


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# ‘La Nación y la Emigración’: How Post-Soviet Era Cuba Designed its Diaspora Statecraft

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## Abstract

This article assesses the inner workings of Cuban diaspora statecraft behind the ‘La Nación y la Emigración’ Conference, post-Soviet era Cuba’s first major outreach to the Cuban community abroad. In contrast to works observing how changing emigration demographics might have transformed Cuba, this study argues that the Cuban state purposefully tried to reshape the homeland–diaspora relationship through the design of its emigration strategies. Because the Cuban geopolitics of mobility had profound security, economic and ideological implications, the leadership discussed not just how to neutralise the counterrevolution abroad but how to address both the diaspora’s needs and popular sentiment at home.

**Keywords:** Cuba; diaspora engagement; emigration strategy; Cuban Revolution and Counterrevolution; Cold War; geopolitics of mobility; nationhood; Latin American migration to the United States

The number of works on the Cuban diaspora has grown thanks to the prodigious efforts of sociologists, emigration scholars and ethnic history specialists both within and outside of Cuba. Whereas the earlier studies focus on the outflow of Cubans following the 1959 Cuban Revolution and its formation of ‘ethnic enclaves’, ‘moral community’ and ‘exile politics’, the later ones examine more recent emigration and its implications for nearly all aspects of society, including foreign relations.<sup>1</sup> Conventional wisdom now suggests that post-Soviet era Cuban emigrants have families remaining in Cuba, maintain transnational contacts, and wish to increase remittances and investment in their homeland. Some assert that these

<sup>1</sup>The standard literature includes: Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); Felix Masud-Piloto, *From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants: Cuban Migration to the U.S., 1959–1995* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996); Maria Cristina Garcia, *Havana USA: Cuban Exiles and Cuban Americans in South Florida, 1959–1994* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); María de los Angeles Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors: Cuban Exile Politics in the United States* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

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‘New Cubans’ have transformed their country of origin more than ‘the rich and powerful earlier arrivals’ who advocated regime change.<sup>2</sup> However, pivotal questions remain unanswered, especially how the homeland contemplated such crucial national security and identity matters as emigration. Despite abundant information on the US government’s relationship with Cuban emigrants, almost no scholarship has seriously explored the inner dynamic of Havana’s approach to the Cuban community abroad.<sup>3</sup> What is crucially missing now is an explicit and concentrated focus on Cuban diaspora statecraft – how Cuban strategists actively discussed and defined the transformation of diaspora politics.<sup>4</sup>

This article addresses this fundamental lack by studying the First Nation and Emigration Conference in April 1994, Cuba’s pivotal official project that declared the goal of the ‘normalisation’ of the homeland–diaspora relationship. The initiative was not the ‘first’ to proclaim this ‘normalisation’ goal, but it was the first after the collapse of the Soviet Union, gathered together over 220 émigré invitees, and paved the way for the government’s subsequent diaspora engagement that ultimately led to a major emigration policy overhaul decades later. The best available sources on this monumental event are personal testimonies, memoirs and published materials by organisers and participants, which provide a rare glimpse into its proceedings and impacts.<sup>5</sup> Our understanding of Cuban diaspora statecraft nonetheless remains severely limited and primarily confined to speculation and rumour about the motive of Fidel Castro, the nation’s highest authority. Out of sight was much of the planning and deliberation by his key strategists, who displayed individual creativity, ran interagency meetings and orchestrated policy innovation. Among them was Roberto Robaina, then Cuba’s youngest foreign minister, who led the internal debate in this critical period and made important decisions within the parameters

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<sup>2</sup>Susan Eva Eckstein, *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the US and their Homeland* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 4. See also Silvia Pedraza, *Political Disaffection in Cuba’s Revolution and Exodus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Danielle Pilar Cleland, ‘Deciding on the Future: Race, Emigration and the New Economy in Cuba’, *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 52: 2 (2020), pp. 399–422; Maria De Moya and Vanessa Bravo, ‘The New Cuban Diaspora’, in Vanessa Bravo and Maria De Moya (eds.), *Latin American Diasporas in Public Diplomacy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 123–58.

<sup>3</sup>Almost all Cuban scholars, too, avoid discussing Havana’s internal debate. See, for example, Jesús Arboleya, *Cuba y los cubanoamericanos: el fenómeno migratorio cubano* (Havana: Fondo Editorial Casa de las Américas, 2013); Antonio Aja Díaz, *Al cruzar las fronteras* (Havana: Molinos Trade S.A., 2009).

<sup>4</sup>Here, the ‘diaspora’ refers to an ‘imagined’ transnational community strategically constructed through nationalist appeal. Cuban authorities rarely use this analytical concept in their internal documents, but their terms – the community abroad and ‘the emigration’ – encompass the same group of emigrants and their descendants seeking ties to their homeland instead of just being a minority inside their country of residence. For a useful discussion on the definition, see Fiona B. Adamson, ‘Constructing the Diaspora: Diaspora Identity Politics and Transnational Social Movements’, in Terrence Lyons and Peter Mandaville (eds.), *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 25–42.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Ruth Behar (ed.), *Bridges to Cuba/Puentes a Cuba* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Hedelberto López Blanch, *La emigración cubana en Estados Unidos: recorriendo mamparas* (Havana: Editorial SI-Mar S.A., 1998); Iraida H. López, *Impossible Returns: Narratives of the Cuban Diaspora* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2015); Magda Montiel Davis, *Kissing Fidel: A Memoir of Cuban-American Terrorism in the United States* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2020).

set by his superior. Hundreds of pages of notes, reports, cables, data, letters, analysis papers, memoranda of conversations and internal polls – now stored in the central archive of the Cuban foreign ministry – went through the foreign minister's hands.

This study of the First Nation and Emigration Conference analyses these primary state records to provide an overview of the Cuban emigration statecraft behind this crucial diaspora project. It focuses on policy formulation and investigates the inner strategic debate over objectives, management and impact assessment, in addition to considering supplementary findings obtained from interviews and published sources.<sup>6</sup> This research presents three interrelated arguments as to why Cuban strategists launched this initiative and how they sought to achieve their goals. First, it contends that Havana's main purpose was to propel the transformation of diaspora politics and strengthen the anti-embargo coalition of Cubans living abroad. The majority of Cuban exiles supported the US embargo on Cuba, advocated regime change, and wielded disproportionate political influence on US foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> Alarmed by their political power, Havana's national security imperative reimagined the diaspora and courted an emerging coalition of embargo opponents in the name of the 'normalisation' of the homeland–diaspora relationship. Second, this research reveals that, despite the long-standing politics of embargo – in existence since the heyday of the Cold War – post-Soviet era Cuba appraised the changing nature of the diaspora and the homeland's deepening reliance on its resources. The conference organisers were obliged to address more of the diaspora's needs than they would otherwise have done – if not indeed all of them – and the concept of 'normalisation' was subject to limited and carefully calibrated discussion with the invitees. Robaina refused to negotiate over one-party rule at home but became Havana's most insistent champion of bolder, more ambitious overtures to the Cuban community abroad.

However, Havana's conference planners had to consider something they deemed even more important: domestic politics. The top echelon of the Cuban leadership genuinely worried about how ordinary people remaining in their country would perceive the change they envisioned. Although often forgotten by the scholarship on the Cuban Revolution, foreign policy and emigration, this issue was crucial and sensitive because the homeland government had long called emigrants the nation's 'traitors', regardless of race, gender, class, or precise reasons for leaving their birthplace. This old emigration paradigm, so vital for Cuba's making of revolutionary identity, left the state with a tremendous emotional burden even decades after the peak of the confrontation; under no circumstances, its leadership pledged, could the 'normalisation' programme look like an opportunistic move rewarding those former 'betrayers of the motherland'. This study argues that these conflicting demands at home and abroad configured Cuban diaspora statecraft. Although most

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<sup>6</sup>Historians long lamented the impossibility of studying Cuban history without primary state records, but the Cuban foreign ministry has recently opened the archive to researchers. However, the author has found over the years that materials are still being moved in or out of files or reclassified. Interviews with former officials, scholars and participants, especially those living in Cuba, have helped fill in gaps in the record. Translations are mine.

<sup>7</sup>Patrick J. Haney and Walt Vanderbush, *The Cuban Embargo: The Domestic Politics of an American Foreign Policy* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005); Hideaki Kami, *Diplomacy Meets Migration: US Relations with Cuba during the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

accounts of Cuban emigration have described Havana as a political monolith, the story of its policy review was never clear-cut and straightforward. Almost no one inside the government challenged the supreme leader's authority, but Havana's emigration strategy more often emerged through the complex mixture of internal debate, negotiations and the perception of public opinion. Critics rightly point out the limits and conditionality of Havana's diaspora project. The internal discussion nonetheless suggests the government was torn between its desire to modify emigration policy and its need to pre-empt a backlash at home. Cuba's subordinate position in international politics, the lasting memory of confrontation and the tight US embargo constrained its range of options. Cuban strategists spent much time crafting, running and assessing the pivotal emigration enterprise to design the homeland–diaspora relationship.

