

CHAPTER 7

The End of Socialism and Cuban Miami's Transition

The Berlin Wall was one of the icons of the Cold War. Built by the Soviets after their occupation of East Germany, the wall symbolized the great ideological divide between communism and capitalism. When East and West Berliners dismantled the concrete structure in 1989, everyone anticipated the quick downfall of the socialist camp, including Cuba.¹ As communist governments fell, the debate was about which one would collapse next. Those of us on the U.S. side of the aquatic divide between Miami and Havana asked not only whether Cuba would be next but also if and when Cuban exile Miami would fall.² At the time, according to the 1990 census, 675,786 of the over one million Cubans in the United States lived in Florida, most of them in Miami.

In this chapter I explore Miami's transition in the early 1990s and the Cuban government's response to this phenomenon. This period is framed by the dramatic, increased exodus of thousands of Cubans in handmade rafts and the U.S. government's decision to reverse its open-door policy.

Cuban Miami: Myth and Reality

Miami is, in effect, the capital of the exile community. Despite concerted, well-funded efforts by federal, state, and local governments to relocate Cubans out of Miami, by 1980 more than half of the Cubans who had come to the United States were living there. By 1990 more than a million Latinos lived in Miami; Cubans made up close to 70 percent of this group. The geographic concentration of Cubans in south Florida has contributed to both their economic and political power.³

Miami conjures up many images. In 1967 *National Geographic* called Cuban refugees the "golden exiles" who were successfully building a city in south Florida. As hopes of returning to Cuba faded and émigrés settled into their new lives in the United States, the image of Miami changed. Eventually, the golden exiles found that they too could be victims of discrimination and low-paying jobs, just like other Latin Americans before



ENVÍOS

LA HABANA, 1994

SHIPMENTS

MIAMI, 1995



them. In the 1970s, as the Watergate scandal unfolded and the inner workings of Cuban terrorism came to light, the portrait of Miami as the beacon of freedom gave way to an image of the city as a haven for right-wing Latin American extremism. The rise of political violence at the end of the 1970s added to the public image of the intolerant exile. Books, such as Joan Didion's *Miami*, caricatured the *cubanazos* and their wives with red-lacquered nails obsessed with *la lucha* (the struggle).⁴

With the dramatic exodus from Cuba of more than 120,000 immigrants through the port of Mariel in 1980, the impression of a model community was tarnished by reports from both Cuba and the United States of the high number of criminals purportedly present among this migration. By the late 1980s, when college students were asked what images came to mind when they thought of Miami, they would commonly cite drugs and crime, post-Mariel impressions popularized in the prime-time television show, "Miami Vice," or in books such as Penny Lernoux's *In Banks We Trust*.⁵ Toward the end of the 1980s the shifting nature of the city caught the imagination of several writers. T. D. Allman, in *Miami: City of the Future*, talks about the city as a state of mind.⁶ The exiles' tenacity in holding onto their heritage disturbed others, such as David Rieff, who asked in so many words, "Why are you still Cuban?"⁷

For Cuban exiles Miami has its own set of myths and realities, all intimately tied in one way or another to the island. In some ways Miami is the closest place on earth to Havana. Ten percent of Cuba's population lives there, and the city could become home to another 10 to 20 percent of the island's residents in the coming years, as immigrants from the island arrive daily. It is a border town—a place in which political and cultural discourse revolves around homeland in ways uncommon to other cities in the United States. And Miami is a backdrop against which foreign and domestic policies are played out continually.

In other ways Miami is as far from Havana as one can get. It is a place in which Kafkaesque metamorphoses occur daily, as people who were defined as traitors are transformed into heroes by a thirty-minute airplane flight—or, from the Cuban perspective, from heroes into *gusanos*. It is a place in which world politics and local power groups prey on people's most intimate longings. It is a city in which the desire to relate to one's homeland has been treated as an act of betrayal.

Miami is a city in which antagonistic chapters of Cuban history coexist in the same geographic space. It is one of the few places in the world where former enemies mingle so closely, as Batistianos who were part of the prerevolutionary regime cohabit with disillusioned Fidelistas who were once their opponents and with recent immigrants who were part of the revolutionary regime. Yet, because of all this, Miami may be a place

where the history of the revolution can be recovered. Miami has become a depository of the island's political memory.

Paradoxically, Miami is also a place in which many of Cuba's internal battles have been fought out. In 1957 the Cuban House of Representatives declared Miami home to "gangster acts as frequent as they are reprehensible," and the mayor of Havana censured Miami as an unsafe city. These statements were a response to several incidents in which anti-Batista activists had beaten up their opponents.⁸ After the Cuban revolution U.S. and Cuban policies continued to fuel a political culture of intolerance. Miami emerged as the product of a standoff between two superpowers on the brink of nuclear war—a city in the clutches of international and national security interests. Miami was one of the training grounds for this war; both the United States and Cuba, for example, have long had intelligence operations in the city.⁹

