

Toward a Transnationalism of the Middle
How Transnational Religious Practices
Help Bridge the Divides between Cuba and Miami

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It is eight o'clock in the evening on September 8, 2001, the feast day of Cuba's patron saint, Nuestra Señora de la Caridad (Our Lady of Charity). In her national shrine in the eastern Cuban town of El Cobre, thousands of pilgrims file past rum-sweetened revelers into the teeming, sultry sanctuary where the petite, gold-caped statuette of the virgin attends to their petitions throughout the night. Many come to ask her assistance to get a visa to the United States or safe passage for a family member embarking illegally on a raft bound for Miami. Others come to thank her for providing help—to fulfill a promise made to her earlier. They come despite the difficulty of finding transportation and food.

At exactly the same hour, thousands of Cuban Americans have flocked to the giant American Airlines arena in Miami. The sports center has been transformed into a temporary sanctuary complete with pulpit and communion table and rows of folding chairs serving as pews. To the right is a huge display of yellow flowers surrounding another Caridad statuette. A Cuban exile

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priest leads the thousands of attendees in round after round of “Hail Mary” and “Virgin of Charity, save Cuba!” Then, one by one, 11 couples lovingly cradling carafes of water blessed in and transported from their home diocese in Cuba move down the aisle separating rows of diocesan priests and VIPs. When they reach the altar, they bow to Caridad before pouring their holy water into a large crystal bowl on the communion table. The commingled waters are then sprinkled by the Miami priests upon the exiles in attendance, a transnational blessing. Cheers of “Cuba Libre!” and strains of “Virgen Mambisa”¹ punctuate the hours-long performance of this patron saint festival for the fortieth time.

Some of the faithful in Miami wear T-shirts or signs bearing images not of the virgin but of Elián González, the boy who the year before became the central figure in a prolonged transnational custody battle that captured headlines around the world. The child survived the illegal trip from the island to Miami in a small boat that capsized, his mother and others aboard having perished. Though only six years old, he quickly became glorified as a savior of *cubanía* (Cuban identity)² on the island and in South Florida’s exile neighborhoods. In Miami, he was exalted as a messiah rescued by the same Caridad who, according to popular myth, had centuries earlier saved three boys from a tempest off Cuba’s shores. His relatives’ home in Miami’s Little Havana neighborhood became a central sacred space or *axis mundi* for exiles even after the boy returned to his father on the island. Across the Florida Straits, he was similarly deified, his image imprinted on placards, hats, shirts, and fans that hundreds of thousands of Cubans displayed during great parades of nationalistic fervor. In each arena the boy’s plight was used to promote political interests.

The performances of key Cuban religious festivals such as Caridad and San Lázaro on December 17 and the Elián spectacle are but two of myriad transnational religious ties that span the Florida Straits linking the two Cubas, islander and exile. They illustrate the predominant view according to which both exile-islander and Cuba-U.S. relations are overwhelmingly hostile. The same image characterizes most scholarly work on the subject (Arboleya, 1996; Benjamin, 1990; Brenner, 1988; Domínguez and Hernández, 1989; Fernández, 2000; Gunn, 1993; Ortega, 1998; Paterson, 1994; Pérez, 1990). Vitriolic rhetoric has so dominated these relations that other ways of viewing them have been clouded if not completely obscured.

In this article we analyze relations between Cubans on the island and in the United States through the prism of religious practices that cross national borders. This vantage point reveals a more complex lived reality for these two peoples and nations than that found in most public portrayals. The alternative view we see exposes rage alongside resolution, the bitterness of betrayal as

well as the sweetness of reconciliation; there are bridge builders and there are demolitionists, evangelists of the Word and promoters of personal agendas. Transnational religious ties help constitute a communications bridge, a transnational space, between the two Cubas.

We argue that much of the literature compares only macro- against micro-level cross-border phenomena and actors. This dichotomous framework—the global and the local—is insufficient and often inappropriate for analyzing our data. We offer a more textured approach to agency that is more actor-oriented and incorporates multiple social, temporal, and spatial scales, particularly those that articulate macro- and micro-forces and actors. We argue for a transnationalism of the middle that can bridge the global and the local and transnationalism from above with transnationalism from below.

TRANSNATIONAL RELIGIOUS TIES

Although Cuba is often viewed as less religious than other countries in the Americas owing to a weak Catholic Church during colonial times and, more recently, to state-imposed atheism, it is teeming with religious activity, particularly missionary activity on the part of mainstream churches and smaller Pentecostal groups. Evangelists view the island as one of the last great nearly virgin grounds for evangelization in the Western Hemisphere and a particularly fertile terrain in which to plant Christianity as an antidote to what they perceive as “Godless communism.” Entry into Cuba takes many forms, from clerics who go through the often tedious process of obtaining permission from both United States and Cuban authorities to enter to the thousands of religious “tourists” who come to Cuba from many countries, obtain tourist visas at the airport, and proceed with their faith activities without official sanction. Religious visitors to the island include church groups on short-term mission visits such as the Bridge of Hope sister-church exchange between Florida and Cuban Methodist congregations, which developed out of a vision for reconciliation by a now deceased Methodist bishop in Florida.

Some pastors arrive with the express purpose of starting new, usually conservative Pentecostal congregations. They constitute another type of religious “tourist.” Pastors of established congregations on the island lament that many foreign itinerant pastors take advantage of the deteriorated economic conditions on the island to entice potential converts with promises of gifts in dollars or goods. A common practice is to offer to pay lay leaders regular salaries to lead new congregations initiated and supported by the foreign pastors’ flocks. Offers of \$20 to \$100 a month—a princely sum in Cuba, where the average salary is \$10 per month—attract increasing numbers of Cubans

into foreign projects. These projects subtly subvert the revolution by cultivating faith in Jesus as the antithesis of faith in the government. Cuban lay leaders are also tempted by these offers because stature as a religious leader enhances Cubans' chances of acquiring visas to travel abroad. Clerics have greater access to international travel than virtually any other sector of society save top party members.

