

Ethnicity and Belonging: An Overview of a Study of Cuban, Haitian and Guatemalan Immigrants to Florida

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Abstract: This article provides an overview of an interdisciplinary qualitative study that explored the personal meanings and public expressions of home, ethnicity and belonging among Cuban, Haitian and Guatemalan immigrants to Florida. We present the theoretical bases for the study, a description of the interview and observational methods employed, and the major themes discerned in the analyses of the biographical interviews. This paper provides a gateway to the four articles in this special issue, which will then focus specifically on one major theme found to be important for each of the sub-groups.

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1. Introduction

The project, which was part of a larger collaborative undertaking between researchers from Nova Southeastern University in Florida and Georg August University in Goettingen (Germany), focused on the life experiences of refugees/immigrants who left their homelands due to violent conflicts or hard living conditions and resettled in southern Florida in the United States. We studied first and second generation immigrants who came from Cuba, Haiti and Guatemala. Specifically, we considered the personal and social/cultural meanings migrants attach to their life experiences and their sense of collective identity. The

reason for choosing these three groups is not only because they comprise significant numbers in the population—there are over 390,000 Cubans living in Miami-Dade counties (PEW HISPANIC CENTER, n.d.); over 180,000 Haitians living in the state (NEWLAND & GRIECO, 2004); and between 29,000 – 60,000 Maya and/or Guatemalans, depending on source, living in the state (UNITED STATES CENSUS, 2000 and BURNS, 2001, respectively)—but also because they have a myriad of influences on the political, cultural and social life of the region. [1]

In order to address these issues, we undertook an interdisciplinary approach—combining psycho-social, anthropological and conflict resolution perspectives (REPKO, 2008). Furthermore, we engaged in three kinds of qualitative methods; we conducted: (1) life-story/biographical interviews (ROSENTHAL, 1993; CHAITIN, 2004) with refugees/immigrants—the lions' share of the work; (2) open-ended semi-structured interviews with representatives of social organizations that work with these populations; and (3) participant observations (LINSTROTH, 2008; EMERSON, FRETZ & SHAW, 1995) of community events. We hoped these integrated perspectives and methods would help us learn about the immigrants' life experiences, and also to gain in-depth insights into their understandings of sense of belonging and relationships within the community. [2]

The research questions in this study were: (1) During life, when does belonging to a nation, ethnic group or a culture become important for an individual? (2) How does self-definition impact how one deals with specific experiences, such as being a refugee? (3) What are the impacts of the process of migration on one's sense of belonging? (4) How do immigrants re-construct their sense of belonging in their host societies? (5) How is the sense of belonging to a collective expressed in different generations in families of immigrants? (6) What is the impact of being a citizen of a country versus being a temporary resident on one's sense of collective belonging? And (7) How do intergenerational conflicts manifest themselves in terms of identity ownership? [3]

The following three articles presented in this issue provide beginning answers to these research questions, mostly centering on topics of self-definition, belonging—in different generations of immigrants and the intergenerational conflicts connected to being a hyphenated-American. [4]

2. The Theoretical Assumptions and Bases of Our Study

2.1 Ethnic belonging and identity

As our study focuses more upon biographical concerns in relation to ethnicity and social belonging, we have differentiated our viewpoints from other important works about immigrants in South Florida (GRENIER & STEPICK, 1992; PORTES & STEPICK, 1993; LAMPHERE, STEPICK & GRENIER, 1994; STEPICK, GRENIER, CASTRO & DUNN, 2003). We thought it important to employ nuanced narrative approaches in order to contextualize belonging, ethnicity, and identity, seeing this research process as optimal for our purposes and a way to

add to case studies and ethnographic anecdotal-accounting as our foundational standpoints for analyses. For us, therefore, it is significant to comprehend "the importance of ethnicity *in people's lives*" (ERIKSEN, 2002, p.135, original emphasis). [5]

Even so, understanding "ethnicity" and "collective identity" is difficult and under the best of circumstances, fraught with many interpretive issues; social anthropologists have argued that these concepts are often framed in ways that lead to dichotomous labeling and analytical oversimplification. For example, MacCLANCY (1993, p.84) states:

"Identity is a catch-all term of our times. It is an empty vessel which can be filled with almost any content ...The range of possible topics [on the subject of identity] seems to be limited only by the imaginative power of the compiler." [6]

Ethnicity was once seen as having primordial roots, or the tendency to fix ethnicity as "a permanent and fundamental aspect of human identity," with claims of common origin. An instrumentalist approach of ethnicity is an "outlook that is adopted to achieve some specific end or to see it as the outcome of a set of particular historical and socioeconomic circumstances" (BANKS, 1996, p.185). As such, BANKS suggests that researchers can reach deeper understandings by viewing ethnicity as existing in the "observer's head" and as "an analytical tool devised and utilized by academics to make sense of or explain the actions and feelings of the people studied" (BANKS, 1996, p.186). In this research, we have attempted to be mindful of Banks' recommendations/warnings as we have explored these phenomena among the different groups that we researched. [7]

