Diaspora Politics and Identity: Rethinking Theory, Politics, and the Personal

In this book I have provided an account of the development of Cuban exile politics and identity since the Cuban revolution. I have argued that the community's politics have been profoundly influenced by the national security interests of the U.S. and Cuban states. These two states developed policies that, while seemingly at odds with each other, have had the mutual effect of fueling a Cuban *exile* identity and political culture in the United States. From these large and complicated structures and practices exile political organizations with a unique identity have emerged, but their range and effectiveness have depended heavily on host and home country states. The émigré community has also continued to grow and develop as new exiles have crossed the Florida Straits. Yet, as unique as these experiences may be, Cubans in the United States are part of the larger Latino community, for not only does it share the broader historical relationship between the United States and Latin America, but, ultimately, the development of community politics occurs within a similar institutional and rhetorical framework.

In this final chapter I discuss the implications that the Cuban case may have for the way we think about the political development of diaspora communities. As unique as the circumstances may have been that shaped the contours of the Cuban exile, they suggest that we need to reexamine the conceptual frameworks used to study the development of communities that have crossed political borders during the last half of this century. I also explore ways of analyzing such communities in the future so that we can begin to think about new approaches to understanding the human needs and political responses that emerge from immigration, separation from homeland, and incorporation into a new home.

State Interests / Exile Politics

Since the emergence of modern states, people moving across national boundaries have had a political dimension attached to their experience.

Applying for visas, getting reentry permits, and passing through security checks are political processes. Since these processes also represent points of contact between states, there are many opportunities for international political maneuvering to take place around the movement of people. For the United States, one of the superpowers involved in the cold war, refugees came to have a symbolic and ideological value by demonstrating that communism was a system worth fleeing. Given that the cold war was fought principally through national security apparatuses, national security agencies in the United States had an extraordinary influence on Cuban exiles. Decisions about who could come to the United States from Cuba, and how, were made under the rubric and in the halls of national security interests. Once they arrived émigrés became foot soldiers for cold war–era U.S. policies toward Cuba.

But the Cuban exile community had an additional role in terms of U.S.–Latin American relations. Because of Cuba's status as a former quasi-colony of the United States, the revolution was not only a challenge to the superpower position of the United States vis-à-vis the socialist camp but also a threat to U.S. hegemony in Latin America. The Cuban revolution and its exiles were thus embroiled in both the East-West confrontation and the struggle between North and South.

Cuban national security interests also have influenced exile politics. From its onset the Cuban revolution equated leaving the country with treason and defined all those who left as enemies of the state. Practices and laws were institutionalized that contributed to defining the Cuban émigré community as exile, with attendant ideological and political positions. Emigration became the vehicle through which opposition to the Cuban regime was externalized and, indeed, how opposition to the regime was shown.

The Cuban revolution was a nationalist revolution, one that sought social justice and national sovereignty. Support for the revolution came from many social classes, including middle and upper classes concerned with issues of sovereignty and government repression. Yet Cuba's policy of encouraging emigration, a position reinforced by the need to control the population, presented a nationalist revolution with a major contradiction: taken to its logical conclusion, the promotion of emigration denationalized the nation. If early emigrants to the United States were the product of the previous order, in later years emigrants were also the children of the revolution itself. Emigration reflected the profound disarticulation of a revolutionary process that did not have open political processes with which to incorporate into governance the nation it purported to represent.

Changes in Cuba's policies toward the exile community have generally been very cautious, usually coming in response to changes in U.S.

LIBRES Y VICTORIOSOS

LA HABANA, 1994

FREE AND VICTORIOUS

MIAMI, 1996

policies toward Cuba. The framework within which these policies have been developed is one of war and defense of the country. Added to this was the fact that bureaucratic fights would erupt periodically as certain sectors of the Communist Party's bureaucracy attempted to take over chunks of the government's programs toward the community abroad. The Cuban bureaucracy sought to make policies toward the émigré community part of the domestic realm by trying to include them in the struggle against the counterrevolution. For all these government entities, however, the aim was not necessarily to resolve problems for the exile community but, rather, to grow bureaucratically.

The Cuban government's main strategy toward the exile community was to divide and conquer. Many exile organizations were delegitimized in Cuba because of their allegiance to the United States, a foreign state whose proclaimed aim was to destroy the Cuban revolution and its leadership. At the same time, organizations friendly to the Cuban state were given the opportunity to provide services to the exile community as a way of expanding their political influence—a tricky proposition, since émigré community organizations closely allied to the Cuban state had little legitimacy in the exile community. Nonetheless, the dramatic separation between those on the island and those abroad, and the lack of direct economic activity between the United States and the island, created a host of needs for divided families.

Service providers who attempted to meet these needs were mainly relegated to selling travel packages for visits to Cuba and sending food, medicine, and correspondence to relatives on the island. Through such ties the émigré community, while a national security issue for Cuba, also became an economic resource for an increasingly cash-strapped state. This role became so important that by the late 1990s exile remittances had become one of the most important contributions to the island's gross national product. Continued separation between Cuba and the exile community even after the end of the cold war created expanding business opportunities for the Cuban state and U.S.-based organizations friendly to the regime.

For both states policies toward emigrants/immigrants were developed and conducted within realms of the government that have little or no accountability to the public. For the United States émigrés from Latin America could be used to meet larger strategic state goals—a situation made more acute by the fact that, until recently, Latinos have had little political power. For Cuba once a person left, he or she was considered a traitor and as such had no rights under the law. In both U.S. and Cuban government bureaucracies those who developed policies toward the exile community had little public accountability.

Since many of the original exile organizations also emerged from a national security background, they, too, operated clandestinely and were not subject to public accountability. This encouraged a political culture of secrecy and intolerance in which the rules of the games were defined not by democratic principles but by those of war. Even as organizations in the late 1970s and early 1980s tried to enter electoral politics in the United States or to provide meaningful services to the émigré community the dominance of national security interests, whether for those allied to the United States or those working with the Cuban government, encouraged secrecy and intolerance.