One key reason for the increase in transnational religious activities between Cuba and Miami was President Clinton's relaxation of travel restrictions under the U.S. embargo for, among other groups, people of faith. Such visits promote face-to-face contact that helps break down the politically polarized and acerbic stereotypes and images of life in these two countries that have been carefully cultivated for and by political interests. They constitute a "people-to-people diplomacy" that is now threatened to some degree by the Bush administration's newly imposed restrictions on travel between the two countries.³ This diplomacy has been most skillfully developed by Catholics, who since 1997 have organized several meetings of high-level officials entitled *Reuniones para Conocerse Mejor* (Meetings to Get to Know Each Other) and aimed at encouraging dialogue and reconciliation between Catholics in the two Cubas.

It is important to underscore that travel by religious practitioners is bidirectional. In prerevolutionary times, clerics were often trained abroad—Catholics in Spain and Protestants in the United States. Indeed, most Protestant denominations missionized the island during its occupation by U.S. troops in the early twentieth century, and many of them, including the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Southern Baptists, were incorporated into home not foreign, missions. This structural relationship initiated deep-seated institutional, economic, emotional, and political ties between Cuban Protestants and their counterparts in the United States that endure to this day. Before 1959 Protestant pastors regularly traveled to their denominations' annual conventions in the United States and more often than not received both salary and pension benefits from their northern neighbor (Ramos, 1989; Yaremko, 2000). They also hosted revivals and evangelism campaigns that many North Americans attended. Most of these activities halted abruptly in the early years of the revolution, particularly after Fidel Castro declared Cuba an atheist state in 1961. This declaration, as well as the systematic discrimination by the new government against all religious in the 1960s, precipitated the mass emigration of Cuban clerics and laity to the United States (Crahan, 1979).⁴ Only a tiny fraction of these clerics would retain ties with their congregations in Cuba over the coming years.

Relations began to thaw notably, however, during the Special Period, the years of painful austerity begun in 1989 when the former Soviet Union

collapsed and with it the subsidies on which Cuba's economy depended. Compassion for islanders' suffering has increasingly trumped exiles' hatred of Castro, and the need for basic necessities such as food and medicine has also prompted recent religious tourism. Catholic priests from the island, in fact, come to Miami every month. They celebrate mass in one of the many Cuban parishes in Miami, meet with their former congregants who now live there, and even perform sacraments such as weddings and baptisms. Along with their Protestant counterparts, they minister to members of their flocks who have emigrated in large numbers not only in the first wave but in the 1980 Mariel boatlift, among the 1990s *balseiros*, or rafters, and as recipients of the 20,000 legal immigrant visas issued every year. They help heal long-standing wounds within and across these divided communities through the rites they perform and also, informally, by sharing local and personal news. Many also preach a theology of reconciliation, applying a delicate faith-based balm to old political wounds. During their stays in Miami they also collect large sums of money for their churches back in Cuba, funds that enable them to offer many social services that the Cuban government cannot provide.

Material aid from Miami to Cuba has grown enormously during the Special Period. Medicine, building materials to restore crumbling church buildings, cash to fund soup kitchens, fabric for sewing first-communion dresses, powdered milk to subsidize the meager diets of children, disaster relief aid, and multitudinous other resources arrive daily on the island, shipped primarily from Miami but also from other regions of the United States. In addition to food aid, one evangelical organization based in Miami has also sent dozens of laptop computers to clerics and seminary students on the island so that they can advance their theological studies. Perhaps the most ingenious project for bringing material aid into Cuba is Faith in Action, the invention of an exile priest in Miami. He began broadcasting mass to Cuba from the special shrine built to venerate the Cuban patroness, Caridad, in Miami—not incidentally located on the shoreline facing Cuba and full of patriotic and nationalist religious symbols (see Tweed, 1997, for discussion). His radio broadcasts could be heard in certain sections of northern Cuba, and he showed his compassion for people's affliction by offering to meet their need for medicines if they would write him with their requests. Since 1994 thousands of letters have been received and processed. Wealthy Cuban exiles underwrite the expense, and a team of volunteers responds to each request, making individualized bundles of the needed medicines along with rosaries, religious pamphlets, and a note from the priest. Cubans in Miami who plan on visiting the island obtain free passage from Faith in Action if they fill a suitcase (22 pounds) full of these small bundles (*paqueticos*).⁵ They are met in Cuba by

Catholic charity workers who distribute the packages. The Cuban government is privy to the arrangement and to the myriad others that discreetly provide material aid to Cuba, but it does not intervene unless participants draw too much public attention to their charity work. Some Miami participants attribute their involvement in the venture to this very political purpose—undermining the government's credibility as provider—while others characterize their actions in purely altruistic terms.

