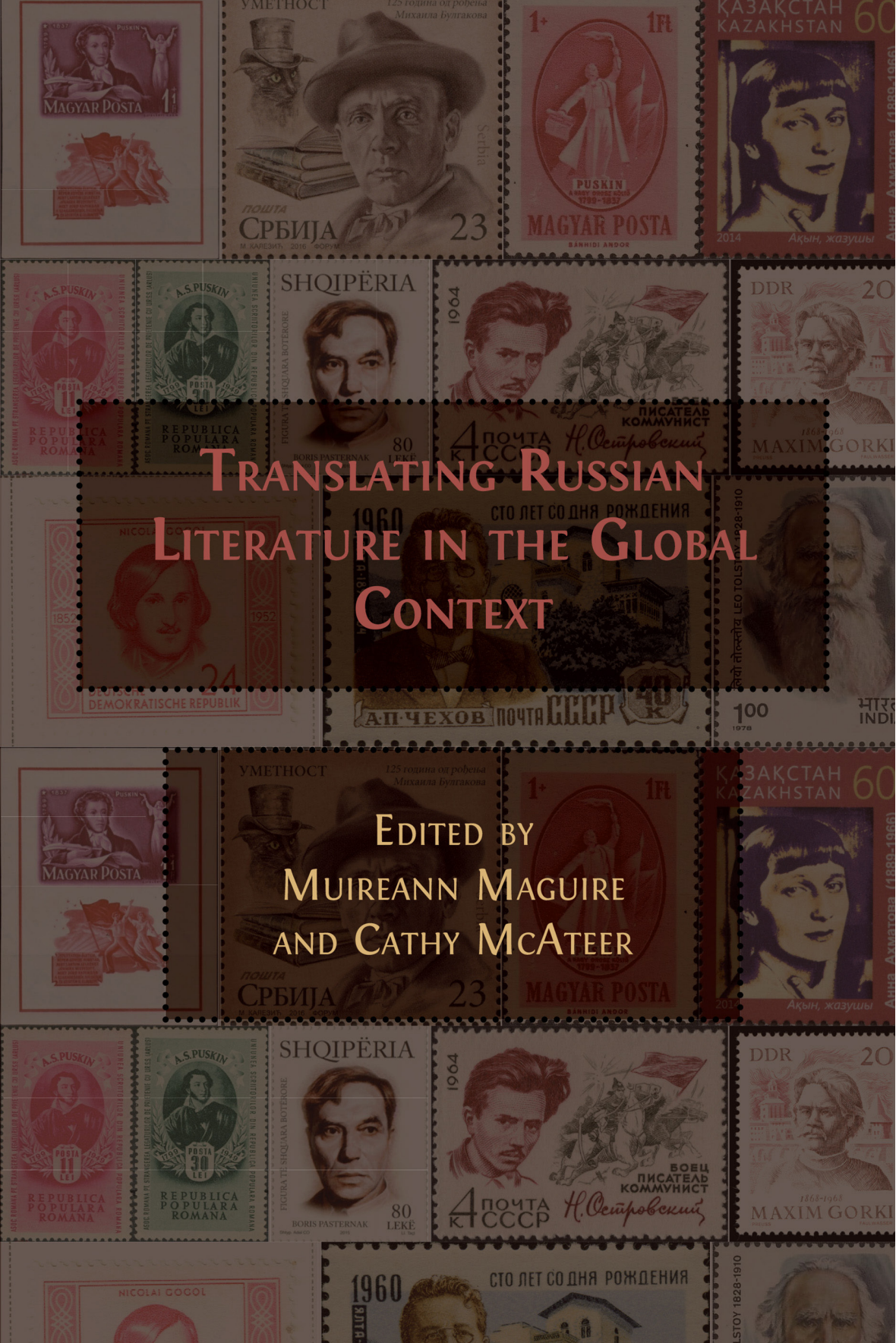

Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context

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Cuba and the Caribbean

The Last Soviet Border: Translation Practices in the Caribbean during the Cold War

Damaris Puñales-Alpízar

In recent Cuban culture, two movies illustrate how deeply the Soviet presence affected the island's social landscape over at least three decades. *Sergio & Sergei* (directed by Ernesto Daranas Serrano, 2017), and *A Translator* (*Un traductor*, directed by the brothers Rodrigo and Sebastián Barriuso, 2018), address, from different perspectives, the complicated yet rich relations between Cubans and Soviets between the 1960s and the 1990s, and the role that Russian language and literature played in Cuba's daily life. When *Sergio & Sergei* was first screened, the viewing experience was cathartic for local audiences. The film, which contains scenes in Russian with Spanish subtitles, represented an identity marker for many Cubans aged forty or older, for whom the Soviet Union and the Russian language had formed part of their sentimental and formal education. These generations belong to what has been called the Soviet-Cuban sentimental community.[1] The movie, inspired by actual events, tells the story of Sergio, a Cuban amateur radio operator who unexpectedly contacts the last Soviet

1 My article 'Cuba soviética: el baile (casi) imposible de la polka y el guaguancó' ('Soviet Cuba: The (Almost) Impossible Dance of the Polka and the Guaguancó') coins the term 'Soviet-Cuban sentimental community' to refer to Cubans born between the 1960s and the 1980s, who were exposed to Russian language and Soviet culture as no other generation. Such exposure provided them with a sense of belonging and cohesion. See Damaris Puñales-Alpízar, *La Gaceta de Cuba*, 1 (Jan-Feb 2010), 3–5, https://www.academia.edu/4342328/Cuba_sovi%C3%A9tica_el_baile_casi_imposible_de_la_polka_y_el_guaguanc%C3%B3. This topic is later explored more thoroughly in Puñales-Alpízar, *Escrito en cirílico. El ideal soviético en la cultura cubana posnoventa* (*Written in Cyrillic: The Soviet Ideal in Post–1990 Cuban Cultural Production*) (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2012).