For those opposed to the revolution their organizations and political strategies became so closely tied to the United States that they were rendered politically impotent on the island. But this closeness also provided them with access to power in their host country. Since the exile community came of age politically in the 1980s, just as other Latino communities were also entering national mainstream politics, certain sectors of the Cuban émigré community provided Republican administrations in Washington an opening to the emerging Latino movement. Cuban exile electoral activism acquired a special political function, with Republicans seeing Cuban-Americans as "their" minority community. But, even with greater participation in domestic politics, the foreign policy realm continued to dominate and define roles for Cuban exiles.

Those supporting the Cuban revolution were often undercut by the aims of Cuba's policies, especially that of externalizing dissent. As some émigrés tried to unite in a broad coalition supporting dialogue and reconciliation, the Cuban government concerned itself with preventing the emergence of any powerful block, even one supporting policy changes that would favor the island. As such, the quest to unify the greatest number of individuals committed to reconciliation directly contradicted the Cuban government's strategy of dividing the exile community. This contributed to making these organizations politically ineffective within the exile community and hindered their goal of normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba.

Although Cuba initially severed ties to its émigrés, as the United States incorporated exiles into its foreign policy projects the Cuban government looked for ways of reestablishing contact with émigrés who might be friendly to its own foreign policy objectives. The struggle between the two feuding states came to be waged through immigrants, often on host country territory. The U.S. state brought its foreign policy projects to a domestic community, Miami. And Cuba's interest in the mid-1970s in engaging with sectors of its communities abroad injected a new element into traditional paths for immigrant political development—an active

home country government's involvement with its émigré community. (Other Latin American governments began engaging with their communities sometime later.)

This study suggests that, while political borders may indeed be more fluid than social scientists have traditionally allowed, especially in regard to how people define their politics and identities, they still serve as structures that determine the ways in which these more fluid relations occur.

Negotiating Space within Host Countries

In the first instance the political incorporation of postrevolution Cuban émigrés into the United States resulted from their symbolic and political utility. Because of the impact of Cuban and U.S. national security interests, the political development of Cuban exiles has not followed the typical path of other immigrant communities that first obtained political power at the local level in order to gain access to resources such as jobs and service. The Cuban exile community was provided jobs and services by the federal government from the very beginning, rendering moot the traditional immigrant model. Rather, from the start the politics of the exile community were closely linked to strategic foreign policy objectives. Cuban exiles acquired political significance in the foreign policy realm first and in the domestic realm only later.

The Cuban exile community developed within broader U.S. society and thus has been influenced by another set of elements: those related to social discrimination. Unlike the federal government, which welcomed refugees in the early 1960s, local government reaction to Cuban exiles was mixed, particularly when it became clear that exiles were in the States to stay and that many more would be coming. Local reaction included housing segregation and a demand that the federal government relocate Cubans out of Miami. People complained that Cubans were loud, pushy, and spoke in Spanish. Local officials feared not only that they would change the complexion of the city but, worse, that someday they would demand the right to vote.

But negative local reaction, coupled with the political trauma undergone by the early exiles, contributed to a unique sense of self. In part this can be traced to the class origins of the initial wave of immigrants who arrived in the early 1960s. People considered nonwhite (regardless of how they identify themselves)[1] and of middle-class background generally experience more blatant racial and cultural discrimination than other groups, because they are often the first to enter exclusively white U.S. institutions. In their jobs these individuals are expected to shed their culture and take on that of the dominant society. Ironically, this process often tends to rein-

force an émigré's own culture at the same time that it increases cultural and ethnic tension. Cubans were often the first nonwhites to obtain certain high-level jobs, a development that reinforced strong feelings of nationalism in the exile community.

In addition, Cubans were able to build a fairly self-sufficient enclave in Miami, a closely knit community that tempered the reaction to rejection. This contributed to a less "Americanized" or "racialized" view of their self-identities. Outside of Miami, however, Cubans did not have the support of such an enclave. Although many communities did succeed in setting up cultural and political clubs in other cities, their experiences differed depending on their location.

While the Cuban exile community has often been a victim, willing and unwilling, of larger state policies, it has not always been passive. Even within those political and cultural institutions that are tied closely to one or another state, there have been contradictions, dissidence, and rupture indicative of other forces and needs at play in shaping the contours of what we know as the Cuban exile community in the United States. On language issues, for instance, Cubans have advocated bilingual programs and services—a position that has pitted them against the Miami establishment.

The first major break between the shared desire of the exile community and the U.S. government to topple Fidel Castro occurred in the 1970s, when young Cuban exiles entering U.S. universities were radicalized by the U.S. civil rights and antiwar movements. This radicalization forced a redefinition of the relationship to homeland precipitated by the search for equality and peace. The quest for equality for Latinos has often included the quest for identity and a reconciliation with homeland. While many organizations that emerged, such as the Antonio Maceo Brigade, looked to the homeland, they were led by Cubans who had lived most of their lives in the United States. The political activities that developed were both a challenge to the Right's monolithic hold on the community and a challenge to the U.S. state. Although many of these organizations later lost some of their breadth as they moved closer to official Cuban policies, initially they were organic movements emerging in the heart of an exile community.