The culture of intolerance has led to acts of repression not only against those who support better relations with the island but also against artists, musicians, playwrights, and others whose political loyalty did not meet whatever rigid standards had been set. These acts have included the cancellation of concerts by Brazil's Denise Kalafe, Puerto Rico's Andy Montañez, Venezuela's Oscar de León, and Spain's La Massiel because they all had performed in Cuba. Others, such as playwright Dolores Prida and singer and actor Rubén Blades, had visited the island and therefore were censured as well.¹⁰

Miami is also home to many who have been victims of censorship and repression. Thousands of former political prisoners live in the city. Each has sons and daughters, wives or husbands, mothers and fathers, relatives and friends. Their imprisonment is a collective tragedy for the community. It was within this context that many young Cuban exiles who had supported the fight against South African apartheid and criticized the leadership of the exile community for not joining in this support were disappointed in 1990, when Nelson Mandela refused to recognize that in Cuba, too, there were political prisoners.¹¹

Exile and Island Second-Generation Encounters

Despite the institutionalization of a culture of intolerance, changes were occurring in the exile community related to the coming of age of a new generation in exile and the increased migration of the "children of the revolution." For many exiles among the "one-and-a-halfers" (as sociologist Ruben Rumbaut calls those born in Cuba and raised in the United States) and the second generation, the political rhetoric of both the old exile political elite and the institutional Left had little to offer. Their lives were now

in Miami, although many had a burning desire to get to know their homeland and the parts of themselves that had been left behind. There is much debate among social scientists about the differences between members of this generation and their parents. Some have found significant differences in political positions but not in regard to reestablishing relations with Cuba.¹² Others have noted that younger Cubans tend to be more supportive of policy options that favor engagement with the island.¹³ Undoubtedly, the exploration of home country and culture is a central concern of this generation. And, while this does not translate to support for the Cuban government, it does suggest a more open attitude toward island culture.

Young writers like Lydia Martin traveled to Cuba and wrote moving accounts of their encounters with relatives.¹⁴ Tina Rathbone recounted her discovery of her Cuban heritage on a trip to the island.¹⁵ An increased desire to learn about “Cubanness” spawned a cultural movement that found its strongest expression first in music—particularly a rediscovery of “old” Cuban music¹⁶ and the mixture of sounds that characterized performers like Miami Sound Machine, Willie Chirino, and Nils Lara.¹⁷ Outside of Miami painters, visual artists, and writers emerged who were also grappling with their multiple points of cultural reference.

Cuba was the roots and the backdrop, rather than the centerpiece, of daily existence for this generation. The Cuba presented to them by both the Castro government and anti-Castro groups had little significance in their lives. This generation was focused on Miami, not as a point of transit but as a place to build. Many became the first Cuban-Americans at their jobs. As their presence in mainstream and citywide organizations increased, their voices began to be heard.

In addition, Cubans raised outside of Miami began to return to the city. This reverse migration brought a wave of more liberal exiles. Modesto Maidique, president of Florida International University, built up the faculty by recruiting Cubans trained in universities outside of Florida with the explicit purpose of bringing in more moderate voices. The result was that a more liberal exile generation was institutionally poised to rethink its identity.

The Mariel generation was also coming of age. Many of their number provided the talent that made possible the launching of a Spanish daily newspaper run by the *Miami Herald*, making them particularly influential. The founding of this newspaper contributed to breaking the monolithic hold that the intransigent wing of the Cuban political spectrum had maintained over the written press. Each exile subgroup published its own *peridiquito*, which bombarded the public continually; *El Nuevo Herald* provided a more professional news standard. Radio stations continued to play

the role of “firing squad,” shooting down any viewpoint opposed to the conservative opinions dominant in the exile community. Other news outlets, however, began to allow more disparate voices to be heard. The overall tone of the city began to change little by little.

This is the environment in which an influx of Cuban exiles arrived during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Increasing repression on the island made returning to Cuba more difficult for intellectuals who had been abroad.¹⁸ More than four thousand Cuban intellectuals, musicians, and artists had moved to Mexico, Spain, or other neutral “third spaces” in search of an alternative to the options of island or exile.¹⁹ But the fear that they might be recalled to the island led many to move to Miami, reluctantly at first. Some crossed the Rio Grande on the backs of coyotes whose passengers were more likely to be Mexico’s poor than the Cuban revolution’s cultural elite.

Miami became home for a new wave of exiles: the children of the Cuban revolution. Unlike past waves of émigrés, who were dismissed by the Cuban government as the ancien régime or as outcasts of the new one, this swell of exiles contained the revolution’s own cultural elite, who criticized the government not for its leftist ideology or inefficient governance but because it had betrayed its own nationalist and socialist principles. (This generation did not realize that many who had left in the 1960s had felt the same way.) While many in Miami were at first suspicious of the new émigrés,²⁰ they were greeted warmly by the second generation in exile, which was thirsty for island culture and economically able to buy their products. While Albita Rodriguez, a singer, first played to small crowds of young women at the Centro Vasco, before long she had become a sensation in the community and throughout the United States.²¹ The result was the emergence of a locus of cultural production in the very place identified by the Cuban government as the headquarters of the counterrevolution.

