The phrase “Cuban film” contains both nation and diaspora, referring to films made in Cuba and in the U.S. As in diasporic Cuban film, exile and betrayal are frequent and often intertwined themes in films made in post-Revolutionary Cuba. In certain films, betrayal takes on different tones that reflect particular historical moments and the varying motivations for leaving that arise from them. In earlier productions, emigration suggests betrayal of the Revolution and, by extension, of the Cuban. As the economic privations of the Special Period take hold in the 1990s, the theme of emigration not only becomes a filmic preoccupation, but also begins to suggest a sense of betrayal by the Revolution, specifically by its more repressive aspects. In some films, emigration continues to imply a betrayal of those Revolutionary ideals and achievements that remain identified with the nation. As the new millennium begins, however, Cuban film starts to frame exile not only as interpersonal betrayal, but also as betrayal of a nation that is imagined less as constituted by the Revolution than by community. My talk will touch on several films made in Cuba from the 1960s to the present, analysing the ways in which the themes of emigration and betrayal emerge in each: Memorias del subdesarrollo; Fresa y chocolate; La vida es silbar; Lista de espera; and Viva Cuba.

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