Even organizations such as the Cuban-American National Foundation (CANF), which were closely tied in origin and function to U.S. foreign policy objectives, have demonstrated a capacity to build and use resources in ways that give them independence from the U.S. government. Nonetheless, the message from the federal government, particularly in the 1980s, was that the closer an organization was to the foreign policy objectives of the United States, the more resources it would have. CANF is, in part, a result of Cuban exile capital resources as well as a beneficiary of

local, state, and federal government contracts. The political possibilities available to CANF are a product of its relationship to individuals and policies in the federal government. Many of the opportunities given to the Cuban émigré community, both in terms of political appointments and contracts, occurred at a time when other Latinos began to gain entrance into the public sector. In a sense Cuban exiles reaped the benefits of years of civil rights struggle waged by other Latinos and African-Americans. This added to the symbolic value that the exile community held for U.S. foreign policy, making it relatively easy for political organizations such as CANF to gain a tremendous amount of prestige and power. Once this power was acquired, it did not always serve the interests of the state, particularly when CANF began to act independently of the White House on international issues. Yet the *origins* of that power are related to CANF's links to the state.

As the cold war entered its final stages, many Cuba watchers wondered why the United States did not change its policies toward Cuba. They found their answer in CANF's lobbying efforts in Washington and claimed that an immigrant group was buying U.S. policies toward Cuba. Yet these observers failed to understand that, while CANF had tremendous influence, especially in Congress and in the implementation of policies already developed, the organization had been created in large part by the U.S. state, which had helped it gain legitimacy. Moreover, CANF's success in the electoral arena was due in part to an undisputed ethnic stereotype about Cuban exiles and their politics. U.S. policy toward Cuba had a dynamic of its own that predated not only the emergence of CANF but also the revolution itself. Finally, as independent as CANF could be in the timing and even in the tactics of its political campaigns, it shared in the overall objective set forth by the GOP administrations in power in the 1980s: the demise of the Castro government. The Democrats later bought into the electoral strategy pioneered by the Bush and Reagan administrations, moving to the right of the Republicans to regain the foothold in the Cuban exile community they had lost the previous decade.

In the case of the Cuban exile community its incorporation into mainstream political institutions was greatly facilitated by the value the community brought to the state in its foreign policy objectives. Nonetheless, when the space opened up by these opportunities began to be used for the consolidation of individual and political agendas, struggle ensued, particularly at the local level. The local Democratic Party machine in Florida did not facilitate the entrance of Cuban exiles into politics; rather, it was ethnic mobilization on a national scale by the Republicans that opened the door for Cubans to participate politically at the local and state level.

Local politics continued to be contingent on foreign policy. In the late

1980s and early 1990s, as CANF tried to impose a specific political agenda on the émigré community while excluding all other voices from the public debate, cracks appeared in the empire which became more evident after Jorge Más Canosa's death in 1997.[2] Other organizations, such as the Coordinadora de Derechos Humanos, with its links to human rights activists on the island, challenged CANF's claim to representing the consensus of the community. Many of these battles were waged in the ideological arena; in this sense Latin American and U.S. traditions coincided. The *Miami Herald* launched a daily Spanish-language supplement that became home to political and ideological debate and quickly gained prominence in Miami and Havana.

The organizational alternatives to CANF, groups such as the Cuban-American Committee and the Cuban Committee for Democracy (CCD), also focused on foreign policy objectives and, like CANF, lost sight of their own role in the domestic policy arena. In the case of CCD its organizational structure tried to mimic CANF and as such provided no alternative organizational vision.

The U.S. political experience contributed to the emergence of organizations that concentrated their political efforts on their host country government, even though Cuba was still the focus of their agenda. Ethnic mobilization, with its "Cuban exile" content, was a vehicle through which community politics was conducted. A political culture began to emerge that clearly distinguished the practice of politics in the community from the past and offered new ways for dealing with controversial opinions. Terrorist tactics gave way to conventional methods of pressure and debate and to more familiar kinds of ethnic organizations.

Homeland and Identity

Most Cubans in the United States realized that they were here to stay regardless of what happened in Cuba. But the issue of Cuba still dominated the Cuban émigré political agenda. Hostilities between host and home countries continued to distort the debate. As a result, it was difficult to negotiate a political/cultural identity that kept the homeland alive in a constructive way.

The initial rupture was so painful that the search for identity changed direction and turned inward, leading many Cubans to articulate a mythical image of homeland. The changing nature of the exile community allowed for an expanded definition of self, just as concern for the homeland was further legitimized when new waves of exiles came into the community's political life. The rupture between émigrés and homeland, so definitive in the early 1960s, did not seem to reproduce itself in later waves

of exiles. Many of the later émigrés wanted to maintain an active relationship to their home country. Perhaps they did not expect to go back.

The pull of home country has been a steady preoccupation of most immigrants. In this sense Cuban exiles' longing for homeland has not been unique. In the early 1960s painters such as Felix Ramos made a living recreating lush and colorful *framboyanes* (royal poinsettias) that hung in the living rooms of Cuban families throughout the United States alongside a much-reproduced photograph of the Malecon, the Havana seawall. But nostalgia was permeated with the impossibility of return. Paradise had been lost forever to the forces of evil. For the first group of postrevolution émigrés, nostalgia was a means of defying the official Cuban position that forbade their return to Cuba and defined them as anti-Cuban.

When Cuban exiles were allowed to return to Cuba in 1978, some artists and writers started to break through the ruptured or dichotomized identity. New possibilities were opened, but the polarization was so definitive that return to the homeland remained politicized and continued to be seen by the community as an act of treason. Enjoying music or art or friends who lived on the island became an act of otherness, an act of betrayal.

It was not until the mid-1980s that this dichotomy began to give way to the possibility of a more fluid identity. The Mariel immigration injected the community with a significant number of intellectuals, writers, and artists who brought with them a more contemporary, albeit sometimes complex and antagonistic, vision of Cuba. But this more fluid identity emerged at the margins of political structures because the Mariel immigration had provoked a crisis for the revolutionary government and the exile community.

For the island Mariel showed that the Cuban government was incapable of uniting the very people it was supposed to have served, the poor. The revolution had failed in the nationalist principles that had been its moving force since the 1950s. With Mariel the government pushed a significant sector of its population out of the geographic boundaries of the nation and officially denationalized it, while claiming that these people, the lumpen and the *escoria,* were not part of the nation. For the exile community Mariel was a reminder that the cultural life of the country, however difficult, had continued in Cuba after their departure.

