

THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR: LESSONS FROM ELIAN

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Despite the enormous economic crisis experienced by Cuba in the aftermath of the 1989 disappearance of the Soviet Union, the systems of social control in the island have been very effective in minimizing the number of people who participate in political protests, the number and variety of places in the society in which these overt political acts have occurred, and the institutions of civil society which would provide support for political alternatives. It has virtually eliminated all iconic dissident leaders and rendered very difficult all communication and coordination among members of dissident groups and publics. The system has also succeeded in reducing the degree of conceptual sophistication of the ideologies of resistance articulating the values and goals of the political dissidence, the knowledge of these ideologies among Cubans, their awareness of governmental abuse, and the ability of dissidents to claim ownership of the central constitutive historical experiences, beliefs, values and myths of the nation.

The above-mentioned list of successes is not due solely to the operation of formal social control mechanisms, despite their effectiveness. Instead, as is true to some extent in all societies (Boudon and Bourricaud, 1989, 331-333), they are to a significant although unknown extent the result of a broader effort to transform Cuba's society and culture on behalf of an ideology that justifies the continued political domination of the state by the present day regime.

In a comparative international context, Cuba is in a pre-transitional political stage in which civil society is undeveloped (O'Donnell et al., 1986; Munck, 1994;

Baloyra, 1993; Puerta, 1996). Cuba's political dynamics are very different from that of East Germany and Czechoslovakia in 1989, in which the worker brigades refused to back the police against the demonstrators (A. Oberschall, personal correspondence; see Dahrendorf, 1990). Absent in it are the political opportunities that come with the end of state repression, as in the case in Hungary and Poland during most of the communist period (Touring, 1983; Burrow and Lucks, 1992; Rothschild, 1993; for Russia see Duka et al., 1995; Yanitsky, 1993). In J. Kadar's Hungary the relative few that protested the political dictatorship were never a real threat to the state and were largely ignored by it (Szoboszlai, 1991; Gombar et al., 1994; Hanak, 1991, pp. 213-223). Kadar's government kept a close reign on the state security system, never allowing it to have operational autonomy. Poland's experience during the Solidarity period of the 1980s is also quite similar in its relative near absence of official terror (Staniszki, 1984).

Cuba is also dissimilar from the post-1956 Hungarian state in that Hungary made a clear distinction between the political and the private spheres of life, respecting the latter (Burawoy and Lukacs, 1992). Another important difference is that membership in the Hungarian communist party became a form of participation that many believed could be used to change the system. And when the end came in 1989, after Russian foreign policy failed to reestablish control of Central and Eastern Europe, the party was at the vanguard of the transformation and one of the most important factors favoring the Hungarian tran-

sition to democracy. In contrast, the Cuban Communist Party (CCP) does not represent such options. The CCP continues to oppose political change (*Granma*, 1996; Amuchastegui, 1997; Darling, 1997a; *Cubanet*, 1997b) and leads its mobilized supporters and members of the secret police in very effective acts of repression.

The system of domination is most effective in destroying independent associations and dissident leaders. It is least effective in controlling the emergence of a generalized culture of opposition to the government and the occurrence of relatively unorganized collective protests. Paradoxically, the very activities of repressing people have the largely unintended effect of creating similarities of experiences and collective awareness among them. It has also transformed the culture of the neighborhood, making the neighborhood identity an important facilitator of mobilization as people react against official actions. And more importantly for my present purpose, it cannot determine entirely the outcome of political processes in the international system.

As a way of partial summary, the continuing, effective repression and neutralization of social movement organizations by the state security systems, the dominance of the state-directed culture, the relative lack of independent associations and civil society, and the division of the opposition regarding strategies and tactics, make relative non-institutionalized collective behavior the primary means that the people of Cuba use to demand changes in the political system. It is the thesis of this paper that there is a dire need to internationalize collective behavior in and out of Cuba.

