences; therefore, its key assumption is that people are social creatures. The individual is conceived as located in social groups that form the structure of modern society. The individual is formed through his/her membership of the group, through his/her interaction with others and through a complicated web of social relations and collective norms. In this sociological view, although the self is still conceived as having an inner core, this is formed interactively between the inner world of the subject and the outside social world. The internalisation of social values makes the subject adapt to fit into the society in which he/she lives:

Identity, in this sociological conception, bridges the gap between the "inside" and the "outside" - between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them "part of us," helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world'. Identity thus stitches (or, to use a current medical metaphor, "sutures") the subject into the structure. It stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable. (Hall, 1992, pp. 275-276)

According to the sociological model, identity is created by a combination of an inner core, which, placed in a specific cultural environment, evolves, aligning the subject with the objective place the individual occupies in society. Hence this conception considers identity to be both innate and socially constructed. This is how we might begin to speak of cultural identity, precisely because it is socially and culturally constructed.

I argue that this conceptualisation of identity can be considered to be closest to the identity model used by the Cuban revolutionary establishment in the 1960s. On the one hand, the revolutionary government promoted an essentialist view of national identity as a unified and stable entity; however, on the other hand, it was aware of the influence of the cultural context on identity creation and of the importance of internalising specific cultural values. In fact,

the government devoted considerable attention to the institutionalization and perpetuation of symbolic and ritual acts.

The last conceptualisation proposed by Bauman and Stuart Hall is the post-modern subject. Hall argues that, as a result of the many structural and institutional changes (such as globalisation and delocalisation) occurring in Post-modernity, which reflect their consequences on the social and cultural landscape, identities are breaking up:

The subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented, composed, not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities. [...] The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable, and problematic. (Hall, 1992, pp. 276-277)

Hence, the rapid socio-cultural changes of late modernity produced a model of subjectivity which has no fixed, essential, or permanent core:

Identity becomes a "moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. (Hall, 1992, p. 277)

Bauman argues that the postmodern 'problem of identity' primarily concerns how to avoid fixation and keep options open. Both identity and society lose their solidity, definiteness and continuity. In a world in which the rules of the game constantly change, the only sensible strategy is therefore to adapt to this instability and avoid becoming fixed in any way: post-modern subjects avoid being tied to one place or anchored in the past and refuse to mortgage the future (1996, p. 24). Thus, the post-modern identity refuses to be conceived as a coherent and unified historical continuum:

The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent "self." Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. (Hall, 1992, p. 277)

If postmodern identities are inevitably fragmented and unstable, the feeling of having a unified, completed and coherent identity from birth to death is a culturally constructed fantasy:

If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or "narrative of the self" about ourselves. (Hall, 1992, p. 277)

This narrative of identity links different images and representations of what we think we are now, in the light of our past and present circumstances, together with what we think we would like to be. Self- narratives reconstruct the otherwise fragmented trajectory of our life, from past to future, and build up a consistent feeling of biographical continuity.

The post-modern subject is the result of a totally anti-essentialist approach to cultural identity. It states that identity is not some universal spirit living inside us, transcending culture and history, nor is it given once and for all. Instead, it is bound to historical and cultural discourses. Hence, as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, "we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities. Any one of which we could identify with - at least temporarily" (Hall, 1992, p. 277). Since cultural identities and their social, temporal and spatial contexts are mutually interacting, the post-modern proliferation and diversification of social contexts and sites of interaction produces fractured multiple identities as a consequence. Plurality, fluidity and instability, then, prevent the easy identification of particular subjects with a given, fixed identity so that the same person is able to shift across subject positions according to temporal and spatial circumstances.

This approach to cultural identity is useful for my study on post-Soviet Cuban identity. In fact, I argue that the post-modern model of multiple and fragmented identity has some similarities with the representation of contemporary Cuban identity proposed by Leonardo Padura Fuentes. In the next section I will explore the concept of post-modern identity further and I will describe its contextualisation and its features in greater depth.

## 6 Post-modern identity

As I have anticipated, the postmodern identity paradigm seems particularly appropriate to describe the evolution of Cuban identity in the 1990s. Catherine Davies argues that in Cuba, although the state ideology and values had been losing their power of attraction since the 1980s, it was mainly after the economic crash of 1992 that the real socio-cultural shift happened (2000, p. 105). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba experienced a moment of profound collective trauma and disbelief, that led to the appearance of alternative stories and identities in public life. I claim that Padura's literature represents Cuban identity as the shifting and unstable product of these socio-political changes. The psychological condition of his characters reflects the experience of the collective trauma and identity crisis. Each one of Padura's characters faces this identity crisis and frustration in a different aspect of his life: it is an ideological and work-related crisis in the case of Conde, physical in the case of *el Flaco* Carlos, a psychological and family crisis in the case of Andrés, religious or mystical in the case of Candito. In the post-Soviet world, the anchoring values the characters have previously interiorised are no longer valid: rootless and confused, each of these characters faces the emergence of many internal conflicts which pull them in different directions.

The multiplication and fragmentation of possible identity representations and the identity crisis are precisely some of the main features of what Hall defines as post-modern identity. These phenomena are the consequences of a wider process of socio-historical change, which dislocates the subject, fragmenting and undermining his frame of reference (Hall, 1992, p. 275). In this respect, Ticio Escobar poses the question of what can happen when the great concepts and points of reference that constitute the foundations of our idea of identity are placed in doubt (2002, p. 146): What happens to the symbolic and imaginary construction of identity when the values and symbols that provide its anchorage in society are challenged and overturned? According to Hall, the loss of this stable frame of references causes the dislocation or de-centring of the subject. Hall claims that "modern identities are being de-centred; that is dislocated or fragmented" (1992, pp. 274-275). Dislocation and decentralisation are, then, the key concepts at the core of the phenomenon of

post-modern identity crisis. Post-modern societies have no clear core or centre which could provide the ground for the representation of a unified identity. On the contrary, there is a plurality of centres which produce a plurality of identities. Thus, the post-modern subject gravitates around multiple centres: in a certain way, each of these centres forces the subject to assume a different identity (personal, public, etc). It could be said that the post-modern subject performs him/herself differently according to the setting in which he/she is acting and in which he/she is positioned. The different kinds of identities that the subject embodies in contemporary society can be conflictual, can create tensions inside the subject and lead to the fragmentation of identity.

The term 'fragmentation' emphasises the multiplicity of identities and of positions arising and coexisting within any cultural identity. To construct an image of the self, a narrative of the self that could make sense, each particular concrete subject in contemporary society needs to come to terms with the idea of fragmentation. In the Cuban case, however, dislocation and fragmentation can have positive implications. In chapter 2, I will argue that in the 1990s these phenomena provided the basis for the representation and articulation of new subjects. In fact, as I will explain in chapter 2, after the *Período Especial* the partial decentralisation of the revolutionary system questioned the dominant system of representation and the symbolic structures supporting the idea of a unified, dominant Cuban identity. By undermining the traditional distinction between one main centre and the periphery, decentralisation and dislocation create a liminal space. It is precisely these different liminal spaces that prepare the ground for the construction and negotiation of different and alternative forms of identity. Padura's literary production is populated by these 'different' identities which emerge from the liminal spaces created by the economic crisis and the relaxation of central control in the 1990s. Padura recognises and gives voice to 'minority' groups, which are not normally represented by the narrative of the Revolution (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 256) and reincorporates them into the Cuban national narrative. Examples of these marginalised groups that I will

analyse in the rest of this thesis are homosexuals, 'freakies' and urban tribes, petty criminals, and exiled and diasporic identities<sup>2</sup>.

The identities emerging from this kind of middle space are difficult to define. They challenge the binary distinction between the 'dominant' and the 'Other'. They live on the frontier between different spaces and different centres and often overcome the geographical border to mix the two spaces; these liminal identities are hybrids. Hybrid identities perform a constant border-crossing as an essential part of their identity construction. They are formed at the intersection of different discourses on class, gender, race and nation. Hybridity takes up the different spaces and centres of contemporary society and merges them in a new syncretic definition of cultural identity. In chapter 5, I will apply this idea of multiple identity centres, which constantly interact and create hybrid identities, to the analysis of Padura's novel *Máscaras*. A specific section of this novel in fact sees the protagonist Mario Conde attending a gay party in which various hybrid Cuban identities are performed. These identities are the points of suture between the multiple sexual, political, economic, psychological, social and cultural positions existing in contemporary Cuba.

In conclusion, the crisis of identity emerging in contemporary society challenges once more the essentialist and ontological idea of identity. On the one hand, it inscribes the production of identity inside socio-political and cultural dynamics; on the other, it shows that the construction of identity in the post-modern era is a complex, unpredictable and open-ended process.

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<sup>2</sup> Hall, when defining Caribbean cultural identity, speaks of diasporic identities as unstable constructions which are not linked to a specific space but epitomize the historical and spatial fluidity of identities (Hall, 1990, p.235). As I will comment in chapter 6, the Cuban diasporic identities challenge the revolutionary idea of national borders and national space and attempt to incorporate the Miami diaspora and Cuban-Americans in the discourse on the Cuban nation.

## 7 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the most important concepts that will be used in my analysis of the representation of Cuban identity in Padura's novels and has provided a conceptual framework for the development of my thesis. The discussion has given some explanation of the ways in which cultural identities are formed by social and symbolic systems, placing emphasis on the transitory and mutable nature of identity. I have briefly illustrated the mutually constitutive relation between identity and the complex historical and geopolitical setting of its production. I have argued that cultural identities are constructed through binary classifications and logics of difference and exclusion and I have linked this system of classification to specific dynamics of power and positioning. Finally this chapter has introduced important conceptual models (essentialist/anti-essentialist identity) and social phenomena (decentralization, fragmentation, hybridity) which will be crucial to understanding my description of Padura's post-Soviet identities.

Starting from these concepts, the following chapter will focus specifically on the Cuban case, providing a brief excursus of the different identity representations promoted after the revolutionary victory. My aim will be to show how the idea of Cubanness moved from an essentialist, unitary and hegemonic position in the early 1960s and 1970s, to a more fragmented, anti-hegemonic and unstable notion during the *Período Especial* in the 1990s. I will consider different components of Cuban cultural identity and pose them as the main categories for my analysis of Padura's plural and multiple definition of contemporary Cubanness.





## Chapter 2

### Cuban Identity after the Revolution

#### 1 Introduction

In this chapter I will apply the terms and concepts I have presented in chapter 1 to a description of Cuban cultural identity. My aim will be to show how the historical, political and spatial context of post-1959 Cuba affected the creation of new forms of Cuban national identity. In this way, I will provide a brief overview of the main features of Cuban identity in the 1960s-70s and in the 1990s. This chapter is divided into two main sections, each of which presents a different model of identity representation, to explain how the idea of Cubanness shifted from an essentialist, unitary and hegemonic position, to a more fragmented, anti-essentialist and unstable notion during the *Período Especial*. In my analysis I will consider different components of cultural identity, since, as I have stated previously, in the contemporary world, identity derives from a multiplicity of sources. The final aim of this examination will be to set the ground for a comparison between the rigid, prescriptive model created in the early decades of the revolutionary government, and the more recent and flexible model of cultural identity represented in Padura's novels.

#### 2 Cuban revolutionary identity: an essentialist model

I argue that Padura's literary production critiques the institutionalized, essentialist model of Cuban national identity of the 1960s and '70s, which was influenced by a logic of binary classification and exclusion. In order to lay the basis for an analysis of Padura's novels, the first section of this chapter will therefore stress the similarities between the newly constructed revolutionary identity of the 1960s and 1970s and an essentialist model of identity

representation. In presenting my overview of the Cuban revolutionary identity I will focus my attention on the re-formulation and re-shaping of national identity according to a dichotomous model. In the following paragraphs I will take into account the different aspects and sources of identity and, combining them with the complex post-1959 political situation, I will show how the Cuban national identity was reinterpreted by the Revolution according to the political needs of that specific historical period.

When I speak of essentialist identity in the case of the revolutionary Cuban identity I am not implying that, under this model, the core of Cubanness is considered to be an immanent essence, innate and self-contained despite temporal and social influences. As I anticipated in chapter 1, the Revolution has in fact been highly conscious of the importance of the social context in the shaping of national identity and that is why, considering the three models proposed by Hall, the one which I associate with the revolutionary identity is the sociological model. As explained in chapter 1, this model has an essentialist character but combines this with a recognition of the social components of identity construction: the inner core of the subject is not autonomous and self-sufficient, but is formed in relation to the socio-cultural world outside the subject. Identities, then, are the products of the interaction between the inner world of the subject and the outside social world; they bridge the gap between the personal and the public world and allow the subject to fit in its social space (Hall, 1992, pp. 275-6). The sociological model stresses the importance of social values and cultural codes that are internalised in the process of identity formation; in line with this idea the Cuban revolutionary government placed a lot of emphasis on promoting specific cultural values that needed to be internalised by the Cuban population. On many occasions the regime devoted considerable attention to the institutionalization and perpetuation of specific traditions and proved to be able to control and manipulate external factors to its advantage. A clear example of the interaction between the personal and social sphere is provided by the construction of the New Man. This model, around which the revolutionary identity has been shaped, implies the possibility of constructing a new identity and promoting self-improvement through education, discipline and social participation: “El

proceso es doble, por un lado actúa la sociedad con su educación directa e indirecta, por otro, el individuo se somete a un proceso consciente de autoeducación” (Guevara, 1982, p. 6).

The revolutionary government was concerned with creating a subject that could fit into the new social structure of post-1959 Cuba; its aim was to use the external political changes to influence further changes at the level of identity. As I will explain in greater depth in the next subsection, in the 1960s a new Cuban national narrative was constructed by re-interpreting Cuban culture and history from a revolutionary perspective. It was imperative to create a new nation that could be defined as a unit and as faithful to the Revolution. From the beginning, unity and homogeneity were placed at the core of the revolutionary national model: for example the abolition of sexual difference or racial difference (at least on the official level and in revolutionary rhetoric) was a crucial step towards the construction of a new homogeneous social body. For this purpose, differences needed to be eliminated, absorbed by the majority or at least silenced.

The product of this sociological process of identity formation was an exclusive model, which established a set of specific and prescriptive parameters, behaviours and virtues as fundamental for the definition of the revolutionary national identity. Once the revolutionary identity was established and delineated it needed to be kept stable and solid in order to support the survival of a stable revolutionary society. Therefore, the second aim of the Revolution was to fix its new identity model, giving it a definitive character that would be maintained over time; this was the most essentialist trait of this model. The essentialist character of the revolutionary identity resides precisely in the rigidity of its features and criteria and in its attempt to homologate the Cuban population to the prescribed model. Even though the revolutionary identity was not originally essentialist in itself, gradually, during the period from the mid-1960s to the beginning of the 1970s, it developed essentialist features as a consequence of its prescriptiveness, of its tendency to ‘engulf’ and exclude alternatives and as a result of the introduction of increasingly intransigent Soviet-style structures in Cuba.

## **2.1 Towards a new national identity: *Cubanía revolucionaria***

As I explain in chapter 1, the construction of national identity has a strong political dimension and its process can be profoundly influenced by powerful social and political actors that act as the agents of identity production. In the 1960s, the revolutionary government represented precisely the new political actor and powerful agent that re-defined the Cuban national identity model.

After the historical shift represented by the end of Batista's dictatorship and after the success of the revolutionary movement, the new government needed to embark on a complicated process of national rebuilding and identity reshaping. Once the creation of the new revolutionary Cuban nation was declared in political terms in 1959, it was necessary to describe the creation of the new nation in terms of a common identity. The task of the new revolutionary government was, thus, to shape a strong representation of the nation and to construct a national narrative that would reinforce the idea of a coherent Cuban political community. The goal of creating this homogeneous nation was a fundamental trait of the revolutionary project, which posited national and ideological unity as vital elements in the preservation of the revolutionary victory. Thus, the Cuban leaders in the aftermath of the Revolution sought to elaborate an integrating and homogenising formula that could be imposed over the social and cultural diversity of the Cuban population and which would be understood as a necessary condition for the realisation of the revolutionary nation. The revolutionary government needed, then, to establish a set of values pertaining specifically to the revolutionary movement, strong enough to give a coherent image of unity and communion to the Cuban population. This systematic body of ideas, values, symbols and myths should also pertain to Cuban history and be applicable to it, in order to provide a reading of past events and recent political changes in the line of a tradition of *historia patriae* (Kapcia, 1989, p. 167). Finally, this reinforced set of values should be combined with new symbols or myths, in order to create a solid national project and to guide collective action towards the construction of the future Cuban society. In fact, the aim of this newly established national ideology was to propose a new vision of the national future and to offer a guide to collective action towards the attainment of that identified, collective, better

future (Kapcia, 1989, p. 167). Therefore, the first step in the 're-imagining' of Cuban national identity was to establish a systematic body of values that could link the revolutionary ethos to the Cuban national tradition. The combination of these elements was intended to create an image of Cuban identity that would be meaningful to citizens and usable in political terms.

The debate on Cuban cultural identity has historically been based around three different terms used to define the Cuban character: *cubanidad*, *cubanismo*, and *cubanía*. All these terms appear in Fernando Ortiz's "Los factores humanos de la cubanidad". Ortiz's essay is considered one of the canonical texts on Cuban identity. According to the author, *cubanidad* is the "condición genérica de ser cubano" (28/11/1939). It is primarily a civil status, the fact of having a Cuban passport and sharing a certain set of cultural elements that bind the individual to the state. *Cubanidad* is thus, as Pérez- Firmat suggests glossing Ortiz, a generic civil condition shared by all individuals of Cuban nationality (1997). *Cubanismo* by contrast is not embodied in birth certificates or passports, it is rather a mood, a temper, something related to the culture. It is defined by Ortiz as "todo carácter propio de los cubanos" (28/11/1939). It is the national character of the Cuban people, grounded in cultural habits, behaviours and traditions. Finally Ortiz takes a further step, creating a new term: *cubanía*, to combine civil status and cultural affiliation with a third essential criterion: the will to be Cuban. *Cubanía* is a higher and more complete form of Cubanness: "consciencia de ser cubano, y la voluntad de quererlo ser" (Ortiz, 28/11/1939). In order to possess the real essence of Cubanness, that is *cubanía*, it is not enough to have a Cuban passport or perform a set of habits and social behaviours, it is compulsory to have the consciousness of being Cuban and the will to identify oneself as Cuban.

While *cubanidad* is essentially a generic and collective civil status, *cubanía* is an inner spiritual state, an individual act of the will. It does not require documentary support, it is given to those who want and desire it. To want *cubanía* is already to possess it. Ortiz emphasizes the subjective consciousness and will to be Cuban rather than external or legal features such as national origins, citizenship or race. I will say more on Ortiz's definition of Cuban identity later on, when I will propose an anti-essentialist approach to

Cuban identity. What I argue here is that the Revolution attempted to reinterpret the notion of Cubanness through focusing on its more complete expression: *cubanía*, and reformulating this concept in what has been defined by Antoni Kapcia as *cubanía revolucionaria*: “a fusion of the two radical Cuban ideological traditions: *cubanía* and Marxist socialism” (2000, p. 141). Linking the revolutionary ideology to an historical definition of Cuban identity provided unity and stability to the social community. At the same time, the adjective *revolucionaria* added a warlike character to the traditional definition of Cubanness, inscribing the revolutionary struggle within the national tradition of struggle for Cuban freedom and independence (Kapcia, 2006, p. 57).

The second step in the ‘re-imagining’ of Cuban national identity was precisely to inscribe the revolutionary trajectory within the national history, to ensure a sense of historical continuity and to legitimize the revolutionary government. With the idea of *cubanía revolucionaria*, then, the new regime constructed a bridge to an historical and mythical past, ensuring continuity in the national project and providing a nationalistic reading of the recent political changes. To this end Fidel Castro adopted José Martí as a crucial inspiration for his Marxist revolutionary government. Castro considered himself the ‘spiritual heir’ of Martí, invested with the role of gathering around him the different groups opposing Batista’s dictatorship. The success of the Revolution was, then, presented as the last event of a long and noble history of struggle for freedom and independence. The Revolution built its legitimacy by ensuring historical continuity with the pre-1959 narrative of struggle and betrayal (Kapcia, 2006, p. 57). In the new rhetoric of the Revolution the *guerrilleros* continued the tradition of the struggle for a *Cuba Libre*, eliminating the element of betrayal that was represented by Batista’s government.

Therefore, in this process of re-conceptualization of the Cuban national identity, the Revolution on the one hand establishes continuity with the historical past of the nation, while on the other hand, poses itself in contrast with the Batista period, marking the change between present and recent past. Once national consensus was achieved and the legitimacy of the new government established, the regime needed to propose a new direction and mark the distance from Batista’s dictatorship, demystifying symbols and icons

perceived to be a betrayal of original, purely Cuban values. The Revolution proposed a negative approach to the recent historical past, considering Batista, and his affiliation with the USA, as an obstacle to Cuban independence and stressing the need for a strong rupture with the previous regime. Presenting Batista's era as a negative moment of Cuban history, the government was implicitly conveying a positive interpretation of the post-revolutionary present. This attempt to define the Cuban revolutionary national identity as a rupture with Batista's idea of the nation is a prime example of the exclusive and binary character that the Cuban revolutionary identity model assumed. In fact, the Revolution in the 1960s shaped its idea of the nation and of national identity through a series of antagonistic relations between opposite terms according to Escobar's model of *inverted identity*<sup>1</sup> (2002, p. 147). This dichotomous structure of representation presented two opposite poles: the positive one corresponded to features and behaviours considered within the revolutionary ideal (or to quote Castro's words from a speech given on 30 June 1961 "dentro de la revolución"<sup>2</sup>), while the negative pole was formed by those elements considered outside the revolutionary canon ("contra la revolución" (30/06/1961)).

Finally, once the main features of the new Cuban nation had been identified, the final essential step was to use the newly established set of values to provide a guide to collective action, towards the realization of a positive social project. As affirmed by Kapcia, the vision of the national future and the guidelines proposed by the Revolution to make this future vision real were in line with the principles of socialism. Although in 1959-60 the Revolution was considered by Cuban leaders as a praxis rather than an established political ideology, already in a speech given on 14 April 1961 Fidel Castro announced that the revolutionary programme would be socialist:

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<sup>1</sup> As I stated in chapter 1, Ticio Escobar defines inverted identity as a model in which "Each identity is not considered statically but in an antagonistic relationship to another" (2002, p. 147).

<sup>2</sup> "Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada" (Fidel Castro, Havana, 30/06/1961).

Compañeros obreros y campesinos: ésta es la Revolución socialista y democrática de los humildes, por los humildes y para los humildes. (Castro, 16/04/1961)

This decision was determined by economic and historical reasons that led Cuba into conflict with the USA and a consequent communion of interests with the Soviet Union. After the Bay of Pigs invasion (1961), Castro looked towards the USSR for protection, establishing a new economic relationship with the Soviet state and, at the same time, increasing the hostile attitude toward the US. Subsequent historical and political events, such as the economic war due to the drastic US reduction of Cuban sugar import quotas, the missile crisis and the embargo (1962), forced Cuba into a high level of dependence on the USSR's economic aid. At the same time, the Soviet Union started to increasingly exercise its influence over Cuban politics. Under the Marxist influence, the Cuban Revolution proposed an ideology based on the desire for social justice and equality, a devotion to national independence and sovereignty, a strong sense of self-sacrifice and collectivism in the line of a tradition of heroic struggle and activism.

Returning to Escobar's definition of inverted identity (2002, p. 147), it appears clear that after 1961, the Cuban revolutionary identity defined itself as the antagonist of the US capitalist identity, as a kind of reaction to the military invasion and the subsequent economic isolation imposed on the island. Therefore, what was considered an important economic partner and a point of cultural reference until 1959 became the counterpoint against which the new revolutionary policy would be shaped. A decade before, in the 1950s, Cuba was known as the US' playground. At the same time, under Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship, the economy of the island was primarily based on sugar monoculture, and was heavily reliant on exports to the US. For Castro and his companions, therefore, after 1961-62 it was of primary importance to mark the difference from the previous regime and from its alliance and affiliation with the US imperialist model. One of the main aims of the Revolution was the liberation of Cuba from a form of economic-colonial dependence on the US and the aspiration to full national sovereignty and self-determination. This political-economic strategy had repercussions at the social level, influencing



the new identity model proposed by the revolutionary state. In fact, although not clearly stated from the beginning, soon the Revolution focused its model of identity on socialism and collectivism in opposition to US capitalism and bourgeois individualism. During the first years of the revolutionary government, against the backdrop of the Cold War, which had divided the world into two opposed areas of influences, Cuba was forced to position itself inside this geopolitical division. The Revolution therefore, to protect itself, to enforce its power and provide a viable alternative to the previous regime, incorporated these mutually exclusive tendencies into a socialist nationalistic model based on a strongly dichotomous structure.

In the revolutionary era, the creation of a new Cuban national identity based on a binary model confirms what I have already said on the relation between identity and difference: one of the most important discursive strategies for identity representation is the confrontation with 'the Other', 'the different'. This Other in the case of revolutionary Cuba could be the former official establishment perceived as oppressive, or a dissident group (such as the USA or the exiles in Miami) trying to establish a different discourse, but in both cases the Other serves as counterpoint against which national identity is shaped, established and usually protected. This confrontational mechanism functions only through the capacity to select, to exclude, to leave out, to identify an 'outside' (Hall, 1996, p. 5). This explains why the Cuban nationalistic discourse, in the 1960s and 1970s, shaped everything in terms of us vs. them, inside vs. outside. Many of the slogans used by the Revolution have a binary structure: *Dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución nada; patria o muerte*. Once the Revolution established its government, it also established the criteria and limits of the new idea of national identity and nation. The revolutionary motto *patria o muerte*, which in 1960 substituted the previous one *libertad o muerte*<sup>3</sup>, maintained the same binary structure, identifying

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<sup>3</sup> On the 4th of March 1960 Fidel Castro gave a speech in honour of the 75 people killed by the explosion in Havana harbour of the freighter *La Coubre*, which was carrying munitions and explosives to Cuba. The Cuban government claimed that the CIA was responsible for the explosion: "Recordamos que un día nosotros fuimos 12 hombres solamente y que, [...] sin embargo, nosotros creíamos que resistíamos entonces, como creemos hoy que resistimos a cualquier agresión [...] y que nuevamente no tendríamos otra disyuntiva que aquella con que iniciamos la lucha revolucionaria: la de la libertad o

*libertad* with *patria* and *patria* with the Revolution. From the 1960s the Cuban nation started to be identified with the Revolution. The logical implication of this binary representation is that if you are not one thing you are automatically the opposite: no middle way is conceived. If you are not with the Revolution, you are against it. Thus, the binary structure of the revolutionary identity model was used in the 1960s to interpret and frame the new Cuban socio-political reality. As Escobar would say (2002, p. 147), the dichotomous structure was used as a model to establish order between the conflicting forces coexisting in Cuban society in the 1960s.

The complex geopolitical situation of the 1960s together with the specific changes that occurred in Cuban national history just before the 1960s explain why the Cuban revolutionary identity has been constructed in terms of binary oppositions such as male/female, straight/gay, normal/deviant, and through a hierarchy of power. For the purpose of my project, I will briefly examine these sets of bipolar tensions to understand how significant the recent changes in the perception of contemporary Cuban identity represented in Padura's novels have been.

## **2.2 From a theoretical to practical model: the New Man**

The binary model of identity representation adopted by the Revolution in the 1960s is at the same time an essentialist model. In fact, the aim of such a rigid structure is to identify a supposed core essence and propose a notion of unity, constructed precisely through a play of difference, power and exclusions. The binary classification of desirable and undesirable identity features and behaviours serves the purpose of delineating an ideal positive model of Cubanness to which the citizens of the new revolutionary state should conform. This idealized model would ensure the creation of a unified and homogeneous national community, faithful to the revolutionary ideology. The clearest theorization of this model of desirable Cuban identity was elaborated by Ernesto Che Guevara. His New Man applied the revolutionary ideology to

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la muerte. Solo que ahora libertad quiere decir algo más todavía: libertad quiere decir patria. Y la disyuntiva nuestra sería: ¡Patria o Muerte!”

practical life. It was an effective model that mediated between the individual and collective tensions. It moved the revolutionary project from a theoretical onto a more tangible and concrete level.

The New Man was the prototype of the perfect revolutionary, combining the features of el *guerrillero* with the myth of el *mártir muerto por la patria*. The political activism and its militant nature placed this ideal prototype inside the old tradition of the *lucha* for independence. The struggle for national freedom, thus, represents here the *leitmotiv* of the whole of Cuban history, linking together the war of independence against Spain, the revolutionary struggle against Batista's dictatorship, Che Guevara and his *guerrilla* movement and the *lucha* against the imperialism and the economic tyranny of the United States. On the one hand the New Man places himself in the trajectory of the Cuban militant and independence movement, establishing historical continuity for the legitimization of the revolutionary project, while on the other hand, it epitomizes the binary structure promoted by the Revolution, representing the sum of all the prescriptions and norms set by the new Cuban government for its citizens. Along with honour, intellectual honesty and physical strength there belonged to the New Man's virtues above all a revolutionary morality, passionate spirit, self-control, and the consciousness of duty, incorruptibility, discipline and the willingness to sacrifice one's own life. Some of these elements are typical of a socialist representation of identity. In fact, to mark a difference with the individualistic identity model proposed by capitalism, the Revolution stressed the importance of collectivism and egalitarianism as key points of its social project.

Lo importante es que los hombres van adquiriendo cada día más conciencia de la necesidad de su incorporación a la sociedad y, al mismo tiempo, de su importancia como motores de la misma. Ya no marchan completamente solos, por veredas extraviadas, hacia lejanos anhelos. Siguen a su vanguardia, constituida por el partido, por los obreros de avanzada, por los hombres de avanzada que caminan ligados a las masas y en estrecha comunión con ellas. Las vanguardias tienen su vista puesta en el futuro y en su recompensa, pero esta no se vislumbra como algo individual; el premio es la nueva sociedad donde los hombres

tendrán características distintas: la sociedad del hombre comunista. (Guevara, 1982, pp. 8-9)

The Revolution promised a general improvement of life conditions, it identified itself with *el pueblo* and placed at the zenith of its political agenda the protection of the interests of the Cuban community. If, on the one hand, the Revolution assured social equality and protection to the population, on the other, to defend the new ideology from external and internal threats, the revolutionary system demanded the devotion, personal involvement and collaboration of Cuban citizens. Therefore, the new government began to place great emphasis on the individual's responsibility in the realization of a desirable future society. Thus, the good Cuban citizen was one who was conscious of his personal responsibility, who accepted his duty and was willing and ready to sacrifice himself for a higher common interest.

Se trata, precisamente, de que el individuo se sienta más pleno, con mucha más riqueza interior y con mucha más responsabilidad. El individuo de nuestro país sabe que la época gloriosa que le toca vivir es de sacrificio; conoce el sacrificio. Los primeros lo conocieron en la Sierra Maestra y dondequiera que se luchó; después lo hemos conocido en toda Cuba. Cuba es la vanguardia de América y debe hacer sacrificios porque ocupa el lugar de avanzada, porque indica a las masas de América Latina el camino de la libertad plena. (Guevara, 1982, p. 15)

The New Man represented one pole of the Cuban binary model of identity representation. It was the positive pole, exemplifying what a Cuban needed to be like in order to possess *cubanía revolucionaria* and to be considered a real revolutionary. Considering that the official discourse of the Revolution identified *patria* with Revolution, being a good revolutionary meant being a real Cuban.

The New Man was created in the 1960s as a powerful instrument for the social reform of Cuban society promoted by the Revolution. It summarized within itself all the new values established, it placed itself inside the Cuban tradition and, at the same time, it embodied the new socialist ethos. The New Man had

a powerful symbolic value, which increased after the heroic death of its creator, Che Guevara, and it therefore exercised a strong influence on the imaginary construction of the revolutionary Cuban identity.

### **2.3 Defining gender roles and masculinity**

The construction of a shared cultural identity in post-1959 Cuba was based on identification with a prototypical exemplar: the New Man, and on a process of homogenization of differences and the exclusion of incompatible identity performances. Such a process of homogenization and exclusion involved all aspects of Cuban life, from the public to the private sphere. Particularly important was the transposition of the binary identity model to practical life, where it came into play in conjunction with issues of gender. The binary model classified gender performances according to a strict heterosexual logic. This new Cuban gender identity model was created according to predefined social patterns that were historically and culturally constructed. The definition of gender features and behaviours therefore conformed perfectly to a traditional and patriarchal representation of man and woman. The revolutionary model of gender identity performance in the 1960s-70s was, then, structured on a clear bipolar male/female classification; each one of these categories was characterized by specific features and had a different role inside Cuban society. For example, during the revolutionary struggle, Che Guevara described the role of women in the guerrilla war. Even though Che stressed the importance of women's contribution to the active guerrilla war, he also specified that women could only collaborate with the revolutionary struggle according to the features and characteristics of their gender. Guevara said "Naturalmente, las mujeres combatientes son las menos" (1972, p.131). He attributed an important role to women as messengers or infiltrators in enemy territories, but mainly excluded them from the real fight and armed conflict. The majority of the functions assigned to women were related to civil organization and social care: the woman was essentially a "trabajadora social" (Guevara, 1972, p.133), who, with her sweet character could work as a nurse and a cook for soldiers or a teacher of illiterate peasants. The perfect Cuban male and female citizens, then, responded perfectly to predefined gender roles.

The philosophy of the Revolution changed over time, moving away from Guevara's description of the gender role division and providing all women with free education, health care, and birth control, access to abortion and the freedom to divorce. Although the official discourse presented women as an active force in the construction of the new society, old practices of male sexual dominance continued in Cuba, where a *machista* and patriarchal approach to gender issues was maintained. Clearly, in this identity discourse there was no space for alternative identity performances such as homosexuality or homoeroticism. The different kinds of identity performances which, for any reason and in any respect, escaped this binary classification were considered by the Cuban government as deviations and were therefore excluded and marginalised. Homosexuality by its very nature escapes binary logics of classification and does not fit into the revolutionary model. In particular, during the 1970s homosexuality was treated as an unacceptable deviation, a sort of perverse illness which challenged social stability. As a result, a policy of social marginalization and exclusion of homosexual identities from the revolutionary project was put in place during the late 1960s and 1970s.

The strongest discriminations had been against male homosexuals because they were considered to be clearly incompatible with the New Man stereotype: "¡el hombre nuevo no puede ser maricón!" (Padura, 2013). Gay men were considered socially inadequate and useless for the revolutionary project and, consequently, had been rejected and marginalised. To point out the incompatibility between homosexual behaviour and socialist ideology Castro said in a 1967 interview with Lockwood:

We would never come to believe that a homosexual could embody the conditions and requirements of conduct that would enable us to consider him a true revolutionary, a true Communist militant.  
(Lockwood, quoted in Young, 1981, p. 8)

Hence, homosexuality was, to a certain extent, considered to sabotage the revolutionary project and undermine national stability. It was often framed in terms of national security: homosexual bodies were perceived to be a threat to the body of the nation. As pointed out by Emilio Bejel, "nationalist discourse

tends to perceive some bodies as healthy and desirable and others as queer and dangerous” (2000, p.157). Homosexuality was a dangerous threat: it could corrupt young citizens and distract them from their social duty. It could obstruct the coherence of the nation and the homogenization of the Cuban population under the established model. Homosexuality, challenging the interpretation of gender performances proposed by the Revolution, implicitly undermined the whole binary organization of the new Cuban socio-political reality. Thus, in official Cuban discourse, homosexuality has often been charged with a strong political value and for this fundamental reason much time and effort has been invested in the attempt to control, contain, normalize and sometimes repress certain ‘deviant’ identities and their sexualities (Bejel, 2000, p.157).

Soon homosexuality was identified with ideological diversionism. It represented, in fact, a challenge to the Stalinist approach to gender issues. As Brad Epps reminds us, in 1934, under the directions of Stalin, male homosexuality in the Soviet Union was recriminalized and even consensual intercourse was punished with up to five years of imprisonment. Homosexuality in the Soviet Union was considered a threat to national security: it was perceived as a crime against both masculinity and the state (Epps, 1995, p. 238). Cuban socialism reinforced this idea with values pertaining to a Spanish-Catholic morality which perceived homosexuality as a deviation from human nature, which denied the value of heterosexual union and its reproductive function:

En los setenta la sexualidad es un elemento conflictivo importante, viene de una tradición cultural hispánica, judeo-cristiana, muy arraigada en Cuba que ve la homosexualidad como una enfermedad. (Padura, 2013)

The affiliation between ideology and sexual orientation became almost automatic in Cuba. Soon the Revolution began to see homosexuals as victims of capitalist or imperialist influences and as the product of bourgeois decadence. Therefore, in the first decades of the revolutionary government, homosexuals were perceived as allies of capitalism and were often seen as corrupt individuals spreading bourgeois values among young Cubans.

Such an intolerant mood during the late 1960s and 1970s led to the creation of a strong anti-gay politics in Cuba. The most famous manifestation of this were the UMAP (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción). Established in 1965, the UMAP were military camps devoted to the 're-education' of 'deviant' Cuban citizens (Kapcia, 2005, p.136). Even though they were originally created to 'cure' homosexuality, they soon became forced labour camps, wherein every kind of 'deviant' identity performance (sexual, moral, ideological, and religious) was imprisoned, in order, supposedly, to be 're-directed'. The UMAP institutionalized the marginalization of 'the different', separating all the possibly 'dangerous' elements from the body of the 'healthy' Cuban nation.

En los setenta se marginan los homosexuales de la vida pública. En el campo del arte, del teatro, en la escena pública y en la política, por supuesto, no podía haber homosexuales. En los años setenta, entonces, se produce toda una política de marginalización hacia lo diferente. (Padura, 2013)

Although the UMAP did not last long, the anti-gay politics of the Cuban regime continued in the 1970s, as affirmed by Padura, and the discrimination against homosexuality encompassed all aspects of public life after the enactment of specific repressive laws<sup>4</sup>. This anti-gay policy also had important effects on the Cuban cultural world. In 1971 the government began a process of purges of the artistic and intellectual sphere called the *parametración de los intelectuales*<sup>5</sup>. The regime established specific criteria that every citizen involved in public and artistic life was required to comply with. Obviously,

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<sup>4</sup> Between 1971 and 1979 different laws were enacted which penalised "homosexual molestation, homosexual acts and ostentatious displays of homosexuality in public".

<sup>5</sup> The *Primero Congreso de Educación y Cultura* held in Havana in April 1971 declared that "no es permisible que por medio de la calidad artística reconocidos homosexuales ganen influencias que incidan en la formación de nuestra juventud (...) Se sugirió el estudio para la aplicación de las medidas que permitan la ubicación en otros organismos de aquellos que, siendo homosexuales, no deben tener relación directa en la formación de nuestra juventud desde una actividad artística o cultural...".



homosexuals did not conform to the ideological requirements imposed by the Revolution and, as a consequence, were banned from public office and cultural activities. During this period many homosexuals were dismissed from their jobs, expelled from schools and denied admission to university. I will examine the situation of homosexuals in the 1970s and the effect that the *parametración* had on Cuban intellectuals in greater depth later on in my thesis, in the chapter devoted to the analysis of the novel *Máscaras*.

In its attempt to organize undefined reality according to a dichotomous structure, the Cuban government posited homosexual and unconventional identities as the Other of its official discourse. Nevertheless, homosexuals had an important role in the shaping of the Cuban national identity in the 1960s and 1970s, albeit from an oppositional position: they represented the constitutive outside, marking the margins of the official model of the Cuban revolutionary identity and helping to consolidate the new image of the nation. As I showed in chapter 1, every form of identity is defined by its 'margins' and its internal unity and homogeneity is constructed through the play of difference with the 'outside'. The internal unity and homogeneity claimed by the Revolution was, then, the result of a selective social process of 'closure' and exclusion, based on binary oppositions such as heterosexual/homosexual, normal/deviant. One of the two terms is the desirable identity performance, the other is the negative term that defines and delimits the official model of national identity by contrast. The Revolution, therefore, by shaping homosexual identities as the negative term of the bipolar classification, implicitly identified them as a constitutive element of Cuban national identity. In fact, the subordinate term, the marginalized Other, is also constitutive of, and necessary for, the existence of the dominant term (Grossberg, 1996, p.90). Thus, as Emilio Bejel said, despite the government's refusal to acknowledge it, "the notion of homosexuality and homoeroticism is inscribed, by negation, in the prescriptive models of the national Cuban narrative" (2001, p.XIV). Paradoxically, the exclusion of the homosexual community from official discourse automatically fostered its group identity as an inverted term. In fact, despite the existence of differences between individual gender performances inside the Cuban gay community, the homosexual group identity was

consolidated around a common experience of marginalization and exclusion. Excluded from official discourse, homosexuals lived at the margins of the official identity model and of the Cuban national narrative.

Homosexuality constitutes one of the categories of otherness against which Cuban nationalism defined itself in the 1960s and 1970s. From the 1990s, the regime officially moderated its attitude towards gays, affirming that homosexuality does not prevent anyone from being a good revolutionary and stating that homosexuality should not be persecuted, if it is performed as a personal private practice between consenting adults. Nevertheless, old practices of heteronormative dominance and the marginalization of the 'different' continue to exist in the praxis of Cuban life. Padura states that:

Esta política de marginalización hacia lo diferente sigue practicándose hoy en día en Cuba, porque si bien la diferencia sexual ha dejado de ser tan problemática, todavía hay otro tipo de diferencias que sí siguen siendo problemáticas. (Padura, 2013)

In the following section I will explore the persistence of another kind of difference and another form of ideological diversionism against which the Cuban revolutionary government constructed its definition of Cubanness: the diaspora.

## **2.4 Cuban national identity and exile. Cubanness: a transnational construction?**

The question of constructing a new collective identity in Cuba also had to deal with the relationship between place and nationality. This relationship is a complicated one for a population that, as Padura states, sees exile as an endemic condition of history and at the same time as “un trauma nacional” (Padura interviewed by Clark, 2000). Often, Cuban nationalist discourse attempted to equate the definition of the Cuban nation with its territory. Chapter 1 has already explored the importance of spatial representation and imaginative geography in the construction of national identity and national belonging. Here I argue that Anderson’s image of a nation as a political unit

delimited by physical limits and boundaries provides the theoretical basis for the re-shaping of national identity promoted by the Revolution in the 1960s. The official rhetoric placed terms such as soil, motherland and territory at the centre of its nationalistic discourse and re-interpreted the relationship between place and nationality, identifying the insular territory as an essential component of Cubanness (Duany, 2000, p.35). A common trend in the discussion of Cubanness has been the use of an arboreal or agricultural language, full of metaphorical references to roots, uprootedness, transplants and mother earth (Duany, 2000, p.19). Such figurative language localizes one's sense of belonging in a confined physical space and contributes to the creation of a territorialized and naturalized national identity. This position is closer to an essentialist approach to national identity, promoting the idea of a pre-existing, natural identity core linked to a specific and defined space, at the same time excluding the possibility that a national identity can flourish or bloom outside the soil of the motherland. This kind of approach to national identity obviously excludes the diaspora from any discourse on the nation and considers it as a completely distinct entity (Duany, 2000, p.20).

Again the idea of a binary structure of classification is used to define national identity against its negative pole: the diaspora. In this binary interpretation, spatiality plays an important role in the definition of the self and the Other. In fact, Cuban nationalists tended to identify the island territory as the symbol of Cuban national unity and perceived the sea as a clear physical boundary which separated the nation from the Other. Considering the strong link of national identity with the idea of *patria* and national soil, it is easy to understand why the new government excluded the exiles from its Cuban nationalist project. As mentioned above, due to the political pressures of the 1960s, Castro's government established the total identification of the notion of *patria* with the Revolution. Therefore, on the one hand, being counter-revolutionary meant being anti-Cuban while, on the other hand, leaving the island soil meant abandoning the revolutionary struggle for independence and being unpatriotic. If, in order to be a real Cuban it was necessary to conform to the new idea of *Cubanía revolucionaria*, this idea of militant Cubanness was based on Ortiz's description of *cubanía* as "consciencia de ser cubano, y la voluntad de

quererlo ser” (Ortiz, 28/11/1939) and consequently, in the Revolution’s adoption of Ortiz, it posited a personal commitment to the revolutionary project as the main criteria with which to assess Cubanness. To be a real Cuban it was compulsory to have the will to identify oneself with both Cuba and the Revolution.

The émigrés who left the island refused to take part in the Cuban social project; consequently they lost their identity as proper Cubans. Emigration has been perceived by the government as a loss of *cubanía plena*, by leaving the island the emigrants were denying their willingness to be *plenamente cubanos* and they became examples of what Ortiz calls *cubanidad castrada* (Ortiz, 28/11/1939). Emigrants were no longer part of the Cuban nation, as Fornet said: “We [revolutionary supporters] said simply that he who left, he who abandoned the country, stopped being Cuban” (2009, p. 256). Clearly, according to the binary logic adopted in the 1960s and 1970s by the revolutionary government, the diaspora community was not ‘dentro de la revolución’ and consequently it was excluded from the official definition of the Cuban nation and was conceived, instead, as the constitutive outside against which the revolutionary model of national identity was constructed.

I have explained above that the Cuban revolutionary identity in the 1960s was shaped as a reaction against US imperialism and consequently in the Cuban nationalistic discourse the US has been presented as ‘the Other’. The emigration of Cubans to the USA was interpreted by the government as an alliance with the enemy, a kind of compliance with American capitalism (Dunay, 2000, p.34). The spatial displacement of the Cuban subject, then, directly affects the representation of its identity proposed by the revolutionary government. Especially after the waves of migration to the USA, the spatial perception of the national territory and its insularity were perceived as insurmountable boundaries, separating the inside from the outside. The imagined representation of the Cuban island in the 1960s - 1970s and 1980s, then, was the result of a specific spatial order which had an essentially divisive function: to separate the acceptable from the unacceptable. Therefore, the Cuban case confirms Said’s theories on the investment of space with figurative values. The imagined geography of the Cuban nation and its spatial perception

are not neutral representations; on the contrary, they are the product of a specific logic of power. In the narrative of Cuban identity both the nationalists and the exiles reinterpreted territoriality and spatial belonging from opposite positions, and charged them with strong figurative values.