This first historical analysis of Cuban diaspora outreach intends to rebalance the emigration scholarship that examined emigrants' voices but unduly reinforced the stereotypical portrayal of policy formulation. In contrast to the overwhelming majority of studies that have discussed bilateral issues almost exclusively from the perspective of the United States, this article seeks to redress our strikingly unbalanced understanding of the 'geopolitics of mobility' and explore how a smaller state resisted US power from a subordinate position in the neglected sphere of emigration.<sup>8</sup> The objective of this article is not to judge the decisions made by the Cuban government, the conference participants, or anyone else. Instead, it aims to go beyond the existing framework of migration studies and bring it into meaningful conversation with the diplomatic and international history of US–Latin American relations. Scholarship on Mexican diaspora policies shows that Mexico has developed innovative outreach programmes since the mid-1980s in response to the growth of the migrant population, democratisation at home, economic integration with the United States, and the evolving strategy of improving Mexico's image in the face of the US anti-immigrant environment.<sup>9</sup> Other Latin American countries have looked to Mexican policies as a guide for their own in light of greater transnational connectedness.<sup>10</sup> The Cuban case does not fit this pattern; emigration

<sup>8</sup>I borrow this term from an article that critically assesses US immigration history: Paul A. Kramer, 'The Geopolitics of Mobility: Immigration Policy and American Global Power in the Long Twentieth Century', *American Historical Review*, 123: 2 (2018), pp. 393–438. Only a few scholars examine Cuban foreign policy during the Cold War based on internal Cuban records. See, especially, Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959–1976* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

<sup>9</sup>On Mexico's diaspora policies in the context of bilateral relations, see Alexandra Délano, *Mexico and its Diaspora in the United States: Policies of Emigration since 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); *From Here and There: Diaspora Policies, Integration, and Social Rights beyond Borders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also David Fitzgerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages its Migration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009); Natasha Iskander, *Creative State: Forty Years of Migration and Development Policy in Morocco and Mexico* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup>Alexandra Délano, 'The Diffusion of Diaspora Engagement Policies: A Latin American Agenda', *Political Geography*, 41 (2014), pp. 90–100; Vanessa Bravo and Maria De Moya, 'Mexico's Public Diplomacy Efforts to Engage its Diaspora across the Border: Case Study of the Programs, Messages and Strategies Employed by the Mexican Embassy in the United States', *Rising Powers Quarterly*, 3: 3 (2018),

was not just a compelling national security issue but a controversial ideological problem because of the US embargo against Cuba, the decades-long hyper-politicisation of human mobility across the Florida Straits, and the presence of highly active Cuban American groups in opposition to the homeland government. For this reason and many others, the interpretation of Havana's diaspora statecraft requires a much deeper investigation into the internal decision-making process involving top-ranking officials.<sup>11</sup>

The following consists of six sections and concluding remarks. The first section narrates why and how the Cuban leadership began to reexamine emigration issues in the post-Soviet era and what they expected from the First Nation and Emigration Conference. The second section delves into Havana's decision-making process and considers how the original concept went through revisions at the planning stage. The third and fourth parts focus on the vital issues of whom the government would invite and how, and the fifth explains what happened at the gathering. The sixth section ponders how Havana managed the project's unexpected consequences, paying special attention to the feedback loop that constituted an indispensable component of Cuban diaspora statecraft. To underscore the rich diversity of Latin America's emigration strategies, enhance our knowledge about the complicated implications of migration for world politics, and appreciate the sizable gap between what we know from published sources and what we can learn from previously inaccessible state records, we now assess Havana's geopolitics of mobility and the challenges that it faced over decades.

### The Blueprint for the Emigration Conference

In September 1993, José Ramón Balaguer, chief of the powerful Department of Ideology of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (Cuban Communist Party, PCC), asked Foreign Minister Robaina to begin preparation for a new project: a 'national conference' on emigration. Earlier, in May, Balaguer had broached the concept with Fidel Castro, hoping its announcement would coincide with the Ibero-American Summit in Brazil, scheduled to take place in mid-July. This timing proved too tight for working out all the details, but Fidel approved the strategy; Foreign Minister Robaina's upcoming trip to New York in early October was the next best opportunity to unveil the initiative. The PCC's leading ideologist expected the envisioned emigration project would have a 'strong' political impact. The basic idea was to produce 'political results not inferior' to those of the 1978 'Dialogue', the previous major diaspora outreach. Success, however, would require 'a different design'.<sup>12</sup>

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pp. 173–93; Susan Bibler Coutin, *Nations of Emigrants: Shifting Boundaries of Citizenship in El Salvador and the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup>Recent scholarship on diaspora policies has already developed a multilevel analysis of state and non-state actors, but few have discussed the state's decision-making process at the highest level, which is simply hard or impossible to trace without a rigorous investigation of historical archival sources – at least in cases like Cuba. Alexandra Délano Alonso and Harris Mylonas, 'The Microfoundations of Diaspora Politics: Unpacking the State and Disaggregating the Diaspora', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45: 4 (2019), pp. 473–91.

<sup>12</sup>Balaguer to Robaina, 13 Sept. 1993, hereafter referred to as 'Balaguer's proposal paper', Archivo Central del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Cuba, Havana (hereafter MINREX), Fondo Cuba-EE.UU.

Cuba stood at a pivotal crossroads when Balaguer outlined this roadmap. The nation had lost its powerful ally, the Soviet Union, and the economy had suffered a tremendous blow. Fidel Castro declared a ‘Special Period’ in 1991; bicycles, horse-drawn carts and oxen replaced buses, taxis and tractors.<sup>13</sup> Emigration appeared to take on new meanings. The cash-strapped government courted family remittances from abroad, especially after July 1993, when it legalised the holding of foreign currency. This reliance on diasporic economic assets grew, even though the emerging inequality inflamed social tensions between those with relatives abroad and those without, undermining the state’s egalitarian vision. Beneficiaries of the policy tended to be families and friends of old capitalist foes rather than the socialist regime’s loyalists.<sup>14</sup>

Havana’s emigration problem was not limited to the ideological sphere; unlike many other contemporary Latin American countries, Cuba defined emigration as a crucial national security concern. The strong influence of anti-Castro exiles, or former counterrevolutionaries turned activists, lobbyists and politicians, unnerved the Cuban leadership. The most powerful group, the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), promoted the 1992 Cuban Democracy Act that further tightened the US embargo on Cuba. The CANF’s allies in the US Congress, including three Cuban American representatives, denounced Cuba’s human rights records, opposed US citizens’ trips to Cuba, and promoted Radio y Televisión Martí, US-sponsored radio and television broadcasting to the island. Convinced that the tide of history was on their side, they relentlessly called for regime change.<sup>15</sup>

There was another perplexing issue that loomed over the new operation: the legacy of the ill-fated 1978 ‘Dialogue’. In this unprecedented overture to the diaspora, or more precisely, to the self-styled ‘representatives’ of the Cuban community abroad, Fidel Castro had admitted the error of the Cuban Revolution’s one-dimensional emigration policy that condemned all emigrants as *vendepatrias* (sell-outs). He expressed a wish for the ‘normalisation’ of the relationship with Cubans living abroad – except ‘the heads of counterrevolutionary groups’, who still plotted for regime change. With Jimmy Carter’s human rights policy in mind, the government released approximately 3,600 prisoners accused of ‘crimes against the state’ and allowed them and their families to leave for the United States. It also permitted tens of thousands of émigrés to return to their homeland for family reunification, another previously inconceivable gesture. Cuba’s supreme leader promised to study further steps in response to conference participants’ requests.<sup>16</sup>

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(hereafter CU-EEUU), Serie 1. Asuntos Migratorios (hereafter AM), Box 18. See footnote 16 for the 1978 ‘Dialogue’.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Gott, *Cuba: A New History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 286–98; Ana Julia Jatar-Hausmann, *The Cuban Way: Capitalism, Communism, and Confrontation* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian, 1999).

<sup>14</sup>Al Campbell (ed.), *Cuban Economists on the Cuban Economy* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2013).

<sup>15</sup>On Cuban exile politics in general, see Garcia, *Havana USA*. On CANF and its influence on the making of US foreign policy, see Kami, *Diplomacy Meets Migration*, pp. 185–316.