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0340.38

cosmonaut, Sergei Krikalev, who is in orbit during the final months of the Soviet Union's existence.[2] In *A Translator*, the relationship between Soviets and Cubans is depicted in a different light. As in *Sergio & Sergei*, it is inspired by historical events that portray how ordinary lives are touched by history. The movie follows Malin, a professor of Russian literature and language at the University of Havana, who lost his job when Russian ceased to be taught after the end of the Soviet Union. He finds alternative work as a translator for those victims of the Chernobyl nuclear accident to be treated in Cuba.[3] As both films demonstrate, the Russian language was a unifying element that provided many Cubans with professional opportunities and a sense of belonging to a specific community. Taking these two films as its starting point, this chapter will explore the impact of Russian language and culture on Cuban society, arguing that translation practices within the Socialist bloc became a geopolitical instrument.

A Soviet Doorway to Latin America

After the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the island's geographical and historical proximity to North America made it a strategic territory for the Soviet Union. Until then, the latter had maintained different degrees of relationships with and interests in Latin America and Hispanic culture. But once aligned with the Socialist bloc, Cuba transformed into the westernmost border of the Soviet Empire, part-fulfilling its long-sought intentions to spread Socialist ideology into the American and African continents.[4] Many obstacles hampered the developing interactions

2 In May 1991, just a few months before the USSR disintegrated, the cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev arrived at the MIR space station. He remained there until March 1992, when Boris Yeltsin finalised agreements between public and private entities from all over the world to allow for Krikalev's safe return to Earth. But the country the cosmonaut had left no longer existed when he returned to the planet. See Claire Barrett, 'Cosmonaut Sergei Krikalev: "The Last Soviet Citizen"', in *History Net* (12 June 2020), https://www.historynet.com/cosmonaut-sergei-krikalev-the-last-soviet-citizen.htm.

3 The Ukrainian-Cuban programme Children of Chernobyl provided humanitarian and clinical aid; it began on 29 March 1990. It is estimated that in twenty years of medical assistance to victims of the disaster in Ukraine, some 21,000 children were treated in Tarara, the children's camp-cum-medical facility outside of Havana. The programme operated at full capacity until the year 2000, and although patients continued to arrive in the following decade, numbers were much fewer than in previous years. For more information on this topic, see: Desmond Boylan, 'Chernobyl victims treated in Cuba', *Reuters* (23 March 2010), https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/chernobyl-victims-treated-in-cuba-idUSRTR2BZRV; and Prensa Latina News Agency, 'Tarara: The Story of Chernobyl Children in Cuba', *Escambray* (27 August 2021), http://en.escambray.cu/2021/tarara-the-story-of-chernobyl-children-in-cuba/.

4 For further discussion about Cuba and USSR's involvement in the wars on the African continent, see Orlando Freire Santana, 'La otra cara de la intervención en

between the two nations, such as language barriers, geographical distance, and cultural and economic differences. To overcome them, both the Soviet Union and Cuba inaugurated a new chapter in their international relations by creating new institutions and programmes to foster mutual cultural and ideological understanding while also facilitating Soviet access to Latin America. In this way, from 1959, Cuba became the epicentre of geopolitical operations for Socialism, for which ideological dissemination through culture, and especially literature in Spanish translation, played one of the most active roles. The new direction that translation practices took after 1959, especially after Fidel Castro declared the Socialist path of his government in 1961, configured an alternative literary system on a global scale by facilitating the presence of Soviet culture in Latin America.[5] Cuba became the natural doorway through which the Soviets could gain access to that continent. Many Latin American intellectuals' fascination with the Cuban Revolution, together with the amount of resources that the Soviet Union poured into the region, allowed a very dynamic exchange between regional artists and intellectuals with Eastern Europe in general via the USSR.

Soviet Culture in Cuba

The triumph of the Cuban Revolution and Castro's rapid alliance with Soviet Socialism implied a shift in the geopolitical struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States for political and economic control in Latin America. Cuba, as the newest member of the Socialist bloc, found itself stranded: it did not share a language with either of these rivals. Spanish-language specialists from Eastern Europe were called in to help solve this problem. Most came from the Soviet Union, where many citizens of Spanish origin had been living since the Spanish Civil War. From 1936 onwards, many Spaniards had sent their children to the Soviet Union to protect them from Franco's troops.[6] Those *children of the war* (*los niños de la guerra*), as they are historically known, became the first translators to

África' ('The Other Face of Cuban Intervention in Africa'), in *Cubanet* (1 December 2010), https://www.cubanet.org/htdocs/CNews/year2010/Nov2010/29_C_2.html.