In the city the new émigrés had been taught to hate—and that had been taught to hate them—the children of the revolution met the children of original exiles. Like their island counterparts, many young Miami Cubans also rejected the dominant political culture of their community, including the prescribed ways in which the two sides were expected to deal with each other. The result was an intense search for new ways of rethinking Cuban identity, art, and politics. The fruits of this encounter were evident in the resurgence of cultural activities in Miami—for instance, in film festivals organized by Alejandro Ríos, formerly a television film critic in Cuba, at Miami Dade Community College, whose vice president belonged to Miami’s more open-minded generation. Recent arrivals gave experimental theater presentations. Critics like Armando Correa and Antonio Evora, who were close to cultural developments on the island, wrote in *El*

Nuevo Herald and *Exito* about alternative expressions emerging in Cuba. These activities contributed to bringing island culture to Miami.

Particularly impressive was the encounter between visual artists from the island and exiles. Visual art had been a natural medium of expression in both places. In the United States a generation raised in two languages found visual art, unconstrained by text, to be a rich avenue for its creativity. The generation raised on the island understood that visual art was a means of expression that was harder to censure than the written word.

As artists from the *Generación de los 80s* began to arrive in Miami, important visual art exhibitions began to be organized. Not surprisingly, much of the cultural debate in Miami—especially that carried out through visual art forms—reflected cultural issues on the island. One exhibit emblematic of the new Miami was “Arte Cubana,” a show by twelve Cuban women from the island and abroad that opened at Miami’s Museo Cubano de Arte y Cultura in November 1993.²² One work in the show was Quisqueya Hernández’s *Spiral*, a series of sculptures and photographs consisting of a complex set of twists and turns—the visual representation of dialectics in a one-dimensional form—suggesting a critique of the manner in which the Cuban leadership flattened the essence of Marxism. A similar message was found in her *Infinitas Formas de Tránsito*, a long horizontal metal sculpture resembling an alphabet in which all things are always in motion (or should be)—a message with symbolic meaning on both sides of the Florida Straits. Hernández’s work provided Miami a window through which to observe intimate island discourse and thus disturbed the prevailing notion of a static island. In turn this forced Miami to rethink its own ideological parameters and its place in the future of the island.

The immediate effect of having a once-divided generation inhabit the same geographic space has been to shorten the distance between Miami and Havana. However shortened, the journey across still would not be easy, as Teresita Fernández’s one-room installation at the Museo’s exhibit intimated. In an almost completely white room her unevenly sketched, stacked tiles filled the walls, creating an uncomfortable impression of being in a familiar place, like a public restroom. A basin or urinal protrudes at waist level from a stained wall. Inside, a line of rotten fruitlike sculptures intensify in color as they near the center. Fernández, a Miami-born artist, wanted her viewers to reexamine familiar spaces and objects. She believes that each individual has the power to interpret his or her own life and questions any single authority that claims to interpret history for us all.²³ While this perspective empowers individuals, it also makes each of us responsible for rethinking those things we take for granted—a process that is always painful.

For a time something new was in the making as a single generation that grew up divided discovered its other half in Miami. Artists, critics, and scholars from various émigré generations began to share experiences with one another.²⁴ We discovered that we listened to the same music—The Beatles, for instance (although in the United States our parents had said they were communists, while Cuban parents had called them imperialists). We also read the same theorists—Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, and Antonio Gramsci—who likewise were either communists or ideological deviants, depending on which side of the Florida Straits you were raised.

Our island counterparts had broken away from Cuba's power structure only to find it replicated in exile, just as we broke away from the exile power structure only to find its mirror image on the island. A similar quest, a mutual disillusionment, a parallel political vision, and a shared generational experience across borders promised to create common ground.

Yet differences were also present. The generational unity that had been forged on the island dissipated in a market-driven economy that did not always reward talent. The group of recently arrived artists and writers began to disintegrate, for few public institutions in Miami could replace the resources that the Cuban government had dedicated to their work in the past. Furthermore, those of the generation who were raised on the island—particularly the most recent arrivals who had lived through *el periodo especial en tiempo de paz* (the special peacetime period, a euphemism for the Cuban government's severe cutbacks in electricity, services, goods, and food)—wanted little to do with American-style politics or debate. Everything “political,” to them, smacked of power and opportunism. For those raised in the United States, however, political struggle over issues of identity was a matter of survival.

Because the island group did not come from a culture that allowed political protest in its many forms, the differences were accentuated. There was little understanding of identity politics—in particular, the search for roots and women's voices that were integral parts of the identity of Cubans raised in the United States. Artistic critiques of U.S. cultural discourse were present in “Cubana” yet were not understood by many recent arrivals. Elizabeth Mesa-Gaido's multimedia installation, for example, portrayed a ship with severed trunks above the hull and thick roots underneath, accompanied by a video projection of images of hands digging and a soundtrack of the artist's mother and relatives discussing their journey to the States and their lives after the migration. Her need to understand her mother's journey was also a way of understanding her past and recuperating her roots.

