

Privileged Subject / Observer of Cuban-American Relations and Migration Dynamics: A Conversation with Rubén G. Rumbaut

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is not easy to come across individuals who enjoy the advantage of having been the actors of certain historical processes by having actively participated in the evolution and transformation of particular human groups and, simultaneously, of being among the key analysts of those processes by having mastered all the skills necessary to interpret them in the most appropriate light. But such is the case of Professor Rubén G. Rumbaut who, born in Havana, has been one of the most prominent scholars in the field of Migration and Refugee Studies in the U.S. over the past three decades.² Like many of his compatriots, despite his dazzling professional career and growing responsibilities in “la Cuba del Norte,” Rumbaut has never lost sight of the socio-political events taking place on the island (Rumbaut 1978; 2016; Rumbaut & Rumbaut 2009) and has also paid close attention to the metamorphoses that the Cuban diaspora has undergone over time (Rumbaut 1977; 1997a). In fact, one could easily surmise that there

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must have been some sort of continuity between his two roles as a member of the Cuban-American community and as a leading scholar who has focused much of his research on immigration and refugee movements (Rumbaut 1988; 1989; 1994a; 2006), the processes of integration into the receiving society across generations (Rumbaut 1994b; 1997b; 2004; 2011), and the transitions and adaptations of the children of migrants (Rumbaut 1991; 2005a; 2008). His own life-history –although exceptional in several ways³– must have been an invaluable asset in terms of making him especially sensitive to all those innumerable factors that have a bearing on the trajectory followed by migrants, exiles, asylum seekers, etc. from the moment they plan to leave their country of origin to that in which they begin to develop a sense of belonging in the destination country. Rumbaut (together with Alejandro Portes) was the architect in the 1990s of a new paradigm that tries to explain the various pathways of immigrant incorporation in receiving countries and that is widely known as “segmented assimilation” (Rumbaut 1994b; Portes & Rumbaut 2001). By using the results of comparative longitudinal studies of the adaptation of different groups of immigrants in the U.S. and directing several multidisciplinary projects,⁴ they have been able to identify the kind of incentives and structural barriers that may condition how well or how poorly those groups of migrants and refugees manage to integrate. Professor Rumbaut has shown special interest in how life course and intergenerational differences often determine the degree of success or failure of migrants in adaptation processes, which in turn are very much conditioned by their access to educational and professional opportunities as well as their family’s assets for socioeconomic mobility (Portes & Rumbaut 2014; Rumbaut 2005b). In this regard, what he has called the “one and a half” or “1.5 generation” –that is, those who, like himself, were born and raised in another country but completed their formative years in an adoptive land– has received much attention in his research due to the challenges they may face for being somehow “suspended” between two cultures at a difficult phase in their lives, when they are moving from childhood to adolescence and, finally, into adulthood (Rumbaut 1991; 2004; Rumbaut & Ima 1988). As noted, many of the concerns that Rumbaut has shown during his prolonged and productive professional career have been spurred by his own experiences as an active member of the increasingly diverse Cuban-American community in the U.S. (see UC-Cuba 2017).⁵ One goal of our exchange below is to try to trace those elements of continuity or discontinuity that can be singled out in his path as both a subject and observer of his –and others’– migratory journey.

Several historians have written about the serious political and identity dilemmas that Cuban-Americans have faced –and still face now– due to the long and troubled history of the relations between the two countries (see Thomas; Pérez 1990; Rumbaut & Rumbaut 2007; Schoultz). As British journalist and historian Richard Gott rightly notes, “The Cuban people [...] have had a conflictive and violent past, and this entrenched tradition has not altogether disappeared in the twenty-first century” (10). On top of the many racial, political, economic, social, and even environmental disruptions faced by most Caribbean nations, Cuba has been over the past two centuries at the very crux of trade and military tensions with the giant country to the North (Rumbaut & Rumbaut 2007: 136-138). Louis A. Pérez notes that both the proximity between the two countries and the unending instances of U.S. intervention in the political and economic system of the island –notably since the mid-nineteenth century, and predominantly since the U.S. military occupation of the island in 1898– have affected profoundly the institutional and social stability of the formal Republic established in 1902 (1990: 149-169; cf. Schoultz). No doubt, one of the major consequences of these political strains between the two countries has been the countless waves of migrants and exiles –Gott refers to them as “exodus” (266, 298)– who, for various reasons, have left the island since the early nineteenth century, whether provisionally or, in the end, permanently. Being an expert in all types of human mobility, Professor Rumbaut is profoundly aware of both the burden and the clout that this long tradition of Cuban immigration to the U.S. represents for those whose ancestors lived at some point on the island. While it may be true that most Cuban-Americans have historically assimilated themselves variously into mainstream American society (cf. Grenier & Pérez), there have been other cohorts who have had to deal with unwelcoming immigration policies and even aggressive anti-immigrant reactions. There has been so much variety among the different groups of migrants and refugees from the island –from economic transients to political refugees, from unaccompanied children (Operation Peter Pan) to the *marielitos* in 1980 and the *balseros* in 1994 that the whole picture is like a natural laboratory for anybody interested in the phenomenon. Not only this, but the fact that most Cuban émigrés have settled in a limited number of states in America –mainly Florida (70%), but also New York and New Jersey, California, Texas and Illinois– has resulted in their very active socio-political participation and an increasing visibility in business ventures, academia, performing arts, and the political life in those areas (Grenier & Stepick). As will become evident below,