5 In April 1961, shortly after the US invasion of Cuba, Fidel Castro made explicit the Cuban Revolution's Socialist agenda, which he had previously denied. For more information see Fidel Castro Ruz, 'Discurso pronunciado en las honras fúnebres de las víctimas del bombardeo a distintos puntos de la República, el día 16 de abril de 1961' ('Speech Given at the Funeral Honors of the Victims of the Bombing in Different Parts of the Republic, on April 16, 1961'), http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1961/esp/f160461e.html.

6 It is estimated that between 1937 and 1938, some three thousand Spanish children had been evacuated to the Soviet Union, besides "educators and auxiliary personnel who accompanied the minors on the expeditions, the pilot students who were going to study at the Soviet aviation schools and the crew of the Spanish ships that were in that country or sailing towards it when the war". After 1939, the number of Spanish exiles to the Soviet Union declined drastically. See: Alicia Alted

work on Russian/Spanish translations, the first linguistic links between Cubans and Soviets post-1959.[7] A significant number of this cohort, including Arturo Carrasco, María Cánovas, José Santacreu, Francisco Roldán, Venancio Uribes, Aurora Kantoróvskaia, Clara Rosen, José Vento, Julio Mateu, and Isabel Vicente became translators. Many of their translations felt odd to Cuban readers, given the linguistic distance between the translators—raised and educated in the Soviet Union, and therefore unfamiliar with the Spanish spoken in Spain—and the readers on the island who in many cases found the translations to be too 'peninsular', rather than Cuban.

Almost simultaneously, Cuba created new university curricula for the study of Eastern European languages, new language schools opened, the educational system implemented the teaching of Russian as part of its regular curriculum, and even a radio programme (Russian Language by Radio/Russkii iazyk po radio) started teaching Russian to the general population. At the same time, thousands of Cuban students went to the Socialist bloc to learn languages, while students from those countries travelled to Cuba to learn Spanish. One of the first groups of Cubans that went to the Soviet Union left the island in 1961: a thousand young peasants travelled there as part of an agreement between the two countries that would allow Cubans to learn the Russian language and agricultural techniques.[8]

Unlike many other islands in the Caribbean, Cuba has never been a multilingual space. For many decades, translational tasks were performed individually by intellectuals, poets, and cultural agents; these were fundamental

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Vigil, 'El exilio español en la Unión Soviética' ('Spanish Exile in the Soviet Union'), *Revista Ayer*, 47 (2002), 129–54.

7 See Verónica Sierra Blas, *Palabras huérfanas, los niños y la Guerra Civil* (*Orphan Words, Children and the Civil War*) (Madrid: Taurus, 2009). Carlos Aguirre offers some insights into the role that these "children of the war" played in bringing Latin American and Russian cultures closer together. See Carlos Aguirre, 'Dionisio García: De "niño de la guerra" a traductor de *La ciudad y los perros* al ruso' ('"Child of the War" to Translator of *The City and the Dogs* into Russian') (30 January 2016), https://blogs.uoregon.edu/lcylp/2016/01/30/dionisio-garcia-de-nino-de-la-guerra-a-traductor-de-la-ciudad-y-los-perros-al-ruso/.

8 In June 1961, a meeting of the International Union of Students took place in Havana. In the closing speech, Fidel [Castro] said: "The Revolution aims to expand the plans of cultural exchange and in relation to this we express our proposals to the Komsomol (Union of Leninist Communist Youth of the Soviet Union). We propose that Komsomol send us a thousand young Soviet peasants, not to teach them agricultural sciences, since we do not believe that our agriculture is so developed that we should act as teachers, but they could come to get to know our agriculture and learn Spanish. And, for our part, we are ready to send a thousand of our young peasants to the Soviet Union to study agricultural sciences and the Russian language there"'. Blas Nabel Pérez Camejo, *Cuba-URSS. Crónica* (*Cuba-USSR. A Chronicle*) (Moscow/Havana: Progress/Editorial Progreso, 1990), p. 254. All translations from Spanish in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

not only to establishing relations with non-Spanish-speaking countries but also as a cornerstone in the foundation of the nation. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, Cuban intellectuals always made a visible and constant effort to bring knowledge and literary creations from other languages into Spanish. At the same time, these efforts informed and influenced the island's literary production and shaped the road for the birth of a national literature into the global scene. Even with all their limitations, such practices of translation allowed, as Pascale Casanova describes when explaining the circulation of World Literature, for limited contact between Cuban and international literary production.[9] As Casanova states: "[t]he construction of national literary space is closely related, [...], to the political space of the nation that it helps build in turn [...] [i]n the case of 'small' countries, the emergence of a new literature is indissociable from the appearance of a new nation".[10]

Soon after Fidel Castro took power in 1959, translation practices became for the first time an institutionalised and centralised activity facilitating the circulation of literatures that, until then, were only rarely known in Cuba. Many of the actions promoted by the new government aimed to create a literate citizenship while, at the same time, enabling access for new potential readers to books and other cultural materials, especially after the national literacy campaign of 1961. According to Casanova: "[s]ince language is not a purely literary tool, but an inescapably political instrument as well, it is through language that the literary world remains subject to political power".[11] This explains, in part, how Cuba entered an international Socialist literary circuit that was, to a certain degree, parallel to the global literary market.

