

# Cuba, Miami, and the Question of a Transnational Space

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**Abstract:** Since the early 1960s, Cuba and the United States have been mutually isolated in terms of political, diplomatic, and economic relations, and the growing Cuban community in the U.S. has maintained limited contact with the island's population, especially due to the U.S. embargo against Cuba and to the political contradictions between Cuba's government and the Cuban elite in Miami. There is, nevertheless, a growing transnational space of, especially, "common Cubans." This article discusses Cuban transnational space from different perspectives, including history, economy, and politics, and it is argued that newer migration waves and economic reforms have contributed to the creation of such space. Furthermore, if this dynamic continues, such a space can become an important factor in the current transformation process that Cuba is undergoing, confirming in this way a historical tradition: since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. before independence, all major transformation processes in Cuba have included an important transnational dimension.

**Key words:** Cuba—Miami—transnationalism—migration—politics—economy—culture

## Introduction

Currently, Cuba is engaged in a process of profound social, economic, and—possibly—political changes aimed at reforming and restructuring the country's social and economic system. In the discursive self-representation

by the Cuban authorities as well as in academic and journalistic analyses, this process is mostly discussed as an autonomous national phenomenon in which the transnational context—including the basic fact of an important Cuban community outside the country—is not seen as a fundamental factor. Analyses of social processes in Cuba and in the Cuban communities outside the island are often seen as separate, rather than interrelated questions. There has been, thus, a tendency to disregard the transnational dimension, which—as will be argued in this article—has played a stronger and more permanent role in Cuba's evolution than is often acknowledged, also during the last 50 years.

A main reason for this tendency in the academic and media analyses of Cuba is, undoubtedly, that the political contradictions between Cuba and the U.S. (and to some extent other Western countries), as well as between the island and the exile communities, have been taken as ontological premises for an analysis rather than a political and discursive construction that in itself could be an object of study. The fact that the Cuban emigration has been considered politically rather than economically motivated has been seen—to some point correctly—as a basic factor impeding the creation of a transnational space similar to other Caribbean and Latin American communities. It is obvious that actual political, economic, and other formalized relations between the island and the exile communities have been very limited since the early 60s, but it is also a fact that the very existence of the external communities has been a constant and fundamental factor for Cuba's political, economic, and cultural development. Furthermore, important changes in the character of the Cuban emigration to the U.S. and other countries have taken place since 1980, and these changes have been playing a growing role in the creation of a transnational space in a broad sense of the word including economic, political, and cultural aspects.

This transnational aspect of Cuban society has, however, been increasingly acknowledged in the more recent literature where a more explicit interest in the study of transnational aspects of different Cuban phenomena has been manifest. Examples are the studies of Mahler and Hansing (2005), Perera Pintado (2005), and Blue (2004). Also the works of Eckstein (e.g. 2004) and Barberia (2004) are part of this current. On the other hand, works like Pérez (1998 and 1999) show how transnational economic and cultural spaces between Cuba and the U.S. existed long before the massive emigration of exiled Cubans to Florida in the 60s and 70s and even before the U.S. intervention in the Cuban-Hispanic conflict in 1898. This type of work is

important in order to give a broader understanding of a history of transnational relations that is both longer and more complex than often acknowledged by a historiography that tends to focus on the 20<sup>th</sup> century, or more specifically on one period from 1898 to 1959, and another from 1959 and on. The first would correspond to a period of tight relations between Cuba and the U.S., and the second to the revolutionary period and the conflicts between the two countries. Although such premises are no doubt very relevant, they also seem to be—at least implicitly— influenced by a Cold War perspective and/or a nationalist-revolutionary perspective, both of which tend to stress political conflicts in the U.S.-Cuban and Cuban transnational relations.

Therefore, a broader discussion of different aspects of Cuban transnational contexts, including history, politics, economy, and culture, is still needed. This article will build on the works mentioned and others, and it will discuss the importance of the transnational dimension, including first and foremost the Cuban-U.S. relations and the relations between the émigré community and the island. Such a discussion should not, however, be limited to the most visible types of transnational relations—like migration, traveling, remittances, cultural exchange, etc.—but include more implicit and less visible elements of the configuration of transnational space, such as the (socially) imagined space, the mental inclusion (or exclusion) of the “other,” as well as the effect that the existence of a transnational space can have on political discourse, culture, and informal economy.

A basic fact in this discussion is that 1.6 million Cubans and Cuban-Americans live in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> (see also Pérez 2006, Eckstein and Barbería 2002). Compared to the island’s population of about 11.4 millions, this number is of considerable importance. A majority of the 1.6 million were born outside the U.S. (i.e. in Cuba), namely around 979,000 (*ibid*). The high concentration of the Cuban diaspora is another important factor. Apart from the more than a million and a half of Cuban origin residing in the U.S., the second most important destination for Cuban emigrants is Spain with a little less than 100,000 Cubans, whereas most other receiving countries have rather small numbers of residing Cubans. The question of concentration is also of a regional importance: of the 1.6 million Cubans or Cuban-Americans, more than 1.1 million live in Florida, and mainly in Miami,

1 According to the Pew Hispanic Center: <http://pewhispanic.org/files/factsheets/60.pdf>

especially Dade County. This means that a number corresponding to around ten per cent of the island's population is concentrated in an urban area in the neighboring U.S., only around 200 miles from Havana.<sup>2</sup> Miami is thus the second Cuban urban area in size, and an important part of its (Cuban) population possesses considerable economic and political resources and power. The particular political circumstances and relations between the "two Cubas," i.e. the island and the U.S.-based community, indeed play a major role as a modifying element, but these relations are also subject to important changes. Hence, the transnational dimension is fundamental in order to understand not only current but also future dynamics of both Cuba and Miami.

In this article it shall be argued how and why some important processes and changes in Cuba, both historically and in the current reform process, are somehow linked to a transnational context. I will also argue that the development and existence of a transnational space between "the two Cubas" have bearings on the perspectives on and possibilities for the current reform process in Cuba. In order to do so I will discuss the following aspects: first, the dominant, "national-revolutionary" political discourse in Cuba and its transnational and dichotomic character, taking into account the historical background; secondly, the different emigration waves from Cuba to the U.S., especially after 1959, and their importance for the creation of a transnational space; thirdly, I will focus on some of the Cuban government's economic strategies, in particular the openings toward a more market-oriented economy, and it is my hypothesis that the general legalization of the dollar and other convertible currencies in the 90's was especially important in this sense, as will certainly be the current process of privatization of the labor force; finally, I will relate these questions to the dynamics of the social imaginary in Cuba and in the exile, characterized, according to my hypothesis, by tendencies of de-politicization, which, again, would augment the potential for the creation of a transnational space. The aim of this multi-faceted focus is to pursue the general hypothesis of the complex and often non-acknowledged character of the transnational dimension and its importance for the understanding of Cuba's socio-economic processes. It is important to stress that a contemporary and historical, as well as a

2 The shortest distance between Florida and Cuba is about 90 miles, a number very often used in Cuban political and popular discourse as a measure of the threat (or promise) constituted by the close U.S. presence.

multi-faceted view on these problems is necessary in order to argue for the importance of the transnational understanding as a broader perspective on Cuban social phenomena.

