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"My Country" / "This Country": Ambivalent Belongings of Cuban Americans in South Florida

Robin Cooper, Denese Edsall, Diana Riviera, Julia Chaitin & J.P. Linstroth

Key words: immigration; immigrants; home; belonging; ethnic identity; national identity; Cuban-American; second generation

Abstract: This article explores significant notions of home and belonging among first- and second-generation Cuban immigrants in South Florida. The analyses are derived from biographical narrative interviews with six Cuban Americans. Three key subjects were in the biographical life stories—the notion of escape or leaving, the sense of home, and constructions of Cuban identity. In assessing these themes, we found there to be profound differences between the generations. Moreover, these Cuban biographies demonstrate how differing stories of migration provide new theoretical perspectives on immigration, transnationalism, and ethnicity. The experiences presented and discussed here connect to the ambivalence and complexity of belongingness and interpretations of Cuban-ness.

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1. Introduction

How do immigrants from Cuba and their children characterize their sense of belonging and identity in the United States? Do first- and second-generation immigrants differ in conceptualizing home, and if so, in what ways? How do Cubans from different waves of emigration understand the transnational experience of leaving and settling? These are the questions explored in this article, which is part of a larger qualitative study of ethnic identity and sense of belonging among immigrants from Cuba, Haiti, and Guatemala in South Florida (see CHAITIN, LINSTROTH, and HILLER's introductory article in this issue). [1]

This article presents analyses of interviews with six informants from among the total sample of ten Cuban-American participants—first- and second-generation Cuban immigrants. These six informants were chosen based on the factors of gender, generation, and immigration pattern. In turn, we wanted to assess how these particular characteristics influenced the experiences of these Cuban participants. The ages of informants ranged from the mid-twenties to late-fifties, and the sample was divided evenly between men and women. We identified emergent themes in the biographical interviews, placed those themes within a wider theoretical lens, and then explored our findings in relation to the sense of home and identity. Furthermore, it should be noted our sample size was particularly small since these were life-story interviews and our study followed guidelines accorded to biographical-interviewing and the in-depth analyses of only a few individuals. Below is a table providing information regarding the six informants.

Name	**Gender**	**Age**	**Generation of immigrant**	**Year immigrated**
Nina	Female	40	1st generation	1989
Victor	Male	Late 50s	1st generation	1975
Martin	Male	53	1st generation	1988
Daniel	Male	36	1st generation	1980
Yolanda	Female	26	2nd generation	NA[1]
Lisa	Female	31	2nd generation	NA

Table 1: Demographic information of Cuban-American biographers [2]

It is important to begin with a brief overview of Cuban history and the history of Cuban immigration to the United States since the participants in this study had very different immigration experiences. Following this discussion, we explore the individual stories of six participants, focusing on three aspects of the immigrant experience: the phenomenon of leaving, the sense of home, and perceptions of ethnic and national identity. A common theme emerging from their stories is what

1 "Not Applicable" because they were second-generation immigrants.

we termed "ambivalent belongings." This term refers to the simultaneous, conflicting feelings our informants convey regarding home and identity, and which we will discuss in detail below. [3]

2. Socio-Historical Context

2.1 Cuban history

Europeans first came to Cuba in the course of Columbus' seafaring explorations, and in the years after 1492 the island came under Spanish control as a key trading port and shipyard. With colonization, the indigenous population was devastated by disease and forced hard labor, as occurred in other occupied territories of the Caribbean and the Americas. Some native Cubans intermarried with Spanish families, however, and native customs and words remained interwoven in the island's culture and language (THOMAS, 1998). African slaves were first brought to Cuba by the Spaniards in the early 1500s. The cultivation of vast sugar cane plantations led to several hundreds of thousands of African slaves being brought to Cuba to work the sugar cane fields over the next three hundred years (THOMAS, 1998). [4]

In the 1800s, the Spanish colonists looked to the authority of Madrid, but many of the Creole elite—people born in Cuba of Spanish ancestry—turned to North America and even hoped to be incorporated as a territory into the United States. Others among the Creole liberal and intellectual elite began promoting Cuban nationhood in the latter half of the nineteenth century (BENJAMIN, 1990). The Ten Years War (1868-1878) was a guerilla struggle for freedom from Spain. Although this effort failed, it fostered widespread interest in independence. José Martí, a Cuban émigré in the United States, combined the cause of independence with a vision of social justice and worked in the exile population to develop nationalism and the Partido Revolucianaro Cubano, the Cuban Revolutionary Party (BENJAMIN, 1990). [5]

The Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898) ended Spanish sovereignty. With United States intervention on behalf of independence in the so-called "Spanish-American War" in 1898, the new Cuban citizens saw Spanish colonization replaced by North American occupation. In 1902, U.S. occupation ended, and the Cuban Republic was established. The Platt Amendment of the 1903 Permanent Treaty with the United States, however, limited Cuban sovereignty for the next two decades. The next several decades saw periods of political corruption and instability under several governments. This instability continued until the mid 20th century when Fulgencio Batista y Zaldivar came to power. The corruption of the Batista administration was a key factor leading to Castro's takeover of the government (THOMAS, 1998; PEREZ, 1990; WHITNEY, 2001). [6]

Fidel Castro failed in his first effort to bring revolution to Cuba in 1953, and as a result he was imprisoned. Castro received amnesty in 1955, however; he traveled to Mexico, where he continued planning to overthrow Batista. In December of 1956, Castro and his troops returned to Cuba, and a period of attacks, strikes,

and political unrest followed. On the eve of 1959, Batista fled the island, leading to Castro's rise to power. Although he had broad support initially, due to widespread frustration over the corruption of Batista's administration, Castro lost favor with a growing segment of the population when he turned to a repressive form of rule (ENCINOSA, 1988; BONACHEA & SAN MARTIN, 1974; LEONARD, 1999; FARBER, 2006; PEREZ-STABLE, 1999). Various groups of Cubans, beginning with the political and business elite, sought a way out of the repressive system, leading to several waves of emigration. [7]

2.2 Waves of Cuban emigration

For over 40 years, Cubans have been categorized as political refugees and have been provided relatively easy entry into the United States compared to other immigrant groups. Those Cuban immigrants who did not specifically fit the model of a refugee under the United Nations Conventions were instead defined according to criteria contained in the Walter-McCarran Act of 1952. This act specifically identified someone who is fleeing a communist country as a refugee (NACKERUD, SPRINGER, LARRISON, & ISAAC, 1999). There were four specific "waves" of Cuban immigration into the United States: the Early Exiles departure in the years 1959-1962, the "Freedom Flights" from 1965-1973, the Mariel boatlift in 1980, and the Rafter Crisis in 1994, which led to the policy known as "wet-foot, dry-foot." This policy allows Cubans to stay in the United States and seek asylum if they touch U.S. land**,** but requires their return to Cuba if they are intercepted in water (SELSKY, 2006). [8]