In view of these assumed facts, recent events show the appropriateness of a general strategy of guided social change that, while continuing to sponsor and support organized collectivities clamoring for social and political change in Cuba, would also concentrate on the mobilization of the Cuban community outside Cuba and the creation and enhancement of links between these democratic forces and international organizations and fora that would support a culture of opposition in the island and peaceful social change. While the time is not ripe for the establish-

ment of a pluralistic, democratic political system in Cuba, it is possible to prepare now the foundations for such change in the future. This preparation will involve much greater integration of the constituents of Cuba's culture of opposition to the international community working against the Castro dictatorship and for peaceful political change in the island.

LESSONS FROM ELIAN

The aforementioned considerations serve as backdrop to the Elian episode. Elian as symbol and historical episode has taught and clarified for us a number of important matters.

First, it shows the continued power of the Cuban state to organize and choreograph demonstrations throughout the island. Despite the well-known, documented increase in popular discontent in the island, the state apparatus continues to have power to mobilize people and to create collective behavior events akin to mass theater in which political ritual is enacted. The government continues to dominate the public space. Moreover, even a cursory examination of the rhetorical aspects of the Elian episode reveals Fidel Castro's political style.

Distinguished scholars like Antonio Benítez Rojo have begun to dissect Castro's rhetoric, which can be best understood through the use of the metaphor of *melodrama*. The formal aspects of melodrama as a genre of theater are well understood (Hatlen, 1992). In it, the action is centered on a grave conflict. There are tremendous difficulties of various natures, such as physical impairments, economic and material differences and exploitations, dangers and moral sufferings. Key to melodrama is the life and death struggle between good and evil. There is a villain and a morally pure, vulnerable victim. And then there is the hero, weak in material resources but a giant in virtue. As a process, melodrama never explores the psychological underpinnings of human action. Rather, it is in the development of external conflicts among them and the predictable resolution favoring the weak over the strong, the good over the bad. There are no surprises or historical developments, no escape into other forms of resolution, for the end result of the struggle is assured.

A working hypothesis of a paper now in preparation is that melodrama provides a useful metaphor to understand the unchanging deep structure of Fidel Castro's public speeches during more than 40 years in power. Elian represents the extension and enactment of this melodramatic theater style so successfully used by Castro in his public speeches to the area of international politics. Just as in the speeches, Fidel is the hero of the Elian melodrama, responding to the clamoring for justice of the Cuban people. The "Cuban mafia" in Miami is the villain. The victims are the young child and the mother, coerced by an unfeeling and perverse second husband to undergo the dangerous sea travel and kidnap her child. Alive still is the loving father deprived of the love and company of his cherished son. Reason and justice will prevail. The wrong will be righted, for as in all melodrama the victory of good over evil is a given. This is the interpretation of events that the propaganda system has made to prevail in Cuba and that gains credence in the U.S. through the operation of the U.S. mass media and the cooperation of the executive branch of the U.S. Federal Government.

The Elian episode shows the unchallenged totalitarian control of the country and the undiminished genius of Fidel Castro in selecting from the seemingly disorganized events of daily life a symbol that is amenable to treatment as *simulacra* in Jean Baudrillard's meaning of the term (Horrocks and Jevtic, 1997). Elian as simulacra allows the Cuban state to claim to be the protector of family values, a claim that is arguable, debatable, for many would say that it has never been concerned with such matters, much less a defender of parental rights over children.

It would take too long to document this fact, reflected in many well known instances, from the documented unpunished murder by government agents of many children in the sinking of the "13th of March" tugboat in the bay of Havana in 1994 to the official policy prohibiting parents to immigrate with their teenage children. Indeed, the precedence of the socialist state over the rights of parents towards their children is a basic principle of Cuba's legal system. Cuba's official constitution (see *Granma*, September 22, 1992) does not give the family institutional pre-

cedence in the socialization of children. Instead the family is one of a number of institutions so charged, to wit: "The family, the school, state organs, and mass organizations have the duty to give special attention to the total formation (*formación integral*) of children and youth (Chapter V, Article 40)." Likewise, Cuba's "Code of the Child" (Sicre-Rivas, 1978) reflects the emphasis on politics as a key principle of childhood socialization:

- The communist formation of the young generation is a valued aspiration of the state, the family, the teachers, the political organizations, and the mass organizations that act in order to foster in youth the ideological values of communism (Article 3).
- Society and the state watch to ascertain that all persons who come in contact with the child, constitute an example of the development of his communist personality (Article 5).
- The state grants special attention to the teaching of Marxism-Leninism due to its importance in the ideological formation and political culture of young people (Article 33).

