

INTERNATIONALISM'S REMITTANCES: THE IMPACT OF TEMPORARY MIGRATION ON CUBAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Since the implementation of post-Soviet economic reforms, remittances have had a strong influence on the Cuban economy and society. While economic and social influences of remittances from permanent migration have been examined, the same cannot be said of remittances from temporary migration. As part of an expansion of professional service exports over the past decade, tens of thousands of Cuban professionals (*internacionalistas*) have worked abroad, remitting their earnings and often returning with substantial savings and a broadened global perspective. The expansion of professional service exports across more than 65 countries in the global south has extended the influence of remittances far beyond Miami and the USA. Using first-hand accounts of returned *internacionalistas* interviewed in Havana in 2010 and 2011, this article explores the socio-economic influences of the remittances from Cuban internationalism.

Keywords: Cuba, internationalism, remittances, migration

Introduction

Opportunities for Cuban professionals to work abroad throughout the revolutionary period have been relatively few and highly coveted. Migration out of the country has tended to be permanent. When an opportunity for temporary migration is available, it is closely linked to and regulated by the Cuban government. Positions to work abroad have been created on an unprecedented scale over the past decade, however, through the expansion of what the government refers to as international collaborations or humanitarian missions abroad.

International collaborations have enabled Cubans without relatives abroad to earn hard currency and increase their household's standard of living without having to migrate permanently or seek out higher salaries in a sector where dollar earnings are available. This government-contracted migration has provided an

escape valve for Cuban professionals, likely minimising external or internal brain drain (Feinsilver 2008). Through temporary migration, Cuban professionals can avoid leaving their profession as a result of permanent migration or changing to a non-professional job that provides more access to hard currency (CUCs). It also provides opportunities for economic advancement to otherwise disadvantaged groups (Blue 2010).

Temporary migrants who work on government-contracted missions are positioned to be key players shaping a new Cuban society through the resources they've acquired working abroad. These 'international collaborators' (*internationalistas*) are return migrants – coveted across the developing world – who arrive home with capital, experience, new ideas and connections (Conway et al. 2012; Démurger and Xu 2011; Dumont and Spielvogel 2008; Jones 2011). In contrast to permanent migrants who remit, return migrants are 'embedded' in their communities, providing the strong social ties necessary to potentially translate new ideas and capital into meaningful change at home (Jones 2011). By expanding professional service exports, the Cuban state has created a class of tens of thousands of temporary migrant workers, most of whom will return, invest, and contribute to Cuban society. Using the words and experiences of returned *internationalistas*, this article explores the impact of temporary workers' remittances, both economic and social, on Cuban society.

By contrasting the social and economic influence of remittances from permanent and temporary migrants on Cuban society, this article aims to recognise the major influx of capital and ideas stemming from a decade of expanded Cuban internationalism. The experiences and perceptions of temporary and permanent migrants in Cuban society are stark. While long-term migrants are considered to have 'abandoned' the revolutionary effort, short-term *internationalistas* are sacrificing the comforts of home to work in difficult conditions in the name of the revolution. The first group resides in a wealthy society with a strong consumer culture and remits to Cuba both goods and ideology that reinforces that culture. The second group is serving on humanitarian missions in impoverished areas in poor countries on the periphery of the capitalist world economy. In a seeming contradiction, professional contract workers work in the spirit of humanitarianism and collectivity, motivated by economic and political independence while sacrificing for the revolution and promoting its goals. There are important differences as well as commonalities in how the remittances sent from these different contexts affect Cuban society.

This exploration of how Cuban internationalism has affected Cuban society begins with a review of literature highlighting the history of Cuban internationalism and its expansion over the past decade. It then explores the influence of remittances in Cuban society, from both permanent and temporary migration.

After outlining the study's methods, I examine evidence of the social and economic impacts of temporary migration on Cuban society. The Cuban government would like to expand and transform its service exports into a primary means of raising foreign currency. Whether or not it succeeds, the *internationalistas* interviewed and surveyed here represent a steady stream of thousands of returning workers that possess the resources to make a major contribution to a changing Cuban society.

Cuban Internationalism

International missions are having profound socio-economic effects in Cuba. Since 2003, tens of thousands of Cuban health workers have volunteered to serve in government-initiated public health missions around the globe. The renewable two- or three-year international service contracts allow professionals in health care and an array of other services to earn hard currency salaries and remit part of their earnings back to their families in Cuba. For Cuban professionals, contracted international work is an opportunity to earn up to ten times their regular salary. This represents a major shift in how missions are understood, as a formalised system of extra payments to *internationalistas* did not exist before what Kirk and Erisman (2009) call the Cuban Revolution's 'Millennial Renaissance' era of the twenty-first century.