In addition to Protestant and Catholic faiths, Afro-Cuban religions thrive transnationally for several reasons. Particularly in recent years, Santería, Palo Monte, and other faiths with African origins have drawn foreign attention to Cuba, largely because of the perception that they are purer in Cuba than in other countries where they are practiced. Cuba's economic isolation is praised for keeping foreign elements from contaminating these faiths. This purity is believed to enhance the power and effectiveness of the *orishas* (Afro-Cuban gods). Additionally, people outside Cuba seeking initiation into these faiths often undergo the rite on the island because they cannot access the correct lineage, rituals, and so forth at home⁶ or because the ceremony is usually much less expensive there than elsewhere. Aspirants frequently arrive with suitcases full of ritual garments and other paraphernalia purchased in Miami's *botánicas* (religious specialty shops), one stop along their transnational travel routes. Once initiated, they must keep in touch with their newly formed religious families to continue their training. The Internet has become an increasingly important tool for nurturing and sustaining these transnational religious ties.⁷ The Cuban government has sought to capitalize on global interest in these faiths by sponsoring the construction of the Yoruba Cultural Center in Havana, among other projects, an attraction that appeals to tourists and generates revenue but alienates many established practitioners. These dynamics represent one of the newest waves of transnational religious ties linking Cuba to Miami and other sites, virtually all of which have yet to be documented and published. Afro-Cuban religions do not carry overt or even subtle political messages in their transnational practices, but they have become highly politicized as well. The government's public embrace of these religions, albeit for instrumental reasons, has made practitioners subject to criticism for collaborating with it.

In the early years of the revolution, when faith communities on the island were increasingly under attack, the exodus of Cuba's clerics and laity depopulated the island's churches quickly, and most resettled either immediately or some years later in Miami (Crahan, 1979; Kirk, 1989). The city's religious institutions responded in a variety of ways, often helping the newcomers to form congregations from scratch. Built into these new Cuban religious

institutions was political antagonism toward Castro, preached from pulpits and taught in religious schools.

The 125,000 Cubans who arrived on Miami's shores during the Mariel boatlift of 1980 included disproportionate numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh Day Adventists because these groups' prohibitions against bearing arms and working on the Sabbath had made them particular targets. The Refugees⁸ Adventist Church in Havana emigrated en masse to Miami during Mariel. Despite the causes and experiences of this migration, these Adventists do not engage in the more politically oriented transnational ties just described. In contrast to the earliest Cuban religious exiles, the majority of the Refugees' members have lived much or most of their lives in revolutionary Cuba. They may have arrived in Miami with high aspirations for their new lives, but they have encountered impoverishment—both material and spiritual—and are disillusioned over the influence of secular society in the lives of their children. The Refugees thus help to illustrate the consequences of demographic changes in Miami's Cuban population for the type and frequency of transnational ties.

TOWARD ANALYZING TRANSNATIONAL TIES: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

GLOBALIZATION AS PARADIGM

According to Giddens (1990: 64), globalization is the “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.” In this definition we find two critical elements common to many if not most conceptualizations of globalization. First, there is a dynamic between two poles: the local and the “worldwide” or global. These poles are conceptual and not simply spatio-geographic, for there are enormous debates on what is “local” and what is a “locality” as opposed to “global” and “the world.” These are less fixed, spatial concepts than they are social constructs that can obscure more mobile, contextual, and contested relations. Most definitions emphasize interconnectedness between these poles but do not always clearly identify the power relations that shape these interconnections or the effects globalization has on different people and places. In the classroom, on the shop floor, and in the streets, who wins and who loses under the conditions of globalization is constantly contested. The debates, though complex, can be boiled down to two⁹ fundamental and opposing viewpoints. One side argues that macroeconomic, political, and other sociocultural forces, often

characterized as Western or, more narrowly, American, are dominating increasing numbers of the world's peoples and places, with the result that they are becoming more similar, more homogeneous; the trend it sees is cultural convergence or what is often referred to as "Americanization" or "McDonaldization" (e.g., Meyer et al., 1997; Ritzer, 2000). The other side does not dispute that there are homogenizing pressures but counters that these pressures do not achieve uniformity for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they are not received and adopted similarly in different places, that they are resisted by people, that they are transformed by people, and that they themselves are constantly changing (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1990; Bhabha, 1990; García Canclini, 1995; Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; Hannerz, 1987; 1989; Nederveen Pieterse, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999). In other words, these writers see globalization and localization as the Janus faces of the same processes (see also Waters, 1995).

Another way in which power relations are embedded in debates on globalization is their association with levels of agency. Conceptualizations of globalization tend to simplify geography and power into two levels: high/global versus low/local. This dichotomous framework is also often expressed, explicitly or implicitly, as "transnationalism from above" (or globalization) versus "transnationalism from below" (or grassroots globalization) (e.g., Appadurai, 2001; Brysk, 1993; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998; Kearney, 1995b; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Levitt, 1998; Mittelman, 2000; Smith, 1994). The slippage between the terms "transnationalism" and "globalization" has added to the difficulty of bringing conceptual clarity to these important concepts, leading some to lament their having become "empty conceptual vessels" (Guarnizo and Smith, 1998).

In both the popular imagination and much academic scholarship, transnationalism from above or globalization is characterized as oppositional to transnationalism from below. Some scholars argue that structures and forces such as regional trade associations and transnational social movements serve as intermediaries between the presumed poles (e.g., Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Mittelman, 2000). Some concentrate their efforts on studying various articulations of the poles (Burawoy et al., 2000; Vásquez and Marquardt, 2003). Although the idea of articulation heads in a promising direction, it remains murky at least in part because we do not know what "local" and "global" mean or where one ends and the other begins. Trying to apply the above/below dichotomy to our empirical data has raised problems because both transnational ties and the agents who build them can rarely be strictly characterized as one or the other. Most people operate in and expand a very thick middle ground that links individuals to institutions. We therefore find the globalization paradigm insufficient as an analytical tool.

