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DON'T SAY "CHE": THE REVOLUTIONARY SUBTEXT OF JUAN CARLOS CREMATA MALBERTI'S *VIVA CUBA*[1]

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Abstract: Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti's 2005 film, *Viva Cuba*, is widely recognized as marking a turning point in Cuban revolutionary film from the 1960s through the 1990s, both as a feature film produced within Cuba but outside of the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC), and as a digital production whose director insists upon the film's distance from revolutionary politics. Indeed, the Revolution might seem to be at most a hushed background to what is frequently understood as *Viva Cuba*'s universally human story of two children about to be separated by emigration. Nevertheless, *Viva Cuba* reminds viewers of the Revolution's achievements and renders the nation's postmillennial hardships and socioeconomic inequities as poignantly as it does the child protagonists' potential losses. This article analyzes the ways in which Cuba's revolutionary ideals of egalitarianism, solidarity, and anti-imperialism, particularly as conceived by Che Guevara, constitute a powerful subtext to *Viva Cuba*'s personal drama. Although in many respects it represents a clear divergence from the tradition of ICAIC-produced films of the 1990s, Viva Cuba is also a reframing of its predecessors' preoccupations, one that revives what are both 1960s revolutionary and twenty-first-century socialist ideals more urgently needed than ever in Cuba and beyond.

Key Words: Revolution, film, Cuba, Cremata, Guevara, *Viva Cuba*

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Juan Carlos Cremata Malberti's 2005 film, *Viva Cuba*, boasts a series of firsts: it is the first Cuban film to feature children as protagonists; the first to win a prize at the Cannes Film Festival; and the first to shoot in Punta de Maisí, which as Cremata notes, is a place that all Cubans know, but few have visited, given its remote location at the easternmost point of the island (*Progreso Weekly*). *Viva Cuba* is often understood as marking a turning point in Cuban cinema made on the island from the 1960s through the 1990s, both as a feature film produced outside of the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC), and as a digital production whose director insists upon the film's distance from revolutionary politics. Cremata is not alone in this characterization of *Viva Cuba*: numerous critics have pointed to ways in which the film is positioned as apolitical. And, given Cremata's 2015 rift with the Castro government and subsequent decision to remain in the U.S. after a film festival,[2] his work seems an unlikely vehicle for revolutionary ideologies. In the film's diegesis, the Revolution might appear to be at most a hushed background to the story of two ten-year-old children about to be separated by emigration. Yet Cuba's revolutionary goals of egalitarianism, solidarity, and anti-imperialism, particularly as conceived by Che Guevara, are a simmering subtext to the film's personal drama. I argue that *Viva Cuba* reframes the revolutionary ideals of radical egalitarianism, social duty, and political autonomy in a twenty-first-century context of socioeconomic inequities and ever-increasing numbers of Cubans desperate to leave the island. I show how these revolutionary values emerge through a close reading of the film's narrative and images. *Viva Cuba* is indeed a political film, championing what are both 1960s revolutionary and twenty-first-century socialist ideals more urgently needed than ever in Cuba and beyond.

The film tells the story of two best friends, Jorgito (Jorge Miló) and Malú (Malú Tarrau Borché). Its narrative is driven by the fact that Malú's mother (Larisa Vega Alamar) is in a relationship with a foreigner. Now that her own mother (Sara Cabrera) has died, she plans to leave Cuba to join him, taking her daughter with her, as soon as she obtains written permission from her ex-husband (Abel Rodríguez). Desperate to forestall this outcome, the two children run away from their homes in Havana to Punta de Maisí, where's Malú's father is the keeper of the locale's iconic lighthouse. Relying on their wits and the adults along the way who offer them transportation, food, and other assistance, the protagonists undertake an arduous journey involving rides hitched in motor vehicles, an oxcart, a motorcycle, and long stretches of walking. They reach their destination only to find that Malú's father has signed the authorization form allowing her to leave. While their overwrought parents fight, Malú and Jorgito join hands and run to the cliff's edge, where the film ends in a freeze frame of their embrace just as it is obscured by crashing waves.