Cuban international initiatives must be understood in the context of Cuban society and its international relations. Clearly, without Cuba's five-decade long history of solidarity and collaboration with other countries around the world, its international reputation for successful public health and education systems, and the humanitarian-focused moral education given to its people, it would not have the opportunities nor the professional workers willing or able to carry out service exports on this scale. Moreover, without the dual economy, the resultant salary inversions and inequality within the Cuban economy, and restrictions on travel there would not be long waiting lists of professionals willing to make the necessary personal sacrifice that international contract work requires.

Non-tourism services – most of which are medical services – are now earning more hard currency for the Cuban economy than either remittances or tourism (Feinsilver 2009). Favourable trade agreements with Venezuela have allowed Cuba to expand its medical service exports to a total of 68 countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe and even the South Pacific (República de Cuba 2011, table 104). Over a period of more than 50 years, over 113,500 health workers (the majority of which are doctors) have completed missions in 103 countries (Feinsilver 2008). From 1998 to 2008, approximately 185,000 Cubans participated in international missions, 37,000 in the year 2008 alone (Kirk and Erisman 2009). In addition to health services, Cuba has signed agreements

(*convenios*) for collaborative ventures providing sport and other services such as education, agriculture, science, and infrastructure-capacity building in dozens of countries around the world, with 53 such contracts in African countries alone (Huish 2011: 420). Much of the literature about Cuban international initiatives has focused on its motivations: political, in a bid for soft-power and political or symbolic capital; economic, in an effort to obtain hard currency; and moral, as evidenced by decades of solidarity and humanitarian aid (Artaraz 2012; Bustamante and Sweig 2008; Feinsilver 2008; Huish 2013; Kirk and Erisman 2009; Saney 2009). The focus of this article is to highlight the domestic influence of these initiatives through the lens of the experiences of returned *internationalistas*.

An expansion of professional export services occurred as part of Cuba's collaboration with Venezuela and ALBA (Bolivian Alternative for the Americas) after the turn of the century. In 2003, Hugo Chavez's efforts to bring universal literacy and health care to Venezuela through the Barrio Adentro programme involved hiring Cuban specialists as part of two trade agreements signed in 2000 and 2005 (Feinsilver 2008; Kirk and Erisman 2009). In what has been referred to as an 'oil for doctors' swap, Venezuelan funds have allowed the expansion of Cuban professional exports in Venezuela, Bolivia, and other poor regions throughout Latin America. In what P. Sean Brotherton calls 'transactional humanitarianism', Cuban professional services are marketed as *humanitarian* aid while enfolded in trade relations designed specifically to earn valuable foreign exchange (i.e. Venezuelan oil at preferential prices, investments in strategic joint ventures and credit) (Brotherton 2012; Feinsilver 2009).

Anticipating cutbacks in Venezuelan funding and a desire to align with the economic reforms announced in April 2011, the Cuban government modified the terms of its international labour contracts, effective January 2012. Cuban technical support remains free for the very poorest countries, but middle and higher-income countries are now being asked to pay for the Cuban services they receive (Interview, Enrique, 30 December 2011).

Remittances to Cuba

Much has been written about Cuban exceptionalism regarding migrant remittances. Remittances to Cuba in the past two decades have been distinctly shaped by a host of factors: the lack of return migration, difficult and therefore infrequent communication between migrants and their families, lack of investment, disincentives to send money, hostility between sending and receiving countries that restricts sending, and the high cost of sending and related informal nature of sending (Díaz-Briquets and Pérez-López 1997; Eckstein and Barberia 2002; Orozco 2009). While not denying these exceptions, there are also – especially in

relation to Cuba's cautious but significant 2011 economic opening – commonalities in regard to the social and economic impact of remittances and the influence of return migration. Cuba's recent policy reforms and the increase in non-permanent forms of migration are slowly shifting Cuba towards convergence with remittance patterns seen in other developing countries. As is true in countries throughout the region, remittances to Cuba are now having tangible social and economic impacts. Their revenues are greater than foreign investment and development aid, they influence the nature of income inequality, are responsive to economic crisis, and have far-reaching social repercussions (Blue 2004, 2007; Eckstein 2009, 2010b; Grabel 2010; Ratha 2007; Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 2009).

Remittances to Cuba now originate from two main sources: permanent migration and temporary contract assignments abroad. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Development Bank (IDB) define remittances as 'money transfers conducted by individuals who change their residence', distinguished from employee compensation for temporary work that does not involve a change of residence and from migrant transfers that refer to capital that migrants send from abroad to their own accounts back home, usually when they return to their home countries (Maldonado et al. 2012: 10). Given that the majority of temporary migrants live abroad for more than a year, this study considers remittances to be all of the money and goods migrants send home, including money sent and saved on a migrant's behalf.