RELIGION AND GLOBALIZATION

The literature addressing the relationships between religion and globalization has expanded quickly in recent years (e.g., Hopkins et al., 2001; Mandaville, 2001; Rudolph and Piscatori, 1997; Vásquez and Marquardt, 2003). Religions have been crossing borders for at least as long as other aspects of human life. Religion has been a major historical force in the building of empires and nation-states and also transgresses these structures (Rudolph, 1997). Clearly, these dynamics are at work in Cuba today and in transnational ties between the island and other lands. The dramatic rise in Pentecostalism in Cuba—an alchemy of the efforts of foreign evangelists and local, lived conditions—serves as an excellent example of the way religion operates simultaneously on multiple social and geographic scales, from individual and collective praxis to institutional structures to social movements. Similar dynamics characterize fundamentalist and evangelical movements and faiths elsewhere (e.g., Beyer, 1994; Bretthauer, 2001; Mandaville, 2001; van der Veer, 1994).

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION

The majority of the transnational religious ties we have discovered link Cuba to the southern tip of Florida. (If we were to map historical ties during Cuba's colonial period, in contrast, the highest-density strand would link the island and Spain.) The principal organizing force that can explain this pattern is international migration, albeit often in the form of refugee flows. Given that some 750,000 Cubans live in the region and 20,000 more emigrate each year and settle disproportionately in the Miami area,¹⁰ it is no wonder that South Florida serves as both the origin and target of transnational activity with the island.

The geographic patterning in our data—as well as that in many if not most migration contexts—strongly suggests that we are observing not a global interconnectedness but a more particular interconnectedness of peoples located in nation-states separated by borders. An analytic framework called the transnational perspective on migration, or “transnational migration,” diverges from the customary view of international migration as a unilineal process of travel across international borders leading to settlement and assimilation. In transnational migration, “persons, although they move across international borders and settle and establish social relations in a new state, maintain social connections within the polity from which they originated. In transnational migration, persons literally live their lives across international borders” (Glick Schiller, 1999: 96). Transnational migration,

then, includes cross-border processes and the people who enact them in its examination of immigrants' experiences and those of people who do not move but whose lives are affected nonetheless (e.g., Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Glick Schiller, 1999; Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton, 1992; Guarnizo and Smith, 1998).

The transnational perspective on migration provides a critical analytic optic for examining our data. We, in turn, hope to improve on this paradigm in substantive and theoretical ways by addressing two substantive lacunae. First, while the majority of research on transnational migration has been done in Latin America and the Caribbean, very little has been published to date on the Cuban case (see the brief mention in Eckstein and Barberia, 2002). Second, although in the past ten years or so there has been a wealth of research on certain transnational ties, such as remittances, hometown associations, and cross-border political parties and businesses (Glick Schiller, 1999; Goldring, 2001; Gonzalez Gutierrez, 1997; Guarnizo, 1998; Guarnizo, Portes, and Haller, 2003; Hamilton and Chinchilla, 2001; Itzigsohn, 2000; Kearney, 1995a; Lungo, Eekhoff and Baires, 1996; Nagengast and Kearney, 1990; Popkin, 1995; Smith, 1998; 2003), little has been published on migrants' transnational religious activities, although the literature is growing (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2000; 2002; Levitt, 2001a; McAlister, 1998; Menjivar, 1999; Vásquez, 1999; Vásquez and Marquardt, 2003). It is not surprising that theorizing these phenomena is still in its early stages (see Levitt, 2003).

The transnational approach to migration suffers from the same dichotomous framework discussed above with regard to globalization, namely, the primary division of transnational processes into those from above and those from below. The transnational activities of migrants are almost invariably associated with the latter and have on occasion been heralded as resisting globalization (e.g., Smith, 1994). We gain more analytical refinement from mapping activities across a continuum than in a dichotomous framework. Similarly, Peggy Levitt (2001b) argues that Dominican migrants and their nonmigrant counterparts knit together transnational communities that are a geographic and social intermediary between the poles of the global and the local. In their very thick ethnography of Haitian transnational migration, Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001) document how extended-family and even fictive-kinship relations mediate the emotional and spatial distances experienced by migrants living outside their homeland. Other scholars theorize hybridity and creolization as processes mixing different and often oppositional identities (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1990; Hannerz, 1987). While these are positive developments in refining the paradigm, much more attention to the middle terrain between the global-local poles is needed.

**TOWARD THEORIZING
TRANSNATIONALISM OF THE MIDDLE:
A MULTISTRANDED AND MULTISCALAR APPROACH**

We have witnessed in our research that processes of hybridization and transnationalism from below, among others, do occur, but we are more interested—because our own empirical data are full of examples—in the ways in which people engaged in transnational religious activities construct the latticework that bridges global-local divides. In so doing, these activities create a transnationalism of the middle. This occurs in a number of ways. First, the transnational itself is a space intermediate between localities and the globe. Transnational processes often reflect practices that occur globally, but they link much more delimited geographical places and thus often represent different articulations of higher-order processes with localities. For example, though the Elián González affair became a global media spectacle, its significance within the transnational sphere around Cuba and Miami reflected not a global but a transnational spotlight. Second, many people who engage in transnational ties intentionally work to create specific sociospatial relationships and are not working on a global scale. Third, the people who enact and sustain transnational ties exert agencies that start at very different levels of institutionalization and other axes of differentiation yet often intersect each other in the middle and/or change over time and in so doing occupy shifting but usually still middle locations on the global-local continuum.

We argue that the global-local paradigm obscures the transnational middle. We also argue that the middle is so textured and complex that we need both very thick ethnography of transnational activities along the lines advocated by Clifford Geertz some time ago (1973) and a framework for mapping participants' agencies along multiple scales. Mapping merely types of transnational ties—for example, material, media and communication, and spiritual or faith practice—without reference to the specific people behind them yields a much less rich understanding of the transnational middle than mapping actors' agencies. People's agencies are constrained and facilitated by a multitude of factors that we need to take into consideration to comprehend them (a position we share with many scholars, from Marxists to feminists and postcolonialists, whose work has preceded ours). Typically, analyses that consider constraints on people's individual or collective agencies focus on their location within socially stratifying hierarchies shaped by race, class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and so on. We agree that these are critical social forces organizing agency, but we consider other factors that we feel should be included in the calculus as well.