The concept of ethnicity is connected to issues of home and belonging (BANKS, 1996). As SANDERS (2002) has noted, all the literature on ethnicity emphasizes cultural and geographical elements, even though researchers' definitions of ethnicity vary. The first of these elements refers to cultural beliefs and practices, which are mutually acknowledged both by insiders and outsiders alike, even if they disagree over details of their cultural differences, or interpretations of distinguishing attributes which separate them. The second element, the geographical origins of the group, has both objective and subjective bases. Oftentimes, members of an ethnic group who migrate from their native lands, continue to be identified in terms of their foreign origin by outsiders whilst so-called in-group members, those born in a new homeland, may also self-identify in such a manner, and may continue to be seen as such by non-members. [8]

In order to better articulate these often contradictory and variable strands of thought, following SANSONSE (2003, p.3), we believe "ethnic identity" may be "conceived as a process, affected by history as well as contemporary circumstances, and by local as well as global dynamics." Or, to put it another way, "ethnicity" may also be referred to as "a relation and process intimately connected to issues of power, hierarchy, stratification, indeed to the nation-state" (CAMPBELL & REW, 1999, p.11). Of course, such summarizing statements entail the suffering effects of discrimination and racism many immigrants are

forced to face while re-grouping their identities within new homelands and in juxtaposition to the "majority-making" projects of homogenization of adoptive societies like the United States associated with "neo-liberal" economies and policies. It is within these layered social "dynamics," the interplay between continuing modes of displacement and shifting levels of acceptance by larger societies which co-opt such immigrant peoples in transition, both newly arrived and more settled, and the relationship between the remembered past and the lived present, which is our focus here (e.g. GLADNEY, 1998; and ONG, 2006). [9]

These social-historical contexts in which inter-group interactions between immigrant populaces take place have other general considerations as well such as the encountered positioning of the group within society, including the interchange between "in-group" and "out-group" members (NAGEL, 1994; WATERS, 1990). Ethnic identities are therefore fluid across time and social contexts, which may be transformed into types of "ethnic switching" (ALBA, 1990; NAGEL, 1995). The public presentation of ethnic identity is moreover situational, revealing the hybrid and plural character of modern ethnicity (ESPIRITU, 1992; LESSINGER, 1995). [10]

Perhaps the most apt questions in relation to these views and in general illuminating the character of ethnicity in the United States are asked by HOLLINGER (2003, p.152), when he states:

"what is the authority by which claims about an individual's identity are warranted? To what extent does this authority reside in the will of the individual? If individual will is not a sufficiently authoritative basis of identity, who has the authority to ascribe identity to an individual, and what is the theoretical foundation for that authority?" [11]

To wit, notions of ethnicity are never divorced from ideas of power and the imposition of power upon others, especially in association with ethnic-minority groups. [12]

Ethnic boundaries are parts of patterns of social interaction, which are fomented by and later reinforced by in-group members' self-identification and outsiders' confirmation of group distinctions, as opposed to territorial demarcations (SANDERS, 2002). However, as CORNELL (1996) has pointed out, while it is important to understand the role of ethnic boundaries in defining ethnic groups, it is no less important to study what goes on within those boundaries—that is, within the shared cultural content of ethnicity—in order to understand why ethnic identity remains so strong and sometimes rather persistent among group members and less so among others. [13]

One way to bridge the gap between these divergent approaches has been offered by GURR and others (e.g. GURR & PITTSCH, 2002; TILLEY, 1998). GURR's conceptualization of ethnic identity is based on shared social experiences and norms and is compatible with an interpretative and social-constructionist approach, since the concept assumes that social constructions of ethnicity are never random nor static, but rather connected to a person's life

circumstances (see ROSENTHAL & KOETTIG's introduction in this issue for elaboration of this approach). Furthermore, as KÖßLER and SCHIEL (1995) have argued, ethnicity is a matter of consciousness. Therefore, people choose ethnicities, understand them within a given social-cultural frame, and on the basis of this decide who belongs and where the boundaries are between "us" and "them" (e.g. BARTH, 1969; ELWERT, 1989). [14]

The formation of ethnic groups implies a process of identifying one's own group that is identical, or closely intertwined with a process of classification and social exclusion of outsiders (TAJFEL, 1982; TAJFEL & TURNER, 1986; TURNER, 1985, 1987). [15]

In sum, we understand that ethnicity and ethnic belonging are fluid and difficult concepts to capture. They are not simply geographically or territorially rooted, but are constructed through the perspectives of the researcher and the other social actors and are contrived through different sets of social relations, social actions, and profound differences about belonging and meaning. [16]

2.2 Homes and belongings

As in the case of ethnic belonging, the notion of "home" is also complicated (HANNERZ, 2002), not straightforward (BLACK, 2002) and has multiple meanings (SIGMON, WHITCOMB & SNYDER, 2002). The meanings of "home" for groups and individuals largely depend on how they construct them and what kind of attributes they associate with them in a given context. In other words, we assume in this study that home must not be taken for granted as a pre-defined notion. As suggested by MOORE (2000, p.213), we focus on the exploration of "home meaning" or a pluralistic understanding of "homes and belongings," specifically in relation to ethnic groups or nationalities. Along with BRYCESON and VUORELA (2002, p.19) we agree that "home areas" have transnational elements through "extra-familial networks" and are transformed by the varying transnational choices of migrating populations and settlement patterns of such groups, as well as differing degrees of yearnings for homelands. [17]