Viva Cuba is widely characterized as a film that eschews potentially divisive political meanings in favor of universal human appeal. Ann Marie Stock notes that the words "revolution," "Fidel," "United States," and "Miami" are absent from the film, quoting the director as to his disinclination for what are often polarizing political issues: "'I'm not interested in talking about the Revolution. I'm an artist and I'm interested in the effect of these processes on people rather than in the processes per se'" (156). In another interview, Cremata asserts that Malú does not want to stay in Cuba because of the Revolution, but because her friends and her school are there, and above all, because her grandmother is buried there, adding, "quien vea la película en términos de castrismo y anticastrismo no entenderá nada" ["anyone who sees the film in terms of Castroism and anti-Castroism won't understand anything"] (qtd. in Vicent). The director's attitude conforms to what Laura Zoë Humphreys identifies as twenty-first-century Cuban filmmakers' frequent rejection of political readings of their work and their insistence on its status as art (61-62). However, this stance rests upon the shaky assumptions that art exists in opposition to political

1. The author thanks Dr. Naomi Lindstrom for her thoughtful review of this study

2. Cremata's adaptation of Eugene Ionesco's play, "El rey se muere," was censored in Cuba, leading to his self-exile in the U.S. in 2016 (Costa). Since that time, his hostility to the revolutionary government has only increased, especially after the death of his nineteen-year-old daughter in 2022, an event that he believes Cuban officials insufficiently explained (Redacción de *CiberCuba*).

engagement and that any political meanings ascribed to it are necessarily invalid. As well, like other interpretations of *Viva Cuba* based on Cremata's statements, it depends upon the problematic notion that artists are authorities on the meaning of their work. Moreover, in his self-identification as an artist, Cremata seems to disown other parts of himself, including his past as a supporter of the Revolution and a member of the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (Menoyo Florián).

Viva Cuba's context of production is inevitably a factor in the ostensibly universal and human character of the film. His proposal for an elaborate musical rejected by ICAIC, Cremata embarked on the making of *Viva Cuba* as a low-budget digital production outside of the auspices of the Cuban film institute, with partners from Cuba, France, Costa Rica, and the U.S. (Stock 152-53). In the new millennium, Cuban filmmaking in general has been characterized by shortages that engender increasing reliance on international coproductions, while digital technology has allowed for international distribution via flash drives to sites such as YouTube and Vimeo (Baron 58). *Viva Cuba* is no exception and as such is part of a twenty-first-century commercial orientation in Cuban filmmaking, one that perceives a need to appeal to international audiences as well as to viewers on the island (Stock 156; Fehimović 17). As a student at the Escuela Internacional de Cine y Televisión (EICTV) in the late 1980s, Cremata trained with peers from around the world and learned how to work within transnational markets (Stock 150). Viva Cuba retains little of the formal experimentation that characterizes films made in Cuba prior to the Special Period. Rather, it exemplifies a homogenous aesthetic that targets a global viewership; indeed, Dunja Fehimović refers to the film's "televisual aesthetics based on the medium shot" that typify its road movie genre and increase its international appeal (133). As well, *Viva Cuba*'s tour of iconic locales from Havana to Punta de Maisí is variously understood by critics as the retention of "markers of difference" suited to both local and international audiences (Stock 155) and as the production of a colonial, touristic gaze (Martin 75). Certainly, the film has achieved enormous success worldwide, winning forty-three international prizes, including the Gran Prix Écrans Juniors at the Cannes International Film Festival, and garnering a nomination for inclusion in the U.S. Library of Congress (Costa).

Yet *Viva Cuba*'s genre and its visual tour of the island also contain radical implications. The film deviates from the American road movie convention of freedom of movement to highlight the difficulties involved in travel during the Special Period in Times of Peace. Declared by Fidel Castro in 1991 after the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the Special Period was characterized by food and fuel shortages and crises in infrastructure and transportation that continue to the present. In Cremata's film, the exigencies of the time emerge through images such as a broken-down bus, a truck spewing oil smoke, and the decaying rooftop the children use as a meeting place, as well as allegorically through the child protagonists' negligible funds, their need either to walk or to depend on others for lifts, and their ultimate lack of food and water. The narrative itself, which is put in motion by the desire of Malú's mother to improve her material situation by leaving Cuba, is grounded in the Special Period's economic hardships. The film's journey into rural Cuba is not merely picturesque; it simultaneously recalls the early revolutionary government's valorization of the countryside as a site of authentic Cuban identity (Martin 92), particularly as it is outside of the city that the film's child protagonists develop as characters who learn the revolutionary value of solidarity. The vivid and varied images of Cuban nature also evoke José Martí's Americanist idealization of land as a source of literal and metaphorical nourishment for the independent nation, as in his well-known essay, "Nuestra América," in which he refers to "la abundancia que la Naturaleza puso para todos en el pueblo que fecundan con su trabajo y defienden con sus vidas" ["the