These principles are periodically enforced. Recently, Mr. José Enrique Rives Peña and his wife, Mrs. Debora Cento Perna, were sanctioned to detention by the courts in the City of Camagüey, accused by the teacher of their young boy of opposing his ideological indoctrination and not performing their ideological duties as parents (*Diario Las Americas*, 24 March 2000).

Despite these ascertainable facts, it is undoubtedly true that, in a political sense, in the minds of most Americans the reality of the case is superseded by its simulacra representation as articulated by Mr. Castro. The many who in recent years have argued for the enfeeblement of Mr. Castro with advancing age are proven wrong by the Elian episode. Whatever the mechanisms of execution of the decisions of the Cuban elite — and we know only imperfectly how the top leadership's will is put into practice — the Elian episode shows both, that the system works quite efficiently in pursuit of state policy, and that at its most general it is a policy guided by the melodramatic in-

distinct so quintessential to Castro's style of politics. Elian shows us that it is a grave mistake to base programs and policies on the presumed growing senility of Mr. Castro. Even if one is keenly aware, as I am, of the many serious crimes committed by Mr. Castro and others in his inner circle, it is nevertheless indispensable to carry out clearheaded and dispassionate examinations of his successes and failures. Instead of demonizing or ridiculing him, the objective should be to show his mode of operation and the systems and culture created to ensure the continuity of his regime.

Second, the Elian incident shows both, the contemporary ability of the Cuban state to manipulate the mass media in the United States in the furtherance of its simulacra interpretation, and the changed nature of the ideological discourse of American elites in the post-1989 period.

The Cuban state's power of manipulation is partly due to the widespread practice by the U.S. mass media of *naïve realism*, at its basis an ethnocentric view of how the world operates, denoting the tendency by the mass media to interpret the world using concepts and theories that have wide currency in American society to interpret and explain how reality operates outside it. Thus, the widely accepted view in civilized societies, with ample precedence in Roman Law, that parents have privileged rights over their children, is used to justify the claims of Elian's father while ignoring the political realities of such claim, the long history of its violation in Castro's Cuba, and its disastrous effects on Elian's freedom.

It is also due to the assiduous monitoring and sanctioning by the Cuban state of the operation and reporting of the news in Cuba by foreign journalists, to include their proscription from the island if their reporting is seen as unfriendly to the government and the consequent self censorship that most often ensues. This is a very important matter that just now is beginning to receive sustained attention.

To my way of thinking, however, the power of the Cuban state to manipulate the coverage of the news by the U.S. mass media, most recently in its mass agitation efforts surrounding the Elian incident, is due

most importantly to the transformations that have occurred in the operation of the mass media in the United States particularly since World War II. For purpose of analysis, it is useful to think of the mass media in the United States as a non-totalitarian *propaganda system*. This is Noam Chomsky's celebrated and in my estimation well-founded criticism of the industry (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). To justify it, he points to what are empirically irrefutable facts: (1) The decline in investigative journalism and the dependence of the mass media on the state and established organizations and institutions for the sources of news, rendering them vulnerable to manipulations and the production of "news" by public relations; (2) The concentration of the news media into a few giant organizations and their organizational integration into larger economic multi-industry corporate conglomerates, so that what they report as news is very much impacted and mediated by the economic interests of other segments of the conglomerate of which they are part; (3) The dependence on corporate sponsors for advertising and funding for special reports, acting to curtail the treatment and substance of "sensitive" mass media programs in the United States.