In the first few years following Castro's revolution, a number of upper class refugees left the island as they saw their industries nationalized. This early wave became known as the Early Exiles. From 1965-1973, middle class Cubans joined the upper class in migrating in the so-called Freedom Flights. These airlifts were conducted with the agreement of the Cuban and U.S. governments. Preference was given to those persons who already had relatives in the United States and Cuba banned the exit of young men of military age, professionals, and technically-skilled workers. A specific subset of these flights were the "Peter Pan" flights containing some 14,000 children sent by their parents in order to escape communist indoctrination in state-run schools. In the end, these flights brought more than a quarter of a million Cuban refugees to the United States (PEDRAZA-BAILEY, 1985). [9]

The third wave of immigration was in 1980, the Mariel boatlift, bringing 125,000 Cuban refugees to the United States (COPELAND, 1983). This was a mass exodus from Cuba. Initially, Cuban-American families boated 90 miles from Key West, Florida, to Cuba to "rescue" family members. It ended with Cuban officials forcing "undesirables" onto whatever boats were available and thousands of Cubans fleeing the island-nation. Some participants left of their own volition. Others were forced out. These immigrants were from the middle or lower classes; many were of African descent, political prisoners, or homosexual. The American press stressed the involvement of those that were forced to leave and labeled all as undesirable. Despite the labels of "criminal" and "scum" given by the press,

however, the majority of the Mariel refugees were working class people with no criminal record (PEDRAZA-BAILEY, 1985). [10]

Finally, there are the refugees who have come to the United State under the "wet-foot/dry-foot" policy. This policy was precipitated by the Balsero Crisis during the Clinton administration when Castro warned that he would open the Cuban borders and allow anyone to leave who wished to do so. The Clinton administration, fearing another mass exodus such as the Mariel boatlift, determined to tighten the rules regarding Cuban entry into the U.S. and thus created the new policy (NACKERUD et al., 1999). Because of the continued Communist government, these immigrants are still termed political refugees. However, the reality of the situation is that more and more are economic refugees who cannot sustain themselves or their families in the impoverished Cuban economy. Regardless of the motivations for migration, one result of these four waves of emigration is that a large segment of South Florida's population has Cuban ethnic roots. Over 650,000 Cuban immigrants live in Miami-Dade County alone. This broad Cuban community has economic and political influence in South Florida, especially in Miami (MORENO, n.d.). [11]

2.3 The Cuba-United States relationship

We now turn to a short description of the mutual influence resulting from the historical relationship between Cuba and the United States, a relationship that has impacted the sense of home and belonging for Cuban immigrants. For some two hundred years, the proximity of Cuba to southern Florida led to trade, tourism, and commercial linkages (PEREZ, 1990). In the nineteenth century, North Americans came to Cuba to invest in the sugar industry, while many Cubans moved to Key West and Tampa to work in cigar factories. In the latter half of the 1800s, wealthy Cubans traveled to North America to vacation or to study. In the 1920s, working class Cubans came to Miami as entertainers and workers (PEREZ, 1999). Political exiles, too, have made the short trip from Cuba to the United States from the time of José Martí prior to independence from Spain. Such political exile to the United States continued in the late 1920s and 1930s and has been ongoing ever since to the present day (BENJAMIN, 1990). [12]

Following the war for Cuba's independence from Spain, the United States' occupation of Cuba had a longstanding influence on the island. Aside from the political ramifications, the U.S. presence left its mark on the culture and the landscape of Cuba, as well. The period of occupation included massive reconstruction, including the building of banks, stores, homes, and a new capitol building all resembling U.S. architecture (PEREZ, 1999; BENJAMIN, 1990). Meanwhile, North Americans developed a growing fascination with Cuba, beginning in the 1920s and continuing through the 1950s, as a nearby destination that was both exotic and tropical while maintaining old-world Spanish charm. At the same time, as Miami grew, some neighborhoods were modeled after the style of Havana; and hotels and housing developments were given Spanish names (PEREZ, 1999, 1990). As a result of these mutual influences, when Cubans came to South Florida as exiles, they found themselves in a nation that was clearly

different from their own, yet at the same time not completely strange. They were in a region filled with Spanish street and town names, where architectural styles and plants were similar to those in their homeland, and where they often had relatives or business associates. Thus the land of exile was at once foreign and familiar. [13]

2.4 Cuban nationalism

Before turning to our results, it is also important to discuss briefly the history of Cuban nationalism, since this relates to the construction of Cuban identity for both first and second generation Cuban immigrants. For the majority of Cuba's history, the notion of *Cuba Libre* (Free Cuba) has been at the core of the imagined homeland. This democratic vision, popularized most famously by José Martí in the fight for Cuban independence, served as the cherished dream throughout years of colonization by Spain and occupation by the United States prior to official statehood (BENJAMIN, 1990). Along with the establishment of the Republic of Cuba, was the Platt Amendment, which allowed for United States' interventionism in Cuban affairs and thereby instilled in most Cubans an unfulfilled sense of independent-nationalism. It was not until the 1930s that independence emerged, resulting in great national pride but short-lived satisfaction. In the following decades, the strong-man rule of Machado and Batista left Cubans seeking real freedom. At first, the revolution of Fidel and Raul Castro was welcomed by many as offering hope for a democratic republic. With the coming of the communist regime, however, many felt the dream of *Cuba Libre* remained unfulfilled. As a result, most of Cuban history has consisted of longing for an imagined free nation. This imagined belonging is an important part of the continued identity that we found in our interviews with Cuban Americans. We will see in the following analyses that the imagined homeland is a prominent theme for both generations of Cuban immigrants. [14]

3. Results and Analysis

3.1 First generation immigrants

Among the six biographical interviews discussed in this article, four came from the first generation of immigrants from Cuba. These immigrants had quite different experiences, while their divergent views evoked distinct political eras (ECKSTEIN & BARBERIA, 2002). Victor was a young adult when he left Cuba in the early 1970s, having earned his visa by working several years in the sugar cane fields. By contrast Martin is a few years younger than Victor, and immigrated to the United States in 1988 after years as a political prisoner. These two men experienced a Cuba prior to Castro's revolution, and in revolutionary Cuba, their lives altered forever. Another interviewee, Nina, was a generation younger and grew up in Havana under Castro's rule. She did not want to leave Cuba, but eventually did so as a young adult when frustrated by the hardships. Our informant Daniel, who was just a few years younger than Nina, migrated to the United States at age seven with his parents in the Mariel boatlift. [15]

This article summarizes these different lives and interprets how our biographers conceptualize their sense of belonging in relation to their immigrant experiences from Cuba to the United States. [16]