abundance that Nature gave to all of the people who make it fruitful with their labor and defend it with their lives"] (134). Similarly, the scene in which Jorgito and Malú bury a time capsule containing their wishes endows Cuban soil with hope for the future. The trajectory of the children's trip also evokes the ideological opposition between Havana, western symbol of capitalism and Santiago, eastern symbol of socialism, reinforcing the idea that the children's quest is allied with revolutionary values. The fact that the children's goal is a lighthouse evokes the discourse of Che Guevara, in which Cuba frequently figured as a beacon for other nations still subject to colonial and neocolonial rule (Llorente 102), as in a 1961 speech in which he called Cuba the "faro más alto" ["the tallest lighthouse"] in all of America ("Cuba, sin miedo").

Critics also point to the film's child protagonists as furthering its international appeal through ideologies of childhood as universally identifiable and apolitical (Fehimović 90-91, Martin 84). Yet, as Fehimović suggests, the film's romantic understanding of childhood as authentic and natural is complicated by its link to the ideas of Martí, whose own romantic view of children positioned them as symbols of political hope and of national salvation (110). Martí is evoked in the opening scene, in which Jorgito and his friends reenact battles from the War of Independence, using anachronistic toy machine guns that suggest the links between the nineteenth-century war and the twentieth-century Revolution. Called the "intellectual author" of the Revolution by Fidel Castro (López), Martí articulated politicized ideas about children that became the foundation of the extensive revolutionary discourse on the topic, including Guevara's concept of the morally elevated *hombre nuevo* who would be characterized by egalitarianism and expanded social duty, and who would be fully realized only with the emergence of a new generation (Fehimović 110). For Guevara, children were the site of hope for a specifically twenty-first-century future: "Haremos el hombre del siglo XXI […]. La arcilla […] de nuestra obra es la juventud: en ella depositamos nuestra esperanza y la preparamos para tomar de nuestras manos la bandera" ["We will make the man of the twenty-first century. The clay with which we work is youth: in it we deposit our hope and prepare it to take the flag from our hands"] ("El socialismo y el hombre" 49). As Anita Casavantes Bradford notes, Martí's view of children as the hope of the world strongly informed the Revolution's well-known emphasis on literacy and elementary education (62). Revolutionary discourse took Martí's politicization of children a step further as Castro frequently directed speeches to children as political actors, who by now were positioned as role models for adults by virtue of their loyalty to the Revolution (Casavantes Bradford 74-75). For Casavantes Bradford, the conflation of children with the Revolution created a dichotomy between children and their elders, moral and immoral, revolutionary and anti-revolutionary, and national and antinational (77-78). In the introduction to their 2014 collection of studies of Latin American films in which child characters diverge from adult behaviours and beliefs, Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet note that as figures of otherness, children can represent nostalgia for the lost (12). Although Rocha and Seminet do not discuss *Viva Cuba*, their insight applies to Cremata's film given that the child protagonists leave their parents' socioeconomically and ideologically divided world and come to embrace the revolutionary ideals of egalitarianism, solidarity, and autonomy that seem to be missing from the sphere of their elders. From the opening sequence of the film, in which Jorgito scrawls "Viva" above the word "Cuba," evoking the revolutionary cry "Viva Cuba, viva la Revolución" through the journey that Rosana Díaz-Zambrana identifies as a space that privileges rebellion (173), Cremata's child protagonists embody Castro's assertion that "los niños son revolucionarios" ["the children are revolutionaries"] ("Discurso […] 6 de enero de 1962").