Given the precarious situation of the publishing industry in Cuba at the time and the reallocation of those scarce publishing resources for educational purposes, the support of the USSR was fundamental for providing Cuban readers with new books and a new ideology. Very soon, Cuban bookstores saw a flood of publications of Soviet origin in Spanish. The experiences and translation practices put in place in 1918 in the USSR, when Maksim Gorky founded the World Literature publishing house in Petrograd, were fundamental to speeding up the translation tasks between Cuba and the Soviet Union. Among those practices was the translation from a wide array of languages, the training of cohorts of professional translators, and the addition of didactic prefaces to

9 Maria Khotimsky offers a thorough explanation of the actions taken by Gorky to provide the Soviet reader with a wide variety of world literary works, in her article 'World Literature, Soviet Style: A Forgotten Episode in the History of the Idea', *Ab Imperio*, 2013:3 (2013), 119–54, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/531927. Gorky's publishing house only lasted until 1924.

10 See Pascale Casanova's sections on 'Literary Nationalism,' and 'National versus International Writers', in *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 85 and p. 104 respectively. See also pp. 103–15 for further discussion.

11 Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, p. 115.

translated works, normally written from a Socialist ideological perspective. Cuban literature was widely published and distributed in the Soviet Union. For instance, in 1960, print runs of a Russian translation of a poetry collection by the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén totalled two hundred thousand copies. That year, twelve thousand copies of translations of Soviet literature into Spanish were sent to Cuba; two years later, in 1962, that number reached a million copies. Between 1959 and 1962, Cuban publishing houses printed about forty-seven Soviet titles, in a total of five million copies.[12]

In *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova states that "political domination is often exerted by linguistic means [which] implies a condition of literary dependency". Such linguistic dependency is reinforced by different methods: "the effectiveness of consecration by central authorities, the power of critical decrees, the canoni[s]ing effect of prefaces and translations by writers who themselves have been consecrated at the centre [...] the prestige of the collections in which foreign works appear, and the leading role played by great translators"[13]. In the case of Cuba, however, the prefaces and translations had not only the effect of canonising certain literary works but also of enforcing ideological standards. Besides suffering most of Casanova's conditions of dependency listed above, Cuban authors lacked access to wider publication opportunities. Soon after 1959, all publishers became state-owned; thus, all publications had to be approved by the government. Therefore, any Cuban author wishing to stay on the island had to adhere to state policies regarding literature and culture. Gaining international visibility was only possible via the publishing houses in the Socialist bloc, mainly in the Soviet Union. As Damrosch notes, "[a] culture's norms and needs profoundly shape the selection of works that enter into it".[14] Cuban authorities saw culture as a means of ideological education; they followed Damrosch's principle by favouring works which aligned with Socialist models and ideas.

To help spread knowledge about Cuba in the Soviet Union, the two governments signed an agreement to jointly publish, between 1975 and 1980, a ten-volume collection of Cuban literary works in Russian translation. This was part of a more ambitious and comprehensive agreement:

> In June [of 1975], the USSR and the Republic of Cuba signed the first five-year plan for cultural collaboration. The relations between the two 'brother' countries started to have a planned basis, and to consider all perspectives, not only in the area of economics but also in the culture. In particular, an agreement between Goskomizdat and the Cuban Book Institute provided for publication in the USSR over five years

12 Pérez Camejo, *Cuba-URSS*, p. 300.
13 Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, p. 115.
14 David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 26.

> of a 10-volume collection of Cuban literature. Soviet readers thus had the opportunity to learn about the best works of Cuban poetry, prose, and journalism, not in separate publications, but a compilation with a specific historical-literary order; the best Soviet specialists provided the translations of the Cuban authors.[15]

However, no such volume was ever published: Pavel Grushko and Yuri Girin, two leading Russian translators and specialists on Cuban culture and history, when specifically asked about these publications, stated that they had never heard of them.[16] Blas Nabel Pérez Camejo also informed us that '"the result was the separate publication of some books on Cuban literature, starting with José Martí".[17] Many other Cuban books were translated into Russian. Meanwhile, the number of Spanish-language publications on the island by Russian and Soviet writers continued to rise. Several titles became widely known, either by being sold and read or through citations in different cultural media, such as movies or soap operas. Among the most popular Soviet titles were *Seventeen Moments of Spring* (*Semnadsat' mgnovenii vesny*, 1969), a novel by Iulian Semenov, Nikolai Ostrovskii's *How the Steel was Tempered* (*Kak zakalialas' stal'*, 1934), and Aleksandr Beliaev's 1929 science-fiction novella, *Amphibian Man* (*Chelovek-amfibiia*). Semenov's novel became widely known thanks to the television series which it inspired, transmitted for the first time in Cuba in 1973; Ostrovskii's tragic Bildungsroman was broadcast as a radio soap opera there from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, while *Amphibian Man* was known in its 1962 movie version, often aired on Cuban TV.[18] Other novels, such as Gorky's *Mother* (*Mat'*, 1906), Boris Polevoi's *A Story about a Real Man* (*Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke*, 1947) and Mikhail Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don* (*Tikhii Don*, 1925–40), appeared on high-school curricula.