The layout of the article is as follows: first a brief introduction to the main theoretical concepts and the methodology used, which is followed by a run-through of the historical background in order to show the importance of the transnational context for political and other social processes in Cuba. I then discuss the question of Cuban revolutionary nationalism as well as the implicit (and explicit) transnational character of this nationalism, including the question of dichotomic discourse and the lack of a third space. The subsequent section contains an analysis of the impact that later migration waves had on the creation of a transnational space, and this analysis is followed by a discussion about the economic changes in the 90s and how they made for a transnational economic space. The question of the politicization and de-politicization of the social imaginary and the private space is the theme of the next section, followed by a discussion of the current reform process under Raúl Castro. In the conclusions, I will try to synthesize these various perspectives in order to return to my starting point: the importance of a further analysis of the transnational dimension of Cuban social processes.

### **Theoretical Concepts and Methodological Approaches**

A main theoretical concept to be used is obviously “transnational(ism),” according to, among others, Levitt (2001) and Levitt and Schiller (2004). In Levitt’s work, as in this article, migration is an important aspect of the concept, both theoretically and in the empirical approach. But I will also use the concept in a broader sense in order to include phenomena not directly related to migration, such as political discourse, cultural and mental spaces, and “social imaginary.” For transnationalism also implies the idea of “space” (Lefebvre 1991, Hall 1966). Following Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga (2003), the notion of “transnational spaces” can be studied in three dimensions, i.e. *global spaces*, *transnational spaces*, and *translocal spaces*. The notion of space will also be used in a broader sense that includes imagined, mental, and cultural spaces like, for instance, the space of economic transactions or the imagined constitution of a Cuban identity.

A more specific idea of space used in this article is the notion of “third space”—and particularly its absence—which I use as my starting point for

studying Cuban political discourses and identity constitutions (see also Gustafsson, *in print*). The concept will be further discussed below (in the section “The Two Cubas and the Question of a Third Space”), but it relates mainly to the discursive dichotomy of political and identity discourses according to which there are two—and only two—antagonistic Cuban identities, both politically defined as for or against the national-revolutionary regime. The fact that the dominant political and identity discourses in both Cuba and the exile community have taken this for granted has resulted in a lack of solid political alternatives and a lack of a “third space” for the construction of identities and discourses.

Two other central theoretical concepts are “discourse,” inspired mainly by Laclau (2005) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985), and “social imaginary,” originally coined by Castoriadis (1998). For reasons of space, I will not engage in further discussions of the former. The latter, “social imaginary,” has been used in some European traditions, and has been (and still is) quite popular in Latin American social and human sciences. Although it has a certain similarity with notions like “mentality,” “discourse,” and “habitus,” it cannot be completely identified with any of these. It stresses the importance of a mental and symbolic constitution of the social world besides its more physical manifestations. This mental-symbolic world, i.e. the “imaginary,” is not independent from the rest and is closely entangled with economic and political structures, discourses, etc., in a complex relation of causes and effects.

The interdisciplinary use of different empirical and theoretical perspectives implies likewise a certain variety of methodological approaches and empirical sources, including media texts, political discourse, film, and literature, as well as interviews and conversations held in Cuba, November 2006, and Miami, February 2008. Earlier visits to Miami (1986 and 1993) as well as a four-year period of residence in Cuba (in the mid-eighties) constitute the general background for my studies of Cuba and the Cuban community of Florida.

### **Cuban Transnational Traditions—a Brief Historical Comment<sup>3</sup>**

The Cuban nation is, as any postcolonial nation, transnational in its very constitution. The economic, political, and cultural foundation of Cuba is

3 This paragraph is based, among others, on: Pérez, 1998 and 1999, Skidmore 2005, and Staten 2003.

related to the Spanish conquest and colonization of the territory, whose insular geography and relative cultural unity contributed to creating the basis for a nation during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nationalist movements and rebellions, including two wars, took place during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the country did not obtain its independence until 1902, after a process of conflicts, wars, and political and diplomatic efforts in which the U.S. played a central role. The Cuban nationalist movement started the second war of independence against Spain in 1895, and in 1898 the U.S. intervened by declaring war against Spain—the Spanish-American war (a term not recognized by Cuban historiography), which the U.S. won after a short period of fighting. In this way, the process of Cuba's independence is doubly transnational: against the colonial power, Spain, and with the help of—but also against—the new (and to some, neocolonial) power, the United States of America. It is important to acknowledge the complexity of the Cuban-U.S. transnational relation and to avoid simplified historiographies, according to which the U.S. acted either as a pure liberating force or as a simple neocolonial power with selfish interests. There can be no doubt that the U.S. had strong economic and political interests in Cuba already during the colonial period, and that the relations between Cuba and the U.S. from 1898 to 1959 can be characterized as a relation of interdependence. But the economic, cultural, and political relations between the two countries were very complex during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even earlier. Before obtaining formal independence, Cuba was an American protectorate until 1902, and the U.S. secured the right to the naval base of Guantánamo as a condition for the independence. Until the Revolution of 1959, Cuban politics and economy depended basically on the U.S. On the other hand, members of the Cuban nationalist and revolutionary movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the national hero José Martí (1853-95), took exile in the U.S. and organized activities from there. Therefore, the period from the 1890s to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century constitutes an important first part of a long and complex transnational relation, in which the U.S. both appears as a self-interested superpower that can be seen as an impediment for real Cuban independence and becomes the space that relates to exile and important changes.

While the period from around 1900 to 1959 is characterized by intense relations of economic and political dependence, as well as important cultural exchange, the latest and most important moment of transnational relations between Cuba and the U.S. begins after the national-popular revolution of 1959. As mentioned, the massive emigration of Cubans to the U.S.

during the 60s and 70s created the basis for actual Cuban communities in the USA, especially in southern Florida and New Jersey, with Miami as the most important 'Cuban' city of the United States, and the second most populated 'Cuban' city after Havana. The character of this community differed from most other Latino communities due to the middle and upper class origin of a majority of its members, as well as the preferential treatment they received as a consequence of their migration status.