Putting additional pressure on the Cuban government's failure to provide a home for all Cubans was the increased contact between people on the island and abroad. Cubans on the island rejoined families that, in almost every case, had not seen each other for twenty years. Toward the end of the 1980s the decision by the United States to allow tourist visas for family visits to the United States, as well as Cuba's decision to lower the

age of those allowed to travel, contributed to breaking down the political wall that had been erected between those who had left and those who remained. Academic exchanges, although tightly controlled in Cuba as well as the United States, also contributed to creating new ways for people to relate to one another.

While for most émigrés the longing for Cuba is about the past and is, as such, nostalgic, these new contacts allowed the development of another type of longing, one that sought a meaningful connection in the present. The hope was that homeland could become a source of pride and cultural rejuvenation for a community of Latin American émigrés. But, it seemed, the closer émigrés moved toward their homeland, the more difficult it was for the island government to incorporate this force.

Adding to the complexity of the problem was the Cuban government's response to the worsening economic situation after the fall of the socialist bloc. The government sought to attract foreign investment, but when many Cuban exiles came forward ready and willing to invest in Cuba they presented the Cuban government with a dilemma. For years the Cuban press had created a negative image of Cuban exiles, yet now many wanted to help their country. Initially, the economic restructuring that took place in Cuba allowed foreigners, but not Cuban exiles, to invest in the island. A proposed solution was to strip Cubans who had left of their Cuban citizenship and thus be able to say that those investing were not Cubans but foreigners.

Naturally, this created an even larger conceptual problem. Could the state erase a person's nationality? Wasn't there a distinction between state and nation? In a society like Cuba's, in which civil society is almost nonexistent, the notion of citizenship is difficult to imagine. Citizenship is intimately connected to the fall of monarchies and the rise of a modern state, in which rights are constituted precisely to protect the individual from the state. In Cuba the revolution had blurred any distinction between society and the state and between the state and the nation. As a result, national identity had to be found outside legal and political definitions. Thus, culture and its definition became an important debate for Cubans inside and outside the country.

In the 1980s the prevailing wisdom in the Cuban communities abroad was that the high level of repression on the island made it impossible for culture to flourish. On the island it was argued that for culture to be Cuban it had to be created inside the nation. But this outside/inside distinction lost viability when people on and off the island came into increased contact with one another. Toward the end of the 1980s the worsening economic and political conditions in Cuba contributed to the spiraling number of intellectuals and artists forced to emigrate. Mexico City, Madrid,

and Miami received a significant number of writers and artists. Most of these young artists were uninterested in reproducing the rupture of the early 1960s and became a force in changing any definition of Cuban culture that excluded those outside the island.

At a time when important sectors of the exile community were searching for a redefinition of identity that included homeland, those in Cuba were searching for a new paradigm based on a nationalist vision that redefined the nation as well—a redefinition that often included those who had left. This crossroads provided an opportunity in which Cuban identity might shed its politicized dichotomy and the geographic distinction between who is and isn't Cuban.

This exploration was a challenge to the way power had arranged itself in the twentieth century. Cuban émigrés have had two political options: either staying and defending their home country or joining an "enemy state." Yet the identity of Miami's Cubans is far more complex than the stark choice offered by these two options. Cuban exiles have constructed their political, cultural, and personal identities in ways that go beyond what is legal or officially permitted.

This search for a more fluid identity has been a feature in the politics of other Latino communities as well, particularly in the radical politics of the 1960s and 1970s. There have been numerous projects to establish a dialogue between Puerto Ricans from the mainland and those on the island. The great influx of new immigrants from Mexico has also spurred debates in many U.S. Mexican communities on how to connect struggles across the border. The preoccupation with homeland is an important component of Latino identity in the United States, but it is not the only preoccupation. And moreover, it is a preoccupation that comes and goes depending on many factors.

Remapping Theoretical and Political Boundaries

While the movement of people from one land to another has been part of human history from its beginning, in the twentieth century new modes of transportation and communication have contributed to the speed of this movement. In addition, the political boundaries drawn by colonization have given way to larger-scale economic units at the same time that ethnically driven political forces have tried to redraw national boundaries. How, then, are we to understand communities formed by the transnational movement of people from one state to another in the age of globalization?

The paradigms that have dominated the social sciences adopt the conceptual framework of the nation-state as the organizing unit of people's

lives. This framework misses important parts of the social and political reality lived by communities shaped by more than one nation-state. Those studying the interaction and effects of host and home country policies on immigrant communities have often found that the topic is considered too "ethnic" for traditional foreign policy paradigms and too "foreign" for ethnic politics approaches. The other model of political behavior is the minority model that emphasizes exclusion and inclusion on the basis of race. The minority model traces political development as a product of struggle for inclusion, basing its observations largely on the experiences of African-Americans. While this perspective acknowledges the importance of social mobilization along ethnic and/or racial lines, it is still bound by the confines of a single nation-state.

The conceptual framework that approached Latinos from a development or socialization perspective relies on a definition of political behavior as something that takes place within the political institutions of one nation-state. The nation-state constricts the lens used to examine identity and, consequently, political action. Identity can be conceived only within the host nation-state; one's relationship to homeland, another nation-state, or host country falls outside the realm of traditional processes of political activism and therefore of political identity.

The political experiences of Cuban exiles and other Latino communities cannot be placed neatly within conceptual categories that predict that once you emigrate you sever connections to your homeland. Instead, we may want to ask when and how a home and/or host country shape the development of immigrant communities. The socialization model's unilinear path does not allow for the ebb and flow of concerns about ethnic or national identity that, in part, may be socially and personally contextual. One may become more sensitive to issues of identity, for example, when under threat, such as at moments when there is a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment against a particular community. In addition, these concerns can become accentuated during certain stages of the life cycle, such as becoming a parent.