Many in the island group wanted to break away, not reengage with Cuba. Those who had just left Cuba began to look to the United States, addressing topics of biculturalism and border identities. For instance, Consuelo Castañeda's U.S. work, exhibited in the spring of 1995, was entitled *On Becoming Bilingual*. It reflected an initial attempt to engage in contemporary host country debate and at the same time criticize the narrowness of Cuba's official policy of denationalizing its recent exiles. But the early efforts of artists of this generation to explore host country issues were not as sophisticated as their work about the island had been, perhaps because of a lack of contact with other Latinos who had been engaged in these debates for two decades or perhaps because their Cuban Miami public was not ready to accept the immigrant part of its identity.

Cubans who had been in the United States for some time, in contrast, were beginning to consider issues of return and questions of what role the exile community could play both in home and host countries. These themes had been examined in the earlier works of artists, such as former Chicago resident Nereida García, who painted colorful canvases that affirmed her Cuban identity and spoke simultaneously of the pain of her exile. (The fact that she lives in the United States has prevented Garcia from exhibiting her work on the island, while her returns to Cuba have resulted in her exclusion from important U.S. shows, such as "Outside Cuba," the first retrospective work of Cuban exile art.)

García's work initially focused on her desire to return to the island. Yet, as the option of return was denied, many émigré artists, Garcia included, began to search for ways of reconciling their host and home country experiences. From this quest emerged a broader conceptualization of identity and a desire to merge the disparate parts into one. Artist María Martínez Cañas pieced together Lam-like montages of photographic negatives of different components of her identity, including her body and Puerto Rico. Her late 1990s work came to terms with her present as photographs of her physical surroundings took the place of past images.²⁵ Writer Cristina García, in her novel *Dreaming in Cuban*, concludes her story with a letter from Celia, the grandmother who stayed in Cuba, written to her lover, Gustavo. Celia writes of Pilar, her granddaughter who eventually goes into exile, "She will remember everything."²⁶ Exiles, then, are assigned the role of remembering for the nation. This defies the passive role commonly ascribed to those who leave their homeland. It further challenges the standard prediction that, upon arriving in the United States, the exile's homeland would be forgotten.

This broader conception of identity has also been prominent in various academic projects. During the summer of 1994 the Instituto de Estudios Cubanos held a conference of scholars representing more than forty

years of Cuban intellectual history. Included among the attendees were academics both from Cuba and from the exile community. Only official Cuban academics refused to participate, stating that they would not sit at the same table with “dissidents.” Also in 1994 Ruth Behar and Juan León edited two issues of the *Michigan Quarterly* entitled “Bridges to Cuba,” which contained a range of voices extending not only from the island to the exile but also from the official to the marginalized.²⁷ In October 1997 the Cuban Research Institute of Florida International University held its first conference that included a broad range of scholars and writers from the island and from various exile communities. Clearly, the same could not occur on the island.

The Cuban Government Responds

These encounters and mutual self-discoveries contributed to the theoretical debate about identity and politics in home and host countries. The island, however, was much slower in opening up to its exiles than the United States had been. By 1994, for example, only one Cuban exile artist, Natalia Raphael, had exhibited her work in Cuba. Raphael’s showing was in Matanzas, whose cultural community often avoids the capitol’s political battles and censures. Matanzas was also home to *Vigia*, a hand-assembled literary journal that never excluded exiled writers. In contrast, in 1993 *Gaceta*, the publication of the official Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC), published a special section on Cuban-American writers in which it emphasized the differences between those who had stayed and those who had left. The publication also failed to discuss the works of writers who had recently left the island.

In Cuba the government responded to the exodus of its cultural elite by trying not only to deterritorialize them by banishing them from the island but also to denationalize them by labeling them non-Cubans. Those who continued to leave were betraying not the revolution but, rather, the nation: they were not called counterrevolutionaries, as in the early 1960s, but anti-Cuban (the political term used was *annexationist* and the sociological term *assimilated*). Political dissenters were considered non-Cuban, and exile was their punishment. In an extremely defensive editorial announcing more visits by exiles, *Granma* stated, “we reiterate that under no circumstances will authorities permit anyone linked to anti-Cuban activity to return to national territory.”²⁸

The challenge posed to this exclusive definition of Cuban identity was, in part, at the root of the Cuban government’s refusal to define culture outside the island’s geographic boundaries as “Cuban.” To accept that Cuban culture could be created outside its national borders was to

concede that the nation had grown larger than state boundaries permit. The state had lost control of the nation. Ironically, a country whose identity was precisely a product of cultural inclusiveness had little tolerance for political or ideological diversity.