This brief outline of transnational Cuban relations emphasizing the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the political relations should not, however, make us forget the very basic fact that there exists, as mentioned above, a much broader and more complex web of economic, cultural, and other kinds of transnational relations between Cuba and the U.S. beginning already by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing into the 20<sup>th</sup>—and now 21<sup>st</sup>—century (Pérez 1999). Small and big business, individuals, and organizations of Cubans in New York, New Jersey, Florida, and other places, as well as of Americans in Cuba, have contributed to a history of transnational relations that goes far beyond what the more general historiography tends to focus upon. So do exchange and relations of popular culture—Cuban music has played a major role in the U.S. during a great part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, baseball rapidly became Cuba's national sport and even more important than in the U.S., relatively speaking at least. All this points to a complexity of transnational relations and spaces that goes far beyond the idea of a little country defending its identity against an empire or the Cold War-inspired notions of Cuban-U.S. confrontations as essentially being a question of the West versus communism.

### **The Two Cubas and the Question of a Third Space**

The notion of "third space" as a sort of presence-absence in Cuban political discourse and identity constructions, and in a more general sense in other social fields, is, in my opinion, a useful instrument for the understanding of both negative and positive factors influencing the creation of a transnational space. Third space and transnational space are not totally synonymous, though they partly overlap. The notion of third space covers any symbolic, economic, discursive, or other social space (in the broader sense of the term) that constitutes an "in-between" between the "two Cubas" (Gustafsson, in print). The term "two Cubas" refers to the existence and construction of ideologically, politically, economically, and symbolically separated

Cuban spaces, and any space, discourse, or project that constitutes itself as a third option or as an in-between (including transnational phenomena) will function as a “third space.” It is therefore relevant to discuss the problem of the “two Cubas” and a third space, on the one hand as a factor working against the evolution of transnational spaces and, on the other, as a factor that is doomed to change if the development of economic, cultural, and symbolic transnational spaces continues.

The Cuban socio-economic model of today maintains a series of elements from a Soviet-inspired economic model and contains economic and political elements that can be considered obsolete. Raúl Castro’s current reform process is aimed at creating a much more dynamic economic model without abandoning, however, the fundamentally nationalist revolutionary ideology. Any analysis of Cuban politics and economy based mainly on the assumption of the system as a “communist left-over” will face difficulty when it comes to identifying the factors which have assured the survival of a system so often deemed on the verge of collapse, especially in periods of crisis, such as the early 60s, the early 90s, and after Fidel Castro’s illness from 2006. In this context, the importance of nationalism and national popular discourse (Rojas 2006; Gustafsson, under publication) must be taken into consideration as a central, although not the only, explanatory model.

What is interesting in relation to the question of Cuban transnationalism is that nationalism becomes both an important source for and result of transnational elements in the Cuban social processes. A first argument is mainly theoretical: nationalism is in its essence transnational, as the nation must be defined and identified in contrast and in relation to others (Jenkins 1996, Wodak et al 1999). But such identifications are, obviously, also empirical in nature, and in the case of Cuba the country’s history has shaped a particular nationalism in which the neighboring U.S. is the indisputable “significant other” (Jenkins 1997), toward which Cuba and Cubans define themselves. If we look at the official discourse since 1959, and particularly since 1961 after the failed invasion of the Bay of Pigs by counterrevolutionary exile Cubans supported by the U.S., it is evident that the national identity is constructed against a U.S. seen as hostile and imperialist, and as the basic enemy of the Cuban people and the Cuban Revolution.

Nevertheless, the transnational dimension of Cuban identity and society relates not only to the U.S., but also to the transnational constitution of Cuban society as such. As indicated above, the Cuban and Cuban-American population outside Cuba totals more than 1.6 million, of which many

are economically a lot better off than most of their fellow countrymen living on the island. Traditionally, a considerable part of this community and in particular the elite constituted by the first migration waves (Eckstein and Barberia 2002) is influenced by strong anti-communist and anti-Castro discourses and practices, and tend to see themselves as the inversed reflection of Castro's revolutionary discourse, contributing in this way to the constitution of the "two Cubas." This radical political division between the government of Havana and the exile community elite, as well as the Cuban emigration policies and the U.S. embargo, all contributed to the establishment of two very different and separated Cuban communities—one in Cuba and the other in the U.S.—rather than to a transnational space of continuous and multiple relations. To leave Cuba and settle in the U.S. or elsewhere was—and to some extent still is—for most people a radical decision that could mean a permanent separation from family, friends, and home as well as giving up the right to maintain Cuban citizenship.

In the dominant discourses, the two Cubas became each other's "other," the part of the nation considered the nation's enemy, and with which a dialogue, or even contact, was almost impossible. Any Cuban could be with one or the other, but not with both, nor in-between. There were, and to some point remain, two spaces with no third and no common space.

Just how radical this division was, came as a surprise to some exiles of the 80s and 90s, who were taken aback by the fact that although civil rights and liberties were key elements in the exile community's political discourse, the daily practices did not include the right to say something positive about the Castro government or argue that dialogue and compromise could be a way of solving the country's conflict. "It's almost like being back in Cuba; if you want to keep your job and friends, you must be careful about what you say," stated a married couple of recently exiled Cubans in Miami in the 1986. Later interviews, made in 2006, tend to confirm this view, although later generations of migrants probably have a better knowledge of the Miami community and a more pragmatic and economic approach to their situation.<sup>4</sup> A key Cuban informant, an employee of a Florida-based advocacy organization for immigrants, tells us about his own and other immigrants' experiences in this sense. "It's not a dictatorship here [in Florida],

4 According to interviews made during visits to Miami in 1986 and 2006. See also Eckstein and Barberia (2002) and Pérez (2006).

but it is difficult to maintain a nuanced idea of today's Cuba without being socially excluded," is a common statement. As an increasing number of Cuban exiles tend to emigrate for personal, social, and economic, rather than specifically political or ideological reasons, this situation becomes more manifest and is experienced by many as a kind of inverted repression. In this sense, the two Cubas were not only separated and mutually opposed, but they also reflected and even resembled each other in an almost ironic way. The dichotomic discourse thus constituted a paradox: the "other"—the "bad Cuban"—is excluded, but constantly present as the necessary opposition for the construction of a "we."

There are two incompatible Cuban political and identity discourses, and therefore a lack of common ground or "space" for a dialogue between the two Cubas (Gustafsson, *in print*). The fact that this mechanism is being slowly and partly undermined by other processes will be argued in the next sections, but I also believe that it still has an important function as a discursive control mechanism, which makes it very difficult to present alternative, in-between, or third political projects or even identity discourses. An interesting example is the blogger Yoani Sánchez. She is a young Cuban who maintains a blog<sup>5</sup> that began as a critical, but not anti-government comment on her own daily experiences in the city of Havana. She rapidly became quite popular, especially outside Cuba and was awarded important prizes in for instance Spain and Denmark. First looked upon as just a young Cuban, criticizing aspects of daily life with a sense of humor, she began to be considered as a politician and dissident fighting for democracy. At the same time, she suffered harassment by the pro-Castro groups or, according to herself, the non-uniformed members of the secret police. Recently she has become a lot more radical in her criticism and has ended up being the dissident that the outside world and the Cuban authorities saw in her. She began as one of the many bloggers that potentially could constitute a new third space, but ended up as a person and a discourse fitting comfortably into one of the two Cubas. These events have taken place within the last couple of years and show, in my opinion, that the discursive, symbolic, and practical mechanisms of mutual exclusion described above still play an important role.