Rumbaut has remained –for over four decades now (Rumbaut 1977, 1978, 2016)– interested in the study of the transformation of the Cuban diaspora as well as the developments in the difficult relations between the two countries.⁶ Given the hugely consequential recent vicissitudes in the history of both nations, we aim to gather his well-informed opinion about how these changes are going to affect the future of the island and of Cuban-Americans.

The body of this article has been divided into two sections in which we hope to get a fairly in-depth knowledge of Professor Rumbaut’s experiences and impressions as both a subject and privileged observer of the path followed by Cuban migrants/exiles in the U.S. The queries in the first section delve into more personal recollections, since we are primarily interested here in learning what the experience of becoming an exile at a relatively young age was like and what key factors had an incidence on the process of adaptation to the host country (see Rumbaut 1977). There will be aspects of Rumbaut’s condition as a Cuban-American exile that may sound familiar and comparable to those of other migrants; however, there will presumably be others more specific to the experience of his compatriots and his own family (Rumbaut & Rumbaut 2005). One aim of this first set of questions would be to ascertain which elements of the migratory passage have helped/hindered the integration in the receiving country and which others have contributed to maintaining some ties with the motherland. In the second section, our attention will turn to collective issues regarding the Cuban diaspora in the U.S.

María Cristina García has noted about the early waves of exiles right after the revolution of 1959 that “The government justified this accommodation of the Cuban refugees as a humanitarian gesture that would ultimately benefit the United States: the refugees would one day return to Cuba to mould their country’s future, and would establish more cordial relations with the U.S.” (22). This prediction, like many others, proved utterly incorrect, and many Cubans –the Rumbauts included– soon came to realize, especially after the debacle of the 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion, that a return to the motherland would not be an option, at least for the foreseeable future. How did this fact condition the hopes/expectations of exiles? How did it change their relationship with their country of origin and their culture? Was their experience too narrowly mediated by the political tensions between the two governments? (see Pérez 1990: 238-282). The second section in the body of the article wishes to bring light to some of these issues and to possibly discern some of defining elements of the Cuban-American diaspora.

Figure 1. Cuban identity started early for Rubén.



Source: Rubén G. Rumbaut

2. COMING OF AGE AND INTEGRATING IN THE “CUBA DEL NORTE”

Anybody who has been “transplanted” at a tender age into a different culture is familiar with the kind of shocks that one inevitably experiences in those circumstances. It is true, however, that those shocks are very much modulated by factors such as the type of family they belong to and the capital (of various kinds) they come with, the context of reception in the destination country or their mode of incorporation (see Portes & Rumbaut 2001).⁷ In the case of exiles, whether they count with some assistance from the government or some networks may make a tremendous difference in how far they are able to navigate the initial difficulties. Rumbaut, as a young man, was probably exposed to a number of obstacles –but also incentives– that must have surely conditioned his early adaptation process. Not only must that, but the transformations taking place in the receiving society at the time have had an impact on his decision to follow a particular path of integration into that society (Rumbaut & Rumbaut 2005). The questions below intend to unveil some of the elements that accompany that process of adaptation and the role that the ties with the country of origin may still play in it.

Aitor Ibarrola: When did you and your family leave Cuba and under what circumstances? Was your family’s “migratory journey” (a)typical? When your family first arrived to the U.S., did they have any social or ethnic network that they could count on?