Scholars across the social sciences have developed a large body of literature dealing with the notions of home and belonging. The concepts that have been developed from philosophical, theoretical and empirical approaches are contested, changing, fluid and multidimensional. Here we provide a brief overview of main approaches dealing with the notion of home, and how they pertain to our study. [18]

Home and belonging have pragmatic attributes (e.g. physical places and buildings) and emotional/cultural attributes (e.g. customs and traditions) that are constantly changing and reinterpreted (seen as real, imagined and/or desired) (BLACK, 2002; LOVELL, 1998). As imagined spaces of belief, yearning, and place, homes and homelands are distinct from "house societies," defined as the specific loci of socialization within one physical place or house (e.g. CARSTEN & HUGH-JONES, 1995). In our view, these processes of "home and homeland" are

connected to other human identities and are tied to other aspects of private and public memory. Furthermore, they are intertwined with other meanings, practices and symbols as well as other attributes of physical and bodily connotations (BLACK, 2002; HANNERZ, 2002). Therefore, notions of home in our investigations are addressed from individual, familial and collective perspectives, looking to the individual meanings, as well as the socio-cultural perspectives. That is, we have taken into account factors such as social class, age/life-cycle, gender, or employment status, in addition to the conflicting concerns of language identities, generational allegiances, and problems associated with dissimilar diasporas (DESPRES, 1991; GURNEY, 1997; SIXSMITH & SIXSMITH, 1991; TERKENLI, 1995; GANS, 1996; LANDAU, 1996. and ESMAN, 1996). [19]

Home also comes with spiritual and emotional, and nationalistic and patriotic connotations (SIGMON et al., 2002; DUNCAN & LAMBERT, 2004). A psychological home can be defined as "a sense of belonging in which self-identity is tied to a particular place" (SIGMON et al., 2002, p.33) that consists of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. Moreover, as SIGMON et al. point out, the sense of belonging is a dynamic process continuing throughout a person's lifespan, and not only tied to the individuals' home of origin. SIGMON et al. further conceptualize home by focusing on "how an individual reinforces his or her self-identity in a physical environment to represent that part of their identity that is not shared with others." (p.26) [20]

We can understand the complex meanings of home by also examining journeys away from home: the "things, places, activities and people associated with home become more apparent through their absence" (CASE, 1996, p.1). According to CASE (1996), there is evidence of a dialectical process of home that is affected by the conditions of routine and break from routine, as well as being with other people and being alone. Thus Case defines home both as a place of everyday habit and as togetherness/separation. Home can also be understood as not only being a point of origin, but also a destination (HOLLANDER, 1991; MALLETT, 2004; TERKENLI, 1995). As MCHUGH tells us (2000, p.78): the "dialectic of home and journey is a unified whole." [21]

While our world today may be characterized by neo-liberal economic forces, globalization processes, and transnational movements, LOVELL (1998) reminds us that "locality and belonging may be molded and defined as much by actual territorial emplacement as by memories of belonging to particular landscapes whose reality is enacted only through the acts of collective remembering" (pp.1-2). [22]

Adding to this, and following LINSTROTH (forthcoming), we prefer the notion of plural "belongings" to exemplify the contested, multiple, and polyvalent associations of identity for imagined spaces and defined places, which underline the push and pull of transnational claims by varied immigrant populations, more concretely, "belonging is multiplex and multi-layered, continuous and shifting, dynamic and attached" (YUVAL-DAVIS, 2003, p.141). As YUVAL-DAVIS (2003, p.141) elaborates, belonging should not be formulated as an abstraction but may

be seen as "embedded in specific discourses of power, in which gender, class, sexual and racialized social divisions are intermeshed." This idea is very relevant for our study, which looks at such disparate interconnections discussed in the biographies of Cubans, Haitians, and Guatemalans—diasporic and immigrant contexts. [23]

From another perspective, MALLETT (2004) discusses the concept of home in relation to place, space, feelings, practices, and an active state of being. In her view, spatial aspects are elided into many meanings of home, even though her conceptualization does not refer to a particular place. The idea of home with its spatial connotations is in our outlook one entwined with and inseparable from places, spaces, and/or territories as immigrants define distinctions or re-invent varying gradations of belonging. By contrast, GUSTAFSON (2001) maps out individuals' meanings of place around the interplay of self, others, and the environment. This latter author stresses the importance of the life path in regard to roots, continuity, experience, and memories albeit with elaborations of a sense of place through emotions, activity, and self-identification. [24]

The notion of "place identity," initially discussed by PROSHANSKY, FABIAN and KAMINOFF (1983 in DIXON & DURRHEIM, 2004) holds that individuals continually construct their sense of self through their interaction with material environments. Moreover it is argued that an affiliation of self with place leads to a sense of belonging (CUBA & HUMMON, 1993). The identity of place is constantly reproduced in relation to cultural identity. Places can be home, but they should not be thought of in that way. There can be numerous home places and each of these are "an equally complex product of the ever-shifting geography of social relations present and past" (MASSEY, 1994, p.171). The notion of place attachment is considered an integrating concept incorporating many aspects of people-place bonding (ALTMAN & LOW, 1992; MILLIGAN, 2003) linking specific settings with comfort and safety (HERNÁNDEZ, HIDALGO, SALAZAR-LAPLACE, & HESS, 2007) or providing an emotional link to a physical site (MILLIGAN, 2003). Furthermore, MALKKI (1992) argues for examining a sense of belonging not only based on birthplace and "degrees of nativeness," but also on the multiple forms of attachment that people create through living, remembering and imagining places. [25]