Despite official unwillingness to engage in a more open redefinition of Cuban culture, informal debate about what constituted “Cubania” ensued across the Florida Straits. For instance, widely circulated in Havana during the summer of 1993 was Mirta Ojito’s *Miami Herald* article, in which she reported that most of Havana’s artistic community could be found mingling with second-generation Cuban exiles at Friday night gallery openings and concluded that Miami was more Cuban than the island itself.²⁹

Independent intellectuals on the island found Ojito’s argument overstated: after all, Havana was still there, along with the palms, *el Malecon* (the seawall), *la brisa* (sea breeze), and important intellectuals and artists. At the same time, however, these writers admitted that Cuban culture on the island was in jeopardy. Since the fall of the socialist camp, the government had been engaged in the unthinkable: catering to foreign capitalists and tourists. The result was an explosion of commercial entertainment for tourists—including the emergence of prostitutes of all ages, genders, and colors—that eroded the sense of nation brought about by the revolution. Many of the contemporaries of these intellectuals had left the island, and many still remaining were scheming of ways to leave as well.

In search of alternatives island intellectuals were curious about the persistent sense of Cubania in the exile community. But, even while many admitted that Cuban culture could be created outside national boundaries, many were not willing to consider literature written by Cubans in English as part of the body of Cuban literature.³⁰ Moreover, pressure to resolve Cuba’s war with its community abroad started to come from other sectors in Cuban society. As economic difficulties mounted, people across the island demanded that solutions be found. With economic collapse under way on the island, the ongoing fight with the community was seen as detrimental to Cuban interests. The Catholic Church on the island and in exile was among those organizations that supported the call for national reconciliation and a dialogue.³¹

The Cuban government also faced international pressure to talk to its exiles, as was being done by the Palestinians and Israelis, Koreans, and Salvadoreans, whose divisions had been fueled by the cold war. Although one response was that the Cuban situation was different because Cubans were geographically divided,³² the Cuban government was encouraged to show that it was dealing with the community. The island government finally responded to this internal and external pressure, and a two-track policy was initiated: one for the diplomatic world, implemented through

the Ministry of Foreign Relations, and a second within the intellectual world, through the University of Havana and UNEAC.

Official Dialogue Revisited

In the spring of 1994 Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Relations hosted a conference entitled "La nacion y la emigracion" (The Nation and Its Émigrés).³³ The tone of the event was evident early on. Jorge Gomez Barata, the official in charge of the Communist Party's powerful Departamento de Orientacion de Revolucionaria (the party's ideological czar) was quoted as saying, "For us the meeting in April is conceived of as a political project to kick the floor out from underneath the counterrevolution . . . fragment its discourse, and isolate it in the heart of the immigration."³⁴ For others it was a way to show the world that Cuba, too, could deal with its "dissidents." The public relations aim of the event was clear, as the production of images proved more important than its substance. On the flight to Havana, for instance, those of us attending the conference were shown a videotape, laced with nostalgic music, about the upcoming event: where we would stay and meet, opinions on the conference from "people in the street," and interviews with Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Cespedes and Elizardo Sanchez, a leading human rights activist, cautiously supporting the effort.

Oddly, although they could be included in the television production, these leaders were not invited to the conference. Most human rights activists and other key individuals in Cuba and the exile community were excluded as well. For instance, María Cristina Herrera, director of the Instituto de Estudios Cubanos, and Marifeli Pérez-Stable, president of its board and founder of *Areito* and the Antonio Maceo Brigade, were not invited because they had signed a letter condemning the Cuban Democracy Act that also had been signed by island-based human rights activists.

Conference organizers chose the term *emigrant* over *exile*.³⁵ Emigrants, somehow, defied the existence of exiles or the notion of diaspora. And, while individuals had various reasons for moving to the United States, the social structure that emerged among the Cuban émigré community was not the product of these motivations alone. The Cuban exile, after all, was until recently swayed by comparatively favorable immigration policies in the United States and the lack of meaningful options for dissent on the island.

Moreover, decisions about the conference were made unilaterally.³⁶ The agenda was narrow and missed essential topics. Substantive discussion was discouraged; participants were required to write down their questions, while a moderator chose which ones to pass on to the government officials

on the podium. One participant's comment that Cuban history had been forged by a spirit of inclusion and that we needed to go beyond the exclusionary practices that had been imposed by a single authority for the past thirty-five years was met with hostility.³⁷ Radical suggestions went unanswered, such as the idea that family members on the island be permitted to use remittances for investments (this might have been a vehicle through which exiles could play an important role in helping to decentralize and bolster the economy). Questions and complaints dominated the meetings. It became evident that Cubans from almost thirty countries around the world had problems with the Cuban government similar to those of their U.S. counterparts—problems that could not be explained simply by the U.S. blockade. Furthermore, there was an almost cynical lack of attention to the history of Cuba's policies toward the communities abroad. The convocation to the conference began by mentioning the 1978 dialogue and then skipping immediately to the present.³⁸ The sixteen years that had elapsed, during which the Cuban government itself had implemented policies that barred the community from the island, simply disappeared.

The backdrop to the three days of meetings was a battle raging among different factions in Cuba over who would handle relations with the exile community. These battles were not new. But added to the traditional actors within the bureaucracy who in the past had competed for control over programs dealing with the community abroad was a group of Young Communist Party members whose former secretary-general had just been named to head the Foreign Ministry. The stakes in this bureaucratic warfare had risen as well. Not only would the faction that gained control of the "community project" acquire power, information, and resources, but it would also have access to remittances sent to Cuba by exiles estimated at worth over \$500 million a year—at the time the second largest component of Cuba's gross national product after tourism.³⁹ Policies toward the exile community would also have profound consequences for the internal reordering of politics, economics, and ideology on the island.