On 7 November 1980, the popular Cuban magazine *Bohemia* inaugurated a new feature, 'What Is Read?' ('¿Qué se lee?') highlighting the top ten bestselling books (fiction and non-fiction).[19] A quick examination of this section allows us to determine some of the most popular Soviet books among Cuban readers during the ensuing decade. Some of these were Ukrainian author Iurii

15 Pérez Camejo, *Cuba-URSS*, p. 354.

16 Pavel Grushko and Yuri Girin, email to the author, 1 January 2022.

17 Blas Nabel Pérez Camejo, email to the author, 5 January 2021.

18 For a more detailed account of all Soviet novels broadcast as TV series, see 'Novelas literarias que llegan al éter' ('Literary Novels that Reach the Ether'), *Televisión Cubana*, 9 July 2014, https://www.tvcubana.icrt.cu/secciones/seccion-historia/1293-novelas-literarias-que-llegan-al-eter; and Julio Cid, 'Shtirlitz-Tijonov: una dupla única' ('Shtirlitz-Tikhonov: A Unique Duo'), *Televisión Cubana*, 27 October 2018, https://www.tvcubana.icrt.cu/seccion-en-pantalla/3908-shtirlitz-tijonov-una-dupla-unica.

19 The National Book Distribution Company and the Culture and Science Publishing provided this information for the magazine.

Dol'd-Mikhailik's *Alone on the Battlefield* (*I odin u poli voin*, 1956; translated as *A solas con el enemigo*); Vladimir Bogomolov's *The Moment of Truth* (*Moment istiny*, 1973) which enjoyed fourteen weeks in the top ten, and Aleksandr Vek's *Volokolamsk Highway* (*Volokolamskoe shosse*, 1944; published in Spanish as two separate books: *Los hombres de Pánfilov* and *La carretera de Volokolamsk*), which stayed for five weeks on the bestseller list. We might note that all three books are on military topics. Overall, between 1959 and 1990, literature from Socialist countries (mostly from the Soviet Union) played a major function in the formation of the national literary system.

Fiction books were not, however, the only materials translated from Russian circulating in Cuba and the rest of Latin America during this period. To connect with more readers, the Soviet Union promoted the circulation of popular magazines on the continent, such as *Sputnik*, *New Times*, *Soviet Woman*, *Misha*, *Moscow News*, *USSR,* and *Soviet Literature*. All these magazines widely circulated in Cuba from the 1960s to the 1990s. Many Cuban magazines also spread Soviet culture: *Signs* (*Signos*) in Villa Clara and *Santiago*, in Santiago de Cuba, devoted special issues to Soviet literature. To a lesser extent, popular non-literary magazines such as *Bohemia*, often included literary pieces from Socialist intellectuals. On a regular basis, *Bohemia* included information about frequent visits by Soviet intellectuals, scientists, and political figures to the island. *Mondays of Revolution* (*Lunes de Revolución*), during its short life (1959–61—it was shut down by the government because of political disagreements) published information from the USSR and other Socialist countries.

Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro provide a useful theoretical framework to better understand the role of literary translations, the different levels of relations involved in Socialist translation practices, and the circulation of cultural goods within the Socialist bloc:

> To understand the act of translating, one should in a first stage analyse it as embedded within the power relations among national states and their languages. These power relations are of three types—political, economic and cultural. […] In these power relations, the means of political, economic and cultural struggles are unequally distributed. Cultural exchanges are therefore unequal exchanges that express relations of domination.[20]

In the case of Cuba and the Soviet Union, the greatest weight was given to the ideological function of literature in translation for aligning nations despite widely different cultures, languages, and histories. The selection of works

20 Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro, 'Outline for a Sociology of Translation: Current Issues and Future Prospects', in *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, ed. by Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2007), pp. 93–107 (p. 95).

for translation depended upon the cultural and editorial policies of both the country of origin and of reception; often the translators chose texts aimed at fostering a Socialist identity designed to create a new society based on Soviet Socialist criteria.

Between 1959 and 1990, thousands of books from other Socialist countries, such as Bulgaria, GDR, Romania, and Poland, were translated into Spanish and circulated in Cuba through a network of bookstores, libraries, and educational curricula. Four genres and topics were particularly favoured: poetry, Socialist Realism, science fiction, and detective novels. Thus, they modelled the literary genres considered desirable in a Socialist country.[21] The first translations of Soviet-Russian literature into Spanish to circulate in Cuba were made mainly by intellectuals of Hispanic origin—the *children of the war* referred to above. However, Cuban intellectuals and poets, who in many cases worked together with Russian translators, also played a very active role in the translation processes and in spreading Russian culture into the Hispanic world. To mention just two examples: *Russian and Soviet Poets: A Selection* (*Poetas rusos y soviéticos. Selección*), published in 1964 by Cuban writer Samuel Feijoo after spending four months in the Soviet Union, was a well-curated selection of Soviet poetry, with ten thousand copies printed. *Five Writers from the Russian Revolution* (*Cinco escritores de la Revolución Rusa*),[22] a volume edited by Roberto Fernández Retamar, was published in 1968.[23]

A review of magazines dedicated to the cultures of the Eastern bloc and to Asian Socialist countries shows clearly that they intended to unite the diverse nations of the Socialist world. The introductory sections common in books

21 Literary works were not the only texts translated into Spanish from different Socialist languages (the Russian language, given the economic and ideological weight of the Soviet Union, being predominant). Much information from the Socialist bloc circulated in Cuba. Moreover, every Cuban ministry had Soviet advisers; most pedagogical, military, and economic data exploited in Cuba from the 1960s to the 1990s originated in the Soviet Union or other Socialist countries.

22 The volume includes both poets and prose writers: Aleksandr Blok, Vsevolod Ivanov, Victor Shklovskii, Isaak Babel and Vladimir Maiakovskii.

