

Diasporic bodies. An ethnography of Cuban women's experiences of migration in Europe

A stunning 10% of Cuba's population – more than a million people – left the island between 2022-2023. Official figures on migration, made public for the first time by the Cuban government, show that Cuba's population went from 11,181,595 in Dec. 2021 to 10,055,968 in Dec. 2023. These numbers surpass those of significant historical events including the Golden Exile (the first wave of Cuban emigration, in the wake of the Revolution, from 1959 to 1962), the Freedom Flights (an airlift operation that transported Cubans to Miami from 1956 to 1973), the Mariel boatlift of 1980 and the Cuban rafter crisis of 1994.

In response to the ongoing crisis, the government reaffirmed the country's strong attachment to revolutionary values. The hashtags #SomosCuba (We are Cuba) and #SomosContinuidad (We are continuity) are commonly used by Cuban revolutionaries, including members of the government across social media, while for ordinary Cubans the agonizing decline of the Cuban Revolution and an acutely perceived sense of rupture permeate their life stories whether in Cuba or abroad.

While men are more prone to politicize the crisis and accuse the Cuban government of depriving them of what was theirs, women actively sought ways to adapt and rebuild their lives. This also held true for women's personal and professional trajectories outside the island. Their bodies bear evidence of the pains, joys, and struggles that stand witness to a failing state.

This project examines, with the tools of feminist anthropology, women's embodied and emplaced experiences of migration, which speak of the decline and transformations of the revolutionary project, in stark contrast with official narratives of continuity. The project engages with the notion of body work (understood as either work done on the body or through the body) to address a variety of embodied practices and to gain insight into women's corporealities and subjectivities, as well as their experience of labor, whether it be through traditionally attributed responsibilities of family care or the experience of employment. The project examines how the hypersexualization of gendered and racialized bodies in European contexts forces women to rethink/reassess how their bodies show up in the world/in the workplace. This research draws from feminist scholarship that addresses the interlace of individual and collective bodies, racism and patriarchy and foregrounds a comparative perspective from the most prominent Cuban diasporas in Europe: Spain and Italy.

The expected results of the project will be presented in the form of publications in national and international peer-reviewed journals and during national and international conferences as well as other academic events.