<sup>16</sup>*Diálogo del gobierno cubano y personas representativas de la comunidad cubana en el exterior, 1978* (Havana: Editora Política, 1994). On what Fidel thought of Carter, see Kami, *Diplomacy Meets Migration*, pp. 95–184; Elier Ramírez Cañedo and Esteban Morales Domínguez, *De la confrontación a*

Havana's 'Dialogue' stalled despite the appearance of small but notable émigré groups that adopted Havana's normalisation cause as their own, called for the lifting of the US embargo, and urged the rest of the overseas community to overcome the long memory of enmity. This advocacy had met with a vehement backlash. Pro-dialogue activists endured constant intimidation, harassment and bomb threats in the following years, and a wave of terrorism killed two of them in 1979: Carlos Muñiz Varela and Eulalio José Negrín. The impact of the new family travel programme also went beyond anyone's control. The policy change brought tens of thousands of émigrés back to their birthplace with a massive number of US consumer products, mostly cheap but dear for Cubans complaining about shortages of everyday goods. The ensuing 'ideological disorder' among the Cuban population helped cause the Mariel boatlift, the unwanted and massively chaotic departure of around 125,000 Cubans for the United States that embarrassed the regime, traumatised the nation and rolled back Havana's emigration thinking. The government again denounced all emigrants as *gusanos* (worms). Talks of dialogue and rapprochement evaporated.<sup>17</sup> As recalled by Cuban sociologist Rafael Hernández, Cuba relabelled emigration as 'a taboo'.<sup>18</sup>

Yet this return to the anti-émigré doctrine was never permanent. Convinced that most recent emigrants had left the nation for non-political reasons, a growing number of Cuban scholars and officials claimed that the old paradigm would merely alienate them and push them into the enemy camp.<sup>19</sup> The leadership accepted this view and recognised the existence of 'legitimate interests' among emigrants maintaining transnational familial ties and sending remittances back home.<sup>20</sup> These émigrés supposedly defied the politics of regime change, and Balaguer's September 1993 proposal paper pointed to modest post-Mariel policy modifications, such as piecemeal deregulation of family visits, as proof of Havana's lasting commitment to the goal of 'normalisation'.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps so, but a trip to Cuba remained problematic for most Cubans living abroad. Cuban law obliged anyone born in Cuba, including naturalised US citizens, to carry a Cuban passport or a visa to enter their homeland, which proved expensive, slow to obtain, and dependent on case-by-case authorisation. Visitors also had to purchase hotel accommodation in advance for their time in Cuba, even when they preferred to stay with their families. In Balaguer's opinion, however, the government could resolve these problems 'only through the expansion of the [homeland–diaspora] relationship'.<sup>22</sup>

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*los intentos de 'normalización': la política de los Estados Unidos hacia Cuba*, 2nd expanded edition (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2014).

<sup>17</sup>García, *Havana USA*, pp. 51–4; Michael J. Bustamante, *Cuban Memory Wars: Retrospective Politics in Revolution and Exile* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), pp. 222–3. On interpreting Mariel as a 'mass political protest' against the socialist regime, see Lillian Guerra, *Patriots and Traitors in Revolutionary Cuba, 1961–1981* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2023).

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Rafael Hernández, sociologist, Havana, 20 March 2018.

<sup>19</sup>Interviews with Aja Díaz, sociologist, Barcelona, 24 May 2018; and Arboleya, former official in charge of emigration affairs, Havana, 29 March 2018.

<sup>20</sup>Draft announcement, n.d. (13 Sept. 1993), attached to Balaguer's proposal paper.

<sup>21</sup>By April 1994, for example, the government had increased the maximum number of emigrants' family trips to the nation to 10,000 per year, in addition to an annual 5,000 quota for humanitarian entry permits from abroad. Cited in Robaina, 'Propuestas de modificaciones a la política migratoria', n.d. (ca. 1 April 1994), MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>22</sup>Draft announcement, n.d. (13 Sept. 1993), attached to Balaguer's proposal paper.

These antecedents informed the PCC's emigration proposal aiming for 'political results not inferior' to those of the 1978 'Dialogue', as stated above. But why then did Balaguer request 'a different design', as noted above? Here, the timing was critical; Bill Clinton had been sworn in as the first post-Cold War US president only months earlier. The young Democrat pledged his commitment to the US embargo on the campaign trail but never seemed as enthusiastic about regime change as his two Republican predecessors, Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. Two groups emerged as CANF's rivals in Miami: Cambio Cubano (Cuban Change) and the Cuban Committee for Democracy (CCD). Both Cambio Cubano and CCD opposed the US embargo and advocated a 'peaceful transition to democracy' in Cuba. These groups were hardly Havana's friends, but they were certainly foes of Havana's greater enemy, CANF.<sup>23</sup>

Balaguer's principal concern was how to take advantage of these developments in US domestic politics and broaden the base of political work beyond the émigré Left. According to Havana's lexicon, 'leftists' belonged to various solidarity groups allied with Fidel and the Cuban government. These 'traditional' activists were politically reliable, yet had suffered 'attrition' and could not change the US political dynamic alone. Balaguer's prime targets were 'moderates', 'liberals', or those who criticised the Cuban government on issues like human rights but at least opposed the US embargo. Most Cambio Cubano and CCD members belonged to this category, and Havana's approach to these groups would help 'neutralise counterrevolution in Miami' and entice 'those forces inside the [Clinton] administration and other US political sectors' to advocate US policy reversal.<sup>24</sup> The PCC's Ideology Department chief was not alone with this idea of using emigration 'to advance certain [political] objectives'.<sup>25</sup> René Mujica, Robaina's aide, found this proposal 'very timely and correct'. His only concern was with the proposed title of the conference: 'La Emigración ante la Realidad Nacional' ('Emigration/Émigrés in the face of National Reality').<sup>26</sup> This framing implied too bluntly that only the government had a correct understanding of 'the national reality' and that émigré participants would just listen.

The other limits and conditionality of dialogue did not stir internal debate. Robaina adopted Balaguer's blueprint when he submitted his proposal paper for Fidel's approval. The envisioned stratagem aimed to 'assist the objective of politically isolating the Cuban American right wing', 'open the space for political activity for émigré sectors closer to our interests', and 'utilise the émigré community to aid our political interests in the dispute with the United States'.<sup>27</sup> Cuba's supreme

<sup>23</sup>Balaguer's proposal paper. On the Clinton administration's early stance on Cuban emigration, see Hideaki Kami, 'Migration Normalcy: Havana's Dialogue with Washington before the Balsero Crisis', *Diplomatic History*, 47: 1 (2023), pp. 85–111.

<sup>24</sup>Balaguer's proposal paper. Balaguer and other Cuban officials used the terms 'liberals' and 'moderates' almost interchangeably. On the émigré Left, see also Ian Lekus, 'Queer Harvests: Homosexuality, the U.S. New Left, and the Venceremos Brigades to Cuba', *Radical History Review* 89 (2004), pp. 57–91, in addition to those cited above.

<sup>25</sup>Balaguer's proposal paper.

<sup>26</sup>Mujica to Robaina, 21 Sept. 1993, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 18.

<sup>27</sup>Robaina to Pérez Roque (Fidel Castro's chief of staff), 25 Sept. 1993, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 18.



leader gave Robaina the green light. On 10 October 1993, Robaina revealed the initiative to émigré guests at the Cuban mission to the United Nations in New York. He declared that the government would host a national emigration conference in the first half of the next year. Havana would have official talks with hundreds of émigrés for the first time in a decade.<sup>28</sup>

There was a significant modification, however. The upcoming event was renamed 'La Nación y la Emigración' (officially translated as 'The Nation and Emigration'). By separating 'Emigration' (i.e. émigrés) from 'the Nation', Robaina was suggesting that the Cuban community abroad was not an intrinsic part of the Cuban nation. But Robaina's new title, 'La Nación y la Emigración', at least softened the patronising 'government-knows-best' attitude displayed in Balaguer's original title ('La Emigración ante la Realidad Nacional') and conveyed a more egalitarian image of the homeland–diaspora partnership. His foreign ministry understood that such discursive gestures would be needed to give the conference participants a greater sense of belonging and membership. This 'symbolic nation-building' made room for visions that would nurture an imagined community abroad with close ties to the homeland.<sup>29</sup>

### Robaina's Redefinition of Success

Robaina was Havana's rising star when he became the public face of the new initiative. A former leader of the PCC's youth wing, the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (Young Communists' League, UJC), this energetic but inexperienced man was one of Fidel's protégés; the Cuban leader raised eyebrows when he elevated Robaina to the highest rank of Cuba's foreign ministry. The new foreign minister worked with Balaguer and other seasoned organising committee members: José Ramón Machado Ventura, Politburo member; Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly; Abel Prieto, president of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba; Carlos Lage, secretary of the executive committee of the Council of Ministers; and Sergio Corrieri, president of the Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos (Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Peoples, ICAP). These preeminent Cuban officials debated how best to pursue the conference's major goal of neutralising counterrevolution abroad and influencing US foreign policy. Designated as a principal organiser, Robaina also led the second-tier interagency coordination team.

Internal discussion resulted in a proposal booklet Robaina presented to Fidel on 5 January 1994. Much like Balaguer, the foreign minister argued that Cuba should reactivate the 1978 'Dialogue' project of 'transforming the Cuban community in the United States into a positive factor for bilateral relations'. The Clinton administration in Washington was 'less bellicose' than its Republican predecessors, allowing Havana to 'gain political ground in favour of [its] interests'. In Miami, he found 'the emergence of a greater diversity in the emigrants' political expressions' despite 'the control exercised by extreme right-wing sectors'. But in contrast to Balaguer's

<sup>28</sup>The *Miami Herald* (hereafter *MH*), 13 Oct. 1993, p. 11A.