23 Russian translator and literary critic Daria Sinitsyna provides an excellent analysis of the ideological-literary production from both Cuban and Soviet poets of the time in her article 'Thirsty for More Homeland: The Vision of Cuba/USSR in Committed Soviet and Cuban Poetry', in *Trasatlantica. Poetry and Scholarship*, 1 (2012–13), 42–52. Rafael Pedemonte offers a detailed study of the cultural agents who facilitated the exchange between the two countries in his article '"De Cuba a Seván no existe distancia: / Ha sido abolida por la poesía": el rol de los escritores y la consolidación de los lazos cubano-soviéticos (1959–1971)' ('"From Cuba to Seván There Is No Distance:/It Has Been Abolished by Poetry": The Role of Writers and the Consolidation of Cuban-Soviet Ties (1959–1971)'), in *Asedios al caimán letrado. Literatura y poder en la Revolución cubana* (*Sieges of the Literate Cayman. Literature and Power in the Cuban Revolution*), ed. by Emilio J. Gallardo-Saborido, Jesús Gómez de la Tejeda and Damaris Puñales-Alpízar (Prague: Carolina University Press, 2018), pp. 97–111.

translated into Spanish and the graphic composition of these publications functioned as paratexts that courted the reader to accept a culture presented as essentially familiar. In all cases, these similarities were mostly reduced to representing so-called anti-imperialist liberation struggles and constructing a new society. The effort to create a heroic cultural community among the Socialist nations, while putting into circulation other literatures that remained outside the international literary system, strove to unite countries and histories that had little in common. European Socialist nations and Cuba were connected, above all, by their commitment to Socialist construction. This intention to forge Socialist brotherhood was part of a political and ideological project that grew increasingly powerful in Cuba starting in the mid-1960s, enhanced by translation and publishing practices.

Newly created cultural institutions and policies in the Socialist bloc—such as literacy campaigns and the strong financial support given to book production—tried to challenge the concept of a bourgeois urban elite monopolising both the production and enjoyment of (high) culture. In the same way, the circulation of literature from Socialist countries exemplified an effort to create a new literary world map that defied the canons traditionally imposed by European and North American literature. Efforts launched from the epicentre of Socialism in Moscow attempted to extend the reach of a contemporary literary production that had often gone unheard in the dialogue of World Literature. For the first time, much of the literature produced in peripheral zones found itself circulating alongside and competing with more central literatures. In this sense, translation played a fundamental role in configuring a new literary order and putting Socialist countries' literary production into circulation and knowledge. Membership in the Socialist bloc facilitated a flow of works and authors that otherwise would never have happened, while allowing literature from minority languages and areas to reach realms and readers entirely out of their geographical or economic range. The translator's practice ceased to be an individual craft and became a social, collective labour, giving literary translation geopolitical weight. In most Socialist countries, translation departments and teams were created over the years, which led not only to the professionalisation of the translator but above all to the systematisation and regulation of a practice that until then had largely been in the hands of individuals or specific groups. Regardless of state policies, however, these translation departments were in many cases made up of prestigious intellectuals who put their talent, training, culture, and their own tastes into the translated works. This process enriched the final translated product and often influenced decisions on what to translate. Thus, we must analyse translation not as a mechanical task that only followed instructions according to the Socialist ideology but as a symbiotic and complex activity in which translators also added their personal and cultural touch.

Since early 1959, the Cuban government had prioritised culture; in addition to the literacy campaign of 1961 and other institutional and legal initiatives of

that period, the state heavily subsidised the book industry. This made prices very affordable and increased the number of publications; precedence was given to all forms of knowledge disseminated from within the Socialist bloc. According to the *Catalog* of the Arte y Literatura publishing house—the main publisher of foreign literary works in Cuba—this organisation published a total of 1989 titles from its foundation in 1967 until 2004.[24] Until the 1990s almost 23% (that is, 453 titles) of its publications came from the Socialist bloc. In *Bibliography of Soviet Authors: Books and Brochures Published in Cuba (1959–1977)* (*Bibliografía de autores soviéticos. Libros y folletos publicados en Cuba (1959–1977)*), Ernestina Grimardi Pérez lists the number of Soviet titles published in that period: 450 titles in 17 years, an average of about 27 new titles per year.[25] Twenty-eight different publishers were responsible for producing these books. These numbers include not just literary works, but titles from almost all areas of knowledge. Nevertheless, none of these statistics considers books published in Spanish by other Soviet publishers, such as Progress (known as Progreso in the Hispanic world), Raduga, or Mir, for example, which were distributed through local Cuban publishing houses; nor does it count books from other Socialist countries.

These institutionalised practices of translation were common in all Socialist regions, where priority was given to re-structuring society. As Thomson-Wohlgemuth has shown, similar processes also happened in the German Democratic Republic.[26] The goal, not only for the GDR but for all Socialist countries, was to provide a comprehensive education for members of the nascent Socialist society. To this end, the creation of new institutions and cultural infrastructures was promoted to guarantee universal access to high-culture literature, not necessarily exclusively Socialist. As already mentioned above, the antecedent to these practices can be found in Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the main goals of the World Literature Publishing House, founded by Gorky in 1918, was to provide the Soviet reader with the best of global literary production while at the same time offering accurate paratextual information about the work to be read. The same trend—adding historical and social explanations as an introduction to literary works from a Socialist perspective—was followed by other Socialist publishers during the twentieth century.