In terms of academic disciplines the Latino political experiences are located in the fields of ethnic studies, area studies, *and* foreign policy. Without exception the emergence and growth of Latino immigrant communities can be traced to the interaction among local development politics in the country of origin *and* U.S. economic and national security policies in the region. The continual interaction of labor and capital flows with regional and hemispheric national security policies has contributed to shaping Latin American immigration into the United States and has affected the politics of these immigrant communities. Traditional questions of local and national politics have had an impact as well.

While the emergence of Miami as home to most of the Cuban exile community has its own set of characteristics, these are connected to the overall relationship of the United States to Latin America, specifically to the Caribbean and Central America. In fact, the United States's hypersensitivity to the Cuban revolution had as much to do with the unique relationship of Cuba to the United States as it did to how the events would play in Latin America. This does not deny the individuality of different national experiences that contain multiple layers and unique characteristics of their own (the Texas Chicano experience is not the same as the Hispanic Mexican-American experience in New Mexico). But it does suggest that there are overall dynamics of the Latino experiences that create as much common ground as they do differences. The challenge for social scientists is not to assume that these dynamics do or do not exist but to investigate them.

Latino experiences, including the Cuban exile political experience, are best understood within a comprehensive and comparative conceptual framework, as suggested by Frank Bonilla and the political economy working group of the Inter-University Program on Latino Research.[3] Such a framework needs to include an understanding of the origins of Latino communities in the United States. These can be traced to the interaction of the United States with other nation-states, be it through conquest, expansion, or intervention. Thus, immigration from Latin American countries to the United States can be seen as a by-product of a more complex set of hemispheric relations between country of origin and host country than that allowed by traditional paradigms. In addition, the internal dynamics of home countries also influence the politics of those who have left. The other side of the coin for Latino politics, including those of Cuban exiles, is the political environment in the United States. And again, while there are regional distinctions, there are similar institutions and political cultures though which the various Latino experiences are filtered. Indeed, the "Latino" phenomenon of the 1980s is one of the filters through which community politics is articulated, particularly at the national level.

Furthermore, although these home countries were not direct colonies of the United States (with the exception of Puerto Rico), they do share some of the same dynamics of European countries and their colonies. The United States essentially took over the postcolonial relationship between Europe and its others in the southern part of the Western hemisphere. This economic and political relationship is accompanied by a conceptual framework that sees Latin America and Latin Americans as others. At the turn of the century U.S. views of Latin Americans were blatantly racist.[4] While such images have given way to more sophisticated portrayals of

Latin Americans, they are still influenced by these perspectives. Once in the United States, émigrés from Latin America live and work in a society that has often excluded people of different cultures from full participation through a process of racialization.

Unlike European societies, the United States had legalized slavery, along with which came a racist conception of who was entitled to participate in the public sphere. Racism permeated society.[5] While rooted in the experience of slavery, ideas about race have affected conceptions of nationality as well. People of certain nationalities, Latin Americans included, are often not considered white. For example, government forms ask applicants whether they are white, black, or Hispanic. "Hispanic"—an ethnic category—is equated conceptually with the racial categories of "white" and "black." While color is a concept that was part of the language of colonization, in the United States, it has unique elements that influence the way that exclusion and, consequently, struggles for inclusion have been waged.[6]

Yet, instead of challenging the categories themselves as exclusionary practices, many of the empowerment movements of the 1960s reproduced the same categories, albeit in a positive light. Race, ethnicity, and gender were exalted as essential elements in defining one's identity. For immigrant communities, these movements sought a reconnection to their cultural roots, a notion which suggested a return to a lost territory. In the past ten years rigid categories have given way to more complex understandings of ethnic and cultural identity. Curiously, some of these new ways of looking at identity are not direct responses to exclusionary categories of race and culture but, rather, a response to categories promoted by progressive movements that, in trying to develop a discourse of inclusion, promoted exclusionary categories themselves. As such, the conceptual paradigms were not transformed but applied differently. In the 1990s intellectuals, particularly artists and writers, began proposing more complex ways of understanding multiple identities and multiple points of cultural and political references that inform the postmodern experience and that have been particularly evident in communities made up of large numbers of immigrants.[7]

There is a rich intellectual tradition in Latin America that can contribute to these debates. Unlike the British, whose settlement patterns led colonial societies to create rigid categories of insider and outsider (note the "one drop of blood" rule), the Spanish relied on armies to implement colonialism. In addition, the military was accompanied by Catholic missionaries who believed that, if converted, natives could be considered full human beings. As a result, in the Spanish colonies there was more intermingling of

different peoples and a more flexible view of blending than in the British colonial tradition. *Mestizaje* and syncretism have long been accepted as contributing to the formation of Latin American identity.[8]

There is an important debate about identity issues taking place in postcolonial Europe that can enrich the American debate.[9] One perspective that can be discerned from both is the need to understand cultures and, consequently, identities both as hybrids and as ongoing processes. In diaspora communities in particular the transculturation, or practice of clearly identifiable multiple cultures previously conceived as homogeneous (home and host cultures), produces new forms of cultural practices that can best be described as hybrid. In contrast to a paradigm that sees these cultures as proof of cultural diversity, Homi Bhabha suggests that they demonstrate the hybridity of cultures themselves. This may open the way "to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture based not on exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*"[10] and in politics as a place "not located in any particular geographic space, nor . . . tied to a single predetermined political position."[11]

This is particularly helpful in understanding diaspora communities. The proposition of hybridity allows us to appreciate the dynamics of a community that has points of reference in multiple cultures that are themselves mixtures as well. And, while there is already some acceptance of the hybridity of cultural practices, a rethinking of political practices for people whose lives are affected by multiple states is just beginning. Ironically, countries of origin have been the most active in trying to include in their polity those living abroad. This effort is directly related to an awareness of the economic role played by remittances sent home by immigrants that in many cases make up a critical component of the sending country's gross national product as well as the growing political importance of their communities abroad. Yet, while sending countries have extended to their diasporas an invitation to participate in national politics, albeit symbolically, many host countries are closing the doors to immigrants.