<sup>29</sup>On 'symbolic nation-building', see Alan Gamlen, 'Diaspora Engagement Policies: What Are They, and What Kinds of States Use Them?', COMPAS Working Paper 32, University of Oxford, 2006, pp. 6–8.

earlier memorandum, Robaina's paper made clear that the planned action did not seek a breakthrough. The foreign minister acknowledged the impossibility of reversing a long history of homeland–diaspora estrangement in just a year or two, noting that the conference should be just 'one more step, neither the first nor the last', toward Cuba's 'normal' relationship with its emigrants. This step-by-step approach would characterise Havana's incremental expansion of the 'nation'. Robaina would court the so-called 'liberals', in addition to traditional leftists. Yet this targeted group would be a minority among the invitees. The foreign minister advised that the ratio of leftists to liberals would be seven to three.<sup>30</sup>

The mission, now envisaged as a long-term process rather than a one-off stunt, would chase two sets of goals, one publicly acknowledged and the other pursued behind the scenes. The conference would evaluate the effects of US policy toward Cuba, examine ideas for 'normalisation' of the homeland–diaspora relationship, and create conditions for improvements in communication. At the same time, the government would 'strengthen the links' with leftists, liberals, or those who at least 'dissent from US policy', incentivise them to lobby the US government 'in favour of lifting the blockade and normalising [US diplomatic] relations with Cuba', and help 'neutralise the harmful activity of the Cuban American representatives', who allied with CANF. In this optimistic scenario, more emigrants would accept the existence of the political regime, Fidel's supreme leadership and the PCC's authority on internal matters. The conference was programmed accordingly. Top-ranking Cuban officials would deliver speeches on politics, the economy, culture and emigration, and discussion among all the participants would follow. The conference would approve a forward-looking declaration on the final day.<sup>31</sup>

As in other cases, however, diaspora engagement was easier said than done. Rhetorical and symbolic gestures were necessary, but they alone rarely enhanced the government's credibility among its targeted community. The homeland state had to offer something more tangible, but with resources so limited during the 'Special Period', Robaina had to calculate how to demonstrate Havana's good faith. First to seize his attention were the 'pending' eight items émigré guests had presented to Fidel at the previous 'Dialogue': the establishment of a state institution in charge of emigration; émigrés' rights to repatriation; scholarships for émigré youths; the participation of émigré children in camp activities on Cuba; exchanges between artists and professionals; émigrés' citizenship status; links of Cubans living abroad with Cuban institutions; and a special publication for the community abroad.<sup>32</sup> The foreign minister pushed for all these inside the Cuban government.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>A proposal paper for 'La Nación y la Emigración' (hereafter 'Robaina's proposal paper'), n.d. (5 Jan. 1994), pp. 1–2, attached to Robaina to Pérez Roque, 5 Jan. 1994, MINREX, CU-EUUU, AM, Box 24. Robaina also talked with Raúl Castro: Robaina to Raúl Castro, 5 Jan. 1994, in the same box.

<sup>31</sup>Robaina's proposal paper, pp. 3–5.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 6–7. The José Martí Pioneer Organisation, a Cuban youth movement, ran camp activities for primary and secondary students. Diaspora engagement often focuses on the young, and in the Cuban case the ideas of their enrollment in camps and universities came from the participants in the 1978 'Dialogue'. They worried about their sons' and daughters' relative absence of interest in their homeland, primarily due to the lack of opportunity to travel and appreciate their cultural roots.

<sup>33</sup>Curiously enough, Robaina went as far as to suggest creating a 'permanent committee', which would consist of 15 members among conference participants and communicate directly with the government as

Robaina's job grew more complex because he also had to consider the other participant in the dialogue: the Cuban public. At issue was whether the government could persuade its domestic constituencies, especially its most faithful supporters, to embrace change in its emigration approach. The foreign minister found it essential to prepare convincing information 'for the most reluctant', provide adequate guidance for 'those who exaggerate the impact and possibilities', and deny opponents any opportunity for manipulation from abroad. The conference organisers would brief key persons, such as PCC cadres, UJC leaders, National Assembly representatives and mass organisations. The national press would publish in-depth articles and commentaries on the event and emigration issues under the byline of well-informed journalists. Top-tier officials and specialists would appear on television programmes. The government would lead all these media and public relations activities for 'a national consensus' in favour of a revised emigration policy.<sup>34</sup>

So vital was this information campaign that the organising committee had already drafted an internal message for PCC militants and the UJC. The two-page directive, signed by Politburo member Machado, explained why the new project did not mean 'concessions' or 'renunciation of the [revolutionary] principles'. On the contrary, its official 'normalisation' goal would capitalise on the changing political landscape and weaken the part of the overseas community that allegedly maintained an 'anti-national' attitude and followed 'the dictates of imperialism and counterrevolution'. The message reiterated that 'the Revolution shows strength and coherence', converting yesterday's enemies into tomorrow's friends, although the success of this innovative emigration gambit required selfless cooperation at home. True revolutionaries should prioritise national interest over any personal misgiving, and they should wholeheartedly embrace 'those compañeros' who now sought ties with their homeland and adopted 'a dignified, patriotic, and revolutionary behaviour'.<sup>35</sup>

The analysis of Cuban records so far highlights some noteworthy features of Havana's decision-making process. Balaguer's proposal paper reveals that Havana's core motive for the so-called 'normalisation' of the relationship with the Cuban community abroad was to neutralise national security threats represented by CANF and other pro-US embargo forces overseas. None in the Cuban leadership questioned this rationale, but the impossibility of achieving this end overnight convinced Robaina to redefine the conference as only 'one more step' in the long process. The foreign minister realised that even this prudently designed stratagem needed carefully calibrated steps, including emigration relaxation measures for the diaspora *and* a well-organised public relations effort for Cubans at home. While attending to the diaspora's needs, the organisers urged PCC and

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an official 'interlocutor'. This entity would include '*some well-known personalities who are not identified with leftist positions*' to enhance its 'credibility' outside the country, especially in the United States. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6; original emphasis. This idea met with internal opposition, probably due to the fear of legitimating an alternative political body abroad. The organising committee postponed a decision regarding this entity, spent more time evaluating it, and eventually shelved it. Its papers months later made no mention of it.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>PCC Comité Central, 'A la militancia del partido y la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas', n.d. (ca. 5 Jan. 1994), MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 24.

UJC loyalists to modify their old one-dimensional view that denigrated all emigrants as anti-Cubans.

The conference would lose credibility if the targeted guests failed to attend, but it would alienate the regime's followers if any policy adjustment proved too radical. This balancing need would make Havana's planning more vulnerable than otherwise to diverse influence and opinions beyond the inner circles of strategists.

### Who Was to be Invited?

After defining the basic approach, the Cuban leadership began to appraise specific matters. The question of whom the government would invite was obviously important; it became the focal point of media attention in mid-February 1994 when Robaina formally convened the conference and said the organisers would turn down anyone affiliated with pro-embargo groups like CANF. The comment prompted many outsiders to suspect Havana's motives. Miami news media reported that the Cuban authorities aimed to isolate 'hard-line anti-Castro groups'.<sup>36</sup> A sizable rally occurred in Washington, DC; some of the protesters reached the Cuban Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy, throwing stones at anyone entering the building. An anti-Castro militant group named Alpha 66 warned that it would attack visitors to Cuba.<sup>37</sup>

Havana anticipated these reactions. Its targets were those who met the minimum criteria of opposing the embargo, such as Roberto Solís, founder of the Cuban American Professionals and Entrepreneurs (CAPE). A Miami-based group looking for post-embargo business opportunities, CAPE collaborated with ICAP to host a business seminar in the city of Havana a week after Robaina's announcement. The foreign minister hoped such 'collateral activities' would stimulate émigré interest in the conference.<sup>38</sup>

The problem was that even these like-minded embargo opponents proved rebellious when it came to emigration policy. CAPE members, never faceless and submissive pawns, condemned Havana's emigration regulations no less vehemently than the US embargo. Like Mexican Americans visiting Mexico, they said, Cuban emigrants deserved the right to travel, work, study, rent an apartment or retire in their country of origin. Because of multiple rules and bureaucratic red tape, however, a Cuban passport holder was forced to wait over a month just to receive an entry permit, whereas a non-Cuban tourist received the same document within 48 hours. Solís perceived this 'discrimination' as collective punishment. 'This is my country', he claimed, 'and I did not harm or kill anyone when I left'. A colleague called the visa requirement 'absurd', stressing that he was Cuban, 'neither right-wing nor political'.<sup>39</sup>

Government officials highlighted security concerns only to receive more nationalist and nonpartisan appeals. These reports reached Robaina and incentivised him to press for measures to relax restrictions on émigrés. Failure to secure the participants' minimum satisfaction would embarrass his government and himself. Havana

<sup>36</sup>*MH*, 15 Feb. 1994, p. 1A; *El Nuevo Herald*, 15 Feb. 1994, pp. 1A, 4A.

<sup>37</sup>*The New York Times*, 6 Nov. 1993, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup>Robaina to Machado *et al.*, 5 Jan. 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 24.