By reviewing our empirical data and studying who became involved in what activities and for what reasons, we have developed a multiscale approach to agency that we cannot detail fully here but will discuss in brief. Scales are imperfect; although they can incorporate fluidity and are relational, they still appear to “fix” or locate agency statically. To avoid reification, we map agency using continuums and incorporate temporal scales. Continuums are more accurate than simple dichotomies, and they illustrate the fact that the vast proportion of what people do and why they do it falls in the middle portion of the scales. People’s agencies are complex permutations that overwhelmingly construct and occupy the latticework bridging the poles of global and the local.

The first step in our approach to agency is to break the complex concept of agency into numerous dimensions and subdimensions. Then, for each dimension and subdimension, we develop a scale or continuum that can serve as a heuristic device for mapping individuals’, groups’, and organizations’ agencies. Our model incorporates time in such a way that plotting any one individual, organization, or action on a scale is time-dependent—that people’s identities and affinities and therefore their actions often change over time. A second time-related issue we address is the frequency of any transnational activity. Measuring how often people participate in transnational activities should, as others have argued (e.g., Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, 1999), indicate their degree of commitment. Time both complicates our analysis and enriches it, particularly when we see people’s actions evolve or devolve over time. In addition to the temporal dimension of agency, we have identified other dimensions: social, spatial, power, and purpose.

Our social scale includes three independently graphed subdimensions: the size of the agent or agents involved, how formally or informally these people operate, and the quality (close or distant) of the transnational relationship. This last subdimension is a measure of trust and gauges the strength of social ties without mapping them on a kin/nonkin continuum.

The next dimension of agency we address is spatial. At first glance, a spatial scale would appear to be a commonsensical measure of physical distance between actors. However, people experience space in a multitude of ways, not only as Cartesian distance but also as emotional propinquity—what geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) has termed “topophilia.” Therefore, when we map spatial relationships between actors, we need more than one measure. The first can be computed using a standard, objective measure of distance between people interacting transnationally such as kilometers or miles. A second measure is an evaluation of the types of interactions people have. Are they face-to-face? Do they involve direct contact without face-to-face exposure (such as through telephone calls, mail, or e-mail)? Or do actors relate

through intermediaries? An even slipperier concept of space is captured in a subdimension that we call “personal geographies,” the emotional attachments to places that reflect people’s lived experiences and imagined worlds. These personal geographies are not inconsequential for understanding the types and locations of agency people engage in; consider, for example, how the differences between those of second-generation Cubans, many of whom have never visited the island, and those of their parents, many of whom left reluctantly under often traumatic circumstances, might affect the ties to Cuba that they engage in. Personal geographies do not map well onto continuums, but they need to be kept in mind as we analyze agency.

The third major dimension of agency we address is power. Agency is not merely a form of interconnection; it is a concept that ineluctably involves measures of influence, of the power to affect others’ actions. It would seem, therefore, that instead of mapping power as a way of comprehending agency, we should do the reverse. However, our intervention here is more foundational. To evaluate agency, we identify the positions from which people act—that is, we locate actors’ embeddedness in the multiple stratification systems or power hierarchies that condition their agency, hierarchies of class, race, gender, citizenship, and so on. We assign the term “social location”¹¹ to this embeddedness, admitting that social locations are multiple (reflecting numerous hierarchies), contextual, and mutually constituting (and thus not independent of each other) and shift over time. At a minimum, for each hierarchy individuals should be located along a continuum from “dominant” or “privileged” to “subordinate” or “disadvantaged.” States are often transnational actors and generally operate on the highly privileged end of our continuum, as in the case of determining who can receive visas. A needed caveat here is that social locations influence but do not overdetermine agency; even if two people act from identical social locations, their agencies may differ because of personal initiative and desire, what some might label “free will” and Doreen Massey (1994: 149) articulates as “power geometry.” Therefore a key subdimension of the power dimension of agency is individuals’ initiative or effort along a scale reflecting whether it is on a par with or higher or lower than that of others observed.

The final dimension of agency is purpose. Purpose can be difficult to document; it is not always articulated openly, and the public purpose provided may obscure a different private intention. Theorists studying transnational ties have slowly identified a range of reasons that people give for their participation from the altruistic to the self-serving. We have observed a wide range of intentions but found that they fall into identifiable patterns, including (1) humanitarian concerns such as sending aid to the needy; (2) religious reasons such as evangelizing to save souls, visiting congregants, and pursuing reli-

gious education; (3) communications rationales focused on keeping in touch with people separated by borders such as the Afro-Cuban *babalaos* (priests) with their new initiates; (4) highly personal, often instrumental reasons such as pursuing an improvement in one's status or material welfare through transnational activities and finding ways to leave Cuba; and (5) implicit or explicit political designs.

Purpose articulates with agents' nation of residence. People in Cuba who participate in transnational religious activities often cite the country's current economic and political crisis as a motivator. Average Cubans have few ways to improve their lives. Many find solace in their faith communities, while others have learned that religion can be their ticket off the island or at least a way of learning more about the rest of the world through transnational exchanges. Additionally, religious leaders often seek transnational ties to obtain resources from the outside that aid their delivery of social services. In Miami, motivations tend to reflect the participant's immigration wave and politics. Evangelism often involves thinly veiled politicking, although it may be interwoven into humanitarian discourses and actions. And some transnational actors pursue more personal objectives such as reconnecting with relatives and friends.