What does this anti-immigrant backlash tell us about the conceptions of democracy and citizenship in the United States in particular? It again reminds us that society puts a premium on those who are either born in the United States or have become naturalized citizens, not necessarily on those who contribute through their work to the well-being of U.S. society. The frontier of who is entitled is demarcated by legal conceptions of who was born in the United States and who has successfully met the requirements to become a citizen. It also suggests that, while the notion of who is entitled to participate has expanded over the past two hundred years, and indeed may be one of the most open processes among countries, it is not an

inevitable or steady progression but one that occasionally contracts as well. It is one of the arenas in which the battle to define democracy is waged. This was clearly the case in the debate in the mid-1990s about whether or not legal residents were entitled to social benefits.

The issue of identity, including its multiple dimensions, is at the heart of the debate about immigration and multiculturalism. It is a debate to define what the public culture should look like. Should it be a uniform culture driven by a single language and set of values or one that is more open, not just permissive of multiple cultures? Inherent in the more monocultural vision is an authoritarian and exclusionary view of who is entitled or at least what it takes to be entitled to participate in the public arena. Those who argue for a uniform culture worry that ethnic diversity in the public sector somehow weakens the country and fragments the whole. Democracy, a political system that purports to be inclusive of all political ideologies, seems not to be as tolerant of ethnic diversity or difference in the public sphere. The price for political diversity in the United States is a form of monoculturalism in the public sphere. And even more curious is that, as privileged as Cuban exiles have been in the context of U.S. politics, it was the governor's race in the state of Florida in the 1990s that launched an anti-immigrant platform nationwide.

There have been moments when the public culture has been more accommodating of difference. The 1975 extension to the Voting Rights Act included a provision to provide bilingual ballots in counties that had a certain percentage of Spanish-speaking residents. And many public school districts have recognized the diversity of their student bodies and have provided bilingual education. But even these programs are aimed in great part at "weaning" students from their native language into English, not necessarily in teaching all students two languages or even in helping students retain a native language as they learn English.

The U.S. political system does include extraordinary avenues through which immigrants can become "political Americans," but the underlying assumption is that, by doing so, people will eventually shed their other "ethnic" identities or at least their other national loyalties.[12] In reality some communities were never accepted as truly American. Furthermore, underlying this paradigm is the notion that there is "an American culture." While it is true that the content of this culture is rapidly becoming more inclusive—particularly since marketing strategists have discovered that sales increase when markets are targeted ethnically—for most of U.S. history nonwhites have not been considered American. Perhaps most problematic among all these notions is the idea that ethnic identity is in some way static or an end product.

There is a contradiction here that should be noted. Much voter mobi-

lization occurs along the lines of ethnic-based appeals.[13] But a close examination of ethnicity in the electoral arena shows that much of it is based on ethnic stereotypes that conveniently organize sectors of the American electorate for the purposes of electioneering, not necessarily for the purposes of empowerment. The formula for Cuban exiles is: "be hard on Castro." In addition, the conceptual underpinning of the ethnic construct that operates in elections is the hyphenated phenomenon—that is, ethnicity, although belonging to the private arena, becomes a vehicle to becoming a "political American."

In contrast, a multicultural vision of the public space defined as a dynamic, ever-changing mixture of multiple cultures that in and of themselves are also changing mixtures calls for a public environment more open to difference. For instance, instead of "English only" rules, multiple languages could be part of the national heritage. There are conceptual difficulties, however, with definitions of multiculturalism that are based on group rights. For example, what happens to individual or human rights if rights are conceived along group lines? But another vision of multiculturalism strives to make individuals themselves multicultural. Such a vision sees the public culture not just as the outcome of different cultures being incorporated on the basis of a preexisting culture but as an open-ended process that changes with each new wave of immigrants.[14] This, incidentally, is far different than changes in popular culture driven by marketing techniques.

Curiously, for home countries like Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico the national project has included a process of cultural integration. For instance, Cuba is a country that historically has had an amazing capacity to make "cultural Cubans" of (and make Cuban culture inclusive of) all kinds of people—Gallegos, Africanos, Chinos, Judios, Irlandes, Libanos, Jamaiquinos. In Cuba's case cultural pluralism has been accompanied by authoritarian political uniformity. Political dissenters are considered non-Cubans, and exile is their punishment.

A similar theoretical limitation frames both of these perspectives: a definition of national identity conceived as a singular identity that falls within the geographic borders of a nation-state. What may be missing in the prevalent analysis of identity and politics in home and host countries is the sense that in order for democracy—that is, a political system in which power lies in the polity and the polity is protected from the abuses of government—to flourish, societies must encourage both political and ethnic/racial pluralism. One cannot exist without the other. Imagine, for a moment, the similarities in the effect of structural mechanisms needed to impose either a single culture or a uniform political ideology. While not overt, there are repressive social and educational mechanisms in place in

the United States that strip immigrant children of a non-English language and erase from their memory their heritage. And, although more brutal and authoritarian, there are national security mechanisms in place on the island and other authoritarian countries that delegitimize opposing political ideas and erase from the collective memory political dissidents, including those in exile.

Nation-states that demand either political or cultural homogeneity may have outlived their usefulness in a world in which many of us, for a myriad of reasons, have crossed many borders and transformed both our home and host countries. Our own identities are now made up of multiple sources, as are our sending and receiving societies. We live at a time when capital, images, and culture cross borders with ease. Thus, all of us are influenced by and act upon some of the same elements. Added to this are the revolutions in communications and transportation that allow us to be in many places at the same time. The outcome is not a postmodern, uniform, single identity but, rather, an identity with multiple layers. Negotiating through these various contexts has also become more complex. To understand the new matrices within which we live we need to have a more open definition of identity and politics.