While temporary migration as an 'international collaborator' is the most common means of working abroad while maintaining permanent residence in Cuba, there are in practice a variety of means available for professionals to work abroad. Cuban ministries arrange contracts for their professionals under an agreement where a portion (30–50 per cent) of the worker's foreign earnings goes to the state (Eckstein 2010b; Hammett 2007). Arrangements such as 'Permission of Residence in the Exterior' (PRE's) also allow Cuban professionals to work abroad on non-government visas (Barberia 2002). A 2009 news article (Millman 2009) reported that the Mexican embassy had been issuing 8,000 to 10,000 PRE visas per year allowing Cubans to work in Mexico.

The increase in remittances is directly related to the economic crisis of the early 1990s, which legalised the US dollar and introduced a dual (dollar–peso) economy. Workers' peso wages became insufficient to supply their family's basic needs. Prior to the establishment of a dual economy, money had been devalued and unlinked from professional prestige or standard of living under the socialist economy. Key commodities such as housing, personal transportation and access to large electro-domestic goods were obtained through one's workplace, elevating the importance of political loyalty and good standing in one's workplace over wages earned. Almost 20 years after the establishment of the dual economy, the

workplace remains an essential source of supplemental food, toiletries and clothing for those without an external source of income such as remittances. Either through formal access to goods through the workplace in the form of supplemental goods or informally through workplace theft which results in goods sold on the black market, most Cubans depend on their state jobs to compensate for the lack of a living wage. For those families with relatives living abroad, remittances allow a higher standard of living and a degree of independence from their workplace and the state.

Economic remittances from permanent migration

With the legalisation of the US dollar in Cuba in 1993, the amount of money Cubans sent to their relatives rapidly increased from an estimated \$50 million in 1990 to approximately \$1 billion in 2000 (Orozco 2002). After a decade of on-again off-again restrictions that dampened the amount sent, remittances once again jumped significantly when President Obama lifted all restrictions on Cuban-American travel or remittances to the island in 2009. While it remains difficult to measure the amount of money that is transferred due to the highly informal nature of remittances to Cuba, it is clear that recent changes in US and Cuban policy have made higher levels of remittance possible. Although estimates vary widely, Cuban experts Emilio Morales and Joseph Scarpaci (2012) argue that remittances doubled in the six-year period between 2005 and 2011, from \$1.1 billion to over \$2 billion. They highlight six factors leading to the recent dramatic growth in remittances: increased trips by Cuban Americans to Cuba since 2009, the opening of the Cuban real-estate market in 2011, greater opportunities for Cuban private enterprises, rapid growth of cell phone usage since contracts were authorised in 2006, decreasing cost of money transfers and package shipping, and a consistent outmigration of an average 45,000 Cubans a year who maintain close family ties and an interest in investing back home.¹

‘State-regulated remittances’

While other sectors of the economy grew faster than remittances in Cuba, the real surge in Cuba’s national income since 2008 has come from the export of professional services (Feinsilver 2009). The export of professional services generates income that this study refers to as ‘state-regulated remittances’, due to the fact that part of the funds *internationalistas* earn is remitted by the government on the migrant’s behalf. Income earned through temporary international work is remitted either directly from the government to the migrant family as ‘family aid’ or as savings held by the government in escrow bank accounts that are available to migrants when they are home visiting or at the completion of their contract. These ‘state-regulated remittances’ are independent from additional earnings that

are remitted directly from the migrant, including more expensive goods (in-kind remittances) whose purchase is restricted in Cuba, such as computer equipment or automobiles (Hansing 2009, see table 1).

Remittances from temporary migrants are increasingly being felt in the Cuban economy. Orozco and Hansing (2011) conducted a study on remittances and small businesses in Cuba in January 2011, interviewing 300 remittance receivers. Their data revealed a marked increase in the number of remittances to Cuba coming from outside of the United States and Europe: 19 per cent of respondents received remittances from Latin America and other developing countries, with 8 per cent from Venezuela alone. The results of a similar 2005 study found that only 7 per cent of remittances originated from outside the US or Spain (Orozco and Hansing 2011). In contrast to remittances from permanent migrants, those sent from temporary workers are often sent to families as an investment for the migrant's own future use. Temporary migrants retain their full citizen rights to property and assets held in Cuba, which allows them to invest in a manner denied to permanent migrants. The right and ability to return is an important incentive for investment, because it allows migrants a direct return from their remittance assets in the future.