It is not only the Cuban revolutionary government that proposes its representation of Cuba and the diaspora, on the other side of the Gulf of Mexico, the dominant sector of the exile community proposes its own representation of national territory and identity. The diaspora re-interprets the relationship between space and nationality and contests the idea that national identity cannot exist outside the national territory, while, on the other hand, émigrés often speak of a Cuban nation in exile. The exiles' perspective often considers the island territory as "a constrained ideological space which represses dissidence and allows very little diversity" (Duany, 2000, p.34); therefore it claims that it is reductive to identify the Cuban nation with the island territory.

The diasporic narrative of national identity often uses the same cultural references used by the Revolution to create its own definition of Cubanness. In fact, the exiles refer to canonical texts on Cuban identity and re-interpret the definition of Cubanness in a broader sense. For example they use the definition of *cubanía* as the desire to be Cuban as a counterargument against their exclusion from discourses on Cuban national identity. Cuban émigrés, quoting Ortiz, affirm that Cubanness is a "condición del alma" (28/11/1939), a mental state, and, as such, it is not related to geographical boundaries. For example, Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, looking back at Ortiz's characterization, reframes *cubanía* as a "willingness of the heart" (1997, p.8). The diaspora community disengages nationality from territoriality. It reinterprets national identity as the feeling of belonging to a cultural community more than to a physical space. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat declares that his '*patria*' is not an official state, it is a private perception, a feeling that binds him to Cubanness, his motherland is an imagined reconstruction which does not have territorial boundaries and which he calls "my own private Cuba" (1999, p. 229). Thus, the imaginary representation of Cubanness proposed by the diaspora uses the idea of imagined geography and pushes it to its extreme, to the point of

suggesting the existence of a “nationality without a nation” (Pérez-Firmat, 1999, p. 234).

Many scholars have attempted to reinterpret Cuban national identity and to overcome the bipolar division between inside and outside using different symbolic images and spatial metaphors. Pérez-Firmat (1994) moves radically away from binary and essentialist approaches to national identity and presents it as having a mutable and hybrid nature. His famous metaphor of the hyphen substitutes the oppositional approach to Cuban-American identity with a less negative one. The hyphenation represents a link between the two terms that stop being conflicting poles to become parts of the same new identity. Thus, Pérez-Firmat’s position shows that it is possible to overcome the bipolar structure of identity representation and analyse the connection between the diaspora and the island from a more flexible perspective. A similar spatial metaphor is used by Behar in her book *Bridges to Cuba* (1995): the idea of the bridge creates an imaginary link between the two coasts of the Gulf of Mexico, suggesting that the two spaces (the island and US mainland) are not as separated and self-contained as they may appear. All these metaphors deconstruct the traditional image of nationhood and move its representation from a national to a transnational level. Eliana Rivero, for instance, redefines Cubanness as “a continuing process of transnational identity construction” (Rivero, quoted in García-Obregón, 2006 p.24).

To solve the conflict between national representation and spatial belonging, Said suggests reframing spatiality from a different perspective. As I explain in chapter 1, he proposes the idea of a dynamic spatiality that disrupts the rigid hierarchical organization of space and challenges essentialist approaches to national identity (Al-Mahfedi, 2011, p.121). In line with Said’s ideas, Duany refigures Cuban national identity as rooted in a wider cultural space “with no fixed, stable, and impermeable borders” (Duany, 2000, p.33). This new identity space is fluid and permeable, like air or water, and can incorporate different expressions of Cubanness pertaining to both the island and the diaspora. The diasporic discourse, then, shifts the focus away from the conventional representation of national identity as a fixed and immutable substance that cannot ‘set roots’ outside the native soil (Duany, 2000, p.33) substituting it with

the idea of a nomadic and permeable Cubanness. Exiles brought Cuban identity beyond the confines of the insular territory, establishing strong cultural and emotional ties between both coasts of the Mexican gulf and transforming Cubanness into a transnational construction.

## **2.5 Limits of a binary model of identity representation**

The identity model promoted by the revolutionary government, then, is an essentialist and hegemonic model. It derives its meaning from a system of differences, a set of mutually exclusive elements that establish order and give meaning to the complexity and multiplicity of Cuban society. National identity is defined through a confrontation with the Other, the 'outside' and is determined to a large extent by what it is not (Bejel, 2000, p.155). The Cuban Revolution constructed its identity as a negation and refusal of particular identity performances, which were considered inappropriate to the socio-historical Cuban context in the 1960s. The natural consequence of adopting a binary and oppositional identity model is to impose a compulsory one true image of the nation to which everyone has to conform, and at the same time to exclude and negate the manifestations of identity that do not correspond to that model. This automatically implies the exclusion from the dominant discourse of alternative possibilities of self-representation.

However, since the subordinate term is a necessary and internal force existing within the identity of the dominant term, the Other is implicitly included in the definition of the Cuban nation. Thus, Cuba's national model seems to include as much as exclude: the binary oppositions ban dissident tendencies, but, at the same time, to exclude differences is automatically to recognise them. In an indirect, negative way, then, the revolutionary system of representation conceives the existence of possible different identity performances and incorporates them into the national model, as the pillars on which the official Cuban identity has to be constructed.

Hence, within the official idea of the Cuban national identity many other different and often dissident identities are hidden irremediably. It is not possible to frame cultural identity on simple binary oppositions: the play of

'difference' within identity is so complex that it exceeds the binary structure of representation (Hall 1990, p. 228). The boundaries between identification and difference are continually repositioned as the result of many simultaneous confrontations that take into account several aspects and components at the same time. Exactly this idea of multiple confrontations and possible alternatives is what I will use to study Padura's representation of a polyphonic Cuban identity.

### **3 Towards a plural model of identity representation**

Until now I have illustrated the strategies of identity construction and representation used by the revolutionary government in the first decades after the Revolution. The conception of identity promoted as a result of this process was an essentialist one; it was constructed around some specific elements (language, territorial location, history, heteronormative masculinity, etc.) that constitute the unity and uniqueness of *lo cubano*. This model has been used to support a revolutionary hegemonic discourse, which sees identity as single rooted, centralized and constructed according to a binary logic. In this section I will propose instead a non-essentialist approach to Cuban identity. I will show how, in the 1990s, Cuba went through a process of transition and transformation that also affected the conception of Cubanness. My argument here is that the social and cultural changes of the *Período Especial* prepared the ground for a reinterpretation of Cuban national identity that came closer to an anti-essentialist notion of identity. In this last section, then, I will describe the main socio-cultural changes that occurred in the 1990s and explain how this specific historico-cultural conjuncture led to the creation of a new cultural scenario. In this renewed scenario I will insert Padura's production and show how his characters are confronted with a new social environment and with a new kind of fragmented and multiple, revolutionary and post-Soviet, Cubanness.



### 3.1 The post-Soviet Cuban scenario

The most drastic shift in the conception of Cuban identity took place in the 1990s. In this period the country experienced a terrible economic crisis linked to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the 1990s Cuba lost the Soviet subsidies and experienced an alarming political isolation and a deep economic crisis that forced the government to put into place an emergency plan for the rationing of food, energy and transport called the *Período Especial en Tiempos de Paz*. The *Período Especial* brought about a deep reconsideration of the economic system and of the whole Cuban ideological establishment. In 1986, just before the fall of the Soviet bloc, the Cuban government had already introduced the *Rectificación de los errores*: a new strategy that recognised some of the faults in the revolutionary system and rejected some old Soviet models<sup>6</sup>. The new reforms of the *Período Especial* had the aim of inserting the Cuban economy into the international market and providing for the population's basic needs while maintaining the same social structure and political system (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p. 3). The country was opened up to international tourism and investments and the US dollar was made legal tender. The economic reforms were essential to ensuring the survival of the Revolution but this economic side of the question was separated from the ideological nature of the Revolution and from the official discourse. From 1991 a new debate started to re-define the Revolution and, looking back to the earlier revolutionary past, tried to identify and restore the original revolutionary ideals and forms (Kapcia, 2012, p. 69-70). In this transitional period, therefore, the identity policy of the Revolution also underwent a renovation. During the *Período Especial*, the Cuban national identity seems to have lost its strong political connotation. As stated by Ariana Hernández-Reguant, "during these years of crisis the public discourse sought to distance politics and economy from national culture and to that effect it redefined the latter" (2009, p. 70). Thus Cubanness was presented as "a matter of culture and heritage rather than ideological commitment to the revolution" (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p.

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<sup>6</sup> In the same period Gorbachev provided a fresh direction to Soviet politics by promoting political openness and economic restructuring with his policies of 'Perestroika' (restructuring) and 'glasnost' (openness).

70). This new emphasis on culture primarily had the effect of reincorporating, albeit partially, cultural elements and expressions (such as some of those pertaining to the diaspora) into the reformulation of post-Soviet Cuban identity. For the Cuban government, the disappearance of the Soviet bloc and the prospect of cultural and economic globalization caused a deep preoccupation with the future of socialism and therefore with its own hegemony (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p. 70). The government therefore looked at Cuban culture as a possible means of creating cohesion and unity among the population.

The importance of culture in supporting political ideologies in Cuba has a long tradition. Culture was considered by Castro and Guevara as the main tool with which to change mental structures, influence the conscience of individuals and consequently enable a radical transformation of society. Since the 1960s the revolutionary leaders have conceded great importance to culture and also built their hegemony through devoting attention to it, using it as a propaganda tool to popularize the new ideology and to consolidate the socialist government. The idea of constructing political consent through the manipulation of culture to reinforce a specific dominant ideology was one of the main aspects of Gramsci's theory of cultural domination<sup>7</sup>. According to the Italian Marxist philosopher, a society can be dominated by one social class, by manipulating the societal culture and thereby disseminating a specific system of beliefs, explanations, perceptions and values pertaining to the ruling-class. The dominant class therefore impresses upon every other social class that the economic interests of the ruling class are the interests of the entire society, securing the consent of other social strata by negotiation and compromise. Hence, Gramsci suggests that the prevailing cultural norms of a society must not be considered something natural, inevitable and universally acceptable, but must be recognized as artificially and socially constructed. The means to achieve this hegemonic domination may be many and varied (economic control, political leadership, military power, religious control), but according to Gramsci the most effective method is the manipulation of culture in the

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<sup>7</sup> On the concept of cultural hegemony and hegemonic domination see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. 1986. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds). London: Lawrence and Wishart; and Antoni Kapcia. 2000. *Cuba: Island of Dreams*. Oxford: Bergpp, pp. 15-16.

construction of a new collective 'world-view' and the use of systems of persuasion. From this assumption flows the fundamental role of the intellectuals in directing the ideas and aspirations of a social class and in constructing the political consensus:

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in the active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator. (Gramsci, 1986, p. 10)

Thus, according to Gramsci, an effective political strategy must be based on consensus rather than on imposition and coercion. Consequently, the construction of hegemony implies an ability to balance the complex relation between coercion and consent in many different fields ranging from literature and artistic expression to political science and international relationships.

In June 1961, Castro's famous speech *Palabras a los intelectuales* defined the new role of art and cultural production within the revolutionary society: culture was considered a key vehicle for ideological hegemony. Cultural producers were asked to adhere to revolutionary politics and to put the collective interest above their own creative spirit. This situation changed in the 1990s when Cuban cultural policy entered a phase of *descongelamiento* and the relaxation of previously rigid precepts. The particular historical and political juncture of the *Período Especial* became the occasion for re-examining established cultural paradigms and setting new parameters. The collapse of the Soviet Union had also left Cuba ideologically isolated; the attention devoted to culture was, then, an attempt to find a new ideological path, rejecting the previously dominant Soviet cultural ideals and looking back to the Cuban heritage. A similar process took place in the former Soviet countries, where intellectuals emphasized national culture and pre-socialist history as a way of re-establishing the idea of national identity in non-political terms (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p. 71). As Hernández-Reguant suggests, then, "in the post-Soviet world the Revolution was willing to compromise and tolerate a broader range of non-oppositional views" (2009, p. 70).

In this period a certain degree of cultural diversity was accepted in Cuba and different cultural manifestations (including some pertaining to the diaspora) were reclaimed as part of the national culture. New debates took place between the cultural and the political elites and the quest for freedom of artistic expression came into question again. The speech *Palabras a los intelectuales* was reinterpreted, opening up a space for artists who, although not supportive of the Revolution, were not against it. From the late 1980s, a new generation of Cuban cultural figures thus emerged, affirming their demand for a revision and a profound change of cultural policy. Writers, painters, dramatists and filmmakers took risks in experimenting with themes and subjects that were previously not accepted, conveying their quest for a less inhibited cultural expression. The most popular examples of this phenomenon came from the film industry of the period, as filmmakers started to deal with controversial issues such as *machismo*, in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Hasta Cierta Punto* (1984), or emigration, in Jesús Díaz's *Lejanía* (1985) (Kapcia, 2005, pp. 158-159).

In the 1990s the State reduced funding to the cultural industry. Therefore, in order to survive, Cuban artistic expression needed to integrate itself into a global system of production and distribution, securing funding through co-productions and collaborations with foreign artists and adjusting its output to the preferences and requests of international consumers (Fernandes, 2006, p. 45). The disappearance of State patronage, the diminishing control over cultural production and the reinsertion of Cuban literature into the 'Western' publishing market made it possible for Cuban writers to move away from the official revolutionary narrative and to explore new themes and topics that would have been censored during the previous political situation. Antón Arrufat emphasises that the level of censorship and self-censorship has decreased and that Cuban authors since the *Período Especial* have lived in a 'conditioned freedom'. They are still far from absolute liberty but this form of conditioned freedom has been gaining space, granting new possibilities of expression and less restrictions to the intellectuals working 'within the Revolution', which no longer means in favour of the Revolution but within the new degrees of freedom conceded by the government and not openly challenging its authority:

Now you find references to Cuban reality that would never have been allowed before but there is no absolute freedom. This form of conditioned freedom is something that has been won in recent years. There is no absolute freedom. It would be naive to think that there can be absolute freedom, whether it be in a socialist country or a capitalist one. (Arrufat interviewed by Kirk & Padura, 2001, p.35)

However, by the end of the 1990s the government had regained full control of economic production and of the public sphere. It created a new delicate balance between economic reforms and political stability: the economic policy was subordinated to the political survival of both the revolutionary government and the socialist state. The same difficult balance needed to be found in the cultural sphere between the 'conditioned' freedom of expression, already granted to the artistic community, and the necessity of avoiding political challenges and ideological opposition (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p.7).

In this scenario the most critical voices came from popular culture. In fact, the forms of art traditionally considered to be 'high' culture were the most controlled and therefore many exponents of 'high' culture decided not to directly oppose the Revolution, advocating instead a separation of art and politics. At the same time, so-called popular culture managed to create a space for cultural expression and a critical re-examination of the socialist state (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p.11). This popular culture better reflected the elements of everyday life in post-Soviet Cuba, with its disenchanting mood and its harsh view of the failed socialist project. Padura's detective fiction inscribes itself precisely into this newly acquired space for cultural criticism.

### **3.2 Reinterpreting *Cubanía*: an anti-essentialist model of Cuban identity**

Starting from the *Período Especial*, the government proposed a new definition of national identity in Cuba: its main constitutive parts were culture and history rather than allegiance to a revolutionary project which was in crisis. The redefinition of the Cuban nation as a cultural community, in Hernández-

Reguant's view (2009), led to two important consequences: the first was a partial disentanglement of nation from territory; the second was the recognition of the multiple cultures, heritages and cultural facets coexisting in the contemporary Cuban nation. At a time when the Cuban government was in need of economic support it started a rapprochement with some moderate sectors of the exile community. In this context, emphasising the importance of a shared culture was the main vehicle for mutual communication and understanding.

In the *Período Especial*, then, concepts such as *Cubanidad* and *Cubanía* were reinterpreted in a broader cultural perspective and to this end canonical texts and theorists of cultural nationalism such as Jorge Mañach and Fernando Ortiz were rediscovered and re-interpreted. In his *Los factores humanos de la cubanidad* Ortiz (28/11/1939) formulates a specific cultural model for Cuba that stresses its plurality and syncretism. Using a cooking metaphor, the recipe for the famous Cuban stew *ajiaco*, Ortiz describes the regeneration of culture as the constant inclusion of new elements that harmonically mix with the previous ingredients, giving a new taste to the famous Cuban dish. The *ajiaco* is a dish formed by multiple ingredients superimposed over time thanks to the encounters between different cultures and traditions. This metaphor has been interpreted in many different ways and used to support instances of cultural homologation as much as plural and hybrid views of Cubanness<sup>8</sup>. Duany, for instance, affirms: "Ortiz's discourse is radically antiessentialist because it never pinpoints the core of Cuban culture, other than lacking such a core" (2000, p. 22). Following Duany, I argue that the *ajiaco* can support an anti-essentialist reading of Cuban national identity, demonstrating that there is no such thing as an essence or a core for Cubanness. On the contrary, it is the result of a constant process of addition of new ingredients and new cultures: indigenous, Spanish, African, Asiatic, French and Anglo-American. For Ortiz, the bases of contemporary Cuban culture were the constant immigrations, transmigrations and the adoption of various cultural elements:

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<sup>8</sup> See for instance Miguel Arnedo, 2001. "Arte Blanco con Motivos Negros: Fernando Ortiz's Concept of Cuban National Culture and Identity". *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 88-101.

Acaso se piense que la cubanidad haya que buscarla en esa salsa de nueva y sintética suculencia formada por la fusión de los linajes humanos desleídos en Cuba; pero no, la cubanidad no está solamente en el resultado sino también en el mismo proceso complejo de su formación; desintegrativo e integrativo, en los elementos sustanciales entrados en su acción, en el ambiente en que se opera y en las vicisitudes de su transcurso. (Ortiz, 28/11/1939)

The most important aspect of the *ajjaco* metaphor is that the process of interaction between the ingredients, the ingredients themselves and the contexts in which the interactions take place appear as equally representative of the Cuban national identity. Cubanness is presented, consequently, not as a product or a tangible fixed entity but, rather, as complex processes of interaction between a variety of different elements, all equally important. This image thus interprets national identity as something which is constructed through complex processes of relationality and representation. According to this approach, the Cuban identity appears as a process and not as a consolidated entity. To continue with the cooking metaphor, it can be said that the Cuban identity is not the dish itself but the preparation of the ingredients and the cooking process. Ortiz's image has been criticized for being too naive in supporting the idea of a smooth interaction between different cultural elements and for not clarifying exactly how, why, and when Cuba was imagined as a national community, or what discursive practices constructed it. However what I want to stress here is that Ortiz's *ajjaco* posits cultural mixture, fluidity and hybridity as key elements of Cubanness. This implicitly paves the way for a dialogue with the exile community and, on the grounds of a shared culture, allows the possibility of reincorporating the moderate elements of the Cuban diaspora into the national discourse. Some exponents of the diaspora, such as Pérez-Firmat, have already pushed the classical image of the *ajjaco* to its extreme by insisting that contemporary Cuban-American culture represents the latest strata of the cultural *mestizaje* to have been added to this traditional Cuban soup (Pérez-Firmat glossed in Duany, 2000, p.30). Cubanness is thereby defined as a diverse and ever-changing mixture.

In 1994 Abel Prieto gave an important lecture that may be useful for understanding the changing atmosphere inside Cuba. The lecture was titled *Cultura, Cubanidad and Cubanía* and it explained a softening view on national identity from inside the island. Prieto does not disengage nation from territory but he adds a new element to the picture: culture. Stressing that in Cuba during the struggle for independence people pertaining to different ethnic and cultural groups bonded, Prieto argues that the Cuban nation was not only a political concept but also a cultural project (Prieto, 1994). Prieto seems to come closer to the idea that national identity can overcome internal differences and create a shared image of cultural unity (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p. 76). National sentiment is not therefore only anchored in the existence of a physical homeland but also in the sharing of a common culture.

A peculiar example of how culture can transcend national and ideological borders is the so called *Cubanidad* test. In the same conference on Cuban identity, held in 1994 at the University of Havana, Ambrosio Fornet spoke during the closing session about the uniqueness of Cuban culture and, to support his theory, used as an example what is known as the *Cubanidad* test. This test was used by the US Border Patrol to distinguish Mexican from Cuban immigrants. In fact for US police it was essential to distinguish Cubans from Mexicans, since the former could be allowed in, because the US guarantees asylum to Cubans, while the latter were to be sent back. Therefore, the US police adopted a test created by Cuban exiles to assess the degree of *Cubanidad*. For the exiles that elaborated the test, *Cubanidad* was to be found in culture, it was not linked to territoriality or to political allegiance; it was related instead to knowledge of traditions, popular culture and music (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p. 71). As Hernández-Reguant stresses, then, this test poses at the base of Cuban identity the participation in popular culture and everyday experiences shared by an 'imagined community' (2009, p. 74).

At the end of his speech Fornet recognised that the test would be hard to pass for young Cubans. In fact the test was grounded on the experience of the older generation that experienced the Revolution and then exile. Consequently it was making reference to historical and cultural elements that young Cubans had not experienced and which are not part of their shared cultural



background. Paradoxically then, this test joins together the older generation of Cubans living inside and outside the island, but on the other side it creates new internal differences based for instance on generational belonging. The example provided by this *Cubanidad* test is important because it stresses the value of popular culture in the formulation of a Cuban cultural identity, and, at the same time, it challenges the idea of a homogeneous and unified experience of national identity, acknowledging instead the existence of other internal patterns of difference that can depend on age, gender or race. These diverse patterns of difference are recognised and explored in Padura's fiction, and I will focus on many of these aspects in my analysis of his novels. The author, in fact, uses a popular form of literature, detective fiction, as a pluralising medium to challenge any rigidifying representation of Cubanness.

### **3.3 Identity crisis and fragmentation in post-Soviet Cuba**

In chapter 1 I note that the image of Cuban identity emerging in the Post-Soviet period shares many features with the post-modern model of identity performance proposed by Hall. Here I want to explore some of these common features to show how the psychological condition of the Cuban subject changed after 1990 and to delineate the identity profile of Padura's characters.

The *Período Especial* represents a moment of crisis and a transitional phase in Cuban history: there was a 'before' which was stable, a present which was confusing and unsettling and a future that lost its clear features and seems blurred (Hernández-Reguant, 2009, p. 2). After 1989, in Cuba there has been little prospect of a better future to aspire to or a social project to take part in, the result of which has been a feeling of existential void and disillusion. These phenomena have deeply affected identity performance. The fall of the Soviet system represented the disappearance of a unified centre and a solid frame of reference for Cuban people which led to the disaggregation of revolutionary society into many different centres. As I explain in chapter 1, when the core values and points of reference that constitute the foundations of national identity are placed in doubt, the national subject loses its anchorage and starts to become de-centred, dislocated and fragmented (Hall, 1992, pp. 274-275). I

argue that identity crisis, dislocation and fragmentation are precisely some of the post-modern identity features that characterise post-Soviet Cubanness.

Odette Casamayor-Cisneros argues that in the absence of official identity models from the 1990s, an absence which has dominated the island's existence, there floats a weightless Cuban subject (2012, p.41). This weightlessness only emerges when the subject feels unable to logically organise its existence and fit into an historical trajectory, consequently this subject re-interprets its experience as fragmented, jeopardized and disconnected. Casamayor-Cisneros argues that:

I relate here the uncertainty of post-Soviet Cuba with the ethical crisis that Zygmunt Bauman has attributed to the postmodern subject, who lives dizzyingly exposed to an infinite number of inexplicable phenomena and also to other subjects towards whom it lacks ethical norms that might regulate social interaction. (2012, p.42)

Post-Soviet Cuban identity contains the main features that Bauman ascribes to post-modern identity: it is unstable and unfixed, exposed to several new social elements and agents to which the subject is unable to relate. The weightless Cuban subject floats in this post-Soviet void, in a suspended time dimension which, as Bauman would say, is nothing more than a flat collection of present moments: a continuous present (1996, p. 24). I will come back to this definition of a continuous present in the next chapter when I will describe the peculiar temporal and spatial categories which frame contemporary Cuban life. For now it is important to understand this singular and paradoxical condition as the last product of the Cuban revolutionary and socialist identity: once the Marxist utopia failed, the better future and the happy ending to the Cuban revolutionary story have been irremediably displaced and deferred. Padura's characters are the product of this historical experience: they represent the fragmentation of the revolutionary subjects which find themselves lost in the post-Soviet world. In the rest of my thesis I will propose an in-depth description of this Cuban psychological condition, in the next chapter I will re-examine the generational and historical experience lived by

Padura and, through his character's memories, I will trace the trajectory of a generational disillusion.

From the fractures created by the fragmentation of political and national unities suppressed voices and new spaces for the re-negotiation of differences can emerge. In the 1990s, therefore, the partial lack of central control triggered a process of re-consideration and re-discussion of the boundaries between Cubanness and otherness. In the praxis of Post-Soviet life, new forms of Cubanness appeared which were formed at the intersection between the different historical, political, social, sexual and cultural positions that emerged in the Cuban scenario of the 1990s. These new forms of Cubanness are constantly shifting due to a process of negotiation and re-assessment of the new social elements of the post-Soviet Cuban present. In my study I argue that Padura advocates a reformulation of Cuban national identity on the basis of this new socio-cultural scenario. In his work he describes and proposes a plural image of Cubanness which is shifting, hybrid and mutable. The following chapters of this thesis will examine the diverse components and sources of this new Cuban identity, which takes up the different spaces and centres of the post-Soviet Cuban world and merges them into a new syncretic definition.

## 4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that defining Cubanness was and is one of the main concerns of the revolutionary government. As this brief overview has shown, from 1959 institutionalized identity models have been proposed to the Cuban population in order to create an image of unity and stability for the Cuban revolutionary nation. From the New Man to the post-Soviet identities, all these images and models share a fundamental trait: they are incomplete and in the process of construction. They all assume the necessity and possibility of a re-formulation or re-shaping and imply that this re-formulation needs to start from the manipulation and re-assessment of cultural and social elements. The importance of the cultural components and of the cultural mixture had been affirmed well before the revolutionary victory, by Ortiz's famous *ajjaco*. This

image posits mixture, fluidity and hybridity as the main features of Cubanness. Over the centuries the definitions of Cubanness and Cuban culture have expanded and new elements have been incorporated into the picture: after 1959 the revolutionary ethos and ideology were added to the Cuban soup, while in the 1990s the post-Soviet changes gave a different flavour to the Cuban *ajiaco*.

Some of the ingredients added have been new factors consequent upon the international scenario left by the collapse of the Berlin wall, others are endemic elements, old traditions rediscovered, repressed and marginalized voices that have come to the fore in the *Período Especial*, when the government lost part of its rigid control. In any case, as the chapters of this thesis will show, different positions and representations of self-identity and otherness based on generational, sexual or historical divisions spread outwards, marking the distance from the previous imperative towards the uniformity and homogeneity of identity performances. These different representations of Cubanness are often non-harmonious; on the contrary they are confused, fragmented, conflicting and hybrid. The post-Soviet Cuban *ajiaco* presents national identity as impure, heterogeneous and fragmented; all of these features fit into Padura's representation of contemporary Cubanness. The following part of my study, then, will apply the definitions and phenomena explained in these first two chapters to the analysis of Padura's production. The reason for the investigation into the selected novels is to show how, from the social crisis and the de-centring tendencies of the *Período Especial*, a new form of post-revolutionary and post-Soviet Cubanness has emerged.

## Chapter 3

### Memory and Identity in *Pasado perfecto* and *Vientos de cuaresma*

#### 1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the relationship between group memory and collective identity representation in two of the detective novels written by Leonardo Padura Fuentes. Starting from the premise that the creation of an identity is a continuous process that finds its basis in memories of a shared past and in a collective history, this chapter will examine different kinds of memories and their influence on the construction of the new Cuban identities described by Padura. Here I argue that, taking advantage of the specific nature of the detective genre, Leonardo Padura Fuentes uses the police investigation and the detective's research into the past to confront the official Cuban memory with alternative forms of memory. In my analysis I show how Padura uses his characters' memories to recover the cultural elements excluded by the official memory of the Revolution and to re-incorporate them into Cuban national narratives. The aim of this chapter is to show that different types of memories coexist in contemporary Cuba and to explain how these multiple memories take part in the formation of new Cuban identities. In all of us different types of memories coexist: at any given moment we select the kind of memory we want to perform. The same can be said for national memory: different kinds of group memory coexist inside the same nation and the leading group of the moment decides which memory is going to impose itself on the others.

This chapter first briefly illustrates the connection between time representation, memory and identity construction. Secondly it explores Padura's use of different types of memory to reinterpret the Cuban past and

present and to question the validity of a binary view of history and identity. I will focus on different forms of memories, but all of them will be considered as collective and social productions taking place in a specific temporal and spatial context and promoted by a specific social group. In my analysis I will take into account both the temporal and spatial aspects of memory and consider memory as a complex social construction that establishes transversal connections between different points in time and space. Through memory these different times and spaces are drawn together to create a complex net of new meanings. Memory and remembering are essential to most detective narratives because the resolution of a crime often depends to a considerable degree on the recollections of witnesses, victims, or suspects involved in a case. However, in the case of Padura's novels, the investigative process that underpins the detective story is paralleled by an enquiry into the country's recent past. I posit that this constant looking back is primarily a way of reinterpreting Cuban history and the revolutionary regime's construction of a collective identity from a personal and generational perspective. All Padura's narrative is characterized, then, by a constant reflective recollection of the Cuban past which fulfils a dual task: to advance a testimony to the societal and historical shift that has occurred in Cuba and to understand the bases and evolution of Cuban identity. Although the novels are narrated in the third person, it is obvious that the reader sees and interprets events from Conde's critical point of view. Through free indirect speech we are able to access the character's thoughts and memories which inevitably influence the reader's interpretation of life in Cuba. This explains why the detective has been widely considered to be Padura's *alter ego* through which the author expresses a personal, ironic judgement of his country (Wilkinson, 2006).

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the first two books of the tetralogy: *Pasado perfecto* (2000) and *Vientos de cuaresma* (2001). The two novels are analysed together because both of them use time perception and memory to confront and contrast the Cuban past and present. The books work together as the *incipit* of the tetralogy: they give a clear presentation of Conde, his group of friends (Carlos, Miki, Andrés, *el Conejo*, Candito *el rojo*) and their role as representatives of a generation. Moreover, some elements of Conde's

personality, especially his highly disenchanted mood, which are stated from the beginning of the first novel, only fully emerge in the second. The association and comparison of the two novels allows, then, a deeper and more complete analysis of the evolution of Conde's personal and generational character. In *Vientos de cuaresma*, in fact, the detective shows a more sceptical and existentialist approach to life (Wilkinson, 2006, pp. 257-262): his strong pessimism, already present in *perfecto*, moves from a personal to a more general perspective. Finally, the two crimes investigated in the novels present an excuse to lead Conde into a journey towards his personal and generational past, bringing him back to the school period to re-examine the relationship with his schoolmates and his expectations as a young Cuban. In *Pasado perfecto* the investigation is focused on the murder of one of Mario's schoolmates, while in *Vientos de cuaresma* the murdered person is a young teacher working in the same school that Mario attended years before. Both novels bring the character back to the school period and trigger memories generally pertaining to the same time frame.

## **2 The theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework of this chapter deals with memory and its significance for identity formation. Here I will provide a brief overview of different kinds of memory and I will propose a definition of the terms I will use for my analysis in the rest of the chapter. I will firstly describe collective memory according to Halbwachs's and Assmann's characterization and analyse its function in relation to group identity. Secondly, introducing Nora's definition of *lieux de mémoire*, I will explore how memory relates to its spatial and temporal context of creation and representation. In all these cases I will consider memory as a performative and active process that takes place in a specific socio-cultural context and which has the capacity to construct and reformulate meanings in the present.

Consequently, I will explore the relationship between power and collective memory and I will analyse how this relationship works inside the contemporary

Cuban context. I will start by presenting the creation of a national memory in Cuba as a competitive process: a fierce struggle for the dominance and official validation of the memory of a specific social group against all other competing memories. I will discuss the creation of an official memory promoted by the Revolution and of many silenced counter-memories. Finally I will try to overcome the dichotomy between official memory /counter-memories and I will propose a new plural and multidirectional model for the construction of Cuban national memories. This model will allow me to read the production of Cuban national memories as a dynamic and collaborative process in which the memories silenced by the official discourse also take part. What I intend to do in this chapter is to show how Padura tries to expand the horizon of Cuban history to validate and recognise the existence of different groups with different memories. I argue, then, that a multidirectional model of memory is the most suitable to interpret Padura's attempt to represent Cuban national history and identity, not as an exclusive and competitive construction but as a collaborative and continuous process.

## **2.1 Forms of memories and identity construction**

The first kind of memory I am going to define is collective memory. The term is associated with the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who, for the first time in his work *La Mémoire Collective* (1992), defined memory as a collective and social process. Halbwachs claims that all memory is not accidental recall but a social activity that takes place in a specific social framework and depends on the social environment:

It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories. (1992, p. 38)

Memory depends on the group in which one lives and on the status one holds in that group. It is of course individuals who remember, not the group, but these individuals are located in a specific group context and draw on that context to remember and recreate the past. The personal experience remembered by an individual is always recalled within a collective framework and under the



pressure of society. Halbwachs, then, insists on the socially constructed nature of any memory and on the importance of context and of the group in the remembering process. Each person belongs to different groups (families, political parties, professional associations, etc.), and each one of these groups allows the subject to perform a different kind of memory. Individual memory is therefore a conglomeration that emerges from participation in different group memories. For instance, later on in my analysis I will focus on a specific kind of memory: generational memory, and I will explore the construction and performance of this memory in Padura's characters and the impact it has on their identity construction. The generational belonging and the link to the social context are of primary importance for Padura's production: his fictional narrative is inextricably bound to the social, historical and cultural context in which it is created; the writer belongs to a key generation which lived through an important collective experience and he therefore shares a collective memory with it, and his fictional works often deal with a past pregnant with meaning and which still impinges on the present.

Halbwachs also stresses the link between collective memory and group identity formation: memories are continuous repetitions of shared experiences and visions of the past that create the unity of the group and reinforce the sense of belonging to it. Memory validates identities and gives meaning and narrative coherence to life. Therefore, later in the chapter I will investigate the role of collective memory in the construction and characterization of national and generational identity.

Finally, Halbwachs makes a sharp distinction between historical and autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory is the memory of events that the subject has personally experienced in the past. Autobiographical memory tends to fade with time unless it is periodically reinforced through contact with other members of the group that had the same experience in the past. This kind of direct memory, then, is rooted in other people and can be performed correctly only within the group (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 24). Historical memory, instead, is testified to by written and visual records, and is usually kept alive through commemorations and festivals. These celebrations aim to reinforce the memory and persistence of a single event, and even those

people who have not physically taken part in the event celebrated can access and “remember” it through commemoration. Historical memory is, then, continually performed in the present and renewed through rituals. This performative process and the ability to re-create new meaning is what make memory interesting for the present dynamics of power. Memory as a social performance can be continually shaped and reshaped according to the specific logic of power and present needs: “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present” (Halbwachs, 1992, p. 40). On the one hand, because they must be created and recreated, collective memories of the past are subject to the social forces of the present and, on the other hand, since they empower collective identities and animate action, are themselves social forces of the present.

Other scholars (Beatriz Sarlo, Mieke Bal, Jan Assmann) agree with Halbwachs and affirm that beliefs and judgements pertaining to the present are applied to the past and used to reinterpret it: “La memoria coloniza el pasado y lo organiza sobre la base de las concepciones y las emociones del presente” (Sarlo, 2007, p. 92). Memory is, then, a performative and active process that brings the past into the present, conferring on the past a different nature. When recalling a past event, the subject integrates past reality with present awareness. Reconstructivism is, then, one of the main characteristics of memory: memory works through reconstruction. The past itself cannot be preserved as a whole and thus it is continually reorganized according to the changes taking place in the present, which is why condensation and displacement of meaning is constant and continuous. Thus, history is constantly recomposed through memory, without reaching a final form. This suggests that no memory exists that can be considered objective or definitive; instead each reconstruction of the past is biased and partial.

Alongside the concept of collective memory I will use the term ‘cultural memory’ to describe the remembering process performed by Padura’s characters. Cultural memory is a concept introduced by Jan Assmann:

The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's

self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. (1995, p. 132)

Assmann bases his research on Halbwachs' work, and as in the case of collective memory, he postulates a collaborative approach to memory. However, in addition to this social feature, cultural memory is constructed around some fixed points in the past which store memory and allow members to repeatedly access and perform it. Assmann's cultural memory, then, is unable to preserve the past as it was and consequently tends to condense it into symbolic objects, celebrations and events that preserve the memories of the group:

Cultural memory has its fixed point. [...] These fixed points are fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance). We call these "figures of memory". (1995, p. 132)

These figures of memory are characterised by three main features: a concrete relationship to a group, an independent capacity for reconstruction, and a concrete relationship to time and place (Assmann, 2011, p. 24). The first characteristic, the relation to a group, is based on the idea that memories emerge through communication:

Through this manner of communication, each individual composes a memory which, as Halbwachs has shown, is (a) socially mediated and (b) relates to a group. Every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others. These "others," however, are not just any set of people, rather they are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past. (1995, p. 127)

Halbwachs theorises the nexus between memory and group, taking as examples families, neighbourhood, political parties, and nations. From this theorization Assmann elaborates his theory of the 'concretion of identity'. According to this theory a group bases its consciousness of unity and

specificity upon a set of knowledge, which allows the group to reproduce its identity:

Cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. The objective manifestations of cultural memory are defined through a kind of identificatory determination in a positive ("We are this") or in a negative ("That's our opposite") sense. (1995, p. 130)

By recalling its history and re-enacting its special events, the group constantly reaffirms its own image against the image of "others". Through such a concretion of identity, then, the group sets its horizons and borders. It sharply distinguishes between those who belong to the group and those who do not. In this way, through cultural memory, the group creates images of home and feelings of belonging. The second feature of the 'figures of memory' is their capacity for reconstruction. Assmann agrees with Halbwachs on this point, and affirms that memory works through reconstruction and representation and always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary situation. There are fixed 'figures of memory' which store group knowledge, but every contemporary context relates to these figures differently, sometimes by appropriation, sometimes by criticism, sometimes by preservation or by transformation (Assmann, 1995, p. 130). Finally, the last feature of 'figures of memory' is that they are always related to time and space. Figures of memory need to be given substance through a particular setting and realized at a particular time and in a concrete place. Cultural memory creates specific points of crystallization in time and space, these points have a mnemotechnical function, they store the memory and support the identity image of the group. In fact, any group that wants to consolidate itself will make an effort to find and establish a temporal and spatial ground for itself, and provide points of reference for the construction and perpetuation of its memory and identity (Assmann, 2011, pp. 24- 25).

Finally, in my analysis of Padura's novels I will use Assmann's theories on the figures of memory in conjunction with Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*. The *lieux de mémoire* are sites where memory crystallizes and secretes itself at a particular historical moment. What Nora theorises then is

the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists (1989, p. 7). This concept binds memory and recollection to the spatial and cultural context. Nora postulates the existence of a geography of memory, a process through which memory is spatially constituted. For Nora, memory is attached to sites that are concrete and physical (cathedrals, monuments, battlefields) as well as to sites that are non-material (festivals, rituals, celebrations, spectacles) and which provide an aura of the past. Sites of memory therefore encompass geographical places and buildings as well as historical figures and commemorations. Therefore there is a physical geography or topography of memory, but at the same time there is also a symbolic geography of memory which is attached to figurative sites of memories. Through memory, then, we ground our identities on such specific sites. There are clear similarities between Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* and Assmann's figures of memory: both are points on which memory crystallizes. The fundamental purpose of the *lieux de mémoire* is to stop time, "to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial" (1989, p.19). However, on the other hand, Nora affirms that *lieux de mémoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis and the endless recycling of their meaning (1989, p.19). I will say more on the process of re-signification of cultural sites and urban space in the next chapter in which I will analyse the representation of Havana as a palimpsestic city. What is important to stress for the analysis I will carry out in the present chapter is that it is precisely the capacity of reconstruction and reinterpretation of meaning that confers on memory its political value. Through memory the past is constantly recomposed and performed in the present, without reaching a final form: therefore memory can effectively manipulate and change the perception we have of national history and reality.

## **2.2 Memory and power: official memory, counter-memory and multidirectional memory**

To recognise the collective, cultural and social character of memory does not necessarily mean that a specific cultural memory is a reality shared by a whole society. On the contrary, there are as many collective memories as there are

groups and institutions in society. This means that memory is by nature always multiple and plural. These memories, held by different groups, are often in conflict, rival memories compete over the appropriation of the past and the legitimisation of their vision as the 'true' memory. Different groups and different actors relate to the past in different ways, partly because they have lived through different experiences, and partly because they have specific and often conflicting interests in the present. Usually the group narrative supported by the most powerful institutions shapes the collective present and future according to the interests of one group and against the interests of others. Memories are instruments of power and are frequently called upon to support a specific kind of authority and domination: the dominant social classes recall the past not for its own sake, but as a tool to justify their dominance. The relationship between power and memory is particularly important in the case of national memory, which is a specific kind of collective memory shared by a national group. As I have already stated in chapter 1, each nation creates its own narrative and symbolic representation, and memory plays an important role in the creation of such a representation. It creates, in fact, a sense of belonging to a specific national group and country, grounding the national identity in a collective past. Thus, going back to Anderson's definition, we can consider national memory as one of the main components of the imaginary construction of a nation.

Because it is a social and collective construction, national memory can be conditioned by public actors according to specific socio-political needs. In the case of post-revolutionary Cuba, the Castro regime largely relied on collective commemorations and public festivals dedicated to different national myths and celebrating important historical moments of the revolutionary struggle, in order to re-enact citizen participation in the revolutionary project. The type of cultural memory which is encouraged and held by official actors is called official memory. Official memory is not perfect or comprehensive; on the contrary it is always the result of a process of selection and exclusion. In the case of post-revolutionary Cuba, in the 1960s the selective process was guided by the newly-formed political institutions and its aim was to delete the traces of the old regime and exclude disturbing elements that could challenge the newly-

established power. From the perspective of the Cuban revolutionary regime, then, the construction of a national memory was a competition. The public sphere in which cultural memories are articulated is a kind of battlefield on which different memories struggle for pre-eminence. The winning group takes control of the public sphere, excluding the competing groups and giving official recognition to its own memory. In this sense, the creation of an official memory in Cuba followed a binary logic of the exclusion of some groups and the validation of others.

However, the recognition of a group memory as the official memory of a country does not imply that the other non-official memories simply disappear. These different competing memories remain present in the social framework as the memories of the excluded or marginalized groups; these are counter-memories which propose alternative views of the national past and present. Foucault defined counter-memory as a form of resistance against the official versions of historical continuity (1977, p. 160; 2004, p. 69). If official histories create and maintain the unity and continuity of a political body by silencing alternative interpretations of the past, counter-memories and counter-histories try to break this silence and to undermine the unity and continuity that official memories produce. Therefore, in the first place, a counter-memory produces disunity. The disunity effect of a counter-memory has the potential to destabilize a normative order by introducing a counter-perspective that resists and invalidates the dominant ideology (Medina, 2011, pp. 14-15). Foucault, when speaking of the counter-history of race struggle, describes it in the following way:

Counterhistory breaks up the unity of the sovereign law that imposes obligations; it also breaks the continuity of glory, into the bargain. It reveals that the light—the famous dazzling effect of power—is not something that petrifies, solidifies, and immobilizes the entire social body, and thus keeps it in order; it is in fact a divisive light that illuminates one side of the social body but leaves the other side in shadow or casts it into the darkness. [...] [Counterhistory] will be the discourse of those who have no glory, or of those who have lost it and who now find themselves, perhaps

for a time—but probably for a long time—in darkness and silence.

(Foucault, 2004, p. 70)

Counter-histories and counter-memories have a primarily critical function: they resurrect buried and hidden blocks of history in order to criticise official and hegemonic discourses. In my analysis I will stress the critical value of Conde's memories, considering them as counter-memories. During his lifetime Conde changes his position towards the revolutionary establishment, and consequently moves from an initial total conformity with official memory toward more critical forms of counter-memory. In the next sections of this chapter I will show how Padura attributes different kinds of memories to his character and uses them to recover cultural elements excluded by the official discourse. Through his autobiographical and family memories and his link to specific Cuban urban geographies, Conde first recovers the story of his generation from a critical perspective and compares it with the present circumstances of the 1990s, and then brings back older images and memories which pre-date his birth to reconstruct a wider picture of recent Cuban history and identity. Thus, Padura gives to his protagonist the task of representing generational and trans-generational memories which have a subversive and critical power. In the following sections I will firstly consider Conde as a generational archetype and will explore the critical value of his generational memory and, secondly, I will focus on Conde's trans-generational memory. The kinship relation and the affective components are what differentiate the mechanisms of transmission of this trans-generational memory from those of public and official memory. Thanks to these inherited memories, Conde establishes an intimate connection with his ancestors and with his cultural origins and analyses both his generational condition and Cuban contemporary reality from a different and wider perspective. My final aim will be to illustrate Padura's critical approach to official Cuban history and to show that it is possible to overcome the dichotomies of official memory/counter-memory and official identity/counter-identity. In fact, in my analysis of Padura's novels, instead of interpreting memory as a competition, I will use the concept of multidirectional memory. Michael Rothberg describes multidirectional memory as the result of a productive and dynamic interaction between different historical memories:



Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory -as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources- I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative. (2009, p. 4)

Multidirectional memory focuses on both agents and sites of memory, and especially on their interaction within specific historical and political contexts of struggle and contestation<sup>1</sup>. Thinking of memory as a multidirectional process encourages us to reinterpret the public sphere as a discursive space in which groups do not simply fight for dominance but actually come into being through their dialogical interactions with others. Consequently, multidirectional memory perceives both subjects and spaces as open to continual reconstruction. This approach to memory disrupts essentialist readings of cultural identity and national belonging. If memory is multidirectional, the identities that it forms will also be multidirectionally constructed, and this means that national identities will not proceed in a straight line from the past, but instead will be continually re-constructed in the present:

Our relationship to the past does partially determine who we are in the present, but never straightforwardly and directly, and never without unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider other. (Rothberg, 2009, p.5)

Finally, reinterpreting memory as multidirectional provides a different perspective on Cuban history and social logic: if memory is never singular but always plural, never finite but always in flux, then the struggle for public

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<sup>1</sup> Multidirectional memory is often associated with Max Silverman's definition of 'palimpsestic memory' (2013). This concept considers memory as a vertical and palimpsestic structure created by different spatial and temporal layers which constantly interact with each other. What distinguishes palimpsestic memory from multidirectional memory is that the first is more concentrated on the figurative and performative character of memory. I will come back to this conceptualization of memory in the next chapter in which I will use the palimpsest as a model to study Padura's representation of Cuban space, history and identity.

recognition and validation is a never-ending process, subject to ongoing reversals, unexpected changes and unpredictable results.