Rubén Rumbaut: On July 16, 1960, with \$ 450 and five cardboard suitcases, our family of seven (my parents and five siblings, ages 5 to 11) left a revolution in Cuba for exile in the United States, speaking only Spanish and surmising that our sojourn would be short. I remember that day vividly still, hour by hour; of the next day, July 17, I remember nothing at all. We came with a two-week tourist visa, unprepared, with no contacts or job prospects, but hopeful that our absence would not last longer than a year or two. At the time, there were no established social or ethnic networks we could rely on. Such networks evolved over time as the exodus accelerated and concentrated in the Miami area —as did, later, U.S. government assistance programs. But we were relative pioneers, and by late 1961 we had already left Miami for Albuquerque, NM, where my father finally landed his first full-time job (and I finished high school). The debacle of the Bay of Pigs invasion and its aftermath had made clear that our bridges were burned and our stay would be indefinitely prolonged.

AI: What were your family’s main concerns upon arrival to the new country? During your early years in the U.S., were there any particular barriers and/or aids that played a major role in your development as a student?

RR: The process of remaking our lives in the United States ensued inexorably. For the parents, the decision to leave a beloved country entailed an agony that lasted for months. Once in exile, personal trials followed in never-ending succession. The ideological struggle consumes time and energy; the survival struggle, another part; the duties toward family, job and the host society, yet another. One feels torn between diverse imperatives. Dilemmas ensue about one’s work and career: should one try to gain income by multiple means or study and prepare again for the future after having seen one “future” evaporate before one’s very eyes, or just work hard in one’s profession and hope for the best? And how to proceed with the children’s education?

Language was a crucial barrier to overcome —a process that proved far easier for the kids; the adults managed haltingly and with heavy accents. I remember that first year in Miami like a silent movie: I see the moving pictures, but there is no sound (I couldn’t understand the meaning of spoken words). My father once told me he felt

he started “from below scratch,” because he “had to learn to speak all over again, like a baby.” His accent was his “racial stigma,” he added; he could pass until he opened his mouth, which then left no doubt of his “otherness.” But by 1965 the first of the children started going away to college —with the decisive aid of full academic scholarships and government loans.

We went through multiple “shocks” (Rumbaut & Rumbaut 2005). “Culture shock” diminishes with acculturation and a positive reception in the new country. “Exile shock,” in contrast, entails much more than moving from one culture to another. The refugee has lost his homeland against his will; his bridges are burned behind him; he cannot return at will. Length of expatriation, separation from family and friends, and political change in his country are not in his hands. Sadness and depression derive from experiences of loss, uncertainty, conflicting loyalties and uprooted isolation, which leave deep-seated psychological scars that never disappear. Some of these “shocks” are diluted and attenuated by the passage of time, others modified. There have been wide gaps between distinct waves and generations of Cubans who have come to the U.S. over the past five decades; the meaning of exile varies for them as a function of age and generation, self and circumstance. But exile is a defining fate; you don’t just take it off like you would a pair of shoes.

AI: To what extent did the profound socio-cultural changes taking place in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s affect your perception of what was happening in Cuba? Did those changes have any impact on the decisions you took regarding your education?

RR: At the age of 16, with one of those old cardboard suitcases, a scholarship, and my wits, I arrived alone in St. Louis to begin my pre-med studies. But before my freshman year was done, I had declared sociology as my major. The turbulent 1960s formed the “surround sound” of my formative years. By the late 1970s, after a decidedly nonlinear trajectory, I completed a Ph.D. in sociology and began work on what would become (in a way I could not have foreseen) a series of never-ending studies of refugees and immigrants from all over the world to the U.S.; in a way, I have made a career out of reflecting on my own experience, while universalizing it via comparative research.

For Cuban youth coming of age in those times, their “psycho-historical actuality” was shared primarily with American peers in networks of relationships and affiliations, rather than within Cuban enclaves no longer central to their lives. For certain sectors of this “one-and-a-half” generation of youth, particularly student groups, it was the general crisis of the U.S. in the 1960s that presented the context

for ideological commitment and identity formation, sustained by youth movements which themselves became principal agents of change and challenge to established arrangements. It was, whatever the nature of our response to it, a period of flux and upheaval which indelibly affected us all. There is, of course, considerable diversity within generational units. Still, I think the following generalization applies: if the parent generation in exile, the protagonists of the decision to leave, was defined by the events of the Cuban Revolution of the 1950s and its aftermath –if that was the decisive crisis of their experience– then, and with not a little irony, the Vietnam War defined significant segments of the youth generation of that era: that, more than their own inherited exile (though not their Cuban heritage), was the decisive crisis of their experience. Certainly it was of mine.