Not surprisingly, the conference ended with a fiasco. A private reception with Fidel Castro was videotaped without the consent of the participants. An edited version of the reception line that showed exiles flirting with and lauding Fidel Castro, as well as edited conversations, was sold to the international press by Raul Taladri, a press agent who worked with the Ministry of the Interior. The week before the conference participants had left for Havana through the Miami airport without incident, a sign that the intransigent forces of the exile community were in decline. But the prospect of an émigré community that was more rational, more comprehensive, and more inclusive than the Cuban government was exactly what those opposed to a reconciliation process in Cuba wanted to destroy.

Many suspected that the sale of the video was calculated to divide the émigré community and resurrect its intransigent elements at the expense of reformers on both sides of the Florida Straits who were calling for an end to the embargo as well as the democratization of the exile community and the island. Cuban government hard-liners did not want an opening toward the community abroad, nor did they want a more open community on the island. Indeed, conference events called into question the entire strategy of “dialogue” with government officials.

In the next year two more attempts at political discussion with the Cuban government went nowhere. In the summer of 1994 Roberto Robaina met with international representatives of the various dissident groups on the island.⁴⁰ Ramon Cernuda, representative for La Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Derechos Humanos, noted that this was the first time that the Cuban government had spoken with members of the opposition.⁴¹ The following summer Fidel Castro met with Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, who had led the fight against him in the Segundo Escambray in the mid-1960s. As dramatic as these gestures were, no political changes came of them. Enrique Patterson, one of the intellectuals who had been part of the island's human rights movement, correctly warned that any solo attempts to negotiate with Castro would fail. What was truly needed, he suggested, was to organize a broad-based process for a peaceful transition.⁴²

In spite of official policies, increased contact between Cubans from the island and Cubans in exile contributed to the gradual erosion of the divide between the two groups. First had come the visits to the island in the 1970s. Then came the Mariel immigration, which contributed to reengagement, especially when the Mariel generation started to come of age. Barriers first came down within families. In the late 1990s, as the economic situation on the island deteriorated, many exiles in Miami were moved to help their relatives on the island. These efforts continued to be tainted by the Cuban government's attempt to profit from the exiles' assistance. Cuba insisted, for instance, that money transfers be conducted via Cuban banks that undervalued the price of the U.S. dollar and fixed the exchange rate far below the black market value (a rate that was closer to the international market value).

The willingness of Miami residents to help their island relatives found expression in the moderating politics of the community. Those opposed to sending aid to Cuba were increasingly isolated.⁴³ (Two years later, when Hurricane Lili hit Cuba, even the Cuban-American National Foundation joined a community drive to send aid to Cuba.)⁴⁴ But there were few political or social organizations that had the legitimacy to organize the community to help the island, since the groups supporting family reunification were closely connected to organizations with close ties to the Cuban gov-

ernment, which, of course, had created the policies that divided families in the first place.

A year after the spring conference the Ministry of Foreign Relations began publishing a magazine for Cuban émigrés called, ironically, *La Gran Familia*.⁴⁵ And, while encouraging groups in exile to pressure the U.S. government to ease its policies toward Cuba, the Cuban government repressed any attempts at pressure on itself from exile organizations or groups on the island. Therefore, the family reconciliation groups had little influence on the community. The community and the island both suffered from the lack of political solutions to unmet human needs.

Who Is Cuban?

The second track of Cuban policy toward the community involved retaking the reins of the identity debate. Abel Prieto, president of UNEAC, was put in charge of the effort, along with the Ministry of the Interior's University of Havana-based CEAP. The center was now directed by Milagros Martínez, who had moved from the Ministry of Foreign Relations, where one of her tasks had been to accompany intellectuals to conferences to prevent their defections. In response to Miami newspaper headlines claiming that Miami was more *Habanero* than Havana, Prieto declared that the *Aleph* (Jorge Luis Borges's concept of a zone through which all moments of history and humanity can be seen simultaneously) of Cuban culture was still on the island.⁴⁶ Although Prieto advocated a nondogmatic approach to defining what was Cuban, he still insisted on geography as an essential criteria. This geographic construction of culture was to be asserted repeatedly as island bureaucracies clumsily attempted to control the debate.