### **3 Conde, his generation and their ambivalent relation to memory**

The first form of memory I will attribute to Conde is a collective and generational memory. As I briefly mentioned before, generational memory is an important type of collective memory shared by a group of people who use this memory to define their common identity. Thus a generational memory is part of the wider social and cultural memory of a population, and more precisely it is that bloc of memories and experiences that individuals share with their contemporaries. A generational memory is usually time, space and age specific; therefore it can fade away with time, once the persons who embodied it die. However, as with any other kind of collective memory, the generational also creates a specific identity for the group who share it, and this identity consciousness can be transmitted to other generations, allowing the generational memory to survive after the death of its constitutive members. Thus, generational memory, in its attempt to survive, can be considered as one of the many group memories that strive for durability and validation in the public sphere. Every generation, to a certain extent, tries to impose its legacy on the following one, blocking out changes as far as possible and establishing a sort of historical continuity with the next generation. This is, for instance, what the generation who lived through the Revolution tried to do with the generation that followed it. They tried to pass on to Conde's generation the revolutionary legacy and the institutionalized memories of the revolutionary struggle. In the next chapter, when analysing *La neblina del ayer*, I will provide an example of how the transmission of generational legacy can fail: Conde's generation and that which follows do not share the same revolutionary ethos, and as a consequence there is a sharp contrast between these two generations. Generational memory, thus, takes part in the struggle for dominance and recognition with the other kinds of memory and its survival is

often linked to a specific logic of power. A generational memory can be supportive or critical of the official memory: it can be part of a wider official memory or position itself as a counter-memory. Conde's generational memory can be considered representative of both these positions: initially it has an official character while at the end of its trajectory it shows a more critical approach to the Cuban establishment. Through Conde, Padura reconstructs the affective past of his generation and compares it with the official view of history and with the reality of the post-Soviet present. Therefore, when in *Pasado perfecto* and *Vientos de cuaresma* Padura recounts his character's personal experiences, these personal narratives transcend the individual and concern a much larger group of people: a generation to which the author belongs as much as the fictional character.

Mannheim, in his definition of generation, transcends the biological elements to focus instead on the social and historical elements that determine the generational character. The members of a generation are held together by the fact that they experience historical events from the same perspective and at the same moment. The bond between the members of a generation is even stronger when the generation emerges as a social effect and consequence of traumatic events or important social changes (Mannheim, 1997, pp. 276-320). The revolutionary victory first and then the post-Soviet economic crisis represent unique historical fractures that delimit the generation to which Conde and his creator pertain. Schuman and Scott (1989), combining Halbwachs's theory with Mannheim's, affirm that the events that a group experiences during its youth exert a decisive influence on what each generation remembers, and thus presumably influence its later life and behaviours. Based on Mannheim's idea that late adolescence and early adulthood are the formative years during which a distinctive personal outlook on politics and external reality emerges (1997, pp. 276-320), Schuman and Scott affirm that the collective memory and identity of a generation are largely influenced by the experiences lived at a young age. Historical events that happened during one's youth are those recalled as especially meaningful later in life because they occurred during a critical time in the development of one's identity. Consequently, the members of a generation that have been through

significant socio-historical changes develop a strong feeling of belonging to the group and share a distinctive memory related to that particular socio-historical event. Starting from these premises I consider Conde's memory as archetypical of the history of his generation. Conde recalls episodes grounded in the collective memory of his generation and consequently shared by all the members of the group. Conde's group memory is rooted in his generational fellows and it is constantly reinforced and re-enacted through conversations and confrontations with the other members of the group. Padura himself, in an interview I conducted with him in Cuba, openly recognises the role of Conde and his group of friends as generational archetypes:

De alguna manera yo creo que Mario Conde no estaría completo si no existiera el grupo de personajes cercanos a él, que son sus amigos, que lo rodean y lo complementan y entre todos se forma una especie de espectro de una generación que es esta generación que nació en los años 50, a la que yo pertenezco, que llega al momento en que empiezan estas novelas alrededor de los 35 años, es decir en su madurez física e intelectual y sufre un quiebre muy violento con la desaparición del campo socialista y toda la crisis que viene después y que limita sus posibilidades. Es una generación que ha vivido su niñez en los primeros años de la revolución, su adolescencia en los años 70 y su juventud en los años 80. Por lo tanto viene marcada por los acontecimientos y la forma en la que mi generación vivió cada uno de estos momentos históricos. (Padura, 2013)

Mario Conde and his friends grew up under the revolutionary system; they experienced the social changes and the rigid state control directly and actively took part in the revolutionary utopian project for a better Cuban future. Conde's ideological commitment, his sense of duty and social justice are the result of the state education policy of the 60s and 70s, which promoted the ethos of renunciation and abnegation of the New Man ideology:

Está en el trasfondo de todo eso lo de la construcción del Hombre Nuevo, todo este proceso ideológico de un socialismo que crea la utopía que puede cambiar no solo la sociedad sino también los

individuos y construir una nueva sociedad y un nuevo individuo.  
(Padura, 2013)

At first, Padura's protagonist Mario Conde and his generational peers accept the utopian project and embrace the socialist egalitarian ideology. However, during the late 80s and 90s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the terrible economic crisis of the 90s appeared as serious obstacles on the path towards the realization of the collective better future:

Cuando llega ese quiebre de los 90 llega una gran decepción, frustración y un momento de desesperanza, desilusión, desencanto [...] la sensación de que hemos perdido el suelo debajo de nuestros pies y que no sabemos qué cosa va a ocurrir con nosotros, como realmente ocurre. (Padura, 2013)

The trauma caused by the failure of the social utopia provokes in Padura's characters a sharp disenchantment and a generational disorientation. Jorge Fornet defines the generation to which both Conde and Padura pertain precisely as the "generación del desencanto" (2003, p.19). Fornet argues that the crisis of the socialist system in the 1990s led to a disjunction between the idea of future life, as imagined by Conde's generation, and their real life in the post-Soviet present. Deprived of the utopian dream, Conde and his Cuban peers have been deprived of the roots of their identity: they face a deep identity crisis because they do not know who they are, where they come from and where they are going anymore. Disoriented and confused, Conde and his friends start to look back on their past, to make sense of their existence and the historical trajectory of their country. That is why Padura's characters who belong to Conde's generation share a common and fundamental trait: a compulsive obsession with the past. Padura affirms that this obsession with the past is a common trait in Cuban literature and, in line with this tradition, in each of his novels the characters look for the origins of the social conflicts that created their personal, generational and national identity:

Siempre hay una mirada hacia atrás para encontrar las razones de lo que está ocurriendo en el presente, y únicamente entendiendo ese pasado que puede ser personal, histórico,

cultural, nacional, físico (por lo que se refiere a la ciudad), Conde puede expresar, yo puedo expresar una comprensión del presente que estoy viviendo. (Padura, 2013)

Therefore the recollection and comprehension of the past are the essential conditions for a full understanding of the Cuban present. Memory is, then, the magnifying glass or the microscope used to analyse and compare the past and present.

### **3.1 Memories of a disenchanting generation**

Mario Conde, with his nostalgic and introverted personality, epitomizes the generational obsession with memory. One of the first descriptions of Mario Conde states: “Al Conde le gustaba recordar, era un recordador de mierda” (Padura, 2000, p. 22). The detective is not a shrewd and tough cop, or a charismatic policeman; he is, instead, an introspective and idealistic hero, a kind of Quixotic knight fighting hopelessly against the Cuban social illness (Uxó, 2006, p. 32). With his artistic sensibility and sentimental education, Conde often feels inadequate in his job, he does not wear the uniform, he is constantly adjusting his pistol, he cannot drive the police car and is also unsure about the reason why he chose this profession (Kirk & Lavoie, 2006, pp. 90-91). Clearly he does not fit the Cuban police model; he is a frustrated writer, locked into the body of a policeman but still dreaming of a literary career and constantly regretting the moment at which he abandoned his aspirations:

Se preguntó que había hecho con su vida: cada vez que revolvía el pasado sentía que no era nadie y no tenía nada, treinta y cuatro años y dos matrimonios deshechos. [...] Ya apenas leía y hasta se había olvidado de los días en que se juró, mirando la foto de aquel Hemingway que resultó ser el ídolo más adorado de su vida, que sería escritor y nada más que escritor. (Padura, 2000, p.55)

Conde has an obsession with the past that forces him to constantly look back to the roots of his present dissatisfaction and frustration; consequently his

recollection of the past starts from a critical perspective and always results in a critical comparison between the national past and present:

La ruta de los recuerdos de Mario Conde siempre terminaba en la melancolía. [...] Descubrió que le gustaba recordar con la esperanza de mejorar su vida, y trataba a su destino como un ser vivo y culpable, al que se le podían lanzar reproches y recriminaciones, insatisfacciones y dudas. (2000, p. 189)

As stated by the title of the first book of the tetralogy, *Pasado perfecto*, adolescence and the generationally formative years are always characterised by Conde as an idyllic and perfect period, the moment of hope and innocence, when the construction of a collective better future was still possible. By contrast, the post-Soviet present is described as a negative and deformed dimension: an “expanded present” (Quiroga, 2005, p. 4) in which Cubans are entrapped while waiting for a promised perfect future that does not arrive. However, early in the novel the perfect past mentioned in the title reveals its inconsistencies and contradictions when re-examined in the post-Soviet present, suggesting an ironic reading of the title and of the novel. In fact, what Conde melancholically regrets of the perfect past is not the reality of his life in the 1970s but his lost innocence, his faith in the construction of a better world through collective work and abnegation. In the 1990s, Conde examines his youth from a different and critical perspective and realizes that “La felicidad y la alegría de vivir habían quedado como atrapadas en un pasado que se hacía cada vez más utópico, inasible” (Padura, 2001, p. 152). Conde’s reconstruction of the past is performed in a post-Soviet present, from an *a posteriori* perspective characterized by a new historical awareness, therefore Conde reads the recent national past as a utopian dream, which faded with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and his present as a dystopian reality. The economic crisis of the 1990s increased the gap between the present and the utopian future, transforming the revolutionary project into an endless wait for a perfect future. Thus, Padura’s generation remained “stuck in time”, blocked in a kind of temporal “limbo” (Quiroga, 2005, pp. VIII-XII) which in the novel is metaphorically represented by the image of Conde’s goldfish Rufino

constantly swimming round in circles in his fishbowl with no possibility of escape from the limits of his present situation:

En la pecera, el pez peleador salió de su letargo de oscuridad y movió las aletas azules como dispuesto a volar: solo que su vuelo era un círculo interminable alrededor de las fronteras que le imponía el cristal redondo. (Padura, 2001, p. 223)

In an interview I conducted with him in Cuba, Leonardo Padura Fuentes describes the effect that the disappearance of the promised future had on his generation:

Hasta el año 89 la gente de la generación a la que yo pertenezco tenía una idea de un futuro posible, de un futuro que con su trabajo, con su esfuerzo, con su obediencia, con su entrega podía conseguir. Ese futuro muchas veces estaba representado por la posibilidad de tener un apartamento, un auto soviético, un viaje al extranjero [...] A partir del año 90 esa expectativa de futuro desaparece. [...] Se vive entonces en ese presente que no termina nunca, ese presente de sacrificios, de entrega, de falta de recursos y de medios que se complica con la inexistencia de un futuro. (Padura, 2013)

The uncertain conditions of the present exclude the possibility of a promising Cuban future, therefore Conde's remembering process disregards an important function of cultural memory: the ability to link "the past to the present and future" (Bal, 1999, p. VII). Through the remembering process the past is recalled in the present, manipulated and continuously modified in order to create the basis for shaping the future. Significantly, however, Conde's memory process does not result in the creation of a future and does not cast any new light on future changes. Padura's characters are "coming back to *the* past, *their* past. But all they could perceive was the failure of a future perfect" (Quiroga, 2005, p. XIII). The impossibility of achieving a better future and the difficulties in interpreting and making sense of present reality are metaphorically stated by Padura from the *incipit* of the first novel: "No necesitó pensarlo para comprender que lo más difícil sería abrir los ojos" (Padura,



2000, p. 13). Conde's difficult and problematic awakening after a drunken night symbolically refers to the rude awakening of his country during the Soviet crisis and to the difficulties in accepting the consequent disappointing reality (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 192). By dismantling the idea of a promised perfect future and describing the present hardship and limitations as a disenchanting awakening from the perfect past, Padura destroys the core of the revolutionary utopia. Some elements of the utopian construction persist in Conde's present but the values grounding the revolutionary Cuban identity have for the most part been destroyed by the new historical evidence and substituted by a counter-memory and a disenchanting counter-identity. In the following paragraphs I will first propose some examples of the generational counter-memory to then describe the main features of the disenchanting generational identity resulting therefrom.

As mentioned above, the obsession with memory shown by Padura's characters is bound to Cuba's historical-political evolution, and as such its aim is to re-construct the historical trajectory of the Revolution and question its distortion and alteration. The generational memories usually work as counter-memories that present important episodes and iconic moments of revolutionary history which are reinterpreted through a critical generational perspective. These memories usually start by reproducing the institutional discourse to interpret its effect on the young Conde and his friends, and finish by presenting the final distortion and corruption of the revolutionary ideology. The first example I will present is an iconic moment of revolutionary history: the disastrous sugar harvest of 1970. In the late 1960s, Fidel Castro had proclaimed his decision to reduce dependence on the Soviets and reverse economic decline, and to do so he set a goal of 10 million tons for the 1970 sugar harvest, more than double the level produced the previous year. All Cubans were called to take part in the collective effort and to do whatever was necessary to meet the target. Young students were sent to factories and farms to help out with the harvest. For many Cubans the failed sugar harvest of 1970 was paradigmatic, it ended the love affair with the Revolution, and the dream that anything was possible as long as Cubans worked together and hard enough. Conde in *Pasado perfecto* recalls his own experience of cutting sugar

cane in a school camp to collaborate in achieving the target of 10 million tons. Much of the official rhetoric and social pressure to which these young Cubans were exposed in that period is reflected in the episode. However, at the same time Padura here ironically manipulates and twists the features of the official discourse, transforming its solemnity into a comic trope: in the episode recalled, in fact, one of the students throws a mud-caked boot at the camp-leader who is annoyingly ringing the bell all around the camp to wake up the students:

Que cómo era posible este acto de indisciplina en un campamento de estudiantes de preuniversitario, esto no era una granja de reeducación de presidiarios y una persona así era como una papa podrida en un saco de papas buenas: corrompía y pudría a las demás, era el ejemplo de siempre, con papas a falta de manzanas. [...] ¿Y nadie se atreve a denunciar al indisciplinado que afecta el prestigio de todo un colectivo que ya no va a ganar la emulación después de tanto esfuerzo cotidiano en los campos de caña? [...] Entonces habló el oráculo de Delfos: Yo estoy aquí como estudiante, dijo Rafael, como compañero y representante de ustedes escogido por la masa [...] Ustedes me conocen, compañeros, aquí hay gente que llevan tres años conmigo, ustedes me eligieron presidente de FEEM<sup>2</sup> y yo soy tan estudiante como ustedes, pero no puedo aprobar cosas como ésa que afectan al prestigio del estudiantado cubano revolucionario [...] Y les pregunto, ya que están pensando en la hombría y esas cosas ¿es de hombre tirar una bota en la oscuridad a la máxima autoridad del campamento? Y más todavía: ¿es de hombre esconderse en la multitud y no dar la cara, sabiendo que todos seremos perjudicados? Díganme, compañeros, díganme algo, pidió y yo grité: ¡Tu madre, maricón! (2000, pp. 164-165)

The values of manliness and the ethos of sacrifice, mentioned in the passage above, are directly derived from the New Man identity model and are the

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<sup>2</sup> Federación de Estudiantes de la Enseñanza Media (FEEM).

examples of the spirit of abnegation and heroism to which young Cubans were called in the 1970s:

Todos y cada uno de nosotros paga puntualmente su cuota de sacrificio, conscientes de recibir el premio en la satisfacción del deber cumplido, conscientes de avanzar con todos hacia el hombre nuevo que se vislumbra en el horizonte. (Guevara, 1982, p. 16)

In the name of the collective project and socialist ideology, the regime imposed oppressive social control and exerted different levels of coercion on the young Cuban population. A clear example of the ideological intransigency of the 1970s is represented in the text by the suppression of *La Viboreña*, the high school literary journal to which Conde contributed. After the first edition of the journal, ironically and significantly called number zero, the editorial board was invited to meet the headmaster who questioned both the literary value of the journal and the commitment of the authors to the revolutionary ideology:

¿Por qué todos, todos los poemas de la revista eran de amor y no había uno solo dedicado a la obra de la Revolución, a la vida de un mártir, a la patria en fin? ¿Por qué el cuento del compañerito Conde era de tema religioso y eludía una toma de partido en contra de la iglesia y su enseñanza escolástica y retrógrada? [...] ¿Esa es acaso la imagen que debemos dar de la juventud cubana de hoy? ¿Ese es el ejemplo que proponemos, en lugar de resaltar la pureza, la entrega, el espíritu de sacrificio que debe primar en las nuevas generaciones...?, y ahí se formó la descojonación total. (2000, pp. 59-60)

In both these examples the school and camp authorities represent the Stalinist ideological approach which triumphed over the students' attempts to freely express themselves in 1970s Cuba. In contrast to official history, presented as a one-dimensional story, the childhood memories related here portray both the commitment and the agonies of the characters' generation in the first decades after 1959. Together with a testimony to the Sovietisation of Cuba, Conde recalls first his blind faith in revolutionary success and, then, his despair after

the failure of the collective utopia. The cultural memories of this generation thus represent the trajectory of Cuban disenchantment. Precisely because of the rigidity of their education, these Cubans felt frustrated and disillusioned to a great extent and now found themselves struggling with conflicting feelings and memories, which produced as a result the disenchanted collective identity shared by Padura's peers. Most of the characters in the novels define themselves as the *generación del desencanto*, *generación de escondidos y miedosos*, *generación de mandados*: it is firstly Miki *cara de Jeva*, an old school friend of Mario, who in *Pasado perfecto* applies this definition to Conde and to his generation:

Te tienes miedo a ti mismo y no te asumes. ¿Por qué no eres policía de verdad?, ¿eh? Estás a medio camino de todo. Eres el típico representante de nuestra generación escondida, como me decía un profesor de filosofía en la universidad. Me decía que éramos una generación sin cara, sin lugar y sin cojones. Que no se sabía dónde estábamos ni qué queríamos y preferíamos entonces escondernos. (2000, p. 156)

Thus, Conde, as the prototype of his generation, is “a medio camino de todo” because, together with all the other Cubans of his generation, he is stuck in the Cuban temporal limbo. He is unable to escape from this stagnation and indecision and is constantly struggling with his conflicting feelings and memories. His feeling of ambiguity and inadequacy is projected onto his working status. As suggested by Miki, despite his affiliation with the State institution, he is not a ‘real policeman’. In fact, his behaviour is no longer motivated by revolutionary ideology and values; on the contrary, he often challenges institutional norms in order to follow a personal morality and sense of justice, as the detective explains in *Pasado perfecto*:

Soy policía por dos razones: una que desconozco y que tiene que ver con el destino que me llevó a esto. La otra es muy simple, [...] porque no me gusta que los hijos de puta hagan cosas impunemente. (Padura, 2000, p. 90)

Although formally employed by a state institution, Conde does not feel he belongs to the institutional group and does not share the official point of view of Cuban history and reality. The detective lives between two different groups, the first one, his work environment, supports an official discourse, the second one, his group of friends and his private sphere, shares a critical view of Cuban society and history, opposing a generational counter-memory to the official one. Therefore Conde's positioning towards Cuban reality is often problematic and ambiguous. On the one hand he feels alienated from the surrounding society he perceives through his critical gaze and, on the other hand, since his personal identity is the product of the important historical changes that have occurred in his country, he feels bound to these events and to the collective memory of the Revolution. This constant feeling of impasse is projected onto the policeman's work: even though Conde normally succeeds in solving the case and arresting the murderer, essentially performing his task as a detective, the end of the police investigation leaves a lot of questions open, as well as the consequences and implications of a crime that cast a shadow on the whole of Cuban society. Consequently, at the end of each case, Conde is not satisfied; in his mind he is not restoring a peaceful situation previously disrupted by the murder. What he does experience is a feeling of blankness and impotence because the criminal act with all its damage has already happened:

[Manolo:] Oye, Conde, ¿Cómo te sientes tú cuando cierras un caso como éste?

El teniente extendió las manos sobre el buró. Las tenía abiertas, con las palmas hacia arriba.

– Así, Manolo, con las manos vacías. Ya todo el mal está hecho.

(Padura, 2000, p. 223)

Conde's empty hands are the material symbol of a wider generational void and existential crisis that take over the lives of all the characters in the novel. The iconic image of this traumatic generational experience is physically

represented by the maimed body of Carlos, the war veteran wounded in his first fight in Angola and condemned to live the rest of his life in a wheelchair<sup>3</sup>:

El Flaco Carlos pesaba ahora más de doscientas libras y se moría a plazos sobre una silla de ruedas. En 1981, en Angola, había recibido un balazo en la espalda, justo sobre la cintura, que le había destrozado la médula. (Padura, 2000, pp. 95-96)

He clearly represents the mutilation of the dreams and aspirations of his generational fellows, who sacrificed themselves to promote an ambitious societal mission that ultimately resulted in the disillusioned present that they refuse to accept. Carlos's relation to memory is even more problematic than Conde's, since the opposition between his present condition and his past is so sharp, that the character prefers not to remember:

La nostalgia te engaña: nada más te devuelve lo que tú quieres recordar y eso a veces es muy saludable, pero casi siempre es moneda falsa. [...] Oye, aunque casi nunca yo hable de eso, a veces me pongo a pensar en lo que me pasó en Angola [...] Era terrible, mi hermano, y además sabíamos que estábamos allí para morirnos, porque era la guerra, y era como una rifa en la que a lo mejor, si tenías suerte, te tocaba el número de salir vivo: así de sencillo, lo más irremediable del mundo. Entonces lo mejor era no recordar. Y los que mejor resistían eran los que se olvidaban de todo [...] yo no, yo me puse allá como eres tú, un nostálgico de mierda, y me dio por sacar la cuenta de cómo había llegado hasta allí, de por qué carajo estaba en aquel hueco, hasta que me dieron el tiro y entonces sí me sacaron de allá abajo. (Padura, 2001, pp. 127-128)

Carlos does not want to look at what he has lost and why he lost it. He is convinced that nostalgia is deceptive; it is not the solution because no one can

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<sup>3</sup> Persephone Braham described Carlos as a “monument to Cuban misguided foreign policy” and compared the failure of the Cuban mission in Angola to the United States' experience in Vietnam (2004, p. 57).

really live in a nostalgic past. Carlos's physical condition turns him into an emblematic victim of the revolutionary dream and the symbol of a mutilated generation. At the same time, however, he is the only character that does not perform the constant recollection of the past in the search for answers and recriminations. Carlos's approach to life seems more pragmatic and less idealistic than Conde's. Conde, by contrast, constantly questions his life:

¿Qué has hecho con tu vida, Mario Conde?, se preguntó como cada día, y como cada día quiso darle marcha atrás a la máquina del tiempo y uno a uno deshacer sus propios entuertos, sus engaños y excesos, sus iras y sus odios, desnudarse de su existencia equivocada y encontrar el punto preciso donde pudiera empezar de nuevo. (Padura, 2000, p. 56)

His compulsive recollection of the past seems to be as hopeless as it is inevitable. In his attempt to go back in time to amend or change his life, the character lives the same trauma again and again, without being able to avoid it or change his destiny:

Aquella larga cadena de errores y casualidades que habían formado su existencia no se podía repetir, debía haber algún modo de enmendarla o al menos romperla y ensayar otra fórmula, en verdad otra vida. (Padura, 2000, p. 28)

In the novels of the tetralogy, Padura thus provides a testimony to his historical and generational experience and recalls part of his collective memories, realising as a consequence that his generation has changed together with the Revolution and that both have been betrayed by international historical dynamics:

Nos ocurrió algo históricamente muy terrible: en el momento en que llegábamos al clímax, al máximo de las posibilidades de mi generación, vino la caída de la crisis económica del período especial. (Padura quoted in Costanzo, 2008, p. 472)

The memories Padura attributes to his characters convert the generational experience into a kind of counter-history which challenges the official

discourse, incorporating elements of disillusion, dissatisfaction and disaffection into the cultural memory of the Cuban population. This generational memory refuses a single definition of national memory and identity, presenting instead the co-existence of different and competing memories and showing that the past can continuously be reinterpreted and reconfigured from a different perspective. The evolution of Conde's generational memory and its progressive distancing from the official view suggest that there is no true or stable version of the past; conversely, memories (and the identities that derive therefrom) are always fluid and plural. The cultural memory of Padura's characters, then, proposes multiple perspectives on memory and an anti-essentialist reading of identity.

#### **4 Conde's trans-generational memory: from counter-memory to multidirectional memory**

In this last section I am going to show how Padura widens the horizon of Cuban national memory to a further point: using Conde's family history and his feeling of belonging to a specific Cuban space the writer recovers forgotten elements of the national past and incorporates them into a new Cuban national narrative. To consider memory as multiple and plural implies that every kind of memory, including the official variety, contains traces of other previous or competing memories. In the case of contemporary Cuba, the traces of previous different memories that have been temporarily silenced or displaced exist and persist inside the official memory of the Revolution. Conde's family history and cultural memory become the means to give voice to these marginalised memories and recover a plurality of old images which can challenge and destabilize the official version of national history. I explain above that Conde's memory is plural because it contains elements of the official memory and of a critical generational memory; but it also contains traces of other memories, which go beyond his lived experience. The character's memory in fact forms part of a bigger family history which in turn inscribes itself into the wider canon of Cuban cultural memory. Often Conde's memories exceed their personal or



generational dimensions to stretch back into an older past, to a period preceding Mario's birth. These older memories, pertaining to Conde's forefathers and ancestors, confer a trans-generational character on the detective's memory which widens the scope of the books so that a broader historical perspective can be explored. In this case, the object of Conde's recollection is not his personal or generational past but the cultural past of Cuba:

[Mario] Sabe que el alma profunda de La Habana se está transformando en algo opaco y sin matices que lo alarma como cualquiera enfermedad incurable. Y siente una nostalgia aprendida por lo perdido que nunca llegó a conocer: los viejos bares de la playa donde reinó el Chori con sus timbales, las barras del puerto donde una fauna ahora en extinción pasaba las horas tras un ron y junto a una victrola cantando con mucho sentimiento los boleros de Benny, Vallejo y Vicentico Valdés, la vida disipada de los cabarets que cerraban al amanecer, cuando ya no se podía soportar un trago más de alcohol ni el dolor de cabeza. [...] una ciudad desfachatada, a veces cursi y siempre melancólica en la distancia del recuerdo no vivido ya no existía. (Padura, 2001, p. 92)

Conde longs for a past that he is too young to have experienced directly but which has been transmitted to him through Cuban popular culture. The images of 1940s-50s Havana in Conde's mind are so real as to have become a remembered era that he could never really have experienced but for which he can nevertheless feel nostalgia (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 261-262). This explains why Padura speaks of *recuerdos* when Conde is actually recalling images pertaining to a family memory or a wider cultural memory which have been transmitted to him by former generations. Conde is thus the bearer of a trans-generational memory which takes different forms: from a more personal and affective family memory, transmitted by Conde's grandfather Rufino, to a wider cultural and popular memory absorbed through traditional music, cinema and literature. I will refer to these trans-generational memories recalled by Conde as 'recuerdos vicarios' because their main feature is their vicarious and

mediated character. In the field of cultural studies and memory studies, different scholars (Marian Hirsh, James Young, Beatriz Sarlo) focus on mechanisms for the transmission of memories between different generations. Marian Hirsh coined the term 'postmemory' to define "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to constitute memories in their own right" (2008, p. 103). Postmemory, then, describes the memories of the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective traumas, but this second generation experiences the events they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. The main component of postmemory, according to Hirsh, is its mediated character. Conversely Beatriz Sarlo, commenting on Marian Hirsh's definition, claims that the vicarious character is a feature of memory *tout court* and not a peculiarity of postmemory. According to Sarlo, memory is always mediated because in contemporary societies the majority of a person's memory store has been created vicariously:

Es obvio que toda reconstrucción del pasado es vicaria e hipermediada, excepto la experiencia que ha tocado el cuerpo y la sensibilidad de un sujeto. [...] Toda narración del pasado es una representación, algo dicho *en lugar de* un hecho. Lo vicario no es específico de la postmemoria. (2007, p. 129)

Thus, in Sarlo's view, both postmemory and memory *tout court* share a mediated and fragmented character, and the only features that distinguish postmemory from other kinds of memory are: "la implicación del sujeto en su dimensión psicológica más personal y el carácter no 'profesional' de su actividad" (2007, p. 130). Following Sarlo's predicament, in my study I will use the term *recuerdos vicarios* when referring to any kind of 'inherited memory', whether it is directly gained from older members of the family or part of a more general shared patrimony of cultural memory that Conde absorbed as he was growing up.

It is mainly in *Vientos de cuaresma* that Conde recovers this kind of trans-generational memory, usually based on geographical images. Conde begins to recall sensorial experiences linked to his personal geographical memory

and then goes back, adding to it the sounds, images and sensations learned from his forefathers and ancestors. During his investigations, the detective roams around his neighbourhood and around the city, recovering first a family memory linked to the evolving aspect of his neighbourhood and then a national memory linked to the urban structure of Havana. Walking in the heart of his neighbourhood, Conde encounters his personal sites of memory, his *lieux de mémoire* on which familiar and national memory have crystallized. These sites of memory allow Mario to establish a connection with an older past:

De cualquier forma aquel paseo en solitario por el barrio era un placer que cada cierto tiempo el Conde se concedía: en aquella geografía precisa habían nacido sus abuelos, su padre, sus tíos y él mismo, y deambular por aquella Calzada [...] era una peregrinación hacia sí mismo hasta límites que pertenecían ya a las memorias adquiridas de sus mayores. (Padura, 2001, p. 84)

Conde takes over the memory of others and unifies this inherited memory with the personal and generational to create a wider perspective and emphasize once more the physical and social decay of contemporary Cuba. Urban space is often used in the novels of the tetralogy as a signifier of a lack of social cohesion and as a marker for identity and economic crisis. I will explore the value of Padura's representation of the urban space of Havana in greater depth in the next chapter, in relation to *La neblina del ayer*, but here I want to stress that the description of the city resulting from Conde's *recuerdos vicarios* is a mosaic of different images and sounds which span from the pre-revolutionary era and Batista's regime to the Castro era and the post-Soviet experience. In this way, Padura widens his historical analysis, offering a plurality of Cuban memories over the homogeneity of the single official one. Conde's trans-generational memory can therefore be classified as counter-memory: its function is to recuperate images of past beauty and happiness which contrast with the present decadence of the Cuban urban and social space. Padura explains:

Los conflictos en los que Mario Conde se ve envuelto tienen lugar dentro de un espacio que está sufriendo un proceso de degradación importante. La Habana no es una ciudad que se ha

mantenido estática en el tiempo, detenida en el tiempo, como muchas veces se dice, la Habana está retrocediendo en el tiempo, se está ruralizando, se está deteriorando, está perdiendo sus características. [...] Este deterioro tiene que ver con los comportamientos de la gente. Hay una relación entre el deterioro físico de la ciudad y el deterioro espiritual de las personas. Vivir en lo feo afecta a la gente. La fealdad, la suciedad, la desidia han ido invadiendo esta sociedad. (Padura, 2013)

The Havana of the 1990s becomes, then, the projection of a physical and spiritual deterioration affecting the entire Cuban society. Padura uses Conde's sites of memory, such as the neighbourhood or the high school, to recover episodes of the generational and national past and epitomize the process of disaggregation and corruption of the revolutionary societal project. In the case of Conde's neighbourhood, for example, there is such a wide gap between the present aspect of the urban district and its remembered image that Padura's protagonist often discredits his own recollections:

La realidad visible de la Calzada contrastaba con la imagen almibarada del recuerdo de aquella misma calle, una imagen que había llegado a preguntarse si en verdad era real, si la heredaba de la nostalgia histórica de los cuentos de su abuelo o simplemente la había inventado para tranquilizar al pasado. (Padura, 2000, pp. 18-19)

Trans-generational memories thus mark to an even greater extent the distance between the remembered perfect past and the imperfect present. They entrust Conde with the authority to speak for a wider part of the Cuban population and to recover a wider historical basis for the representation of contemporary Cuban identities. An important feature of trans-generational memory is its ability to construct links and connections across time and space, between different memory traces and different generations. These inherited cultural memories allow Conde to conceive of himself as multiply interconnected with others of the same, of previous, and of subsequent generations. Trans-generational memory can therefore be considered a form of multidirectional memory: it brings together disparate historical imaginaries, giving voice to

memories and counter-memories that might disrupt hegemonic views of national history. The re-construction of Conde's trans-generational memories thus serves a critical function: it allows Padura to analyse Cuban social history and reinterpret Cuban national identity as the changeable product of recent political, social and cultural developments.

## **5 Conclusion**

In the first two novels of the tetralogy Padura, proceeding from Conde's autobiographical memory, first reconstructs a generational memory and then a wider trans-generational memory. This journey into different Cuban memories creates the ground against which Padura traces the historical development and transformation of contemporary Cuba. Taking advantage of the non-linear nature of the narrative time of the detective novels, Padura reconstructs different historical moments and generational experiences that together take part in the deconstruction and re-creation of a new cultural memory and consequently a new national identity. Even though the public memory of the Revolution maintains a competitive approach to the representation of the past, behind this official memory there are other memories which survive and resist silencing and exclusion. The traces of these previous and different memories show that it is not possible to separate a singular memory from the others and that there is no social actor powerful enough to own and impose one version of memory and exclude all the alternatives. On the contrary, the production of a national memory is fundamentally a collective and dialogic process that cuts across individuals, generations and times: it is constantly created and re-shaped through social interactions. It cannot be fixed and therefore one single group can never be totally in charge of a national memory, even if it claims the right to be. The construction of a national memory is always the product of a negotiation between the different elements forming the memory of the hegemonic group and the counter-memories. These different memory sources converge in the creation of the plural and multidirectional image of Cuban memory proposed by Padura, which may not be officially recognised but which actually exists.

This tendency to interpret Cuban reality according to a plural model is central to my study on the work of Padura. In the rest of the thesis I will apply this approach to different aspects of Cuban contemporary identity: in the next chapter, for instance, I will focus on the image of the palimpsest and use it to represent an imbricated network of spatial, temporal and generational connections which together produce a composite image of Cubanness.

## Chapter 4

### Havana: The Palimpsestic City. Time, Space and Identity in *La neblina del ayer*

#### 1 Introduction

This chapter examines the representation of Cuban identity proposed by Leonardo Padura Fuentes, focusing on its changeable, multiple and multilayered nature. As argued in the previous chapters, the revolutionary government tried to delete some of the historical symbols and cultural manifestations that pre-dated it, creating a historical utopia and superimposing a standardized binary model of Cuban identity. In *La neblina del ayer*, Padura tries to recover the roots of contemporary Cubanness, looking into the past cultural tradition and rediscovering milestones of Cuban literature and masterpieces of Cuban music. As shown in chapter 3, using different narrative techniques such as flashbacks, analepsis and prolepsis, Padura manipulates the categories of time and space, incorporating different epochs and places into the narrative, and creating a counterpoint against which Conde analyses the Cuban present. In *La neblina del ayer* the accumulation and comparison between different times and epochs is rendered through the representation of the urban space of Havana, which bears the marks of different historical events and political perspectives. This chapter takes into account the influence of both categories on the city structure and examines the connection between the representation of urban space and the shaping of Cuban identity in *La neblina del ayer*.

I will read the city of Havana as an accumulation of different strata and parallel spaces, in which the official history and counter-histories coexist as well as official and alternative identity performances. The central questions of the chapter are: a) how does Padura's representation of Havana as a multilayered

and palimpsestic city inform the representation of Cuban identity as plural and variable? b) How does the narrative representation of 'other spaces' or counter-spaces enounce the existence of significant layers of cultural subversion which are to be found in the city? c) How can the palimpsest model be used to represent the construction of Cubanness, to examine the generational identity crisis and to critique the exclusive model of Cuban identity proposed by the Revolution? Answering these questions, this chapter will read Padura's depiction of the geographical and cultural stratification of Havana as a contestation of the essentialist and homogenising reading of Cuban identity, history and culture.

The chapter is focused on the analysis of *La neblina del ayer*. This novel was published by Padura in 2005. It is the sixth book of the Mario Conde series, although it is not part of the tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones*. The story is set in Havana, in September 2003. Fourteen years have passed since Mario Conde retired from the police force and became an antiquarian bookseller investigating the old libraries of collectors now forced to sell their treasures in order to survive the harsh economic crisis. In a city severely affected by the economic crisis of 2003, Conde discovers an extraordinary book collection, guarded by the Ferrero brothers, and hidden inside the mansion of Alcides Montes de Oca, a rich Cuban who fled after the fall of Batista. Inside one of the volumes of this huge private library, Conde finds a newspaper article about Violeta del Río, a beautiful bolero singer of the 1950s who disappeared mysteriously. Conde becomes infatuated with Violeta and her unexplained death and starts a personal investigation into Havana's dissolute past and violent present. Digging into the Cuban past he rediscovers the lights and shadows of the old city populated by prostitutes, pimps, and drug-pushers, allowing the author to describe the glamorous atmosphere of the city of a hundred night clubs, where boleros, mambos and jazz were the undisputed owners of the night. Much has changed in Cuba since that time but the criminality, ambition and moral corruption that the regime's propaganda declares defeated and eradicated are still there, hidden in the labyrinth of the city. Proof of this is the murder of Dionisio Ferrero, one of the guardians of the library. Conde and his new work partner Yoyi are the main suspects for the



assassination, prompting the former detective to start a second investigation that will surprisingly end up revealing the culprit of both Violeta's and Dionisio's murders and uncovering the hidden past of the Ferrero family. The murderer in both cases is Amalia Ferrero, the sister of Dioniso and illegitimate daughter of Alcides Montes de Oca. She first killed Violeta because she was a competitor to the Montes de Oca's inheritance, and then she killed Dioniso, when he discovered, inside the library, Nemesia's letters accusing Amalia of murdering Violeta.

As has been the case in the other Conde novels, the now-former detective and his expanded circle of friends are a collective device through which the history of pre-revolutionary, post-Soviet, and contemporary Cuba is told. This chapter breaks the chronological order of the thesis and analyses this book here because, as mentioned in the introduction, its temporal distance from 1989 and from the events narrated in the tetralogy clearly marks the difference in the attitude of the protagonist and his group of friends. If, as I maintain in chapter 3, the first two novels of the tetralogy work together as an *incipit* for the series, *La neblina del ayer*, the last of the novels analysed here to be published by Padura, can be considered to occupy the opposite pole of the series. Therefore, the disenchanting mood which Conde starts to experience in *Vientos de cuaresma* reaches its climax in *La neblina del ayer*, in which Conde consciously realizes the total disappearance of the revolutionary world as he knew it. Knocked out by the "crisis galopante" (Padura, 2005, p. 16) of the 90s that destroyed every possible hope of future improvement, Mario, Carlos and *el Conejo* now appear totally disillusioned and irremediably alienated from the post-90s Cuban world around them. Moreover, this novel introduces new characters who represent different generations: one preceding Conde and his friends and one following Code's generation. The youngest generation, in particular, will express an even stronger and more cynical condemnation of the New Man ideology and will show how young Cubans, born in the mid-1970s, distance themselves from the revolutionary ethos and vision of the world. This novel allows me to expand on the analysis of the generational experience and of the trans-generational transmission of memories which I began in chapter 3. Finally, in this text the recovery of trans-

generational memories is strongly linked to the spatial dimension and to the urban setting of the novel. Therefore, this text shows to a greater extent the relationship between space and memory and the process of spatialization of memory which I introduced in chapter 3 when I presented Conde's personal and familiar *lieux de mémoire*. Due to these important points of contact between the first two novels of the tetralogy and *La neblina del ayer*, for the purpose of my study, it will prove more productive to break the chronological order of the Conde series and analyse *La neblina del ayer* immediately after *Pasado perfecto* and *Vientos de cuaresma*.

## 2 The theoretical framework

As previously stated, the main object of this thesis is to show how Padura contests the idea of a singular Cuban society and Cuban identity proposing, instead, a plural identity model. This chapter contributes to this hypothesis by spotlighting how the author recovers different layers of cultural tradition and describes their role in the construction of multiple identity performances. This chapter studies the representation of Havana as a heterotopic and heterochronic place in which a plurality of times and spaces coexist. Associating this representation with the image of the palimpsest, this study describes the geographical and cultural stratification of contemporary Cuba.

The theoretical framework of this chapter deals with two basic concepts: the idea of heterotopias defined as counter-spaces and the metaphor of the palimpsest as a tool for the study of cultural identity. I will first provide a description of the relationship between sites using Michel Foucault's definition of heterotopias. Drawing on this concept I will describe the relationship between official spaces and counter-spaces in Havana and I will focus specifically on two different examples of heterotopic places in Havana: a library and a slum because both represent different forms of deviation from the normative space articulation proposed by the revolutionary discourse. I will secondly link the complex articulation of heterotopic and heterochronic sites in Cuba with the palimpsest metaphor proposed by José Quiroga and with Michel

de Certeau's reading of city space as stratified. Thirdly, I will take into account José Quiroga's description of the Cuban system as a palimpsest, which juxtaposes different symbolic sites, sets of values, and socio-cultural traditions, and I will use the palimpsest as a symbolic model to study the historical evolution of the Cuban social system and the representation of Cubanness in the post-Soviet era. Self-definition and national identity formation will be defined as a palimpsestic process. Identity will be presented as formed by several mutually dependent strata and linked by a relationship of either contrast or continuity. Therefore, this chapter will apply the concepts of the palimpsest and heterotopia to the study of Padura's narrative representation of time and space in Cuba, the geography of the city and, more importantly, the identity-construction of the Cuban people.

## **2.1 Heterotopias: counter-spaces and subversion of the dominant order**

The first concept that will be used to describe Padura's depiction of the urban geography of Havana is 'heterotopias'. The French philosopher Michel Foucault elaborated for the first time his idea of heterotopias in a lecture entitled *Des espaces autres* (Of Other Spaces) given in March 1967. Heterotopias literally mean 'other spaces' and the term refers to places that are different and fall outside the normal definition of everyday space. Foucault uses the concepts of heterotopia to describe spaces of 'otherness', which can be simultaneously physical and mental, and which have more layers of meaning or relationships than normal places. The philosopher, at the outset, defines heterotopias in relation to utopias: both sites have the "property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). While utopias are unreal places, heterotopias are real sites and at the same time counter-sites.

The main feature of these 'other spaces' is their being "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves

incompatible” (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). The ability to transform and invert the rules of the spatial dimension is what gives heterotopias their character of subversion and classifies them as counter-sites. Foucault writes that heterotopias are “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1986, p. 24). As suggested by Heidi Sohm, “Foucault’s heterotopias have an essentially disturbing function: they are meant to overturn established orders, to subvert language and signification, to contrast sameness and to reflect the inverse or reverse side of society” (Sohm, 2008, p. 44). It is then in the subversion of and challenge to the established order of things that the heterotopia realizes its full potential. Heterotopias by nature enact a mechanism of contestation of the space in which we live, they exist in contrast to a set of parameters of normalcy and order. It is against this set of parameters that they can define themselves as abnormal and deviant spaces.

In modern cities, many urban spaces accommodate deviant behaviours or subcultures and could, therefore, be defined as heterotopias. Also in the Cuban case, heterotopic spaces are sites of resistance to the social and cultural establishment. In comparison to the model of revolutionary society, formulated by the hegemonic discourse, these places are formed bottom-up by communities that are unrecognized within the public sphere. Therefore, in Havana it is possible to recognize different kinds of heterotopic spaces, performing different functions in relation to the dominant order. In official Cuban discourse, terms such as ‘ideological resistance’ and ‘deviant behaviours’—normally associated with the idea of heterotopias—can have diverse meanings. Virtually any location that challenges, in any way, the revolutionary establishment can be considered a space of deviation or a counter-site. Therefore, examples of heterotopic spaces associated with deviation and resistance in Cuba could range from cultural clubs or intellectual societies, where people gather systematically to confront ideas and critique the *status quo*, to slums and red-light districts where criminal and illegal activities, such as prostitution or smuggling, are common practices. Any space considered deviant with regard to the established common code of conduct

can be considered a heterotopia, since it is a counter-site that contests and inverts the codes of the official discourse.

In the description of Havana proposed by Padura in *La neblina del ayer* the city incorporates many of the spaces that Foucault loosely categorises as 'other spaces', such as theatres, libraries, brothels, barracks and hospitals: in their different ways, these spaces exist somehow outside of conventional time-space coordinates and, in some cases, also outside the law. In *La neblina del ayer*, Padura presents two different examples of heterotopic places: a library and a slum. Each represents a different kind of deviation from the normative space structure and from the dominant revolutionary discourse; nevertheless both sites, in equal measure, challenge the revolutionary social establishment. These spaces create zones of discontinuity on the city's surface, in which different voices emerge to disrupt the organicity and coherence of the revolutionary discourse. I will read these heterotopic zones as sites of counter-history: they resurrect buried and hidden blocks of history to critique the official and hegemonic views of the national past and present. In the following sections of this study on *La neblina del ayer* I will analyse the specific features of these two 'counter-sites' which survive and coexist with other official spaces in the city of Havana.