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In her 2019 study of Cuban cinema since the Revolution, Humphreys argues that ICAIC films from the Special Period enact a play on Castro's famous 1961 declaration, "'dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada'" ["within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing"] (qtd. in Humphreys 4). Specifically, such films defend their right to criticism from within the Revolution and, in subsequent decades, amplify the forms this criticism may take while remaining loyal to revolutionary values such as "solidarity, social justice, national sovereignty, and commitment to public health care and education" (Humphreys 4-5). Although *Viva Cuba* was not made within ICAIC and does not figure in Humphreys's study, it can be understood as an extension of the Special Period tendency that Humphreys describes into the international, digital realm of twenty-first-century Cuban cinema. In common with earlier, ICAIC-produced films such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's and Juan Carlos Tabío's 1993 *Fresa y chocolate*, Fernando Pérez's 1998 *La vida es silbar,*[3] and Tabío's 2000 film *Lista de espera*, *Viva Cuba* may be understood as criticizing the economic exigencies of the Special Period through the theme of emigration. Between 1991 and 2000, more than thirty thousand Cubans left the island, including many artists and filmmakers who could not secure funding, and emigration became a frequent theme in Cuban film (Chanan 447).[4] By 2005, the year of *Viva Cuba*'s release and around the time that the Special Period is widely considered to end, the possibility of emigration had become an inherent part of Cubans' lived experience (Johnson 143-44). Like Cubans in general, *Viva Cuba*'s child protagonists must make sense of the very real possibility of emigration. When Jorgito asks Malú whether leaving will turn her into a foreigner, she replies "ojalá que no," ["I hope not"] (00:39:13-00:39:15) suggesting the ways in which emigration raises anxieties around identity and the future, both of self and of nation.

With emigration as a central theme and narrative motor, it is unsurprising that images of travel –real and imagined, antiquated and modern –are ever present in *Viva Cuba*. In one of film's early scenes, Malú launches paper airplanes to free Jorgito from the schoolroom in which he is serving detention. On the first day of their journey, the children settle down for the night in a beached boat from which they chart the constellations with their fingers. In the next scene, Malú and Jorgito ride a bus, then navigate through the countryside on foot using a compass. In a subsequent scene Malú expresses her desire to work as a flight attendant when she grows up, immediately before the film presents the viewer with an airplane juxtaposed to a shot of the two children riding in an oxcart, an image that highlights the contrast between the protagonists' lofty dreams and earthy reality. Finally, the children travel by motorcycle to their destination, the nineteenth-century lighthouse commissioned by Isabella II of Spain where Malú's father lives. Although her father will stay in Cuba, his job as lighthouse keeper is yet another reminder of those who have left the island and of those who might return. Considering the theme of emigration in an interview with the director, Mauricio Vicent claims that Viva Cuba "no cuenta una historia política sino humana" ["does not tell a political story, but a human one"] and quotes Cremata to the effect that emigration is more economic than political. Here again, insistence upon the film's apolitical nature seems to be somewhat forced, especially given that Cuba's economic woes and resulting waves of emigration are necessarily related to its status as a former colony and the nearly fifty years of embargo inflicted on the island nation by the United States between 1960 and the year of the film's release.[5]

In response to the economic crisis provoked by the loss of Soviet support and fueled by ongoing U.S. policy, the Cuban government legalized small businesses and self-employment, expanded foreign tourism, and allowed the entry of U.S. dollars largely through remittances. Although these changes were a source of hope to some, they also underpinned a growing inequality sharply at odds with the

3. Humphreys does not *discuss La vida es silbar*.

4. 1994 was the peak of Special Period emigration, which is vastly exceeded by the most recent exodus. Cuban economist Juan Carlos Albizu-Campos estimates that 1.79 million Cubans left the island between 2021 and 2024 (Rodríguez Granja).

5. The near-full embargo of 1960 was extended to food and medicine in 1962.

ideal of radical egalitarianism espoused by the Revolution, particularly as it is conceived by Che Guevara, both through his concept of the *hombre nuevo* who would be characterized by egalitarianism and solidarity (Llorente 87), and through his explicit references to equality such as this one from a 1961 speech:

> No es bueno que una cosa falte en un lugar y exista en otro; no son buenas las diferencias de trato a los ciudadanos, cuando estamos en un régimen donde queremos que todo el mundo tenga las mismas posibilidades, el mismo trato, y que se sienta exactamente un ciudadano como cualquier otro, un compañero más en la gran tarea de la edificación del socialismo. ("Discurso en la primera reunión nacional de producción")
>
> [It is not good that something should be lacking in one place and exist in another; differences in how citizens are treated are not good, when we are in a regime in which we want everyone to have the same possibilities, the same treatment, and to feel exactly like any other citizen, one more comrade in the great mission of building socialism.]