It is clear to me that changes in the ownership and operations of the U.S. mass media makes a significant proportion of the reporting of the news about Cuba much more malleable to the interests of the U.S. and Cuban states and the political elites of both countries. To give two examples that can be derived from Chomsky's critical analysis: since increasingly the U.S. mass media depends on the state and on established institutions and organizations to source its items of news, U.S. reporters in Cuba accept the sourcing of the news by the Cuban state as a normal part of doing their business, for it is after all standard operating procedures. Or to give another example, the corporate integration of the U.S. mass media organizations into large economic conglomerates with interests in Cuba render understandable the consistently politically biased, anti-Cuban exile reporting of the news by entities such as CNN and ABC.

Third, and very much implicated with the situation just described is the peculiar, ongoing ideological transformation in the United States in the post-1989

period. A tremendous lesson from Elian is what it tells us about the definite decline of the ideology of anti-communism in vogue during the Cold War period as applied to Cuba. Many other events in the last ten years have anticipated the turn of events during Elian, but not any one of them have shown with such clarity the new ideological climate emerging in the United States.

In a paradoxical and unexpected way, the disappearance of the Soviet Union threatens the ideological justification of the anti-Castro community. The ideology of anti-communism widely in vogue in the United States during much of the post-1958 period, gave support to the claims of the exile community in its struggle for a free Cuba. This support is now largely gone. In its place, a new ideology is emerging in the US and elsewhere in the developed world that, while continuing to cultivate nationalistic xenophobia, lends support to the expansion of international capital. In the United States, symptomatic of this passing is the effective abandonment of the long standing policy of asylum and the rendering void of the promise engraved in The Statue of Liberty, and its replacement with penal systems under the aegis of the Immigration and Naturalization Service that are acknowledged by Amnesty International and other influential organizations as constituting grave violations of human rights (Wilch, 2000).

Obviously, there are many variations and dimensions to this new ideology, often termed neo-liberalism, that should not be downplayed, such as the protection of the environment and human rights. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake not to emphasize that the search for profit drives the emergence of the new ideology, particularly in the case of Cuba. In it, calculations of possible profits in an invigorated Cuban market and perceived present-day competitive disadvantages to European corporate interests go a long way in explaining the motivations of American political and economic elites. In light of these changes, the Cuban exile community's continued use of the anti-communist ideology to justify its struggle against the Castro brothers is increasingly seen as anachronistic and reactionary by large segments of the American public, a public manipulated by the

propaganda that nowadays masquerades as news of Cuba in the United States.

The continuation of the anti-communist ideology and the continued absence of mobilization of the Cuban community in exile would mean that the ongoing ideological transformations will make the lifting of the U.S. embargo and sustained efforts in the United States to improve relationship with the Cuban government, even to the point of reestablishing diplomatic relations, a logical outcome during the next ten years irrespective of the national political party in power in the United States. Of course, it may be argued that the tremendous lack of isomorphism existing between the ethical dimensions of the emerging ideology of neo-liberalism and the Cuban government's persistent and grave violation of human rights would prevent such an outcome. I do not believe so. U.S. foreign policy in the 20th century is full of this sort of contradiction. Importantly, if and when it happens, it will be done in such a way so as to further the interest of the Castro-led Cuban elite in power. Ironically, to the surprise of most people in the United States and elsewhere that have a superficial understanding of political dynamics in Cuba, the greatest obstacle for these events to occur in the short term is not the U.S. but the Cuban government. Still, the increasing abandonment in the United States of a system of values that proclaimed freedom as its greatest hope for mankind means that in the new ideological dispensation increasingly dominant in the United States, "practical" considerations reign and accommodation with the Castro regime should be expected that would dispel its chronic fears of rapprochement.

Fourth, another important lesson that can be derived from the Elian episode is that it showed the continued vitality of the anti-Castro feeling among the vast majority of Cubans in the United States and elsewhere outside Cuba and the willingness of Cubans throughout the country to express their dismay at the actions of the federal government. Despite the systematic and overwhelming downplaying and misrepresentations of the community's actions by the American mass media, the show of support by the Cuban community in the United States for the

Gonzalez family, their massive protest strike in South Florida, their boycott of schools, their demonstrations in most major cities throughout the country, are unparalleled in the annals of the exile.