Cuban officials resisted any attempts to unite intellectuals and artists from the island and abroad. For instance, José Toriac's proposal for a seminar and art exhibit that would bring together Cuban visual artists from the island and abroad, including some who had recently left, was denied in 1993.⁴⁷ Even Lourdes Grobet's photographs of young exiles were censured from an art exhibit in the 1994 Havana Biennial. In addition, Prieto rejected a proposal by a Latin American Studies Association working group inviting island intellectuals to participate in a Miami conference on Cuban identity that was to include artists and intellectuals who had left the island in the early 1990s. Later, in the spring of 1995, Prieto would refuse to transmit the papers necessary for travel, in effect denying exit to island artists who were invited to participate in a Barcelona conference called "Cuba: la isla posible" (Cuba: The Possible Island) organized by Ivan de la Nuez, a leading cultural critic, who had recently left.⁴⁸ Nei-

ther would government officials process requests by *Vigia* to invite “foreigners” (including Cuban exiles) to its ten-year anniversary celebration. Finally, *Memoria de la posguerra*, an island-based newsletter that had published two issues and included articles by Cubans on and off the island, was abruptly shut down by island security agents. Unlike official publications, *Memoria* provided a different vision of those leaving by engaging in a reflective and critical discussion not only of the younger generation’s exodus but also of the insular nature of the culture within Cuba, or the internal exile.⁴⁹

The official response to such activities was to organize a Conference on National Identity in Cuba cosponsored by UNEAC and the University of Havana. Again, key intellectuals from the island and exile community were not invited. Clearly, there was great preoccupation among official intellectuals in redefining the parameters of the identity debate for both internal and external reasons.⁵⁰ The orthodox definition of Cuban culture, based on the ideological commitment to *patria*, was anachronistic in light of the regime’s need to survive economically. The *patria*, some argued, needed capable administrators, not military heroes. Furthermore, as Cuban culture eroded on the island, it seemed to flourish in the exile community. The paradigm of the revolution was still nationalism, so to admit that *Cubanness* might be even more present in exile than on the island was to admit defeat.

In this context it seemed curious when island-based psychologists proposed that identity was neither a historical construct nor an ideological one and argued that nationalism was a mere sentiment. This way they could avoid the difficult debate about politics. Despite what could be considered a more inclusive definition of *Cubanness*—that is, anyone who *felt* Cuban could be considered Cuban—the official policy on encounters with Cubans off the island continued to become more and more restrictive. For example, Prieto announced that from then on conferences on Cuban identity in third countries—Spain or Mexico, for instance—would have to be held on the island. Not only was the construction of identity geographically based, but it also collapsed the notions of state and nation as though there were no distinction between the two. In effect, encounters would be permitted only if they were managed by state bureaucrats.

Increased Immigration and Its Backlash: The End of the Symbolic Refugee

The island was not alone in further closing its doors to exiles; the United States, too, removed its proverbial welcome mat. In the mid-1990s the United States again witnessed a vicious anti-immigrant political backlash

that would change the legal framework and migratory practices that had facilitated Cuban immigration. In the spring of 1994,⁵¹ in response to Castro's threat of encouraging rafters to leave the island⁵² and under election-year pressure, President Clinton ceased the long-standing policy of accepting all Cubans who entered the United States. The U.S. government began to incarcerate anyone who attempted to enter U.S. territory at its naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Fearing the exile community's reaction to his new policy, Clinton tried to appease its hard-liners by issuing regulations prohibiting the transfer of remittances and restricting all travel to Cuba, except by reporters and those with Treasury Department licenses for which only researchers or those responding to extreme cases of humanitarian need were eligible to apply. Ironically, the Clinton administration did exactly what hard-liners in the Cuban government had been advocating: shutting the doors between exiles and the island.

Even more ironic was the fact that the right wing of the exile community reached a pact with the Clinton administration: in exchange for get-tough policies against Cuba, they showed themselves willing to sell out the rafters. Thus, amid the anti-immigrant hysteria of key gubernatorial elections in 1994 Cuban exiles lined up with those who called for the deportation of all immigrants. Foreign policy priorities were deemed more important than an immigrants' rights agenda.

But the policy backfired. The added economic hardship resulting from the new regulations only increased discontent on the island. Rafters continued to sail out to sea, reasoning that after a stay at Guantanamo they would be allowed into the United States. Instead of providing the final measure of pressure that would cause the Castro government to crumble, the new U.S. policy gave Castro added ammunition with which to blast the United States for causing the island's economic crisis. At the same time, he continued to allow rafters to leave the Cuban coast, even encouraging the flow.

In May 1995 Clinton announced a new policy of intercepting Cuban rafters at sea and returning them to Cuba. Just as CANF had supported the detention camps in Guantanamo Bay in return for tougher sanctions, the Cuban Committee for Democracy, a more liberal group, gave its consent to the new policy in return for a promise of easing sanctions. Again, foreign policy matters, not immigrants' rights, dominated the agenda of political groups in the Cuban community. One organization came to the aid of the rafters, *Hermanos al Rescate* (Brothers to the Rescue). Its pilots volunteered to fly small planes over the Florida Straits and alert the Coast Guard when rafters were sighted.

The new policy of interception and return shocked the exile commu-

nity. While some of the outcry simply may have been a reaction to being excluded from Washington's policy discussion, the decision, made in connection with bringing the Guantanamo detainees to the United States, unearthed a multitude of questions about the place of the Cuban exile community in both the host and home countries. Cuban exiles, it seemed clear, were no longer welcome in the United States.