While Guevara speaks of an ideal of egalitarianism in implicit contrast with the socioeconomic inequalities that grew out of the sugar plantation system, deep-rooted racism, and political corruption, the inequities of the Special Period arose from the loss of Soviet support and the revolutionary government's efforts to alleviate the economic hardship experienced by its citizens in a context of globalization. Nevertheless, as Mayra Espina explains, these more recent remittance-based inequalities are firmly rooted in the injustices of the past:

> La búsqueda de igualdad en mi país es una vieja aspiración. Comenzó hace más de cien años. Forma parte del ideal de nación independiente, forjado en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. En este escenario las remesas actuaron como factor fuerte de acentuación de las desigualdades. Debido a que en la composición de la población emigrada cubana conservaban el mayor peso, en aquellos años, las personas blancas y de capas medias y altas, los envíos de estas ayudas económicas benefician, principalmente, a un tipo específico de familias.
>
> [The search for equality is an old aspiration in my country. It began over one hundred years ago. It forms part of the ideal of national independence forged in the second half of the nineteenth century. In this context the remittances acted as a major factor in the accentuation of inequalities. Given that white people from the middle and upper classes formed the greater part of the composition of the Cuban emigrant population in that period, the delivery of these economic aids primarily benefit a specific type of family.]

In sum, remittances tend to benefit white people from upper- and middle-class backgrounds because this group is more likely to have relatives in the Cuban exile community in the U.S. Although Malú's mother's support comes from a boyfriend, her socioeconomic class, which is inevitably racially inflected, allows her to spend time in Cuban resort areas where she is more likely to meet a foreign companion; when the children reach Varadero on their journey, Malú tells Jorgito that she vacations there every year and expresses her surprise that this is his first visit to the beach resort. Espina also points out that emigration as an escape from economic difficulties itself requires either ample income or the willingness to risk one's life in a dangerous crossing. In contrast to people with little or moderate income, the only impediments to the departure of Malú and her mother are solved by

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the death of her grandmother and the assent given by a father who fails to consider his child's wishes.

In addition to its emigration-centered narrative and repeated images that suggest departure, *Viva Cuba* critiques the economic privations of the Special Period through elements of mise-en-scène that highlight the unequal positions of the children's families. Malú's mother's house suggests that her family was upper class prior to the Revolutionary victory: it is old, large, and elegant, containing fine antique furniture and a wealth of books. The film's contrast between the front doors of Malú's and Jorgito's neighbouring homes instantly identifies the politics of each family: Malú's door features a cross and the words, "Esta es tu casa Señor" ["This is your home Lord"]; at the home of Jorgito's parents, who are workers loyal to the Revolution, the door bears an image of Fidel Castro and the words, "Esta es tu casa Fidel" ["This is your home Fidel"] (00:25:35-00:25:39). Malú's mother forbids her daughter to play with her friend, "porque es gente baja, sin nivel" ["because they're low-class, unrefined"], telling Malú "tú perteneces a otro mundo, tú eres diferente" ["you belong to another world, you're different"] (00:04:55-00:05:08). Equally, Jorgito's mother (Luisa María Jiménez) tells her son to avoid Malú, using the epithet "cara de burguesa" ["snob"] to describe her neighbor (00:04:46-00:04:48). Nevertheless, it is not the past alone that determines Malú's mother's economic advantage, but her relationship with the foreigner who is her source of remittances from abroad, which give her access to foreign goods only available through the black market. Cross cuts of the children at home constitute a poignant critique of twenty-first-century socioeconomic inequality in Cuba. While Malú's mother delicately adjusts a platter featuring fresh lettuce and tomatoes at dinner, Jorgito stares down at the small plate of rice and fried egg that his mother gives him. As the children prepare for their trip, the film continues this pattern of contrasting cross cuts: Jorgito opens the drawer of an inexpensive, chipped dresser containing binoculars and a few worn T-shirts, while Malú's dresser is of antique wood and holds colorful T-shirts with designs; Jorgito's backpack is plain and dark, unlike Malú's shiny new one in Barbie pink; Jorgito goes to sleep in a bed with one plain sheet while Malú settles into a nest of embroidery with a ruffled bedspread and pillow shams; and at breakfast, Jorgito drinks from a dented tin cup while Malú's mother hands her a bright yellow ceramic mug with a smiley face on it. These contrasts are more than a study in the heterogeneity of Cuban experience. The representation of one child who has fresh fruit and vegetables, and another who does not, constitutes a harsh critique of the twenty-first-century economic realities that run counter to the radical egalitarianism espoused by the Revolution.