In Socialist countries such as Cuba, following the example of the Soviet Union, translation practices had several functions. These were all-important and sometimes, at first glance, contradictory. Their goals were:

24 *Catálogo de Publicaciones* (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 2004).

25 Ernestina Grimardi Pérez, *Bibliography of Soviet Authors: Books and Brochures Published in Cuba (1959–1977)* (*Bibliografía de autores soviéticos. Libros y folletos publicados en Cuba (1959–1977)*) (Havana: Ministerio de Cultura, 1977).

26 See Gabriele Thomson-Wohlgemuth, 'A Socialist Approach to Translation: A Way Forward', in *Meta: Journal des traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal*, XLIX:3 (2004), 498–510.

1. to create a universal literary consumer, capable of enjoying the literature of the world;
2. to educate people about a specific model of society;
3. to reach out to different regions of the world to spread Socialist influence;
4. to seek a balance in the circulation of World Literature that would allow literatures from peripheral areas or minority languages to have a certain international presence while promoting literary production in those same areas.

Historically, in many societies, literary translation has played a central role in developing the local literary system. But as we show, the dynamics created during the processes of literary translation within the Socialist bloc—although not only there—were explicitly intertwined with the ideological intentionality of such tasks during the cultural Cold War.

All Cubans Learned Russian

Many years of teaching and learning Russian, and the many programmes and institutions created with this goal, ensured that Cuba had one of the highest Russophone populations in the Western hemisphere. Other factors also contributed, such as mixed marriages between Cubans and Soviet emigrants. And although the times of widespread Russian instruction are long gone, there are still Cubans who can recognise, at the very least, the letters of the Cyrillic alphabet. Others still retain some knowledge of the language, even if it is rusty from lack of use. However, despite widespread instruction in Russian, it never became a lingua franca in Cuba for various reasons—among them, Cuba's strong Spanish linguistic and cultural history, the geographical distance between the two countries, the lack of an effective Russian occupation of Cuba, and the concerted efforts made by Cuban cultural agents and institutions to maintain cultural independence. For most Cubans, some phrases in Russian became familiar and part of the daily speech, such as '*net*' ('no'), '*tovarishch*' ('comrade'), and '*konets*' ('the end'). Also, titles of Soviet movies and TV series entered common conversations in a process of re-semantisation by which such phrases were incorporated into the Cuban context, acquiring new and broader meanings. In a society that put great emphasis on reading and the production and circulation of books,[27] the book as an object became the bearer of a highly

27 After the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the government created new institutions and approved new laws to promote book production, such as the National Press House (1959–62); the Department of Literature and Publications of the National Council [of Culture] (1959–62); the National Publisher of Cuba (1962–67);

symbolic value—a "symbolic good", to use Bourdieu's term[28]—of belonging to an erudite group. Buying and accumulating books became a popular hobby, especially given that other hobbies were harder to support. But buying and accumulating books did not always mean reading them. Thus, many literary references of Socialist origin found their way into Cuba's culture, popular speech, and social imaginary not from the knowledge provided by reading, but from their inclusion in other forms of cultural production, such as radio, soap operas, or movies in what Itamar Even-Zohar has described as "indirect readers".

The direct consumption of *integral texts* has been, and remains, peripheral to the largest part of 'direct,' let alone 'indirect,' consumers of 'literature.' All members of any community are at least 'indirect' consumers of literary texts. In this capacity we, as such members, simply consume a certain quantity of literary fragments, digested, and transmitted by various agents of culture and made an integral part of daily discourse. Fragments of old narratives, idioms and allusions, parables and stock language, all, and many more, constitute the living repertoire stored in the warehouse of our culture.[29] In this sense, Soviet culture became a 'living repertoire' within Cuban culture, and found its way, directly and indirectly, into Cubans' daily lives.

Cuban translated editions of Socialist books comprised tens of thousands of copies, sometimes up to a hundred thousand; as a result, even if they were not read, these titles were part of the bibliographic heritage of many Cubans. Socialist literature in translation was more a reference than a direct source, and its influence was often mediated by its use in non-literary media. Although Soviet literature was published in Cuba on a massive scale by both Cuban and Soviet publishers, the popularity of many titles was made possible by their inclusion in other cultural forms, such as television and radio soap operas, movies, or plays. This might never have happened had they not been part of literary discourse in the first place. According to André Lefevere, translation has

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Revolutionary Edition (1965–67); Casa de las Américas (1959); and the Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (1961). For more information, see Jacqueline Laguardia Martínez, 'Industria editorial cubana: evolución y desarrollo' ('Cuban Publishing Industry: Evolution and Development'), in *Memorias. Feria Internacional del Libro de La Habana* (*Memories. Havana International Book Fair*) (Havana: Editorial Científico-Técnica, 2012), pp. 160–97. For example, between August 1960 and early April 1962, the National Press House printed 14,497,956 books; 26,463,600 brochures; and 22,579,882 magazines. See Pamela Maria Smorkaloff, *Literatura y edición de libros. La cultura literaria y el proceso social en Cuba, 1900–1987* (*Literature and Book Publishing: Literary Culture and the Social Process in Cuba, 1900–1987*) (Havana, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1987), p. 140.

28 Pierre Bourdieu, *Capital cultural, escuela y espacio social*, trans. by Isabel Jimenez (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 2013).