For years, social scientists at Florida International University and elsewhere argued that the culture of the exile community was changing and that the new generations were less militant, more willing to come to terms with Castro's political domination. Fidel Castro himself started to use the epithet "mafia" to signify the presumed remaining extremists, the small segment of the Cuban exiles still opposed to his government. Yet, the collective behavior of Cubans in the United States during the Elian episode shows all such thinking to be incorrect in some very important ways.

This theme of generational transformation is wrong because it ignored the power of family socialization and political indoctrination into an anti-totalitarian point of view. It is a socialization experience based not only on the direct observations by young Cubans of how people live in freedom, but also of the pain of their parents, their longing for their homeland, the collective sufferings of a nation, their struggles as a minority group in the United States, their pride, their hard work, their love for freedom. In a myriad ways, through witnessing the ongoing life-and-death struggle of escapees at sea, socialization into the language, the music, the norms and values, the rights and wrongs of being Cuban, children from Cuban families with no immediate experience of Cuba become Cuban. The community reproduces itself. It is obviously changed by births and deaths, for these children are in some very important ways socialized differently than their parents and grandparents. Yet, as Elian showed us, the political passion against Castro's government remain.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

If the foregoing analysis is correct, certain things need to be done at this juncture to improve the chances of peaceful change and the establishment of democracy in Cuba.

First and foremost, there is a dire need for the political leadership in the Cuban community to recognize

the lessons from Elian and act accordingly. Clearly, Elian showed that the community must change its anti-communist ideological stance in ways that would make it more palatable to the larger American society. This change will demand inspired leadership. There are things that facilitate it. The socialist-inspired dream of the Cuban revolution died many years ago. What exists now is a dictatorship of a minority of the population over the majority under the aegis of the Cuban Communist Party.

This emphasis on the totalitarianism of the political system has gained us friends in Europe and elsewhere in the past and should be stressed in the future. The exile community needs to broadcast this message with renewed vigor. It is on the matter of violation of civil rights, the brutality of the social control systems, the absence of a multiparty political system, the destruction of the environment by government directives and programs, the racism and sexism and homophobia of the Cuban political system, the use of semi-slave labor in Cuba by foreign corporations that operate in the island, that our chances to mobilize world opinion in favor of democratic social change in Cuba are maximized.

Second, Elian also showed us the need for the increased practice of civil protest by Cubans in the United States. The 1990s saw the beginning of such practices in South Florida, but they must be increased and perfected. Saul D. Alinsky's justly famous book, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (1989), should become forced reading for every aspiring community leader and organizer, for the time is ripe for the mobilization of the community. There is a tremendous reservoir of spiritual and material resources in it that could be obtained for mobilization in the struggle against Castro if the right strategy and tactics are put in place, and Alinsky's monograph is the best place that I know of for guidance as to how to do it. For example, it is conceivable that boycotts against products of companies in the industrial conglomerates to which key U.S. mass media organizations belong that consistently misrepresent the Cuban community could be used to exert pressure on them to change their reporting practices and make them more objective.

Similarly, boycotts and other acts of protest could be organized against international corporations that use semi-slave labor in Cuba.

I cannot think of a more important remaining matter to prepare for a political transition in Cuba than the organization of the exile community and its integration to the dissidence, the Catholic Church, other segments of the emerging civil society, and other unorganized manifestations of alternative culture in the island. Clearly, the organization of the community and its participation in civil disobedience outside Cuba must be guided overwhelmingly if not solely by the expressed needs of the people of Cuba in Cuba. In other words, the struggle should not be directed primarily to change U.S. society or to improve the living conditions of Cubans in the United States but rather to change practices in the United States and elsewhere to facilitate the coming of freedom to Cuba. Obviously, from a tactical point of view, the ideal situations that should be selected to bring about mobilization and the civil disobedience of Cubans in the United States and elsewhere will combine the grievances of Cubans generated by their living in these societies with the aspirations and needs of Cubans in the island.