While the *raison d'être* for exile had not changed—in fact, repression was increasing on the island—the symbolic place that Cuban exiles had held in U.S. policy was gone. When the United States was at war (albeit a cold war) with the former Soviet Union, refugees coming to the United States demonstrated to the world that the U.S. political and economic system was better than others. The special place once assigned to Cuban refugees in the United States was not due to Cuba's lack of democracy but was a function of a world power struggle between two empires. (If democracy had been the primary concern, refugees of the Batista regime in the 1950s would have been treated as heroes in the United States. They were not; in fact, many were “illegal aliens” who lived in constant fear of deportation.) When the Soviet Union collapsed, the context that gave meaning to the symbolism of the Cuban exile collapsed as well.

The question was why the exile community never realized that it was being used as a symbol. Part of the answer lies in understanding the many components of this tightly knit political mythology. The symbolic value of refugees fleeing communism was coupled with the myth that we were welcome in the United States. But a hard look at history shows that, more often than not, we had not been welcomed. This is not to deny the opportunities and privileges given Cuban exiles in Miami, particularly in comparison to other refugees such as Haitians, but, rather, to examine critically the claim that now we had been betrayed.⁵³ In the early 1960s Cubans had been admitted to the United States by way of visa waivers. Immigration policy had not been changed, only circumvented. It was clear that attempts to change the law would have been met by stiff opposition from Congress and local communities. To understand that the American public did not wholeheartedly support the program to harbor refugees of communism, one needs only to review local reaction at the time.

Moreover, the operating assumption during this period was that we would all be returning to Cuba soon. When it became clear that the Castro government would not fall immediately, however, the doors slammed shut. From 1962 to 1965 few Cubans were let in. People working with the underground were told from one day to the next that the policy had changed. In 1965 Castro, not the United States, opened the door that led to the freedom flights via Camarioca. For Castro exiles also have been expendable capital, as long as their exodus did not have an uncontrollable

boomerang effect that would create an irreversible crisis of legitimacy for the government.

By the mid-1960s it was fairly clear that Castro was around to stay and so were the exiles. The Cuban Adjustment Act came as an afterthought in order to “legalize” what the State Department had done “illegally” in the early 1960s: issue hundreds of thousands of visa waivers to Cubans on the island. Again, the lack of support for Cuban exiles became evident when Castro canceled the freedom flights in 1973 and the Republican administration did not try to reopen the doors.

When the Carter administration made human rights a cornerstone of its foreign policy, it reignited the debate about lack of freedom of speech and movement in Cuba, and, again, the doors were opened slightly. But, as before, the American public was not supportive of this policy. Deep divisions, even within the administration, resulted in an impasse that finally contributed to the dramatic events of Mariel in 1980. Marielitos were welcomed with open hearts and arms only for a brief period. The subsequent images are those of refugees in detention centers across the United States.

U.S. ambivalence toward Cuban refugees showed itself again in the summer of 1994 against a sharper backdrop: the tragic loss of human lives at sea and increased economic crisis and political repression on the island. When Castro again played the trump card, Clinton closed the door, this time imprisoning men, women, and children in Guantanamo for months.

This more realistic perspective on U.S. policy toward Cuban exiles does not deny the cynicism and lack of disregard for human lives exhibited by Fidel Castro. It merely fixes the role of the U.S. government in this process. This is precisely what had been so hard to do within the exile community: be critical of both the U.S. and Cuban governments and have a political agenda independent of both.

In late 1997 Jorge Más Canosa, head of the Cuban-American National Foundation, died. Symbolically, his death suggested the passing of a generation of exile. The foundation created a channel for the frustrations among exiled Cubans with continued repression and lack of change on the island. They succeeded in playing American politics well even in the midst of an anti-immigrant backlash in south Florida. But, while it advocated democracy on the island, it did little to encourage it in the community. Jorge Más Canosa was intolerant of opposing opinions, particularly those critical of his style and politics.

Undoubtedly, the foundation helped reduce Cuban exile political imagery to a single issue and stance, which contributed to fixing the political stereotype of the rabid anti-Castro exile. Cuban communities, including Miami's, are very different places, however, than they were in the 1980s. A large influx of new immigrants and increased contacts between

the exiles and the island have provided the community with a more nuanced understanding of island reality. A political program based on the premise that "Cuba is Fidel" is not as attractive to a more sophisticated political audience. And Cuban exiles, for a variety of reasons, including reverse migration to Miami and growing sense that they are immigrants and not always perceived as equals, have become more tolerant, particularly of those issues and people who represent our "other," the island.

But Miami's transition would require the development of political organizations that could be independent of both governments and grounded in Miami. Both the Left and Right had made Fidel Castro their main political object, whether to support or overthrow him. A political agenda that included Cuba but was grounded in Miami would require a different kind of political vision. The second generation's emphasis on a more complex understanding of its identity would lay the groundwork for Cuban Miami's political transition—hopefully, a more open political atmosphere in which second-generation exiles, and maybe those on the island as well, would contribute to a rethinking not only of their identity but of their political organizations as well.