<sup>39</sup>Corrieri to Robaina, 21 Feb. 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 24.

could not impose its will on Cubans living abroad; the planners had to emphasise voluntary participation rather than coercion.

Far less pliant than CAPE members were the so-called 'moderates' or those with overt political agendas. *Cambio Cubano*, led by former guerrilla fighter Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, urged the Cuban government to promote national reconciliation, human rights and electoral democracy. 'Our doctrine is love and respect for our counterparts', Gutiérrez Menoyo proclaimed in the organisation's newsletter. 'We were men of war, but [we now] do believe in peace.'<sup>40</sup> The *Comité Cubano para la Democracia* (Cuban Committee for Democracy, CCD), chaired by former Bay of Pigs veteran Alfredo Durán, echoed this message and promoted itself as a political action committee to sponsor 'moderate forces' in the United States. Whereas *Cambio Cubano* recruited grassroots supporters in the community, CCD focused on fundraising, contested CANF's influence in Washington, and opposed the tightening of the US embargo under the Cuban Democracy Act, which they claimed harmed the Cuban people, if not the Cuban state.<sup>41</sup>

These 'moderates' posed a distinct challenge to Havana's diaspora outreach. Although *Cambio Cubano* and CCD criticised the US embargo on nationalist grounds, they also demanded that the Cuban state remodel its political system. The foreign ministry screened the potential participants with utmost caution. Even after the ministry of the interior had completed an intensive background check, Robaina sought Fidel's personal approval of names like Bernardo Benes, Robert Carballo Díaz, Rafael Hugué, Max Lesnik and Dunney Pérez Álamo. The foreign minister noted their participation might be 'politically more sensitive' because of their ties with 'moderate' groups.<sup>42</sup>

Fidel sanctioned the move. He was willing to set aside seemingly minor political differences to confront greater enemies like CANF. There emerged a tacit understanding between the organisers and the invitees. Although Gutiérrez Menoyo and Durán declared their non-participation to protest against the conference's deliberate lack of attention on Cuban political affairs, their colleagues received invitations and set off for their homeland. Gutiérrez Menoyo sent his daughter, Patricia, on his behalf, and the Cuban leader admitted her as an 'observer'.<sup>43</sup>

Invitation letters went to 310 Cuban émigrés in 46 countries, including 123 women. Of those, 269 responded, and 220 would arrive from 27 nations, consisting of 48 academics, 40 businesspeople, 26 workers, 14 journalists, and more. The largest number, 150 participants, would come from the United States despite their anticipation of threats, repudiation and harassment by angry anti-Castro militants and hardliners.<sup>44</sup>

### How Should the Homeland Receive the Invitees?

The preparation for the First Nation and Emigration Conference picked up steam in the final month. In late March, the organising committee considered the draft list of

<sup>40</sup>Gutiérrez Menoyo's statement, 19 Jan. 1993, cited in *Cuba y tú*, 1: 1 (1993), pp. 2–3.

<sup>41</sup>CCD brochure (ca. June 1993), Bernardo Benes Collection, University of Miami Cuban Heritage Collection, Miami, Florida, Box 61, Folder 'Cuba'.

<sup>42</sup>Robaina to Pérez Roque, 1 March 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23.

<sup>43</sup>Pérez Roque to Robaina, 7 March 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23; *MH*, 26 April 1994, p. 3B.

<sup>44</sup>'La Lista de Invitaciones', 20 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

representatives from the 'Nation'. Up to this point, the second-tier interagency coordination team had followed the precedent of the 1978 'Dialogue' and expected that Fidel would again preside over the event, accompanied by his brother Raúl and numerous others from 'a core group of party and state directives'.<sup>45</sup> The VIP list, however, provoked objection from Alarcón, a member of the organising committee. He called the draft 'excessive' in terms of the number and the rank of the hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> Alarcón won the argument. Fidel remained out of the public eye until Robaina was fully confident about the project's success. The updated line-up no longer included Fidel or Raúl.<sup>47</sup>

A more tangible issue was the measures the government would deliver as the fruit of 'dialogue'. After spending months cautiously studying the benefits and costs of all the issues 'pending' since 1978, the organisers concluded it could deliver most of them as goodwill gestures toward overseas Cubans. Promoting scholarships, camp activities for children and cultural exchanges would help build the reimagined transnational Cuban community. An émigré magazine would disseminate information, advertise investment opportunities and send specific messages to expatriates. A new office under the foreign ministry would coordinate all émigré matters.<sup>48</sup> Major exceptions were those concerning émigrés' citizenship and legal rights, which the organising committee found 'the most difficult' to address without thoroughly revising the whole legal system. The Cuban leadership postponed the final decision.<sup>49</sup> Havana allowed Cuban emigrants to apply for permanent residency only after the 2013 emigration policy overhaul.

Despite these limitations, the architects of Cuban diaspora statecraft believed they were taking a bold step. Sixteen years after the 1978 'Dialogue', the government would finally address specific émigré requests, with Fidel blessing its recommendations.<sup>50</sup> ('In general', he responded briefly, 'I agree with the proposal.') The Comandante's only concern was the project's financial cost. For example, he was unsure if the government should provide émigré students with scholarships, even though he conceded that this was 'not impossible'. He suggested that the programme 'start prudently'. Fidel's remark about a special publication for émigrés was in the same vein: 'Printing the publication in the United States is more expensive. Other printing options may be considered.'<sup>51</sup>

Fidel's wary yet instant approval emboldened Robaina to examine other possible goodwill gestures. In another memorandum to Fidel in early April, Robaina recommended the government issue a *permiso de residencia en el exterior* (foreign residence permit, PRE) for those Cubans with a 'respectful' attitude to the nation, meaning those who did not openly object to the island's political system. If issued, PRE holders could visit their homeland, stay in Cuba for up to a year, and return to their country of residence without an exit permit. Only emigrants married to

<sup>45</sup> Allende to Machado *et al.*, 24 March 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23.

<sup>46</sup> Alarcón to Allende, 29 March 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23.

<sup>47</sup> Robaina to Pérez Roque, 31 March 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23.

<sup>48</sup> Robaina to Pérez Roque, 30 March 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> 'Apuntes de la Reunión del Grupo de Trabajo Preparatorio', 29 March 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Lorenzo Gómez to Bolaños, 2 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23.

non-US foreigners had enjoyed such privilege. The idea must have originated from Robaina's receipt of complaints by pro-engagement groups like CAPE, although this proposal still exempted those living in the United States.<sup>52</sup>

Robaina's plan of action included more. The foreign minister wanted to abolish numerical restrictions on émigrés returning to the homeland strictly for humanitarian reasons, lower the minimum age requirement for travel abroad from 20 to 18, and extend the maximum overseas stay from six to 11 months for Cuban holders of a temporary exit permit. He added that the government could streamline the administrative process for Cubans travelling abroad by establishing a uniform system for issuing no-objection letters. Regarding émigrés' application for a permanent return, an issue on which the organising committee had already decided to take no action, he insisted that the government grant permission to those who presented a humanitarian case. In addition to all these, Robaina advised the abolition of the five-year ban on temporary return to Cuba by legal emigrants. His rationale was that emigrants who had spent five years abroad must have taken root in their host country, and were therefore less likely to raise contentious issues surrounding their citizenship and legal rights in Cuba.<sup>53</sup>

Fidel again endorsed this list of reformist ideas, albeit more vaguely this time. Havana would soon abolish the five-year ban but took little action on most other measures even months after the conference. Although this latest group of 'pending' actions would find ways into the subsequent emigration discussion, Fidel preferred slowing down the pace of engagement in the early 1990s. Robaina's repeated urgings had little effect.<sup>54</sup>

Robaina was busy setting the agenda while leading the second-tier coordination team and handling almost all other matters. Even the attendees' travel logistics demanded his intervention; he specifically ordered the Hotel Comodoro instead of the Hotel Nacional to host the guests, calling the latter 'privileged' and requesting the interagency group to pursue 'the maximum degree of austerity and sobriety'. The foreign minister demanded that the government sponsor anything but a 'warm reception' because that 'can provoke justified rejection among the people'. Several planned parties were cancelled, leaving only a cocktail party at the end of the event. Robaina vetoed a proposed Cuban film week. 'For each decision', he repeated, 'consider the social impact on our people'.<sup>55</sup>

Investing a large amount of money in a single emigration conference – or any other diaspora project – would no doubt strain the budget and invite criticism at home. Public support was difficult to obtain, especially when the nation was under economic duress and reports of malnutrition were circulating widely. By reaching out beyond the small circle of émigré leftists, the administrative issue of how to treat the participants would also require an additional dose of prudence to ensure positive reception by the host society. Even though the gathering excluded CANF and other pro-embargo groups, it still invited the so-called 'moderates', who

<sup>52</sup>'Regulaciones migratorias que pudieran flexibilizarse actualmente', n.d. (ca. 8 April 1994), MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>Cited in Robaina to Fidel Castro, 30 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>55</sup>'Reunión Comisión Preparatoria', 30 March 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 23; 'Apuntes de la Reunión del Grupo de Trabajo Preparatorio', 29 March 1994.