Capturing all the diversity in people's purposes is too complex for any one continuum. We therefore focus on distinguishing between personal and social motivations. Much of what we have observed of the latter could be mapped along a continuum with end points of "maintenance of the status quo" and "radical transformation," though the Cuban political climate in which these activities takes place might better be represented by end points of "pro-" and "anti-" Castro. The various activities oriented toward reconciliation between the two Cubas would therefore fall in the middle of this spectrum.

APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK: AN ILLUSTRATIVE CASE

Rarely is enough information collected on each actor for all or even most of the dimensions of agency scaled above. The successful application of our framework is highly dependent upon the richness of the empirical data themselves. In our case, we have sufficient data to accomplish this for only a subset of the transnational ties we have distinguished because we did not enter the field with our framework developed. As we analyzed our data, we found existing frameworks insufficient and developed one that helped identify dimensions of agency and their shifts over time to create a more

comprehensive understanding of Cuban transnational religious ties. The case we develop was selected because it illustrates, by tracking how people's actions "trickle up" and "trickle down" over time, a thick transnationalism of the middle.

In January 1998 Pope John Paul II undertook his historic visit to Cuba. Among the large entourage of clerics and pilgrims that accompanied him to the island were several Miami-based religious leaders, both Cuban and Anglo-American, including Archbishop John Clement Favarola. During his five-day visit, the pope delivered a message of peace, love, and hope to the Cuban people. Inspired by his words and observant of Cuba's dire economic crisis, Archbishop Favarola returned to Miami with the idea of creating sister-church programs between parishes in Miami and dioceses in Cuba. Apart from sending badly needed funds, he hoped that these church-diocese ties would act as a means of communication and potential solidarity for an otherwise divided nation and people.

Despite the archbishop's good intentions, his idea was met with tremendous resistance at the parish level. As one woman explained with reference to Cuban exile parishioners, "Most people automatically assume that by helping the church in Cuba one also helps Fidel and his government stay in power. They are blinded by a mentality that equates everything Cuban with Fidel Castro, including the church." Given this hostile climate, it is not surprising that when the church-diocese plan was announced, it was not embraced by most exile Catholics, even though parishes and congregants participated in other transnational religious ties. In fact, of the dozens of Cuban-dominated parishes invited to participate, only one, St. Amelia's, responded. We argue that the reason for this is embedded in a thick web of relationships, multi-stranded and multiscale, that can be disentangled and understood through the application of our analytical framework.

The pope's visit to Cuba precipitated a political and spiritual crisis among many Catholic exiles in Miami. For decades, ardent anti-Castroism among the exiles had produced a climate that prohibited returning to the island as long as Castro remained in power. However, many followers desperately wished to worship with their spiritual leader during this particular visit to their homeland. What could they do? The pope's unique social location facilitated not only the return by many exiles to their homeland but also the expansion of the religio-civic space for dialogue between Cuba and the United States, Miami in particular. From many exiles' perspective, the linchpin was not John Paul II's social location as leader of the Catholic hierarchy but his Polish background and his consistent stance as an outspoken critic of communism. Among Miami's hard-line exile community, he was therefore the first pope to have not only unquestionable anticommunist credentials but also

a personal geography that included emotional and experiential familiarity with life in a country characterized by limited religious freedom. It can be said, then, that John Paul II's visit—more than just any pope's visit—opened up the possibility for exiles to return to Cuba without the automatic assignment to them of a scarlet letter as communist sympathizer. As a member of St. Amelia's parish told us, "The pope's visit opened up doors. If he goes, we thought, then it's all right for us to go too." From the Cuban side of the transnational religious landscape, another aspect of John Paul II's social location was also vital to his acceptance there by government officials. As head of the Vatican, John Paul personified its long-standing stance against the United States embargo on the grounds that it was not humanitarian, a position that he reaffirmed in his homilies and that endeared him to Fidel Castro despite his views on communism.

In sum, Pope John Paul II entered Cuba enjoying legitimacy and a high degree of acceptance on both sides of the Florida Straits. He also arrived at a critical moment, nearly a decade into the Special Period in Cuba. During these years, hunger and dashed hopes had fostered disillusionment within the populace, attracting people to faith communities for material as well as spiritual needs. The pope took advantage of this moment to offer a call for Cubans to open themselves up to the world and for the world to open itself up to Cuba—a clarion cry for reconciliation on many levels but vague enough to be interpreted in multiple ways. In other words, at the moment when temporal and purpose scales in our framework became exceedingly important, the pope opened the way but did not dictate the paths that intermediate- and small-scale actors would follow. Rather, these paths were cleared through the thicket of political animosities according to different calculi of agency.

Thousands of clerics, laypeople, and other religious from Miami, albeit not the most politically conservative Catholics such as Bishop Augustín Román, traveled to Cuba for the first time since exile to attend the pontiff's masses. Many received the pope's call into their hearts, and some began to work quietly and informally to build transnational religious ties, particularly humanitarian aid. Archbishop Favarola was among them, but he was also to try to institutionalize his vision. At the time of the pope's visit to Cuba in 1998, the archbishop was still learning the ropes in Miami. Originally from Louisiana and of Italian descent, he had been appointed to lead Miami's archdiocese by John Paul only three years before after serving as bishop in St. Petersburg on Florida's Gulf Coast. He was therefore a novice at navigating the turbulent waters of the Florida Straits when the pope's visit was announced. He attended the official celebrations but then decided to extend his stay in Cuba, where he encountered a church and people in dire need. These personal experiences equipped him with the resolve to answer the

pope's call by entreating Miami Catholics to build ties to their spiritual sisters and brothers on the island. He could attempt to act on his desires because, in contrast to Román and other senior Cuban clerics in Miami, he was not tethered by the historical reins of ethnic and political loyalties. He devised a plan that would partner Miami parishes with dioceses in Cuba, a program that would be initiated at the macro-end of our social size scale but that he expected would trickle down to the middle range of parishes and dioceses, ultimately producing face-to-face relationships among individuals who had long been distanced by geography and politics. This implementation strategy flowed directly down the church's hierarchy: the pope's call passed to high-ranking intermediaries who then distributed it down to parish priests for implementation.