5 See: <http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony/>

## **Migration Waves and Transnational Space**

As discussed above, the general tendency of the migration waves from Cuba to the U.S. in the 60s and 70s confirmed what I have termed the establishment of “two Cubas”: a conservative middle- and upper-class Cuban community in the U.S., mainly in Miami, opposed to the socialist regime of the island (Eckstein and Barberia 2002). The relations between the island and the “Comunidad” (the Cuban community in the U.S.) were almost non-existent. Therefore, any change in this situation would have to depend on a number of factors, including the migration policies of both Cuba and the U.S., as well as the character of the Cuban migration waves.

The first massive “alternative” migration wave to occur was the so-called Mariel bridge in 1980, where Fidel Castro turned a threatening political crisis—beginning with the occupation of the Peruvian Embassy in Havana by various thousands of people seeking asylum—into a victory by unilaterally allowing around 125,000 persons to leave the country from the Mariel port, some 60 km west of Havana. They would be transported to Florida by a maritime bridge made up of thousands of embarkations coming mainly from the coasts of Florida. The official Cuban discourse managed to interpret the situation as a kind of social purification: it was supposed that whoever would leave the country were dissatisfied, anti-social and, in many cases, criminal individuals that did not belong to the profound revolutionary process that was constructing a national and social utopia. They were dismissed as “escoria,” that is, “human scum,” and they were basically considered non-Cubans from the moment they decided to leave the country. In this sense, the Mariel migration wave still represented, in the official Cuban political discourse, the traditional Cuban dichotomy: the emigrants belonged to the decadent capitalist society and not to the revolutionary Cuba.

However, their arrival and integration in Florida represented something different in the case of many of these refugees. While the major migration waves of the 1960s and 70s primarily consisted, as mentioned, of middle and upper class, mostly white Cubans, the Mariel expatriates were generally of much more humble social extraction, and the proportion of blacks and mulattos was much higher than among the Cubans living in Southern Florida (Eckstein and Barberia 2002). Furthermore, these new and different exiles were generally uninterested in politics, and their motives for leaving Cuba were rather imprecise and sometimes unrealistic ideas of personal economic progress or, in some cases, the possibility of escaping prison or

punishment for “anti-social behavior” like prostitution, black-market activities, or unwillingness to work. In some cases, alleged convicts were offered the opportunity of freedom if they chose to leave the country by Mariel, and some seemed to have left simply by chance.<sup>6</sup> To the Cuban community in Florida, the arrival of this new wave of fellow countrymen—although at first considered a political victory and the liberation of 125,000 victims from dictatorship—was soon to have an important impact. A relatively homogeneous and dominantly white, middle-class community was “enriched” by thousands of fellowmen who were socially, economically, racially, and culturally different. According to informants in Miami, class and race began to be more visible elements of the community, and while earlier migration waves could rely on a rapid integration thanks to the solidarity of their compatriots, many “Marielitos”—which was the name given to the members of this migration wave—were soon to realize that solidarity had its limits, namely limits related to, for instance, class, social position, or race. In this sense, many Marielitos experienced a double rejection: they chose to leave Cuba—some even felt forced to do so—yet Miami was not for all of them the promised utopia. Some experienced social exclusion based on (generally unspoken) racial or social prejudice; others were excluded on suspicion of being Castro sympathizers, while others simply had difficulties finding themselves at home in the receiving country.

The Mariel wave brought something more: the newcomers—many of whom were young—had been socialized in the Revolutionary Cuba of the 1960s and 70s, with new cultural and consumer habits as well as new ways of thinking and acting. Furthermore, while the first migration waves typically consisted of whole and extended families, the Mariel and later migration waves more often comprised individuals, couples, or nucleus families, for whom family and friends back in Cuba were very important (Eckstein and Barberia 2002, interviews held in Miami 2008). To the Marielitos, the island was very much a real space with real people, while to the first waves of migrants Cuba was becoming a mythical space seen as a kind of lost Paradise and contemporary Hell, which most of them had very little contact with and very limited knowledge of. So, for a number of reasons the “Marielitos” and, even more so, later migration waves, were

6 In interviews held in Miami 2008, one informant told me that he had left his house in the morning, got drunk and ended up on a boat heading for Key West. Part of his story was confirmed by another informant who works in an NGO dedicated to helping refugees and immigrants in Florida.

much more inclined to stay in contact with friends and families on the island and to develop an actual transnational conscience and feeling of belonging. Likewise, they were also more inclined to develop transnational economic and other social practices to the (still rather limited) extent this was possible.

So, the Marielitos were more inclined to develop a transnational imaginary and transnational practices, and it should be stressed that this transnationalism is *Cuban*, in other words, the Marielitos and later migrants would see themselves as Cubans in the U.S. rather than Cuban-Americans. The members of the first migration waves, and particularly their second and subsequent generations, on the other hand, tended to develop a Cuban-American identity and imaginary, speaking mostly English, and with their daily lives and practices completely linked to the U.S. and with almost no actual or practical relations to Cuba. Therefore, the Marielito wave constitutes an important step in the construction of a Cuban transnational space of social, economic, and symbolic practices.

Another kind of transnational practice started in the late 1970s, namely the visits of expatriate Cubans to their “homeland”.<sup>7</sup> These visits were—and are—limited, dependant as they are on both U.S. and Cuban migration policies, although the U.S. embargo laws, and especially the so-called Helms-Burton Act of 1996 (Eckstein and Barberia 2002: 811-12) constitute an overall obstacle to these contacts by the limits it imposes on the frequency and possibility of “home” travels for Cuban-born U.S. citizens.<sup>8</sup> The effect of these visits with regard to the development of a transnational imaginary and practices was probably rather small, not only because of the limited number of visits and their limited economic effect, but also because the meetings between “Community Cubans” (members of the Cuban community in Florida) and their mostly distant families and old friends on the island tended to confirm the idea of two Cubas with completely different political systems, economies, life styles, and imaginaries. Moreover, a central element of such visits was very often the gifts brought by the visitors, an element that tended to confirm the idea of members of a rich capitalist

7 Obviously, “homeland” here is to be understood in a symbolic and mythic sense: the actual homeland of most of these Cuban-Americans was, as argued, the U.S..