A framework is needed that welcomes the exploration of multiple layers of identity that have evolved outside the confines of established rules and procedures. This theoretical paradigm would not assume that geographic borders organize the politics and identities of peoples; rather, while they are structures that have a real impact on immigrant communities, they can be crossed at many levels, including the level of politics.

Subsequently, a different vision emerges of how politics can be organized. If states can and do enter into international agreements on a host of issues, why shouldn't individuals organize binational or even multinational organizations that can bid for representation in multiple governments and hold them accountable for their actions? The contestation of power might also include an organizational vision that transcends political borders. Alliances can be built both with movements in home and host countries. Roger Rouse has pointed out how the social bifocality of immigrant groups creates a complex system that does not necessarily choose one or another of the cultural or economic arrangements in host or home country but, instead, involves a process of syncretism between various aspects of both localities.[15] Purnima Mankekar suggests we extend this understanding to politics. "The political lives of diasporas," she writes, "are clearly not insulated from politics in the homeland . . . How then do we conceive of a political space that enables us to subvert the binaries of homeland and diaspora while simultaneously allowing us to build alliances with struggles for social justice in both places?"[16]

Diaspora groups are outsiders, on the margins of their societies. The fact that they have left their homeland puts them outside whatever power structures may be in place there. As immigrants, they are also marginal to the power structures of their new home. In a situation of contestation between home and host country, as was the case with Cuban exiles, to line up with the power structures of their host country (as was the case for the Right) or with the elite in the home county (as was the case for the Left) does not guarantee democratization for the community or for the home or host country. Ultimately, diaspora communities need to struggle for democratization in *both* places.

Binational or international efforts to form political coalitions raise questions beyond the appropriate organizational unit of politics for both the exercise and contestation of power. For one there is the question of national sovereignty. Since individual nation-states are more or less powerful, movement emanating from the powerful states runs the risk of intervening in the affairs of less powerful nations and not necessarily for noble purposes but, rather, for the purposes of domination from abroad. Claims of national sovereignty cannot be allowed to serve as excuses, however, for unabated or uncontested power formations that have proven to be abusive and corrupt.

These alternative political visions also raise questions about the conception of citizenship itself. Liberal democracy brought forth the idea of the universal individual with equal rights but then conceived the public space as one that removed to the private realm everything that could cause difference. But how can we define the rights of groups that emerge from differences without falling into the trap of constructing yet another homogeneous category that does not allow for differences and, consequently, debate?

In the struggle against racism or for democracy on the part of diasporic movements there is a tendency to speak about the similarities within groups.[17] But the differences within groups may be just as important.[18] This leads us to another dilemma—that of how group and individual rights can be reconciled. Chantal Mouffe suggests that an approach that "permits us to understand how the subject is constructed through different discourses and subject positions is more adequate than one that reduces our identity to one single position."[19] Here a more radical project of democracy is needed—one that does not seek simply to unshackle a nation or a community from its oppressor but, rather, that engages in debate because difference is assumed even within. As we enter the next century, we must begin to think of ways to protect both human and community rights. This necessarily includes a rethinking of the political units available to participate in debate and deliberation.

New ways of thinking are required that are not based on unilateral categories but, instead, appreciate the interconnectedness of the world around us. Exiles live in both home and host countries. This experience has contributed to what may be a new way of conceptualizing the postmodern experience. Edward Said suggests that "intellectually this means that an idea or experience is always counterpoised with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light: from that juxtaposition one gets a better, perhaps even a more universal idea of how to think, say, about a human rights issue."[20] Precisely because diaspora communities have had to negotiate their identities in relation to various states and cultures, our experiences may be critical in developing new ways of thinking about multiple identities in which nations (that is, the souls of communities) can survive and states (the mechanisms that control these souls) are transformed.

My Continued Quest for Coherence: Politics and Identity

For years to talk about xenophobia or discrimination against Cubans was heresy. Those of us raised outside the enclave, and therefore more exposed to racism, were ostracized in Miami when we tried to discuss racism or raise our voices in support of the civil rights movement. We were accused of having crossed the great ideological fault line between capitalism and communism. In retrospect we were not living up to our end of the symbolic bargain that said, "Refugees thrown out of their communist countries are welcomed by the free United States."

The world, for communities in the battle zones of the cold war, was one-dimensional. Everything was either/or: either you loved or hated Castro; either you loved or hated the United States. Any deviation from this simplistic formula left one vulnerable to accusations of treason. The unipolarity of the political discourse also malformed our politics and our visions of ourselves. We could not develop a coherent political discourse that was critical of both governments or that viewed both governments simply as state actors. Instead, governments became our allies. Those fighting the Castro government placed their faith in the U.S. national security bureaucracy; those of us targeted in the Cuban exile community for traveling to Cuba believed that Cuban bureaucrats wanted to protect us.

Maybe the truth was too hard to accept: We were unwelcome in both our home and host countries. From different sides of the political spectrum we found comfort in being accepted by either government. Our need for acceptance blinded us to the realization that we were expendable symbolic capital—not an uncommon phenomenon for diaspora communities.

Diaspora communities seek a place. This place is not constructed by a single country, either the United States or Cuba, but by both.

The realization that our place will be constructed in and by both countries does not deny the exile component of our reality. Unfortunately, it will continue to be a critical aspect of our identity as long as there is a law in our home country that prevents us from returning or as long as the only meaningful options for dissent in Cuba are going to jail or being ostracized or asked to leave the country or as long as there is a *ley de peligrosidad* (law of menace) that gives the government authority to imprison whomever it wants—that is, as long as the present and future of the island are held hostage to the concentrated power and arbitrary whims of an aging autocrat.