Although, as Stock notes, Cremata's film does indeed avoid voicing words such as Revolution, Fidel Castro, and United States, the silence around these terms is attention-getting and suggestive of a return of the repressed in the form of revolutionary imagery. Indeed, in her study of nostalgia and collective memory in *Viva Cuba*, Seminet remarks that the film is characterized by "constant visual reminders of the Cuban Revolution in the form of posters and iconography of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Camilo Cienfuegos" (197). The "intellectual author of the Revolution," José Martí, must be included here as well, especially given the film's opening sequence in which Jorgito and his male friends play at the War of Independence while the viewer catches glimpses of the giant mural of Che Guevara in the Plaza de la Revolución in the background. The figure of Che Guevara appears above all through what critics identify as a Che-like character that the children encounter near the end of their journey.[6] The character of the spelunker who looks like Che (Pavel García Valdés) also drives a motorcycle, recalling the 2004 Walter Salles road movie about the revolutionary leader (Unruh 89). This character appears at the children's lowest point: they have run out of food and water and, worse, have fallen out with each other. He takes them to their destination and, notably, also serves as their moral guide.

6. See, for example, Stock (154), Unruh (89), and Seminet (196).

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Like the Special Period films that Humphreys discusses, although *Viva Cuba* criticizes from within the failure of revolutionary egalitarianism in the twenty-first century, it remains loyal to specific aspects of the Revolution, including its creation of a successful educational system. As Seminet points out, the importance of education is highlighted in *Viva Cuba* through two separate depictions of the protagonists starting their school day by singing the national anthem and chanting the slogan, "'Pioneros por el comunismo, seremos como el Che'" ["Pioneers for communism, we will be like Che"] (192). At this point in history, the child protagonists are in fact communist pioneers, living in a moment of anxiety about the future of socialism in Cuba. The figure of Martí and his emphasis on learning emerge prominently in *Viva Cuba* when the children encounter a school pageant in his honour, in which students sing in front of a backdrop inscribed with the quotation "ser cultos para ser libres" ["to be educated is to be free"].[7] *Viva Cuba* is also like its Special Period predecessors in its valorization of Cuba's health care system. Toward the end of their journey, when Jorgito gets ill and the children seek help at a hospital, he receives an examination and antibiotics at no charge, an occurrence that would be impossible in the U.S. where, the film suggests, Malú's mother will take her child. Cremata's film goes further by suggesting the safety and lack of corruption that characterize twenty-first-century Cuban society. Havana is the children's playground and at no point is there a sense that they have anything to fear. Similarly, on their journey across the country, they encounter only people who wish to help them (Seminet 197). The absence of official corruption is highlighted by a phone conversation in which Malú's mother responds to an off-screen question from her foreign boyfriend by explaining that the police cannot be bribed to do more to find the missing children. And, in the final sequence of the film, while the distressed parents argue, the police officer is the one adult who hugs the children, in an image that suggests the solicitous character of the state.

In addition to the revolutionary value of egalitarianism that *Viva Cuba* espouses through its critique of twenty-first-century socioeconomic inequities, Cremata's film is remarkably suggestive of the ideal of solidarity as it is articulated by Che Guevara. The film's repeated evocations of the figure of Che Guevara may be a product of the director's relative youth. Born in 1961, Cremata is a generation removed from the directors of earlier Special Period films like the ones that Humphreys discusses. While films such as *Fresa, Silbar,* and *Lista* criticize from within and retain loyalty to certain Revolutionary values, they also suggest what Michael Chanan describes as a post-Cold War shift in official discourse from Marxism to the nationalism of Martí (447). In contrast, *Viva Cuba*'s repeated images of Che Guevara as well as implied references to his ideas seem to bear out the results of a late 1990s study which showed that younger Cubans saw Martí as relevant, but Guevara as more important as both a means of aligning with the Revolution and of dissenting from it (Kapcia 2005 408). In Cremata's 2005 film, the ten-year-old protagonists who join forces to leave an adult world characterized by inequality, strife, and the threat of loss of Cuban identity cannot help but evoke Guevara's concept of *el hombre nuevo*, the new person of the twenty-first century who would embody egalitarianism and expanded social duty. Guevara underscored his commitment to the ideal of solidarity through his frequent expression of Martí's sentiment that "'a real man should feel on his own cheek the blow inflicted on any other man's'" (Llorente 87). Fehimović notes that the children display a "natural propensity" toward solidarity which, given that it is a Che lookalike who reaffirms this value, positions the film as an "update" of national identity and revolutionary ideals (118). Similarly, Vicky Unruh argues that *Viva Cuba* urges solidarity across classes and among Cubans on and off the island in the context of reemergent inequalities (89). In two early scenes, both Jorgito and Malú evince a tendency toward solidarity that is highly reminiscent of Guevara's belief that expanded moral concern equates to feeling the