The construction of home and belonging among diasporas moves along various avenues and confluences, a topic relevant for our study. Following SAFRAN's (1991, pp.83-84) conceptualization of diasporas, we understand that expatriate communities (1) maintain a "memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland"; (2) regard their original homeland as a place of eventual return when the time is right; and (3) define themselves by upholding relations with the homeland. In more recent work, SAFRAN (2007) posits that a distant view from the homeland is often more pleasant than the view from within the homeland. Sentimental and nostalgic memories of home and homeland are often found, especially among diaspora communities (positions which are characteristically distinctive from "ethno-symbolic" approaches of myth and homeland supported by scholars such as SMITH, 1999). [26]

This nostalgia often masks experiences of the original home as "a space of tyranny, oppression or persecution" (MALLETT, 2004, p.64). HOBBSAWM (1991) points out the complexity of home for exiles, which we transfer here to that of diasporas. Albeit home for immigrants is their "old country," paradoxically, it must be transformed into a "new" one in order to permit their return. Along this line, APPADURAI (1996, pp.176-177) points out the contradictory ideas of homeland that often exist among exiles and immigrants; territorial homeland attachments are opposed to "elements of a postnational imaginary." [27]

It is argued that nostalgia enables people to maintain or regain identity continuity after displacement (MILLIGAN, 2003). Nostalgia, however, does not only or necessarily refer to a place, but also to a time, feelings, people and ways of living. BHATIA (2002) posits that different Third World diaspora communities are engaged in a dialogical process of negotiating their cultural identities as First World citizens, while at the same time strongly identifying with their home culture. Regarding what they call transnational or diasporic identities, CORNELL and HARTMANN (2007) maintain that global connections, a common rhetoric and long-distance cultural exchange are not as strong as locally constructed ethnicities/conceptualizations of the group. Moreover, as ANTHIAS (1998) has shown us, Diasporas form collective group representations differently; therefore, they must not be perceived as homogeneous groups. In other words, while "traditional" ethnic bonds are both strong, they are also dynamic and continually influenced by ongoing social organization. [28]

In sum, then, we see that the notion of home, like ethnicity, is dynamic and fluid, and cannot only be tied to a specific territory or place. One's conception of home is simultaneously imagined and real, nostalgic and concrete, clear, yet contradictory. Its perception is influenced by personal emotions as well as social-cultural memories, symbols, and traditions. It is not one clearly defined spatial or emotional notion but a multiple construct in individuals' lives—hence we speak about plural homes and belongings. [29]

2.3 Immigrant experiences and their connection to the concepts of home and ethnic belonging

The process of migration is closely linked to the notions discussed above; migration experiences impact peoples' identities and their understandings of home (MALLETT, 2004). For example, the immigrant experience of home can be one in which the greater temporal and spatial distance to home there is, the stronger the yearning for such a home becomes (BLACK, 2002; TERKENLI, 1995). Furthermore, for immigrants, the significance of home is often a notion that carries with it stress and different meanings for different generations, regarding the country of residence or, what might be even more relevant, the place where one comes from (DUNCAN & LAMBERT, 2004). Immigration to the United States always carries a sense of contradiction and ambiguity for refugees and migrants from poor and/or conflict-ridden regions; on the one hand the new homeland offers cultural and economic opportunities unavailable in the country of

origin, while on the other, it often makes immigrants feel unwelcome and estranged from their original homeland (DUNCAN & LAMBERT, 2004). [30]

Connected to migration is the notion of transnationalism—a concept that pertains to people who live in social worlds in two or more nation-states (McEWAN, 2004). For migrant communities, key elements of home are shared history, relationships and social networks (BLACK, 2002; BRYCESON & VUORELA, 2002). Since we assume that people consciously and/or unconsciously choose aspects of their familiar social worlds to construct their sense of home, we caution against adopting a simplistic understanding of transnationalism in order to get at the complexity of these processes. [31]

Based on a study that explored the relationship between culture of origin and immigrants' ability/inability to create home outside their countries of origin, MAGAT (1999) introduced the notion of "partial homes." Whereas in the ideal home, body, landscape, relationships, culture and nationality are congruent, the partial home is missing some of these factors. This idea can be further tied to the concept of "rootedness," which according to TERKENLI (1995), means belonging somewhere. This is of considerable relevance for migration experience where home contexts expand spatially with people's increasing distance from home. [32]

Given that immigrants live at a distance from their homeland, ethnic groups, often become very relevant since these groups can serve as a primary community anchor and provide scripts for values, identities, and cultural aspects of living (SONN, 2002). However, the opposite may be true as well, in many cases. That is, for various reasons (e.g. personal, economic), immigrants may choose to deny their ethnicity, and in doing so, deny their belonging to a certain group or home, as they strive for ethnic separation, rather than belonging. This idea—of shifting wishes and behaviors—between choosing ethnic belonging or ethnic separation connects to APPADURAI's (1996, p.48) term of "ethnoscapes," which refers to refugees/immigrants in the contemporary shifting world. As APPADURAI notes, group loyalties are affected by processes of de-territorialization. Therefore, group loyalties and notions of "home" are also affected by de-territorialization. [33]