opposed the political system at home. Deputy Foreign Minister Jorge Bolaños noted at an early April press conference that not all guests would be ‘friends’ to the state, although they would be ‘respectful of the nation’.<sup>56</sup>

Havana’s domestic imperative not only structured operational details but also drove the information campaign that played out in the public sphere. The PCC’s newspaper, *Granma*, published a full-page commentary in early April, rallying the reading public to get behind the upcoming event. The column underscored the participants’ ‘legitimate’ interest in the *patria* (nation) and even romanticised the collaborative project by evoking the memory of patriotic tobacco workers in nineteenth-century Tampa, legendary heroes of the independence movement.<sup>57</sup> As if this metaphorical transformation of émigrés were not enough, another *Granma* report days later accentuated the divide between a minority of vengeful right-wing ‘extremists’ and ‘a growing number’ of Cuban overseas community members. In its view, the former were outspoken in the so-called ‘anti-Castro industry’ that tried to intimidate ‘the silent majority’ of emigrants, who genuinely aspired to reunite Cubans at home and abroad.<sup>58</sup>

Havana media cast public support for dialogue as a demonstration of the nation’s goodwill rather than a concession to the pressure from abroad or a ‘renunciation of the [revolutionary] principle’.<sup>59</sup> All these rhetorical manoeuvres mirrored the leadership’s desire to pre-empt rightful rejection among loyalists at home, who would never have thought of receiving emigrants as fellow patriots after decades of mutual estrangement except for the brief period of pre-Mariel ‘Dialogue’. This priority influenced the government’s six-month-long meticulous preparation for the Nation and Emigration Conference that began on 22 April 1994.

### The Conference Goes as Planned

Robaina’s first job at the conference was to greet the participants and lower their expectations. In an orientation seminar on the eve of the formal inauguration, the foreign minister stressed that the purpose was not to make decisions but ‘to exchange opinions’. After calling the event no more than another step toward ‘normalisation’ of the nation–diaspora relationship, he reminded the participants that the government alone would represent the Cuban nation, with or without their cooperation. ‘We must ensure all important decisions are always analysed by the government and approved by competent authorities.’<sup>60</sup> Robaina was ‘clear on that’, recalled historian Felix Masud-Piloto, a participant. The caveat surprised some of his fellow participants, who had expected more.<sup>61</sup>

This pre-emption by Robaina set the overall tone for the conference that commenced the next morning. In his opening statement, the foreign minister welcomed

<sup>56</sup>MINREX press release memo, 6 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 24.

<sup>57</sup>*Granma*, 13 April 1994, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup>*Granma*, 16 April 1994, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup>Quoted from PCC Comité Central, ‘A la militancia del partido y la Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas’, n.d. (ca. 5 Jan. 1994).

<sup>60</sup>‘Para intervención día 21 con compañeros que irán a la conferencia’, n.d. (ca. 21 April 1994), MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 24.

<sup>61</sup>Interview with Felix Masud-Piloto, historian and participant, Barcelona, 24 May 2018.



the attendees on behalf of the government. At 10 a.m., Alarcón sketched out the Cuban political system of 'Poder Popular' and explained why he believed democracy was possible only within a socialist framework. At 3 p.m., Prieto argued in his speech on Cuban culture that the Revolution was the national endeavour that had saved Cuban nationhood from the nefarious influence of neo-colonial US tutelage after 1898. The next morning, Robaina's key speech on emigration blamed Washington's Cuba policy for 'the abnormality' in Havana's relationship with the Cuban community abroad.<sup>62</sup>

More than 40 émigré guests stood up and volunteered to offer their views. Some responded favourably to the speeches and elaborated on their ideas on topics of their choice. Others appealed to the government for peace, dialogue and further reforms, especially on the political and economic fronts. Still others questioned the cultural and political boundaries the government had drawn for dialogue and the concept of 'normalisation' it projected at the conference. At least one individual demanded that the government not exclude anyone from its reformulation of Cuban nationhood. Yet, according to the foreign ministry's notetaker, most participants reached a minimum consensus: their meeting was the new beginning of the nation's relationship with the Cuban community abroad. They all seemed willing to pursue the ending of the US embargo as a strategic priority.<sup>63</sup>

The conference's general direction satisfied Robaina, who unveiled Havana's five new measures. The government would publish a periodical for the community abroad and provide a limited number of scholarships for émigré students at Cuban universities. The Cuban authorities would no longer impose the five-year ban on temporary return for those who had left the island legally. This de-penalisation signalled the partial yet long-awaited official recognition of the non-political nature of emigration. Another meaningful gesture was to stop requiring émigré visitors to spend money in government-owned hotels. This administrative change would not only save them travel expense but would encourage immigration officers to treat emigrants more as fellow nationals than as foreign tourists. In addition, the foreign ministry would create an office in charge of émigré affairs. The establishment of this entity signalled the government's permanent commitment to diaspora outreach, one of the major requests émigré guests had made at the 1978 'Dialogue'. The participants welcomed these measures with standing ovations. Their enthusiastic reaction signalled that Robaina's advocacy for emigration policy reform was paying off.

The rest of the conference proceeded smoothly. On the final day, after Lage's speech on the economy, Balaguer made a closing remark reiterating the politics that constrained Havana's new concept of imagined Cuban nationhood; the PCC's chief ideologist declared that embargo supporters would 'never have any place in our efforts' because they were 'false patriots'.<sup>64</sup> Robaina concluded that the conference had been successful. Most participants, including 'moderates', seemingly agreed on the conditionality of the partnership: the state extended less

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<sup>62</sup>Robaina to Fidel Castro, 20 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>63</sup>Acta de la sesión de la mañana del 23 de abril de la conferencia la Nación y la Emigración', n.d. (ca. 23 April 1994), MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>64</sup>Balaguer's speech, 24 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

restricted rights to emigrants while emigrants opposed the embargo as a moral obligation.<sup>65</sup> Then came a surprise for the participants; the moderator announced at the end of the conference that the Cuban leader would host the émigré guests at a cocktail party at the Palace of the Revolution. In Miami, anti-Castro radio stations had spread the unverified rumour that he was dead or seriously ill. The speculation was so widespread that the global news media repeatedly asked the government for comment.<sup>66</sup> Robaina must have thought that Fidel's appearance would be another opportunity to discredit their foes as well as a convincing demonstration of Havana's commitment to a new deal – without foreseeing what would happen next.

### The Feedback Loop

At 10.30 p.m., the cocktail party began. All but four of the émigré participants attended, and dozens lined up for their once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to talk with Fidel. Whereas the rest of the crowd kept their distance from the Cuban leader, some grew emotional and forgot the camera crew's presence. Among them was Magda Montiel, a 41-year-old immigration lawyer and treasurer for CCD who had once unsuccessfully run for a congressional seat in Miami; she kissed him on the cheek. 'Fidel', she said, 'I want to tell you something. Thank you for what you have done for my people. You have been a great teacher to me.'<sup>67</sup>

The video that captured the kissing scene, released to the global news media by the Cuban authorities, added fuel to the simmering fury among anti-communist exiles who called Castro the worst dictator in world history. How could Montiel kiss the man they had despised for decades? Why did she call him a teacher? Outraged people found plausible answers by casting Montiel and all other participants as Castro's puppets. When Montiel flew back to Miami, she, her office and her family were subjected to bomb scares and harassment. Many other conference participants received death threats, lost their jobs and faced insults and repudiation. The collective condemnation was almost unstoppable as the hosts of Miami Spanish-language radio stations criticised the participants rather than the mobs. Five months later, the office of Lesnik's magazine *Réplica* was bombed. Human Rights Watch, an NGO, denounced the lack of freedom of speech in the Miami Cuban community.<sup>68</sup>

The so-called Montiel affair dismayed conference participants and shook their faith in dialogue. Miren Uriarte, an émigré sociologist from Boston, complained to Robaina that Cuban officials had abused the participants' trust by releasing the video to the international press without their consent. Their blatant disregard of the risk taken by émigré attendees, despite the loss of life that had resulted from the violent reactions to the previous 'Dialogue', caused her 'deep sadness

<sup>65</sup>Patricia Gutiérrez praised Havana's steps as a 'nice decision', although she called the conference 'just the beginning of a future walk together'. Quoted in *MH*, 25 April 1994, p. 1A.

<sup>66</sup>Media analysis report by the Centro de Prensa Internacional, 21 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>67</sup>Montiel, *Kissing Fidel*, pp. 5–20; *MH*, 1 May 1994, p. 28A. The host had told the participants that the event would be videotaped for historical purposes.