Third, Elian reminded us about the sociological truism that people do not live in an unmediated world. Rather, they live in the world that they construct symbolically. And in the battle of symbols that Elian brought about the exile community lost. Elian showed us that in the future war of symbols we must choose our battles much more carefully than we did in Elian and we must go against the majority of the U.S. mass media and the propaganda it spreads. The only way to counter these effects is to use better propaganda. Thus, there is an immediate, dire need to systematically present a different view of the Cuban community to the rest of the country and to the Cuban people in the island. It is for this reason that all efforts must be made to improve the technical capability and programmatic sustainability of *Radio Martí*. The function of *Radio Martí* in bringing about information to the Cuban people is a critical part of any effort against the present day regime. The same is true of other smaller radio stations that operate as

parts of specific transnational movement organizations, such as *La Voz del CID*. There is also a very important need to create institutionalized means to systematically counter the anti Cuban exile propaganda in the United States.

More broadly, every effort should be made to improve communication and interaction between the people of Cuba and the rest of the world and in designing new mechanisms whereby such goal is maximized. The recent opposition in Miami to artistic groups from Cuba is a tactical error. It must be discontinued. Despite its anti-Castro rationale, in fact such collective protests run contrary to the needed improvement. True artists are always the creators of new styles and new ways of thinking, the harbingers of change. To oppose art and to curtail it is to commit moral suicide.

Similarly, irrespective of differences in political credo, all democratic forces willing to respect and abide in the future by the results of elections in a multi-party political system in Cuba must be financially supported and encouraged by the exile community. The recent difficulties of *Cubanet* created by the withdrawal of financial assistance by the U.S. federal government, and the continuing financial difficulties of important journals like *Disidente*, must not be allowed to continue. Instead, the community's resources must be mobilized to support these and other similar efforts to broadcast the situation of Cuba throughout the world. Again, it is totally unimportant as a basis for collective action what fellow Cubans may believe should be the precise form of government in a future Cuba. As long as they believe and respect democratic ideals, the desirability of free elections, and the need for a multiple party political system, they should receive support and assistance by the mobilized community.

Fourth, in the sociology of social movements there is the truism that organizational efforts that combine both public and private goods often work best. We need to think of ways of combining the maximization of both private and public goals. For example, at the present time an important private goal of many Cuban families is to send dollars to their relatives in Cuba. Indeed, foreign remittances are the most im-

portant source of hard currency for the Castro government and a very lucrative business (Alfonso, 2000). Still, however, there is a need to create a corporation, perhaps a not-for-profit entity, that would do the transferring of these funds and that also would, from its earnings, give grants to improve the quality of life of communities in Cuba, or would give financial support to organizations in Cuba and in the United States with an interest in furthering progressive peaceful social change in the island. In the post-embargo period, this and other types of activities would become possible and an activity for radicals in the spirit of Alinsky, with obvious benefits for the people of Cuba.

Fifth, Elian also revealed as few other times before it the relationship between national boundaries and national politics in the case of Cuba. True in the past and increasingly so in the future, anti-hegemonic political collective action by Cubans in and out of Cuba is not a national but an international process. As is the case in other social movements in the United States and elsewhere (McCarthy and Zald, 1977), events in Cuba and South Florida often coincide with political sensitivities and agendas of agencies and organizations that are distant from the place of action. Distal political participatory events occur as reflections of events elsewhere. This is a key reality embodied by Elian that all community leaders and organizers must attend to in the future.

The international nature of politics is maximized by the new means of electronic communication. Despite many attempts, the system of government control and repression has been incapable of stopping dissidents' use of the new electronic means of communication and their forging relationship with international associations. There is a very effective censorship of the Internet inside Cuba. Nevertheless, the new electronic means of communication are playing a key part in energizing and transforming the organizations and affinity groups that are part of Cuba's culture of opposition. They have also proven very important in informing the world about unplanned collective protests such as the August 5, 1994 protest in Havana.

In Cuba, while most people do not have access to the Internet, they have access to the recently improved international telephone services. Increasingly, they also have organizational representatives and cooperating organizational affiliates and representatives outside Cuba that have access to the Internet. They are key sources of organizational resources that must be strengthened (not unrelatedly, the e-mail addresses of members of Amnesty International's Urgent Action Network are distributed outside Cuba among supporters of the Cuban organizations to facilitate their appeals to AI for help).