7. "Ser culto es el único modo de ser libre" ["To be educated is the only way to be free"] is Martí's original quotation from his 1884 essay, "Maestros ambulantes."

injury inflicted on another. When a boy at school maligns Malú's mother, Jorgito fights him; when Jorgito is given detention and the assignment of repeatedly writing "no debo boxear en la escuela" ["I must not fight in school"] (00:18:23-00:18:39), Málu writes the phrase numerous times on pages that she shapes into airplanes and sends flying to the classroom to help her friend complete his task. Nevertheless, the two children also evoke Guevara's belief that expanded social duty would not manifest itself as an immediate result of the victory of the Revolution but rather would require moral leadership and the experience of socialism to come into being. In a scene from the beginning of the film, Jorgito and Malú fail to cooperate with each other, instead getting into a heated argument in which Malú claims authority as "la reina de España" ["the queen of Spain"] (00:03:38-00:03:40) and Jorgito rails at his friend for her domineering behavior. It is only after the shared experience of their journey, including the hardships of hunger, thirst, and exhaustion that lead them to fall out with each other, that the children encounter their moral guide, the speleologist character whose appearance and ideas liken him to Che Guevara. This character tells the children that they have failed in their quest because they stopped being friends, warning them that "sin amigos, no se va a ningún lado" ["without friends you don't get anywhere"] (01:08:00-01:08:24), and explaining that even when friends argue, they are still friends. The latter insight elicits relief and happiness from Jorgito and Malú. It also parallels the implication in *Viva Cuba* as well as its Special Period predecessors, that one may criticize the Revolution and remain loyal to it. Now travelling with their empathetic moral leader, the child protagonists are like the post-revolutionary Cuban people as Che Guevara describes them in "El hombre y el socialismo":

> [los hombres] 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. (39-40)
>
> [[men] no longer walk completely alone, on little-traveled pathways toward distant longings. They follow the vanguard, constituted by the Party, by the forward-thinking workers, by the progressive men who walk connected to the masses and in close communion with them].

A close-up of the two children riding in the motorcycle sidecar toward Punta de Maisí shows them smiling widely, confident in their journey now that their solidarity has been restored under the leadership of their moral guide.

As do the Special Period films that Humphreys studies, *Viva Cuba* espouses the revolutionary value of national sovereignty, implying an anti-imperialist stance in the post-Soviet context in which, as Espina puts it, "el peso del embargo norteamericano se siente con más rigor" ["the weight of the North American embargo is felt with more rigor"]. The emigration-centred dilemma of Viva Cuba's child protagonists inevitably evokes the Elián González crisis and the aspects of revolutionary thought and action that were revitalized during its unfolding (Martin 90, Fehimović 112), including a return to the anti-U.S. imperialism characteristic of the Revolution in general and of Che Guevara's speeches in particular. In December 1999, Fidel Castro denounced the violation of the rights of Juan Miguel González, the father of the six-year-old Elián, who had survived a shipwreck in which his mother died, to be taken to relatives in Miami. This led to the Battle of Ideas, a political campaign that began with the January 2000 Elián marches and continued after the child's return to his father on June 28, 2000, until Fidel Castro's retirement as president in 2006. From the outset of this campaign, Cuban youth played a central part in