From a psychological perspective, SONN (2002) maintains that immigration, forced or unforced, is accompanied by factors such as the severing of community ties, the loss of social networks and familiar bonds, and the loss of resources and meaning systems. One of the ways in which immigrants cope with these losses is through adaptation to their new experiences, through a process called community making. The sense of community is considered to reflect "feelings of belonging and identification with and participation in communities" (SARSON 1974 in SONN, 2002, p.206). Therefore, community making and construction of a sense of community among migrant groups are also important for understanding processes of transnationalism and the creation of transnational migrant networks. However, we must be careful to remember that not all migrants from a certain region will create a homogeneous sense of community; just as they were heterogeneous in their homelands, they will continue to be so in their adopted land as well. [34]

The sense of home, regardless of its meanings, migratory status or spatial aspects, is also a part of a human process of identity construction and tied to emotions and behaviors. People have the need to attach themselves to a context where they have ownership in ever-changing associations of place, society, and time (TERKENLI, 1995). Drawing from TURNER (1957, 1976 in MAGAT, 1999, p.120), MAGAT suggests that the concept of home "can help us identify the sense of order people try to impose on experience as they shape their own behavior." The author notes that it can take the form of structures, feelings, metaphors and symbols. More importantly, he posits that the meaning of home varies from person to person and changes over the life course. In a similar vein, SOMERVILLE (1992) takes the notion of home from the emotional and lived experience to the level of cognition and intellectual construction. In other words, people can develop a sense of home without having experiences or memories of it. In WU'S philosophical perspective (1993 in MALLETT, 2004), home refers to inter-subjective relationships developing self-identities of persons. Therefore, home is understood as fundamental to being, or as part of the ontological processes of selfhood. [35]

Further idealized and public and private conceptualizations of home have been discussed by MAGAT (1999) and HOBBSAWM (1991). MAGAT (1999) distinguishes between the "little home," that of the daily activities, and the "big home," conceived of as the place where one belongs and to which one ultimately will return. However, the notion of "when the time is right" for such a return might never occur in a person's lifespan, thus the big home might remain a desired/imagined one. In HOBBSAWM's (1991) discussion of the ambiguity of the term home, he points to the analogy of the German word *Heim* as home in a literal private sense and *Heimat* as home in a broader public sense that is socially constructed. Both notions can be very meaningful and simultaneously valid, regardless if they apply to one's household (*Heim*) or home country (*Heimat*). [36]

As noted above, the multi-group study of Cuban, Haitian and Guatemalan migrants to southern Florida provided us with the opportunity to explore the complex, fluid and often contradictory understandings of the concepts of ethnicity, home, and belonging. We chose to untangle this somewhat messy undertaking by asking our participants to provide their understandings of these concepts, through a variety of open-ended qualitative methods. In order to provide the methodological background for the three articles in this special issue on each of the three groups, we now turn to a description of the methodologies of our project. [37]

3. Methods

3.1 The research team

Based on our understandings of how social science research of complex issues is best approached, the co-investigators on this study chose to undertake this work as a group/team project. We trained a number of our graduate students in the qualitative methodologies relevant to the study, inviting them to take part in the stages of data collection, analysis and writing. This study, which was part of a larger teaching-research collaboration with Drs. Gabriele ROESENTHAL and Michaela KOETTIG from the Georg August University in Goettingen, included a seminar in which our students learned about the concepts discussed above and received training in biographical interviewing and ethnographic field methods. As part of this seminar, each student, either alone or in small groups, interviewed and/or observed people/events from the Cuban, Haitian and Guatemalan communities. From the beginning of the project through its end, 20 people participated in the research. A core group of 9 people participated in all three stages, and their articles appear in this special issue. [38]

3.2 Sample

In our overall sample, we interviewed 37 people and undertook 23 observations (see Table 1). Specifically, we conducted biographical interviews with 29 people—10 Cubans, 7 Guatemalans and 12 Haitians—23 of whom were first generation immigrants to the United States. We undertook interviews with representatives from 8 service agencies that offer a variety of social/advocacy/welfare services for their respective communities and engaged in participant observations of neighborhood and community events (detailed below) in Dade, Broward and West Palm counties. We used snowballing and convenience sampling techniques (CRESWELL, 1998) to reach participants. Given the diversity of our research team, some of whom were Haitian, others with family ties to Cuba, or had close contacts with the Latino and Caribbean communities, we were able to reach participants through these acquaintances and/or friends. These connections led the researchers to still other participants and further to invitations to community events.