3. THEORIZING MIGRATORY FLOWS AND ADAPTATION PROCESSES

As mentioned in the introductory notes to this article, Professor Rumbaut has been a well-informed witness and analyst of the migratory movements between Cuba and the U.S. for at least forty years. Like some of his Cuban-American colleagues –García, Grenier, Pérez and Portes, among them– he is conscious of how both the shifting tensions between the two countries and the socio-economic conditions on the island have been giving shape to a very specific migration system (see Grenier & Pérez). In this section, we are interested in Rumbaut's analysis of the situation of the Cuban-American community these last five decades and his explanations for the changing character of the Cuban diaspora over time. Often described as easily assimilating into the mainstream society, there must have been features of the group that must have favored that process. On the other hand, as Pérez Firmat (1994: 18-21) and others have argued, it is not as if –especially members of the 1.5 generation– have not also been affected by and used elements of their Cuban heritage to find and make their niche in the host society. In this sense, the signs of the Cuban presence in the socio-cultural and political life of the U.S. today are unquestionable.⁸ What is less clear is whether we can now speak of a more diverse and heterogeneous profile of the Cuban diaspora.

AI: Compared to other groups of Hispanics in the U.S., Cuban-Americans have fared remarkably well both socioeconomically and in accruing political power. What factors would you highlight as having fostered these higher levels of achievement?

RR: Although there are significant socioeconomic and generational differences among distinct waves and “vintages” of Cuban émigrés who have come since 1959,

their resettlement has been mitigated by a variety of factors: (1) the resources of the exiles as a group, including (notably among the earlier arrivals) a comparatively high level of education and occupational experience and technical skills, familiarity with U.S. society and ideological congruence with dominant U.S. political values; (2) the creation of a network of “institutionally complete” ethnic communities, the most salient example of which is the teeming enclave of “Little Havana” in Miami, which facilitates the maintenance of a vigorous sense of collective identity and ethnic consciousness, ethnic political mobilization, and ethnic entrepreneurship; (3) the organized reception accorded the refugees by American public and private agencies, which facilitated their entry and subsequent resettlement, and the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act, a law still extant which has privileged Cubans like no other migrant group. In these respects, the Cuban emigration to the U.S. has contrasted sharply with most previous migrations of the 19th and 20th centuries.

AI: Quoting President McKinley, the preeminent historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr., has argued that, despite the many historical tensions and political collisions, the destinies of Cuba and the U.S. are inevitably linked by “ties of singular intimacy” (1990). In what spheres would you say that those ties are most apparent? Is the “big brother to the North” really influenced by the island in any significant ways today?

RR: Baseball, imported from the U.S., is in my Cuban DNA. There are many cultural influences of the U.S. on Cuba. And in *The Havana Habit*, Gustavo Pérez Firmat (2010) argues that the island’s influences on almost two centuries of American life and cultural imagination are also extensive and ingrained, which he illustrates through books, advertisements, travel guides, films and music, as well as through Cuban exports like the rumba and the mambo, cigars and mojitos, to forge a site that Cubans and Americans have jointly imagined and inhabited, a Cuba, less than 100 miles away, at once “so near and yet so foreign.”

But McKinley’s “ties of singular intimacy,” a paternalistic phrase uttered in his 1898 State of the Union message, glossed the U.S. military occupation of Cuba over which he presided. That First Occupation of Cuba extended until 1902 (after McKinley’s assassination in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt became president and presided over a Second Occupation of Cuba from 1906 to 1909). Indeed, for two centuries the “mental mold” (Shoultz) of U.S. policy toward Cuba dripped with a presumption of entitlement and moral superiority: of imperial aims masked as selfless moral purpose (Pérez 2016).⁹

Roosevelt put it bluntly in 1905: “It is manifest destiny for a nation to own the islands that border its shores.” And then this, in 1906 (quoted in Schoultz): “I am so angry with that infernal little Cuban republic that I would like to wipe its people off the face of the earth. All that we ever wanted from them was that they would behave themselves and be prosperous and happy so that we would not have to interfere.” That has been the “default template” of U.S. policy toward Cuba—from John Adams and Thomas Jefferson to the Monroe Doctrine, the so-called Spanish-American War of 1898, and all since (Rumbaut & Rumbaut 2007; 2009; 2015). Those “intimate ties” finally ended in a revolutionary divorce in 1959.

AI: Do you think the restoration of diplomatic relations between Cuba and the Obama Administration these last three years is going to have any significant effects on how Cuban-Americans view the island?