### **2.1.1 The library: a heterotopia of accumulation of time**

Libraries are considered by Foucault as heterotopic and heterochronic spaces in which different times and epochs coexist in a place that is itself out of time. Dettman affirms that the library in *La neblina del ayer* can be considered a heterotopic place because "es un espacio en que diferentes historias coexisten con el presente" (2008, p. 86). In *La neblina del ayer* the discovery of an old library is the plot device that triggers the action, as well as the site where the most important developments of the story take place. The library is also the scene of the murder and the main clues leading to the resolution of the case emerge from the pages of one of the books held there. Finally, it holds a collection of rare and valuable books which mark the milestones of Cuba's historical and cultural heritage, representing a bridge to the island's past. It is

in the pages of one of these books, in fact, that Conde discovers the article about Violeta, which both inspires his quest to solve the mystery of the death of the young singer and which connects him with pre-revolutionary Havana and its landmarks.

Libraries are classified by Foucault under the fourth principle of heterotopias:

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time-which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. (1986, p. 26)

Heterochronies follow the same principle as heterotopias but applied to the category of time. They can be considered 'other times', escaping the normal structure of time and proposing alternative forms of representation. Heterochronies are then "heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time" (Foucault, 1986: 26). For Foucault, the best examples of this kind of heterotopia are museums and libraries:

Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit [...] establishing a sort of general archive,[...] to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, [...] constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, [...] organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place. (Foucault, 1986, p. 26)

The library in *La neblina del ayer* is simultaneously a heterotopia and a heterochronia. It is hidden within a house that from its appearance immediately announces the accumulation of time and the coexistence of traces of the glorious past entangled with the cracks and void of the present:

Aquella sala, con manchas de humedad, desconchados y hasta algunas grietas en las paredes, no tenía mejor aspecto que el exterior de la casa, pero conseguía conservar un aire de elegancia solemne y la capacidad vigorosa de recordar cuánta riqueza durmió alguna vez entre aquellas paredes ahora desguarnecidas. (Padura, 2005, p. 22)

The physical appearance of the library itself makes its unconventional nature clear. It is a space contained within another, the mansion, which seems to represent several different eras at the same time. While the house is empty and looted of all its precious adornments, the library has remained unchanged for 40 years, preserving all its priceless bibliographical treasures:

Miles de libros de lomos oscuros, en los que aún lograban brillar las letras dormidas de su identidad, vencedoras de la malvada humedad de la isla y de la fatiga del tiempo. (Padura, 2005, pp. 23-24)

The doors of the library are mirrors indicating to readers from the outset that the world contained beyond these doors will reflect and invert expected codes. The supernatural nature of this place affects Conde as soon as he enters the room: “Conde tuvo la sensación de que aquel recinto era como un santuario perdido en el tiempo” (Padura, 2005, p. 25). The library, then, is resistant to the passing of time, like an island out of the ordinary time dimension. At the same time, however, the books that it contains link it to several different eras and many different stories that coexist on the same shelves, giving the room its heterotopic and heterochronic value. The library —which succeeded in “navegar a salvo de las iras del tiempo y de la historia” (Padura, 2005, p. 69) — is, in fact, an encyclopaedic archive of Cuban culture ranging from the milestones of *criollo* literature to the books banned by the Revolution in the 1970s; Conde describes it as the place where all the books written in or about Cuba are preserved. Furthermore, the library is the place where the different narrative lines of *La neblina del ayer* are connected. In this unique space, Conde’s post-Soviet present is linked to both the pre-revolutionary past (recalled by the magazine about Violeta hidden in one of the books), the revolutionary victory and the first glorious years of revolutionary history (which forced bourgeois property owners to leave Cuba). The library bridges all these different temporalities and opens the passage between one epoch and the others.

As with every other heterotopia, this space also has its own mechanism of opening and closing, and this mechanism in the novel is often associated with

the thermal contrast: “Cuando salió a la calle lo recibió el vapor húmedo de la tarde [...] De inmediato el Conde reparó en el contraste termico: la casa de los Ferreros, antes de los opulentos Montes de Oca, tenía la capacidad de sobreponerse al verano habanero” (Padura, 2005, p. 39). The library and the whole house, being a site out of ordinary time and space, are not affected by the normal atmospheric conditions.

The plurality of time characteristic of the kind of heterotopias to which the library pertains leads to a constant presence of past phantoms bringing back their personal histories, which have been lost in the mist of time. The library goes against the revolutionary attempt to erase part of the Cuban past in order to start a new era; conversely the past in this heterotopic place, as much as in contemporary Cuba, keeps emerging from the covered substrata. The inherently nostalgic and counter-hegemonic nature of the library inevitably attracts and fascinates Conde. The character has a sacred respect for books and libraries which function for him as a collective cultural patrimony. At the same time, his inability to fit into post-Soviet Cuban society and his fascination with the pre-revolutionary past draw him to the library as a site of knowledge and rebellion. The attraction towards the library is so strong that Conde behaves as if under a spell and, despite knowing that “no debía mirar atrás”, as soon as he exits the Ferrero’s house and the heterotopic library he is tempted to look back towards the house, which is the door to the parallel world: “por un momento sintió la tentación de volverse y observar nuevamente la fresca mansión” (Padura, 2005, p. 39). Conde’s life appears to be strongly connected to the library: both are characterized by an accumulation of layers rooted in Cuban history, and both seem to be populated by ghosts emerging from the past.

Heidi Sohm, when analysing the possible origins of heterotopias, says “heterotopia derives from the changes that can occur within the same society or culture evolving over an extended period” (2008, p. 46). This is exactly what happened in Cuba: the post-Soviet changes affected the historical representation of the island. As I will explain in greater detail in the section devoted to the representation of the Havana city-space as an urban palimpsest, the emergence of new values and myths requires the creation of



new physical and symbolic spaces to adapt to these changes, influencing the geographical organization of the city and the symbolic construction of new Cuban identities. Padura, through the representation of these other spaces, creates a counter-world in the attempt to criticize revolutionary dogmatism. During his work in the library, selecting and cataloguing the books, Conde suffers from different symptoms of estrangement and temporal confusion: “Mario Conde abrió los ojos con la sensación resbaladiza de no saber en qué sitio ni en qué tiempo estaba” (Padura, 2005, p. 177). Foucault states that “the heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (1986, p. 26). This is precisely what happens to Conde as he constantly floats from past to present, entering and exiting from the heterotopic library. This confusion of times and places, this superimposition of memories and realities fix Conde in a constant spatial and temporal displacement, preventing him from fitting into the revolutionary world and consequently allowing him to hold a more critical view of Cuban society. I argue that Padura applies Foucault’s heterotopic concept in all its subversive potential: calling for a society with several heterotopic spaces for the affirmation of difference.

### **2.1.2 Slums and red-light districts: city spaces as heterotopias of deviation**

The second example of a heterotopic place proposed in *La neblina del ayer* is a slum. Slums and red-light districts represent the degraded areas of the city where different rules and codes of behaviour seem to function. These kinds of urban sites fall into the category that Foucault terms ‘heterotopias of deviation’. This category encompasses those sites that host “individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm” (1986, p. 25). Even though Foucault includes among these sites prisons and psychiatric hospitals, I argue that other spaces of deviation such as the slums, which have clear geographical limits but not restricted access, can be included in the list. These spaces exist both outside normativity and outside the law, since they have a declared illegal nature and criminal connotation. In these places, significant

layers of subversion emerge onto the urban surface, openly and increasingly challenging the ideological façade of the Revolution.

The subversive power of sites such as slums and brothels resides in their violent nature, disrespect and total negation of official law, moral codes and established social rules. These heterotopias of deviation take the basic features of every heterotopic space to extremes: they are linked to all the other urban places, they coexist with them in the same time frame and space unit, yet they openly contradict and subvert the life codes ruling all these coexisting places (Foucault, 1986, p. 27). The slum, then, is strongly linked to all the other city spaces and, at the same time, mirrors and represents each one of them in a parallel universe:

Mario Conde volvió a preguntarse cómo era posible que en el corazón de La Habana existiera aquel universo pervertido donde vivían personas nacidas en su mismo tiempo y en su misma ciudad, pero que a la vez le podían resultar tan desconocidas, casi irreales en su acelerada degradación. (Padura, 2005, p. 217)

In fact, heterotopias have an important function in relation to all the spaces that remain, which is to create counter-spaces that expose every real space or site inside of which human life is partitioned (Foucault, 1986, p. 27). The subversive function of the heterotopic slum is manifested by both the activities performed in it and its spatial articulation as a kind of labyrinthine counter-world<sup>1</sup>:

Un triángulo eternamente degradado en cuyas entrañas se ha acumulado, a lo largo de los siglos, una parte del deshecho humano, arquitectónico e histórico generado por la capital prepotente. (Padura, 2005, p. 206)

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<sup>1</sup> A labyrinth is often associated with an underground world, with a regression to the world of chaos, a journey through time and space from darkness to consciousness. It is a quest for identity, for the meaning of life (see Martin, 2007, pp. 158-162).

This parallel city is interwoven in the urban structure, hidden in the old heart of Havana and delimited by specific boundaries that indicate the border between two universes opposing order and chaos. In fact, while Conde is crossing the boundaries to enter the slum “una sensación de estar atravesando los límites del caos le advirtió de la presencia de un mundo al borde de un Apocalipsis difícilmente reversible” (Padura, 2005, p. 208). According to Foucault, “heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. [...] To get in one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures” (Foucault, 1986, 27). Conde, while crossing the boundaries to enter the slum, is consciously entering a parallel apocalyptic world ruled by chaos; he has been introduced to this world, he knows how to enter but does not know what is beyond those boundaries and does not have the knowledge and experience to understand the codes of communication of the slum. Inside the slum, the conventional social structures and governmental law do not exist, they are perceived as “un orden distante” and “siempre represivo” (Padura, 2005, p. 207). The law of survival of the fittest and a kind of fierce natural selection are the only recognised rules, and violence is the only code understood:

Entre sus calles sinuosas la historia parecía haber volado sin detenerse, mientras generación tras generación se empozaban allí el dolor, el olvido, la rabia y un espíritu de resistencia casi siempre desfogado en lo ilícito, lo pecaminoso, lo violento, en busca de una dura supervivencia, procurada a toda costa y por cualquier vía. (Padura, 2005, p. 207)

This neighbourhood is populated by “proletarios mal pagados, lumpens de todos los colores, putas, traficantes y emigrados” (Padura, 2005, p. 206), all living in the same precarious conditions and all equally frustrated by the impossibility of future improvement but at the same time “deseosos de una oportunidad en la vida que casi nunca les debería de llegar” (Padura, 2005, p. 206). The inhabitants of this urban area are exemplars of the cynical pragmatism opposing the utopian idealism of the first revolutionary period. Padura’s description of the slum presents a deviant heterotopia in opposition

to the revolutionary utopia and conveys a harsh critique of the failed dream of a better life for everybody. The Cubans living in this counter-site have lost every hope in the promised perfect future; unhappy and frustrated by everyday miseries, they decide to forget future expectations and utopian dreams, trying to take advantage of everything, here and now. Stuck in a never-ending present of difficulties and sacrifices, they decide to take a self-constructed shortcut to their personal utopia.

The slum in *La neblina del ayer* takes Foucault's concept to its extreme potential of subversion and destroys and undermines the revolutionary order and the effectiveness of the collective utopian project. On one hand, the social marginalization of the slum dwellers implies that the Cuban socialist and egalitarian project has failed. On the other hand, the persistence of such spaces of deviation and illegality, which the Revolution considered to have been eradicated, suggests that social ills and moral corruption still exist in contemporary Cuba. While in the 1970s and 1980s illegal activities were covered by the new clean façade created by the Revolution, in the narrative present of 2003 the revolutionary construction is falling to pieces and the social plagues re-emerge from its fissures. Functioning as places and spaces that elude the control of the hegemonic system, the heterotopic sites constitute important elements of critique and subversion embodied in the city structure. Padura's description of the Cuban urban space alternates between normative spaces and counter-spaces, and the result is a city that has the features of a palimpsest, interweaving layers of ideological conformity and cultural subversion.

### **3 The palimpsest: a model to study contemporary Cuba**

The second concept forming the theoretical framework that sustains this chapter is the metaphor of the palimpsest. The palimpsest will be used as a theoretical model and applied first to the urban geography of Havana and secondly to the representation of Cubanness and Cuban identity.

The OED defines a palimpsest as “a parchment or other writing surface on which the original text has been effaced or partially erased, and then overwritten by another; a manuscript in which later writing has been superimposed on earlier (effaced) writing”. Daniel Cooper Alarcón in his book *The Aztec Palimpsest* applies this definition to the study of the production of Mexicanness. He extends and adapts the concept of palimpsest to the Latin American context in general, saying that it is “a site where texts have been superimposed onto others in an attempt to displace earlier or competing histories. Significantly, such displacement is never total, the suppressed material often remains legible, [...] challenging the dominant text with an alternate version of the events”. (Cooper Alarcón, 1997, p. XIV) Starting from these premises, this study uses the idea of the palimpsest in a broad and metaphorical sense<sup>2</sup>, converting it into a symbolic model with which to study the representation of time, space and identity in *La neblina del ayer*. Thanks to its main characteristic: the incomplete erasure and superimposition of texts, the palimpsest metaphor proves particularly useful to understanding the construction of Cubanness as a series of erasures and superimpositions. As stated by Cooper Alarcón, the palimpsest’s structure has “the advantage of preventing a dominant voice from completely silencing other voices” (1997, p. 7), consequently, its structure and its power of resistance to a total erasure of the past, enable the representation of alternative and plural models of identity and history. I, therefore, argue that the palimpsest may represent an important conceptual tool that, applied to the study of contemporary Cuba, will allow me to describe the origins of the complicated and multilayered Cuban identity proposed by Padura. Thus, in this section I will use the concept of the palimpsest to describe the complex composition of Cuban reality in its many

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<sup>2</sup> Several theorists use the idea of the palimpsest as a useful analytical tool to study different realities. See José Quiroga, *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005); Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (1991); David Carrasco, *Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire* (1991); José Rabasa, *De la invención de América. La historiografía española y la formación del eurocentrismo* (2009).

aspects, starting from urban geography and the time-space dimension to end with the features relating to identity and culture.

The idea of the palimpsest formed by layers inscribed on the surface of the city and at the same time on the Cuban soul emerges immediately from the structure of the book, which resembles a record of bolero music<sup>3</sup>. The novel is split in half, the first part corresponding to the A-side of the bolero record, titled *Vete de mí* and the second half corresponding to the B-side, called *Me recordarás*. The structure of the novel, therefore, implies its multilayered nature: precisely like *un disco grabado*, the narrative representation of Havana and Cuba is organized on a series of surfaces inscribed and re-inscribed over time.

### 3.1 La Havana: a palimpsestic city

Starting from Huyssen's interpretation of cities and buildings as palimpsests of spaces and times, I will apply the metaphor of the palimpsest to analyse the urban structure of Havana and link it to Michel de Certeau's presentation of the city space as a stratified text. Andreas Huyssen affirms that the trope of the palimpsest is inherently literary but it has also been fruitfully applied to discussions on the configuration of urban spaces. Today, we can read buildings and cities as palimpsests of spaces which accumulate in one place traces of the past, erasures, losses, imagined spaces and heterotopias (Huyssen, 2003, p. 7). Linking this argument to Michel De Certeau's city-space image, I propose a reading of the city surface not as a juxtaposition of different spaces but rather as an accumulation of "imbricated strata" (De Certeau, 1988, p. 200). According to De Certeau, in fact, social spaces "cannot be reduced to

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<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the dual division of the narrative structure of the novel, see Domenico Antonio Cusato. 2006. "*La neblina del ayer* de Leonardo Padura Fuentes: las dos caras de un disco de bolero". *Artifara*, n. 6, Monographica. <http://www.cisi.unito.it/artifara/rivista6/testi/padura.asp>. [accessed 08/09/2011]

their unregulatable and constructable surface” (1988, p. 200): under the superficial layer there are several others. Exactly like a palimpsest, then, the appearance of the city is constantly erased, modified and re-written as a text wherein the new dominant discourse tries to impose its voice over all that preceded it. Hence, Havana can be understood as a palimpsestic city that has been constantly reshaped, destroyed and rebuilt to accommodate historical and ideological necessities. The city aspect has been strongly influenced by the dynamics of power and it preserves the traces of the political and historical changes that took place in Cuba over recent decades. As explained in chapter 2, after the success of the revolutionary movement in 1959, the new Cuban government began a complicated process of national rebuilding, carrying out a process of erasure and demystification of the historical symbols and icons associated with the Batista era and articulating a new urban model for Havana. Precisely as in a palimpsest, then, the government undertook a giant project of cultural rewriting to legitimize itself and superimpose a new façade on Havana and on Cuban society.

Many of the monuments destroyed, buildings reconverted or sites created for memorialisation have been the result of government decisions trying to foster a particular vision of the past, and to legitimize the regime’s hegemony (Quiroga, 2005, pp. 3-5). In line with its socialist and egalitarian ideology, the Revolution promoted a proletarian image of Havana as a city inhabited by revolutionary citizens and New Men (Bobes, 2011, p.18). The glamorous Havana of the 1950s with its cabarets, its theatres and its mansions, therefore, became the antithesis of the revolutionary society, a residue of the past of inequality and social injustice. During the 1960s these buildings went through a process of transformation: they were recycled and used for totally different purposes. For example, the Presidential Palace was turned into the Museum of the Revolution and the National Capitol now houses the Cuban Academy of Science. Thus, the old physical spaces of power were appropriated and re-signified by the Revolution. The watchword of the period was not construction but transformation and conversion. Furthermore, according to Bobes, the Revolution put in place a policy to promote economic growth in rural areas and

to reduce the gap between the capital and the countryside, which implicitly condemned Havana to a process of slow deterioration (2011, pp. 15-30).

In the 1970s and 1980s, a process of Sovietization of the city started: the government built Soviet neighbourhoods and restructured the city space in line with the principles of equality and uniformity. In the same period, a plan was put in place to recover and restructure the ruined buildings of the central areas of the city such as *Habana Vieja* and *el Malecón*. However, after 1989, the dramatic historical and socio-cultural changes, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union and the *Período Especial*, changed the core of the revolutionary model and the aspect of the city. In fact, as a consequence of the enduring economic crisis, the social differences and inequalities between the centre and periphery became more evident, and forms of discrimination became visible in the city structure where slums and poor districts began to proliferate (Bobes, 2011, p.15-30). Phenomena usually associated with the pre-revolutionary past, such as prostitution and drugs trafficking, reappeared, revealing the failure of the utopian project that had promised to eradicate these social ills. The Cuban system in the 1990s underwent a new restructuring, and while some elements of the utopian construction persist, some other past values grounding the revolutionary ideology have been destroyed by new historical evidence and substituted by market-oriented practices.

As a result of these different transformations and the reconfiguration of the urban space, Havana is today a palimpsestic city made of many layers and different temporal traces. In fact, in spite of the revolutionary attempt to delete and displace earlier or competing histories, such displacement is never total and previous histories and memories do not simply disappear, but remain legible and partially hidden in the spatial and social framework. These different temporal and spatial strata in the city conflict and compete with each other; each trace can be re-appropriated and transformed by another, in an endless process of reconstitution and re-signification of the urban space.

In *La neblina del ayer*, Padura depicts Havana as a stratified and imbricated city in which different spaces, histories, ideologies and cultures negotiate a plural model of Cuban society and identity. Following the footsteps of Violeta del Río, Conde roams around the old area of Havana, walking amongst the



ruins of the old cabarets and theatres of the 1950s. In his journey into the past he tries to recreate the atmospheres of the glamorous pre-revolutionary Havana to unearth the old layer of the city buried by the revolutionary façade:

[Conde] trató de encontrar los rastros todavía visibles de una ciudad rutilante y pervertida, un planeta lejano, conocido de oídas, escuchado en discos olvidados, descubierto en infinitas lecturas. (Padura, 2005, p. 203)

The Havana which Conde is trying to recuperate is a semi-mythical city, a composite picture constructed through traditional music, movies and literature. In this case, as in *Vientos de cuaresma*, Conde uses geographical sites to recover a trans-generational memory and to establish a direct connection with a pre-revolutionary past that, pre-dating his birth, goes “más allá de su memoria personal” (Padura, 2005, p. 203). During his night-time walk through the old city, Conde encounters ruined buildings, hotels and music halls which were abandoned, closed or reconverted during the process of demolition and reshaping of the pre-revolutionary city. These buildings are linked to a specific period of national history and represent *lieux de mémoire* on which a particular national memory crystallized despite attempts to obfuscate it. The Havana of the 1950s is a dead city, but its traces, its “restos físicos [...] quemados e inaccesibles” (Padura, 2005, p. 204), its “ruinas calcinadas” (Padura, 2005, p. 203) resist and emerge from the past to impose their presence on the new urban geography. In fact, beneath the new surface of the city, opaque and stubborn traces of the old layers persist, now covered but still there, with their “edificios alguna vez pretenciosos de su modernidad, ahora doblegados por una vejez prematura” (Padura, 2005, p. 205), their old and crumbling walls and their stripped façades.

Michel De Certeau explains that each of the buildings and monuments of a city refers to a different mode of territorial unit, of socioeconomic distribution and of political organization (1988, p. 201). In the case of pre-revolutionary Havana, the ideological discourse that formerly articulated the city space and justified the presence of many ruined monuments and historical sites may have disappeared but its physical traces remain on the urban surface, as a

mosaic of little pieces that have lost their unity and overall meaning, and are now spread around the city as ruins still linked to a totality which no longer exists. These fragments of pre-revolutionary history have an inner destabilizing power: they return to overshadow the present and undermine the superficial historical coherence of contemporary Cuba. The semi-destroyed old Havana is, then, a counter-city, a parallel space which constantly reminds contemporary Cubans that there was a different and more glamorous city, another possible life and another world before the Revolution and the post-Soviet reality. Precisely in the constant resistance to a total erasure of past traces and to a rigid normativization of the public space resides the subversive potential of this palimpsestic city. The geographical representation of old Havana in *La neblina del ayer* is, then, a powerful form of counter-memory which, as Foucault would say, breaks up the unity of the sovereign history and resurrects buried and hidden blocks of the past which the hegemonic discourses had overshadowed (Foucault, 2004, p. 70).

The permanence of the old strata enables a constant comparison between the past and the present, extending the comparison to the pre-revolutionary era and pointing out all the failures of the Revolution and the cracks in its superimposed ideological construction. In *La neblina del ayer*, the comparison between different times encompasses a large chronological period: the narrative present situated in 2003 clearly shows the consequences of the economic crisis of the 90s on the Cuban lifestyle; while the Havana of the 50s under the Batista regime provides the reference point for the comparison between old and new social deviations. The palimpsestic representation of Havana expresses a relation of both direct and inverted analogy between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Cuba. While the Revolution officially promoted the idea of a clear break with the pre-revolutionary past and the Batista era, in reality, many of the features characterising this period remained buried under the new Cuban text written by the Castro regime. The palimpsest metaphor then, stresses the existences of elements of both fracture and continuity affecting the social structure of Cuba in the third millennium:

The novel dissipates the alluring 'neblina' of Cuba's prerevolutionary past as it unmasks the collection's embodiment

of a deplorable history of class-based injustices, official corruption, and family conflicts. The novel also draws close parallels between the crime, racism, and human misery of the Batista era with the devastating reality of the resurgent post-Soviet Havana underworld that Conde discovers. (Unruh, 2013, p.193)

The palimpsestic urban space allows Padura to recover a plurality of Cuban memories and histories, which often have a critical function, but which also productively interact with the official memory of the Revolution to widen the horizon of the Cuban national narrative. The novel also seems to apply the palimpsestic image to the memory process, because thanks to the composite urban structure represented in this novel, the remembering process appears as “a combination of not simply two moments in time (past and present) but a number of different moments, hence producing a chain of signification which draws together disparate spaces and times” (Silverman, 2013, p. 3).

The spatialization of memory and its figurative representation is central to Max Silverman’s definition of palimpsestic memory. This concept reinterprets history in a non-linear way and memory as a vertical structure created by different layers which constantly interact with each other:

I have chosen the term ‘palimpsestic memory’ to discuss this hybrid form because, of all of the figures which connect disparate elements through a play of similarity and difference (analogy, metaphor, allegory, montage and so on), the palimpsest captures most completely the superimposition and productive interaction of different inscriptions and the spatialization of time central to the work of memory. (Silverman, 2013, p. 4)

Palimpsestic memory is also multidirectional, proposing a reading of the public space as a site for productive negotiation and interaction while reinterpreting the work of memory as summative and not privative. Memory works palimpsestically, not according to a logic of simple superimposition, but according to a principle of transversal connections across time and space (Silverman, 2013, p.5). These palimpsestic transversal interactions link together disparate spaces and times in order to produce a ‘chain of

signification'; that is why in the novel the investigation into one buried past, the one of the Ferrero-Montes de Oca family, turns out to be an investigation into another past: that of pre –revolutionary Cuba. Through the palimpsestic structure, many moments and spaces in the novel are linked to create the different spatio-temporal configurations which give Havana its heterotopic nature.

According to Silverman, the focus on the figure of the palimpsest reveals how time and space are reconfigured through a ceaseless process of the straddling and superimposition of elements. (Silverman, 2013, p.5) Through this form of palimpsestic memory, then, history is constantly recomposed, without reaching a final form, and producing instead a constant and continuous displacement of meaning. In his recent book, José Quiroga uses the metaphor of the palimpsest precisely to describe the displacement and re-articulation of new meanings typical of the last two decades of Cuban history. According to Anke Birkenmaier, the result of this palimpsestic accumulation of meanings, values and memory traces on the Havana surface is the absence of a coherent national narrative:

Para Cuba, muestra José Quiroga en su libro *Cuban Palimpsests*, la memoria cultural cubana de los últimos años tiene características de palimpsesto en la medida en que las diferentes percepciones y los diferentes recuerdos sobre todo de La Habana se han ido acumulando sin que se haya creado una narrativa coherente sobre ellos. (Birkenmaier, 2010, p. 249)

I argue that, in *La neblina del ayer*, Padura is trying to recuperate part of these different perceptions and images of Havana, putting them together to reconstruct precisely this missing coherent national narrative. Walking in the old heart of his city, Conde has the opportunity to experience Havana from another point of view, which partially challenges the superimposed order of the city. Thus, Conde intentionally looks for silenced sites of memory which he uses to reconstruct a different national narrative and to interpret Cuba's past in a different way. In fact, as affirmed by De Certeau in his essay "Walking in the City", each walker re-writes his path on the surface of the city, creating a superimposition of personal texts on the city palimpsest.

Furthermore, Conde, while walking through the old Havana, casts on the city the projection of his generational historical experience, which as De Certeau would say is “the twofold projection of an opaque past and an uncertain future” (1988, p.93). His path gives a new shape and a new generational interpretation to space and history, placing the subject in between an opaque past, which it is almost impossible to recover, and an unattainable future:

Nada más debíamos mirar hacia adelante y caminar hacia el futuro luminoso que nos esperaba al final de la historia, claro, no nos podíamos cansar en el camino. El único problema es que el futuro estaba muy lejos y el camino era en pendiente y estaba lleno de sacrificios, prohibiciones, negaciones, privaciones. Mientras más avanzábamos, más se empinaba la pendiente y más lejos se ponía el futuro luminoso, que además se fue apagando. Al muy cabrón se le acabó la gasolina. A veces creo que nos encandilaron con tanta luz y pasamos por el lado al futuro sin verlo... (Padura, 2005, p. 201)

The economic crisis of the 1990s increased the gap between the present and the revolutionary utopian future, therefore, Conde and his peers remained stuck at a middle point, trapped in an ‘expanded present’ (Quiroga, 2005, p. 4) and waiting for a promised perfect future that has not arrived. The revolutionary project thus assumed, for that particular Cuban generation, the appearance of a giant illusion. In fact, the government in the 1960s and 1970s, in the attempt to (super)impose its model of society, directed the characters’ existence and shaped their identity through the archetype of the New Man, closing them off from every alternative path:

-¿Te acuerdas, Conde, cuando cerraron los clubes y los cabarets porque eran antros de perdición y rezagos del pasado? -recordó Carlos.

-Y para compensar nos mandaron a cortar caña en la zafra del setenta. [...] -evocó Candito [...].

-[...] ¿Cuántas cosas nos quitaron, nos prohibieron, nos negaron durante años para adelantar el futuro y para que fuéramos mejores?

-Una pila -dijo Carlos.

-¿Y somos mejores? -quiso saber Candito el Rojo.

-Somos distintos [...]. Lo peor fue que nos quitaron la posibilidad de vivir al ritmo que vivía la gente en el mundo. Para protegernos.  
(Padura, 2005, p. 198)

In its attempt to realise the collective utopia, the regime transformed Cuba into a kind of dystopia: the island is a real space, connected with all the other real places, but at the same time it inverts the codes of the rest of the world. It does exist in normal chronological time but, at the same time, it lives “out of time, on a time of its own, stuck in time” (Quiroga, 2005, p. VIII), suspended in a different dimension that accumulates different geographical and temporal strata in the same site.

The association of the idea of the palimpsest and Quiroga’s definition of the Cuban extended present with the concept of heterotopia provides a conceptual model of interpretation for the categories of time and space in Cuba. Inside the Cuban urban palimpsests, heterotopias and heterochronies are subversive spaces which provide an alternative reading of both the Cuban past and present. The palimpsest suggests, in fact, an inevitability of the past, of how things remain both sited in the moment of their creation or destruction, and how the past recurs, recreates and juxtaposes itself with the present, often creating rare combinations.

*La neblina del ayer*, then, suggests that the recent decades of contemporary Cuban history have produced a complex image of Havana and of Cuban society: a delimited space which condenses traces of different times and historical experiences, shifting from the pre-revolutionary past to the revolutionary era, from the utopian future to the expanded present. By describing Havana as a multilayered metropolis and including buried spaces of subversion in his narrative representation of the urban fabric, Padura affirms

the presence of counter-histories and counter-memories that belong to the Cuban tradition and that have the power to interact with and challenge the dominant discourse.

### **3.2 Cubanness as a palimpsestic construction**

Considering what has been previously said in chapter 1 on the influence of imaginative geographies and histories on identity construction, it is easy to understand that the palimpsestic nature of time and space in Cuba affects the very construction of Cubanness, which has been shown to be multiple and multi-layered. I thus argue that the palimpsest can be used as a theoretical model to study generational evolution and to represent the psychological condition of contemporary Cuban citizens. As stated in the first chapter, this study considers identity as a continuous social construction, formed through the interplay of cultural stimuli and the aggregated experiences and memories of the individual. The main feature of the palimpsest, its mutable nature, appears, thus, particularly suited to describing the continuous process of identity formation. As a text that is never fixed, the palimpsest is always undergoing revision, and, consequently, it can always accommodate new features, adding them to the previous ones. If on the one hand its provisional character enables the reshaping and variations to which identity is often submitted, on the other hand, the permanence of old traces provides a space for the representation of different identity performances emerging from the fractures of the superimposed dominant text. Going back to Hall's definition of elusive and unfixed identities (1990, p.225), I suggest that it is possible to re-interpret his description of self-formation as a never-ending palimpsestic construction.

The interpretation of cultural and national identity formation as a palimpsestic process is particularly suited to the Cuban case. A kind of palimpsestic representation of Cubanness has been proposed by Fernando Ortiz in his essay "Los factores humanos de la cubanidad" (28/11/1939). As discussed in chapter 2, the author proposed the famous metaphor of the *ajiaco* to define

Cubanness: a typical local dish formed by multiple strata of ingredients superimposed over time thanks to Cuba's historical and cultural evolution:

Y en todo momento el pueblo nuestro ha tenido, como el ajiaco, elementos nuevos y crudos acabados de entrar en la cazuela para cocerse; un conglomerado heterogéneo de diversas razas y culturas, de muchas carnes y cultivos que se agitan, entremezclan y disgregan en un mismo bullir social; y, allá en lo hondo del puchero, una masa nueva ya posada, producida por los elementos que al desintegrarse con el hervor histórico han ido sedimentando sus más tenaces esencias en un mixtura rica y sabrosamente aderezada, que ya tiene un carácter propio de creación. Mestizaje de cocinas, mestizaje de razas, mestizaje de culturas. (Ortiz, 28/11/1939)

Ortiz's metaphor of *ajiaco* is particularly useful when explaining how historical changes provoke the disintegration of the old ingredients, and how at the same time this decomposition is not total. In fact, the most solid parts of the old agglomerate resist and create sediment at the bottom of the pot, which forms a rich stratum underlying the new one. This palimpsestic process of the addition of new ingredients, along with the decomposition and sedimentation of the old ones, continuously repeats itself every day: "Lo característico de Cuba es que, siendo ajiaco, su pueblo no es un guiso hecho, sino una constante cocedura" (Ortiz, 28/11/1939). With this metaphor, Ortiz presents cultural accumulation as the main feature of Cubanness. The metaphor of the *ajiaco* justifies the idea that the Cuban national identity can be interpreted as a palimpsest, containing many cultural layers superimposed by different hegemonic discourses over the centuries, from the colonial to the post-revolutionary period. The production of collective identities is therefore influenced by many of the cultural layers dominating society, but at the same time, as a palimpsest, identity is available for overwriting.

This possibility of overwriting the identity of the self and the nation is what the revolutionary project aimed at. It meant to scrape off the old set of values, economical models and identity performances and superimpose a 'New Man', who acts upon new principles and lives in a new Cuban era. The addition of a



new stratum to the previous one can be a smooth process but it can also result in sharp conflicts between the different layers. The two texts can amalgamate with each other on the palimpsestic surface or can conflict and fragment each other's meaning. In the Cuban case, the process of erasure of the pre-revolutionary stratum, the over-writing of the revolutionary New Man ideology and the subsequent addition of the post-Soviet elements resulted in the presence of two or more texts and identity models in competition. Consequently, the different identity layers are mutually trying to delete each other and impose their inscription on the surface of the palimpsest. The Cuban identity model resulting from this incompatible superimposition of layers is unstable and uncertain. A violent erasure and overwriting can generate an identity crisis and a feeling of inadequacy towards the external world or the superimposed values. The association between identity formation and the palimpsestic structure explains, then, the identity crisis experienced by Conde and his friends, as a consequence of a violent socio-historical shift of the 1990s. As I will show in the following section, Conde's self-identity as a badly deleted and over-written palimpsest encourages a vision of him and his generation as splintered and meaningless, ultimately unable to find a place in a rapidly changed world and struggling between two different extremes.

### **3.2.1 From the urban palimpsest to the identity crisis: displacement and disillusion in post-Soviet Havana**

Conde's inability to adapt to the new system of values and model of society is represented by the relationship between the character and the city. While in *Vientos de cuaresma* Padura stresses the symbiotic and osmotic relation between Conde and his city more than once<sup>4</sup>, in *La neblina del ayer* the

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<sup>4</sup> "De cualquier forma aquel paseo en solitario por el barrio era un placer que cada cierto tiempo el Conde se concedía: en aquella geografía precisa habían nacido sus abuelos, su padre, sus tíos y él mismo, y deambular por aquella Calzada [...] era una peregrinación hacia sí mismo hasta límites que pertenecían ya a las memorias adquiridas de sus mayores" (Padura, 2001, p. 84).

character's relation to the city is completely changed. Conde often feels disoriented and confused by a city that appears to him as labyrinthine ("avanzó por un laberinto de calles intransitables," 2005, p. 208), a city he does not recognise anymore, a different geography to which the character does not pertain:

Tengo la impresión de que esa ciudad está cambiando demasiado rápido y que yo le he perdido el pulso. En cualquier momento tengo que salir a la calle con un cabrón mapa...  
(Padura, 2005, p. 232)

As affirmed by Padura in an interview, in *La neblina del ayer* Havana has a primary importance: "la ciudad se convierte en un personaje importante y, como personaje, crea relaciones y conflictos" (Padura, 2013). Therefore the city, on the one hand, represents the imaginative and affective geography which grounds the character's identity:

Ese espacio físico en el que Conde se desarrolla es muy importante, porque no es sólo el espacio físico y material en el que se desarrollan los dramas de las historias, sino que también es el contexto general material—pero también inmaterial, porque está compuesto de tradiciones, memorias, asociaciones, imaginación—en el que Conde entra para encontrar una verdad.  
(Padura, 2013)

However, on the other hand, the Havana of the post-Soviet era appears to Conde as a foreign city, suffering from great physical neglect and deterioration. Therefore, as Padura states, the city generates conflicting feelings in Conde:

Mario Conde tiene una relación de conocimiento y extrañamiento con respecto a la ciudad, al punto que en *La neblina del ayer* hay un momento en el que Mario Conde se siente extranjero en su ciudad. Ése es un punto muy importante de esa novela. Yo siento que Conde llegó no empujado por mí, sino que Mario Conde me colocó a mí ante la evidencia de que él se estaba sintiendo extranjero en ese contexto urbano específico al cual él ha pertenecido siempre. Conde mira la ciudad y no la reconoce, se

siente extraño en la ciudad y es una sensación que yo mismo había sentido. (Padura, 2013)

Again, as a personal and generational *alter ego*, Conde reinterprets and makes clear the author's and his generation's difficult and ambivalent relation with the palimpsestic and heterotopic nature of Havana and, by extension, of the Cuban time-space dimension. The accumulation of new strata on the city surface, the creation of deviant spaces and heterotopias, provoke a feeling of displacement in him:

Miró a su alrededor y tuvo la nerviosa certeza de hallarse extraviado, sin la menor idea de qué rumbo debía tomar para salir del laberinto en que se había convertido su ciudad, y comprendió que él también era un fantasma del pasado, un ejemplar en galopante peligro de extinción, colocado aquella noche de extravíos ante la evidencia del fracaso genético que encarnaban él mismo y su brutal desubicación entre un mundo difuminado y otro en descomposición. (Padura, 2005, p. 205)

The repetition of terms relating to spatial and temporal displacement (*extraviado*, *laberinto*, *desubicación*) shows to what extent the new urban structure of 2003 puzzles Mario, who feels lost in a city he no longer recognizes. In fact, the post-Soviet text overwritten on the Cuban palimpsest completely altered the reality he knew, destroying the path he was walking along and imprisoning him in a labyrinthine limbo. Displaced in his own city, Conde understands that his urban image is linked to a stratum of the city palimpsest that has already been covered over. Consequently, he defines himself as a ghost emerged from the ruins of the past and roaming between two worlds: one 'difuminado' and lost in the mist of time and the other as much 'en descomposición' as the Socialist project that created it. As in *Pasado perfect* (2000, p. 15), in this book, Conde and his generation are also defined as being "a medio camino entre este y otro mundo" (Padura, 2005, p. 243). Confused and alienated by the surrounding reality, Conde no longer knows which is the real Havana and which is real life: "Cuál era la vida real, si la que él conoció en su juventud o la que ahora constataba, en su tiempo de madurez y de ilusiones desterradas" (Padura, 2005, p. 203). Educated in the

revolutionary ideology, proposing one unique definition of the city and one acceptable approach to life, Conde and his friends find themselves displaced by the palimpsestic superimposition of different spaces and epochs on the surface of the city.

Suddenly, while walking in an unknown city, Conde realizes that up till that moment he has lived in a parallel utopian reality, that created false expectations: “él mismo era una mentira, porque, en esencia, toda su vida no había sido más que una empeñada pero fallida manipulación de la realidad” (Padura, 2005, p. 205). The failure of the utopian construction allows Conde to understand the arbitrariness of the revolutionary societal model, bringing a deep feeling of disenchantment, disappointment and void. Quiroga describes this mood as a generally bitter atmosphere that in the 90s permeated “many segments of the dismantled and reconfigured social order” (2005, p. 22).

### **3.2.2 Cubanness: a palimpsest of generations**

The conceptual model of the palimpsest can also be applied to an analysis of Padura’s construction of Cubanness as a complex historical process of accumulation and the interaction of different collective identities and generational strata. Considering, as stated in chapter 3, that political and historical events, especially when experienced at a young age, create in the affected group a strong sense of generational belonging, recent Cuban history appears to be marked by several events that, thanks in part to the official periodization proposed by the government, work as a watershed between one generation and the other. In the time-frame covered by the novel, for instance, the representatives of four generations appear and interact with each other. The first generation is that of pre-revolutionary Cuba and it encompasses the characters of Alcides Montes de Oca and Nemesia, who lived the majority of their lives under the Batista regime. The second generation is that which lived and took part directly in the Revolution, its main representatives are the Ferrero siblings: Amalia and Dioniso, who were young in 1959, believed in the revolutionary dream and whose life and generational belonging has been marked by the winning of the Revolution. The revolutionary victory then

represents a watershed between these two generations, marking the end of the happy epoch for Alcides and Nemesia and the beginning of a new and better world for Amalia and Dioniso. The following two generations are the 'disenchanted one' and the generation of the *Período Especial*. The disenchanted generation is represented by Conde and his group of friends, and is the generation that grew up in the early decades of the Revolution and were rigidly educated in the utopian ideology. Finally, the last generation is that represented by Yoyi, Conde's new partner at work. This is the generation of the young Cubans born in the 70s who lived through the harsh crisis during their adolescence and which consequently believe that life is a fierce struggle in which the most important thing is to survive at any cost, taking advantage of everything. The watershed between these last two generations is clearly represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the crisis of the Soviet bloc. I argue that *La neblina del ayer*, focusing on the multilayered composition of the contemporary Cuban collective identity, represents Cubanness as a superimposition of different generational strata, each of them marked by a formative social event that marks the difference with the other generations. In an interview conducted with Padura in Cuba, commenting on the generational difference in contemporary Cuba, the writer added the presence of a new fifth generation, that of Cubans born in 1990, which is not represented in *La neblina del ayer* but which nevertheless exists in contemporary Cuban society:

Incluso hay ya otra generación que nació en el año 1990 y que tiene ahora 20 años. Mi generación nació en los cincuenta, después hay una generación que lo hizo en los setenta y que llegó a los noventa con 20 años y, por último, hay otra generación que nació en los noventa y tiene ya en este momento 22 o 23 años. Es decir, que hay dos generaciones después de la mía. (Padura, 2013)

According to Padura, then, in a relatively short historical period, five different generations have been produced in Cuba, each one marked by different important historical experiences and characterised by its own generational memory. As I explained in the previous chapter, each generation tries to impose its legacy on the next, passing on its memory and identity

consciousness. The generation who experienced and took part in the Revolution successfully established an historical and ideological continuity with the following generation, which is that of Conde. They passed on to the generation born in the 1950s and 1960s the revolutionary legacy and the institutionalised memories of the revolutionary struggle. However, the transmission of the generational and revolutionary legacy seems to have failed with respect to the following generations:

La transmisión de conocimiento y de memoria de una generación a otra en esta novela es mucho menos cierta. Falta una generación sucesora a la de Conde, ya que los jóvenes o se han ido del país, o tienen una mentalidad ya muy 'mercantil'. (Birkenmaier, 2010, p. 256).

Thus, Conde's generation and the following one, which is represented in the novel by Yoyi, do not share the same memory and revolutionary ethos and, consequently, as argued by Dettman, there is a sharp contrast between the two generations:

Hay una ruptura entre generaciones. El Conde y sus compinches pertenecen a la llamada 'generación perdida'. Éstos fueron educados en el sistema revolucionario y creyeron -aunque hayan dejado de creer-las promesas de un futuro mejor. Yoyi, por otro lado, se desentiende por completo de la ética revolucionaria. (Dettman, 2008, p. 91)

According to Padura, the same can be said for the generation following Yoyi's. These last two Cuban generations are different from Padura's peers; they have a different system of values and different priorities in life.

As usually happens in Padura's production, Mario Conde serves as the touchstone and the privileged point of view for the analysis of the generational weave. As explained in chapter 3 in relation to the tetralogy, the character represents Padura's voice in the novels and works as both a personal and generational *alter ego* of the author. As mentioned above, the geographical displacement of Conde in the palimpsestic metropolis and his affinity with the old substrata of the city represent the social and ideological alienation of Mario

and his friends in what they perceive as an inverted world. Suddenly removed from their embellished past and thrown into a confused present, Conde and his group are no longer able to understand the new social codes and behaviours:

Cada vez entendía menos, pues los códigos y lenguajes en uso le resultaban desconocidos. [...] parecía un cabrón marciano sacado de una probeta. (Padura, 2005, p. 145)

Conde is unable to familiarise himself with the Cuban social environment of 2003, on the contrary, the more he knows about the new social code the more he starts to think of himself as an alien, coming from another universe: a Martian, feeling closer to a ghost emerging from the past than to his contemporaries.

The first character who applies the definition of alien to Conde and his friends, marking the ideological distance between the two approaches to life, is the young Yoyi:

Oye, men, tú y tus amigos son increíbles [...] Parecen marcianos, coño, te lo juro. Yo los veo y me pregunto qué carajo les metieron en la cabeza para ponerlos así... (Padura, 2005, p.44-45)

Yoyi is 28 years old in 2003, and 20 years younger than Conde, he was born in 1975 during the *Quinquenio gris*<sup>5</sup>, under harsh state control. He is the main example of the cynical and pragmatic generation that Padura introduced in *Vientos de cuaresma*.