Archbishop Favarella sent his vision for improved exile-islander relations to the many dozens of parishes in the archdiocese, but the seeds he scattered fell on mostly barren ground because the plan would require public, institutional linkages—including travel—that hard-line anti-Castro exiles would readily identify and attack. Informal ties could flourish but not public affiliations.

The critical difference that launched St. Amelia's into action was a combination of its Cuban-born priest's own social location and his initiative. For many years, Father Henríquez had established a personal reputation of unimpeachable *cubanía* coupled with a politics favoring dialogue and reconciliation and deep-seated relations with parishioners. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on Father Felix Varela, the Catholic educator and founding father of the Cuban nation and a personage very dear to Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits. In his position as a highly respected scholar of Varela and the Cuban Catholic Church more generally, Henríquez had acquired a social stature among exiles extending beyond the parish level (i.e., at higher socio-spatial scales) that had helped inoculate him against criticism for his participation in a small group of Cuban Catholics in Miami inclined toward dialogue with the church in Cuba long before the pope's visit. Henríquez not only advocated for reconciliation but pursued it by traveling to the island on several occasions. He attended the 1987 National Meeting of the Cuban Catholic Church on the future of the church and the 1988 bicentennial of the birth of Felix Varela. In each case, as he expanded his personal geography—his emotional and experiential relationship with the church in Cuba—he suffered criticism from the exile community in Miami upon his return. Perhaps no other priest in the archdiocese enjoyed the same social location that permitted Henríquez to withstand these criticisms—the credentials of a respected, Cuban-born scholar and a man of deep faith. “He is a man of the church,” recalled Grisel Pérez, the laywoman whom Henríquez would ask to

lead the parish's initiative, "and a man with a love for Cuba. We are graced to have a man like him as our leader."

Father Henríquez's social locations in the exile, Catholic, and scholarly community hierarchies in Miami predisposed him to be receptive to the Archbishop Favarola's plan when it arrived on his desk. But he faced enormous odds selling the plan to his parish, given the very different social locations of his parishioners, most of whom were from the first wave of exiles or that wave's children. Henríquez began planting a kernel of the archbishop's idea in his congregation via a series of homilies in the spring of 1998 that emphasized Christian values of love and fraternity and contained subtle appeals to his parishioners to reach out and get involved with the church in Cuba. In addition, he had the foresight to create a ministry that would specifically dedicate itself to the planned church-diocese partnership. The parish already had dozens of ministries, programs that put church doctrine into practice. To lead this new—and potentially politically perilous—ministry, Father Henríquez needed to select someone who would exhibit more initiative than most and who could endure the inevitable onslaught of insults from hostile members of the congregation and other setbacks.

He chose Grisel Pérez, a woman born in the mid-1950s in Cuba's eastern city of Santiago who grew up in a small farming community in Holguín Province. Her parents were nominal Catholics, but Grisel's passion for the church was cultivated by a very devout aunt. Under this aunt's tutelage, Grisel participated in the traditional rites of passage of first communion and confirmation and began to teach Sunday School and catechism classes. Her devotion grew in tandem with her service to the church, and both became increasingly important during the decade of the 1960s when clerics and congregants fled the church and the country in the wake of the declaration of official atheism and government repression of religious communities. Grisel has no negative memories of the crackdown, but as her own church's leadership—as well as her extended family—left Cuba year after year, she helped fill the gaps they left behind. Thus, for Grisel, her personal geography of church, homeland, and family became interwoven with her purpose in life of doing God's work, serving her community of faith. This was ruptured in 1971 when, at age 16, she and her parents reluctantly emigrated to Miami. Though they had lost land and livestock after the revolution when these resources were nationalized by the revolutionary government, Grisel's parents did not leave for political reasons. Rather, they left their beloved country and village unenthusiastically because the entire family had emigrated and her parents could no longer stand the distance. Blood was thicker than personal geography.

Grisel's family moved into Little Havana—the neighborhood in Miami where exiles concentrated—in the early 1970s, but the anchors of her life had

been cut and she felt lost and adrift, overwhelmed by the sensation that she had abandoned her church and her homeland. "I feel that everyone is born with a purpose in life, and I feel that I failed God at that time," she told us. "Of course I was just a girl of 16, and I couldn't do anything but follow my parents. But I feel like I could have made a great difference if I had stayed in Cuba." This disquietude plagued her for years until in early adulthood she found her way into a youth group at church and reconnected with her faith and desire to serve. Grisel managed to finish high school and college in Miami. She later married and bore two children, but her guilt over having abandoned her church in Cuba stayed with her. She continued to feel a strong desire to serve her faith community in Cuba but was unable to return home, restrained by political forces beyond her control.