RR: Obama brought a very different message than McKinley’s or Roosevelt’s in March 2016, when he became the first U.S. president to visit the island nation since Calvin Coolidge in the 1920s. That symbolic and historic reset of U.S. policy toward Cuba sought to “normalize” relations that for over half a century had been trapped in the time warp of the Cold War.

One palpable measure of the change is seen in U.S. public opinion toward Cuba: Gallup started asking Americans about Cuba in 1996, when public opinion was 81% unfavorable and only 10% favorable. A decade later in 2006, under Bush, it was 71% to 21%: the negative differential was still 50 points. But in February 2016 (before Obama’s visit to Havana), a majority now saw Cuba in a favorable light for the first time: 54% positive, 40% negative—and the majority-favorable *included* Cuban-Americans in Florida. To be sure, significant differences remained by political affiliation: the biggest shift in opinion was registered by Democrats, 73% of whom viewed Cuba in a positive light—compared to 53% of independents and only 34% of Republicans (although a majority of Republicans now favored an end to the embargo despite viewing Cuba mostly negatively).

In that regard U.S. public opinion is moving toward the nearly universal view shared by all but two of the nations in the world. Every October since 1991, the United Nations General Assembly votes to condemn the U.S. embargo against Cuba. The vote in 2015 was a whopping 191-2; once again the two naysayers were Israel and the United States. Then, in 2016, the vote was historic: 191-0 (with the U.S. and Israel

abstaining for the first time). Instead of isolating Cuba with its blockade, the United States has itself been isolated by it in the eyes of the world.

4. FINAL REMARKS: AND NOW, WHAT?

Two historical events which occurred last November, almost exactly overlapping in time –the (unexpected) election of Donald Trump as President of the U.S. and the (expected) death of Fidel Castro on November 25, 2016– will impact the relations between the two countries and the situation of the Cuban-American diaspora in the future. These two events took place slightly over a year after the American flag had been raised in the U.S. Embassy in Havana in August 2015, an occasion that was greeted as a sign of reconciliation by most observers after more than a half century of rancor. Although the Obama Administration had taken a number of steps in an attempt to normalize diplomatic relations between the two nations, it was also clear that a number of huge obstacles still remained in the way to accomplish that goal. In the words of Louis Pérez, “Most immediately, the embargo remains in place. Radio and TV Martí continue broadcasting. The 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act remains unchanged. And, lastly, the United States retains control of the Guantánamo Naval Station, built on territory seized in 1901” (2016: 18). But, as this author sees it, the major obstacle –and this is not likely to change with Mr. Trump in office– is that “For nearly 200 years, ‘normal’ has meant a presumption of US authority to impose its will on Cuba” (2016: 19). Whether Fidel’s death is going to make the rapprochement any easier is also more than questionable, since the charismatic leader had been formally out of the political scene since February 2008 (and on medical leave since 2006). Thus, a shadow of uncertainty is cast on the future of the relations between the two countries and, we all know, uncertainty and suspicion are not the best friends of stability and mutual trust. Just a few months ago, Jorge Duany observed that, after the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries in December 2014, “Cuban Americans [would] probably be one of the key social actors in the reconstruction of the Cuban economy” (27).

However, this could only happen if significant changes took place in current laws and regulations that remain a major obstacle to trade, foreign investment, and travel to the island. The new President is not likely to endorse such changes given the hard-line voices he will be exposed to within his party and the kind of measures he has already begun to implement toward neighboring countries. All things considered, a lingering hope for the normalization of relations may lie in the increase of the private sector of the Cuban economy –already quite noticeable these last few years–

which might make Trump rethink his political position, and also in the support that growing segments of the Cuban-American community has been expressing for the reestablishment of normal ties, despite the persistent split between “intransigents” and “moderates” within the older “historical exiles,” who differ mainly in the means but not the ends of a counterrevolution.

It is still the case that formidable obstacles remain in the way of “fully normal relations” between the United States and Cuba (Pérez 2016, Rumbaut & Rumbaut 2015). Obama’s executive actions of December 2014 cannot repeal the embargo; only Congress can do that (under the provisions of a 1996 law). It remains to be seen if a Republican-dominated Congress would yield to public opinion and end the longest and most counterproductive embargo against any country in the world. Neither Republicans nor Democrats have shown any inclination to return Guantánamo (built on territory seized from Cuba in 1901, under terms coercively imposed by the U.S. on the Cuban Constitution via the Platt Amendment, which gave the United States *carte blanche* to intervene militarily and otherwise in Cuba’s internal affairs, which it often did since). And that “default template” –the one casting the U.S. as arbiter of Cuban destiny, always in the name of what is “best” for the Cuban people as determined by U.S. political and business interests, with scarcely a respectful thought for Cuban sovereignty– may not be quick to disappear.