In *Vientos de cuaresma*, Conde's investigations bring him to his former school: *el Pre de La Víbora*, where he meets and interrogates some of the young Cuban students who are teenagers in the narrative present of 1989 and,

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<sup>5</sup> The expression *Quinquenio gris* was coined in 1987 by Ambrosio Fornet to indicate the period of time spanning from 1971 to 1976. It was characterised by an increasing Stalinisation of culture and society, justly condemned by today's Cuban government.

consequently, were born in the early 1970s. These students are the next generation after Conde's and they appear to the eyes of the protagonist as less idealistic and much more cynical than his own: "Creo que nosotros éramos más inocentes y estos de ahora son más bichos, más cínicos" (Padura, 2001, p. 67). When interrogated by Conde about their future expectations the students significantly and ironically ask "¿Hay que esperar algo de la vida?" (Padura, 2001, p. 119). The two successive generations thus show a totally opposed social behaviour. As Conde states, his generation was told to take on an historical responsibility, a duty to perform and at the last analysis they believed in the importance of performing the role society was expecting from them correctly: "nos dijeron tantas veces que teníamos una responsabilidad histórica que llegamos a asumirla y todo el mundo sabía que debía cumplirla, ¿no?" (Padura, 2001, p. 67). The new generation instead, influenced by the economic and ideological crisis, seems to mark the distance from the revolutionary ethos: "Nosotros no esperamos nada de la vida [...] Vivirla y ya" (Padura, 2001, p. 68) showing a total lack of commitment to any ideology and a much less idealistic approach to life. The young Cubans do not feel the same commitment to the community, they appear to be more selfish and concentrated on their own lives, trying to live quietly, without engaging in any type of social or political activism:

No nos metemos con nadie y nos gusta que nadie se meta con nosotros. No le pedimos nada a nadie, no le quitamos nada a nadie y nos gusta que nadie nos exija nada. ¿Eso es democrático, no le parece? (Padura, 2001, p. 119)

During our interview Padura, commenting on the ideological features of the generational shift in Cuba, said:

Si para mi generación hay un sentimiento de frustración, para la generación de Yoyi hay un sentimiento de inexistencia y para los más jóvenes hay un sentimiento de vacío. No hay en el contexto del discurso oficial, de la retórica oficial, ningún elemento que los movilice. Hay gente que sigue creyendo y participando, pero un porcentaje muy elevado de estas personas ni creen, ni quieren participar, ni entienden absolutamente nada y cuando les hablan



de sacrificio no saben de qué les están hablando. [...] Por lo tanto, no creen en nada, son mucho más herejes en ese sentido del descreimiento, de la negación de una filosofía. (Padura, 2013)

The portrayal Padura offers of the younger Cuban generations fits perfectly the definition of the weightless Cuban subject floating in the post-Soviet ethical void proposed by Odette Casamayor-Cisneros<sup>6</sup>, which I discuss in chapter 2. According to Casamayor-Cisneros, while the older generations were educated within the ‘cosmology’ of the Cuban Revolution, “based on an epic conception of existence, moulded by the ideals of heroic sacrifice, resistance and permanent confrontation with external and internal enemies”, for the young Cubans there is no cosmology at all and little prospect of a better world to aspire to (2012, p. 38). The new generation born in the 1970s did not live through the heroic enthusiasm of the decade of the 1960s, marked by historical events such as the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 or the Missile Crisis one year later, therefore, these moments are not lived experiences or affective memories for them; they are nothing more than distant historical events, described in textbooks and commemorated in political ceremonies:

Confrontation and the need to defend the Revolution have, for these young Cubans, become abstract situations, repeated in school projects and speeches, and simulated in absurd military exercises. (Casamayor-Cisneros, 2012, p. 50)

As a result, these young Cubans have been unable to attribute an epic meaning to their existence, they are not anchored to the revolutionary ideology (or to any other ideology) and, therefore, they float in a weightless ideological void.

Yoyi shares this ideological weightlessness. The main features of this character are, in fact, strong egocentrism, pragmatism and cynicism (Padura,

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<sup>6</sup> “In the void created by an absence of scatological models and identity models that, from the 1990s, has dominated the island’s existence, there floats the weightless subject” (Casamayor-Cisneros, 2012, p. 41).

2005, p.40). Marking the distance from the set of values proposed by the Revolution, Yoyi *el Palomo* describes Cuba in 2003 as a *selva de cinismo*: “Desde que sales del cascarón estás rodeado de buitres, gente empeñada en joderte [...], en denunciarte y verte escachao para ellos ganar puntos y subir un poco” (Padura, 2005, p. 86). The consequence of this cruel and cynical view of Cuban society and the loss of any hope in a better future leads to a common desire in the new generation: to leave the island:

Hay una pila de gente que está por escapar, por no complicarse la existencia, y la mayoría lo que quiere es ir echando, poner agua por medio, aunque sea pa' Madagascar. Y al carajo los demás... Sin esperar mucho de la vida. (Padura, 2005, p.86)

This lack of expectations and the desire to escape sharply contrast with Conde's feelings towards the island and with his “obstinación de permanecer, a pesar de todos los pesares” (Padura, 2005, p.343). As affirmed in different interviews by Padura<sup>7</sup>, then, the narrative function of Yoyi is clearly to act as a counterpart to Conde's morality, presenting a different and more unscrupulous view of the Cuban present. The distance in the ideological approach to life of the two generations is clearly expressed in this bitter dialogue between Conde and Yoyi:

[C.] -Nos hicieron creer que todos éramos iguales y que el mundo iba a ser mejor. Que ya era mejor...

[Y.] -Pues los estafaron, te lo juro. En todas partes hay unos que son menos iguales que los otros y el mundo va de mal en peor. Aquí mismo, el que no tiene billetes verdes está fuera de juego [...].

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<sup>7</sup> “Cuando iba a escribir *La neblina del ayer*, le dije a Lucía: tengo un problema grave y es que Conde está poniéndose viejo, estamos en el año 2003 y no entiendo determinados códigos de la realidad. Y Lucía me dijo: tienes que poner un personaje más joven. Y me dio la clave. Por eso fue que creé a Yoyi *el Palomo*” (Padura, 2013).

Conde asintió con la vista perdida entre los árboles del patio.

[C.] -Fue bonito mientras duró.

[Y.] -Por eso ahora ustedes están tan jodidos: demasiado tiempo soñando. Total, ¿para qué? [...] Perdieron el tiempo y media vida. (Padura, 2005, pp. 45-46)

Yoyi does not believe in the utopian dream of social justice and egalitarianism promoted by the Revolution, and, consequently, he does not understand Conde's nostalgic feelings and his melancholy for the social illusion which has now disappeared. Furthermore, Yoyi also lacks Conde's 'trans-generational nostalgia' for the magnificence of pre-Castro Cuba. This young character, on the one hand, finds it difficult to understand those generations who devoted themselves to pursuing a socialist ideology, while on the other hand, he substitutes political commitment with irony and acidic sarcasm. Therefore, Yoyi's take on Cuban society is merciless. He ironically denies the basis of the revolutionary identity model, applying a capitalistic logic to the New Man:

[C.] -Alguna vez oíste hablar del hombre nuevo?

[Y.] -¿Qué cosa es eso? ¿Dónde lo venden? (Padura, 2005, p. 86)

According to the rules of the heterotopia, then, Yoyi, with his behaviour and his words is ironically inverting the stereotypical model of revolutionary identity, negating its value and scraping off its conceptual framework, to superimpose a new set of capitalist and pragmatic values on the palimpsest of Cuban identity. Padura, commenting on the validity and power of attraction that the New Man philosophy has in contemporary Cuba for the most recent generations said:

Si para nosotros lo del Hombre Nuevo era algo que nos sonaba a veces un poco opresivo, con el paso del tiempo esa creación del Hombre Nuevo perdió totalmente el sentido y en la sociedad cubana actual no tiene ninguno. En una sociedad donde las personas que más se esfuerzan y más trabajan no tienen los

beneficios que deberían tener con su trabajo [...] cualquier pensamiento utópico ha dejado de tener posibilidad de funcionar y de tener un espacio en el imaginario colectivo y en el contexto ideológico en el que se desarrollan estas personas. (Padura, 2013)

The impossible conciliation of the New Man ideology with that of capitalism is repeatedly expressed by Yoyi, who often criticises not just Conde's personal behaviour but the approach to life of all his friends and his entire generation:

[Y.] Me parece lo mismo de siempre, men: tú y tus amigos son marcianos. A ustedes los metieron de cabeza en una probeta... ¿Y qué salió? ¿El hombre nuevo que me dijiste el otro día? Lo que pasa es que en la probeta les pusieron alcohol y ustedes se lo chuparon enseguida... (Padura, 2005, p. 139)

Yoyi strongly believes that his understanding of the social codes, his ability to survive and get what he wants prove that his cynical view of the Cuban world is the right one. The character, in fact, succeeds better than Conde in adapting himself to every situation, he is used to living at the borders of legality and can move quite confidently between the many heterotopic spaces of the city. Despite the respect he shows to Conde, Yoyi thinks that his older colleague does not have a clear understanding of the world, he appears to him as a product of some kind of strange and unfruitful experiment. If Conde and his generation are the bad results of a scientific experiment, the logical implication, for Yoyi, is that the theories and hypotheses grounding the experiment: the revolutionary ideology with its utopian models, are weak and inconsistent. The socialist project is, then, reinterpreted by Yoyi as a *borrachera general* and Conde and his friends, so used to alcoholic excess, are the protagonists of this collective alcoholic intoxication. Their legacy of frustrated dreams and old ideological values is compared to a terrible hangover that makes it impossible to feel comfortable in the Cuban present.

The differences between the two main characters of *La neblina del ayer*, then, describe the dynamics of evolution of the Cuban identity. In recent years a superimposition of conflicting sets of values have changed the appearance of

the identity palimpsest in Cuba: the idealism of the first years of the Revolution has been over-written by a fierce pragmatism. Yoyi and Conde are, then, the archetypical testimonies of the disconnection and fragmentation created in the Cuban identity model by the rapid and incomplete erasure and superimposition of several strata (the pre-revolutionary layer, the idealistic and revolutionary one, the Soviet, and the post-Soviet, model). These strata are over-written, one after the other, in a short space of time, and create a disintegration of the collective unity and the coexistence of several different identity performances.

As mentioned above, in the construction of a palimpsestic identity the process of addition of a new stratum to the previous ones can result in sharp conflicts and the fragmentation of the self. Nevertheless, at the same time, the two texts can interact with each other and the traces of the buried strata can influence the appearance of the palimpsestic surface in a conscious or unconscious way. As symbolically represented by the metaphor of the *ajjaco*, the oldest fragmented strata, settled at the bottom of the pot, still take part in the cooking mix and collaborate in the creation of the Cuban national dish. The strong influence of the buried substrata on contemporary Cuban identity is clear in the attraction and fascination that the music and culture of pre-revolutionary Cuba have on Conde and his generation. As a vivid example of identity superimposition and amalgamation, Conde's body is transformed at a certain point into a palimpsest: while listening to Violeta's voice, inscribed on an old disk, Conde perceives how the singer's voice is entering in his veins, mixing with his blood and superimposing itself on his soul:

Conde comprendió que el espíritu latente de una mujer reducida a su voz, solo a una voz, estaba haciéndose sangre de su sangre, carne de su carne, convirtiéndolo, sin que él pudiera evitarlo, en una prolongación viviente de la difunta. (Padura, 2005, p. 224)

Finally, as Dettman suggests (2008, p. 89), it is possible to establish a parallelism between Conde's and Nemesia's (Nena's) generation. From the letters written by the woman and inserted between the pages of the book - as in a multilayered palimpsest - it is possible to understand how the

fragmentation of the pre-revolutionary world caused in Nemesia the same displacement experienced by Conde decades later. In fact, Conde shows the same alienation and critical perspective towards the newly corrupted Cuban reality that Nemesia expresses towards the recently established revolutionary reality. In common with Conde's generation, Nemesia had to renounce her individual dream ("cancelé mi futuro individual" (Padura, 2005, p. 154)) to gain a promised better future for her family, but she received in return only "olvido, silencio, distancia" (Padura, 2005, p. 155). These parallels between different characters, who experienced the same feelings toward Cuban reality at different historical moments, convey a sense of eternal repetition, of a constant re-appearance of old strata and circular phenomena, causing the same kind of identity fragmentation and deconstruction. The palimpsest metaphor, then, also offers a way of looking behind dominant narratives of identity, to revisit them and recover occluded voices outside the hegemonic discourses superimposed in different eras.

The introduction of new characters, the wider time perspective and the parallelism between different generations allow the author, then, to trace a full parabola of the evolution of Cuban identity, from the passionate life of the characters addicted to bolero in the 1950s to the cynical and pragmatic attitude of the young Cubans in 2003. I argue that the reason for this study of different examples of Cuban identities is not that the author is attempting to impose his view or provide a moralistic judgement on the Cuban population. Padura is neither trying to depict a manicheistic representation of Cuban identities and generations nor to impose one set of values over others. On the contrary, his representation of different Cuban identities gives space to a multiple and varied interpretation of present and past Cubanness:

Conde estrajo una mirada compleja de su pasado, del pasado de todos los habitantes de la isla, y tuvo una intuición de que el mundo podía ser de muy distintos colores, y las verdades, más complejas de lo que oficialmente parecía. (Padura, 2005, p. 165)

The varied universe of the characters in *La neblina del ayer* proves that contrasting identities can coexist under the same label of Cubanness and, as in the different parts of a palimpsest, they can all collaborate in its definition.

#### 4 Conclusion

This novel expresses a critique of any homogenising interpretation of Cuban society, challenging it through a palimpsestic representation of space, time and identity in contemporary Cuba. Conceptual tools such as the heterotopia and the palimpsest have been applied to describe the complex composition of Cuban reality in its many aspects, from the material geography and chronological time to the social and cultural identity features. The importance of heterotopias and palimpsests has been encountered in their ability to invert and subvert the normal order, and create spaces for the representation of alternative voices. As has been pointed out, the palimpsest's structure has "the advantage of preventing a dominant voice from completely silencing other voices" (Cooper Alarcón, 1997, p. 7). At the same time, heterotopias and palimpsests are strongly related to the concept of heterogeneity, difference, otherness and alterity: being "an exception to uniformity and homogeneity, heterotopia opens up a pathway for the deconstruction of sameness and its subversion" (Sohm, 2008, p. 47). Containing in addition deviance from the norm and subversion, or, at least, inversion, heterotopias become the perfect antidote to the erasure of differences implicit in the revolutionary model of Cuban identity. The representation of areas of discontinuities and deviation inside the revolutionary text challenges any binarism, promoting instead the idea that duality does not necessary imply opposition. Two different aspects, strata or identity performances can coexist in the same place, at the same time, like the two sides of the same record, which together create a unified whole.

In *La neblina del ayer* the city of Havana, with its multilayered nature, becomes an archetype of the Cuban system. Hidden at its heart and interwoven in its inner structure, many different counter-histories coexist with the official one,

as well as alternative identity performances which complement the official paradigm of Cubanness. The narrative represents, then, a tribute to the cultural plurality and richness of Havana and Cuba. Conde, after his cathartic journey into the different strata and subversive areas of the city, finally realizes that “la naturaleza no puede ser entendida por ningún sistema de definición único o invariable” (Padura, 2005, p. 242) and that historical truths can be infinitely more complex than they officially appear.



## Chapter 5

# Gender Identity, Inner Exile, and Social Masquerade in *Máscaras*

### 1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the representation of Cuban identity proposed by Leonardo Padura Fuentes, focusing on issues of gender, sexuality and identity performance. In Cuba, the conceptions of gender and sex are strictly related, and the binary model of identity construction had often been translated into the easy distinction and direct correspondence between sex and gender: female biological attributes were linked to femininity and male attributes to masculinity. As I state in chapter 2, gender role definitions are clear in Cuba and each of the two sexes was assigned specific features and behaviours in society, which construct specific and discrete gender roles. This chapter follows on from what I said in chapter 2 and shows how, in Cuba, gender organization has often been based on what Judith Butler would call ‘compulsory heterosexuality’. As Butler explains, heterosexuality is considered as natural, for the sake of reproduction, therefore, according to a binary logic of sexual relations, homosexuality is considered unnatural. Homosexuality represents, thus, the ‘Other’ of heterosexuality, its constitutive outside. According to Butler, compulsory heterosexuality and binary gender organization are mutually constitutive: it is institutionalised heterosexuality which gives meanings to genders and, more specifically, which constructs two distinct genders that are kept apart conceptually and defined against each other, excluding any other possible option or non-biologically deterministic combination:

One way in which this system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the cultivation of bodies into

discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions (Butler, 1988, p. 524).

Therefore, Butler considers the association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural attraction to the opposing sex/gender as unnatural, as cultural constructs in the service of reproductive interests (1988, p. 524).

Starting from these premises, for the purpose of this study, I will consider gender, in Judith Butler's terms, as performative and I will first apply this concept to the analysis of gender perception in Cuba. As the relation between sex and gender has been traditionally conceived as a straightforward one in Cuba, in the aftermath of the Revolution, both sexual preferences and gender performances were expected to conform to compulsory heterosexuality. Hence, homosexuality was excluded from the institutionalised model of sexual relations. However, using the performative model to analyse the conception of gender and sexuality in Cuba, I will argue that homosexuality has primarily been considered a problem of public visibility, prescriptive social performance and ideological conformity. The Revolution adopted as one of its symbols the image of the *guerrillero*: the virile man who fought in the *sierra* suffering cold, illness and starvation for the sake of the revolutionary struggle. Ostentatious homosexuality, and especially male homosexuality, challenges this image of the *guerrillero*, performing in the public sphere a gender role which was not that which was expected or prescribed. Therefore, for a man to show 'effeminate' behaviours and 'feminine' tastes was seen as a symptom of ideological weakness and lack of commitment to the revolutionary project. This explains why the treatment of homosexuality in post-1959 Cuba often became a struggle over appearance and appropriate social performances.

Starting, then, from the idea of gender performativity, in the second part of this chapter I will broaden the scope of my analysis and apply the performative model to the description of Cuban identity in general. I will analyse the wider notion of identity as the product of a social performance, linking Butler's ideas to Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model of social interaction. In fact, despite their differences, both of these theorists propose a reinterpretation of identity

construction according to performative and dramaturgical models. Both argue that there is no identity that precedes the social and that all identities are always constructed through the repetition of acts. Furthermore, for both, identity is not constructed in isolation, it is a social and collective project and it is always influenced by the context which both directs and contains identity possibilities.

Thus, I will argue that in *Máscaras* Padura uses the idea of a performative gender identity as a synecdoche for a wider phenomenon: the construction of a social masquerade to cover inadequate identity manifestations and substitute them with officially prescribed social performances. The social mask will be read, through a spatial and theatrical metaphor, as a superficially coherent identity performed on stage that hides a plurality of different, multiform identities performed behind the scenes. As stated earlier, I argue that Padura's representation of narrative time and space serves the purpose of challenging the duality of revolutionary identity, providing instead a different representation of Cubanness. This chapter thus contributes to my hypothesis by showing how Padura, in *Máscaras*, uses specific spatial images to illustrate the opposition between acceptable and unacceptable identities; to describe the marginal space assigned to non-conforming identities and to criticize the difference between identity performances in public and in private. The central questions of the chapter are therefore: a) how does Padura create a spatial opposition between included and excluded identities in order to describe the physical and emotional marginalization of non-conforming identities as an internal exile? b) How does the narrative representation of 'other' sexualities reveal the existence of a significant number of identity performances that escape the revolutionary gender and ideological canon? c) How do excluded identities react to marginalization and what are, according to Padura, the consequences of this policy of exclusion for Cuban society? d) How is the reflection on gender identity used by Padura as a starting point to represent the wider construction of a social masquerade in Cuba and to examine the mutability and plurality of identity performances?

To answer these questions, the chapter first briefly illustrates the relationship between the revolutionary government and non-conforming sexualities and

gender identities in the 1960s and 1970s. The marginalization of subversive sexualities will be represented through a spatial image, interpreting the physical and emotional displacement of dissidents as a form of 'inner exile'. The question of the marginalization of homosexuals will be analysed in conjunction with the censorship of cultural production, to stress how forms of cultural and sexual dissidence, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were perceived as being strongly connected in Cuba. Secondly, I will extend the idea of performativity from gender to a wider notion of identity and, combining it with Goffman's dramaturgical model of social interaction; I will use it to read Cuban society as a theatrical performance. My aim will first be to show how, describing the marginalization of homosexuals as well as the resultant creation of a social masquerade, Padura criticises the hegemonic acceptable/unacceptable gender performance dichotomy and substitutes it with his narrative representation of multiple and complex sexualities. Secondly, starting from the multiplicity of sexual performances and tastes, I will show how Padura represents the de-centring of identities and the social fragmentation taking place in contemporary Cuba. Hence, following Persephone Braham, I believe that: "Padura chose to use the discourse of homosexuality and transvestitism as a political metaphor" (Braham, 2004, p. 57). I argue that the existence of a significant number of identity performances that escape classification implies the possibility of subverting the identity canon not only in relation to gender patterns but also on a wider cultural level.

The chapter is focused on the analysis of *Máscaras*, the third book of the tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones*. The story is set in Havana, in the summer of 1989. The plot narrates Conde's investigation into the murder of Alexis Arayán, a young transvestite, who was found dead in the forest of Havana. The investigation brings Conde into contact with one of Alexis's friends, Alberto Marqués, a homosexual, aging and once famous theatre director who was *parametrado* and who spent ten years in isolation without being published. The investigation leads finally to the realisation that Faustino, Alexis's father, killed his own son, not only because he was homophobic and ashamed of his son's sexuality, but also because Alexis was threatening to expose him as a fraud. Before the Revolution, Faustino had been a diplomat but he had been able to

keep his job after 1959 because he had been able to present documentation to prove that he had secretly supported the anti-*Batistiano* struggle. Alexis discovers that his father had falsified these documents and that he had in fact supported the dictator Batista. Finally, at the end of the investigation, Marqués reveals to Conde that Faustino had also denounced him to the authorities as a homosexual in the 1960s and consequently caused his social persecution.

An important innovation distinguishes this novel from the others of the Conde series. The protagonist is here accompanied by a second character who occupies a privileged position in the narrative structure. Alberto Marqués can be considered, in fact, a kind of co-protagonist. A large part of the novel is formed by Marqués's personal memories, which the character recalls in order to provide Conde with his own version of the history of the persecution of homosexuals during the 1960s and 1970s. At the same time, Marqués initiates Conde into Havana's gay underworld. In fact, Conde's journey into the Havana gay nightlife can be compared to a mythological *Katabasis*<sup>1</sup>; Marqués is the wise, expert guide who leads the hero through his redemptive path into the underworld. Through his contact with Marqués, Conde discovers a new world, confronts his own sexual identity and loses most of his homophobic prejudices. As a result of his *Katabasis*, Conde reinterprets the marginalization of homosexuals from a new perspective and begins to doubt the official version of history and society.

## 2 The theoretical framework

This chapter moves Padura's contestation of the homogeneous Cuban identity onto the level of gender, criticising the main characteristics of the stereotyped gender models symbolized by the New Man and the New Woman. Thus, this chapter will read Padura's description of alternative forms of sexual and

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<sup>1</sup> In Greek mythology *Katabasis* is a brief journey of the hero into the underworld. The aim of this journey is usually the purification or redemption of the hero. Most *Katabases* take place in a supernatural underworld; however, the term can also refer to a journey through other parallel spaces.

gender expression in Cuba as an open challenge to the homogenising logic of hegemonic discourses put in place after the Revolution. As explained, this chapter firstly defines gender identity as a performative social construction and then characterizes the traditional image of discrete genders in Cuba as a performative process, examining the consequences this had on the perception of homosexuality. Secondly, the chapter will study Padura's spatial representation of the physical and emotional displacement of non-conforming sexualities as a particular form of 'internal exile'. Finally, the complexity and multiplicity of contemporary Cuban identity will be read through a theatrical metaphor, associating the idea of identity performativity with the dramaturgical model of social interaction. Thus, the theoretical framework of this chapter deals with these three basic concepts: Butler's definition of gender as performative; the interpretation of inner exile as a spatial and sentimental separation from the public sphere; and Goffman's dramaturgical model of social interaction. The thread unifying these three concepts is the representation of identity as a performance constantly taking place in a specific temporal, spatial, and cultural context that determines the performance itself.

## **2.1 Gender performativity**

In *Máscaras*, Padura deals with the complex representation of sexual and gender identities, examining the cultural basis of Cuban *machismo* and homophobia and consequently criticizing any policy of persecution and exclusion of different sexual performances. To set the framework of my analysis I will start by linking the concepts of gender roles and sexual performances to a wider definition of identity as a social construction. As in chapter 1 in relation to cultural identity, in this chapter I consider gender identity as a social construction and an ongoing process that takes place in a specific cultural context. Feminist criticism has traditionally tended to mark a strong difference between the concepts of sex and gender, identifying sex as biological facticity and gender as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity. This supports the idea that gender is dislodged from sex and that the cultural interpretation of sexual attributes is distinguished from the facticity or simple existence of these attributes. Important scholars, such as Simone de

Beauvoir and Monique Wittig<sup>2</sup>, consider gender to be a continuous activity of construction occurring in a cultural context. De Beauvoir claims, for instance, that the body is a historical situation, to indicate that the socio-historical context influences and limits the possibilities of gender expression. According to these theorists, gender identity, as with every other aspect of identity, is not a static or fixed entity occurring outside society; it is, instead, something lived and experienced in a specific social context. Gender is then an imaginary formation based not on physical attributes but on a set of repeated behaviours and acts aiming at reinforcing this imaginary social construction. The idea of an inner truth of gender is a fantasy produced as the effect of a discourse promoting the existence of a primary and stable identity.

However, the sex–gender distinction has also become the subject of criticism. There is a strand of cultural theory identified with the work of Judith Butler that holds that the distinction between biological sex and cultural gender is untenable. Here the differentiation between sex as biology and gender as a cultural construction is broken down on the grounds that there is in principle no access to biological ‘truths’ that lie outside of cultural discourses and, therefore, no sex which is not already cultural and therefore not already gender (Butler, 1988, p. 524). As Butler puts it, we only know sex through gender, and although we ‘become’ our gender, there is no place outside gender that precedes this becoming. Sex does not antedate or cause gender. Thus, Butler argues that sexed bodies are always already represented as the production of regulatory discourses on sex, which, through constant repetitions, bring sex into view as a necessary norm. This does not mean that everything is discourse, but rather, as Butler argues, discourse and the materiality of bodies are indissoluble. Butler’s work is emblematic of a wider body of thought produced by feminist scholars who have argued that not only are sex and gender social and cultural constructions, but also that there are multiple modes of femininity (and masculinity). Here, rather than a conflict between two

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<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir: “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (*The Second Sex*, 1973, p.301); Monique Wittig: “what we believe to be a physical and direct perception is only a sophisticated and mythic construction”, an “imaginary formation” (*One Is Not Born a Woman*, 1981, p. 48).

opposing male–female groups, sexual identity concerns the balance of masculinity and femininity within specific men and women. This argument stresses the presence of multiple gender aspects in each person as well as the relativity of symbolic and biological existence.

On these bases, Judith Butler considers sex and gender as performative. According to Butler, there is no sexual or gender identity that precedes the social aspect: identities are not expressions of some inner nature or biological essence; rather they are performed, constantly and repeatedly, in society. Thus, gender is refigured by Butler as a cultural fiction, a performative effect of reiterative acts: “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990, p. 33). Such acts are defined as “shared experience and collective action” (Butler, 1988, p. 525) which constantly re-enact a “set of meaning already socially established” (Butler, 1988, p. 526) and they are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they claim to express are fabrications sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. This performative identity representation is perceived as natural by the actors who are performing it and by the audience that views the performance. However, there is nothing natural about sex-gender identity. Even though the acts, gestures, and desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, this effect is produced only on the surface of the body. Therefore, the idea of a compulsory uniform sexuality and a duality of gender roles has been reinterpreted by Butler as “an illusion created and maintained, through repeated acts and gestures, for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (1990, p. 31). As I mention above, Butler frames binary gender organization according to a logic of compulsory heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is compulsory in the sense that it is institutionalised and sanctioned by a social system, and naturalized by the constant repetition of performative acts. According to Butler, there is no causal relation between sexual identity, gender and sexual desire. She states that, although these concepts are normally linked together, what establishes this connection is just a matter of social regulation:



There are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality. None of these terms captures or determines the rest. (Butler, 1992, p. 309)

However, social rules link gender with sexuality in such a way that they mutually define and reinforce each other. Therefore, if heterosexuality is compulsory and perceived as natural, binary gender organization also becomes compulsory and natural. When stressing the performative character of gender construction, Butler at the same time undermines the classical dual conception of gender and the binary opposition between heterosexuality as natural and homosexuality as a deviation. Butler, with her description of both sex and gender as cultural artefacts, intends to demonstrate that there is no uniform compulsory sexuality nor two discrete compulsory genders, but an infinite series of possibilities of sexual performances and gender constructions.

If at the basis of compulsory heterosexuality and discrete gender organization is the repetition of performative acts over time, then the alteration or the breaking of this repetition could produce alternative sexual performances and different gender identities (Butler, 1988, p. 520). Judith Butler, in accordance with previous feminist criticism, affirms that gender identity is: “an on-going discursive practice” (1990, p. 33), but she goes further and adds that this practice is “open to intervention and re-signification” (1990, p. 33). Hence, considering gender as culturally constituted implies, for Butler, the possibility of it being constituted in a different way (1988, p. 520).

Through her idea of performativity, Butler makes a parallelism between the acts constituting gender and those of a theatrical performance, in order to examine how gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts and, more importantly, what possibilities exist for the cultural transformation of gender through such acts (Butler, 1988, p. 521). In her view, just as the different acts of a theatre play create the performance, in the same way, the various acts of gender create the performance of gender; without those acts there would be no performance and no gender: “Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (1988, p. 527). If there is no gender outside performance, and if gender is constituted by the

performative acts themselves, it can be deduced that there is no pre-existing or essential gender identity and consequently: “there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction” (1988, p. 527). The fact that gender reality is created through social performances, which aim at maintaining the binary gender frame, means that the very notion of an essential sex or a true gender identity does not exist outside the performance and that, by modifying the codes that regulate the performance, it would be possible to modify the organization of gender.

Furthermore, extending this concept to other aspects of identity, it is possible to say that Butler suggests the non-existence of an essential true self (1988, p. 527). According to Butler, then, just as for gender identity, the creation of the idea of a true identity core serves a policy of regulation and control. As I have already explained in chapter 1 when referring to ‘inverted identities’, the logic of binary opposition serves to establish order in an otherwise chaotic world. With the polar gender model, the world is divided along gender lines and people are assigned to one of the two genders. Failing to perform the assigned gender correctly is associated with disturbing the social order and, as a result, it triggers a policy of punishment and persecution of non-conforming gender identities:

Culture so readily punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform. Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all (Butler, 1988, p. 527).

For Butler and, more broadly, for queer theorists, all identities are unstable, non-essential and performative. Therefore, if as Butler posits, there is no true self and no core identity, all identity performances are equally valid. The performativity of gender thus assumes that there is nothing previous to performance. It is the performance which constitutes both gender and, on a wider scale, identity.

The disappearance of the notion of a unique inner identity core calls into question the validity of categories such as female and male, appearance and reality. In this chapter, I will show how Butler's idea of gender performativity can be extended to describe other aspects of cultural identity. I will apply this notion to the analysis of *Máscaras* in order to show how, in the book, the easy model of a unique coherent identity is challenged and substituted by a more complex notion of multiple and changing identities.

## **2.2 Homosexuality, gender performativity and Cuban identity**

Before moving on to the proper analysis of Padura's novel, I will briefly present the Cuban perception of homosexuality, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, and the role assigned to queer identities in the revolutionary social project. I will show how Butler's conceptualisation of gender performativity and compulsory heterosexuality are particularly useful to explain the traditional conception of gender and sexuality in Cuba and to analyse the perception of homosexuality as a problem of public visibility.

Following Braham, I identify the origins and roots of the Cuban homophobic attitude towards male homosexuality in the traditional *machista* culture and in the association of homosexuality with the social ills of the pre-revolutionary period, such as prostitution, sex tourism, corruption and paedophilia (Braham, 2004, p. 42). The association of ideology with sexual orientation became almost automatic in Cuba during the process of national consolidation that followed the victory of the revolution. "Castro's regime associated bourgeois power structures with problematic sexualities and differentiated itself from them according to unambiguous gender norms" (Braham, 2004, p. 39). The capitalist system and the pre-revolutionary regime were identified with sexual excesses; therefore the new regime forbade all identities and sexual orientations that escaped the traditional heterosexual pattern (Braham, 2004, p. 40). To this end, special attention was devoted by the Cuban ideological project to the redefinition of gender roles. A good revolutionary could not show any ambivalence or ambiguity in performing the traditional gender role structured on a clear male/female opposition. The new revolutionary society in

the 1960s and 1970s was built around the cult of a charismatic male hero and political power was transmitted along male lines. According to Braham, the Cuban model of masculinity was based on the classical image of the revolutionary fighters in the Sierra Maestra: “los barbudos” (Braham, 2004, p. 41), this led to the common association of masculine features, like the beard, and military virtues (physical strength, discipline, courage and agility) with ideological commitment. As Braham points out, these masculine features and values not only proved to be resistant and deeply rooted in the Cuban culture but also became a built-in part of the revolutionary ideology.

In such a male-centred and politicised identity discourse, there was no space for homosexuality (especially for male-homosexuality) or alternative gender performances. The assumption was that sexual deviation from the masculine model of the *guerrilla* soldier implied a weak devotion to the cause: “A deviation of that nature clashes with the concept we have of what a militant Communist must be” (Castro interviewed by Lockwood, quoted in Young, 1981, p. 8). Therefore, homosexuals and effeminate men were considered useless for the cultural project of the revolution that sustained itself on an unquestioning loyalty to the cause. Thus, homosexuality was labelled by the official discourse as a problem, a deviation, pathology, an antisocial behaviour<sup>3</sup>. Different sexual and gender performances, which did not conform to the New Man model, were defined as ‘the Other’ and automatically excluded from the revolutionary project and Cuban official discourse. Homosexuality, escaping the binary gender categorization, was commonly associated with chaos and the subversion of social and revolutionary norms, and consequently, in the 1960s and 1970s, it was systematically repressed and punished.

However, as I have anticipated, homosexuality in Cuba has largely been defined as a problem of public visibility and it has been measured according to a politics of appearance, or to state it in Butler’s terms, of performance. Applying the theory of gender performativity to the revolutionary gender policy, I will read the attention devoted by the Revolution to behaviours, appearance

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<sup>3</sup> The declaration by the *Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura* in 1971 openly recognized “the social pathological character of homosexual deviations”.

and environmental factors as examples of performative acts used to re-shape and condition gender identity construction. Brad Epps suggests that homosexuality in Cuba is “a mere matter of appearance” (1995, p. 232), related to the way one dresses, walks, talks, gestures, the music one listens to, the books one reads. All this has been bound to sexual preferences and desire and used to determine whether a subject conformed to the revolutionary gender norms, first, and, then, by extension to the revolutionary ideology. Therefore, conformity with established gender performances was used to determine whether someone could be considered a proper revolutionary (Epps, 1995, p. 242).

As a consequence of this logic, many non-conforming identities were discriminated against and punished mainly because of their unconventional look and behaviours. Epps points out that, in the Cuban definition of a homosexual, character, appearance, performances and behaviours play an important part: the label of homosexual is attributed mainly to the man who acts in a ‘feminine’ way and assumes a so-called passive or receptive attitude in sexual intercourse. The ‘active’ part, instead, is not always or not necessarily labelled as homosexual (Epps, 1995, p. 232). Padura gives an example of this peculiar conception of homosexuality when recalling the story of Luisito. Luisito was one of Conde’s childhood friends who was publically marginalized by the other children of the neighbourhood because of his homosexuality. Nevertheless, Conde recalls that many of his male friends that openly despised and rejected Luisito, were at the same time having private intimate relationships with him:

El Conde llegó a saber que algunos de los que lo apedreaban y lo vituperaban en público, ciertas noches propicias habían tenido la segunda escala de su iniciación sexual en el culo promiscuo de Luisito: después de experimentar con las chivas y las puercas, habían probado el boquete oscuro de Luisito (Padura, 1997, p. 75).

This sexual relationship was not perceived by the young men as a symptom of *mariconería* because it did not involve kisses, caresses, or signs of emotive attachment. It was considered instead a proof of manliness:

La relación con Luisito había sido aceptada como una prueba de hombría alcanzada a punta de pene...Luisito sí; ellos no: como si la homosexualidad sólo se definiera por una aceptación de la carne similar a la recepción femenina (Padura, 1997, pp. 75-76).

While performing the active part in sexual intercourse is considered “una prueba de hombría”, performing the passive role is seriously condemned. As Epps affirms, the man who "gives himself" to or "is taken" by another man is considered to place himself at an inferior level; he is considered subordinate and weak (Epps, 1995, p. 233). This particular way of seeing homosexuality leads, as Epps suggests, to a difference between a “homosexuality of identity, regardless of the positions therein assumed, and a homosexuality of performance and appearance, in which positionality is the dominant, or most visible, mark” (Epps, 1995, p. 233). Homosexuality, then, is represented and defined according to a logic of positioning and performance. The label of homosexual is assigned as the result of the role played in the sexual act, or in the sexual performance. Positioning and performance then become an essential sign of sexual identity. The man who does not act properly, that is, actively, during sexual intercourse is the one with a problematic sexuality and a non-conforming gender role according to the Revolution. Here I am not saying that the active homosexual man has not been condemned by the regime, but that the condemnation and persecution have been stronger against the stereotyped homosexual subject, perceived as a submissive, effeminate man. Therefore, what Epps defines as homosexuality of identity is considered less problematic in Cuba. Being homosexual is not condemned as much as showing homosexual tendencies and behaviours: “Discretion, dissimulation, and denial become the paradoxical signs of homosexuals who would be ‘faithful’ to the Revolution” (Epps, 1995, p. 243). The pro-Revolution homosexual is supposed to hide his condition and to perform his gender correctly in order to avoid presenting himself as a queer destabilizing force. Hence, life under the revolutionary government becomes a struggle over signs and appearance. To be accepted, or at least not openly persecuted, any difference, any ambivalence, or ambiguity in the identity performance needed to be rigorously re-worked. Ideally, there should not be any confusing

appearance or ambiguous feature. Style, look, gestures and behaviours are supposed to be shaped according to the binary gender model. Homosexuals were then stimulated, if not forced, to re-shape their behaviours and appearance accordingly.

As Epps suggests, the play between appearance and reality, content and form, as well as the dynamics of revelation and concealment have traditionally been spatially represented in the opposition between body surface and inner identity core. This dichotomous structure is, in fact, typical of the essentialist model of identity representation. What is new is the effort of the Cuban government to institutionalize this interplay between appearance and the supposed inner truth (1995, p. 243). The basic idea promoted by the regime was that the surface of the body, its material appearance, could be refashioned. Such refashioning was, for instance, the main object of the UMAP (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción). As I explained in chapter 2, the UMAP were essentially military camps where supposedly 'deviant' Cuban citizens were 're-educated' through forced labour. The programme of re-masculinisation conducted in these military camps was focused on correcting the improper exterior features that could be associated with homosexuality, therefore "the internees were taught to stand like men, walk like men and talk like men" (Berenschot, 2005, p. 42); a deep voice, a firm handshake, and an assertive personality were seen and perceived as proofs of manliness. This seems to support the theory that the Revolution was more concerned about the appearance of its citizens than their sexuality. The regime promoted the image of the virile man, with short hair and rough manners, even though under this appearance effeminate men may have been hidden (Epps, 1995, p. 243).

However, the same idea of reshaping one's identity through the refashioning of the body implies that the body is not shaped or inscribed once and forever, on the contrary, the body can, in theory, go through multiple refashionings that could result in plural and different appearances. Therefore, implied in the programme of re-masculinisation proposed by the Revolution, there is firstly the admittance of the unfixed nature of gender identity, and by extension the mutability of identity in all its aspects. Secondly, it proves the perception of gender as a social construction formed by performative acts. The idea at the

basis of the revolutionary attempt to masculinise male homosexuals was the belief that the re-fashioning of the body and the conditioning operated on social behaviours would also produce their effects on the deeper level of identity. This is the same as saying that neither gender nor sexuality are natural and that both can be conditioned and re-constructed through the repetition of specific social acts. The Revolution, then, implicitly defined gender and sexuality as constructed social performances that could be conditioned through social coercion. Castro himself affirmed that specific social acts and activities were considered capable of fostering a strong masculine identity: "In my opinion everything that tends to promote in our youth the strongest possible spirit, activities related in some way with the defence of the country, such as sports, must be promoted" (Castro interview in 1965 quoted in Braham, 2004, p. 47). Therefore, the regime instituted programmes of masculinisation dedicated to young Cuban males that, through sporting activity and military education, were meant to develop the desirable sense of masculinity and proper male gender behaviour. The risk of grounding gender identity in the repetition of performative acts is that it opens up the possibility of gender subversion. The constitutive acts, in fact, can always be performed in different ways and produce different identity performances as a result.

Finally, if gender identity can be redefined through social acts, this redefinition is conditioned by a specific social and historical environment that decides the criteria of the reshaping. The influence of the social context is, in fact, considered fundamental by both Butler and Epps. Performance and body inscription are not left to the individual, on the contrary, social and historical scripts invariably influence and very often force the shaping and re-shaping of the individual gender identity (Epps, 1995, pp. 243-244). Braham stresses how, in revolutionary Cuba, homosexuality was considered to be caused by environmental factors and was specifically associated with the city, where the habits and signs of pre-revolutionary society were stronger (Braham, 2004, p. 43). As a result, the revolutionary idea of masculinity was usually associated with the rural environment. The stereotypical real man was the *guajiro*, working and living in contact with nature. In line with this idea of environmental conditioning, the government designed the UMAP as labour camps where the



'correction' and 're-masculinisation' of homosexuals was performed through manual, agricultural work, in the fields, in contact with nature.

I argue that, considering homosexuality to be mainly a matter of appearance and promoting the idea that a proper gender behaviour can be implemented by acting on the body level, conditioning gestures and manners, the revolutionary policy on gender identity unconsciously predicted Butler's idea of gender performativity. The Cuban government, in fact, seems to focus its attention not on a supposed inner essence of gender but on its outer manifestation through specific corporeal acts and social performances.

### **3 Inner exile: spatial marginalization of non-conforming identities**

Having examined the cultural roots of homophobia in Cuba and having defined gender identity as a performative construction, here I introduce the concept of 'inner exile' as a key term for my analysis of non-conforming identities in *Máscaras*. In this analysis I will first explain how Padura allocates different and opposed narrative spaces to accepted and excluded identities, and then I will describe the process of the physical and psychological marginalization of subversive sexualities and non-conforming gender identities as a form of 'inner exile'. In the revolutionary male-centred identity discourse there is no official space and recognition for alternative sexual expressions such as homosexuality or homoeroticism. Nevertheless, as noted above, the performative approach to the idea of gender construction introduces into the paradigm of Cubanness the possibility of multiple identity performances and alternative gender and sexual expressions. Homosexual identities are the result of the errors and mistakes naturally occurring during the production and reproduction of gender-related performative acts. Therefore, as Bejel suggests, homosexuality is implicitly inscribed, by negation, in the prescriptive model of Cuban identity (2001, p. XV). Rejected from the official definition of Cubanness, homosexuality is placed at the margins of the Cuban national narrative and, as a constitutive outside, contributes to defining and delimiting the official

gender model. Despite the regime's attempts to silence non-conforming identities in the 1970s, homosexuals could not be simply deleted or eradicated; therefore, they continued to live inside Cuba as a kind of hidden underworld, confined to marginal spaces outside the public sphere.

The marginal space assigned to homosexual and queer identities becomes central to Padura's description of Cuban identity. This space delineates the borders between the national image constructed by the Revolution and the chaos and variety of sexual performances that come into Padura's idea of multiple Cuban identities. In *Máscaras*, Padura describes how different and indefinable sexual and gender identities actually exist in Cuba as a form of displacement from the ordinary identity model. These subversive identities inhabit a specific space, normally physically or morally separated from the public socio-cultural universe. This space is the result of a policy of coercion and punishment applied by the regime in order to preserve the binary gender structure. In Cuba, in the first decades after 1959, any deviation from what the government dictated to be 'normal' or 'natural' was punished through ostracism and discrimination. Hence, homosexuals, who represented a deviation from the principles and parameters embodied by the New Man, were largely confined to performing their identity only on a private stage. As already discussed in relation to homosexuality and appearance, in revolutionary Cuba male homosexuality was perceived as a threat or a problem mainly when it was openly shown or visible. Therefore, ostentatious homosexual behaviours were banned from the public sphere and confined to a different space dimension. I will consider this dimension as the spatial representation of a form of emotional and moral marginalization that affects its victims mainly on the psychological level. Therefore, following many Cuban critics (such as Rivero and Quiroga), I will define this particular representation of identity displacement as an 'inner exile'.

This term was originally coined by Miguel Salabert in 1961 in his work *L'exil intérieur*. The term itself is an oxymoron: the classical idea of *destierro* or displacement implies the physical removal from one's territory or land. The idea of internal or inner exile suggests instead a different kind of displacement that can be physical without implying the departure from one's nation, such as

in the case of imprisonment, labour camps or house arrest. At the same time, it indicates a moral and emotional condition that implies removal from one's ordinary life and social role and reclusion into a marginal social space, without necessarily involving physical movement. Salabert defines inner exile as social autism, alienation from society, isolation of the individual. Paul Ilie in his book, *Literature and Inner Exile: Authoritarian Spain, 1939-1975*, expands Salabert's definition of inner exile and applies it to the Spanish context. Ilie starts from the premise that "alienation itself is not a geographical matter" (1980, p.38). Physical exile and inner exile are, then, according to this author, not a geographical condition but a mental state:

Separation from one's own country means more than lack of physical contact with land and house it is also a set of feelings and beliefs that isolate the expelled group from the majority. [...] I would contend that exile is a state of mind whose emotions and values respond to separation and severance as conditions in themselves. To live apart is to adhere to values that do not partake in the prevailing values; he who perceives this moral difference and who responds to it emotionally lives in exile. (Ilie, 1980, pp. 2-3)

The exiled condition is primarily characterized by the inconformity and non-correspondence between the personal values of the subject and the prevailing values of the dominant discourse. This moral condition of inadequacy and the consequent emotional response are the determining features of both inner and exterior exile: according to Ilie, in fact, the physical exile is merely a consequence of this first form of emotional exile. While external exile necessarily contains a component of physical displacement, in the case of inner exile the subject is confined to a different 'space', the space of silence, immobility and social exclusion. Ilie uses inner exile to denote multiple forms of expulsion or egress from the cultural centre. According to him, the 'inxiled' live through the same emotions as the exiled: the same fear and experience of being alienated from the cultural centre, the feeling of living on the margins of one's society.