29 Itamar Even-Zohar, 'The Literary System', in *Poetics Today*, 11:1 (Spring 1990), 27–44 (p. 36).

four specific purposes: communicating information, circulating cultural capital, entertaining, and convincing the reader to follow a certain course of action.[30] But these four functions are not the only ones possible. In the case of Socialist translation, as we suggest here, we might add a fifth or at least complicate the fourth: dissemination of Socialist ideology while providing a model of citizenship and society—or, in other words, circulating ideological capital.

Notes for a Conclusion

The arrival of Socialist revolution in Cuba allowed translation practices to become a political and ideological instrument. The material translated from Soviet Russian into Spanish was not limited to literary and scientific knowledge alone but, above all, pointed to a way of thinking about and understanding reality, a way of planning and trying to create a new society. We agree with Heilbron and Sapiro in describing the movement of world translations as irregular: "translation flows are highly uneven, flowing from the centre toward the periphery rather than the reverse [...] communication among peripheral languages very often passes through the intermediary of a centre" (96). We can conclude, however, that the dynamics driven by the Soviet Union not only sought to compete in the international market of cultural goods but mainly to challenge it by creating new ways of putting in circulation literary production from places left out of an international book market dominated by the West. As Susanna Witt notes, "[l]iterary translation in the Soviet Union may well be the largest more or less coherent project of translation the world has seen to date—largest in terms of geographical range, number of languages (and directions) involved and time span; coherent in the sense of ideological framework (given its fluctuations over time) and centralized planning".[31]

In this sense, the dynamics of translation created between the Soviet Union and Cuba defies the description that Heilbron and Sapiro have provided about the flows of translations. They have said: "[w]hile the dominant countries 'export' their cultural products widely and translate little into their languages, the dominated countries 'export' little and 'import' a lot of foreign books, principally by translation" (96). However, as demonstrated in this chapter, during the years of intense relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union, Cuban authors saw their literary works circulating in the (alternate) international book

30 André Lefevere, 'Translation Practice(s) and the Circulation of Cultural Capital. Some *Aeneids* in English', in *Constructing Cultures. Essays on Literary Translation*, ed. by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (Clevedon: Cromwell Press, 1998), pp. 41–56 (p. 41).

31 Susanna Witt, 'Between the Lines: Totalitarism and Translation in the USSR', in *Contexts, Subtexts, and Pretexts: Literary Translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, ed. by Brian Baer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), pp. 149–70 (p. 167).

market as never before or after. Although the number of publications of Soviet origin that circulated on the island was larger than the number of Cuban literary works translated into the Russian language, there was clearly an intention to reach quantitative equality between translations originating in each nation.

Although the effects of the influence of Soviet literary presence in Cuba have been fading since the 1990s, the door that the exchange between the two countries opened has allowed for a lasting flow of translating efforts and enterprises, sometimes at the individual level, both in Russia and in Cuba and Latin America. Almost six decades later, the remnants of Soviet presence in Cuba have been reduced to a cathartic afternoon in the cinema. But such a nostalgic moment ends once the audience steps back outside into a reality in which the Russian language and Socialist ideology are becoming more and more undefined and blurred. Its influence, however, was undeniable in the development of Cuban literature. Genres such as science fiction and detective novels were born and enriched because of the contact with Soviet literary works and until today we can find a considerable corpus where traces of Russian culture are evident.[32]

32 Many scholars have worked on the influence of the Soviet culture in Cuba. An essential bibliography would include Raúl Aguiar's article 'El futuro pertenece por entero al comunismo! Influencias del cine de ciencia ficción de la URSS y de otros países del este en el imaginario literario cubano' ('The Future Wholly Belongs To Communism! Influences of Science Fiction Cinema from the USRR and Other Nations on the Cuban Cultural Imaginary'), *Kamchatka*, 5 (2015), https://doi.org/10.7203/KAM.5.4619; Jacqueline Loss's study *Dreaming in Russian: The Cuban Soviet Imaginary* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2013); my own monograph *Escrito en cirílico* (2012), developed from my doctoral dissertation, 'Nieve sobre La Habana: El ideal soviético en la cultura cubana postnoventa' ('Snowing on Havana: The Soviet Ideal in post-1990 Cuban Culture') (University of Iowa, 2010), on Russian and Soviet influence on post-1990 Cuban cultural production; and José Miguel Sánchez's articles 'Lo que dejaron los rusos' ('What the Russians Left'), *Temas*, 37 (2004), 138–44 and 'Marcianos en el platanal de Bartolo: Análisis de la historia y perspectivas de la CF en Cuba' ('Martians in the Bartolo Plantation: Analysis of the History and Perspectives of SF in Cuba'), *StarDust* (2002), http://www.stardustcf.com/articulos.asp?arti=30; and Isabel Story's monograph, *When the Soviets Came To Stay: Soviet Influence on Cuban Culture, 1961–1987* (London and New York: Lexingon, 2020). There are also a number of useful unpublished doctoral dissertations on this topic, including Magdalena Matuskova, 'Cuban Cinema in a Global Context: The Impact of Eastern European Cinema on the Cuban Film Industry in the 1960s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2017); and Vladimir Smith Mesa, 'KinoCuban: The Significance of Soviet and East European Cinemas for the Cuban Moving Image' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College London, 2011).