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NOTES

¹ We would like to express our gratitude to the Salzburg Seminar on American Studies, and especially to its Symposium Director, Marty Gecek, which has allowed the two authors of the article to come together on three different occasions to discuss topics of great interest to both of us: “The Continuing Challenge of America’s Ethnic Pluralism” (in 2002), “Transnationalism and Migration Shock” (in 2008), and “Resistance and Readiness: Immigration, Nativism and Ethnic and Religious Diversity in the U.S. and Europe Today” (in 2012).

² Rumbaut is one of the world’s most cited scholars of international migration. His book with Alejandro Portes, *Immigrant America*, set a standard for the field since its first edition in 1990. Their 2001 book *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* won both the American Sociological Association’s Award for Distinguished Scholarship and the prestigious Thomas and Znaniecki Award for best book in immigration studies. Professor Rumbaut was the founding chair of the American Sociological Association’s Section on International Migration, from which he received its Distinguished Career Award in 2014. He has been elected to the National Academy of Education, and to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

³ In 1977, when he was in his late twenties, Rumbaut was a member of the Antonio Maceo Brigade, a group of 55 young Cubans who were invited to the island, which their families had left in the early 1960s (when they were children) in opposition to the new revolutionary regime. Their month-long visit was a historic occasion; the first group to return to Cuba since the Revolution, they met with most ministers of the government in extended discussions –and with Fidel Castro himself– and helped establish an initial dialogue between the Cuban community abroad and the revolutionary government. Ironically, some of the members of the group –Rumbaut included– were subsequently targeted by members of both the Cuban diaspora and U.S. intelligence agencies as “dangerous” subjects. One member of the group was assassinated by Cuban exile terrorists in 1978.

⁴ Since 1991 Rumbaut has directed (together with Portes) the landmark Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS), still ongoing, which has followed the trajectories of thousands of immigrant youth from dozens of nationalities into adulthood. He also directed in the 1980s the principal studies of Southeast Asian refugees in the U.S.; in the 1990s, the first National Survey of Immigration Scholars in the U.S.; and in the 2000s, with a multidisciplinary UC team, the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles study.

⁵ In 2006, Rumbaut joined forces with a handful of faculty members at the University of California to launch the UC-Cuba Educational Initiative, in which he participates actively via the UC-Cuba listserv. He has lectured and collaborated with colleagues from the University of Havana, *Casa de las Américas* and research centers in Havana. In 2006 he also became a founding director of ENCASA/US-CUBA (Emergency Network of Cuban-American Scholars and Artists for Change in US-Cuba Policy), a nationwide organization with more than 400 members in 37 states and Puerto Rico, which sought actively to promote political debates, to challenge the stereotype of a monolithic Cuban-American community, and to confront and change U.S. policy towards Cuba. One could argue that President Obama’s policy change in 2014 was to some extent a validation and vindication of what this network had long advocated and worked for.

⁶ In the 1990s, Rumbaut served as academic advisor for the popular PBS television series “Americas,” which focused on Caribbean and Latin American societies, as well as on Cubans, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans living in the U.S. (Rumbaut 1992). Since the mid-2000s, as a leader of ENCASA/US-CUBA, he gave briefings on Capitol Hill, lobbied Congress, spoke at conferences, issued white papers, wrote letters to President Obama and to major newspapers in efforts to normalize relations between the two countries and to end the trade/travel embargo.

⁷ In their classic book on the immigrant experience in America (Portes & Rumbaut 2014) –with new editions published in four consecutive decades– Portes and Rumbaut cover many of these issues as they focus on patterns of settlement, identity and loyalty, education and occupational incorporation, religion and politics, public policies, bilingualism and linguistic adaptation, and the psychological consequences of types of migration journeys.

⁸ In the book they edited at the turn of the millennium, Habel-Pallán and Mary Romero (2002) clearly showed that these “transcultural phenomena” –in which language, culture, and identities are subject to a constant and processual exchange and a dynamic of fusion– are not restricted to the Cuban-American community. However, it could be logically argued that this diasporic group has been particularly prone to the kind of difficult negotiations and unexpected (dis)identifications taking place in interstitial social spaces.

⁹ All the parenthetical references appearing in this answer have been inserted in the text by Professor Rumbaut himself.