What it does mean is that we must accept and act upon the multiplicity of places in which our identities are constructed. This includes our place as a diaspora community from Cuba and in the United States. The Cuban source of our identity needs to be nurtured with more than strong doses of nostalgia. It needs a more contemporary vision that flows from engagement with the island. To accept our role as a diaspora community in the United States means to struggle for rights here as well. This requires expanding the political agenda to include issues of immigration, language rights, health care, and economic opportunity alongside the call for a more open society in our home country. So far, this coherence had been missing from both the Left and the Right.

As a transnational community, we have a right to engage with both our host and home countries. It is clear that the current Cuban leadership is not interested in normalizing relations with either the United States or the exile community. Every time we seem closer to reconciliation the Cuban government pulls a stunt that pushes us away: escalation of the Cuban-backed war in Angola during the Ford administration, the Mariel exodus during the Carter years, the videotaping of the exile conference in 1994, and the shooting down of Hermanos al Rescate's planes in 1996. On the other hand, the U.S. government has acted predictably in every one of these situations, playing directly into the hands of the hard-liners on the island. The United States tightened its embargo and effectively shut the doors for engagement with the island. Each government offers us a stark choice, an either/or.

Each time I return across time and space, each time I move between cultures and economic systems, I am more convinced that I do not want or need to accept the either/or conception of my identity that demands that I choose sides. My identity is far more complex. I was born in Havana and raised in Texas. I was radicalized with Chicanos and returned to Cuba and in the process was ostracized from my community. Now I live in Chicago,

but I also live in Havana and Miami, emotionally and professionally. I am always returning; I am always staying.

I am white when I wake up in Havana, but I am other because of my migratory experience. I am again other once I take the thirty-minute flight to Miami, because I am no longer white and because in Miami my commitment to return to Cuba and have a normal relationship with my home country has made me politically other. I arrive in Chicago, and again I am other, now because I am Latina in a city that is defined in black and white. I am always a woman, a mother, a Cuban. I will always have been born in Havana, of a mother who was born in Meneses and a father born in Matanzas, of grandparents who were born in Meneses and Matanzas, of great-grandparents who were born in Meneses and Matanzas, of great-great-grandparents, some born in Spain, others in the Canary Islands.

These multiple roots and experiences are my identity. My search for coherence and voice has been my politics. For years I felt that I had neatly put away pieces of my identity in different parts of the world, but, more recently I have come to understand that I need not accept the categories that divide who I am. Instead, I must construct new categories, new political and emotional spaces, in which my multiple identities can be one.

Regardless of what happens in Cuba (by most accounts it will remain an economically strapped country with authoritarian structures, whether based in the military or organized crime, or both), most Cubans in the United States will stay, and many more will continue to arrive. How the Cuban community sees itself and defines its relationship to homeland and host country will continue to unfold. Will the dominant political culture and practices in the United States be opened sufficiently to allow immigrants both to preserve their heritage and to participate fully in their host country? Can the Cuban government come to accommodate diverse Cuban voices, regardless of where they live? Can we be more inclusive of differences; can we think in the plural?

As a small nation in the Caribbean that sought its independence and waged a radical nationalist revolution, Cuba became a threat to the most powerful country in the world in the hysterical climate of the cold war. Cuban émigrés became the yellow ribbons of the 1960s; Americans could fight communism by adopting a Cuban child or sponsoring a family to come to the United States. In the meantime the besieged revolution became bureaucratized, and power became concentrated. Leaving or staying became a litmus test to ascertain where one's loyalties resided. For almost forty years children and families have been manipulated politically to feed power structures on both sides of the Florida Straits that functioned as mirror images of each other, even though they evolved in radically distinct political spaces.

I will continue to return; Cuba is one of my homes. But, while the circle is larger and more coherent than before, there is a new conflict that I have not resolved. Those who have left recently cannot return; people who have "inappropriately" criticized the government are sometimes denied reentry permits, or their passports are not renewed, even if they are equally critical of the hard-liners in the exile community. I am morally conflicted because, for now, I am able to return, while others who would like to do so cannot.

Mid-flight between Miami and Havana, in either direction, I believe I can hold both sides together. Increasingly, there is the possibility for a coherent perspective, for an imagined future that transcends the rupture without denying the pain, without compromising the ethics and principles that in the long run make a difference in history. Today these are the longest ninety miles in the world, but they are still only ninety miles.

I arrive in Havana, and the smell of humid red dirt surrounds me. I feel so far from Miami and so close to my daughters. They can reside in both spaces: they have not lost a home; they have gained a heritage. I converse with friends in Havana, pick up the letters they wish to send. Then, the next day, I return to Miami and continue the conversation I began in Havana. We drink a bottle of Coronilla, like the ones they used to drink at parties in Varadero during the summers, not daring to think of what life was like on the other side of the Florida Straits, where we now sit watching the moonlight cast an eerie light, the same light I saw the night before from the other side. I suddenly feel very far from Cuba; I miss my friends, I miss the intensity, I miss the familiar context.

When I return a few months later I begin a new conversation in Miami. About an hour later I am sitting on a rocking chair on the porch of my other home on la Calle 20; Josesito comes by, and we pick up the same conversation I started in Miami. Somehow the time between this and our last meeting has been suspended. Each of us are creating third personas that watch as we struggle alone and away from one another, that bring us together even as our day-to-day lives are separated by hostility and fear. It is the persona of friendship and shared passions. We return to the place where we parted, and we feel the connection.

I do not know how long political structures can survive while they impede the tremendous human desire to belong, to build, to have a coherent existence, that for all of us in Miami, Chicago, Havana, Matanzas, and Varadero includes all of these places. Our lives have been marked by the rupture. It is our nation, after all. I am comforted by the thought that, no matter how hard governments may try, they cannot legislate identities; they cannot erase our history. A collective understanding, a recognition, an *Areíto* to heal, may be the way to continue searching for coherence, to begin reconciling with our enemies—and ourselves.