3.1.1 Victor's story

When asked to tell his life story, Victor immediately introduced the traumatic impact of the Castro revelation. He begins his story, "Oh, well, I was very happy in my country until the revolution; you know; they make laws until I didn't like it, and I have to leave my country and leave my family." Victor's thoughts return repeatedly to the impact of Castro on his life. Speaking of his childhood, Victor says, "It's happy, it's normal, like a child, like every child. *Very, very* happy with my family, loving parents, loving brothers and sisters." Then, after a long breath, he says

> "And we have to get separate because of the system, the new system ... I was so happy. I was born in a fishing town. The ocean was very close; I like to swim, play like every boy. ... Just the system changed, and everything changed you know, in *my life*, and the life of all my family and the many families in Cuba ..." [17]

Victor explains that he was prohibited from pursuing abstract art, which was very important to him. In addition, he was a practicing Catholic, and he said he was sent to a labor camp to work in the sugar cane fields for several years because "I was religious" and also in order to get a permit to leave the country. Victor received a visa to Spain, and after a short time he traveled to New York City. While he was able to see family members who had immigrated before him to the United States, it was painful for him to leave family members behind in Cuba, as well. Victor's experience of leaving Cuba was clearly traumatic, even though he was not expelled from the country**.** As he explained, he chose to work toward emigration by toiling on a sugar cane plantation for years in order to gain the desired exit visa. Thus, he both wanted to leave and resented "having" to leave. [18]

When describing his experience as an immigrant in the United States, Victor conveys similarly conflicted feelings.

> "When I get New York, I am going to tell you the truth; I didn't like it at all. I wanted to come back to Spain because New York was very different to our culture. But I have my family, I have my girlfriend waiting for me, and then I decided to stay in this country. That time it was hard because you don't get any help at all. ... My family help me, but I like to have my own money. I started working. I work very hard. I didn't speak any English at all, but I got a job cleaning a bar. I have to work at five in the morning and take the subway and make a change in Times Square...I got lost *many* times in that Times Square. It was very hard, but after that I got another job, I get married, and everything was changing. I started loving this country I love now very much. And then after that I didn't like the cold weather. After four years there, we came to Florida on vacation. I love this weather; I love this state, and in six month ... we move over here, and I start a new life here in Florida. It's still not that easy because ... you have to work and you have to pay for everything. I *repeat,* I start

> loving this country I still love a lot. And now I'm floral designer here and it's my actual job, and I feel very good." [19]

Victor speaks of Cuba as "my country" and of the United States as "this country." However his sense of belonging and home is more complex than these verbal cues would indicate. He disliked the United States at first and found it difficult to adjust. Nevertheless, he uses the word *love* several times to convey his current feelings for "this country." It appears that Victor harbors doubts about his choice to leave Cuba. The emphasis on loving the United States and Florida may indicate an effort to convince himself he made the right choice. At the same time, it might also reflect a genuine appreciation for the positive aspects of his life in America. Therefore, we suggest Victor experiences both seemingly contradictory feelings simultaneously, thus leading to an ambivalent sense of belonging. [20]

3.1.2 Martin's story

Martin was born in 1955 and is a contemporary of Victor, but he did not leave Cuba until 1988. Martin was imprisoned for several years for his political views prior to his emigration and he told us that he was always interested in political issues. By the time he was 17: "the State's Security began watching me, and they thought that I could harm the government because I thought differently, and I had courage to stand by my principles." Knowing he was being followed and in danger, Martin attempted to escape Cuba by sneaking onto a merchant ship. This escape attempt failed when the captain of the ship turned him in. He was subsequently condemned to eight years in prison. [21]

Martin explains pressure from the Catholic Church led to the liberation of many political prisoners and he was among the fortunate ones. While he was trying to arrange his departure from the island, he was re-arrested for both possessing enemy propaganda and trying to escape and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Martin was released in 1988 due to international pressure on Cuba to release political prisoners. Speaking of his immigration to the United States, Martin says,

> "I came with the illusion to be a savior ... with that desire of continuing to fight for Cuba's freedom, for the things that one believes in. But ... at the same time, when you come by yourself, to a country it is so hard, you live with no knowing the language, without knowing the city. You don't know *anything.* You have to start from scratch; it's very hard. I've worked very *hard*. Thank God, never I've had to ask the government for aid. I've never felt inferior to Americans or anyone else. And, really, I've done well ... because I've worked hard, because I'm a serious person and believe that every day will be better. I have worked very hard. I'm a bus driver with Dade-County. I'm not doing bad, and *I'm well off!* I've never blamed this country because I see that people come here blaming this country. They criticize what is bad with this country. When I had it *bad* it was because I had no luck or because I was lazy or because of personal problems *not* because the country did not provide me with the opportunity." [22]

Martin echoes Victor's emphasis on the need to work hard and also emphasizes the success he ultimately achieved in the United States. As he continued his story, Martin spoke of his admiration for the democracy of the United States. He specifically discussed the free press and the freedom to criticize the president as being something he cherished. He also noted that Cubans will not have political conversations on the phone because they have been "programmed" to believe the State is tapping their phone lines. Martin commented,

> "This country gives you the possibility for you to grow, whatever they say ... Chaplin used to say that motherland is where you work, had freedom, and lived. Well, *I don't know*. I don't think that this is my motherland but that Cuba is my motherland. But it could be when I go back that Cuba is not going to be the same." [23]

Martin's reflections on Cuban identity indicated both pride and disappointment.

> "I believe that us Cubans, we are a little hard to deal with, but I have never felt inferior. I am seeing the people that have come not so many years ago are not the same people that came here in '59. Is not the same; is a different world. [Castro] wanted to create a new order. According to him ... everything that was refined or everything that rich people liked or everything that was liked by the bourgeoisie was something nauseating, it was something bad. That's why ... all those refined things went on a downward spiral because they began changing an order that was a bit bourgeois to the so-called proletariat order of the workers. The women were dressed as militia men *and would cut sugar cane and worked in construction* because women were the same as men. And all of that brought about a liberalization, a vulgarity, a tremendous low neighborhood vulgarity ... that's why for me Cubans are not the same. For example, my nephew came who an airhead, and he came with ideas...is telling me things, *thinking* that what he was *telling me* I was going to see him as a *hero*. He doesn't know that what he was telling me is that he was an idiot and that he was a person that was no *good that* was *worthless*. 'Cause for me, anyone who tells me that he is a *gigolo* and all those things, *I can't see those things as good ...*
>
> The first Cubans, they were really the wealthy Cuban class that had to flee the island, the cultural class and the people who opposed the regime and the militaries from the previous regime. Those people ... were brilliant people—entrepreneurs, physicians, etc. ... those people have a *tremendous* merit because they were the first that had to wash dishes over here, the people whose children later on went to college. ...That is the *old* Cuban-ness ... I don't think that Cubans who come now are going to create *anything.* It's already created. *And it's an old Cuban-ness* that inserted itself in a world of democracy, in a world of North American development, *but with the spirit and the Cuban essence ...* I think Cuba is a creature very, what I suspect is terrible. Those same Cubans that say over here, 'I go over there,' that's a lie, that's an ideal. There are thinkers that say that there is a Cuba in the mind; in reality, that doesn't exist anymore. In reality, that Cuba beautiful, that doesn't exist. *Those people have destroyed our homeland.*" [24]

3.1.3 Nina's story

While Nina was born a generation after Victor and Martin, she frames her life story in the context of the Castro revolution. Nina describes what might be called "imagined memories." These are scenes and facts that she was too young to recall herself, but to which she relates as if they came from firsthand experience.