Social remittances

According to Peggy Levitt (2001), social remittances are the ideas, behaviour, identities and social capital that are transmitted from sending- to receiving-communities. These remittances influence local culture, politics, and community development. Social remittances accompanied the dramatic increase in economic remittances that began in the 1990s, including increased communication, visits and the embrace of American-style materialism (Eckstein 2009, 2010a). The transnational culture that has accompanied the rapid rise in cross-border contact and remittances grants status less to political loyalty, work and education than to dollar access and goods obtained through access to dollars (Blue 2007; Eckstein 2009, 2010a). Cuba's *'nouveau riche'* are those with access to dollars, while the poor are those dependent on peso earnings. Highly trained and educated professionals with the highest peso salaries cannot afford the same lifestyle on their state salaries as remittance-receiving Cubans, regardless of their education or work ethic. An emphasis on revolutionary collectivism, non-materialism and egalitarian principles has been replaced by mores of individualism and acquisitiveness in this new dollar (CUC) era (Eckstein 2010a). The largest foreign influence remains the United States, however there is also an increasing social influence transmitted from other regions where large numbers of Cubans have travelled, including Venezuela and Spain.

Methods and Data

This study uses survey and interview data to examine the social impact of international contract work and remittances on Cuban society. It draws on in-depth interviews, a survey of returned or aspiring *internationalistas*, and participant observation from two trips to Havana in 2010 and 2011. During these trips, I was also able to observe changes in Cuban society, such as the presence of thousands of foreign medical students residing in Havana and its outlying regions. Finally, many informative casual conversations with Cubans and a few foreign students in Havana about international missions and their impact on Cuban society helped shape the information presented in this article.

Over 20 days in June 2010, I conducted ten semi-structured in-depth interviews regarding the domestic impact of international missions and their associated remittances. I used snowball sampling to locate my respondents, all of whom were from Havana. Two of the interviews were with key informants. The first was a hospital director who worked for 15 years in an administrative role selecting which doctors would go abroad. This doctor had also gone on several missions to Africa himself and discussed his personal experiences. The second key informant worked for the Cuban government as a liaison for families of temporary migrants abroad on missions. Other interviews included two doctors and one agronomist who had recently returned from missions in Venezuela, two doctors and a lab technician who had decided not to sign up for international missions but knew many who had, the mother of a doctor working in Venezuela (who was also involved, as director of her work centre, in the selection of which workers would go on agricultural collaborations) and a reporter who had written on the topic. Almost all of the interviewees had at least one relative living outside of Cuba. In December 2011 I conducted follow-up interviews regarding recently introduced changes in government policy and collected an additional four surveys.

Two of the doctors and one prospective *internationalista* I interviewed at length volunteered to distribute a short survey to their colleagues between June and August 2010 and in December 2011. The two doctors brought the survey to the clinics where they worked and asked any interested colleagues to participate. The prospective *internationalista* gave the survey to her friends who had worked abroad on an international mission. The respondents, who included 18 doctors, one dentist and one agronomist; ten men and ten women; twelve 'whites' (*blanco* or *trigueno*) and eight 'Afro-descendants' (*negro* or *mulato*), had spent between 18 months and six years abroad. The brief survey included demographic, occupational and salary information as well as detail about how much money the *internationalista* made while working abroad, how they had spent or intended to spend their earnings, and the personal and societal advantages and disadvantages of going on

an international mission. This sample of 18 returned and two prospective migrants provides insight into why Cuban professionals go on missions and what they perceive as the primary advantages and disadvantages, including the economic advantages, of going on a temporary assignment abroad.

Results

The survey and interview data from returned *internationalistas* presented here provides a window into how the social and economic capital earned through temporary work abroad has changed lives. This study examines how temporary labour migration has influenced Cuban society, through an exploration of the types of temporary international work available, *internationalistas*' motivations for seeking work abroad, and the changes in their social and economic outlook upon their return.

Types of international Cuban medical contracts

An explanation of Cuba's international health programmes illustrates the kind of international contract work Cuban collaborators are currently engaging in around the globe and the terms under which the health professionals work. According to the doctors and health professionals I interviewed in 2010 and 2011, there are three basic types of Cuban international medical programmes: missions, comprehensive health programmes, and compensated agreements. This section provides a brief history of each type of collaboration, how it has changed with recent government economic restructuring and the economic benefits associated with each type of contract.