8 Part of the Helms-Burton Act’s restrictions were lifted in 2010 by the Obama administration, which made travels to Cuba easier and potentially cheaper (allowing charter flights from New York and Los Angeles).

community visiting a poor socialist, ancient homeland.<sup>9</sup> As already argued regarding the Marielitos, essential elements in the development of Cuban transnational practices and imaginaries were the later waves of migrants, their relation to Cuba, and their motives for emigration. In these cases, return visits constitute a very desired and, whenever legally or economically possible, normal and frequent transnational practice of Cubans living abroad and visiting their friends and families.

While socialist Cuba in the 1980s experienced its probably most stable and prosperous period—with the limitations that the term “prosperous” in this context must necessarily imply—the period around 1990, with the dismantling of the Soviet Union and the world socialist system, would prove disastrous to Cuba’s economy and lead to situations of actual starvation in the country (Pérez-López 2006). As a further consequence, the country experienced a new and critical emigration wave from the beginning of the 1990s (Eckstein and Barberia 2002, Masud-Piloto 2004). This migration wave has not stopped, although the intensity of migration flows and the preferred routes have varied considerably over time. Obviously, migration from Cuba to the U.S. has been a constant phenomenon for more than fifty years, but until around 1990, the flow was dominated by major waves, as discussed above. However, from the “balseros” wave of the early 90s and on the flow has been more constant (Masud-Piloto 2004, Pérez 2006, Eckstein and Barberia 2002). This means that the tendency toward a more transnationally oriented migration flow beginning with Mariel in 1980 has been reinforced since the beginning of the 1990s. If Mariel and the Marielitos represented new tendencies in Cuban migration to the U.S. and pointed toward new Cuban transnational phenomena, it was still a relatively isolated event. Mariel was indeed very important for the development of the Cuban community in the U.S., especially in southern Florida, but it did not represent the continued and constant tendency that would begin with the migration wave of the early 1990s.

A first characteristic of this steady migration wave is that it is both legal and illegal (or undocumented<sup>10</sup>). While legal migration has been rather

9 These impressions date from the author’s years of residence in Cuba, in the mid-80’s, and are based on mostly informal conversations, participant observation and similar. See also Eckstein and Barberia 2002.

10 In this case, I will use one term or the other. The type of migration mentioned is undocumented in the sense that these people often travel without passport or other documents and without entrance visa. It is also illegal in the sense that Cuban legislation prohibits unauthorized departures from its territory. The actual

steady for more than two decades according to the quotas established by mutual agreements (including a lottery system established in 1994), many migrants to the U.S. in this period left Cuba and entered into the U.S. without papers and permits. The most important route to be taken in the 1990s and during part of the following decade was by sea, crossing the Florida Straits in order to reach U.S. territory. In later years, due to a series of factors, and particularly increased U.S. reluctance to give asylum to the “balseros” (Cuban boat-refugees), the number of balseros has decreased, and other routes, especially Mexico, have been used for undocumented migration.<sup>11</sup>

A second characteristic is that the later migration flows, both documented and undocumented, represent virtually all segments of Cuban society, and likewise the motives for leaving the country vary and range from political and economic to family reasons. In general, however, the main motive has shifted from political to economic (Eckstein and Barberia 2002, interviews held in Miami 2008), a phenomenon also acknowledged by Cuban president Raúl Castro. Furthermore, the political motives often tend to be unspecific and unrelated to formalized political or ideological beliefs, more often connected to personal sentiments and experiences, and frequently mixed with economic reasons. Taken together, such motives would constitute the individual’s or the family’s set of motives for leaving Cuba—often in very dangerous and insecure circumstances—in order to seek a better life elsewhere. The migrants of the 60s and 70s tended to interpret their political motives in clear and general terms of belonging to one or the other side in Cuban (and global) politics, while the migrants of the later decades seem to have a more individual view of politics. Some might see themselves as victims of, or opponents to, Cuba’s political regime, but this is not necessarily translated into a more global political vision and even less to actual participation in a given political project.

Moreover, rather than taking a political stand, many Cubans—on Cuba and in Miami<sup>12</sup>—tend to *deny* an interest in politics, an attitude developed

practices of punishment have varied from severe persecution, in some periods, to a certain degree of tolerance, in others.

11 According to an interview with the aforementioned member of an immigrants advocacy NGO, the “Mexican route” has become more difficult and dangerous and has therefore declined, meaning that there is not one single preferred route for undocumented Cuban migrants.

12 According to interviews and informal conversations held in Miami (2008) and Havana (2006).

as a reaction to the way in which the official discourse politicizes almost the entire public sphere, and even an important part of the private one (Gustafsson in print). When this attitude is brought to Miami, it contributes to the creation of a less politicized and less dichotomized transnational space between the two Cubas.

A third characteristic is that this latest and rather permanent flow of migrants to the U.S. consists mostly of persons born after 1959, and almost exclusively of persons with no or virtually no personal memory of the pre-revolutionary period. Since the early 90s, the absolute majority of the migrants have had revolutionary Cuba as their main, and most often only, life-world and horizon of experience. In most cases they have close relatives and friends on the island and will tend to maintain relations of all kinds with them, even if legal or economic problems make return visits difficult.

The characteristics mentioned point toward a gradual creation of a transnational space between the two Cubas much more similar to the ones seen in cases like Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and other Latin American countries. Likewise, the dichotomized situation of two completely opposed spaces with very little contact seems to be weakening. The significance of this process, however, should not be exaggerated: motives of politics, economy, and tradition as well as the weight of the first wave migrants still constitute important impediments for the full development of such a transnational space. The U.S. embargo against Cuba and Cuban migration policies are obviously major elements in this context. Another equally important factor is the role of the economy and in particular the remittances from the U.S. to Cuba.

### **Economic Changes and the “Dollarization” of Cuban Economy in the 1990s**

For years, Cuba, like other socialist systems, has had a double currency system consisting of a convertible and a non-convertible currency. The convertible currency—besides its use in international transactions—constituted a kind of economic “island” within the island, as it was the currency used in the so-called “diplotiendas,” other stores, and supermarkets offering products normally not available to the ordinary Cubans. Also some hotels and tourist installations introduced a number of products intended for households rather than tourists. Formally, these products and services, consisting of clothes, shoes, electronic equipment, and, to some extent, also

food, were designed for tourism and foreign residents, but in practice they became, in the 80s, an important secondary source of consumption for ordinary Cubans as well as a source of foreign currency revenues for the Cuban government and its enterprises. Until 1993 ordinary Cubans were generally not allowed to possess (and less, to spend) foreign currency—exceptions could be Cubans working in foreign enterprises or whose work implied traveling. Therefore, a complex system of illegal and semi-legal economic transactions and practices developed so that these products—which in quantity and characteristics would exceed the needs of both tourists and the relatively few foreign residents—could be distributed to Cuban homes. A black currency market was a cornerstone of this complex web of economic transactions and multiple popular practices in which foreign residents, including the “*técnicos*” (i.e. “technicians,” which was the common denominator) from the socialist camp played an important role.<sup>13</sup>