> "The year that I was born is called año de la ofensiva revolucionaria [the year of the revolutionary offensive]. Why was it called like that? Because it is the year when the last existing private businesses in Cuba are nationalized. That means that the people who had little businesses like bodegas ... a stand at the corner, it was over, and all the people from that moment on work for the government. Then this means that between '59 and '68 there was space for certain things which still remained, from before the revolution, from what was the life before. But little by little that was over with. ... I was born in Hijas de Galicia, and in this clinic, the doctor who was supposed to take care of me who was there all the time ... this doctor who my mama my family has paid that he attends me when my mama was going to deliver me, he could not attend me, because they had sent him to work in agriculture. It was not some sort of punishment or anything like that, it was because, it was the time when they said that everybody had to do work of the common man. So then when they put a doctor into agriculture of course when the doctor arrived, he said to my mama, look I arrived, I am in the city but I cannot attend you because two days ago I was on the fields and my nails are full of dirt. A doctor cannot attend in a delivery with nails full of dirt; with all the washing of my hands I still have the dirt there." [25]

Nina's memories of her birth and of the early years of the revolution are inherited memories. This indicates her Cuban identity has been constructed, in part, from accounts of Cuba told to her by relatives and learned through historical accounts. This continues in her memories of her childhood home in Havana.

> "I lived in the center of Havana in a street called Amistad which is right next to the capital. Havana has a capitol looking like the capitol in Washington; they made it very similar. Well I lived four blocks away from that. And that was the house of the family of my father's side. The 10 brothers and sisters my grandmother had they were there in that house. But my whole family all the brothers and sisters of my grandmother except for herself and another sister came to live in the United States when the revolution began ... It was one of these houses in Havana or like in Mexico too which have all the rooms one after another, which have a central patio and all the rooms one after another. For me this was a very big house ... because the only ones who lived there were my papa, my mama, and ... it was like a ghost house you could hear many sounds ... I was raised ... in that house. I never liked the house. I liked it because it was my house, but always, when I look back it has an aura of a house where everybody was left, because all the rooms stayed the same, all the furniture stayed the same ... and it seemed like the people were still there. With time, the things were taken down, they were changed. The things of the rooms were given to other needy families or other members of the family, but in the beginning the house was like when they left, identical, the only thing was that they did not live there anymore." [26]

Although Nina expresses both being drawn to and fear of her childhood home, she recalls the city of Havana with great affection and nostalgia. As she described it, "I know Havana where I can walk with closed eyes." Nina's father taught at night, and she and her mother spent many evenings walking through the city. Nina says of that time,

> "The city had still that soul of a beautiful city. In that moment I didn't realize it, because for me it was a normal city, but there was certain things that you still could see like the places where you got in, the lobbies with marble floors. Then these things started to get destroyed because the time is horrible, and if you don't maintain it ..." [27]

Nina's story reflects both the loss of the city she loves and the loss of that city's former glory as a result of the revolution. [28]

Nina's parents divorced during her childhood, and she remained very close to her father. When he decided to leave Cuba, the family kept the decision a secret for his protection. As a result, Nina experienced the shock of sudden separation when she learned he was gone.

> "In ... 1980, my father left. My father that I loved left the country in the year 1980 with the Mariel boatlift ... My dad and my mom had divorced a year earlier. I didn't live with him, but I was very attached to him. The circumstances of the day in which my father left were horrible. My father didn't tell anybody but only ... his mom and his father that he was leaving. He didn't tell me that he was leaving the country. So imagine, I go that afternoon to see my grandmother, and then I arrived to the house and my father is there. And I asked papi, what are you doing here? Well, a day of work, how curious. And I sit with my father to talk with him. At that time I miss him more because I don't live with him, but I continue see him. So I see that papi gives me many kisses and he is rare, rare. And I thought, what is going on with him? We sat in a sofa, and I told him, papi you are giving me a kiss like if you would never see me again. In that time the country is in convulsion...with all people who want leave and others who don't. Papi has all this situation with me of kiss and kiss because...he knows that he is leaving, but I don't know. ... So Monday ... morning, my maternal grandmother starts to say your father left the country, your father left ..." [29]

Clearly, the departure of her father was painful for Nina. Her own decision to leave Cuba was also emotional, though it was anger which prompted her resolve. She told us she "didn't want to leave Cuba." At the same time, however, Nina was growing increasingly frustrated over her deteriorating quality of life. Her boyfriend predicted that economic hardship would increase with the coming of perestroika in Russia, and he encouraged Nina to take advantage of the opportunity she had to join her father in Florida. In fact, Nina was able to leave because her father had gained citizenship in the United States while she was still a minor: "I decide to leave in September of '89. The summer of '89 was very sad, very sad, very sad, because, imagine, you separate from everything. Curiously, instead of being sad, what I had inside was ...a big anger that I had to leave my country. A very aggressive thing, I took everything in a very aggressive way." Similar to Victor, Nina speaks of having to leave her country. Nina made the decision to leave, with

the encouragement of her boyfriend, who saw her growing desperation and unhappiness in Cuba. However, she still perceives herself as having been forced to leave. [30]

Nina originally thought of Miami as "horrible." However, her appreciation for the city grew when she traveled to Spain to reunite with her boyfriend. "When I am in Spain I miss Miami, I start to see Miami with other eyes." In addition, due to the large Cuban community in South Florida, Nina saw little need to speak English and acculturate. [31]

While Nina eventually became a United States citizen, this legal status has not altered her sense of Cuban identity. According to Nina, being Cuban is an unconscious phenomenon:

> "Every day, I don't question myself if I am a Cuban because that is what I am. I mean, I wake up in the morning and I drink Cuban coffee, I eat Cuban food. Everything what I do is Cuban, but it is not a conscientious thing." [32]

In spite of her new citizenship, Nina does not think of herself as American:

> "I behave always, respecting the way of living of the Americans. ... We have their laws, we do everything we have to do, but in our private life we are Cuban. I try not to, that my Cuban part doesn't die." [33]

In her interview, Nina made a distinction between *Cubans* who emigrated from Cuba and *Cuban Americans* who were born in the United States to Cuban parents. In other words, she does not understand those born in the United States to be full Cubans, in spite of their Cuban ethnicity. She reserves Cuban identity for those born on the island. [34]

3.1.4 Daniel's story

When Daniel was 7, he came to the United States in the Mariel boatlift with his parents. He remembers aspects of Cuban life under Castro, such as the nationalism expressed at his school. Daniel does not have direct memories of his migration. Most of Daniel's memories have been constructed with information received from relatives and other sources. He repeats what might be considered the standard discourse of the exile community. For example:

> "I came to this country when I was only about seven years old, so I don't have a lot of memories, very distinctive memories. I do know I didn't have a lot of abundance. I was raised in a land that once flourished in the 1950s. However, when I was born in the 1972 post-Castro era, there started to be more scarcity and less freedoms as far as freedom of speech and so forth." [35]

The most prominent feature of Daniel's memories of Cuba is his father's experience. Daniel was both proud and somewhat defensive about this aspect of his past, because his father worked as a high-level government official under Castro.

