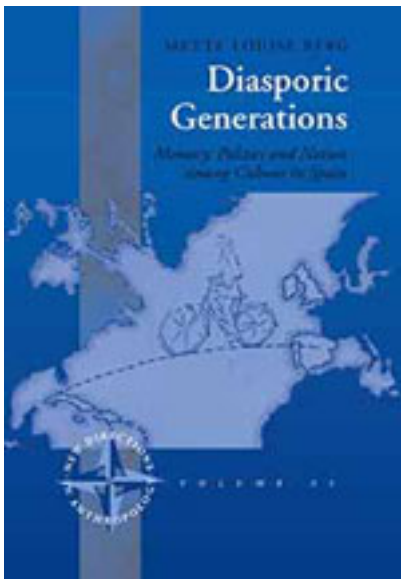


## ***Diasporic Generations: Memory, Politics, and Nation among Cubans in Spain* by Mette Louise Berg**

Jesús E. Sanabria | Bronx Community College

Berg, Mette Louise. *Diasporic Generations: Memory, Politics, and Nation among Cubans in Spain*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011. 213 pages; \$70.00 hardcover.



Mette Louise Berg's *Diasporic Generations: Memory, Politics and Nation among Cubans in Spain* offers an exhaustive, well documented, and detailed ethnographic study of the Cuban diaspora in Spain. The text puts forward an analysis of Cuban communities in Spain that exposes its members' fickle and inconsistent memories of their homeland experiences, conflicting senses of national identity, and the differing feelings of belonging that have developed as a consequence of the unique historical, cultural, and political experiences that continue to shape the history of the Cuban people. As a result, Berg illuminates the lives of Cubans in Spain not as a monolithic group, but rather as a diverse community with different memories, political alliances, class, and racial identities. She thus traces the changing configuration of the Cuban diaspora in Spain from the 1960s to the early 2000s. However, as Berg explains, this text is not a community study of Cubans in Spain, but rather an attempt to offer a window into the cultural politics of diasporic communities.

This work relies heavily on a series of interviews and oral histories carefully compiled by Berg as she attempted to gain access to the daily life and public space of the Cuban community, which as a consequence of its experiences with communism is highly suspicious of sharing opinions. Berg works to separate politics and history from her interactions with Cubans, but finds at times hard to separate the Cubans from them—she experiences hostility and the fear that she could be working for the CIA or the Cuban government. For a group of people strongly

affected by historical forces, shedding their burdens of the past is not an easy task. Consequently, what the Cuban diaspora in Spain may have in common is the overwhelming influence that historical and political influences have on them.

In *Diasporic Generations*, Berg divides the community into three groups: the *Exiles*, the *Children of the Revolution*, and the *Migrants*. In this manner she describes three different diasporic “generations.” Since the Cuban Revolution in the late 1950s, each subsequent group that emigrated to Spain encountered unique political and historical circumstances, complicated by racial and socio-economic differences, which further segregate these various generations. Each of these three thus offer different perspectives on their memories and experiences. In the case of the *Exiles*, who left Cuba shortly after the Revolution, it is class, status, and racial distinctions that shape their memories; in the case of the *Children of the Revolution*, it is their experiences with communism and the revolutionary government of Cuba; and for the *Migrant* generation contemporary patterns of migratory freedom between Spain and Cuba become their defining framework.

Through her use of these generational distinctions Berg explains how for Cubans living in Spain the different political and social conditions they experienced in Cuba as well as in Spain lead to different “diasporic subjectivities,” founded on different “historically situated trajectories,” which however incongruent are easily identifiable when placed against the lens of race, politics, and economic status, in unison with the historical changes both countries have undergone. This provides an exceptional perspective that forces readers to consider that a common origin does not equate with a common experience, and that perhaps classifying members of a diaspora by universal elements separated from cultural or historical experiences, both at the homeland and abroad, is perhaps not the best approach for understanding the diasporic experience. These interactions, as Berg demonstrates, also offer an opportunity to understand how memories are shaped in the context of tensions and mutual incomprehension that are the result of different cultural and political experiences. These generations are then engaged in a perennial practice of shaping the narrative of their diasporic discourse. What makes the experience of the Cuban community in Spain unique are the shared cultural and historical ties between Cubans and Spaniards. These relationships however, are also a source of conflict and separation given the antagonizing colonial and historical links between the two countries. Berg explains how the intergenerational conflicts among members of the Cuban community in Spain are exacerbated as each generation tries to integrate themselves into Spanish society and encounter its racial and cultural stereotypes of Cubans. Cubans, therefore, shape their identity in reaction to what the host society thinks of them, as well as to what other Cubans say about each other.

Both Cuba and Spain have experienced massive change in the last 50 years, as Spain transitioned from dictatorship to democracy and Cuba began relaxing its economic and migratory policies. It is here that the book succeeds in managing to explain how migrations and the memories that emigrants develop are shifting and complex, in particular when the economic, political, and social conflicts experienced by different generations of emigrants trigger unique

# EMISFÉRICA

---

memories of the homeland. The language that is used by Cubans to describe their estrangement and feelings of separation from Cuba may share a similar set of metaphors, but the experiences are always under a constant process of change and redefinition.

*Diasporic Generations* may also serve to expand on our understanding the experiences of the Cuban diasporas in places such as the United States, where the Cuban community is seen as exercising a high degree of cultural and political influence. By offering a framework for understanding the manner in which diasporas manufacture and negotiate their political culture, light can be shed on how the major cultural and political presence of Cubans in states such as Florida provide Cubans in the United States with the opportunity to influence American electoral politics.

---

**Jesus E. Sanabria**, is currently an Assistant Professor-Librarian at the Bronx Community College Library and Gerald S. Lieblich Learning Resources Center. He holds Master Degrees in Early Modern European History, Education (Social Studies) and Library Science.