These economic practices had an obvious transnational dimension as they implied the use of foreign currency, but also because these webs of distribution required the assistance of tourists and resident foreigners in order to function. Even if they possessed foreign currency, ordinary Cubans could not buy in these stores, and even to enter one would immediately cause a reaction from the ever present security guard. The paradox was evident and well known, and the very existence of this market of specialized and privileged stores with their desired products tended to enhance a transnational economic imaginary. The acquisition of blue jeans, leather shoes, refrigerators, stereos, wine, and many other products, also some more basic ones, was a privilege limited to foreigners, and only accessible to Cubans through sacrifice and risk. Yet, at the same time, an actual function of this market was to distribute daily and durable goods to ordinary Cuban households. A common expression in the 1980s and 1990s was “área dólar” (“dollar area”), which meant that a given space, e.g. a store, restaurant, or hotel was only accessible to people legally in possession of foreign currency (mainly U.S. dollars) and, thus, not for common Cubans, for whom this “area” became a symbol of desire and consumption. But this particular transnational economic and symbolic space did not, at that moment, connect the two Cubas significantly. Frequently, of course, the clients of these stores were “community Cubans” from Florida who bought products for their fami-

13 As a foreign resident in Cuba during four years (1983-87), the author became well acquainted with these practices.

lies and friends, but due to the limited number of visits and the relatively scarce contact between the two communities, the existence of specialized foreign currency shops did not have a major impact on the creation of a transnational Cuban space between Miami and the island. In later years, however, this space has become more Cuban-transnational, due to visits by later generations of emigrants.

This market, on the other hand, implied a number of difficulties of both a moral and economic nature, especially due to the extended black market of U.S. currency beyond the control of the official economic channels. To attack these and other problems, especially the acute economic crisis and “years of hunger” of the early 1990s, the Cuban government decided in 1993 to legalize the tenancy and use of foreign currency, in practice U.S. dollars (Rowe and Yanes Faya 2004, Mesa-Lago 2004). The U.S. dollar and other foreign currencies, however, ceased to function as legal means of payment in 2004, being substituted by the CUC, the convertible Cuban Peso. This measure permitted the Cuban government to exercise a closer control over the currency market and to receive an additional tax on currency exchange (Naranjo Orovio 2009). In any case, the legalization and general use of convertible currency can be seen as an important step in a slow and contradictory process of economic reforms and performance (Ritter 2004) that may still today, in 2011, be considered embryonic, although much more developed. In the context studied here, the general legalization of foreign currency possession and use opened up for a much more developed economic transnational space as the sending and receiving of economic remittances became common practice. It is important to stress that this new economic legislation coincided with the new migration wave of the early 90s, during the “special period” and years of crisis (Masud-Piloto 2004). Therefore, two significant factors coincided in the creation of a more extended and developed transnational space between the island and the Cuban community in the U.S.. One was the new economic space created by the legalization of the dollar, and the other a new and rather constant wave of migration of people much more inclined to maintain relations, economic and others, with the home country.

In conclusion, the specific character of the Cuban economic model, including the double currency system, has been an important impediment for the development of a transnational space. Informal economic practices created small, illegal “islands” of alternative spaces, but not until the economic reforms and new migration practices of the 90s did the potential for a more

general economic transnational space become a reality. The opening up of such space(s) is, logically, part of a much broader process of cultural and mental transformations and therefore a discussion of recent changes in what I term the “social imaginary” in Cuba is relevant.

### **Politicization and De-politicization of the Social Imaginary and the Private Space**

The public space, and a great part of the private space in Cuba, is highly politicized in the sense that it is permeated by explicit and implicit political discourse. Public space, in this context, means the media, work places, institutions of all kinds as well as cultural events like concerts, cinema, etc., and, of course, the streets and open public space. All these spaces are permeated, to some extent, by an explicit political discourse from the government, the Communist Party, and other official institutions. By explicit political discourse I refer to ideological and political messages of all kinds, while implicit political discourse is an even more generalized phenomenon permeating even language use as such, for instance in the generalization of the idea that any process is a “struggle.”<sup>14</sup> The media, especially television, logically constitute an important passage way between the public and the private sphere, but the mass organizations like the CDR (Committees for the Defense of the Revolution), the FMC (Cuban Women’s Federation), the “Pioneros” (the School Pupils’ Organization), and others have played and to some extent still play an essential role in controlling and integrating the common citizen in the revolutionary project.

The consequence is that, on the one hand, the official political discourse is present anywhere, anyhow, and constantly without actual competition (Gustafsson, *in print*). On the other hand, it means that this discourse to some point has managed to identify itself with “politics” as such. In other words, Cubans born and brought up after 1959 have become accustomed to understanding the term “politics” as the official political propaganda rather than a contested space of mutually opposed, conflictive, or competing discourses. A further consequence of this discursive monopoly is often that people in their weariness or rejection of such particular discourse tend to re-

14 An example could be the way any minor problem of economic or technical character is referred to as a “struggle,” as the “struggle for the quality of the bread” (heard in November 2006 in a Cuban television program with local news).

ject “politics” as such, including the sole idea of defining a political identity for themselves or opting for one or another political position or discourse. This does not mean that politics cannot return and rapidly become one of the most meaningful elements of the social imaginary, but for years many Cubans have seemed to prefer to concentrate on more immediate questions, like the solution of practical, individual, or family problems, such as housing, day-to-day consumption, etc. (Moreno 2004).

In a certain sense, such a tendency also seems to exist in the Cuban community in the U.S. First, because this community in some way works as a sometimes inverted reflection of the island, the constant presence of an anti-Castro discourse and its hitherto limited effects on Cuba (although often influential in U.S. politics) can lead to a sense of tiredness among younger, especially second or third generations of Cubans or Cuban-Americans in the U.S. Another element is the later migration waves discussed above. For many of these Cubans, the fall of the revolutionary government might be (or not be) desirable, but for many others, or most of them, it is not something necessarily considered a central or realistic issue. As discussed, a main motive for a majority of these migrants, especially since the 1990s, is not politics or political repression as such, but rather a general dissatisfaction with life and its circumstances on Cuba, and especially its economic and social dimensions. Although many of these more recent Cuban immigrants might be inclined to accept a different political discourse than the one they are used to and brought up with, it is likely that their main preoccupations will be with their family, work, housing, children, education, pension, etc., rather than the political perspectives and a final solution of Cuba’s problems.