> "My father was a highly intelligent person who had a lot of merits, also an economist and also accountant. He actually ascended up through the ranks. He was appointed ... well I don't want to talk too much about that. Bottom line, he didn't have too much of a say. If you have a lot to offer as far as your intelligence, you have some expertise in particular areas in what the government or Castro appoints, you can't say no regardless of what your family thinks or feels. It would be a lot worse for you, so regardless of personal views, that's the way that works." [36]

Daniel relates when discussing his father's difficulties in Cuba that some people "were sent to beat him [his father] up and whatever else, discard him." Daniel said his father's past good conduct led people to protect him and help him to escape the island with his wife and son. He notes, "There is things I don't know still till today, because he wouldn't talk about it." As Daniel recalled the day his family left Cuba, he relived the farewells and emotions: "Everybody cried, and *hugs* I still feel today and my grandparents, I couldn't breathe." He remembers thinking he was just going on vacation and wondered why his relatives were so sad. Daniel's portrayal of Cuba includes some happy memories of playing with his grandfather in his childhood home, but Cuba seems largely a shadowy place. Both the sense of threat and possible shame darken the playful childhood images. [37]

Daniel speaks of his father with great respect and admiration. He frames their immigration experience in the context of his father sacrificing a white collar position in order to give his son "the dream of America, you know the greatest country on earth." Daniel expresses pride in his American citizenship and identifies strongly with the ideal of the American dream. Although he asserts that he is also proud of his "Cuban roots and culture." He identifies South Florida as "home" and throughout the interview embraces the diversity of the region. [38]

3.2 Second generation immigrants

Two of the participants, Lisa and Yolanda were born in the United States. They have "Cuban memories" from their parents and grandparents. These second-generation Cuban Americans told us they were acutely aware of the sense of loss felt by their parents. Although the women did not identify with a sense of loss or nostalgia themselves, they assert these forces played a strong presence in their lives. Their sense of belonging reflects attachment to their families rather than to the island of Cuba. At the same time, the women find their families' focus on Cuba oppressive; and they yearn to "migrate" to freedom in their own way. [39]

3.2.1 Lisa's story

Lisa was born in 1977. Her mother emigrated from Cuba on a Freedom Flight at age 11 with her parents and younger sister. According to her story, this was a heart-breaking experience for Lisa's grandparents, whose own neighbors threw eggs at them and called them traitors as they left. Lisa told us, "My dad came another way; I don't want to specifically say, but he came another way when he was 25." Later she referred to the fact that her father had been in prison for

opposing the Castro regime. He had escaped and stowed away on a Dutch cargo ship, hiding in a cavity of the ship where ropes were stored. [40]

Lisa constructs her Cuban identity through her family:

> "My memories or my interaction with Cuban culture has just been through them; I've never stepped on Cuba, never seen Cuba ... Whenever I say I'm Cuban, I immediately follow that saying, oh no my parents are Cuban. I was born here. I *always* do that. ... With me it's ... the hyphenated Cuban-American more ... because the Cuban side is more like I said ... it's more an identity of what my parents gave me." [41]

She gives an example how this hyphenated perspective is expressed through food. The family celebrates Thanksgiving with a turkey and yams because it is the traditional American meal. However, to reflect their Cuban heritage, they add a leg of pork. Her strongest impressions of Cuba come through her grandfather, who she refers to as "old school" and who considers Cuba a "sacred land." When she was a little girl, he gave her sugarcane stalks to suck on as a taste of Cuba, and taught her how to kill a chicken. On the other hand, she told us how her mother remembered President Kennedy's assassination, and so her family identifies with certain iconic moments of American history, as well. [42]

Lisa does not strongly identify with a Cuban ethnicity nor does she feel a strong connection to Cuban national identity. She comments on the fact that it makes no difference to her whether someone is from Puerto Rico or Cuba or Mexico. She is bemused by the tendency of older Cuban immigrants to feel a bond with her when they learn of her Cuban ancestry.

> "There's parts of me that feels Cuban or what I think is Cuban. My identity that I know is from my family, and you know just things from the media. It's entertainment; half the time I can't really tell if they're having a Cuban accent or not. To me it's just a Spanish accent ... I can never tell who's Puerto Rican or who's from Mexico ... I'm very bad at that, and when they tell me, I'm like, whatever. I've had a lot of people confuse me for Puerto Rican and I'm like, no I'm Cuban, and they're like, *oh I'm so sorry.* I'm like, I don't care, whatever. ... I even get it at work a lot of times 'cause where I work there's a lot of Spanish people but from all over. ... They're looking at me because my Spanish is very Americanized, and they ... say, where you from. And then if I say I'm Cuban, and they are Cuban, forget about it ... they start talking to me and they ask me where my parents are from and I'm like, wait a minute. Am I supposed to give you a prize because we are from the same ethnicity? All of the sudden their eyes bloom, and they feel like they have this connection with me. ... Ethnicity wise, I don't see a great connection. Sometimes in the back of my mind someone says I'm Cuban, it's kind of like oh ok, but then it dies ... I don't get that instant connection. I get it, but to me it to me it's not that important." [43]

Lisa also differentiated her own sense of ethnicity with the national identity of her father. She noted how she learned of her ancestry from Venezuela, France, and Spain. And even though her father was born to Venezuelan parents who had

immigrated to Cuba, he continues to stress his Cuban identity. Lisa contrasts this strong identification with Cuban identity, saying,

> "I'm just American. It's just the threads of the makeup of my past and my parents' past that make me who I am; it's the mixture of the French and the Spaniard and the Cuban and the Venezuelan and then all of the things that made them, the places they were and the experiences that made them what they are today, and whatever religious things get tied to it and then any cultural things." [44]

Lisa is somewhat defensive about the United States when her Cuban relatives criticize it.