I will apply Ilie's definition to the Cuban context, using the term inner exile to describe the particular dimension of someone still living within the island territorially but at the same time being kept out of any social activity, with poor interaction with the surrounding world. This term is particularly appropriate to define the condition in which many homosexual intellectuals (such as Virgilio Piñera) lived during the *Quinquenio gris* and the harshest time of social control. Other Cuban scholars, such as Raúl Rivero, use the term to describe the condition of important cultural figures that had been exiled within the boundaries of their city, their nation and their house: artists such as Heriberto Padilla, Antón Arrufat or José Lezama Lima are famous examples of cultural 'inxile' (Rivero, 2000).

Taking into account the previous literature on the concept of inner exile I will use this term to describe the isolation that *in primis* gay men, but also other kinds of dissidents, have experienced in post-1959 Cuba, mainly during the *Quinquenio gris*. I will, therefore, interpret inner exile as the spatial transposition of this socio-cultural marginalization that affected the lives of its victims on both the physical and the emotional level. Homosexuals and excluded individuals have on the one hand been emotionally marginalized by the society that rejected them as deviated subjects and, on the other hand, they auto-marginalize themselves because of their constant fears and feelings of guilt about being different. Auto-marginalization is often a far more complex phenomenon that forces the individual to re-discuss the basis of his/her identity. If auto-marginalization confines the homosexual to a private world of silence and solitude, public marginalization in Cuba has often physically confined homosexuals to a specific reduced space, in some cases also limiting their interaction with other spaces and other subjects (I have already briefly mentioned the creation of the UMAP and the *parametración de los intelectuales* in chapter 2; later on in this chapter I will expand more on these specific cases of physical alienation, which are peculiar to the Cuban context between the mid-60s and mid-70s).

The marginal space designated to non-conforming identities, the space of inner exile, can be considered as a heterotopic space. As already explained in chapter 3, Michel Foucault coined the term heterotopias to identify the 'other

space' that falls outside the category of ordinary spaces. Foucault uses heterotopias to describe spaces of otherness, which can be simultaneously physical and mental (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). The character of heterotopias is determined by the specific kind of relation they establish with official spaces. As explained in the case of the slum, Michel Foucault classifies under the first principle of heterotopias the so called heterotopias of crisis or deviation which host "individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm" (1986, p. 25). Examples of this kind of heterotopia are rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons. According to this definition, I argue that the space of inner exile falls into the category of heterotopias of deviation: inner exile as a space of alienation is fundamentally a counter-space dedicated to containing deviant individuals whose behaviour does not conform to the required social norms. Heterotopias of deviation can be real and mental spaces at the same time, therefore by definition, these kinds of heterotopias, as well as the space of inner exile, are sites of physical displacement and emotional marginalization. These are not only 'other spaces' but also spaces of the 'Others', that is, parallel sites to which non-conforming subjects "had been violently displaced" (Foucault, 1986, p. 24).

In *Máscaras*, a clear example of the spatial representation of inner exile as a heterotopic site is the first description of the house of Alberto Marqués. This character represents the prototype of the 'inxiled' Cuban in the novel. I will focus on the description of Marqués as a dissident character later in this chapter; here I am interested in the representation of Marqués's living space. My aim is to show how, through the description of Marqués's house, Padura enumerates the main features of the Cuban inner exile. Moreover, establishing a comparison between the description of this house and the aspect of Faustino Arayán's house, I suggest that Padura establishes a spatial opposition, between included and excluded identities, stressing, at the same time, the false and excessive perfection of the immaculate official social façade.

As already stressed in the case of another heterotopic house: that of the Montes de Oca in *La neblina del ayer*, Marqués's house is described through a play on thermal and light contrasts:

Allí no existía el calor, a pesar de que todas las ventanas estaban cerradas [...] En la fresca penumbra, el Conde [...] entrevió algunos muebles tan oscuros como el ambiente. [...] Alberto Marqués [...] abrió una puerta ventana que desparramó la luz grosera de agosto contra el piso ajedrezado de la habitación, provocando una luminosidad agresiva y decididamente irreal: como de una lámpara oriental hacia el escenario. (Padura, 1997, p. 43)

As with the Montes de Oca's library in *La neblina del ayer*, the thermal contrast is used by Padura here to stress the unconventional nature of the house. This site is a marginal space: the space of the outsider, of the unacceptable. It is represented as a closed space, delimited by strong and clear lines: "todas las ventanas estaban cerradas" (Padura, 1997, p. 43), "todos los altísimos ventanales de la casa tenían rejas" (Padura, 1997, p. 96). These bars of the windows work as a mechanism of separation between the world outside and the psychological prison in which Marqués has been shut up for more than a decade. The house is a kind of liminal dimension that, despite its geographical belonging to the island, represents an 'other space'. Being a site out of ordinary social conventions and at the margins of Cuban society, it is described as spatially separated from the rest of the city: its qualities and thermal features are not affected by the normal atmospheric conditions of the island. The darkness and coldness of the house are metaphors for Marqués's social status. The darkness and the dominance of "colores desvaídos" (Padura, 1997, p. 42) remind him of the passing by of time, the oblivion and the socio-cultural exclusion to which Marqués has been condemned for ten years. The lack of light can also evoke the lack of attention devoted to the writer's plays and works during the *Quinquenio gris*. The constant feeling of coldness refers to the indifference shown to Marqués by other Cubans during the period of ostracism. Hence, in the short description of Marqués's house, Padura spatially represents the coercion, limitation, isolation, oblivion and indifference experienced by the 'inxiled'.

The description of Faustino's house is completely different, presenting features that are totally opposed to those of Marqués's house. In a game of

symmetrical opposition, the main characteristics of this house are its brightness and light and the darkness and shadows of Marqués's house are, thus, substituted by the predominance of brilliant colours. If black and grey were the tones of the writer's house, an immaculate white is the predominant colour of this house: "paredes pintadas de un blanco brillante" (Padura, 1997, p. 38). The second characteristic of the house, and of its garden, is its abundant light and bright colours: "Magenta, violeta, amarillas, sus flores, como mariposas encantadas, se confundían en un breve bosque de hojas" (Padura, 1997, p. 41). In contrast to the bars in Marqués's windows, this house has "paredes de vidrios milagrosamente enteros en la ciudad de los vidrios rotos" (Padura, 1997, p. 38). The house, then, offers an open view on the surrounding Cuban environment and it is not a closed space, delimited and separated from the rest of the city. Finally, the address itself: 7, *Calle Milagros* ironically reaffirms the idea of perfection and pureness associated with the house, placing it "en un rincón de Paraíso Terrenal, dentro de una gloria perfecta y edénica" (Padura, 1997, p. 41). This house represents, then, an idyllic world where "todo parecía limpio y perfecto" (Padura, 1997, p. 39). This space seems too perfect to be true, therefore, I argue that here Padura is suggesting that this perfection cannot be real. In fact, as will be discovered later on in the novel, beyond the official appearance of cleanness and pureness, the owner of the house, Faustino, hides a dirty past. Through the description of these two houses, then, Padura is spatially representing two opposed worlds: the official one, where Faustino lives with the other conforming identities protected by a clean appearance, and the marginal dimension of excluded identities, condemned to silence, isolation and darkness.

### **3.1 Inner exile determined by sexual and cultural reasons**

If it is true that Padura makes a strong critique of the persecution and alienation of homosexuals and other unconventional sexual and gender identities in this novel, it is also true, I believe, that the discourse on gender is used as a starting point to expand on other possible kinds of exclusion. Inner exile in Cuba, apart from being the peculiar condition of homosexuals, is also

the marginal space for the reclusion of ideological and cultural dissidence. Considering, as I explain above, the strong link between sexual or gender performance and ideologico-political conformity in Cuba, sexual dissidence has often been interpreted as a political act. In this sense it is possible to read internal exile as the physical and mental displacement resulting from cultural dissidence, sexual dissidence and ideological dissidence. In *Máscaras*, Marqués's inner exile can be defined as a form of cultural and sexual exile: apart from representing the marginalized homosexual, he is also the censored artist. These two parts are indissolubly linked, and together construct the complex personality of the character. As affirmed by Wilkinson, this curious link between sexual and cultural dissidence in Padura's novel is due to the nature of the relationship between homosexuality and artistic freedom in Cuba (1999, p. 19).

Interestingly, these two factors became closely linked in the official discourse of the regime in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1971 the *Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura* promoted a Marxist-Leninist approach to culture and defined art and literature in terms of revolutionary weapons, imposing a strict central control on artistic production. Artists or intellectuals who did not follow government directives were considered to exhibit threatening forms of ideological deviation. The same Congress declared homosexuality a moral and ideological deviation, a sum of "influencias culturales negativas" that could corrupt the production of proper revolutionary art. Thus, in 1971, homosexuality was declared a pathological illness that, like any other kind of anti-revolutionary activity, was dangerously corrupting to Cuban society. The Congress targeted intellectuals as possible counter-revolutionaries and homosexuals as undesirables, institutionalising homophobia as a weapon to protect the ideological integrity of revolutionary art. According to the Congress declaration there was "un grupito de colonizados mentales" and "falsos intelectuales" who wanted to "convertir el snobismo, la extravagancia, el homosexualismo y demás aberraciones sociales en expresiones del arte revolucionario, alejados de las masas y del espíritu de nuestra Revolución". These intellectuals therefore needed to be prevented from publishing or disseminating their ideas through the media and official means of



communication. The aim of the Congress was in fact to “impedir que la 'calidad artística' [...] sirviera de pretexto para hacer circular impunemente ciertas ideas y modas que corrompían a nuestra abnegada juventud”. In this declaration resides the ideological justification for cultural censorship. In Castro’s discourse, the dissident intellectuals were addressed through diminutives such as “grupito”, “niños privilegiados”, “agentillos del colonialismo cultural”. This pejorative treatment suggests that the intellectuals who showed a lack of commitment to the cause also lacked masculine virtues, which allowed Castro, the manly militant, to treat them as inferiors. Clearly, not all the intellectual dissidents were gay and equally not all gays were dissidents, but the association of these two categories was almost automatic, and reinforced by the fact that some famous cultural dissidents like Reinaldo Arenas were gay.

The declaration of the Congress provides an example of the way in which both homosexuality and intellectual dissidence were considered products of bourgeois capitalistic society, and therefore both attitudes were punished and condemned to ostracism. Thus, Padura in his novel does not merely condemn sexual intolerance but also criticises the revolutionary cultural policy of the 60s and 70s. In this historical moment when the primary concern of the new Cuban government was the protection of the Revolution, the public expression of any kind of dissidence was perceived as a threat and consequently banned. A different sexual orientation or an unconventional artistic nature were features that did not conform to the revolutionary stereotyped model of identity. This peculiar conception of sexual and cultural performances as forms of socio-political subversion led to the creation of specific institutions and laws to control and contain this subversion. The main examples of political measures adopted for the physical and emotional displacement of the Cuban dissident community that are criticized in Padura’s novel are the UMAP and the *parametración de los intelectuales* between the late 60s and the mid-70s. I comment in chapter 2 on the creation of the UMAP (Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción) in 1965. What is important to stress here is that these labour camps, which were originally devoted to the ‘re-education’ of homosexuals, soon became a mechanism with which to physically marginalize

and confine ideological dissidents and political opponents, such as intellectuals who were reluctant to support Castro's regime. As labour camps dedicated to deviant citizens, the UMAP can be considered heterotopias of deviation, whose main function was to isolate problematic individuals from 'normal' citizens, by imprisoning them in a different space. As argued before, the existence of these re-education camps is enough to prove that in Cuba the presence of multiple identity performances continued even during the harshest repression.

The UMAP did not last for long, but in the 70s the Cuban government enacted other laws specifically directed at regulating homosexuality in general<sup>4</sup>, and more specifically the presence of homosexuals in the cultural world. The aforementioned *Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura* promoted the *parametración de los intelectuales*: a specific policy intended to eliminate any dissident influence on Cuban cultural and artistic production. All those working in literature, education, or in contact with the public should obey certain *parámetros* established by the government; therefore, those who expressed ideological or sexual divergences (or both) from these parameters were banned from public offices and cultural activities. The *parametración* was particularly harsh towards homosexuals. In fact, the declaration of the *Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura* openly defined the *parametración* as "un análisis para determinar cómo debe abordarse la presencia de homosexuales

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<sup>4</sup> In 1974 the 1249 Act declared that 'ostentatious displays of homosexuality' were punishable by three to nine years in prison.

In 1975 the 1267 Act was passed with a clause referring to "El homosexualismo ostensible y otras conductas socialmente reprobables que proyectándose públicamente, incidan nocivamente en la educación, conciencia y sentimientos públicos y en especial de la niñez y la juventud por parte de quienes desarrollen actividades culturales o artístico-recreativas desde centros de exhibición o difusión".

In 1979, homosexual acts were removed from the Penal Code as a criminal offense. However, 'ostentatious displays of homosexuality' were still against the law: "Se sanciona con privación de libertad de tres meses a nueve meses o multa hasta doscientas sesenta cuotas o ambas al que: a) haga pública ostentación de su condición de homosexual o importune o solicite con sus requerimientos a otro; b) realice actos homosexuales en sitio público o en sitio privado pero expuestos a ser vistos involuntariamente por otras personas". Those articles, however, were removed from the Penal Code in 1987.

en distintos organismos del frente cultural”, the consequences of this analysis have been “la ubicación en otros organismos, de aquellos que siendo homosexuales no deben tener relación directa en la formación de nuestra juventud desde una actividad artística o cultural” (1971). As a consequence of this norm, many homosexuals were dismissed from their jobs, expelled from schools or denied admission to university. This political measure practically legalized the physical and emotional displacement of dissident and homosexual intellectuals from public education and cultural production. The intellectuals, *parametrados* and *desplazados*, were confined to an inner exile that implied the emotional separation from the cultural world or the physical separation from the work scene (from the theatre in Marqués’s case). To complete its policy of isolation and confining of rebellious artists to the island territory, the Congress of 1971 also decided that homosexual intellectuals could not leave the country in cultural delegations and could not participate in cultural events abroad because “se debe evitar que ostenten una representación artística de nuestro país en el extranjero personas cuya moral no responda al prestigio de nuestra Revolución”.

An anecdotal example of the rigidity of the regime’s policy of that period against the dissemination of dissident arts is related by Quiroga in his book *Tropics of Desire* (2000, pp. 104-106): when in 1964 Ernesto Guevara saw a volume of Piñera’s *Teatro completo* in the Cuban embassy in Algiers, he threw the book from one side of the room to the other. According to *el Che* it was indecent to find one of Piñera’s books in an embassy representing Cuba abroad. The presence of the book in an embassy was, as a matter of fact, a recognition of Piñera as one of the most important Cuban intellectual figures and inscribed his art within the official canon of Cuban revolutionary literature. Therefore, by excluding the book from the library of the embassy and throwing it to the other corner of the room, Guevara was again spatially demarking the opposition between two incompatible poles. On the one side of the room there is the space of inclusion, the space of the perfect revolutionary soldier, on the other side of the room there is the space of the exclusion, the space in which the book of the non-conformist is confined. The trajectory of the book

represents the eradication and physical displacement of the unacceptable outsider from an official space.

This anecdote reinforces the idea, suggested by Padura, of a spatial separation between Cuban conforming and non-conforming identity performances: the rebellious, the subversive (like Márques or Piñera) needs to be kept apart from the official space of the Revolution. The concept of inner exile reveals how ideological and sexual dissidences are translated into a specific hierarchical organization of Cuban space. In Rose's terms, this hierarchical organization places the location of power at the top and, from this superior position, the dominant discourse is able to objectify and control the marginalized lower spaces<sup>5</sup>. For Rose, to be marginalized simply means to be constrained in a determinate space and to have parameters binding your actions (Rose, 1997, p. 6). As stated in chapter 1, also in the Cuban case, space configuration is a tool of power which has essentially two functions: to separate the acceptable from the unacceptable and to control and subordinate the Other. The condition of the marginalized figures experiencing the Cuban inner exile perfectly correspond to Rose's definition of a marginal space: it is a physical and imaginative space of exclusion, containing those identity performances that, because of their sexual orientation, artistic nature, aesthetic taste, ideological belief or political convictions, cannot be included in the revolutionary identity model, and therefore are defined as the Other. Thus, identity definition in Cuba appears to be strongly related to a physical and symbolic spatial order articulated by logics of power. This kind of spatial logic conveys a series of added cultural values that inform the construction of different kinds of identities. In fact, if spatiality and imaginative geographies give material and symbolic structure to identity, it follows that inner exile, as a particular form of spatiality, produces identities that are radically different from those created by the official space. In the following section, I will introduce the

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<sup>5</sup>"The spatiality that power produces is also understood as hierarchical. The locations of power [can be described] as 'high' and the places marginalized by power as 'low', and this is the hierarchy produced by the actions of power. Power acts from above" (Rose, 1997, p. 6).

character in *Máscaras* who best represents the ‘inxiled’ identity: Alberto Marqués.

### 3.2 Marqués: the dissidence of the homosexual intellectual

Padura presents his critique of the Cuban gender and cultural policy of the 60s and 70s through the personal story of Alberto Marqués. As stated above, Marqués has an important position in the novel: his memories and experiences play such an important part in the story that he can be considered a sort of co-protagonist. The Cuban history of persecution and exclusion of homosexual intellectuals is presented from his perspective. Marqués gives voice to the intellectuals *parametrados* and more precisely he is an “homenaje a Virgilio Piñera y a lo que sufrió durante los años setenta cuando estuvo apartado de los centros culturales importantes, sumido en el ostracismo” (Padura quoted in Epple, 1995, p. 58). Marqués, in his conversation with Conde, first mentions the general condition of homosexuals in Cuba, presenting Cuban history as a “larga historia nacional de homofobia”:

Durante mucho tiempo ese pecado llamado de contra natura ha condenado la vida de los homosexuales, igual que la idea de que es una enfermedad... Pecado capital, aberración social, enfermedad de la mente y del cuerpo. [...] de los diez millones de cubanos que vivimos en esta república socialista, entre un cinco y un seis por ciento somos homosexuales. (Padura, 1997, pp. 163-164)

Marqués stresses the importance of the homosexual community in Cuba, stating that it is not such a marginal part of the population as the Revolution tried to affirm. Then the intellectual revisits the condition of homosexuals during the most repressive periods of the Revolution’s history. Remembering tragic episodes that led to the institutionalization of homophobia, such as the creation of UMAP and the resolution of the 1971 *Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura*:

En los años setenta hubo aquí mismo algo que se llamó UMAP, las famosas Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción, donde

confinaban, entre otros seres dañados, a los homosexuales, para que se hicieran hombres cortando caña y recogiendo café y que, después de 1971, se dictó una ordenanza, otra vez aquí mismo, [...] donde se legislaba jurídicamente sobre el 'homosexualismo ostensible y otras conductas socialmente reprobables'... (Padura, 1997, p. 164)

Marqués says twice in the same paragraph that what he is relating happened in Cuba, in the same revolutionary space where in 1959 the struggle for freedom was won. In these lines, the character, while describing the systematic policy of persecution of homosexuals, ironically emphasises the hypocrisy of the homophobic government. Highlighting the preoccupation of the official discourse with *homosexualismo ostensible* Marqués stresses the importance that the Revolution gives to appearance, confirming that homosexuality in Cuba was mainly a matter of visibility. Finally, Marqués moves the focus from the situation of homosexuals in general to a particular case: that of the homosexual intellectuals, presenting his personal history of *parametración*:

Mire, hace dieciocho años, cuando corría el año del Señor de 1971, yo fui parametrado y, claro, no tenía ningún parámetro de los que pedían. Se imagina eso, ¿parametrar a un artista, como si fuera un perro con pedigrí? Casi es cómico, si no hubiera sido trágico. Y, de contra, es una palabra tan feísima... Parametrar. Bueno, empezó toda aquella historia de la parametración de los artistas y me sacaron del grupo de teatro y de la asociación de teatristas, y después de comprobar que no podía trabajar en una fábrica, como debía ser si quería purificarme con el contacto de la clase obrera, [...] me pusieron a trabajar en una biblioteca. (Padura, 1997, pp. 54-55)

Marqués criticizes, through irony, the revolutionary idea of dissidence as a social deviation, the ideological bases of the project of 'purification' of deviant citizens, as well as the techniques usually adopted to produce this purification. Through Marqués's words, Padura expresses his opinion on this historical event, pointing out the fundamental paradox at the basis of the concept of

parametración: the impossibility of classifying and judging art according to ideological criteria. In the case of Marqués and the other artists, the *parametración* was conducted in both the private sphere, judging their behaviour, sexual preferences and conformity to assigned gender roles, and in the public sphere, evaluating their artistic production from a political and ideological perspective:

La primera acusación que me hicieron fue la de ser un homosexual que exhibía su condición, y advirtieron que para ellos estaba claro el carácter antisocial y patológico de la homosexualidad [...] Que ellos estaban facultados para impedir que la 'calidad artística' [...] sirviera de pretexto para hacer circular impunemente ciertas ideas y modas [...] y que por eso se iba a analizar [...] la presencia de los homosexuales en los organismos culturales, y que se reubicaría a todos los que no debían tener contacto alguno con la juventud y que no se les permitiría salir del país en delegaciones que representaran el arte cubano. [...] Entonces vino el juicio estético: se dijo que no se me iba a permitir esa 'arrogancia señorial' [...] de atribuirme el papel de crítico exclusivo de la sociedad y la historia cubanas, mientras abandonaba el escenario de las luchas verdaderas y utilizaba a los pueblos latinoamericanos como temas para creaciones que los convertían en favoritos de los teatros burgueses y las editoriales del imperialismo. (Padura, 1997, pp. 107-108)

From Marqués's testimony it appears clear that gender roles, sexual orientations and artistic production seem to have formed part of the same system: the performance of identity. In his story the writer glosses and quotes the declaration of the *Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura* and explains how this repressive measure had been applied to him<sup>6</sup>. Marqués was first judged for his gender identity and sexuality and condemned because he was

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<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of the similarities between this passage from Padura's novel and the real historical records of the Congress see Wilkinson, Stephen, 1999. "Homosexuality and the Repression of Intellectuals in *Fresa y chocolate* and *Máscaras*". *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 17-33.

a homosexual “que exhibía su condición”. Again, the first cause of marginalization was non-conforming appearance and social performances. Secondly, quoting the text of the *Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura*, homosexuality is defined as a pathology and a social illness; therefore Marqués is kept apart from cultural life to avoid the spreading of this ‘infection’. Finally his art is judged not on the basis of artistic and aesthetic principles but on an ideological level, therefore it is condemned as the expression of a snobbish and aristocratic sensibility that refuses to comply with the propagandistic necessities of the Revolution.

As Marqués testifies, many Cuban artists failed to conform to the criteria required in both the public and private spheres. As a consequence they have been marginalized and displaced by public life and artistic creation, to render the tragedy of this experience Padura uses a strong spatial image: “todo yo era un tumor maligno que debían extirpar por el bien social, económico y político de esta hermosa isla en peso” (Padura, 1997, p. 105). The narrator re-uses the idea of homosexuality as a social illness (un tumor maligno), extending this definition to artistic dissidence and representing the traumatic experience of social alienation as an extirpation, an eradication of the sick subjects from the Cuban public space. The excluded individuals are confined to a liminal space, between life and death, a space of oblivion, of permanent silence, as “un fantasma culpable de mi talento, de mi obra, de mis gustos, de mis palabras” (Padura, 1997, p. 105). The Cuban playwright Antón Arrufat, who suffered from ostracism, describes this terrible condition as “la muerte en vida”:

Nuestros libros dejaron de publicarse, los publicados fueron recogidos de las librerías y subrepticamente retirados de los estantes de las bibliotecas públicas. Las piezas teatrales que habíamos escrito desaparecieron de los escenarios. [...] No solo estábamos muertos en vida: Parecíamos no haber nacido ni haber escrito nunca. Las nuevas generaciones fueron educadas en el desprecio a cuanto habíamos hecho o en su ignorancia. Fuimos sacados de nuestros empleos y enviados a trabajar donde nadie nos conociera, en bibliotecas alejadas de la ciudad, imprentas de textos escolares... (1994, p. 21)



Today, Arrufat is enjoying his rehabilitation on the island after having been marginalised for years. His works are published again and his plays are performed in Cuban theatres. The same rehabilitation and possibility of publishing again is offered to the character Marqués in the novel, once the period of terrible obscurantism passes. However, this character refuses to return to the Cuban public and cultural scene for personal and ideological reasons. The personal reason has to do with the constant feeling of fear and persecution that the traumatic experience of isolation has left in Marqués. Thus, despite having been rehabilitated, this character is no longer willing to expose his soul to public judgement. When asked to return to his work as a theatre writer, Alberto Marqués voluntarily and consciously refuses and decides instead to remain in his isolation, self-determining his condition of inner exile:

Diez años son muchos años y me acostumbré al silencio y casi que aprendí a disfrutarlo, [...] Además, nadie podía garantizarme que lo del año 71 no volvería a repetirse, ¿verdad?... Y yo no hubiera tenido fuerzas para cumplir una segunda condena, después de haber vuelto al espectáculo y a la exhibición. (Padura, 1997, pp. 110-111)

The ideological reasons behind Marqués's decision are related to his idea of art as free expression and to his sceptical view of the public Cuban world. During his personal experience of exclusion and rehabilitation, Marqués discovered the hypocrisy and falsity hidden in Cuban society. During his period of ostracism Marqués, like other excluded Cuban intellectuals, had been totally marginalized by the rest of the cultural scene, while after his rehabilitation he was converted into a symbol of intellectual and artistic integrity:

[Miki]: Si ahora mismo tú te paras ahí, en la puerta de la Unión y gritas: ¿Quién es Alberto Marqués?, enseguida van a salir doscientos tipos, se van a arrodillar en el piso, van a hacer reverencias y te van a decir: Es Dios, es Dios [...] Pero si lo gritabas hace quince años, hubieran aparecido doscientos tipos, casi los mismos doscientos que viste ahora, y te iban a decir, con el puño en alto y las venas del cuello de este gordo: Es el Diablo, el enemigo de la clase, el apóstata, el apóstata de la próstata,

buena metáfora, ¿no?... Porque esto aquí es así, Conde: antes era mejor ni hablar de él, y ahora es el monumento vivo a la resistencia ética y estética (Padura, 1997, pp. 62-63)

Antón Arrufat describes exactly the same experience, affirming that during his period of inner exile: “Nobody would speak with me, apart from my most loyal friends. It was as if I had the plague” (quoted in Kirk & Padura, 2001, p. 34); like Marqués he has been considered a walking ghost for years. After rehabilitation he acquired new fame and “those people who used to run away wanted to renew their friendship with me, but I refused to do so” (quoted in Kirk & Padura, 2001, p. 34). The false behaviours Padura describes are, then, a testimony to the treatment received by homosexual intellectuals during the 1970s. Thus, after having experienced at first hand the hypocrisies of revolutionary Cuban cultural society, Marqués refuses to return to this world of lies, and converts the social and spatial displacement, to which he had been previously condemned, into a kind of voluntary inner exile. Marqués resembles a typical Pirandellian hero: the alienated character who lives estranged from the world. As a result of the *parametración* and marginalization, he has understood the falsity of the Cuban revolutionary world; therefore, his exclusion is also a kind of disenchantment.

Marqués, as much as Conde, is a disillusioned character, but while Conde and his generation began to feel disillusioned in the late 1980s-early 1990s, Marqués’s disillusionment occurred in the 1970s, when the Revolution started to adopt repressive policies. Marqués’s decision to live apart can be interpreted as a consequence and a reaction to this disenchantment. Auto-assigning himself a separate space, Marqués adopts a strategic dissident position and refuses to reoccupy the place assigned to him by the government. The regime, in fact, has already decided once on behalf of Marqués: in the 70s placing him in the marginal space of exclusion and trying to eradicate him from the Cuban cultural soil. In the 80s the government wanted to rehabilitate the playwright, assigning him a new role within the public space of the Revolution, but, this time, Marqués refuses to take part in the show directed by the revolutionary institutions on the Cuban stage:

[Miki]: Pues la verdad-verdad es que ese maricón que se caga de miedo si le dan un grito tiene unos cojones que le llegan a los tobillos. Aguantó como un hombre y se quedó aquí. Porque dice que si sale de aquí entonces sí se muere, y no le hizo el juego ni a los de adentro ni a los de afuera: cerró el pico y se trancó en su casa... (Padura, 1997, p. 64)

Marqués, then, consciously refuses to take part in the social and cultural construction of revolutionary Cuba. Despite the multiple attempts at coercion and the displacement he suffered over the years, he consciously constructs his own dissident role, retiring from public life and exhibition and using his silence as a powerful cultural weapon. This silence, in the specific Cuban context, can have many different political meanings and functions as Quiroga suggests, commenting on the ten years of silence to which Piñera was condemned:

This was an heroic silence and the silence of fear, a silence of repression and the silence of inner exile, the silence of the literary closet and of the refusal to respond to the mechanism that created that closet. (2000, p. 106)

Marqués's silence is a political decision; he refuses to conform to the mechanism that created the inner exile and the separation between the space of inclusion and the space of exclusion. When Conde asks Marqués if it would not be better and easier to simply forget the past and return to public life and cultural production, the old author answers:

¿Sabe?, es muy fácil decir eso, porque la falta de memoria es una de las cualidades psicológicas de este país. Es su autodefensa y la defensa de mucha gente... Todo el mundo se olvida de todo y siempre se dice que se puede empezar de nuevo, y ya: está hecho el exorcismo. Si no hay memoria, no hay culpa, y si no hay culpa no hace falta siquiera el perdón, ¿ve cuál es la lógica? Y yo lo entiendo, claro que lo entiendo, porque esta isla tiene la misión histórica de estar recomenzando siempre, [...] Y el olvido suele ser el bálsamo para todas las heridas que queden abiertas... Y no

es que no tenga que perdonar o quiera culpar a nadie: no, es que yo no quiero olvidar. (Padura, 1997, p. 111)

The function of Marqués's silence seems to be to ensure that this national amnesia does not continue, at least with regard to the injustices which were perpetrated on homosexuals and dissident intellectuals during the *Quinquenio gris*. Although Marqués explains his choice of auto-alienation as the result of deep frustration and disillusionment, Conde continues to think that his silence is a great pity until the end of the novel, when Marqués shows him the work he has been doing during his years of public silence. Marqués points out that his public face is an adopted character that, as in a play, sustains his role of 'inxiled', but at the same time he continued to write and produce what he defines as his revenge against everyone:

Por lo que te dije antes: mi personaje debe sufrir el silencio hasta el fin. Pero ése es el personaje: el actor ha hecho lo que debía hacer, y por eso seguí escribiendo, porque, como Milton, un día van a recordar al escritor y nadie será capaz de mencionar al triste funcionario que lo hostilizó. No me dejaron publicar ni dirigir, pero nadie me podía impedir que escribiera y que pensara. Estas dos carpetas son mi mejor venganza. ¿Me entiende ahora? (Padura, 1997, p 226)

Thus, despite the effort of the regime and its moral judges and inquisitors, Marqués feels invincible because through his literature he will live forever while, by contrast, his enemies are destined to oblivion. Conde realises the power of literature in this moment and believes that the short story he has just written could represent a final revenge against the censors and bureaucrats (such as his old high-school principal that censored the cultural newspaper *La Viboreña*) who oppress free artistic expression: "Marqués tenía razón: en aquellas ocho cuartillas estaba lo invencible" (Padura, 1997, p 226). Conde then, thanks to the influence of Marqués, rediscovers his own literary vocation and the subversive power of literature. Therefore, when at the end of the case and of the book, the detective begins to question life with his usual nostalgic attitude: "¿Será posible volver atrás y deshacer entuertos y errores y equivocaciones?", the answer he gives himself, this time, is less negative than usual, since it

leaves open the possibility of a new life through literature: “No es posible, Conde, aunque todavía puedes ser invencible” (Padura, 1997, p. 233).

At the end of the book, then, Padura represents the revenge of literature against cultural oppression: ironically, the same literature that was perceived as dissident and caused Marqués’s alienation becomes the only weapon left to the artist for his ultimate revenge. Here, then, Padura presents his personal critique of censorship from the point of view of a Cuban intellectual who, even though he has not been directly censored, is highly conscious of the limitations that affected artistic freedom on the island. In conclusion, through the personal experience of Marqués, his ideological commitment to art and literature, his decision to use his position of inner exile as a critical perspective and a weapon of dissidence, Padura describes how excluded identities react to marginalization, transforming, in the case of Alberto Marqués, the space for the reclusion of the dissident into a space for the expression of dissidence.

#### **4 Conde, Marqués and the plurality of Cuban identity**

Through his contact with Alberto Marqués, Conde begins to question official history and the public façade of revolutionary society. The relationship between the two protagonists is complicated but, through its evolution, Conde increases his cultural and social awareness. As in a *Bildungsroman*, the older character initiates the younger into a new world: Havana's gay subculture. Through the conversation with Marqués and the participation in a gay party, Conde undergoes a *Katabasis* or a journey of purification from his ignorance and sexual prejudices to the acquisition of a different sensibility towards homosexual and queer subjects. At the beginning of their relationship the two characters are presented as opposing poles: Conde is the prototype of the *macho cubano*, he smokes and drinks a lot and affectionately calls his friends *salvaje* or *bestia* (Braham, 2004, p. 57). In the first sequence with Marqués, the detective presents the typical homophobic attitudes and admits that he tried “en vano de limpiar su mente de prejuicios” (Padura, 1997, p. 42). The first pieces of information Conde has regarding Marqués come from a police

report that, mocking the official language of bureaucracy, presents a biased description of the character:

Homosexual de vasta experiencia depredadora, apático político y desviado ideológico, ser conflictivo y provocador, extranjerizante, hermético, culterano, posible consumidor de marihuana y otras drogas, protector de maricones descarriados, hombre de dudosa filiación filosófica, lleno de pequeños prejuicios pequeñoburgueses y clasistas. (Padura, 1997, p. 41)

The first meeting between the two characters seems a verbal *duelo de capa y espada*, between two noble opponents (as also suggested by their names: Conde and Marqués) taking place in a theatre setting, that of *The Price* by Arthur Miller (1968). The first communion between these antagonists happens on the literary level. Marqués's description of his own story of censorship and *parametración* evokes in Conde the memory of his own schooldays when he suffered crude censorship at the hands of a corrupt high school principal. This experience ended with the closure of the writing workshop which Conde attended and which convinced him to give up his ambition of being a writer. Thus, Conde realises that he too had been a victim of the repressive climate of the 1970s. After a couple of meetings, Conde gradually starts to see Marqués less as a deviant figure and more as a sensitive man who experienced traumatic events which he himself lived through on a minor scale:

Entonces el Conde comprendió que [...] la mariconería de Alberto Marqués empezaba a preocuparle menos y que una furtiva solidaridad de rebelde comenzaba a acercarlo al dramaturgo (Padura, 1997, p. 67).

[...] Las historias de aquel personaje que insistía en rejonearlo, rebasaban los límites de cualquier prejuicio y ya no podía verlo como el maricón de mierda con el que fue a encontrarse apenas veinticuatro horas antes. (Padura, 1997, p. 114)

Through the interaction with Marqués, Conde discovers a world of alternative sexualities and identity performances, the initiation into this underworld happens during a cross-dressing gay party. Invited by Marqués, Conde enters

a hidden underworld and a subculture that has its own codes and rituals. After entering the house in Habana Vieja, for his journey of purification Conde changes his guide. As a Virgil in a Cuban Divine Comedy, Marqués prepares Conde for what he is going to experience that night, but once they pass the entrance of the underworld, he leaves his post of guide to the underworld to a young woman called Poly. According to Bejel, the most important expression of a queer voice in Padura Fuentes's text appears in the conversation between Conde and Poly (2001, p. 178). Presenting the participants at the party, Poly lists several different types of identity performances:

Y el Conde supo que en aquella sala de La Habana Vieja había, como primera evidencia, hombres y mujeres, diferenciables además por ser: militantes del sexo libre, de la nostalgia y de partidos rojos, verdes y amarillos, ex dramaturgos sin obra y con obra, y escritores con ex-libris nunca estampados; maricones de todas las categorías y filiaciones: locas –de carroza con luces y de la tendencia pervertida–, gansitos sin suerte, cazadores expertos en presas de alto vuelo, bugarrones por cuenta propia de los que dan por culo a domicilio y van al campo si ponen caballo, almas desconsoladas sin consuelo y almas desconsoladas en busca de consuelo, sobadores clase A-1 con el hueco cosido por temor al sida, y hasta aprendices recién matriculados en la Escuela Superior Pedagógica del homosexualismo, cuyo jefe docente era el mismísimo tío Alquimio; ganadores de concursos de ballet, nacionales e internacionales; profetas del fin de los tiempos, la historia y la libreta de abastecimiento; nihilistas conversos al marxismo y marxistas convertidos en mierda; resentidos de todas las especies: sexuales, políticos, económicos, psicológicos, sociales, culturales, deportivos y electrónicos; practicantes del budismo zen, el catolicismo, la brujería, el vudú, el islamismo, la santería y un mormón y dos judíos, un pelotero del equipo Industriales que batea y tira a las dos manos; admiradores de Pablo Milanés y enemigos de Silvio Rodríguez; expertos como oráculos que lo mismo sabían quién iba a ser el próximo premio Nóbel de Literatura como las intenciones secretas de Gorbachov, el último

mancebo adoptado como sobrino por el Personaje Famoso de las Alturas o el precio de la libra de café en Baracoa; solicitantes de visas temporales y definitivas; soñadores y soñadoras; hiperrealistas, abstractos y ex realistas socialistas que abjuraban de su pasado estético [...] lezamianos –en franca mayoría– virgilianos, carpenterianos, martianos y un fan de Antón Arrufat; cubanos y extranjeros; cantantes de boleros; criadores de perros de pelea; alcohólicos, siquiátricos, reumáticos y dogmáticos; traficantes de dólares; fumadores y no fumadores; y un heterosexual machista-estalinista. (Padura, 1997, pp. 143-144)

The variety and number of definitions given by the girl exceed by far the actual number of participants at the party, and consequently Conde, astonished, asks: “Dime una cosa: aquí hay como treinta personas...¿Cómo puede haber tantas cosas como me dijiste?”, Poly’s answer: “es que practican el multioficio” (Padura, 1997, p.144), suggests the presence of multiple shifting and theatrical personalities in each of the participants at the party. The name of Conde’s new guide, Poly, is a clear reference to the pluralism and polyvalence of the scene and persons Conde sees in front of him.

When analysing this description Wilkinson says that the plurality of different types of performance and taste attributed to the 30 people attending the party ironically challenges “the homogenizing tendencies of either the Marxist revolutionary project or the heterosexual orthodoxy which might see all homosexuals as the same” (2006, p. 254). I would extend Wilkinson’s definition to say that this description challenges the general idea of a homogenized Cuban identity on different levels. Many of the identity features named by Poly are, in fact, not related to the sexual, but to the political, cultural and religious spheres. I thus argue that, starting from the multiplicity of sexual performances and tastes, Padura here represents the ideological and social fragmentation taking place in Cuba. The association of many different types of identity performance in the same list implies that there are no limits between the constructs of gender and other social formations, all of them are based on appearance and performance.



This page can be read as a critique a critique of the discourse that defends the existence of an essential unique self, and a homogeneous Cuban identity. The many identity performances attributed by Poly to each of the participants prove that identity is a complex formation, composed of different layers and features that may also be in contrast with each other. Here the narration seems to come closer to a performative definition of identity, affirming that all the different performances listed are equally important and true. If every performance is true, then each one of them is a part of identity and, therefore, identity is made up of different performances. Performativity then stops being something only related to the underworld of cross-dressing and appears as a key element of every identity manifestation. Thus, with this description of the gay party in *Máscaras*, Padura expands the idea of identity performativity, moving the focus from the gender to the socio-political level. As suggested by Persephone Braham, Padura's discourse on homosexuality and transvestism, apart from being an investigation into the perception of sexuality in Cuba, is also a political metaphor for multiplicity and unconformity (2004, p. 57).

## **5 Social masquerade in Cuban society and the function of theatre**

The final part of this chapter links the idea of gender and identity performativity with Goffman's model for the dramaturgical representation of social life. Here I will use the theatrical metaphor to study the complexity and multiplicity of contemporary Cuban society. I will describe different forms of masking and unmasking of one's identity in post-1959 Cuba and I will argue that the possibility of performing one's identity and playing a role or different roles on the public stage problematizes the definition of Cuban identity and challenges any essentialist view of identity construction.

I will start by showing how Padura uses the idea of masks and theatre to reveal a sort of double morality existing in contemporary Cuba. A good example of the theatricalism ruling Cuban reality is the cross-dressing party mentioned above. The author in that passage makes a direct critique of the binary and

homogenising construction of Cuban identity and society as a whole. This episode is used by Padura as a starting point to represent the wider construction of a social masquerade in Cuba. Expanding the idea of performativity to all aspects of identity and their social manifestations, he implies that performance and transvestism are not just phenomena exclusively related to the gay subculture. The homosexual party appears as a carnival in which the whole of society is represented. In fact, performance and transvestism in Cuba are not confined to the private rooms where Cubans celebrate their marginality and sexual dissidence; on the contrary, they take control of the public space of Havana, forming the general structure of Cuban reality. In this novel Padura creates a space to represent the mimicry and metamorphism typical of Cuban society. The author, in fact, affirms that:

Es una novela de homosexuales, de máscaras, centrada en ese fenómeno del travestismo moral que se ha vivido en Cuba en este tiempo, en que las personas dicen algo y piensan otra cosa, obligadas por las circunstancias. (Padura in Epple, 1995, pp. 49-66)

Here Padura makes the thematic thread underlying the entire book clear: the mask. In *Máscaras*, in fact, Padura uses masks, cross-dressing and gender performativity as a synecdoche for a wider phenomenon: the construction of a cultural identity through social performances. The theme of the mask is clear from the title of the book and from the two quotations that Padura uses at its opening:

[...] PEDAGOGO: Es cierto. En ciudad tan envanecida como ésta, de hazañas que nunca se realizaron, de monumentos que jamás se erigieron, de virtudes que nadie practica, el sofisma es el arma por excelencia. Si alguna de las mujeres sabias te dijera que ella es fecunda autora de tragedias, no oses contradecirla; si un hombre te dice que es consumado crítico, secúndalo en su mentira. Se trata, no lo olvides, de una ciudad en la que todo el mundo quiere ser engañado. (Virgilio Piñera: *Electra Garrigó*, acto III).

Todos usamos máscaras. (Batman)

Wilkinson, when commenting on the title of the novel, lists different meanings and contexts of use for the mask, which can be applied to Padura's text: "the object placed upon our faces", "a gathering or social event where people wear disguises" that he calls a masquerade, and finally "a traditional form of theatre presentation in which the actors wear masks" (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 217). The cross-dressing party clearly represents a masquerade in its literal sense, and at the same time is a synecdoche for the moral transformism in Cuba. Instead, the construction of identity as a performative process that grounds its nature on the performance itself refers to the classical theatrical representation, where the identity of the actors is determined by the mask they wear on stage. In the Cuban social performance everyone consciously or unconsciously wears masks and takes part in a theatrical performance. Padura, throughout the novels, makes many references to masks and theatre and to the relationship between appearance and reality, to the point of questioning what reality is and defining life as nothing more than a theatre play:

El Conde pensó otra vez que estaba en medio de una representación teatral demasiado parecida a una realidad prefabricada y en la que cada cual ya tenía asignado su asiento. El gran teatro del mundo, qué disparate. La Tragedia de la Vida, más disparate todavía. ¿La vida es sueño?<sup>7</sup> (Padura, 1997, p. 170)

Thus, theatre, with its different manifestations and symbolic functions, is a predominant presence in this book. The first and most clear manifestation of theatre in the novel is the presence of theatre scenes, props and settings as the background to many key moments of the narration. For example, as already mentioned, the first meeting between Conde and Marqués takes place in a theatrical setting, that of *The Price* by Arthur Miller, and in this space, both

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<sup>7</sup> This is a clear reference to the famous Calderón de la Barca's plays *El gran teatro del mundo* and *La vida es sueño*: "¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusión, una sombra, una ficción, y el mayor bien es pequeño. ¡Que toda la vida es sueño, y los sueños, sueños son!"

characters play a kind of verbal duel. In the following meetings, the relationship between the two main characters improves significantly and loses its conflictive nuance; nevertheless, Conde in the presence of Marqués continues to feel like a character in a play. In all their meetings Mario Conde analyses the theatricalism in Marqués's gestures, behaviours and environment:

Sintió que ambos se desplazaban con la premeditación de dos actores conscientes de sus movimientos escénicos. (Padura, 1997, p. 96)

-Buenos días- apenas dijo el Conde mientras buscaba en la penumbra el sillón que le habían designado en aquella escenografía. (Padura, 1997, p. 160)

Dejó caer por tercera vez la aldaba y esperó a que se corrieran las cortinas del teatro al mundo de Alberto Marqués. (Padura, 1997, p. 217)

Another fundamental moment of the narration taking place on the theatre stage is the trial of Alberto Marqués, which I will comment on later in relation to Goffman's conception of 'theatre regions'. Finally and significantly the reconstruction of the death scene connects theatre, masks and cross-dressing. Alexis, the victim, consciously prepares his last life scene as in a theatre play, wearing a woman's red dress (pertaining to the character of Electra Garrigó) and mixing references to theatre, mythology and the Bible to construct his own last show. This character symbolically uses cross-dressing and theatre to unmask his father and represent his own truth.