In 1979, under a new policy orchestrated by then President Jimmy Carter, Cuban-Americans were permitted to return legally to the island for the first time in many years. Grisel took one of the first flights and returned to her village, where she was deeply affected by what she saw. Her church had collapsed, physically and spiritually. An itinerant Filipino priest said mass occasionally in a makeshift sanctuary under a mango tree. No children had been confirmed in the parish since her departure over eight years before. Grisel felt her old passion rekindled. She circulated among her past neighbors' homes and collected old, often heavily stained confirmation outfits, and together they bleached them white with salt and lime. Five or six children were confirmed during her visit, but Grisel was just as much transformed by her old friends and neighbors. Over and over in her conversations with them she heard the same refrain, the same loathing for the U.S. embargo against Cuba. At that moment in time, she could take this message back to Miami, but she could not disseminate it, given her social location as a marginal woman within the entrenched anti-Castroism of Miami's exile parishes, including her own. Grisel resolved to work toward reconciliation but to do so largely quietly and informally. She did return to Cuba again on several occasions, such as in 1988 for the Varela bicentennial. Indeed, it was Father Henríquez who encouraged her to attend the celebration, and they did so together, enduring criticism upon their return. Over the years, through their theology, love for Cuba, and similar political affinities, Henríquez and Pérez developed close personal ties. She was the obvious choice to head the new transnational ministry. The invitation motivated Grisel beyond her historical efforts; it spurred her to take greater initiative in the parish.

If Father Henríquez can thus be credited with sowing the seeds and nurturing the seedling for the church-diocese link at St. Amelia's, Grisel Pérez and her organizational committee raised the ministry to maturity. By organizing a big Cuban dinner and other special events, the committee has raised at least

\$6,000 each year that it sends to its sister diocese along with the incalculable goodwill that is generated through these transnational religious relationships. There are travel exchanges for the clergy and laity also. For Grisel, her efforts not only help bridge the distance between the two Cubas she loves but also heal wounds in her own personal and spiritual geographies:

Cuba, to me, is a woman with long brown hair, and I imagine her among the palm trees and in the rivers and the beaches. She is my mother. . . . That's why I feel so strongly the things that happen in Cuba—and the crazy things we do here [in Miami] that make Cuba suffer. Don't you think that a mother won't be sad if her children have abandoned her? And when people here tell me that I'm nuts because I still talk of Cuba, I tell them, "How can you say that about your mother?" And I feel this way about the church, too. It is my mother, and I will always love her.

We present here only a limited ethnography of this transnational tie; given more space, we would provide a similar level of detail on other members of the St. Amelia's committee, on the Cubans from the island who become involved and why, and on the historical development of their transnational religious ties. We trust, however, that the ethnography provided is sufficient to establish the value added to understanding transnational ties when we consider the multidimensional agencies of those involved.

CONCLUSION

It is unlikely that John Paul II knows of Father Henríquez, Grisel Pérez, and their work or about the other people who have answered his call to embrace Cubans on the island. Indeed, his appeal has fallen on more deaf than receptive ears. In transnational terms, the pope's invitation to action served as a form of transnationalism from above that stimulated little transnationalism from below or grassroots action. From our perspective, however, this case heeds the appeal of Vásquez and Marquardt (2003: 51, italics added) for ethnography that includes "a careful mapping of the mobile yet *always situated* ways in which religion links the daily micropolitics of individual and collective identity with a dense cluster of meso- and macrosocial processes, ranging from the urban and the national to the regional and global." It also serves as an example of the mediation of high-level power by these processes and the importance of multiple scales when mapping agency. Transnational activity is not well served by a dichotomous framework marked by end points

of “from above” and “from below” or “global” and “local,” for there is a wide array of activity occupying middle levels of agency, as well as agencies that start out at opposite ends but intersect in the middle. Small-scale actors’ actions can trickle up to have higher-level effects, and high-level activities can devolve over time. It is high time for a transnationalism of the middle.

NOTES

1. The Mambises were the Cubans who fought for Cuba’s independence from Spain. Naming Caridad “Virgen Mambisa” claims her as a nationalist as well as a religious figure.

2. We thank Alma De Rojas for reminding us that there are multiple terms in Spanish for speaking about Cuban “identity.” *Cubanidad* reflects more of a national identity, a civil status of having Cuban citizenship, while *cubanía* reflects a more encompassing emotional notion of being Cuban that is not coterminous with nationality.

3. There are numerous restrictions, but the ones most germane to our discussion are those severely restricting travel to Cuba by people who do not have relatives there and the limit of Cuban-Americans to one trip every three years, reduced from once a year. Trips for explicitly religious purposes are not likely to be affected, though many in Miami fear that they will be.

4. Among Catholics, approximately 550 of 800 priests left the island (including those expelled) during the early 1960s and 2,700 of the 3,000 other religious leaders (such as teachers). Mainline Protestants were especially hard-hit, losing 80–90 percent of their ministers and 50 percent of their lay congregants. The denominations least affected, owing in large degree to their rural base, were the eastern Baptists and the Pentecostals. The Jewish community, which was concentrated in Havana, was reduced from 12,000 in 1959 to 1,200 in 1965 (Crahan, 1979).

5. Since our research ended, the activities of Faith in Action have diminished because of the death of the principal priest involved and the changes in U.S. government regulations on travel to the island. The latter will likely affect many other transnational religious activities.

6. We thank a reviewer of the manuscript for pointing out this issue.

7. Access to the Internet has been made much more difficult in 2004 under new Cuban government rules regulating its usage, particularly for individuals not enjoying e-mail access via government accounts.

8. Pseudonyms have been assigned to churches in this article as well as to our informants.

9. The best discussion of globalization we have found is by Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2004). He identifies three alternatives, the third of which is the “clash of civilizations” paradigm articulated by Samuel Huntington. We do not see this paradigm as equivalent to the other two. In the scholarly world and in quotidian conversations, only two sides are typically voiced.

10. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are 1,242,000 people in the United States who identify themselves as Cuban, and of these, over 750,000 live in South Florida, the overwhelming majority (650,000) in Miami-Dade County (<http://factfinder.census.gov>).

11. The concept of “social location” as we use it was first articulated in Mahler and Pessar (2001). We recognize that it is akin to other concepts such as Sandra Harding’s “standpoint epistemology” (1986) and Mark Granovetter’s “embeddedness” (1985).

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