> "The only thing of Cuba I have is through the stories and the rantings of my grandparents and my father. Of course the worst thing you could do at any Cuban gathering is mention the word Cuba, and there's a good three-hour argument. ... I get mad a lot of times because they always compare things from Cuba, but they are comparing things—Cuba 1950s to here—how better it was in Cuba. I always say, if you went back now you wouldn't recognize the place, and I go stop-stop-stop bumming on this country that you've come to." [45]

While Lisa identifies with the United States as her homeland, she still refers to it in this excerpt as "this county" and does not feel at home in South Florida: "I *don't* wanna live here anymore. I don't see myself, I can't see myself here." She aspires to move to Denver with her husband and likens her parents' and grandparents' decision to leave Cuba with her own desire to leave South Florida.

> "I feel like the black sheep 'cause I want to leave. I live in Broward, and they live in Dade, but I want to *move.* I want to move up north; I want to move to Denver. That's where me and my husband want to go, and to them it's like I'm destroying the family. I try to tell them, well, wait a minute you immigrated here. But then its like *ooh,* we were under *persecution.* I want to take the chance to better myself. I don't see it happening here. ... I gotta figure out what's best for me." [46]

3.2.2 Yolanda's story

Like Lisa, Yolanda was born in the United States, but with far less connections to the cultural artifacts of "Cuban-ness." She has empathy for the trauma her father experienced as a Cuban refugee, but she also feels he is in denial about his possibility of returning to the island.

> "My dad says that he had a good house for the family back in Cuba, but he and my mom and my older brother and sister had to leave everything behind. Castro's regime expropriated the house that belonged to my parents. I think my dad never recuperated from the loss, and he refuses to buy any property in the United States. He only hopes to go back home to his beloved Cuba. I do not feel the same. When Castro dies I will go to Cuba and will visit my aunts, uncles and cousins; but I don't feel as Cubans born in the island feel, like one day they will go back to claim what is theirs. My dad never says it, but I think he is waiting some day to go back and claim

> his house and the farm he lost over thirty years ago. *That is a long time* to wait for something that will never be his again *ever!* The older generation of Cubans...still act and think like refugees ... Many Cubans including my parents and the majority of their friends blame the United States for their long stay in this country. They feel they don't belong in here. Some of them do not speak English, and some others including young people refuse to learn English. For example, if you go to little Havana, you have the impression that you are in another country. People speak and act like if they were in one of the streets from Cuba ... I avoid that area as much as I can. *It is too much for me.* I like the peace and quiet ... I am stressed ... as it is, I don't need the noisy Cubans." [47]

Yolanda repeatedly refers to "Cubans" as a group to which she does not belong. She says even though she is North American, she has to listen to discussions of Cuba because her family is from Cuba. She says she regularly eats Cuban food, but sometimes gets bored and eats sushi.

> "Don't get me wrong, even though I don't feel like a Cuban I still like Cuban people. Many of my friends are Cuban. I like the food, the parties, the way they enjoy life, their work ethics, and one day I will like to visit Cuba. To anybody that asks me where I am from I always mention my Cuban ancestry; I am very proud of it ... If I have kids in the future I would like to teach them Spanish and talk to them about their Cuban heritage; I think it is important to have roots and a sense of belonging to different cultures." [48]

Yolanda simultaneously asserts while she does not feel Cuban, she is nonetheless proud of her Cuban ancestry. She may not yearn for Cuba as her father does, but she is haunted by unfulfilled dreams of her own. She feels her desires to be a singer and artist have been stifled and prohibited by her father, who she refers to several times as a very strict "Cuban father." At the time of the interview, she was living with her parents in an apartment, but expressed hopes of establishing a home of her own at some point outside of Miami-Dade County. [49]

As these interviews highlight, our informants' notions of Cuban identity and home reflect complex and divergent perspectives. These biographers from both the first and second generations convey multiple aspects of what it means to be Cuban in America. A common thread among these interviews, however, is the lived experience of ambivalent belonging. It is this theme we explore more fully below. When summing up our results concerning the sense of belonging to a Cuban identity, we found the second generation did not express a strong national or ethnic Cuban identity. Perhaps the young women who were interviewed for our study are simply too far removed in time from the revolution that took place 50 years ago to feel an emotional connection to the trauma of separation from the Cuban nation. They told us they feel American. The women also appear to be conflicted about the degree of Cuban-ness they feel or want to embrace. They embrace the notion of the American dream, and often feel their Cuban parents are preventing the fulfillment of those dreams. Their Cuban identity consists largely of symbolic ethnicity expressed in food and music. The women speak Spanish, but confess it is "Americanized." Although he was born in Cuba, Daniel,

who came to the United States at age seven, also conveys a strong sense of American identity, placing him in between the first and second generation. In spite of the differing emphasis placed on identity and what it means to be Cuban, Daniel and the second generation immigrants all express pride in their Cuban heritage and a desire for their own children to learn Spanish and to be connected to the culture of their past. Clearly, there is no single Cuban identity; rather, individuals subjectively construct and experience multiple, evolving notions of Cuban identity. We explore this notion more fully below. [50]

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Ambivalence regarding leaving

CHAITIN, LINSTROTH, and HILLER's introductory article in this issue, which provides an overview of the larger study from which our sub-sample was drawn, notes the experience of immigration is often accompanied by stress and a sense of contradiction and ambiguity. This is due to the opportunities afforded by immigration combined with estrangement from the homeland. [51]

One dominant theory of migration relies on this notion of duality in the immigration experience by using a push and pull model to explain why migrants leave one country and move to another. This theory suggests "the 'push' of diminishing opportunities and the 'pull' of new ones" function to motivate immigration (PEDRAZA-BAILEY, 1985, p.5). When one considers refugees, the factors contributing to the push to leave may be political as well as economic. MAINGOT (1992) has outlined how such structural forces have affected the push and pull of migration specifically for immigrants from the Caribbean Basin. [52]

In the stories of the Cuban immigrants analyzed for this article, we saw evidence of pushing and pulling influences that contributed to their decisions to leave Cuba. We suggest this duality contributed to ambivalence among our participants regarding the phenomenon of leaving. Those who emigrated felt forced to leave their homeland, although they were not literally expelled; this was a choice they made to better their lives. As a result, these first generation immigrants convey the conflicting feelings of loss over leaving a homeland, combined with the desire to leave for a better life. They feel resentment over being "forced" to leave, but they simultaneously feel the conflicting feeling of gratitude over having escaped the oppressive Castro regime. For the second-generation participants, leaving is associated with leaving the immediate family, which is strongly identified with Cuban tradition and the Cuban community. These participants want to escape the oppression of Cuban family expectations, while at the same time they feel the conflicting feeling of valuing close family ties. [53]

Based on our analyses, we suggest that the push and pull theory of migration can be expanded beyond consideration of political and economic factors to include psychological and emotional factors. We also suggest the duality of push and pull feelings associated with immigration, which we characterize as ambivalence, are felt long after the decision is made to leave the country. First-generation

immigrants continue to feel an emotional push and pull, simultaneous and conflicted feelings about their decision to leave, in some cases for decades following the actual migration experience. Second-generation immigrants remain affected by their parents' experience and their desire to maintain close contact in the aftermath of separation, yet they also yearn to make their own migrations away from what they perceive as a suffocating grip by their parents. [54]