Currently the largest type of international medical collaboration is the mission. The majority of professionals contracted for mission work have been assigned to Venezuela. In 2003, the initial group of doctors assigned to work in Venezuela was promised new housing upon their return to Cuba. The large number of professionals that followed precluded the continuation of such a lucrative reward, however, a generous stipend was eventually standardised for the workers who signed up for two- to three-year contracts. The temporary migrant's family would continue to receive the worker's normal salary back home in Cuba, of between 455 and 670 pesos (17.50–26 US dollars). The 19 doctors surveyed who had gone on or signed up for a mission earned an average of 580 pesos a month, equivalent to 22 US dollars. They also received 'family aid' (*ayuda familiar*) of \$50 monthly, increasing to \$100 per month after the first year. The *internationalistas* themselves received a monthly living stipend intended to cover their minimal basic needs (housing and transportation was provided by the host country). They were also issued a bank account in Cuba, which received \$200 per month and

gradually increased to \$350 monthly by the third year. The bank account is a government-funded escrow account available to the migrants either when they return home on vacation or when they fulfil their contracted work agreement. Finally, at the completion of the mission, return migrants received a bonus that was equal to 20 per cent of all of the money earned in *moneda nacional* (Cuban pesos) while abroad.²

The nine doctors surveyed who had this type of bank account had an average of \$2,963 in the bank, after subtracting what they had taken out while home on vacation to buy electro-domestics and other durable goods in Venezuela. Three of the doctors who had been in Venezuela for five to six years reported having \$18,750–\$21,000 in the bank upon their return. This is an astounding amount of money for an individual to possess in Cuba, considering the average \$22 monthly wage.

The second type of medical collaboration is the Comprehensive Health Programmes (*Programa Integral de Salud – PIS*), in which health services are provided to the host country free of charge. These collaborations have operated in 43 countries since 1998. Many of the programmes have been re-negotiated to become compensated programmes as part of Cuba's effort to implement efficiency reforms. Prior to 2012, working under these contracts was highly desirable because returned migrant professionals would receive \$50 per month for life upon completion of the two-year contract. The stipends paid while abroad varied by country but were higher than what was paid to those working in Venezuela, thus they had no associated bank account savings programme. The *Misión Milagro*, which provided free eye surgeries, and Henry Reeve Emergency Brigades, which responded to natural disasters represent two examples of medical programmes in this category.

Compensated Agreements (*Atención Técnico Compensado – ATC*) are the third type of medical collaboration. In 2012, Cuba had compensated agreements in Brazil as well as several oil-producing countries in Africa and the Middle East. The contracted workers did not receive the escrow savings account or \$50 in monthly family aid because they were paid much more than workers in the other programmes (see Hammett 2007 and Hansing 2009). In 2012, the government's intent was to transform existing Compensated Agreements into Cuban Medical Service agreements. Signalling the desire to expand this model, the government started a state company to manage these contracts, Servimed (*Empresa Comercializadora de Servicios Médicos de Cuba S.A*), which it promotes through diplomatic negotiations (Cuba Standard News 2011, 2012; Toumi 2012). In 2012, there were Cuban Medical Service agreements operating in two countries: Portugal and Qatar. These contracts are for highly qualified specialists who provide a higher level of expertise and who earn 60 per cent of the salary paid to the Cuban government for

their services, typically between \$600 and \$700 per month. These workers were also among the few who could legally buy a house or a car with their earnings before that right became available to all Cubans in 2011.

Many of the generous benefits outlined above changed with a series of domestic reforms (a process begun in 2009 and strengthened in 2012) that have dramatically reduced the economic benefits for *internationalistas*. From late 2009, migrants working in Venezuela were no longer allowed the three large boxes that the doctors previously were able to bring back with them on their vacation duty-free and the five boxes at the end of their mission. Transport of the boxes had been free until 2009. To encourage *internationalistas* to buy goods in Cuba rather than import them, a new system begun in 2009 allowed the migrants to access only 60 per cent of their savings from their savings account in cash, while the rest was given in the form of a debit card that could be used to make purchases in *divisa* (CUC) stores with a 30 per cent discount. The discount card replaced the right to bring back boxes from Venezuela. As of 2012, *internationalistas* could bring all of the goods they wanted but they had to pay for the shipping themselves. Free flights home for vacations were also reduced from twice to once a year. Dramatic cuts in benefits went into effect as of 1 January 2012, including the elimination of family aid payments (of \$50–\$100 per month) and the final bonus (20 per cent of all wages earned while abroad) in Cuban pesos upon completion of the mission. For the *internationalistas* serving on missions to Venezuela, the family-aid payments of \$50–\$100 per month were replaced by a higher stipend (this time scaled in relation to the worker's specialisation), which was paid directly to the *internationalista*. The migrant would determine how much of his/her salary would be sent home, rather than having the government transfer the money directly to the migrant's family. The amount deposited in the *internationalista's* bank account was also reduced, beginning in January 2012, from \$200–\$350 per month to \$100–\$225 per month, and the return bonus was eliminated. Finally, the PIS collaborators no longer receive \$50 per month for life upon their return. As one doctor commented, 'Now people are thinking twice before going on a mission.'