<sup>68</sup>Human Rights Watch, *Dangerous Dialogue Revisited: Threats to Freedom of Expression Continue in Miami's Cuban Exile Community* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994).

and pain'.<sup>69</sup> María de los Angeles Torres, an émigré scholar who had spent years working with Cuban officials on emigration, had had enough. She concluded that the government had never been serious about dialogue.<sup>70</sup> A conspiracy theory about the videotape emerged. Were Cuban television personnel trying to make a quick buck? Was it political manipulation by Fidel? Or was it an attempt to sabotage the event by anonymous 'hardliners' inside the Cuban government?<sup>71</sup> Interviewed by a Mexican newspaper reporter, CCD president Durán wondered if the video release was 'an extraordinary blunder' or 'a deliberate act by the Party's conservative wing'.<sup>72</sup>

The incident also upset Havana's key strategists, although many were unaware of this. 'It is outrageous', Robaina wrote in a letter to Montiel, 'to see how they accuse you, how furthermore they are so cowardly as to act like barbarians ... towards a woman who has committed no other crime than to act with dignity and to be honest with herself'.<sup>73</sup> The foreign minister was anxious. A few days later, when he urged Fidel to promulgate additional steps to relax regulations concerning emigration, Robaina went as far as to suggest that he ask Montiel to make the announcement of these new measures and let her take credit for them. 'This would give great credibility to the participants', he noted, 'and would demonstrate ... that the reactionary forces and Cuban annexationists were the ones who had lost this battle'.<sup>74</sup> Fidel was sober and unpersuaded, calling this move 'still premature'. His direction was: 'Resist. We will see [how things will develop]. Meanwhile, keep supporting her'.<sup>75</sup>

In the end, Havana's diaspora outreach survived the backlash thanks in part to the government's damage control and its prompt implementation of the promised measures. The Montiel affair bewildered most participants, but many accepted the explanation that the videotape release was an innocent mistake, not a deliberate provocation.<sup>76</sup> Montiel was not an exception. In early August, Fidel received the lawyer discreetly in his office and personally 'confirmed' this point. This unusual gesture apparently impressed Montiel, who kept in touch with Cuban officials.<sup>77</sup> The Cuban foreign ministry established the Dirección de Asuntos de Cubanos Residentes en el Exterior (Directorate for the Affairs of Cuban Residents Abroad, DACRE); even those participants sceptical of the value of other measures welcomed this step.<sup>78</sup> DACRE's first director was José Cabañas, who would become Cuba's ambassador to the United States after Barack Obama's policy reversal and the

<sup>69</sup>Uriarte to Robaina, 28 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>70</sup>Torres, *In the Land of Mirrors*, pp. 168–71.

<sup>71</sup>*MH*, 1 May 1994, p. 28A. The *Miami Herald* reported that the video had been sold for US\$700. *MH*, 27 April 1994, p. 1A.

<sup>72</sup>Lorenzo Gómez to Allende, 6 May 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 19.

<sup>73</sup>Robaina to Montiel, 28 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>74</sup>Robaina to Fidel Castro, 30 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>75</sup>Pérez Roque to Robaina, 3 May 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 24.

<sup>76</sup>*MH*, 5 July 1994, p. 1B.

<sup>77</sup>Remírez to Pérez Roque, 10 Aug. 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, Serie 6. Bilaterales, Box 1994. For Montiel's recollection of this meeting, see Montiel, *Kissing Fidel*, pp. 247–70. After listening to her poignant stories of mob attacks against her and her family, Fidel apologised for the error of not blocking the release of the video: 'I am sorry', he said. 'I didn't think about the consequences for all those of you living in Miami.' Fidel approved Montiel's exit visa requests for her Cuban clients as an additional special favour.

<sup>78</sup>Salazar to Balaguer, 18 May 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 19.

reestablishment of diplomatic relations in 2015. Cabañas assured the foreign minister that he would ‘normalise and expand’ the relationship with the émigré community that opposed the *bloqueo* (‘blockade’).<sup>79</sup> At home, DACRE worked with other state organs and mass institutions to arrange follow-up meetings with conference participants. Abroad, it synchronised outreach programmes, revised policy guidelines for diplomats, and launched a quarterly for émigrés, the *Correo de Cuba*. Printed in Toronto, Canada (outside of the United States, as Fidel directed), this magazine provided its subscribers with information – and a greater sense of belonging – for an annual fee of US\$12.<sup>80</sup>

Havana’s impact assessment nonetheless involved more than measuring its reception in Miami. The idea of dialogue was no less contentious at home than amongst the diaspora, despite the stereotypical image of Cuba as a communist monolith with no dissenting voices. Robaina had made this point to the participants during the conference; the government had to ‘explain the whole issue to the nation itself’.<sup>81</sup> He contended that the new diaspora outreach would collapse if it failed to earn public support.

A reference to the need for public support was more than an excuse for the lack of bolder measures; in fact, the Cuban leaders scrutinised internal polling results, especially those conducted by the PCC’s Centro de Estudios Sociopolíticos y de Opinión (Centre for Socio-political and Public Opinion Study, CESPO). The initial CESPO reports were worrisome. In a sample opinion survey in the city of Havana’s 15 municipalities just a day after the conference, respondents demonstrated ‘contradictory viewpoints and feelings’ regarding the new emigration policy. Some spoke of economic benefits. A resident in Cerro expressed the hope that the meeting would ‘have good results for this country’ and ‘somewhat alleviate this miserable life that we are living’. Others were resentful. ‘I disagree with the Nation and Emigration Conference’, an informant in the same municipality fumed, ‘because I think we are losing sight of our [revolutionary] principles’.<sup>82</sup>

Many others harboured reservations even if they did not explicitly oppose dialogue. ‘I will not bow down to anyone coming [from the Cuban community abroad]’, said a respondent in La Lisa; ‘I will stick to my policy of principles and [of] respect towards the state’s [new emigration] policy.’ The memory of confrontation and mistrust proved difficult to erase. An interviewee in La Plaza de la Revolución, who found the reported guests’ remarks at the conference ‘sincere’, was quick to voice his suspicion that there might ‘always [be] a CIA agent [amongst them]’. Those who volunteered to summarise their neighbourhood’s opinions displayed their prejudice. ‘Many disagree with the conversations with the Cuban emigrants, and others say that it is like welcoming the enemy at home’, a casual commentator in Havana Vieja shrugged. ‘Besides, they [émigré participants] are all just *gusanos* [worms].’<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup>Cabañas to Robaina, 27 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>80</sup>Subscribers in Latin America, Europe and Australia paid US\$17 to cover higher postal charges. It is currently published weekly and available online.

<sup>81</sup>Robaina’s speech, 22 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25, p. 17.

<sup>82</sup>CESPO report ‘Repercusión en la ciudad de la conferencia “La Nación y la Emigración”’, 25 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*

CESPO analysts sensed the imminent danger. The government had filtered the participants and excluded embargo apologists. Robaina and the organising committee had crafted the official directive for PCC and UJC loyalists, which Cuban media had dutifully followed by depicting the participants as patriotic nationals, not *gusanos*.<sup>84</sup> But even a day after the conference, only a few of those polled had appeared to grasp or accept the repeated message that the new emigration policy was morally correct and mutually beneficial for the homeland and the diaspora. The gap between the official script and the persistent antipathy toward emigrants surprised the pollsters, who concluded that a 'misunderstanding' about the whole undertaking circulated on the streets. CESPO addressed the urgent necessity of 'improving the preparation of the PCC, UJC and mass organisation cadres, particularly their grassroots leaders'. They should be deployed and work harder to 'explain, assist, and defend, with solid arguments, the policy regarding Cuban emigration'.<sup>85</sup>

This advocacy for a renewed informational campaign reached the conference organisers. Robaina read the report immediately and attentively; he even ringed its main recommendation with his pen.<sup>86</sup> Cuban periodicals, radio stations and television channels switched gear. They wasted no time rallying public support for the government's policy towards émigrés. An article published in Cuba's major fortnightly magazine *Bohemia* urged readers to differentiate emigrants from 'anti-national' exiles. After implicitly criticising the Cuban public's 'defensive mentality' that resulted from the past revolutionary-counterrevolutionary strife, the author implored patriotic Cubans to embrace the conference's 'noble' purpose in the name of 'humanity', change their anti-emigration worldview, and recognise the 'rights of emigrants, not exiles, to visit their country of origin, kiss it, and feel part of it'.<sup>87</sup> The UJC newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* reinforced this message with an opinion piece emphasising the 'personal risks' the émigré participants were taking in the midst of terrorist threats. Their 'courageous' acts contrasted with 'the cowardice' of their 'enemies'.<sup>88</sup>

Even the dispute over the Montiel kiss acquired a new connotation. Cuban state-run media spotlighted the lawyer but differed from Miami's news stations in siding with those under threat. Radio Rebelde produced a special programme on Montiel, who gave a vivid account of insults, bomb threats and warnings by 'the extreme right wing'. With her life increasingly intolerable, she called herself 'a prisoner' whose only crime was to express her opinion, as Robaina had claimed in his letter to her. Montiel readily played the role of tragic heroine. In her message to the Cuban audience, she pledged that she would hold to 'her position' no matter how terrible the situation became. The theatrical effect of this reporting was striking. Montiel became a living example of the participants' courage, portrayed in stark opposition to the cowardice, prejudice and the old mentality with which

<sup>84</sup>In addition to the sources cited above, see *Granma*, 23 April 1994, pp. 1, 8; *Juventud Rebelde*, 24 April 1994, p. 4; *Granma*, 26 April 1994, p. 3; *Bohemia*, 29 April 1994, pp. 30–1.