revitalizing the Revolution that, until that year, they had increasingly sidelined in favour of "jineterismo" (hustling) and U.S.-based culture, especially hip hop and rap (Kapcia 2009, 7). Cubans in Cuba and U.S. citizens outside of the Miami-centered Cuban exile community supported Elián's return to his father in Cuba (Casavantes Bradford 196). The entire island was mobilized at first weekly and later daily during this crisis in a way that would have been unimaginable even five years earlier (Kapcia 2005 400). Elián became a symbol of Cuba's victimization by U.S. imperialism through the C.I.A. and forty years of economic embargo, reviving anti-U.S. sentiment among the Cuban people to levels not seen in decades (Casavantes Bradford 214). Antoni Kapcia argues that these circumstances allowed for the values of education and morality that had informed 1960s policy to re-emerge in a twenty-first-century drive for educational reform (2005 400). According to Kapcia, the first premise to be instilled in youth was a morality of equality and resistance to "dollarization, privatization and individualism" (2005 408). This socialist and anti-imperialist morality emerges in *Viva Cuba* through the film's implicit critique of the two children's material inequality and through the fact that it is a bourgeois, dollar-dependent and individualistic character who plans to emigrate against her child's wishes. Her class snobbery renders the character of Malú's mother unsympathetic, evoking Cuban films of the sixties, which positioned emigration as an act of betrayal of the Revolution (Johnson 129-30). After her mother dies, she tells her foreign boyfriend on the phone, "ya no me queda nada aquí" ["there is nothing left for me here"] (00:14:07-00:14:09) and sums up the situation in Cuba with the words "esto se hunde" ["this is going under"] (00:07:08-00:07:11). This character's lack of a political commitment motivating her departure, as well as her statement that there is nothing left for her now, recall the character of Sergio in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1968 *Memorias del subdesarrollo*, as he wanders Havana and its environs without political convictions or social purpose. Moreover, her characterization of Cuba as a sinking ship immediately calls to mind the saying about rats fleeing, reinforcing the 1960s view of emigration as betrayal. In contrast to this character, the two children are identified with the will to remain in Cuba (Martin 91). Malú's desire to stay where her grandmother is buried further links her to the early days of the Revolution, given that her grandmother would have come of age at the time of revolutionary victory. Although Malú's mother follows the legal route of seeking permission from her ex-husband to take her daughter from Cuba, the character of Malú raises the issue of her own desire when she rails at her repentant father for failing to ask the child what she wanted before he signed the form that would allow her mother to take her away. Although children's wishes in this area are not protected by the law, Malú's character raises a moral question that haunts many Cuban films that treat the subject of emigration, in which adult characters removed as children return to the island, either physically as in Humberto Solas's 2001 *Miel para Oshún* or metaphorically, as in Esteban Insausti's 2010 *Larga distancia*. Moreover, as she cries out against the trampling of her wishes, Malú becomes a symbol of Cuba's struggle for autonomy, first as a colony and later as a victim of U.S. imperialism. In a 2005 interview, Cremata positions Viva Cuba as an "'[…] opportunity to shout, nationally and internationally, our country's right and duty to exist'" (qtd. in Progreso Weekly). To assert Cuba's "right and duty to exist" is less universal or even nationalist than revolutionary in tone, evoking the nation's historical role as a socialist success story that, in the still hopeful 1960s, inspired anti-imperialist movements around the world. In a twenty-first-century context, Cremata's assertion also hints at the globalizing forces that threaten Cuba's existence as a politically, economically, and culturally autonomous state, including socioeconomic inequities that are no longer grounded in pre-Revolutionary wealth but rather in the gulf between those who have foreign connections and those who do not.

Viva Cuba's road movie genre and aesthetic, its child protagonists, and

its context of production all contribute to the film's international success and its seeming eschewal of the political in favor of the personal aspects of emigration. Nevertheless, like its Special Period predecessors, *Viva Cuba* criticizes from within the economic hardships of its time and reminds viewers of the achievements of the Revolution. Moreover, it represents the twenty-first-century inequalities that arise from the entry into Cuba of U.S. dollars in the form of remittances as poignantly as it does the child protagonists' potential losses. Revolutionary ideals emerge through the film's narrative and through images that repeatedly evoke the figure of Che Guevara. In a present characterized by the socioeconomic injustice, ideological division, and imperialism against which Guevara fought, *Viva Cuba* suggests that egalitarianism, solidarity, and anti-imperialism are both 1960s revolutionary and twenty-first-century socialist ideals. The film's final scene, in which its revolutionary-aligned protagonists separate from their quarreling families to embrace at the foot of a lighthouse, evokes Guevara's repeated casting of revolutionary Cuba as a beacon for other nations and suggests that the core values of the Revolution might serve as signposts for the future. Far from the apolitical cinema focused on foreign viewers that Viva Cuba superficially might appear to be, this film is a rich and layered text in which the revolutionary ideals of egalitarianism, solidarity, and anti-imperialism run deep.

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