This can mean, on one hand, that there are conditions for the development of a more de-politicized transnational Cuban space dominated by economic, social, and cultural remittances that go both ways. Such a space, however, has not been, until now, an important element in the development of alternative political spaces, discourses, and projects that could help to dissolve the political and discursive dichotomy between the island and Miami. Rather, it seems that while the elites in Miami and Havana, to put it simply, maintain a relatively traditional political discourse within their respective spaces of dominance, alternative political voices, such as the dissidents and some “blogueros” (“bloggers”) in Cuba, like the aforementioned Yoani Sánchez, are relatively isolated from the general public’s worries. This should of course not imply that “ordinary Cubans” are indifferent to themes like “democracy,” “human rights,” and the country’s political

system. But such and other specific political issues are, for a number of reasons, out of reach, and less relevant to a majority of non-elite Cubans than economic issues related to the solution of a household's day-to-day and long-term problems. And when it is claimed that dissidents, blogueros, and other elements of opposition receive limited attention from a majority of Cubans, it should also be stressed that these actors do play an important role on other levels, constituting an important element of international pressure on the Cuban government. Likewise, what today seems to be an attitude of political apathy—or, more accurately, an attitude of conscious de-politicization—might change rapidly and radically when circumstances change.

### **Recent Reforms and Raúl's Pragmatism**

The process of economic reforms that have begun under the government of Raúl Castro—who took over presidential functions in 2006, due to Fidel Castro's illness, and was elected president in 2008—seems to have two, closely connected, major objectives, one economic and the other political. One corresponds to the desire and necessity of a general re-structuring of the economic model, which has been suffering from a series of inherent difficulties and often modeled according to ideological, rather than economic criteria (Mesa-Lago 2004), and the population's needs. The new model is aimed at being more adequate under the current global circumstances but also capable of maintaining a certain national sovereignty, as well as designed to begin to meet the desires and necessities of the Cuban population. These goals lead to the second major objective, which is to secure the economic base for a process of change and adaptation which in the official discourse is not termed "transition"—actually the term has been banned explicitly—but rather "actualization" and similar terms to indicate that the process is not a rupture. However, there is no doubt that due to a number of factors, including Cuba's own political, economic, and social dynamics, international circumstances and, not least, the age of the maximum leaders of a very centralized and personalized power, the current political and economic process will inevitably lead to a series of important changes that will modify the Cuban system radically, although it is still difficult to predict how radical this process will be. Minor measures, introduced mainly during 2009 and 2010, have been to "liberate" (i.e. allow for the general public) the sale and purchase of a number of products, including cellphones. Although

such products without doubt are important to a number of Cubans, the most important effect of these measures was probably symbolic: they showed that the government was beginning to worry about something that always seemed to be postponed in order to safeguard the Revolution's needs, that is, ordinary people's consumption needs and desires. Another measure has been to modify the legislation that regulates the selling and buying of real estate properties.

Supposedly, by the end of 2011 or the beginning of 2012, a complete "liberation" of the property market will take place. The most drastic step until now, however, has been the decision to dismiss one million public employees, most of whom are supposed to find their future living by establishing small businesses of their own. At the same time, the conditions for small enterprises are revised in order to secure better conditions, but also more consistent taxation rules. These measures will inevitably change the Cuban society's economic structures and performance in many ways, for instance by further opening up to transnational economic and social spaces.

As indicated, from 2010 the Cuban government has engaged in important economic reforms, including the mentioned reduction of a great number of state-employed workers and the correspondent increase of (private) micro-enterprises. Although many Cubans have expressed for years that an opening up for private initiative could be part of a solution of the country's economic problems, it is also a fact that most Cubans on the island—including, probably, a majority of the "released" state workers—lack both the entrepreneurial knowledge and financial resources required for most such enterprises. However, such resources are available in the Cuban communities in the U.S. A number of factors, some of which have been discussed above, put obvious limitations on exile Cubans' participation in small enterprises on the island, and we can hardly expect to see a development of major transnational joint ventures between the two Cubas before important changes in the Cuban-U.S. relations occur, including legislation and attitudes. The U.S. embargo against Cuba is of course the most important single element in relation to this problem. If a macro-economic transnational Cuban space still seems distant, a considerable potential could nevertheless be opening up at the micro level. While the traditional Cuban and Cuban-American society of the first exile waves and their descendants probably will have very limited, if any, interest in investing in micro-enterprises on the island, later generations, especially those of the last two decades, could find such an option very interesting.

As discussed above, many of these emigrants maintain rather close relations with families and friends on the island, including a constant flow of communication by phone or mail as well as the sending of remittances. These remittances are spent normally on consumption goods, but the perspective of investing some of these resources in small enterprises might seem attractive, first as a way of ensuring a more constant financial resource for the relatives living on the island and, second, as a possible financial source in case their personal situation and the general circumstances should favor a return to Cuba. A rapidly growing number of "Marielitos" and later generations of Cubans in the U.S. are approaching retirement, and for personal and cultural as well as economic motives, a number of these people consider finding their home for their third age outside the U.S. An economically reformed and less ideological Cuba could be an option, depending on the continuity and success of the current process. There seems also to be a growing interest among emigrated Cubans in acquiring properties on the island, which is not legally possible at the moment, but could be with the liberalization of the real estate market.

It is not the first time that economic reforms suggesting a more liberal understanding of the socialist model have been introduced. The first law that allowed selling or buying one's own house or apartment was introduced already in the 1980s. Other examples are the free peasant's markets of the 1980s and 1990s and, of course, the already mentioned liberalization of foreign currency in 1993 (Mesa-Lago 2004, Rowe and Yanes Faya 2004). However, before the Raúl Castro administration, such measures were often introduced reluctantly, and they were frequently modified or simply withdrawn, allegedly because they were inefficient or, in some cases, because they gave unjust benefits to a limited number of persons, or promoted capitalist mentality and the like: in other words, because they were too efficient. The current reform process has been much more radical than any other since the 1970s, and it is presented openly as a renewal or reform of the "model," rather than as isolated measures. For the first time in decades, the official discourse does not picture the reforms as circumstantial and specific measures necessary to secure economically or ideologically defined goals, as generally would have been the case under Fidel Castro. On the contrary, the reforms are the goals, although still presented as reforms aimed at ensuring a more contemporary and dynamic version of the Cuban socialism. Until recently, the ultimate measure of what was "good" and "bad," acceptable or not, would mainly be ideological, and the arguments used in the

official discourse's interpellation of its citizens would be ideological and political. Although still timid, there now seems to be a tendency in official discourse to value more pragmatic elements, including daily needs and desires of ordinary people.