To conclude, Padura confers on his fictional playwright the task of providing the clue to how to read the entire novel in theatrical terms: in the epilogue of the novel Alberto Marqués revisits Alexis's life and the story of his murder and the following investigation as a Greek tragedy:

Todo esto parecía una tragedia griega, en el mejor estilo de Sófocles, llena de equívocos, historias paralelas que comienzan veinte años antes y se cruzan definitivamente en un mismo día y personajes que no son quienes dicen que son, o que ocultan lo

que son, o han cambiado tanto que no saben ya quiénes son, y en un instante inesperado se reconocen trágicamente... Pero todos se enfrentan a un destino que los supera, los obliga y los impulsa en la acción dramática: sólo que aquí Layo mata a Edipo, o Egisto se adelanta a Orestes. (Padura, 1997, pp. 220-221)

At the end of the book Padura proposes a reinterpretation of the plot of his novel as a theatre play. The book itself then takes part in the game of masking and transvestism: *Máscaras* can be considered a theatre play masked as a novel.

### **5.1 Goffman's dramaturgical model: social acceptance and identity performances**

Theatre thus pervades the novel and manifests itself in different ways, but I consider masks, theatre and performance as also having different functions in the novel and in Padura's analysis of Cuban society and identity. In this section I will examine these different functions focusing first on the use of theatre to reflect on the mechanisms of social interaction and social acceptance, secondly to represent the social organization in Cuba and the physical and psychological separation between conforming and non-conforming identities, and finally to contest any essential reading of identity in order to reinterpret self-construction as a purely social and performative process.

To analyse the mechanism of social interaction in Cuba I will use Goffman's dramaturgical model. Ervin Goffman reinterprets social relationships and self-construction through a theatrical metaphor and affirms that, basically, in our everyday life we all play roles and wear masks. Goffman sees a connection between the kinds of acts that people perform in their daily life and theatrical performances: as on the stage, people in their everyday lives manage settings, clothing, words, non-verbal actions and their appearance to give a particular impression to others. Goffman states that the main aim of the creation of a social mask is public acceptance: individuals intentionally play a role for the purpose of managing others' impressions of them. Since the aim of every performance is to be accepted by the audience, "when the individual presents

himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the official accredited values of the society” (Goffman, 1990, p. 45):

A performance is ‘socialized’, moulded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented. (Goffman, 1990, p. 44)

If the actor succeeds, the audience will view the actor as he or she wants to be viewed. In the case of Cuban citizens, then, the performance is constructed in accordance with the revolutionary canon and the aim is to be considered a proper militant. On the public Cuban stage social actors re-propose the values of the New Man and New Woman in an attempt to be included at the front stage of the Revolution. Nevertheless, under the superficially desirable identity performed in public a plurality of different, non-conforming and multiform identities can be hidden.

Inside Goffman’s dramaturgical model there is also space for unsuccessful performances, which are performances that fail to portray a conforming or coherent image. The sociologist defines this phenomenon as embarrassment and states that, as a consequence of non-convincing performances, the actors can be excluded from full participation in society. Thus, also in this model, as in Butler’s theory of gender performativity, the result of failing to present a ‘proper’ exterior appearance and behaviour during social interaction leads to punishment and exclusion. If individuals are dramatic actors on a stage playing parts dictated by culture, when their performance does not conform to the main norms and values, the institutionalized culture “punishes or marginalizes those who fail to perform” (Butler, 1988, p. 527). The Cuban ‘inxiled’ are, then, social actors who, unable or reluctant to perform the correct role have, as a consequence, been punished and excluded from social interaction.

Goffman, in his theatrical model, uses a spatial metaphor to represent the distinction between different identity performances. He makes reference to two different and separate regions in which the self is performed: ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’. In the front stage region the actor is aware of the audience and adjusts the performance according to the specific audience. Front stage actions are visible to the audience and are part of the performance; therefore,

they need to adhere to the social conventions that have meaning to the audience. In the back stage, by contrast, performers are present but there is no audience and, therefore, here the elements and behaviours suppressed in the front stage may re-appear. Padura's representation of Cuban society seems to conform perfectly to this dramaturgical model. As explained before, the logic of the regime tends to divide and separate individuals and spaces according to their conformity with an ideal model. The official façade that is the identity presented in the front stage needs to be clean and committed to the revolutionary ideology. As a consequence, all the ambiguous or non-conforming identities are confined to performing themselves in the back stage, where the audience cannot enter. The back stage, in fact, is a space physically separated from the front stage and from the stalls; those who are in the back stage are not taking part in the performance. When a Cuban citizen acts ineffectually or is unable to sustain the assigned role, the revolutionary institutions exclude him or her from full participation in society and confine him/her to the social back stage. The back stage is, then, the space of the 'inxiled'.

In *Máscaras* this opposition between identities on stage and identities behind the scenes clearly emerges during Alberto Marqués's show trial:

Dentro habían puesto una mesa sobre el escenario, donde había quedado parte de la escenografía de Yerma, con su ambiente luctuoso, lleno de telas negras... Ellos eran cuatro, como una especie de tribunal inquisidor, [...] y le iban diciendo a la gente sus pecados y preguntándoles si estaban dispuestos a revisar su actitud en el futuro, trabajando en los lugares en que se decidiera [...] Después organizaron una especie de asamblea: los protagonistas siguieron tras la mesa, en el escenario, y la gente del grupo en las lunetas, con todas las luces encendidas... ¿Usted ha visto un teatro con luces encendidas? ¿Ha visto cómo pierde su magia y todo ese mundo creado parece falso, sin sentido? Y entonces hablaron de mí, como el principal responsable de la línea estética de aquel teatro. [...] En fin: un mal cierre de espectáculo para la función histórica de aquella tarde de 1971, donde hubo hasta aplausos y gritos de júbilo... Y

dejaron que el telón cayera sobre mi cuello... (Padura, 1997, pp. 106-109).

Significantly, this episode presents an inversion of the traditional theatre roles and spaces. During the trial, the inquisitors are on the stage while the dissident actors and playwrights are the audience. This inversion is a clever spatial metaphor by which Padura expresses his judgement on the trials and inquisitions of the *Quinquenio Gris*: by placing the judges and the tribunal on stage, in the space traditionally devoted to performance, he denounces the hypocrisy and falsity of this ideological tribunal. In fact, as Marqués affirms, with the lights on, the theatre loses its power of representation, its illusion of verisimilitude, and reveals the falsity of its set, its props and its inhabitants. Therefore this scene, on the one hand, represents the spatial and ideological division between conforming public identities and deviant hidden identities, and, on the other hand, conveys Padura's condemnation of the ideological farce staged in Cuba in the 1970s.

The opposition between a conforming front stage and a marginalised back stage is repeatedly presented in the book and, drawing on Rose's theory of power zonality, I suggest that it clearly represents the rigid hierarchy of spaces and identities structuring Cuban society. The spatial representation and opposition between the high zone of power and the low zone of the 'subordinated' appears clear in the comparison between Marqués's and Faustino's houses. As I mention above, the comparison is built on a game of contrast taking into account the thermal and chromatic quality of the two houses. Faustino's house is white and bright, full of light and colours. Being the space of the conforming identity, Faustino's house is on the 'front stage', under the spotlight. Marqués's living space is dark, cold and full of shadows because it is in the 'back stage', far from the light of the scenery.

From this description, it follows that social life is a staged drama that needs to be performed according to the codes of the dominant culture and ideology, in order to secure public acceptance and avoid marginalization. If life is theatre, the Revolution, with its panoptic view and its general surveillance, is the director of the theatre play going on in Cuban society. The use of masks and



the diffusion of masking as a social practice in Cuba can be interpreted as the result of the rigid social order and identity model promoted by the Revolution. Post-1959 Cuba is presented by Padura as a society structured on specific parameters and principles which make the distinction between desirable and undesirable behaviours unmistakable. Cuban citizens compare themselves with the ideal New Man trying to fit into the model. Therefore, throughout the novel many characters of the book are submitted to a kind of *parametración*, which is real and institutionalised in the case of Marqués and informal in the case of Alexis (who needs to fit into his father's expectations, apart from the revolutionary ones), Contreras, Manolo, Rangel and all the *central de investigación*. Also, Mario Conde is left to come to terms with his own *parametración*, which is not as harsh as that of the homosexual intellectuals, but which in any case forces him to question his own position in society.

Padura seems to suggest that this idealized identity model makes it virtually impossible for Cuban citizens to comply with revolutionary expectations. Therefore, to avoid the risk of exclusion and social marginalization, Cubans are forced to wear masks and to perform desirable identity behaviours:

Homosexuales que aparentan no serlo, resentidos que sonríen al mal tiempo, brujeros con manuales de marxismo bajo el brazo, oportunistas feroces vestidos de mansos corderos, apáticos ideólogos con un utilísimo carnet en el bolsillo: en fin, el más abigarrado carnaval en un país que muchas veces ha debido renunciar a sus carnavales... (Padura, 1997, p. 166)

Paradoxically, then, the social masquerade is a direct consequence of the rigid identity model and of the mechanism of control established by the Revolution. As Denis Jorge Berenschot reminds us, in the 60s Castro's government put in place both a legal and moral code to ensure the performance of a correct identity model. The Cuban leaders instituted several organizations (the *Comités de Defensa de la Revolución* (CDR), the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* (FMC), the *Juventud Comunista*) to watch and control social behaviour in order to preserve the established identity canon (Berenschot, 2005, p. 39). These organizations contributed to the creation of a climate of rigid state surveillance that, as in the idea of the panopticon, was based on the

constant feeling of being controlled and observed: no one, included the higher spheres, as Faustino shows in the novel, felt safe from this mechanism of surveillance. As Foucault reminds us, this system works by itself:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. (Foucault, 1980, pp. 154-155)

The most important point of this system is that both the inspectors and the persons being inspected should always feel under inspection. This constant feeling of being watched, of being in the 'front stage' under the spotlight, is what enacts the performance transforming moral transvestism into an endemic phenomenon in Cuba.

If life in Cuba is a theatre play it can have different features: it can be a farce for someone like Faustino and a tragedy for others such as Marqués and Alexis, but, in any case, each of the characters in the Cuban theatre plays a specific role and performs his/her story. Masks can be worn for different reasons and can acquire different meanings. In Padura's novel, many characters wear different kinds of masks according to the specific situation or social event. As previously explained, in Cuban revolutionary society masks have mainly been used to disguise and conceal identity performances which were classified by official discourse as inadequate or unacceptable. The first and traditional function of the mask is, effectively, to cover and disguise: as in the case of the murderer Faustino Arayán, who over several decades pretended to be a faithful revolutionary obtaining political power and becoming a rich and powerful state officer. However, more importantly for this study, masks can be used to construct identity and reveal its multiplicity and plasticity, as the novel shows in the case of transvestitism.

If, as claimed by the dramaturgical model of social interaction, social life is a performance and identity is a social production, then it follows that identity is essentially a performance. This model proposes an anti-essentialist approach to identity construction, suggesting that there is no inner essence behind the

mask or before the performance, and that instead the sense of the self arises as a result of the different roles we constantly perform in everyday life. Thus, the dramaturgical model confers a positive function on the mask: the constitution of one's identity. Goffman points out that the original function of the mask in classical Greek theatre was to identify a character, a persona:

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves. (Park, quoted in Goffman, 1990, p. 30)

Here Goffman is arguing that masks and roles do not conceal the 'true person', on the contrary, they are precisely what makes us persons. We are constantly playing different parts but those parts constitute the different aspects of our identities:

In the end our conception of the role becomes second nature and an integral part of our personality. We come into the world as individuals, achieve a character, and become persons. (Robert Erza Park, quoted in Goffman, p. 30).

This model, considering identity as a performance or a representation that takes place in a social space, denies essentialism and moves the focus onto the process of construction and representation of identities. If we become social persons through social performance and representation, it follows that there is no point in asking what is behind the mask or even in assuming that there is something before performance. Therefore, the classical distinction between appearance and reality, inner identity and outer manifestation, ceases to have any significance.

Goffman supports both Butler's view of gender and identity as performative and Hall's definition of the social and unfinished character of cultural identity at the same time. In line with Butler's idea of performativity as the basis of identity construction, Goffman states that there are no true or false identities, only convincing or unconvincing performances. Performance is fundamental

for taking part in social life and, at the same time, is influenced and directed by the social context. As explained above, the aim of each performance is social acceptance, consequently if the performance is convincing the person will receive social approval and validation and a sense of identity will derive from this social validation:

The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited. (Goffman, 1990, p. 245)

Goffman here seems to echo Hall when he affirms that cultural identities are not something which already exist, transcending place, time, history and culture (Hall, 1990, p.225). On the contrary, they are continuous productions strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context. Consequently, if the context, the scene or the environmental factors change, identity will change as well, shifting position and assuming different features. Goffman's dramaturgical model, then, considers identity construction as a dynamic, social and performative process. For Goffman, the feeling of having a unified identity from birth to death is a social construction: through a series of repeated performances we construct a coherent character for ourselves.

This process of performing as self-construction has its highest realization in transvestism. Transvestism makes the link between identity and performance clear, using the body as a stage to represent different identities. In the case of cross-dressing, then, the function of the mask is no longer to hide but to expose the multiple possibilities of each identity. According to Butler the transvestite challenges the distinction between appearance and reality. If the reality of gender and identity is constituted by the performance itself, then the gender of the transvestite is as real as anyone whose performance conforms to social expectations (Butler, 1988, p. 527). For instance, drag queens are usually taken as imitating femininity, but, according to Butler, so called 'real women' perform gender as much as drags do. The subversive potential of cross-dressing resides precisely in its capacity to undermine the distinction

between gender and sex and expose the cultural nature of both. Masculinity and femininity are continually and performatively constructed in society, just like any other aspect of identity. Thus, for both Butler and Goffman, there is nothing outside of performance and we become what we repeatedly perform.

In this book, Padura explores the social and performative process of identity construction. Interpreting public identity performances as social masks, he undermines the essentialist model and reveals the arbitrariness of the categories forming identity. The possibility of successfully performing a specific desirable identity questions the existence of an essential and unchangeable self and, instead, paves the way to a more plural definition of identity. Thus, as Tseëlon suggests, in Padura's novel, through a dialectic of revealing and concealing, the mask serves a critical function: it questions the essentiality of identity, the truth of identity, the stability of identity categories and calls attention to the relationship between the supposed identity and its outward manifestation (Tseëlon, 2001, p. 3). Masking disrupts the binary identity model and challenges the dichotomy between self and other, between true and false identity, between appearance and essence.

In *Máscaras*, theatre and masking become archetypical of Cuban social dynamics. Padura confers on masks, theatre (and, therefore, literature) the ability to interpret Cuban society and identity: "el teatro no es un juego, sino una realidad verdadera, más verdadera que la misma realidad" (Padura, 1997, p. 165). The Mask thus recovers the original meaning that it had in the classical theatrical tradition of Greece and Rome: to identify a character, a *persona*. As suggested by the title of the novel, Padura uses the classical notion of the mask to reveal the complexity of the identity of his characters, and the fluidity and multidimensionality of contemporary Cubanness.

## 6 Conclusion

*Máscaras* is the novel in which Padura expresses most clearly his critique of the homogenizing and excluding tendencies influencing the revolutionary identity model, especially in the 60s and 70s. As shown in this analysis, the

text uses the symbolic values of mask, theatre and performativity to question the essentiality and stability of identity, in its many aspects, and exposes the incongruities of any attempt to regulate, fix or control identity performances. In this chapter, theatre and performances have been used as conceptual tools to describe the complex composition of Cuban identity and society: from the social organization of spaces to the cultural processes informing the construction of gender. Starting from the sexual and gender aspects, I have introduced the concept of identity performance and performativity, then I have combined Butler's theories with Goffman's dramaturgical model of social interaction in order to read both identity production and Cuban society in terms of a theatrical performance. These theories have the ability to expose the social mechanisms at the basis of any form of identity construction and representation; both Butler and Goffman, in fact, see identity as cultural not natural and as incomplete and 'in process'. Both challenge the distinction between being and performing, arguing that there is no other way to be than to perform oneself and both reject any discourse on essentialism or authenticity, which still influences the perception of identity. Finally, they all assume the possibility of shaping or re-shaping identity in different ways and imply that this re-formulation is the result of modifications and re-assessments of cultural and social elements. Precisely as a script or a play which can be interpreted and represented in different ways, identity production has been presented as a social process constantly performed in public space and continuously changing under the influence of environmental factors.

Through this dramaturgical re-interpretation of public life and space in Cuba, I have shown how Padura exposes the fallacy of the categories forming the revolutionary identity model: if identity is bounded to context and culture, any social, political or environmental change automatically affects the construction of identity, producing different results. Performativity thus re-interprets identity construction as a continuous repetition of performative acts, which is invariably open ended and subject to re-assessment and changes.

Considering self-construction in theatrical terms, as a performance, paves the way to a more plural definition of identity and Cubanness. As the cross-dressing party shows, different positions and representations of self-identity

and otherness based on gender, sexual, political, religious or cultural divisions coexist in Padura's interpretation of post-Soviet Cubanness. These different representations of Cubanness are often confused, ambiguous, conflicting and fragmented. Therefore, *Máscaras* clearly marks the distance from the Cuban imperative towards uniformity and homogeneity of identity performances, representing, instead, national identity as inevitably impure, heterogeneous and hybrid.





## Chapter 6

### Imagination, Displacement and Exiled Identities in *Paisaje de otoño*

#### 1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the connection between spatiality and identity performance, exploring the role of physical and symbolic space in Padura's representation of contemporary Cubanness. The strong relationship between space and identity has been explored in the previous chapters, pointing out how the author often uses geographical images and spatial metaphors to describe the psychological states of his characters and discuss the social situation of contemporary Cuba. The preceding chapter, for instance, has shown how Padura, in *Máscaras*, through the skilful use of space representation, illustrates the opposition between acceptable and unacceptable identities and describes the marginal space reserved for non-conforming identities. In this chapter I will focus on the socio-psychological condition and spatial 'imagination' of another kind of non-conforming identity: that of Cubans living in exile. I will explore the representation of exilic identities, showing how in their case physical displacement affects identity performance. Through reference to the exile experience I will investigate how Padura uses spatial metaphors and spatial abstractions to express the feeling of identity dislocation and uprootedness experienced by Cubans living inside and outside the island. The analysis of spatiality in *Paisaje de otoño* is focused on different and conflicting imaginary representations of Cuba and Miami from both inside and outside the island. My aim is to compare these different imagined spaces and show that they can assume utopian or dystopian features, depending on the perspective of the different characters. Comparing these different spatial imaginative constructions I will explain how Cubans living on both coasts of

the Mexican gulf deal with physical absence, material deprivation and emotional loss.

The central questions this chapter will address are: a) how does Padura re-configure the spatial dimension in *Paisaje de otoño* to examine the identity crisis of Cuban citizens in the late 1980s and 1990s? b) how important is the feeling of being Cuban and pertaining to the Cuban soil to the revolutionary idea of national identity and how does the exile experience fit into this model of nationality? c) to what extent does the exile perspective lead to a re-interpretation of the notions of *cubanía* and Cuban identity as something changeable and fluid?

To answer these questions this chapter firstly briefly illustrates the relationship between spatial belonging and identity, to then focus on the connection between these two elements in the construction of the Cuban nation. I will make reference to Anderson's definition of a nation as an imagined political community (1983, p. 6) and combine it with Said's concept of imagined geographies (1985) to stress the importance of the symbolic component in the construction of nations and nationalities. Imagination, in general, and geographical imagination, more specifically, is central to the dialogical composition and reproduction of cultural and national narratives and, in contemporary Cuba, it became a field for negotiation and confrontation between social agents and ideologies. Using Anderson's and Said's arguments, I will analyse how the same theories can be used to support essentialist and non-essentialist approaches to national identity. My aim will be to confront different Cuban national imaginaries and identity images as they appear in Padura's novel, in order to stress how the author exposes the limits of an essentialist identity model and proposes, instead, a wider and more complex definition of Cubanness which includes the exile community.

Secondly I will focus on *Paisaje de otoño*, exploring how the novel introduces the exile perspective into Padura's representation of Cuban identity. As mentioned in chapter 2, exile is a crucial point of tension in the Cuban discourse on nationality. The idea of considering exiled citizens as part of the Cuban nation is still highly controversial in Cuba and the official position towards the exile community in general, and the Miami community in particular,

is quite complex. There is a huge discrepancy between the official discourse and everyday practice: even though, as explained in chapter 2, the official discourse against exiles has been mitigated in recent years, there is still some resistance to considering the exiles as full Cuban citizens and they are often still stigmatized as different. In practice, it is commonly recognised that the exile community plays an important role in many aspects of Cuban life. Clear examples are the *remisas* arriving from the United States, sent by citizens who have emigrated to their families in Cuba. These goods and monetary contributions are an important part of Cuban life and in a certain way support the Cuban economy.

Thirdly I will focus my analysis on significant spatial images in the novel and on the construction of different imaginary representations of Cuba and Miami. My aim is to compare these different mental constructions and bring together the elements that characterise the mental condition of Cubans living on and outside the island. I will consider Padura's representation of Cuba and Miami as two parallel spaces that are at the same time opposed and complementary, different but similar. I will first look at the imaginary construction of Miami, made by Cubans seeking to escape from the island, to then show how this utopian construction can transform itself into a dystopia for the Cuban émigrés. Finally I will show how, as a result of a difficult exile experience, the émigrés in Miami often transform Cuba into a kind of utopia: a blurred sentimental realm existing only in their memories. Cuba and Miami, then, appear to be both utopian and dystopian places according to the specific perspective of the different characters. In Padura's representation of the contemporary Cuban condition, displacement, fragmentation, existential void, and nostalgia are common feelings. They are the result of a deep historical trauma and, as such, they are shared by Cubans living inside and outside Cuba.

Finally, I will conclude by pointing out how Padura in *Paisaje de otoño* presents the construction of *cubanía* and Cuban identity as a complex and continuous process that crosses geographical borders to involve people living in and outside the island, because, as the author himself says, “una Cuba diferente, nueva —como decía Martí, con todo y para el bien de todos— hay que hacerla

también con los cubanos que viven en el exilio”. (Padura interviewed by Clark, 2000)

## **2 The theoretical framework**

As previously stated, the main object of this thesis is to show how Padura contests the idea of one centralized Cuban nation and one homogeneous Cuban identity as proposed by the official discourse. This chapter contributes to the thesis's hypothesis by highlighting the importance of the 'Cuban nation in exile' for a comprehensive definition of Cuban identity. Taking into account the traditional revolutionary discourse on the Cuban nation, this chapter will move towards a wider definition of Cuban identity that recognises the existence of alternative expressions of national identity outside the Cuban territory. Consequently, the theoretical framework of this chapter deals with two basic concepts: exile and national identity.

### **2.1 Terminology related to exile**

Before starting my discussion of Cuban national identity and the different approaches to exile, from both inside and outside the island, it is necessary to set out the terms of the discussion. Certainly, terms related to exile and national displacement are generally difficult to define; nonetheless, drawing from previous studies, I will try to establish my definition of these terms. In his work titled *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, Edward Said affirms:

Although it is true that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile, some distinctions can be made among exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés. Exile originated in the age-old practice of banishment. Once banished, the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider. (Said, 2001, p. 181)

The term exile thus originally had a strong political connotation. It was, in the beginning, a banishment for political reasons and was perceived as a harsh

condemnation. Said also clarifies other terms often used as synonymous of exile such as expatriates and émigrés:

Expatriates voluntarily live in an alien country, usually for personal or social reasons. [...] Expatriates may share in the solitude and estrangement of exile, but they do not suffer under its rigid proscriptions. [...] Technically, an émigré is anyone who emigrates to a new country. Choice in the matter is certainly a possibility. (Said, 2011, p. 181)

Therefore the idea of exile is usually associated with a forced separation from one's native country, an expulsion from home, and with the impossibility of returning, and it usually has a political connotation, while the terms immigrant, emigrant, émigré associate emigration with a voluntary choice. Sophia McClennen (2004, p. 19) suggests that the usual distinction between exiles and immigrants/emigrants can be based on the political or economic reasons for leaving the birth place. The political reasons determining the exile condition are also what normally determine the impossibility of returning from exile, unless the political conditions of the birth country change.

In the Cuban case, the labels and definitions used for the people who leave the country are even more varied and complicated. Cubans have left and continue to leave their island for several different reasons and in several different waves of migration over time. It is often difficult to identify a unique reason for the departure; it is normally rather a conglomerate of different impulses. Ambrosio Fornet said in relation to this that: "today the Cuban diaspora is a hybrid of exile and emigration, to which we would have to add unclassified displacements, from the sociological point of view" (2002, p.92). This unclassified percentage represents a wide section and nowadays it is difficult to say how many Cubans leave the island for political reasons, how many leave for economic reasons, how many go into exile for personal reasons and how many do so for a mixture of these. Due to the complexity of the Cuban exile and the difficulties of determining a single reason for fleeing, in my work, when referring to the Cuban citizens who left the island, I will use the terms exile, émigré, displaced person, and diaspora interchangeably. My use of these terms disregards the specific reason that prompted a person to

leave, and the voluntary or involuntary nature of the departure. My study is focused more on the act of leaving the native soil, on the movement itself and on the consequences that this has on the displaced person and on the community remaining on the island.

## **2.2 Different approaches to Cuban national identity**

In Chapter 1, national identity was defined as an imagined social production constructed through representation (Hall, 1990, p. 222; Anderson, 1983, p.6). Here, combining Anderson's definition of the nation as an imagined community (1983) with Said's concept of imagined geographies (1985), I will propose two different approaches to Cuban national identity. The main features of Anderson's conception of the nation are its ability to create a feeling of communality, its limitedness and its cultural roots. Each member of a nation feels a sense of comradeship with the other members, he/she participates in and shares a collective representation of the nation based on common cultural roots and imagined spatial boundaries. As stated in chapter 1, according to Anderson, the cultural and imaginative component is central to the construction of national feeling: "Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural system that preceded it" (1983, p. 12). Furthermore, each nation identifies itself with a specific territorial image and, as suggested by Said, this imaginative spatial representation sets the boundaries between the homeland and the 'barbarian territories'. Starting from these theories and definitions of national identity, this section will combine Anderson's and Said's arguments and show how both these theories can be used to sustain essentialist and anti-essentialist models of national identity and how both identity approaches can be applied to the Cuban case.

Authoritarian and hegemonic discourses, which sustain an essentialist model of the nation, are often based on the idea of shared cultural roots and organized according to a logic of exclusion that reinterprets the geographical boundaries of a country as watersheds which divide the national community from 'the Other'. This kind of approach defines national identity as a sort of

collective 'one true self' which people with a shared history and culture hold in common (Hall, 1990, p. 223). Supposedly, historical and cultural roots provide stable and unchanging frames of reference for the imaginative representation of the nation and allow people to overcome their differences and define themselves as 'one population'. As explained in chapter 1 in reference to Said's theories on the investment of space with figurative values, the construction of a national image is not a neutral or objective representation. Because of their imaginative character, nations and national identities can be influenced by powerful public actors which can institutionalize and reproduce a specific national image. To a certain extent this is what happened in Cuba in the aftermath of the Revolution when the government shaped a new national imaginary. As discussed in chapter 2, from the 1960s on the Cuban official discourse adopted an essentialist approach to national identity, placing a great deal of emphasis on the idea of historical and geographical belonging and identifying, on the one hand, nation and *patria* with the Revolution and, on the other hand, the representation of the nation through its geographical territory. Imaginative geographies and histories thus acquire a central position in the revolutionary discourse on the Cuban nation. As explained before, for a long time Cubanness has been equated to one's degree of commitment to the revolutionary project: being Cuban meant principally being willing to share and take part in revolutionary history and to remain within the territory of the island. Considering the common association of national identity with national soil, it is easy to deduce why the exiled citizens have for decades been excluded from institutional representations of Cuban national identity. From the revolutionary perspective, once they left the island, the exiled refused to contribute to the Cuban national project and to be part of the national body: as Duany reminds us, "from the viewpoint of the Cuban government, those who left 'abandoned' their country and ceased being part of the 'imagined community'" (2000, p.34). However, imagined communities and imaginative geographies have also been applied to sustain anti-essentialist representations of national identity. The very idea that a national image is constructed by its population and based on cultural elements and historical and geographical abstractions seems to suggest that the national discourse can be disengaged from a logic of territorial

divisions and spatial origins. The Cuban diaspora used the same discursive elements identified by Anderson and Said to support a reinterpretation of Cubanness in anti-essentialist terms. The diaspora, in fact, problematises the construction of national identity, breaking the traditional link between spatial location and the creation of a national consciousness. Leveraging the importance of the cultural elements posited by Anderson at the bases of national construction and nationalism, exiles deconstruct the traditional image of nationhood to affirm that Cubanness can exist and emerge outside the territory of the island. In their view, cultural belonging is not linked to a specific space or time; it crosses geographical boundaries and allows different elements to be incorporated into the idea of the nation. Consequently, many scholars (Rivero, Fernández, Pérez-Firmat, Behar, Duany) redefine the construction of Cubanness and national identity as a transnational process rooted not in a geographical but in a cultural space. They claim that imaginative geographies can project an idea of a wider and more fluid national space, which does not necessarily correspond to institutional borders. Since, as stated by Said, the traditional configuration of a nation (and its geography as well) is determined according to a logic of power that aims at excluding alternatives and defining outsiders (and by contrast insiders), it follows that the definition of a national character is less natural than expected and responds to social practices and historico-political processes: “the nation and national identity have varied in time and in space. Geography does not locate or contain all that is national” (Fernández, 2000, p.8). The imaginative limits of a nation, then, can be constantly re-discussed and re-positioned according to different necessities.

On the basis of this argument, the diaspora proposes a reinterpretation of Cuban national identity based on a different and wider geographical imagination. As Fernández suggests, the terms of a discourse on national identity need to be redefined, taking into account different perspectives and social phenomena. The construction of Cubanness has to be considered as much transnational as internal. In short, the idea of Cuban national identity resulting from this transnational process is fluid, ‘amphibian’, permeable: “its character is more elusive and malleable than fixed and permanent”



(Fernández, 2000, p. 8). In this non-essentialist approach to Cuban identity, then, imaginative geographies are still used to create a sense of collective identity and belonging, the difference is that in this case the Other is not everyone who lives outside the Cuban territory (including Cuban émigrés); the definition of otherness is not based on geographical location but on cultural background.

Adopting Said's approach, the following sections of this chapter will link spatial organization and the 'poetics of space'<sup>1</sup> with identity definition. As explained in greater detail in chapter 1, to change any exclusive and reductive definition of identity and alterity, it is necessary to rethink the spatialities which give both material and symbolic structure to those definitions. Therefore, in my reading of Padura's novel, I will consider imaginative geography and spatiality as a dynamic and unfixed category which disrupts any binary logic of inclusions and exclusions, and rethinks national communities as open-ended.

### **3 Spatial images in *Paisaje de otoño*: isolation, immobility and frustration inside Cuba**

As stated above, this chapter analyses the link between *cubanía* and spatial belonging in *Paisaje de otoño*, which is the final novel of Padura's tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones*. The story is set in Havana in the autumn of 1989. Lieutenant Mario Conde, deeply affected by the scandals inside the police force (echoing the Ochoa case) and the unfair dismissal of his boss, Major Antonio Rangel, decides to quit his job as a policeman to follow his first passion: writing. But his new boss, Colonel Alberto Molina, does not immediately accept Conde's resignation and instead imposes new conditions. He will sign Conde's release from the police if the detective will solve one last difficult case: the murder of an exiled Cuban citizen. The victim, Miguel

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<sup>1</sup> "Space acquires emotional and even rational sense by a kind of poetic process, whereby the vacant or anonymous reaches of distance are converted into meaning for us here" (Said, 1985, p. 55).

Forcade Mier, had returned to the island for the first time in years, but his journey ended badly: he was killed, his head bashed in and his penis and testicles cut off; his brutally mutilated body washed up on a Havana beach. Forcade was once a high officer responsible for confiscating art works from the bourgeoisie fleeing Cuba after the Revolution, which means that many valuable goods went through his hands, including a Matisse painting titled *Paisaje de otoño*. The murder seems at first sight to be politically motivated, or else revenge for something that happened decades earlier, when Forcade was still living on the island. Reality will prove to be different: against the odds, Forcade's murder is a crime of passion. Nevertheless, the investigation into the upper echelons of Cuban institutions, the conversations with the corrupt characters previously working for the Provincial Office for Expropriated Property and the final discovery of the murderer reinforce the deep cynicism and disillusion experienced by Mario Conde. In this book the character completes his process of maturation: he is turning 36 years old and he has to deal with a mid-life crisis which will lead him to a peak level of cynicism and scepticism.

As anticipated, in my reading of this novel I will focus on the way in which Padura introduces the controversial element of exile into his representation of Cuban identity. Once I have established the terms and positions involved in the discussion of Cuban national identity, I investigate how in Padura's novel the relation between imaginative geographies, physical location and identity representation is reinterpreted from a new, wider perspective. My hypothesis is that, in *Paisaje de otoño*, the spatial perception of the characters is modified and altered to represent different manifestations of the identity crisis which affects Padura's generation. I therefore focus my analysis on significant spatial images and on the construction of imaginary spaces, which provide a metaphorical representation of the stagnation, disruption and frustration experienced by the characters inside and outside the island. The study of spatiality in the novel will be used as a starting point to compare the way in which the identity crisis continues to affect both Cuban residents and exiles, on an emotional and psychological level. Identity displacement, the feeling of alienation and the loss of cultural points of reference is thus what characterises

the life experience of the members of Padura's generation at the end of 1989, regardless of their current geographical location. Paradoxically, then, in *Paisaje de otoño*, identity crisis and historical trauma is what bridges the experience of exiled and non-exiled Cubans, constituting what can be defined as the peculiar Cuban condition at the end of the Soviet era.

I will begin my analysis of the spatiality in *Paisaje de otoño* by focusing on some spatial images that enhance the feeling of isolation, stagnation and immobility perceived inside the Cuban island. As I state in chapter 1 and above, according to Anderson, one of the main characteristics of the image of a nation is its limitedness: "the nation is always imagined as limited" (1983, p. 7). Boundaries delimit the national territory and mentally mark the distinction between what pertains to the imagined nation and what is outside. That is why, in its attempt to create a homogeneous idea of Cubanness, the Revolution endeavoured to make national identity and culture correspond to the island territory. Thanks to its insularity, the boundaries of the Cuban nation seem to be even clearer and the physical borders acquire a stronger symbolic value in the official imaginary of the nation and national identity. For instance, exiled citizens have been considered for many years as *traidores* and labelled as *gusanos*, *escoria*, *basura*, simply and precisely because they decided to leave the national territory. Taking into account this condition of insularity and the consequent feeling of isolation (exacerbated by the embargo imposed by the US), Cuba is described in *Paisaje de otoño* as a place that exists by itself, which is closed in on itself and, at the same time, is ideologically and physically limited by the sea. Thus, insularity in *Paisaje de otoño* is used to represent both the ideological and physical isolation of Cuba and its current socio-political condition.

The sea has an important symbolic value in this book; it is both a physical limit and a psychological barrier. Throughout the tetralogy, the sea is never perceived as a means of communication, its role is not to connect Cuba with the other coast, but to separate the two sides. Significantly, in this novel the exiled victim, Miguel Forcade, was obsessed with and terribly scared of the sea. The ocean is thus presented as a dangerous element, a frontier which it is impossible, or at least exceptionally difficult, to overcome:

Sí, el mar tenía que ver con aquella historia: el mar por el cual Miguel hubiera huido, con su botín probable, casi seguro, de no haber tenido un miedo irrefrenable al mismo océano donde había sido arrojado, como metáfora póstuma de una fobia que lo puso al borde de la ruina. (Padura, 1998, p. 102)

Once killed, the body of the victim is thrown into the sea and is washed up on the Cuban coast by the waves of the ocean. Paradoxically, Miguel Forcade, who refused to leave the island by sea, is washed up on the Cuban shore, exactly like many other Cuban exiles who tried to leave the island and were stopped by the strength of the sea:

Un mar que en treinta años se había cobrado tantas vidas y que vomitó, quizá repugnado, el cadáver de Miguel Forcade. (Padura, 1998, p. 102)

The representation of the sea as an insurmountable boundary, which protects the island and entraps its citizens, and as the limit behind which Cubans cast their dreams and hopes is also present in other books; in *Vientos de cuaresma*, for instance, Padura describes Conde's peculiar love-hate relationship with the sea:

El mar [...] siempre provocaba una fascinación magnética en el espíritu de Mario Conde [...] como si quisiera ver algo más allá de aquel límite engañoso, que parecía ser la linde última de todas las posibilidades. Sentado, frente a la costa, el Conde volvía a pensar en la rara perfección del mundo, que dividía sus espacios para hacer más compleja y cabal la vida y, a la vez, separar a los hombres, y hasta a sus pensamientos. (Padura, 2001, pp. 115-116)

In *Vientos de cuaresma*, Padura introduces the sea as an element of disruption, as a line that divides people with different ideologies, ways of thinking and possibilities. The same idea of the sea as an element of separation between those who live on the island and those who live outside is reaffirmed in *Adiós, Hemingway*. In this novel the spatial opposition between inside and outside is charged with a stronger symbolic value: the sea here

represents the limit against which all the illusions and hopes in a new world and a new future have crashed:

Conde miró hacia el mar, infinito, empeñado en abrir distancias entre los hombres y sus mejores recuerdos, y observó el agresivo lecho de rocas, contra el cual podían estrellarse todas las ilusiones y dolores de un hombre. (Padura, 2006, p. 190)

In *Paisaje de otoño* the presence of the sea is directly connected with issues of migration and exile. The exile characters are associated in one way or another with the sea. The ocean is clearly represented as an element of rupture that not only divides people with different ideologies pertaining to two different nations, but also separates people born in the same country, pertaining to the same culture and to the same family:

El océano que también abrió su abismo entre Miriam y Fermín, en la isla, y Miguel en la península de Florida. (Padura, 1998, p. 102)

The sea, working as a barrier or boundary, actually reinforces the imaginary representation of the Cuban nation as a closed space, clearly separated from what is beyond the sea, on a physical, ideological and emotional level. The symbolism of the sea is thus a first example of the metaphoric value that the spatial features acquire in *Paisaje de otoño*. In fact, in this novel the topography of the island, the natural elements and the cityscapes propose a physical representation of both the emotional world of the protagonist and the social-historical condition of the Cuban population.

Apart from the natural elements, the urban space in this novel is also charged with symbolic meanings. Hence, the second symbolic spatial image I am going to focus on is the description that Padura makes of a famous road in Havana: *La Rampa*, which is a steep slope leading to the sea. As in *La neblina del ayer*, while walking in the city, and more precisely on *La Rampa*, Conde presents this space as a metaphor for his life and his generational experience and, to a certain extent, also for the trajectory of the Revolution. Starting from the description of the urban space, Padura indulges in a comparison between the present aspect of *La Rampa* in 1989 and the characteristics of the same space

recalled in Conde's memory. The author then proposes a double representation of the same place: the first is the physical description of the real city-space lying in front of the eyes of the protagonist; the second image is an imagined reconstruction of *La Rampa*, based on the memories and recollections of the protagonist Mario Conde. As explained in chapter 4, here again the superimposition of two images of a specific urban space provides a testimony to the historical and social changes experienced by Padura's generation. As mentioned above, in the late 60s and 70s the Revolution imposed repressive measures and established criteria of conformity and homogeneity of appearance and behaviours, conditioning fashion, tastes and culture; the author, thus, uses the images of *La Rampa* to represent the effects that these restrictive policies and the purges of the 1970s had on his generation:

Aquel plano inclinado por el cual parecían rodar todos los ríos de los nuevos tiempos: incluso los primeros rápidos de intolerancia, [...] cuando se desataron las cacerías de mancebos emprendidas por las hordas de la corrección política-ideológica, armadas de tijeras dispuestas a devorar cualquier cabello que cayera más debajo de las orejas [...] para exorcizar una perniciosa penetración cultural, liderada por cuatro ingleses peludos [...] La política y el pelo, la conciencia y la moda, la ideología y el uso del culo, los Beatles y la decadencia burguesa, y al fin del camino las unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción con sus rigores casi carcelarios como correctivo formador del hombre nuevo (Padura, 1998, p. 68).

The description of the *Rampa*, with its peculiar spatial and social features, is an allegory for Conde's personal and generational maturation. The character stresses that the topography of this slope forces people into constant movement to reach the top or to descend to the sea. This constant attempt to reach the top and the consequent inevitable descent spatially represents Conde's growing process, made of an endless chain of illusions and disillusion.

Subir o bajar: ésa fue siempre la cuestión. Porque bajar y subir, subir y bajar la Rampa había sido la primera experiencia extraterritorial del Conde y sus amigos. [...] subir y bajar, o bajar y subir aquella pendiente luminosa que nacía -o moría- en el mar, decretó para ellos el fin de la niñez y el inicio de la adolescencia. [...] Fue como un segundo bautismo aquel acto lleno de significados del ascenso y el descenso por esa calle que era como la vida. (Padura, 1998, p. 67)

*La Rampa*, besides being a metaphor for the personal trajectory of Conde's life, also spatially reflects Cuban socio-political evolution. Wilkinson, in his analysis of this passage, affirms that the individual experience of the protagonist functions as an allegory for the collective experience of the population (2006, p. 266). Conde and his friends at first trusted the revolutionary promises and accepted the purges of the 70s, the limitations and the shortages, as the price they needed to pay to reach a perfect future. In the same way, the Cuban system accepted the cultural values, the economic models and the political ideology that emanated from the Soviet Union, because the regime was convinced that this was the road to progress. However, the crisis of the Soviet bloc destroyed both the life project of Conde and his friends and the collective socio-political project of the Revolution, forcing both the state and the population to go backwards and to begin the construction of a new life from scratch (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 266). *La Rampa*, then, interprets both the revolutionary struggle to escape underdevelopment and the corruption of the societal project, in favour of the individual attempts at social climbing carried out by ambitious officers such as Miguel Forcade:

En la evocación de aquella inocencia compacta de su propio florecimiento a la vida, el policía en funciones creyó encontrar algunas causas remotas de posteriores desengaños y frustraciones: la realidad no había resultado una cuestión de caprichos o voluntarios ascensos y descensos, [...] sino una lucha por subir y no bajar, por subir y seguir subiendo, por subir y quedarse arriba [...] con una filosofía trepadora de la cual ellos habían sido excluidos, definitivamente relegados [...] y condenados todos –o casi todos- al eterno ejercicio de Sísifo:

subir para tener que bajar, bajar para tener que subir, sabiendo que nunca se quedaría arriba, cada vez más viejos y más cansados. (Padura, 1998, p. 69)

Wilkinson suggests that the mythological reference to Sisyphus completes and clarifies the socio-political meaning of the spatial image of *La Rampa* (2006, p. 266). According to Greek mythology, Sisyphus was known to be a clever man who betrayed and entrapped different gods and divinities. As a punishment for his *hubris*, Sisyphus was condemned to push a boulder up a steep hill, which rolls back down the hill when he is about to reach the top, forcing Sisyphus to begin again. The same kind of destiny, in Padura's view, characterizes the trajectory of the Cuban Revolution. The difficult Cuban rise towards the perfect equalitarian and collectivist society was interrupted abruptly in the late 1980s and 1990s by the crisis of the Soviet bloc and the following serious economic recession. Wilkinson, interpreting Padura's intention, correctly defines contemporary Cuba as a Sisyphus struggling to reach the top but constantly forced to go back and start its climbing again (2006, p. 264).

While walking on *La Rampa* in 1989 Conde realises that he is a Sisyphus as well. His life has been a pointless struggle to reach the top of a mountain but, despite his efforts and after accepting all the measures aimed at reinforcing the Soviet model of life, he never reached the top. On the contrary, when it was the moment for him to achieve his personal goals and fulfilment, he was pushed back to the bottom of the hill, compelled to reshape his life and start his rise again. The consequence of this unexpected descent is the same feeling of frustration and uselessness epitomized by Sisyphus. Padura, then, uses this mythological image to express the absurdity of Conde's condition and his existentialist approach to life which seems to have started before the *Período Especial* and which goes beyond it. Albert Camus, in his 1942 essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, sees Sisyphus as personifying the absurdity of human life. In the essay, Camus introduces his philosophy of the absurd, reinterpreting human life as a futile search for meaning, unity, and clarity in an unintelligible world where eternal truths or values do not exist. The same incoherence and confusion is experienced by Conde and his generation; in



1989 they found themselves in an unintelligible world where their values and beliefs had become meaningless.

Through the description of *La Rampa*, the reference to the myth of Sisyphus, and the symbolic value of these images, Padura illustrates the peculiarities of life in Cuba at the end of the Soviet era. The Cuba represented by Padura in this book seems a distorted reality in which the categories of space and time function in a different way: Cubans are stuck in an atemporal limbo and trapped in a circular space. That is why, just like Sisyphus, they always end up looking back on themselves, to their past and to the moment when their path twisted abruptly. The characters living on the island are constantly forced to go back and start over. They are not really moving forward, they are just going round, reaching the top just to come back to the bottom<sup>2</sup>. According to Wilkinson the Cubans on the island suffer a particular psychological pathology called anamnesis. Anamnesis, in psychoanalysis, is defined as “the compulsive or incessant re-encounter with a past trauma: not as a recovery of an original lost experience but rather as a recapitulation of an unforgettable one” (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 268). In the last section of this chapter I will go back to the idea of anamnesis proposed by Wilkinson and I will expand its application, suggesting that the Cubans who suffer from anamnesis are not just those living on the island but also the Cubans in exile. Padura’s literature presents the constant recovery of a past trauma as a characteristic of the Cuban contemporary condition: his characters are unable to move towards the future, pushed back and disillusioned by their present, and, thus, they constantly recall their past, living the same trauma again and again, searching in vain for that moment when everything started to go wrong.

These first spatial images present the island as a constrictive space, entrapping Cubans in a static and unbearable physical and psychological dimension. Stuck in this peculiar dimension, the characters experience

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<sup>2</sup> Padura’s characters throughout the series complain about their peculiar condition on the island. In *La neblina del ayer*, for instance, they remark that they do not live at the same rhythm as the rest of the world: “Lo peor fue que nos quitaron la posibilidad de vivir al ritmo que vivía la gente en el mundo” (Padura, 2005, p. 198).

existential void, incapacity to move and a lack of agency. Aware of the absurdity of their condition, they search for a solution, creating their own alternative to immobility and repetitiveness. The different solutions they find, on which I will expand later in this chapter, can be interpreted as getaways to escape from Cuban stagnation and as (often unsuccessful) attempts to start living 'at the rhythm of the other people in the world'.