Biographical interviews (n=29)

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age range</i>	<i>Immigration generation</i>
Cubans (n=10)	5m, 5f	28-57	8 - 1st; 2 - 2 nd
Guatemalans (n=7)	1m, 6f	27-84	6 - 1st; 1 - 2 nd
Haitians (n=12)	6m, 6f	22-56	9 - 1st; 3 - 2 nd

Service agency interviews (n=8)

	<i>Type of organizations</i>
Cubans (n=2)	Political exile organizations
Guatemalans (n=4)	Immigrant service providers, day labor center
Haitians (n=2)	Haitian neighborhood community organizations

Participant observations (n=23)

	<i>Type of observations</i>
Cubans (n=8)	Calle Ocho festival; restaurants/cafes; parks; churches; memorials; exile organizations; art gallery; neighborhood stores & meeting places
Guatemalans (n=6)	Soccer games; Maya New Year ceremony; neighborhood stores; restaurants; community center; day labor center
Haitians (n=9)	Church services; festival (Miami Mardi Gras); neighborhood stores, Little Haiti; political demonstrations; parties

Table 1: Overall sample and methods of data collection [39]

3.3 Instruments of data collection

Since our research was interdisciplinary, and our aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of ethnicity, home and belonging, we drew on two kinds of qualitative interviewing and also employed ethnographic methods (CRESWELL, 1998; EMERSON et al., 1995; LINSTROTH, 2008). The three data collection instruments used in this study included: (a) biographical interviews with the immigrants; (b) interviews with workers in service organizations, many of whom were immigrants themselves and (c) participant observations in community events. [40]

(a) Biographical interviews with refugees/immigrants

In these audio-taped interviews, the 29 participants were first asked to "tell us your life story, whatever you would like to share" (CHAITIN, 2004; ROSENTHAL, 2004). After the person told his/her story without interruption, the interviewer asked questions that were derived from the main narrative of the life experiences. After completion of the life story, specific questions that focused on definition of identity, and connection to the community and homeland were asked, if the person did not speak about these during the life story part of the interview (see [Appendix 1](#)). These interviews took between two hours—seven hours, depending on how much time each interviewee could spare and how much information each participant wished to share. Most of these interviews were one-shot encounters, but some took place over two to three sessions. All of the interviews were transcribed by the interviewer and reviewed by the head investigators on the project. [41]

(b) Interviews with workers in service organizations that work with these populations

We spoke with representatives from 8 social agencies that work with the three research populations in order to learn about the work that they carry out in their communities, the major challenges/obstacles and the central issues of importance to each diaspora (see [Appendix 2](#) for the full set of questions). These interviews were also audio-taped. At times, these interviews also included biographical interviews, given that the majority of social agency workers in this area are also immigrants, or children of immigrants from the countries that we studied. Therefore, although we worked from our set of questions designed for these organizations, at times, we saw the importance of giving the interviewee the space to relate his/her life story, since it was an integral part of the work that they did. These interviews ran between one—two hours and included informal observations of the organization—for example, lay-out and decoration of the offices, who came in and out, organizational publications and more. [42]

(c) Participant observations

In order to supplement the interviews and to provide a context to our study, we also undertook 23 participant observations of community and public events. Examples of these events included neighborhood visits, including visits to restaurants, shops and public areas in which members of the community gather, participation in church service, religious rites, local festivals, political activities, and soccer games in Dade, Broward and West Palm counties. While we did not immerse ourselves into the everyday lives of the three communities, given that these are very large and cover a number of geographical areas, we did try to reach a cross-section of events in order to learn more about the different facets and patterns of social life. In short, our aim here was to collect data that would help us understand the more "public" aspects of home, ethnicity and belonging. During these observations, we had informal interviews with participants, in which we asked for more information concerning what was taking place, explanations of

the activities, their importance to the community, etc. These events and informal interviews were recorded using jottings and fieldnotes (EMERSON et al., 1995). After the event, the observer(s) would then write up their fieldnotes, which included a first analysis of what s/he had encountered, and submitted the notes to the head researchers on the study. [43]

3.4 Data analysis

We drew on a number of methods of grounded theory (CHAITIN, 2004; EMERSON et al., 1995; GLASER & STRAUSS, 1967; LIEBLICH, TUVAL-MASHIACH & ZILBER, 1998; ROSENTHAL, 2004) to analyze our materials. A 7-stage analytical process was used to interpret the biographical interviews; information learned from the service agencies and participant observations were used mainly for triangulation purposes [44]

Seven steps in analysis

For each interview, we undertook our analyses in small groups, ranging from groups of two to 5 people. We found this way of working to be enlightening and relevant for this research. As DENZIN and LINCOLN (2008) state: "there is no single interpretive truth ... there are multiple interpretative communities, each with its own criteria for evaluation interpretations" (p.35). Furthermore, this group work for the interpretation of the interviews reflected our understandings concerning the fundamentally interpretative nature of qualitative studies, the systematic reflection of who the researcher is, the use of multifaceted and iterative complex reasoning (MARSHALL & ROSSMAN, 1999) and the multiple nature of reality, the value-laden aspect of inquiry and the emerging inductive methodology of the research process (CRESWELL, 1998). The group approach brought out these different interpretations, building on the diverse knowledge of our research team that included men and women of different ages, some of whom had been immigrants themselves, from the disciplines of anthropology, social psychology, human geography, political science and conflict resolution. [45]

In general, our sessions were brainstorming sessions. According to OSBORN (1963) the four main principles of the brainstorming process are: (1) ideas are shared without criticism or judgment; (2) all ideas are welcome; (3) a high quantity of ideas is desired; and (4) ideas can be combined and built upon and we endeavored to respect and adopt these guidelines. [46]

While we undertook most of the analyses in teams, we also worked individually at two points: Upon completion of the interview, each interviewer wrote up his/her field notes to share with the co-researchers. These field notes contained a detailed description of the interview context such as the time, location and a general impression of the interview. We drew on the recommendations of EMERSON et al. (1995) who have called this stage a depiction of scenes, where "the writer selects those details which most clearly and vividly create an image on page" (p.69). The second point was at the end; in order to succinctly summarize and write up the final results for each case. [47]