Motivations to work abroad: Economic remittances

Motivations are always multi-faceted, but it is clear that the distortions created in the Cuban economy in response to the economic crisis of the early 1990s were the principle underlying individual motivation that has made the large-scale expansion of Cuban export services possible. Ten of the doctors surveyed who had completed a mission in Venezuela earned 14 times more per month than they otherwise would have, including \$50 in family aid and \$250 deposited in their escrow bank accounts. *Internationalistas* who worked abroad for five or six years earned over 20 times more than their salary in Cuba. With the elimination of the

state-regulated family aid component of Venezuelan missions and lowering of the amount to be deposited in the bank account, the financial incentive has been reduced. Although temporary work contracts have become less generous under the new terms implemented in 2012, an overseas mission would still provide an opportunity to earn much more than the equivalent wages at home. To use a specific example, if an *internationalista* were to earn the equivalent of \$25 more in their monthly stipend in place of state-regulated family aid payment and \$100 in their Cuban bank account, total earnings would be the equivalent of almost six times their regular salary in Cuba.

All of the *internationalistas* in this study had outfitted their homes with new major appliances, televisions, mattresses, and computers. A majority came home with several thousand dollars in the bank, which they planned to use to repair or buy a home, a car, or even save for retirement (see Table 1). These are major purchases that are simply not possible when limited to peso salary earnings. Of the 18 *internationalistas* who had returned from working abroad, 15 said that they would like to go on another work assignment abroad, citing economic and professional reasons.

The earnings from government-contracted temporary work abroad were used in similar ways to remittances from permanent migrants. However, most of the doctors and family members of *internationalistas* interviewed expressed the belief that the situation of the temporary migrant was much different from that of a family member receiving remittances from a permanent migrant relative. The *internationalistas* generally used their money to make repairs and purchases for their homes that they could not otherwise afford, but did not have an ongoing stream of money, or the possibility of receiving large amounts of money in the future for an investment.

As is evident in Table 1, remittances earned through Cuban internationalism have been a major boon to professional workers, equivalent to or greater than remittances received by permanent migrants. Although the flow of large amounts of hard currency is temporary, many migrants were able to save a substantial amount in government-established savings accounts and most intend to eventually return for another stint abroad. Whereas permanent migrants have little to no option to invest directly in Cuba once they leave home, temporary migrants are better positioned to take advantage of recent economic reforms.

Social remittances

While the economic ripples from internationalism's remittances are obvious, social change is also evident for not only the individual collaborator but also for Cuban society. On a personal level, freedom from economic anxiety, a new international perspective, and professional advances gained were the primary

Table 1 Returned *internationalistas*: Economic benefits of contract migration

<i>Profession, years working abroad and where</i>	<i>Items brought back to Cuba</i>	<i>Amount of money in the bank upon return</i>	<i>Plans for money</i>
Gastroenterologist, Venezuela, 2 years	Electro-domestic appliances and necessities for my home	\$3,000 CUC	Repair parents' house
General medicine, Endocrinologist, South Africa, 5 years	Electro-domestic appliances, computer, furniture, car, clothes, etc.	n/a – used the money while on the mission and used remaining amount to buy a car upon return	Buy a car
General medicine, Haiti, 1.5 years	Electro-domestics, clothes, lingerie, etc.	n/a – didn't exist for Haiti	–
General medicine, Haiti, 2 years	Computer, television, DVD, electro-domestic appliances for me and to sell in Cuba	n/a – didn't exist for Haiti	I already invested the money I made on the mission
General medicine, Venezuela, 2 years	Everything needed for a house	\$8,000 CUC	Construct a house above parents' house
General medicine, Venezuela 3 years	Electro-domestic appliances, clothes, soap, lingerie, etc.	\$9,000 CUC	Buy myself a house, improve family's conditions
Neurologist, Angola, 1.5 years	Everything. Electro-domestics, computer, clothes, shoes, etc.	n/a – this benefit didn't exist in the 1980s	–
General medicine (specialising in intensive care), Haiti, 2.5 years	Everything I have – TV, refrigerator, air conditioner, blender, DVD, clothes, etc.	n/a – but I brought back money	Invest in other things to earn more money
General medicine, neurologist, Haiti, 2 years	Refrigerator, TV, washing machine, computer	n/a – didn't exist for Haiti	–
General medicine, Venezuela, 5 years	Electro-domestic appliances, furniture, mattresses, clothes, and shoes	–	Repair house, buy a car, save for retirement
General medicine, epidemiologist, Africa, 6 years	Electronics, clothes, shoes, and things for the house	\$5,000 CUC	Live and travel after retirement
Dentist, Venezuela, 6 years	Lingerie, electronics, furniture, and a computer	\$8,000 CUC	Budget for daily living expenses
Gastroenterologist, Venezuela, 5 years	Electro-domestic appliances, kitchen supplies, furniture, clothes, etc.	–	Repair house and car, save for retirement and travel
Agronomist, Venezuela, 3 years	Refrigerator, washing machine, TV, DVD, mattress, tools, lingerie, shoes	91,000 Cuban pesos (\$3,500 CUC)	Home repairs
General medicine, Venezuela, 2 years	Electro-domestics, clothes, shoes, computer	\$2,100 CUC	Save the money until I complete the mission, daily living, help my family
General medicine, Venezuela, 4 years	Electro-domestic appliances and clothes	\$18,750 CUC	Repair my home, buy a car
General medicine, microbiologist, Venezuela, 6 years	TV, DVD, VHS, washing machine, electric stove, freezer, computer, clothes	\$21,000 CUC	Gain interest in the bank
General medicine, microbiologist, Venezuela, 5 years	Electro-domestic appliances and clothes	\$20,000 CUC	Home repairs