4.2 Ambivalent sense of home

CHAITIN, LINSTROTH, and HILLER's article (this issue) points out why notions of home and homeland carry multiple connotations of meanings, identities, and memories; the authors also remark upon the context of immigration, and how the significance of home varies for different generations. We draw upon this recognition and explanation of dialectal and ambiguous aspects of home to consider the sense of home specifically among our Cuban-American biographers. While scholars in the field of Cuban-American studies have pointed to an "American ambivalence" toward the presence of immigrants in American communities, we argue why the immigrants themselves also feel and express ambivalence toward feeling at home in these communities (STEPICK, GRENIER, CASTRO & DUNN, 2003, p.11). [55]

Some scholars suggest many Cuban immigrants may no longer intend to return to Cuba even after Castro and this means "the United States is their home, not Cuba" (OLSEN & OLSEN, 1995, p.109). This assertion belies the stories of our first-generation informants, who expressed much more complex and conflicted sentiments regarding what and where home is for them. Whether or not first-generation Cuban immigrants actually expect to return to the island, or will eventually do so, they may consider themselves "reluctant migrants" who continue to view Cuba as home (PEREZ, 1992, p.93). In addition, for those residing in Miami, the large and dominant Cuban presence makes possible a daily existence largely conducted in Spanish among fellow Cuban immigrants. Such an environment might be considered a liminal space—not quite Cuba, not quite the United States. This liminality contributes to ambiguity about home. [56]

The perceptions of changes in post-revolutionary Cuba have also fostered a sense of ambivalence about Cuba as home among the first-generation immigrants. There is a belief the Castro revolution destroyed an ideal, beautiful tropical island homeland. While the communist ideology and economic system has transformed the "real" Cuba into a physically damaged and morally decaying country. Of course, this "real" Cuba is an imagined construct, as one of our biographers stated: it exists in the mind only. This finding is reflected by FOURON and GLICK-SCHILLER's assertion (2002, pp.168-169) that immigrants often dream of a "dear, sweet homeland," a fiction non-existent in actual memories. [57]

The first-generation immigrants in our sample also expressed the simultaneous, conflicting feelings of ambivalence in regards to the United States as a new home. Their notions of ethnic difference co-exist with an appreciation for freedom

of speech and the economic opportunity characterized as the American dream. PORTES and STEPICK (1993, p.149) assert Cuban immigrants developed a relationship to the United States through rejecting the discourse of "minority" and adopting the discourse of the "success story." CASTRO (2000, p.306) suggests their espousal of the success story "fuels Cuban accomplishments; from it flow Cuban-American pride and self-confidence and, too often, anger, arrogance, and intolerance, as well." We believe the discourse of achievement also impacted the sense of home among these immigrants. By identifying with the national mythology of the American dream, they have been able to feel somewhat at home in American culture, while simultaneously feeling as outsiders. [58]

It is furthermore important to recall here the role of such structural influences as architecture and Spanish-language street names as described in our socio-historical context of Cuban immigration (PEREZ, 1999). U.S. construction of government and commercial buildings and housing developments in Cuba in the twentieth century, and Cuban-inspired architecture and street names in greater Miami, caused Cuban immigrants to find the Miami environment simultaneously foreign and familiar. This resonance of cultural familiarity may have helped many Cuban immigrants to appreciate living in South Florida and to feel at home. While for most of them, their emotional homeland is the Cuban island. [59]

Our results showed why second-generation immigrants' sense of home is conflicted**,** but in different ways than their parents and grandparents. RUMBAUT (2002) discusses the impact of first-generation immigrants' sense of home and belonging on their children. He asks whether the sense of belonging their parents feel toward the ancestral homeland

> "are sustained *in the generation of their children*, particularly those born here who lack the memories and metaphorical birth connection of their emigrant parents. Where is home—or perhaps homes—for the *second* generation? Do they imagine themselves in multiple sites of belonging? Are they able to lead dual lives or to maintain dual frames of reference? Are they even interested?" (2002, p.46). [60]

Other researchers, such as Diane WOLF (1997, p.459), speak of "emotional transnationalism" as a term that captures this sense of attachment to a homeland for second-generation immigrants. She suggests while there may be less of an attachment to the imagined homeland, second-generation immigrants nonetheless understand "home" in a nostalgic way. HERRERA (2007) applies this line of thought specifically to second-generation Cuban immigrants, arguing how these Cuban-Americans know Cuba only through inherited memories. [61]

Based on our interviews, however, we found the second-generation Cuban immigrants in our study did not feel personally connected to Cuba as home, and saw Cuba as the homeland of their parents and grandparents, while they, the children, identify with the United States as their own homeland. It may be the inability of second-generation Cuban Americans to travel to the ancestral homeland has prevented the formation of these emotional ties and imagined nostalgia. For second-generation immigrants from other countries, especially

those who are able to move back and forth between two countries, such travel may foster a genuine transnationalism. Instead of nostalgia, the second-generation biographers indicated a constant reference to and repetition of Cuban history by first-generation Cubans was somewhat oppressive. They sought distance from the notion of Cuba as home. These participants spoke of their appreciation for their families and for what they have experienced, but at times, they also find life with their families suffocating. They seek to establish independent homes, which will require deviating from family expectations associated with Cuban tradition. [62]

4.3 Ambivalent identity

Cuban identity is a topic of extreme importance for the immigrant community in the United States. It is also a contested idea, due in part to the varying experiences of those arriving in the United States during the different waves of migration. As mentioned above, regarding the ideal of *Cuba Libre* (free Cuba) has existed in the imagination for centuries as an unrealized dream. In light of this unique history, Cuba has been referred to as "the elusive nation" (FERNANDEZ & BETANCOURT, 2000, p.3). Scholars have argued why Cuban-ness itself is associated with "incompleteness, impossibility, loss, and disenchantment" (FERNANDEZ & BETANCOURT, 2000, p.8). DUANY (2000) has pointed to why the perception of Cuban-ness is not American. CASTRO posits how the exile community "believes that it is a repository and trustee of what is most authentic in Cuban culture, which, in its view, has been virtually destroyed on the island by nearly four decades of communism" (2000, p.306). This exile community attempts to pass this Cuban culture on to the second generation, but this construction of Cuban culture and identity does not acknowledge the inevitable changes taking place within every culture. This is a point that MEDINA emphasizes in pointing to the "illusion of uniqueness or singularity" of Cuban identity, an illusion that does not take into account the diversity and contested nature of that national identity (2007, p.3). [63]