Steps 1 and 2: Listening, transcribing and reading

Each group met together to listen to the recording of the interview in a private area, where the interview could be played out loud for all present to hear. (The groups were dynamic and changed according to work/study schedules, individual desires to look at certain interviews or to learn about the different groups.) We all simultaneously transcribed the interview, as we listened. This assured us that if one researcher missed a sentence, another one was likely to hear it. The transcripts were then printed so that we could share them with one another, write notes, mark words and/or paragraphs and refer to them as we discussed possible interpretations. [48]

Every group member then read the complete interview by him/herself and wrote comments that reflected first understandings of the life story. If deemed necessary, specific parts were read together for the purposes of clarification. For example, if an interviewer used a word in Spanish that others did not understand, Spanish speaking members of the team could provide a translation. Moreover in cases where the interviewer was part of the specific analysis team, he or she could provide specific information for the other members of the team, as s/he referred to her fieldnotes if more detail was needed concerning a specific part. [49]

Step 3: Chronological analysis

Based on the transcript, we then constructed a chronology of the biographer's life. The chronology included the biographer's experiences in life, such as birth, education, marriage and employment as well as "extraordinary" experiences such as being a victim of war, organized in a table format. This biographical narrative was not merely a linear chronological account (ROBERTS, 2002); it tied together personal/social/political/historical phenomena with a story that expressed the significance of such events for the interviewee. Therefore, the biographer's chronology could then be superimposed on a historical timeline in order to see where and how the personal story intersected with the historical/social context (e.g. a wave of immigration from Cuba). [50]

For example, in our study, we identified connections that Haitian biographers made between changes of political regimes in Haiti to their migration or how traumatic events, such as incarceration, led a Cuban man to immigrate, even if these connections were only found "between the lines" (JOSSELYN, 2004). In other words, the analysis allowed us to connect the life history with the narrated life. While, as a rule, individual chronologies were made for each biographer, when we interviewed generations of people in a family, we also constructed composite family chronologies in order to have a better understanding of where the interviewee "fit" into his/her family's trajectory (CHAITIN, 2004). [51]

Step 4: Global analysis

We begin the group discussion by having each researcher discuss his/her overall impression of the interview, the interviewee, and the interview process. The global analysis addressed four main points: (1) a description of the interview context that described how hard/easy it was making contact with the biographer, the interview setting, the manner/dress of biographer, how the interviewer felt, length of the interview, etc.; (2) an overall summary of the interview including themes, style of speech (questions, arguments, stories, hesitations, etc.), emotional atmosphere, etc.; (3) first hypotheses concerning possible meanings the experiences have for the biographer; and (4) a critical examination of the interview process in respect to the positive/negative aspects, the necessity of follow-up interviews and/or ideas/ concerns for future interviews. [52]

Step 5: Thematic analysis

In this analytical stage, we identified specific salient themes, recurring ideas or patterns of belief that linked people and settings together, and possible meanings and explanations. We followed LIEBLICH et al.'s (1998) advice and looked for themes by concentrating on the space devoted to them in the text, their repetitive nature and the details provided by the biographer. LIEBLICH and colleagues reminded us of the importance of being aware of the first and last appearance of the theme; the transitions between the themes, the context of each theme, and their relative salience in the text—all good clues concerning the importance of a theme to a biographer. During this stage, we raised hypotheses concerning significance of these themes for the biographer's life. [53]

In order not to "lose sight of the forest for the trees," we looked for no more than six main themes for each interviewee and jointly decided on a name for each theme. As we re-read and discussed the transcript, we "fleshed-out" the interviews and identified specific examples that appeared to reflect each identified theme. For example, when we undertook a thematic analysis of a Guatemalan woman who had immigrated to the United States, we found that one major theme in her life story was "Being Mayan" that included the way she related to religion, work, food, customs, and beliefs in America. [54]

The global and thematic analyses led to discussions concerning multiple and contesting interpretations of reality (ALVESSON & SKOLDBERG, 2000) and prefaced the following stage of metaphorical analysis. [55]

Step 6: Metaphors

As this point, we put away our previous analyses and looked for metaphors that could capture the interviewee, in general. Life story interviews tend to be long, multifaceted and complex. Whereas the previous stage helped us examine major themes in the biographers' lives, it was helpful to take a step back and to approach the interpretation in a holistic manner (BLUCK & HABERMAS, 2000). This was the aim of the metaphor stage of analysis as we found the search for

metaphors to be a creative way to translate/convert biographers' lives to meaningful descriptions. [56]

We looked for central metaphors of the biographer's life that could capture succinctly the way they seemed to approach and understand their life. While there are endless ways to create metaphors, we often used movie or song titles in this stage. All metaphors we developed were then supported by one or two explanatory sentences. The following two examples serve as illustrations. For one Guatemalan biographer, we found the dominant theme of social class. This particular biographer tended to associate people from specific classes with different types of food, which led us to use the metaphor: "You are what you eat." "Tourist brochure" was created during our interpretation of an interview with a Haitian man who presented his life story in a way reminiscent of a brochure for Haiti that invites travelers to discover "the simple life." [57]