#### **4 Connotations of exile in *Paisaje de otoño***

The combination of the cyclical temporal and circular spatial dimension on the island, described in *Paisaje de otoño*, with the representation of its geographical boundaries, results in an imaginative construction of Cuba that has all the characteristics of a dystopian space. For Padura's characters living on the island, the geographical boundaries, which delimit and separate Cuba from the rest of the world, assume a constrictive function, forcing Cuban inhabitants to live a meaningless and repetitive life, from which they obstinately try to escape. For many the ultimate getaway is leaving the island territory and, thus, exile appears the only possible alternative. They are in fact convinced that leaving the island also means leaving the absurd world, in Camus's terms, in which they have been imprisoned. Exile, then, is presented by Padura in a completely different light, if compared to the treatment it receives in the official discourse. As stated before in this chapter, the official rhetoric has considered the decision to emigrate from the island a betrayal of the revolutionary ideology and its socio-political project. In this book, instead, exile is interpreted as a consequence of the failure of this socio-political project, as an attempt to cope with the frustration and the emptiness left behind by the end of the collectivist dream. Hence, in *Paisaje de otoño*, Padura inverts the official discourse on exile, bringing it to a paradoxical conclusion, linking the decision to leave with the disillusioned mood and the political disaffection experienced by his generation in the late 80s and 90s.

#### 4.1 Generational dissatisfaction as the cause of exile

To prove my hypothesis of an inextricable relation between generational dissatisfaction and the phenomenon of exile, here I will consider how in *Paisaje de otoño* the issue of exile is significantly approached from a generational perspective. Inside Mario's personal sphere, among his generational peers, Padura places a character that, already from the second book of the tetralogy, in *Vientos de curesma*, has clearly expressed the generational dissatisfaction by defining himself as a member of *la generación de mandados*. Andrés reaffirms his deeply critical attitude in *Paisaje de otoño*, putting forward the idea that the roots of his personal and generational dissatisfaction and frustration (sentiments that ultimately will send him into exile) are to be sought in the coercive education he received:

Porque tú sabes que somos una generación de mandados y ése es nuestro pecado y nuestro delito. [...] Pero a nadie se le ocurrió nunca preguntarnos qué queríamos hacer: nos mandaron a estudiar en la escuela que nos tocaba estudiar, a hacer la carrera que teníamos que hacer, a trabajar en el trabajo que teníamos que trabajar y siguieron mandándonos, sin preguntarnos ni una cabrona vez en la repuñetera vida si eso era lo que queríamos hacer... Para nosotros ya todo está previsto, ¿no? Desde el círculo infantil hasta la tumba del cementerio que nos va a tocar, todo lo escogieron, sin preguntarnos nunca ni de qué mal queríamos morir. Por eso somos la mierda que somos, que ya no tenemos ni sueños y si acaso servimos para hacer lo que nos mandan... (Padura, 1998, pp. 23-24)

In *Paisaje de otoño* the character's dissatisfaction reaches its peak, he realizes the absurdity of his life in Cuba and ultimately decides to leave the island. Thus, after sporadically expressing his frustrations throughout the tetralogy, Andrés brings it to a close in this last book by articulating an impious sum of his generation's terrible mistakes and frustrations:

¿Tú [el flaco Carlos] no fuiste a la guerra de Angola porque te mandaron? ¿No se te jodió la vida encaramado en esa silla de mierda por ser bueno y obedecer? ¿Alguna vez se te ocurrió que

podías decir que no ibas? Nos dijeron que históricamente nos tocaba obedecer y tú ni siquiera pensaste en negarte [...] Y éste [El Conejo] ¿Dónde se le perdió todo lo que siempre dijo que quería ser y que nunca ha sido en su vida? No me jodas, Carlos, por lo menos déjame estar convencido de que mi vida es un desastre... (Padura, 1998, p. 24)

In this book Andrés openly affirms that the cause of his frustration and the reasons that will ultimately push him into exile are rooted in the historical trauma he experienced as a member of his generation. During all these years, the character carried on with his life despite the absurdities and difficulties, until the point at which he woke up and realised that he had lost every hope and interest in the revolutionary societal project and in carrying on with his life in Cuba:

Hasta que una mañana me levanté sin deseos de ir al trabajo, ni de vestir a los niños, ni de hacer nada de lo que siempre se suponía que debía hacer y sentí cómo toda mi vida había sido una equivocación. Eso te suena, ¿verdad, Conde? Ese saber que algo torció el rumbo que uno debió coger, que algo te empujó por un camino que no era el tuyo. Esa sensación horrible de descubrir que no sabes cómo has llegado hasta donde estás, pero que estás en una parte que no es la que tú querías. (Padura, 1998, pp.248-249)

Andrés suddenly realizes that he is in the wrong place, on the wrong path and desperately decides to change his life's direction, choosing to leave the island. The horrible sensation of immobility, void and uselessness that Andrés suddenly perceives is the main motivation for his choice. But, as this character suggests, it is not a personal feeling, on the contrary it is shared by Mario Conde and their entire generation, which in 1989 abruptly found itself in a place it never wanted to be, due to the waning of utopia. Conde's reflection links Andrés's feelings with the collective disillusion:

Andrés no era feliz, ni se sentía satisfecho con su vida [...] algo en su proyectos más íntimos había fallado y su camino vital -como el de todo ellos- se había torcido por rumbos indeseables aunque

ya trazados, sin el consentimiento de su individualidad. (Padura, 1998, p. 25)

Wilkinson suggests that the life experience of Andrés, Mario and their friends metaphorically represents the parabola of the Revolution (Wilkinson, 2006, p. 264): something twisted the life of these Cubans in the same way as a consequence of what happened to the revolutionary project. In the late 1980s and 1990s the path of the Revolution twisted because of internal and external circumstances that Cuba was not capable of managing. Andrés realises that, at least in part, the institutions and oppressive establishment that caused the generational dissatisfaction are still in place, as well as the policies that brought disillusion and frustration of life-dreams to the members of his generation. Therefore he decides to leave to find happiness somewhere else and to avoid his sons, by experiencing the same coercion, becoming “la segunda promoción de la generación escondida” (Padura, 1998, p. 249).

Posing generational disillusion and dissatisfaction as the cause of Andrés’s decision to leave the island, Padura creates a cause-effect relation between the phenomenon of exile and the failure of the revolutionary project. Instead of presenting the exiles as traitors to the Revolution who, through leaving, are trying to undermine the collective social project, Padura, through the character of Andrés, suggests that it is the corruption and distortion of the revolutionary model, and its tendency to centralization that causes the political disaffection and the exile of its population. Padura thus re-interprets exile as a feature and a consequence of the process of disenchantment his generation went through. As the author remarked in the conversation we had: until 1989, despite everyday difficulties, people were fighting and working to construct their future; but in and after 1989 Cubans realized that they were entrapped, like Sisyphus, in an endless and pointless present, without any hope of improving their condition in the future. Once Cubans lost this image of ‘*un futuro salvador*’, they started perceiving their lives and their present as void, incoherent and meaningless. Hence, as mentioned in chapter 2, emptiness, uncertainty and fragmentation become the key words of the Cuban condition at the end of the Soviet era. As Casamayor – Cisneros suggests, glossing Jameson:

When the subject is unable to organise its existence scatologically, he can do no more than produce 'heaps of fragments', its cultural creation is transformed into the haphazard practice of heterogeneity, fragmentation, randomness. (Casamayor-Cisneros, 2012, p. 41)

This vacuity of life, according to Padura, is the reason why in the 90s people who were settled in Cuba, who had a house, a family and a position, decided to emigrate:

Hasta el año 89 la gente de la generación a la que yo pertenezco tenía una idea de un futuro posible. [...] A partir del año 90 esa expectativa de futuro desaparece. [...] Si tú tienes un presente de incertidumbre, pero tienes una imagen de un futuro salvador, sientes tu relación con la realidad de una forma. Pero, si desaparece esa posibilidad, esa imagen de futuro, el presente se hace mucho más opresivo para las personas. Esa es una de las razones por las cuales con tanta frecuencia vimos, en los años noventa, personas de 40 o 45 años y en los años 2000 de 50, irse de Cuba, irse a buscar otro espacio en el mundo, en un momento en el que se suponía que ya habían encontrado un espacio en su contexto más cercano. (Padura, 2013)

As noted in chapter 3, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cubans lost the very image of a possible future and their place in the world. Displaced and confused by their present, they started looking back, trying to recognise themselves in the past. Therefore, Andrés's reflections, like Conde's, inevitably bring him to a recovery and re-examination of his generational and national past. Andrés, too, is affected by anamnesis. Looking back to the past is for him a real pathology; he reproaches the system, the school, his generation and himself for the oppressions experienced. The recovery of the past is not a way of re-elaborating and sorting out the trauma; on the contrary, it is an obsession that makes him feel worse:

En los últimos tiempos algo había ocurrido en el cerebro de Andrés. Aquel hombre a quien admiraron primero cuando había sido el mejor jugador de pelota de Pre, [...] aquel mismo Andrés

que luego sería el médico eficiente al cual todos acudían, el único que había logrado un matrimonio envidiable, con dos hijos incluidos, y había recibido el privilegio de tener casa propia y auto particular, se estaba revelando como un ser lleno de frustraciones y rencores, capaces de amargarlo y de envenenar el ambiente que lo rodeaba. (Padura, 1998, pp. 24- 25)

Significantly, the most successful of Conde's friends is the one who in the end goes into exile, and who does not do so for material or economic reasons but for emotional ones: "mi vida es un desastre..." (Padura, 1998, p. 24). By making an exile of Andrés, Padura is stressing that the decision to emigrate is not always due to clear-cut political or economic reasons; Andrés, in fact, enjoys a privileged economic situation in comparison to his friends. The reasons that push Andrés into exile are ideological and psychological: he has lost any interest and expectation in his life, becoming increasingly bitter. The only moment when he starts feeling better and recovers some hope in the future is when he asks permission to leave:

Ahora tengo que irme a un policlínico de barrio hasta que me den la carta de liberación, así mismo como suena, la carta de liberación, y me permitan salir, y eso va a demorar como uno o dos años, no sé cuántos, pero no me importa: es mi decisión, es mi locura, es mi culpa, y por primera vez me siento dueño de mis decisiones, mis locuras, mis culpas. (Padura, 1998, p. 250)

The *carta de liberación* gives Andrés the possibility to re-establish and reinterpret his relation with the Cuban present. He is no longer living in an extended present and in an endless waiting; he is waiting for something that he knows will arrive for sure. His waiting and his present have a meaning again, he has rebuilt a future expectation for himself, he has a new dream that helps him accept his present. From Andrés's perspective, as the name of the document suggests, the *carta de liberación* will free him from the Sisyphean condition and from the distorted Cuban time-space dimension.

## 4.2 Representations of exile: the perspective from inside Cuba

Andrés's reflections, ultimately, raise in the character the awareness of his present condition and push him to charge with hopes his future departure from the island. His attitude is thus an example of one of the approaches to exile from inside the Cuban island. In the book Andrés explains that he went through a complex process which changed his conception of exile: initially he had a highly negative approach towards exile and ended up embracing the opposite position. As Sabrina Costanzo argues, following the trajectory of Andrés's relationship with the phenomenon of Cuban exile it is possible to have a picture of the many positions and perspectives from which Cubans on the islands relate themselves to emigration (Costanzo, 2008, pp. 419-422). Exile is a constant presence in Andrés's life, his father left Cuba when Andrés was just a child, at the beginning Andrés harshly condemned his father's decision to leave the island:

El más culpable de todo siempre ha sido el Viejo, que nos abandonó cuando más falta hacía que siguiéramos juntos, y dejó su país y se convirtió en un gusano despreciable, viviendo en Miami... (Padura, 1998, p. 247)

In this passage it is clear how Andrés uses the terminology and the traditional rhetoric used by the Revolution in the 60s and 70s, defining his father as a *gusano*. Thus, the character is in line with the official position of the Cuban government that labels the exiles as betrayers, *escoria* and *gusanos*. However, in a second moment, Andrés's attitude changes and he becomes less rigid, after receiving a letter from his father who apologises for his departure and explains the reasons that forced him to leave his family and his country:

Por primera vez veía a mi padre de una forma distinta al culpable que habíamos creado mi madre, yo y el medio ambiente... Ahora parecía un hombre, con sus propias necesidades, sus angustias y sus esperanzas, un hombre cualquiera que sacrificó una parte de su vida para tener otra vida, la que él pensó que necesitaba y había decidido escoger. (Padura, 1998, p. 248)



The last step in Andrés's approach to exile will bring him so close to his father's position as to finally trigger his decision to leave the island. After understanding that his father was experiencing the same dissatisfaction and frustration as himself, the character realizes that the only possibility for a man that has lost his values and control over his life is to leave and try to start a new life in another part of the world.

This last approach, then, represents the position of many Cubans who want to leave the island and project their dreams of a better life onto new territories and spaces that lie beyond the sea. These Cubans, like Andrés, construct a mental opposition between the images of Cuba and Miami, stressing the suffocating atmosphere of the island and representing Miami as an imagined Cuban counter-space. The comparison is not between two real places, but between the imaginary constructions of these places and it is organized around the axis dystopia- utopia. Exile is the escape from the Cuban dystopian society to reach salvation (or to say it in Padura's words: *el futuro de salvación*) in the utopian land: Miami. In the language of Padura's character, Cuba, with its insularity, is often perceived as a prison and Miami as freedom: Andrés uses the expression *carta de liberación* (1998, p. 250) when he refers to the documents that will allow him to leave Cuba. To have the *carta de liberación* is to have the permission and possibility of leaving the constrictive Cuban environment to achieve one's freedom. Emigrating, then, is a form of liberation, the process of overcoming the constrictive water borders to finally reach the 'Promised Land'. In the imagination of the Cubans who seek to escape from the island, this utopian land is often Miami and it is usually imagined as the perfect Cuban counter-space where the codes, norms and prescriptions regulating life in Cuba are overturned. The imaginative constructions of Cuba and Miami acquire an important figurative value in the book, intensifying the difference between two mental abstractions, two spaces, two nations, two ideologies and two populations that appears so close and at the same time so distant.

### 4.3 The exiles' perspective: utopian-dystopian constructions of Cuba and Miami

The relationship between the mental representations of Cuba and Miami is reinterpreted in a different light by Miriam, the wife of the victim Miguel Forcade. Miriam introduces the perspective of exiled Cubans in the novel. She provides both the representation of Miami from inside and outside Cuba, and the representation of Cuba from exile. Miriam recognizes that the political power and the privileged economic condition enjoyed by Cuban émigrés in Miami was a strong attraction for her and her husband when they lived in Cuba. In 1978 Miguel took advantage of his important institutional position to find a way of leaving the island. He 'deserted' during a business journey and then reached Miami. The young Miriam, by contrast, remained on the island and had to wait for permission to leave and join her husband. The feelings and hopes she experienced and the mental image she constructed of Miami, while waiting for the *carta de liberación*, are the same as those experienced by Andrés. On the one hand, in Miriam's mind the dystopian-utopian opposition between the two imaginary spaces is reinforced; on the other, however, her direct experience of the exilic condition leads her to reinterpret this polarised relation from a different perspective. Once Miriam succeeds in joining her husband and reaching the 'Promised Land', she has the possibility of confronting the utopian construction made of Miami within Cuba with the real appearance of that city; therefore she soon realizes that this utopia does not exist, that the real space does not correspond to the imaginative construction she elaborated in her mind while waiting on the island. The discrepancy between the real space and its imaginative construction is expressed through a significant spatial image: the representation of *Calle 8*. The famous *Calle 8* is supposed to be a 'Little Havana' in the USA, reproducing in Miami the colours, smells and voices typical of Cuba. Miriam, like all Cubans living on the island, has heard a lot of stories about this famous road and creates a detailed imaginary picture of this Little Havana while waiting for her departure from Cuba:

Como todo el mundo, desde aquí yo oía los cuentos y había mitificado la dichosa Calle 8, y la había convertido en mi mente

en algo así como el corazón del Miami de los cubanos... (Padura, 1998, p. 75)

Eventually the real appearance of *Calle 8* does not comply with Miriam's mental image: it is not the lost paradise she expected to see. It is instead an artificial fabrication, a monument to the traumatic loss every Cuban who lives in Miami has experienced:

La Calle 8 no es más que eso: una calle fabricada con la nostalgia de los de Miami y con los sueños de los que queremos ir a Miami. Es como las ruinas falsas de un país que no existe ni existió, y lo que queda de él está enfermo de agonía y prosperidad, de odio y de olvido. (Padura, 1998, p. 75)

The Little Havana in Miami that Miriam dreamed about does not exist in reality; instead, all she has found is “una avenida fea, sin espíritu ni vida” (Padura, 1998, p. 75). Gustavo Pérez-Firmat describing *Calle 8* says: “Anything one needed could be found on *Calle Ocho*, which is located in the heart of Little Havana... it was a golden cage, an artificial paradise, the neighbourhood of dreams” (1995, p.82). This author, despite pointing out the positive aspects of the street, also presents the neighbourhood as an artificial fabrication, a mimicry of Cuban space. The utopian vision of *Calle 8* and Miami, nourished by the Cubans on the island, has been transformed for Miriam into a dystopian reality. As stressed by Miguel Forcade, “Miami es nada. Porque lo tiene todo pero le falta lo más importante: le falta el corazón” (Padura, 1998, p. 76). Miami becomes, then, a golden prison where exiles are entrapped and forced to deal with the trauma of separation from their homeland.

Miriam seems to affirm that, despite having reached a favourable economic condition, the personal and emotional condition of the Cuban exiles has not improved after their departure: exiles still feel that sense of void, frustration and absurdity that they were experiencing in Cuba. The Cuban émigrés, thus, live the same Sisyphean condition of their compatriots who remain on the island. In fact, according to Padura, the exile experience “en el sentido cultural, en el sentido psicológico, en el sentido vital, es una gran frustración” (Padura interviewed by Clark, 2000). Going into exile, then, does not necessarily solve

the problem; on the contrary, in certain cases it can make the feeling of alienation, void and loss, typical of the contemporary Cuban condition, deeper and stronger. The exiled person often feels lost and displaced in the new world and, as a reaction, he or she tries to re-propose and re-construct images, buildings and atmospheres that are familiar. The construction of the many 'little cities' around the world, such as Little Havana, are according to Padura mechanisms and attempts to protect oneself and one's traditions from alienation and cultural disintegration:

[Los exiliados] Se refugian en el español como una forma de resistencia y en realidad más que una resistencia es una defensa lo que están haciendo. Se están defendiendo ellos mismos como individuos por el miedo que tienen de acercarse a la otra cultura. Eso por un lado. Y por el otro, está esa sensación de que están en un lugar que no les pertenece, y por eso han tratado de reproducir en Miami la vida cubana de alguna manera. (Padura interviewed by Clark, 2000)

The spatial description Miriam makes of *Calle 8*, of the city of Miami and its surrounding vicinities becomes a precious resource to read the Cuban exilic experience, marked by its inevitable nostalgia, and its attempts to re-create the familiar world left behind. In fact, as Edward Said wrote: "Much of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule" (2011, p. 181). Exiles often feel out of place and insecure in the new country; they are perpetually dealing with the separation. Therefore, while finding their way of adjusting to the new home, they primarily try to preserve and not forget their origins, culture and the image of their homeland. In their attempt to preserve the memories and images of the homeland, however, exiles often create a new and different imaginary construction of the home-country. As with every other remembering process, imagination has an important role in the matter, and, as Eva Hoffman claims, the country left behind often becomes a new mental space for the projections of fantasies and desires:

The nostalgic addiction of the exilic narrative is a psychic split – living in a story in which one's past becomes radically different

from the present and in which the homeland becomes sequestered in the imagination as a mythic, static realm. That realm can be idealized or demonized, but the past can all too easily become not only another country but a space of projections and fantasies. Some people decide to abandon the past, never to look back. For others, the great lure is nostalgia— an excess of memory. (Hoffman, 1999, p. 52)

From the preceding analysis, it appears clear how the new world constructed by the exiles often ends up being unnatural, resembling a fictional construction (Said, 2011, p. 181). Cuban exiles, entrapped in these artificial Little Cities, actually live in the same psychological condition as the Cubans on the island. They are tormented by a constant feeling of nostalgia, to which they respond by surrounding themselves with images and objects pertaining to the homeland they left. As a defence from the difficulties and frustrations of their exile life, émigrés often deny their present and seek refuge in an idealized past. Hence, against their hopes, the exiles have not really started to live in a new world; they have left the island territory but continue to live in a surreal world and in an imagined past. Significantly, then, Miriam explains that, in the same way that the Cubans on the island idealize Miami, the exiles, lost and homesick, start to mystify Cuba:

Además, allá pasa algo parecido a lo que sucede desde acá con la imagen de Miami: allá la gente empieza a mitificar a Cuba, a imaginarla como un deseo, más que a recordarla como una realidad, y viven en una media tinta que no lleva a ninguna parte: ni se deciden a olvidarse de Cuba ni a ser personas nuevas, en un país nuevo, y al final no son ni una cosa ni la otra, como me pasa a mí, que después de ocho años viviendo allá no sé dónde quiero estar ni que quiero ser... Es una tragedia nacional, ¿no? ... Miami es nada y Cuba es un sueño que nunca existió. (Padura, 1998, p. 78)

Paradoxically, then, Cuba becomes for the exiles an idealized space crystallized in their imagination and often reshaped in their memory according to their personal feelings. Cuba is again represented as the counter-space of

the exile, but this time it assumes the features of a utopia. Araceli San Martín Moreno and José Luis Muñoz de Baena Simón in their article “La Habana real y La Habana imaginada” seem to repeat Miriam’s words when, pointing out the difference between the real Havana and the Havana imagined by the exiled Cubans, they state: “Esa Habana ha sido elaborada con recuerdos y con tópicos personales, pertenecientes al imaginario colectivo de los cubanos” (2005. p. 220). According to them this imaginative construction serves a cathartic function: it sums up the different and conflictive feelings the exile has towards the Cuban reality, which is a reality left physically but not mentally, a reality that is close and at the same time seems so far away. Through this imaginative construction the exile elaborates his/her experience and creates a new object for his/her nostalgia.

In this case, however, the terms of the relationship dystopia-utopia are inverted: Miami appears as a dystopian space, while Cuba is the utopia. For the Cuban émigrés, like Miriam, who discover the difficulties and the bitterness of life in exile, the utopian mental construction of Miami has been transformed into a dystopian reality. Miami becomes a kind of prison or a golden cage (to use Pérez-Firmat’s words) where exiles are entrapped between an unforgettable past, an unaccepted present and the illusions of a future return to the native country. Hence Cuba becomes the counter-space of the exile, the realm of the perfect past and a blurred sentimental realm existing only in their memories. As testified to by Miriam, in the imagination of the Cubans in exile, Cuba and Miami assume alternatively both utopian and dystopian features. Following Said’s ‘poetics of space’, I argue that both of these real sites are invested with different symbolic values according to the specific perspective and position of the character that creates the spatial representations.

The transformation of the utopian construction of Miami into a dystopia and the consequent psychic split experienced by the exiles affect the identity performance of the exiled characters and the image they create of themselves. Miriam often describes her life in Miami, and the life of the other exiles, as ‘a medio camino’ or ‘a media tinta’, between an idyllic perfect past (in a utopian homeland) and an unsatisfactory present (in a dystopian city); they no longer

belong to Cuba but, at the same time, they cannot forget it. They are unable to move forward and successfully integrate themselves into the new society: as André Aciman affirms, “the one thing exiles do almost as a matter of instinct is ‘compulsive retrospection.’ With their memories perpetually on overload, exiles see double, feel double, are double” (1999, p. 13). The exiles, then, share the same pathological psychological condition of the Cubans on the island: they also suffer from anamnesis. As testified to by Miriam, Cuban exiles in the book are obsessed with their departure, it is a trauma they cannot forget or overcome completely, and they therefore constantly indulge in the nostalgic recollection of the Cuban atmosphere. Padura affirms that exiles never really leave their native country completely, they always remain bound to it, and in one way or another they maintain a relationship with their homeland:

Yo creo que la gente que se va de Cuba no se va de Cuba, ni siquiera yéndose. Viven fuera de Cuba y todavía no se han ido. Y en ese sentido siguen participando de esa relación con la madre, la patria que debería llamarse patria. Es un cordón umbilical muy difícil de romper, tanto que, cuando uno se reúne con estos cubanos que viven fuera de Cuba, siempre el tema de Cuba, el tema de la memoria, el tema de la pertenencia está presente. Son gentes que viven relacionados con Cuba, incluso cuando se declaran enemigos del sistema o cuando han decidido no regresar más o han decidido cortar cualquier tipo de relación afectiva no lo han logrado. Siguen estando relacionados con Cuba. (Padura, 2013)

Padura seems to suggest that the Cubans in exile cannot completely eradicate the trauma of separation and therefore they remain linked to their country. According to Grinberg, the reasons for the unresolved traumas reside in the exiles’ negation of the farewell (1989, p. 156-157) since saying goodbye is a ritual act that sets ‘protective boundaries’:

Departure is the border that divides the state of union between two people – the one who leaves and the one who stays behind – from the state of separation. (Grinberg, 1989, p. 156)

The ritual of the farewell, then, sets the dividing line between presence and absence. Extending this concept further, Grinberg affirms that the farewell is “a marking device which clearly fixes a border between what has been called from time immemorial the land of the living and the land of the dead” (1989, p. 157). Applying this theory to the specific case of exile, Grinberg claims that, since exiles are generally denied the ritual of the farewell, they feel like they are disappearing from the lives of their loved ones without achieving a satisfactory separation. Furthermore, the exile’s psychological condition, in his/her traditional interpretation, is strongly affected by the impossibility of coming back. Thus, departure assumes for exiles a symbolic value: they have the feeling of crossing the frontier between life and death (1989, p. 157). The same idea of departure as death can be applied to the Cuban case. Often, once they have left their country, the exiles cannot participate in the life on the island, therefore, for the people remaining in Cuba, the exiles are dead (1989, p. 157). On the other hand, from the exile’s perspective, the loved ones they left behind, without saying goodbye and without having any assurance of meeting them again, become dead. Padura significantly mentions this association of the experience of exile with death in the novel *Adiós, Hemingway*. The last scene of this book presents Conde throwing a bottle into the sea containing a letter to Andrés:

A Andrés, en algún lugar del norte: cabrón, aquí nos estamos acordando de ti. Todavía te queremos y creo que te vamos a querer siempre [...] ojalá que allá tú nos siga queriendo, porque hay cosas que no se pueden perder. [...] Hemos perdido casi todo pero hay que salvar lo que queremos. Es de noche, y tenemos tremendo peo, porque estamos tomando ron en Cojímar: el Flaco, que ya no es flaco, el Conejo, que no es historiador, y yo, que ya no soy policía y sigo sin poder escribir una historia escuálida y conmovedora. [...] Y tú, ¿qué eres o qué no eres? Te mandamos un abrazo y otro para Hemingway, si lo ves por allá. (Padura, 2006 p. 189)

In this extract Conde, by imaginatively placing both Hemingway and Andrés in the same space, is clearly associating the exile condition with death. From the



perspective of the Cubans on the island, the loss and the nostalgia they experience for someone who has gone into exile is the same feeling of abandonment that they experience for someone who is dead. The improbability of coming back from exile and the difficulties of communicating with the island, then, make the Cuban exile similar to a definitive disappearance from life on the island.

Finally, the Cubans in exile not only have to cope with two different realities and dimensions, they are also stuck between two different identities: that of the exile and the non-exile. Physical displacement deeply affects the identity performance of the exiled Cubans: Miriam significantly says that after living in Miami for 8 years she no longer knows: “dónde quiero estar ni qué quiero ser...” (Padura, 1998, p. 78) Pérez-Firmat uses a metaphor that I consider relevant to understanding the feeling of eradication and incompleteness experienced by the Cuban-Americans: he describes life in exile as the result of an amputation. The separation is so painful that Cubans feel like they have lost an indispensable part of their person:

Refugees are amputees. Someone who goes into exile abandons not just possessions but part of himself. Just as people who lose a limb sometimes continue to ache or tingle in the missing calf or hand, the exile suffers the absence of the self he left behind. (1995, p. 22)

The physical absence of a limb is constantly compared and contrasted with the image of a physical unity on the level of memory, and this in turn is what produces nostalgia. The same feeling applies to exiles, who can recover their sense of unity and solve their identity split only in their memories. Exiles try to fight against the fragmentation of their identity by reconstructing an image of completeness through memory. In this sense, the imaginary and nostalgic construction of Cuba can be interpreted as an antidote against the identity crisis, de-centring and fragmentation that derives from the exilic experience.

However, the necessity of creating a new identity and a new life, to cover the loss of an important part of the self, can lead to the creation of dysfunctional and polarised identities:

Aunque aquello esté lleno de cubanos, la gente ya no vive como vivían en Cuba y no se comporta como se comportaban en Cuba. Los que aquí no trabajan, allá nada más piensan en trabajar y en tener cosas: cada día una cosa nueva, sea cual sea, aunque tenga que matarse trabajando. Los que aquí eran ateos allá se vuelven religiosos y no se pierden una misa. Los que fueron comunistas militantes se transforman en anticomunistas más militantes todavía. (Padura, 1998, p. 77)

Miriam says that, despite still being Cubans, in Miami people live in an inversion of the life code of Cuba and they often change their way of living and their personal attitude towards life deeply. In the attempt to fight against the loss of an important part of their identity, exiles desperately try to reach a new completeness, which can be identified with the material accumulation of goods or with the total devotion to religion or political faith. As shown clearly by Miriam's experience, exiled characters participate in the same identity crisis, and share the same psychological condition, feeling of dislocation and identity disaggregation experienced by the Cubans living on the island. Padura's characters, exiled or not, who pertain to Conde's generation, are the product of an historic-political failure and of a generational and national tragedy.

## 5 Conclusion

In *Paisaje de otoño*, Padura, through the spatial descriptions of real and symbolic places both in Havana and Miami, establishes a strong link between these two parallel spaces, which appear to be at the same time opposed and complementary. I argue that, from the author's perspective, Havana and Miami are two sides of the same coin, two different ways of experiencing the same crisis, void and nostalgia for a disappeared national dream. In *Paisaje de otoño*, Padura expands his representation of multiple Cuban identities, introducing the perspective of the big outsider, 'the Other' in nationalistic terms. What is more, he extends his criticism of the exclusive logic of the Revolution, considering exile as a consequence of the identity crisis affecting his

generation. Thus, instead of considering exiles as the constitutive outside for the construction of national identity and *cubanía*, Padura poses exile as one of the many points of tension and rupture existing in the development of a new collective Cuban revolutionary identity.

The several characters, who, in this novel, find their personal way out from emptiness, desperation and immobility, are all trying to find that missing piece, that passion, that dream, which will make them feel complete. This is, for example, the case of Candito *el Rojo*, who in the previous novels was always involved in illegal activities, and who in *Paisaje de otoño* has decided to change his life, moving away from illegality and devoting himself to religion. Religion and spirituality are then Candito's way of curing his existential void, as the character affirms: "Además ya no me siento vacío, como antes, y ahora estoy aprendiendo que uno no puede vivir vacío toda la vida" (Padura, 1998, p. 88). Similarly, Andrés decides to go into exile to escape or, as he says, "para perderme de mí mismo, de aquella sensación de rutina y de encierro que no podía soportar un minuto más" (Padura, 1998, p. 249). Finally, Conde resigns from the police because "él también necesitaba huir, aunque fuese incapaz de moverse del lugar" (Padura, 1998, p. 251). Thus, like Candito, who leaves his illegal activity, or Andrés, who will leave Cuba, Conde leaves his old job to start a new life. Literature is for him his personal getaway. It is what will force him to analyse and reconstruct the story of his generation, to make sense of his life and of the lives of his friends. At the end of the series, Conde asks himself what will remain of all the pain, efforts and illusions of his generation; the answer he gives himself is: memory. Padura in this last novel closes the circle of the tetralogy, making of Mario Conde the author of *Pasado perfecto* and placing testimony and preservation of memory the main function of literature. Memory and literature have a cathartic power for Mario and, in a certain way, they fill the gaps in his life.

All the different life-crises and reactions of Padura's characters are, thus, consequences of the same phenomenon: the failure of the socialist project, the fragmentation of the revolutionary subject and the consequent generational and national disenchantment:

Hay toda una serie de frustraciones que tienen estos personajes, que tiene que ver con ese proyecto del hombre nuevo y con esa identidad revolucionaria, pero sobre todo tiene que ver con la pérdida de ilusiones y la pérdida de posibilidades. (Padura, 2013)

Ultimately, Padura suggests that this difficult psychological condition: the feeling of disillusion, identity fragmentation and loss, represents the hallmark of contemporary Cubanness and constitutes the fundamental link among Cubans living in different parts of the world. The parallelism that can be established between the psychological condition of Padura's characters in exile and on the island has a strong critical and unsettling power. It represents, to some extent, the unforeseen consequences of the revolutionary attempt to create a New Cuban Man (and Woman).

Pérez-Firmat, when defining the relation between Cuban national identity and diaspora, distinguishes three different ways of viewing Cuba: as *país*, as *pueblo* and as *patria* (Pérez-Firmat, 2008, pp. 178-179). The exiles are not living among the other Cubans, therefore, they are not physically part of the *pueblo cubano*. They do not reside inside the geographical boundaries of the Cuban country or *país*, but they do participate in the idea of a Cuban *patria*. Cuba is for them an imagined homeland, a personal creation, an image they bring inside wherever they go or wherever they live, as "a homeland one cannot leave or lose" (which is why the author titled his book *My own private Cuba* and, significantly, another exiled author, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, titled his book in a similar way: *Mea Cuba*). Pérez-Firmat affirms, then, that the exile community participates in the construction of the notion of *patria* as a mental abstraction. Padura, in his narrative, re-elaborates the definition of the nation and national identity as the result of multiple imaginative constructions and mental abstractions created inside and outside the island. In line with Pérez-Firmat's definition of Cuba as a personal imagined homeland, Padura interprets national identity as the belonging to an imagined community with common historical and cultural experiences. Padura offers, then, a wider representation of the nation and of the national social body: his new Cuban nation has elastic boundaries, that stretch over the sea to include Miami in the national representation, and at the same time, his definition of Cubanness

appears to be equally fluid, 'permeable' and shifting, formed at the intersection of different ideological and political positions. Thus, once again, *Paisaje de otoño* shows that the Cuban nation and identity are formed by a confrontation continually taking place on different levels of representation and that cultural identities constantly renew themselves both in the social context and on the symbolic level on which they are created and understood.



## Conclusion

This study on a selection of Leonardo Padura Fuentes's detective novels has presented the most recent developments of Cuban identity, reinterpreting the construction of Cubanness as a complex dialogical process that confronts different symbolic images, cultural values and social practices. I have shown how Padura's texts question official and univocal definitions of Cubanness and otherness, representing instead Cuban identity as mutable, hybrid and constantly shifting between different historical, political, social, sexual and cultural positions.

The analysis of the novels has been framed around the relationship between time, space and identity, considering identity as an on-going social production which results from the interaction between two main categories, which Said refers to as 'imaginative geographies and histories'. Thus, this study took into account different aspects and elements, which inform identity construction, and analysed how they interact with the Cuban spatio-temporal context and how they are represented in Padura's novel. What emerged from this analysis is that Leonardo Padura's fiction undermines the representation of the time-space category that is anchored in the revolutionary discourse, substituting it with a plural and palimpsestic representation of time and space in Cuba. As shown in chapter 4, in fact, the author stresses the palimpsestic accumulation of different temporal and spatial strata which inevitably affect and enrich his definition of contemporary Cubanness.

The first contention emerging from this study is that, from 1959 on, as a response to the historical political changes affecting the Cuban island, different institutionalized and non-institutionalized identity models have been produced. From the New Man model, which aimed to create an image of unity and stability for the Cuban revolutionary nation, to the post-Soviet identities, which revealed a much more fragmented character, all these images and models share a fundamental trait: they are unfinished, in the process of construction, in transition. They all assume the necessity and possibility of a constant re-

formulation and re-assessment which is dependent on the evolution of cultural and social elements.

Thus, what has emerged from Padura's novels as a fundamental feature of Cubanness is its incompleteness and transitory nature which is eloquently summarised by Mario Conde's definition of his condition as 'a medio camino'. In this respect Serra argues:

Conde appears to be in some stage of transition between a past from which he has not successfully distanced himself, an alienating present, and a future in which he feels compelled to be different from the way he is now. Rather than having reached a climax of maturity, all of the elements of Conde's personality seem to illustrate the idea of an identity in flux. (2007, p. 160)

Conde, as an identity in transition, challenges any idea of stability or authenticity traditionally associated with the discourse on national identity. This character is a testimony to the deterioration of the revolutionary identity model, and the epitome of a constant search for different definitions of identity and national narratives. As a Cuban archetype, Conde embodies this transition and the difficult balance between revolutionary elements and post-Soviet changes. He combines what remains of the New Man ideology, and of the impact it had and still partially has on his generation, with more cynical and disillusioned views on contemporary Cuban society. When Padura starts writing his tetralogy in 1990, almost 40 years have passed since the revolutionary victory in 1959, and over this period the New Man has aged and has lost its power of fascination over old and new generations. Conde still maintains some of the features traditionally associated with the New Man: his commitment to friendship and moral justice are strongly linked to a revolutionary idea of social solidarity and community. Thus, both his concept of friendship and spirit of social justice and egalitarianism, which motivates his job as a detective, can be considered as socialist legacies to a certain extent. However, as has been shown in chapter 6, towards the end of the series, Conde becomes increasingly cynical and miscreant, leaving his job and coming close to the sceptical attitude of the post-Soviet generations.



Conde's view on the Cuban world is an 'a posteriori' perspective. Also in the tetralogy, when the narrative takes place in 1989, before the actual collapse of the Soviet Union, Conde's reading of Cuban reality is inevitably imbued with Padura's knowledge and experience of the Cuban world during the *Periodo Especial* and the post-Soviet era. This explains why the evolution of Conde's character inside the tetralogy appears as an accelerated process of social 'awakening'. In a few months, the protagonist goes through different personal and collective events that make him aware of the inevitable deteriorating process affecting Cuban reality and identity during the 1980s and 1990s. Conde's retrospective gaze reads the New Man as a distant ideal, impossible to fully realise and materialise. The comparison with this idealized model deeply affected the character's life and ultimately created the disenchanting mood, feeling of alienation and existential void, which Padura presents as the hallmark of contemporary Cubanness. From the analysis of Padura's novels, the New Man appears as an outdated model of identity, forged in official discourses and tailored to the political needs of the moment.

The main goal of this study of the selected texts was precisely to show how Padura's literature deconstructs the New Man, contesting its constrictive and prescriptive character, and expressing the necessity of a re-definition of contemporary Cubanness in plural terms. Starting from the necessity and possibility of such a re-definition, the chapters of this thesis dealt with different identity aspects and reinterpreted the relationship between the self and others, official and non-conforming identity performances, using the narrative representation of time and space as critical instruments for the analysis of the contemporary Cuban condition. Each chapter discussed one aspect of the Cuban revolutionary identity model, presenting first how this aspect was normativised in the official discourse and subsumed under the definition of the New Man, and then highlighting the elements of subversion or transgression of the prescriptive model present in Padura's novels. Each chapter depicted both the New Man and its opposite. However, as has been noted, rather than maintaining the binary structure of identity classification and simply inverting its terms, Padura completely undermines this logic, refusing to consider the 'Other' as the 'constitutive outside' and re-incorporating, instead, all these

'Other' identities in his definition of Cubanness. From the investigation into the selected novels, there thus emerges a complex and wider image of Cubanness which is not based on logics of exclusion or organised according to a binary classificatory system, and which instead tries to be as inclusive as possible. The research concludes that, despite the generational, historical, sexual, gender, territorial and ideological divisions, all of Padura's characters contribute to creating an image of contemporary Cubanness which is multifaceted, multilayered and inevitably incoherent.

The aim of this thesis was not to provide an organic and comprehensive representation of contemporary Cubanness, quite the opposite. The study offers a perspective on the evolution of Cuban identity in the revolutionary and post-Soviet era, as presented in Padura's novels, while trying to identify possible directions for its future development. This perspective does not claim to be indisputable or unquestionable. My account of the narrative representation of Cubanness is based exclusively on the analysis of Padura's texts, therefore, it could be considered partial. The main aim of Padura, in fact, is not to faithfully reproduce Cuban reality in every detail, but to offer an interpretation of the evolution of Cuban identity and society. Furthermore, due to time constraints, I have analysed only some of the many facets that compose Cuban identity, while important elements and aspects intervening in the construction of a new Cubanness, such as the racial issue or the representation of femininity, have been left out of my current analysis. Nevertheless and despite its limitations, this study shows Padura's fundamental contribution to the debates on contemporary Cuban identity. The analysis of Padura's novels undertaken here has enhanced both our understanding of the author's production and of the development of Cuban identity. The relationship that has been identified between Padura's texts and the re-interpretation of Cubanness contributes to our understanding of the role of literature and cultural production in general in the shaping of a new Cuban identity image.

Padura's perspective is obviously not the only view on the matter, but his work is undeniably an important indicator of the importance of the identity discourses in the Cuban cultural words. As explained in the introduction, the

deep interest Padura has in Cuban culture and history and his experience as a journalist have provided him with the knowledge and resources to critically interpret Cuban reality. Furthermore, as stated above, the writer is profoundly conscious of his role as a critic and interpreter of contemporary Cuba. The author, in the preface to *Pasado perfecto*, says:

Los hechos narrados en esta novela no son reales, aunque pudieron serlo, como lo ha demostrado la realidad misma. Cualquiera semejanza con hechos y personas reales es, pues, pura semejanza y una obstinación de la realidad. Nadie, por tanto, debe sentirse aludido por la novela. Nadie, tampoco, debe sentirse excluido de ella si de alguna forma lo alude. (2000, p. 9)

Padura affirms the fictional nature of his work and, at the same time, recognises its strong link with real life. His literature is, on the one hand, strongly influenced by and dependent on its socio-historical context of production and, on the other hand, indirectly triggers and encourages social transformation, by influencing the imaginative representation of Cuban identity and society. Padura's literature creates, in the Cuban readers, awareness of the changes depicted and promotes a re-consideration of the notion of Cubanness in the contemporary era.

Finally, I would like to state that this research represents a stimulating point of departure for further analysis of the representation of contemporary Cuban identity. As I have shown, Padura's work, to a large extent, breaks away from the legacy of the revolutionary identity model, establishing a new trend for the representation and definition of Cubanness. A study of his most recent production would be very fruitful in order to trace the evolution of his representation of Cuban identity: as I briefly mentioned above, the last novel of the Conde series, *Herejes*, could represent a good ground on which to evaluate what the impact of the New Man ideology (if there is any at all) has been on the youngest generation of Cubans, born in the post-Soviet era. I believe that the generational differences and the accumulation of such different and often contrasting generational experiences, in a relatively short period of time, is an intriguing focus which needs to be explored in further research.

Furthermore, given that, as mentioned above, current research has not dealt with important factors for the re-shaping of Cuban identity such as the racial issue and the representation of femininity, future research should investigate the role of these factors in the re-definition of contemporary Cubanness. Some of Padura's texts, for instance, could be useful starting points for a discussion on the biased representation of femininity in Cuba. Padura, in fact, has often been criticised for depicting a male-centred world, where women are barely present and usually confined to traditional domestic roles (as in the case of Carlos's mother Josefina) or to playing the traditional role of the *femme fatale* (as in the case of Karina in *Vientos de cuaresma* or Miriam in *Paisaje de otoño*). I would, therefore, consider it interesting to explore, first, to what extent his representation of femininity is influenced by traditional patriarchal discourses and by the revolutionary male-centred view and, secondly, why his subversion of the traditional Cuban identity discourse does not involve a re-definition of gender roles and the emancipation of his female characters.

In relation to the racial issue, Padura often stated his intention to overcome the stereotypical representation of black characters as the villains, which was proposed by the previous Cuban detective fiction, and represent a Cuba without racial difference:

Muchas veces mis personajes no tienen color. Y hablo de la piel. En el grupo de amigos de mi protagonista el factor racial está totalmente superado y no es un problema, como no lo ha sido nunca para mi grupo de amigos, con los que crecí y jugué béisbol, con los que estudié y comencé a intercambiar libros y lecturas. (Padura interviewed by Uxó, 2006, p. 29)

However, in the same interview, the author affirmed that there are some characters whose racial features are clearly stated in his novels, these are the villains and the assassins which are usually white, educated and from high socio-political backgrounds. Therefore, also in this case, Padura's literature tries to overturn the usual clichés and propose a different and critical reading of the Cuban social system:

Una de las manifestaciones de los rezagos raciales que todavía subsisten en Cuba es que en los niveles de decisión social y política todavía el porcentaje de blancos es muy superior al de negros y mulatos, a pesar de que se haya tratado de practicar una política de 'equilibrio' y se haya decretado la necesidad de incluir negros en esos niveles sociales. (Padura interviewed by Uxó, 2006, p. 29)

As these few quotes have shown, thus, the racial issue is not excluded from Padura's discourse on Cuban identity and further research addressing this important identity factor needs to be done. My hypothesis is that an investigation into both the presence and absence of racial features in Padura's characters will produce interesting results, since there seems to be a deliberate logic behind Padura's representation of his characters in racial or non-racial terms.

Another identified focus for future research would be to investigate the reception of Padura's work in Cuba. I consider it important to investigate how Padura's representation of Cubaness has been received by the Cuban audience and by the Cuban intellectual community and to assess the impact that Padura's work had on his compatriots.

Finally, the corpus of my current analysis could be expanded further to explore how other Cuban authors, both from Padura's and from younger generations, address the same identity issues that I have analysed in this thesis. In this respect, to expand the perspective even further it could be useful to also look at other artistic representations and analyse how the idea of a plural, hybrid and unstable Cuban identity is presented in other media.



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