advantages cited by return migrants. The experience of living and working abroad was transformative for individuals but also translated into a social remittance in the form of ideas and expectations transmitted to Cuban society.

When asked about the advantages of going on a mission, almost all of the returned collaborators (15 of 17) cited economic freedom or security. Beyond earning more money, respondents emphasised the economic security that even temporary high earnings could bring. The responses included, ‘being able to save’, ‘make future plans’, ‘buy things you can’t get in Cuba’, ‘bring back money that you can do with what you’d like’, and ‘provide a better standard of living for my family’.

The second most cited advantage of working abroad on a mission was gaining an international perspective. Six respondents simply stated ‘travel’ or ‘leaving the country’ (one said ‘because it’s the only way to leave the country’), others mentioned the benefit of getting to know another country and the comparative perspective that allows. In the words of one *internacionalista*, ‘One learns from other parts of the world, you get to know and value your own country’ and ‘One sees with clarity what is going on in other societies. One learns what is really going on in the world, not living distanced from what is happening in the world, good or bad.’

Professional growth can also be considered a form of social remittance, providing both an immediate and future economic benefit in the guise of professional development. Doctors valued the opportunity to test their skill and knowledge in a new environment. They were enthusiastic about being able to use state-of-the-art equipment and felt rewarded by the international validation and recognition they received for their work. The opportunity to treat conditions that no longer existed in Cuba was an oft-repeated advantage of practising medicine outside of Cuba:

Missions act as a school – even for well-established professionals. Cubans are seeing medical cases they’d only read about in books. They are encountering many diseases and illnesses that are no longer seen in Cuba. They know what they are and what medicines are used to treat them, but they’d never seen or touched them, and that’s how they learn. (Enrique, 19 June 2010)

This exposure to other developing countries is a counterbalance to the predominant point of comparison: Miami, Florida. Cuba’s returned *internacionalistas* are providing a conduit for social capital that comes from regions other than southern Florida and the United States. Venezuelan and other Latin American cultural influences, including clothing and other imported goods, were evident on the streets of Havana. New ideas, perspectives and cultural influence was transferred to the *internacionalista*’s immediate friends, family and co-workers, and beyond. The government often reported on the collaborators’

work and highlighted their work in television reports and documentaries on Cuban television, exposing the wider Cuban society to a diverse range of cultures and socio-economic conditions.

The ability to travel abroad and live in societies with very different political, economic, social and cultural realities was fundamental in acquiring greater self-sufficiency and a sense of personal independence. Part of the independence cultivated while abroad was the *internationalista's* ability to critically evaluate Cuban society, which reinforced or changed their own and their friends' and family's perspectives upon their return. In the words of Caridad:

After visiting poor areas in developing countries, when they see the inequality, they love their country more and value more what they have in Cuba. More young people used to abandon their country than they do now. In Cuba it's very rare to see dirt floors without plumbing or medical care – they re-evaluate their own country. They return better prepared in their profession, more prepared to live independently and better prepared economically. I know many young people who wanted to go anywhere outside of Cuba – even to Haiti or Dominican Republic – but now they realise that they're better off in Cuba... Some people still want to leave for the United States, but many young people are more content – they had the opportunity to travel and earn decent money. (Caridad, 16 June 2010)

The reinforcement of positive or negative preconceptions of Cuban society has been yet another effect of Cuba's increased international collaborations. Several of the interviewees discussed how collaborators developed a new appreciation of the positive aspects of Cuban society, including the lack of violence, equal access to free health care and education and the solidarity that exists in Cuban society, even among strangers. In the words of one doctor who had been on several missions to countries in Africa and Venezuela:

The health workers do not come back the same, having experienced misery. Young Cubans never had the experience of a capitalist system, hadn't seen hunger. They see another world that is not on the television. They adopt new values, humanism, they love their own children more. (Rafael, 24 June 2010)

While a renewed appreciation of the positive aspects of Cuban society was common among the *internationalistas*, resentment of less desirable elements was reinforced as well. Even though they were committed to their profession and the humanitarian ideals of the revolution, some return migrants expressed open resentment of what they considered to be unnecessary bureaucratic restrictions. Returned *internationalistas* complained of constant monitoring and vigilance while working abroad – an extension of Cuban workplace control. One returned *internationalista* who had spent a total of six years in Venezuela and had been back

in Cuba for over a year, addressed how some return migrants felt constrained and resentful of the economic restrictions and political obligations of the Cuban system.

Doctors who return often don't want to work in a *consultorio* – they have a different mentality. I personally work more teaching now, but the ones who come back don't want to be family doctors. There are others who take their money and ask for a release from their position (*piden la baja*), or sell their things [preparing to migrate permanently]. Why? They've adapted to a different mentality – even people who were from rural areas. They come home with airs, have a big quantity of money, thinking they are more important. They complain that they don't have a car, about the restrictions. There tends to be less participation in the community when people return from a mission. They don't want to participate in volunteer work and have a very negative attitude. It should be the opposite, but people only want to do the minimum. For example, they don't go to the meetings, saying, 'Let them take it out of my salary, I don't need the money.' Some people feel more identified with the revolution and the mission, but resist the restrictions. (Alfredo, 21 June 2010)

Whether the balance of appreciating and resenting elements of Cuba's political system and society tipped individuals towards a renewed commitment to their profession and country or to abandoning it depended on individual beliefs, experiences and family networks. While most returned *internationalistas* have opted to continue their work in the medical field, the 2011 reforms may permit returned migrants to use their substantial savings to invest in an entrepreneurial venture that allows their families greater independence from government restrictions and regulations. Whichever path they choose, the fact that they continue to live and work in their communities has a much greater potential to influence Cuban society than those who have left the island permanently.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, Cuba has promoted a new economic strategy that capitalises on its greatest resource, its own human capital. While Cuba has long offered development assistance to countries across the globe, the large-scale expansion of professional service exports since 2003 has expanded the opportunity for a wide reach of (especially but not only health) professionals to work abroad and to improve their economic situation at home.

Remittances from Cuban internationalism have left a distinct mark. Money and goods transferred from international collaborations have enabled many professionals to restore their previous socio-economic standing that had eroded with the introduction of the US dollar and consequent dual economy. The ability to invest and save has provided a sense of financial security and independence that

is uncommon for working professionals in post-Soviet Cuba. The *internacionalista* who returns from years abroad, having lived away from the Cuban state and his or her own family, has also experienced a degree of personal independence that is almost impossible to achieve on the island. A new international perspective and validation of professional capabilities has opened the door to an independence from the state that is still fairly uncommon in contemporary Cuba.

Return migrants are using their remittances (economic and social) to negotiate their re-encounter with positive and negative elements of Cuban society. Unlike those who have left the country permanently, Cuban *internacionalistas* return to their jobs, their families and their communities, firmly embedded and in a strong position to influence local perceptions. While some *internacionalistas* have opted to leave the country, the great majority remains. Returned migrants' experiences abroad have begun to influence their own and others' expectations of working conditions and freedom of expression once they return to their jobs back home. They are in a unique position to leverage their new socio-economic status to take advantage of newly introduced economic reforms.

Remittances from both temporary and permanent migration have led to what Eckstein (2009) identified as heightened individualism and materialism. However, a valuation of the positive aspects of Cuban culture and society also has been reinforced by temporary migrants' exposure to poor communities lacking universal human rights such as access to health care and education, guarantees of physical safety and social solidarity. Remittances via permanent migrants often encourage recipients to abandon the low-paying peso workforce and thus their direct dependence on the state. Remittances from international collaborators are less likely to have this disengaging effect, as they are tied to direct payments from the state and larger and widely admired humanitarian missions.

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Notes

1. According to research by Morales and Scarpaci (2012), the lifting of all US travel restrictions on Cuban Americans in 2009 resulted in a 120 per cent increase in travel. Cell phone usage increased from 84,000 in 2004 to 1.2 million users in 2011. Service costs for a cell phone averaged \$20 CUC a month in 2012.
2. All of the data in this section was provided by the two key informants and various doctors interviewed for this study.

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