Examples abound. A few years ago the Partido Acción Nacionalista (Nationalist Action Party) had three representatives in Miami and Costa Rica (*Cubanet*, 1997a). Movimiento Humanista Evolucionario Cubano (Cuban Evolutionary Humanist Movement) circulates its telephone, e-mail address (MHEC@compuserve.com) and home page in the Web (<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/mhec>), as does Hermanos al Rescate (Brothers to the Rescue, <http://www.hermanos.org>) and Partido Demócrata Cristiano de Cuba (Christian Democratic Party of Cuba, <http://www.pdc-cuba.org>), to mention three well-known organizations operating in Cuba and elsewhere. A number of organized members of the culture of opposition act as clearing houses of information on the action of state security and other events in the island. Among them are the Cuban Information Center, the Bureau of Independent Journalists, and the Information Bureau of the Human Rights Movement in Cuba. Once contacted via telephone, these transnational organizational resources broadcast their needs, experiences and information to other Cubans via radio as well as to members of the international community. Using this simple communication system, independent journalists in Cuba devoid of access to the Internet, facsimile machines or office equipment other than antiquated typewriters practice their profession. Likewise, individual Cuban citizens report events and state actions.

News about events affecting a community, group, or person travels around the world before neighbors hear about it. Despite the distance, nowadays they are much more likely to hear about it than in the

past. An excellent example of this process is the convocation by the “Comité Cubano Pro Derechos Humanos” (Committee for Human Rights) of the population in the municipalities of Güines, Nueva Paz, Nicolás de Bari, Güira de Melena, and others in the Mayabeque region in the Province of Havana, to attend a religious rally in the Chapel of Santa Barbara, in the City of Güines, on December 4, 1991, to pray for the democratization of the country. Cuban activists sent the invitation to Cuban Catholic priests in Miami, Florida. The priests were asked to broadcast it to Cuba through Radio Martí, La Voz del CID, and the Voz de la Fundación.

State actions are known that in the past were unknown by most people. This includes rumors of political infighting within the Cuban Communist Party and among the highest authorities of the government as well as knowledge of political mobilizations (LAT 92-188; LAT 92-146). The new electronic system also makes it possible, for example, for interested persons outside Cuba to double-check with their contacts in Havana the truthfulness of reports circulating outside Cuba of bombings of public buildings and have the information divulged worldwide in a matter of hours after the initiation of the request. Recently, at least one independent journalist advertised his services to the public; and in an unusual twist, an underground activist actively being searched for by state security used the system to ask for international protection before his capture. It also makes it possible for people to communicate to the general public information on the abuses done by individual agents of state security, the names of the victims and the likely place of their imprisonment in the island.

The dependence of organized members of Cuba’s opposition on transnational organizational partners

existed prior to 1989. What is new in the post-1989 period is the enormous power of the Internet to broadcast their appeal and to mobilize their constituencies outside Cuba. Its impact on Cuba and on the Cuban community in Europe and the United States is hard to overestimate. The new electronic system neutralizes governmental secrecy, improves the accuracy and timeliness of the ongoing monitoring of the Cuban state and helps people evaluate their interpretations of events and coordinate their actions.

These examples argue for the existence of a transnational political dynamic. The collective actions that occur in Cuba and among Cubans in South Florida, Puerto Rico, and other communities of the Cuban Diaspora must be understood in light of this recently emergent transnational political reality that is facilitated in large part by the new means of mass communication. The strengthening of transnational organizational links should be a priority for community organizing.

The importance of these processes and mechanisms is obvious. Irrespective of their political credo, every effort should be made by the community to help independent journalists in Cuba as well as the organizations and social movement affiliates that actively broadcast and monitor the situation inside the island.

Elian is thus challenge and promise. Challenge to abandon the wrong policies and beliefs of the past. Promise in that it shows what we are capable of doing to help our brothers and sisters. In this effort a spirit of inclusiveness must pervade our actions. Even democratic communists and socialists must be encouraged. In some respects, they have been among the most victimized.

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