<sup>85</sup>CESPO report, 25 April 1994.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup>*Bohemia*, 13 May 1994, pp. 38–9.

<sup>88</sup>*Juventud Rebelde*, 1 May 1994, p. 4.

the government characterised the ‘barbarians’.<sup>89</sup> The backlash in Miami inadvertently assisted Havana’s pro-engagement promotion at home.<sup>90</sup>

The intensified effort, rhetoric and Montiel’s appeals seemed to bear fruit. The overall result of a nationwide CESPO survey weeks after the conference turned more positive; 73 per cent considered the event beneficial for both Cuba and Cuban emigrants, and 83 per cent fully or partially approved the five measures the government had promised there. The numbers were not the only things that pleased the analysts. Contrary to those cited in the previous CESPO report, most of those polled saw more than economic benefits in the diaspora outreach. ‘There should never exist such division [between the nation and the community abroad]’, said an anonymous interlocutor. ‘Those who left legally should not receive the same treatment as those who left illegally’, noted another. The language of law, principle and reconciliation replaced talk of the CIA, traitors and worms. The responses aligned more closely with the government’s new ideology of nationhood across territorial borders.<sup>91</sup>

Another follow-up national poll a month later appeared to confirm this trend. The overall approval rate of the émigré community reached 53 per cent, a significant increase from the previous year’s (12 per cent). CESPO asserted that this rapid 40 per cent increase represented a ‘fundamental change’ in the people’s opinion of the Cuban community abroad.<sup>92</sup>

The question of exactly how this drastic transformation of Cuban public opinion had occurred would never be fully answered. Sceptics may see the result as too neat to be credible; respondents might have said what their interviewers wanted to hear. The data contained no information on race, gender, or other criteria that sociologists outside of Cuba would expect. The polls, carried out for the PCC, were never intended for scholarly examination. Or perhaps figures and sample comments could not capture the subtlety of popular sentiment. Migration scholars point to the enduring nature of mixed feelings that people in the homeland possess about emigration.<sup>93</sup> Despite all these problems, however, these primary state records are significant because they illuminate Havana’s concern about public opinion. The paper trails testify to the leadership’s continuous struggle to drive the people’s opinion over to its side. The conference organisers took pains to launch a public awareness campaign, and they checked poll results to weigh the impact on their domestic constituencies.

Although rarely mentioned in the scholarship on the Cuban Revolution, this feedback loop formed an essential part of Havana’s understudied decision-making process on such pivotal and existential issues as emigration. Cuban strategists extended their diaspora engagement not because it dealt a promising blow to the embargo but because their anxiety about its possible domestic impact subsided. In November 1995, Havana organised the Second Nation and Emigration Conference to explore further steps. More ambitious than the first, 357 invitees attended this event. The long-term trend for greater openness in Cuba’s emigration

<sup>89</sup>Robaina to Montiel, 28 April 1994.

<sup>90</sup>Radio Rebelde interview transcript, 28 April 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>91</sup>CESPO report, 17 May 1994, MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 24.

<sup>92</sup>CESPO report, n.d. (June 1994), MINREX, CU-EEUU, AM, Box 25.

<sup>93</sup>See, for example, Fitzgerald, *A Nation of Emigrants*.

policy was unmistakable, at least until 2013 when Havana revamped its emigration policy. Cubans at home and abroad enjoyed greater freedom to travel, and the nation's communication with the Cuban community abroad deepened further despite the continued feud with pro-embargo exiles. Numerous other setbacks occurred but did not completely stem the momentum created by the First Nation and Emigration Conference.<sup>94</sup>

### Conclusion: Latin America's Geopolitics of Mobility

The post-Soviet era Cuban leadership reformulated its diaspora statecraft to contain pro-embargo forces abroad and contest US foreign policy from within the world's only superpower. Determined to expand an anti-embargo coalition abroad, Havana strove to court the so-called 'moderates' and convert yesterday's enemies into tomorrow's friends in the name of 'normalisation'. This remaking of the homeland-diaspora relationship was never risk-free. Organisers of the First Nation and Emigration Conference had to consider what their invitees would expect in exchange for their participation, while heeding potentially volatile public opinion at home. The decision-making process was top-down, but the simultaneous need to address the community abroad and the domestic population required a delicate balancing act, an extended debate and a follow-up assessment. Havana did all these – behind the scenes.

Although crucially missing from the conventional account of Cuban emigration, foreign policy and diaspora politics, it was this Janus-faced nature of Havana's geopolitics of mobility that made its post-Soviet era emigration policy review slow and undramatic. A set of new emigration measures emerged; Havana's diaspora outreach attained a permanent character; nationalist anti-emigrant arguments seemed to lose resonance. The centrality of the 'Nation' in the emerging relationship with the 'Emigration' nonetheless allowed the state to direct the pace of engagement and its key strategists to exclude embargo supporters from the imagined community's redrawn boundary and, by extension, from membership of the Cuban nation at large. The dichotomous patriots-versus-betrayers framing of the diaspora did not disappear but it took on a different shape. Instead of the old stereotypical image which cast all Cubans living abroad as traitors, the revised narrative that contrasted 'good emigrants' with 'bad exiles' would define the official 'normalisation' discourse.

A brief comparison with Mexican emigration strategies may further illuminate the fundamental character of Havana's diaspora statecraft. By the early 1990s, both Mexican and Cuban policy elites had realised they had more to gain by engaging the diaspora and broadening the borders of their 'national' membership beyond the geographical limits of their nations. Yet Cuba lacked resources for developing expensive projects, had greater ideological difficulty convincing sceptics at home and abroad, and could not so openly promote its interests inside the United States. Whereas Mexico's diaspora engagement progressed in the broader context of US–Mexican economic integration, restoring the 'normal' US–Cuban

<sup>94</sup>A comprehensive assessment of the post-1994 emigration debate is impossible here, but for the 2013 migration law, see, for example, *Gaceta Oficial*, 16 Oct. 2012; Julio César Guancho, *Report on Citizenship Law: Cuba*, trans. Lucrecia Rubio Grundell (Badia Fiesolana: European University Institute, March 2020).

relationship itself – through removing the embargo – was the principal purpose of Cuba's. Because Cuba faced far more complex political, financial, ideological and security challenges, its diaspora outreach would necessitate more time and intensive strategic deliberation.

All these issues regarding Cuba's geopolitics of mobility suggest the widening spectrum of Latin America's response to the emergence of the United States as the world's only superpower and the growing presence of overseas populations within the US territory. To better understand these two interrelated phenomena of global politics and human mobility, it is necessary to discuss the everyday practices of people on the move *and* the remaking of emigration strategies that remains hidden from view. We should thus begin to probe Latin America's geopolitics of mobility by bringing diaspora statecraft to the centre of migration studies – and of scholarship on US and Latin American history.

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### **La nación y la emigración: cómo la Cuba de la era postsoviética diseñó su política hacia la diáspora**

Este artículo evalúa el funcionamiento interno de la política cubana hacia su diáspora tras la Conferencia 'La Nación y la Emigración' de 1994, el primer acercamiento importante de la Cuba de la era postsoviética a la comunidad cubana en el exterior. A diferencia de los trabajos que observan cómo los cambios demográficos de la emigración podrían haber transformado a Cuba, este estudio sostiene que el estado cubano intentó intencionalmente remodelar la relación entre la patria y la diáspora mediante el diseño de estrategias de emigración. Debido a que la geopolítica cubana de movilidad tenía profundas implicaciones ideológicas, económicas y de seguridad, los líderes discutieron no sólo cómo neutralizar a la contrarrevolución en el extranjero sino cómo abordar las necesidades de la diáspora junto a las sensibilidades populares dentro del país.

**Palabras clave:** Cuba; involucramiento con la diáspora; estrategia de emigración; revolución y contrarrevolución cubanas; Guerra Fría; geopolítica de la movilidad; nacionalidad; migración latinoamericana hacia Estados Unidos

### **A nação e a emigração: como Cuba da era pós-soviética projetou sua política de diáspora**

Este artigo avalia o funcionamento interno da política da diáspora cubana por trás da Conferência 'A Nação e a Emigração' em 1994, a primeira grande aproximação de



Cuba da era pós-soviética com a comunidade cubana no exterior. Em contraste com os trabalhos que observam como as mudanças na demografia da emigração podem ter transformado Cuba, este estudo argumenta que o estado cubano tentou propositalmente remodelar a relação entre pátria e diáspora ao projetar suas estratégias de emigração. Como a geopolítica cubana de mobilidade tinha profundas implicações de segurança, econômicas e ideológicas, a liderança discutiu não apenas como neutralizar a contrarrevolução no exterior, mas também como atender às necessidades da diáspora e ao sentimento popular no país.

**Palavras-chave:** Cuba; engajamento da diáspora; estratégia de emigração; revolução e contrarrevolução cubanas; Guerra Fria; geopolítica da mobilidade; nacionalidade; migração latino-americana para os Estados Unidos