This sense of loss brings us to the issue of trauma. VOLKAN (1991, p.13) speaks of "chosen trauma" when referring to experiences of victimization and humiliation as factors in the construction of a collective identity. We contend why this conceptualization is useful in understanding various expressions of Cuban identity. The first generation of Cuban immigrants who participated in this study experienced trauma in the process of leaving the island, and specifically convey how suffering is linked to Castro's regime. This trauma remained at the forefront of their construction of their own identities; indeed it was the first thing they mentioned when they began telling the stories of their lives. While it is understandable any trauma would leave a permanent impression in someone's consciousness, these immigrants chose to identify with this political trauma. It appears to be a unifying element of Cuban exiles in South Florida for creating communal identity. The first-generation immigrants chose to maintain this trauma as the central facts of their collective Cuban identity. [64]

Chosen trauma may also carry over from first-generation to second-generation immigrants where "there is an unconscious expectation that the next generation will complete both the task of mourning and the reversal of humiliation" (VOLKAN & ITZKOWITZ, 2000, p.233). The notion of second-generation "remembering," referred to above, coincides with this idea that those who did not experience the trauma will nonetheless feel traumatized as a result of hearing their parents' stories and memories (HERRERA, 2007). The theory of long distance nationalism supports this notion, proposing "an ideology of belonging that extends across the territorial boundaries of states, as well as across generational divides" (FOURON & GLICK-SCHILLER, 2002, p.170). On the other hand, RUMBAUT (2002, p.91) suggests that the second generation does not experience this trauma "over a homeland that was never lost to them in the first place." Other scholars argue that even if second-generation immigrants seek to maintain a national identity rooted in the ancestral homeland, a lessening of attachment inevitably occurs as a result of the many little acts and decisions of everyday life in the country of residence (KASINITZ, WATERS, MOLLENKOPF & ANIL, 2002). [65]

4.4 Concluding thoughts

In the analysis and discussion above, we have focused on several aspects of ambivalence that emerged in the life stories of our Cuban biographers. We have explored differences among first- and second-generation Cuban immigrants regarding what it means to leave or escape, what it means to be Cuban, and where home is found. These findings have led us to consider areas for potential further research and exploration. [66]

Based on our interpretations of the biographical interviews with the younger generation, we see initial indications in these interviews alluding to the potential formation of a pan-Hispanic identity. While the older first-generation immigrants identify passionately with Cuba, the country of Cuba is important to the second-generation immigrants only as a place they would like to visit some day in order to meet distant relatives. The second-generation immigrants identify more strongly with the Spanish language and with a general Hispanic ethnicity. What is more this research proves how ethnicity does not necessarily need to reflect a unified identity for such groups as Cuban Americans. Generational differences as those among Cuban Americans explain how ethnic forms of belonging may contradict one another, proving why identity formation is so complex and nuanced for any group. In fact, this may be the beginning of a new construction of a new variation of ambivalent identity and may bear fruit for further research. [67]

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Authors

Robin COOPER is a Doctoral Candidate at the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Nova Southeastern University. She is also an Adjunct Professor in the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences in the Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences at Nova Southeastern University. In her dissertation, she explores constructions of ethnic and national identity for members of the national ethnic majority experiencing the transition to a "majority-minority" community. She is a co-investigator in an ongoing international study on ethnicity and sense of belonging among refugee and immigrant populations in the United States. Her research and teaching interests include conflict resolution, ethnicity, human rights, nationalism, migration, gender, social control, culture and conflict, and qualitative research.

Contact:

Robin Cooper

Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nova Southeastern University
3301 College Ave/Maltz Bldg
Fort Lauderdale-Davie, Florida 33314
United States

Tel.: ++1 954 829 9683

E-mail: robicoop@nova.edu
URL: http://www.culture-conflict.org/

Denese EDSALL is a Candidate at the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Nova Southeastern University. She is also an Adjunct Professor in the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences in the Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences at Nova Southeastern University. In her dissertation she explores the self-identity narratives of targets of workplace bullying and their coping strategies. Her research and teaching interests include conflict resolution, workplace bullying, organizational conflict, ethnicity, gender, culture and conflict, and qualitative research.

Contact:

Denese Edsall

Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nova Southeastern University
3301 College Ave/Maltz Bldg
Fort Lauderdale-Davie, Florida 33314
United States

Tel.: ++1 954-242-1015

E-mail: dened62431@bellsouth.net

Diana RIVIERA is a Doctoral Candidate at the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, Nova Southeastern University. She currently conducts Institutional Research using quantitative methods; however, looks forward to using a mixed methods approach for her dissertation study. Her dissertation interest is capturing the biographical narratives of populations living in *Colonia* Communities (border towns) along the U.S./Mexico border. She is a co-investigator in an ongoing international study on ethnicity and sense of belonging among refugee and immigrant populations in the United States. Her research interests include conflict resolution, ethnicity, culture and conflict, identity and sense of belonging, migration, social control, quantitative, and qualitative research.

Contact:

Diana Riviera

Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nova Southeastern University
3301 College Ave/Maltz Bldg
Fort Lauderdale-Davie, Florida 33314
United States

Tel.: ++1 954 673 6479

E-mail: riviera@nova.edu

Julia CHAITIN, Ph.D. is a social psychologist, with an expertise in conflict resolution and peace-building. Her research focuses on psychosocial impacts of the Holocaust and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Social Work Department at the Sapir College, and a member of The Negev Institute for Strategies of Peace and Development and "Other Voice"—peace and social justice organizations.

Contact:

Dr. Julia Chaitin

Department of Social Work
Sapir Academic College
D.N. Hof Ashkelon
Israel

Tel.: 972 54 7976090

E-mail: jchaitin@yahoo.com

J.P. LINSTROTH obtained his D.Phil. in social anthropology from the University of Oxford. Most of his research is concerned with understanding ethnic-minority groups, whether Spanish-Basques, Cuban, Haitian, or Guatemalan-Maya immigrants in the US, or urban Amerindians in Brazil. He was co-awarded an Alexander Von Humboldt Grant (2005-2007) to study immigrant identity in South Florida and has recently been awarded a Fulbright Foreign Scholar Grant (2008-2009) as a visiting professor at the Universidade Federal do Amazonas (UFAM) and for fieldwork amongst urban Amerindians in Manaus, Brazil. He has published several scholarly articles and has two forthcoming books, titled respectively: *Marching Against Gender Practice: political imaginings in the Basqueland*; and, *Violence and Peace Re-Imagined: a new interdisciplinary theory for cognitive anthropology*. Currently, he is Assistant Professor of Conflict Resolution and Anthropology at Nova Southeastern University.

Contact:

J.P. Linstroth, D.Phil. (Oxon)

Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Nova Southeastern University
3301 College Ave/Maltz Bldg
Fort Lauderdale-Davie, Florida 33314
United States

Tel.: ++1 954 262-3000, ext. 3070
Fax: ++1 954 262-3968

E-mail: linstrot@nova.edu
URL: http://shss.nova.edu/

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