This acceptance of political, economic, and ideological pragmatism could indicate a further willingness of Raúl Castro's administration to permit other imaginaries and discourses than the traditional, and since 1959 dominant, national-revolutionary ideology without accepting, however, a political pluralism that might threaten the regime's survival. Another sign in this direction is the changed attitude toward some non-official actors of Cuban society, particularly the religious institutions, including the Catholic and Russian-Orthodox Churches and the Jewish society, which have recently, in one way or another, been granted a certain official status and recognition. Formerly, these institutions were allowed in principle, but barely tolerated in practice. Probably, the most important step in this direction has been to accept members of the Catholic hierarchy as formal and influential partners in the question of the liberation of political prisoners.<sup>15</sup> Such a step would have been difficult to imagine only a short time ago. Furthermore, to underline the Cuban State's reconciliation with the country's different religious manifestations, Raúl Castro underlined in his speech at the end of the National Assembly's gathering in August 2011 that exclusion for religious motives is an obsolete and completely unacceptable practice.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Cuban rhetoric toward the U.S. has changed during the presidency of Raúl Castro, whose own discourse on Cuban-American relations tends to be more moderate and conciliatory than Fidel Castro's. Although this does not necessarily imply a completely new turn in foreign policy—formally, the revolutionary Cuba's policy toward the U.S. has been based on the idea of mutual respect and recognition, but actually dominated by a hostile discourse toward the U.S.—it would seem to indicate an important change of discourse and rhetoric. Eventually, such a change could imply that the official discourse on Cuban-U.S. relations and relations between the “two Cubas” would put less stress on contradictions and hostility and begin to emphasize the existence and even positive values of a transnational space of “cubanness,” consisting of economic, cultural, and—maybe—even political relations.

15 In early July 2010, the process of liberating 75 political prisoners was initiated after a period of negotiations with representatives of the Catholic Church of Cuba.

To sum up, I propose that the current situation of reforms and relatively radical changes, mostly in the Cuban economy and to some extent also in the political and general social spheres, may very well become an important—and even decisive—factor in the development of a transnational Cuban space. Due to the slow, contradictory, and still relatively recent character of the reform process, it is difficult to predict its consequences; however, it is a fact that certain official practices and discourses tend to move away from the highly ideological and politicized visions and statements typical of the dichotomized image of the two Cubas and toward a much more pragmatic version of the national political identity, which could eventually imply an opening toward a more transnational understanding of the country.

### **Conclusion—Transition and Transnationalism**

The relative absence of official diplomatic, political, and economic relations between the U.S. and Cuba for about five decades has sometimes led to the assumption that Cuba and Cubans are generally isolated from the U.S., which is only a partial truth that obscures another and very important fact, namely that there is a growing transnational space of economic, social, and other types of relations between the two countries, and particularly between Cubans in the U.S. and Cuba. As discussed, the history of relations between the two countries has been that of a complex web of transnational connections beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Cuba was still a Spanish colony. The intensity and character of these relations have developed and changed in the course of history, but all major political events in Cuba's history as a nation—beginning with its early formation and independence—have been rather closely linked to the U.S., and indeed more closely than any other foreign country.

It is true that the revolution of 1959 and its subsequent consequences—especially the U.S. embargo (or blockade, in the Cuban terminology) against Cuba and the creation of an exile community opposed to, and isolated from, the island—implied the most radical and profound change of these relations. But a consequence was also that the Cuban community in the U.S. became more numerous, permanent and powerful than ever before, thus confirming in a new sense the historical importance of transnational Cuban-U.S. relations. Although the Mariel events of 1980 marked a turning point in the development of the post-revolutionary transnational space, due to the age and social and racial composition of these émigrés, it was not

until the early 1990s that the actual and probable effects of these new trends would become manifest. With regards to the objective of this article—to demonstrate the tendency toward the constitution of a transnational Cuban and Cuban-U.S. space—the most important effect of the later migration waves was the initial development of a transnational space less dominated by political contradictions and dichotomic discourse, and more similar to those of other Caribbean and Central American countries (and Mexico). Besides the character of the later migration waves, other important contributing factors have been a series of economic reforms in Cuba and the gradual change of mentality—or social imaginary—among Cubans inside and outside the national territory.

Certain developments in recent years and the current period seem to confirm such tendencies: first, the steady growth of a community of Cuban-born immigrants who maintain close relations to family and friends on the island and are less worried about politics and ideology than about their own and their relatives' social and economic situation; second, the—at least apparent—tendency in Raúl Castro's government toward a less ideological and more pragmatic attitude to economic and, to some extent, social and political questions; third, the process of economic reforms initiated by this government and, particularly, its decision to dismiss half a million state-employed workers in order to create a private sector of micro-enterprises for these and other Cubans. The coincidence of a growing community of Cubans who have migrated to the U.S. for economic reasons and a growing space for private initiative and enterprise in Cuba can be a decisive factor in the development of a broader transnational space between Cuba and the U.S., and especially between the two Cubas.

On the other hand, important factors remain that work against such tendencies: first, the U.S. embargo and the legal, formal, and practical obstacles to Cuban-U.S. relations; second, the traditional and very conservative Cuban elite in the U.S., especially in southern Florida, who, together with important fractions of the U.S. political establishment (especially in the Republican Party) oppose any contact with, or opening toward, the “Castro regime”; third, the difficulties that may result from the Cuban authorities' policy toward exile Cubans' engagement in small private enterprises on the island. Such policies have not been defined, but high taxation and bureaucratic obstacles could be possible difficulties. These three factors, and especially the first two at present, constitute some of the major challenges for a transnational socio-economic space that could benefit Cubans on both

sides of the Florida Strait and potentially contribute to a peaceful transition in Cuba (without necessarily defining the end-goal of such a transition).

Three other factors, however, could indicate a potential reduction of these impediments: first, the Obama administration has shown a more pragmatic attitude toward Cuba and its government than most former administrations; second, the traditional Cuban elite in Miami has lost some of its political monopoly—not only are some Cubans now voting for the Democrats, but many members of the more recent migration waves as well as some second or third generation Cuban-Americans are beginning to consider the Cuban-American National Foundation and other traditional elite organizations as too ideological and almost obsolete organizations that have lost contact with the common Cuban and thus will never fulfill their original objective, i.e. to “free Cuba from Castro and communism”; third, the political and ideological pragmatism shown by the current Cuban government might very well lead it to take pragmatic decisions also in relation to small-scale financial operations with participation of exile Cubans.

It has been demonstrated that the existence of a transnational space of economic, political, and cultural-symbolic relations between Cuba and the U.S. and in particular between Cubans in the United States and on the island, has played an important role in all major transformation processes in Cuba’s history. I have also suggested that a transnational space might be of importance in the current process to transform Cuban society. Due to the obstacles discussed, the transnational space remains limited in its extension and effects, but there is an important perspective for a growing interdependence between national and transnational processes in the case of Cuba. Such a perspective could also imply a transition toward an economically, culturally, and politically more pluralistic Cuba. However, this would require and imply the gradual creation of a “third space,” as discussed above, that is a national and transnational space for economic, political, and cultural-symbolic dynamics not dominated by the current Cuban government and the PCC (the Cuban Communist Party), nor by the traditional conservative elite of Miami.

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