We found that brainstorming was an excellent way to develop metaphors in our group interpretation of the life story interviews. As we bounced ideas off one another, we were able to arrive at more creative metaphors. However, it is important for us to note here our ethical obligations. While it might be evident, we found it crucial to refrain from suggesting derogatory metaphors, in order to guard against subtle forms of ridiculing or judgmental metaphors that would find their way into the analysis. We tried to remain aware of the potential hierarchical (researcher-biographer) power relations that are associated with gender, class, educational level, ethnicity, race, nationality, etc. (CHRISTIANS, 2003). Therefore, we never placed the developing of metaphors above respect toward the biographers, even though our interviewees would never know that their stories had been judged. [58]

Step 7: Creating a summary paragraph

Once the steps were completed, each group developed a summary paragraph tying together all of the previous steps. For example, when addressing the question: How does the biographer appear to re-construct her sense of belonging in the United States, we used the global analysis, chronology, themes and the metaphors as our basis, to write a paragraph that reflected this construction. One of the team members took it upon him/herself to draft a summary document and circulate it among the other group members. After all members had commented on the draft, we compiled one final summary that reflected the groups' work. [59]

The entire process of analysis took between one to one and a half days per interview. [60]

4. Major Thematic Findings

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss all of the findings of this study. In fact, we are still carrying out analyses, as we have *many* materials that remain to be addressed in a myriad of ways. Therefore, in the following three articles in this issue that focus on specific aspects of each of the groups, we will present the major themes evident in the biographical interviews that were undertaken with members of the three groups. In these articles, the authors provide detailed insights into major themes that we discerned as significant in our study. [61]

In the Cuban sample, the main themes were idealization of Cuba, gender, ambiguous belongingness (pre- and post-Castro take-over; between being Cuban and being American); ideologies and values; close and/or conflictual family ties; independence versus repression; and "broken dreams" (as a result of the revolution, migration experiences etc.). In the Haitian immigrant population, we found major themes of importance, that tied to belonging and ethnicity, were political activism; the "discovery" and adoption of voodooism; class and race; (un)acceptance of authority; ambiguous belonging (between Haiti and America, issues of status etc.); the importance of education; pride/guilt in being Haitian; and gender. Finally, the themes that were prevalent in the analyses of members of the Guatemalan sample included the violent political situation, family, and religion/spirituality. [62]

5. Summary and Conclusions

In this article, we presented the major theoretical bases and underpinnings that drove this research study, the methods that we employed to arrive at in-depth understandings of ethnicity, belonging and home among Cuban, Haitian and Guatemalan immigrants to the United States, and the major themes that were discerned in the biographical interviews that we undertook with our research participants. Therefore, the modest aim of this article was to present a doorway into our study and to provide the context for the articles on the Cuban, Haitian and Guatemalan samples that follow. There is no doubt that arriving at theoretical conceptualizations of ethnicity, belonging and home for migrant populations is not easy. In our opinion, arriving at a GEERTZian (1973) interpretation of a "thick description" of these phenomena through the analyses of interviews and observations of members is moreover no easier. Even so, and in light of CHASE (2008, p.84), it is our hope that our narrative analyses will demonstrate "the creativity, complexity, and individual's (or groups') self and reality constructions" while also proving why the "power of the historical, social, cultural, organizational, discursive, interactional, and/or psychological circumstances" shape individual immigrant lives, their memories, their beliefs, and their overall sense of identity and place, and by and large, what it means to be either Cuban, Haitian, or Guatemalan. It is no less our tenuous hope that this article, and the four following papers, will provide the reader with a few more worthwhile ideas for scrutinizing and comprehending these concepts and for future studies about these or other immigrant populations. [63]

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide for Biographical Interviews

Main question for all of the refugees/immigrants:

1. Please tell me your life story—whatever you feel is relevant, beginning with your childhood.

Follow-up questions (if not discussed in the life-story section of the interview):

2. Please tell me about an experience when you feel Cuban (Haitian/Guatemalan)?

3. Please tell me about an experience when you felt American?

4. How do you define being Cuban (Haitian/Guatemalan)?

5. How do you define being American?

6. Do you keep in contact with people back home? If so, how do you keep in touch?

7. Do you keep up with Cuban (Haitian/Guatemalan) radio, television, media etc.? Please tell me about the programs you listen to/watch? Do you visit Cuban (Haitian/Guatemalan) internet sites? If so, please tell me about those.

8. Please tell me about your migration experience.

9. Please tell me about important cultural events to you. Can you tell me about cultural experiences/events that you have here in southern Florida?

10. Do you receive packages from home? If so, what kinds of things do you receive? Do you send packages home? If so, what do you send?

11. Do you support your family back in your homeland? If so, what do you do?

12. Do you support your community back in your homeland? If so, could you tell me what you do?

Appendix 2: Questions for Representatives in Service Agencies and Groups and Organizations

1. Please tell me about your history with this organization.

2. What is the history of your organization?

3. What work does your organization engage in?

4. What is your role in the community?

5. What kind of projects do you do in the community?

6. What are your main objectives in the work you do in your community?

7. How do you engage with the community members?

8. Describe the day-to-day work of your organization with the community members.

9. What do you see as the biggest challenges in your work?

10. What gives you the most satisfaction?

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