Fernando Mateo has been shuttling between New York City and Santo Domingo since he was in utero. His pint-sized immigrant mother, belly swelling, flew back to her homeland so Mr. Mateo, now 40, could be born a Dominican. After that, his childhood was split between here and there, between a cramped Lower East Side apartment and a pink house beneath a mahogany tree in the Dominican capital.

As an adult, Mr. Mateo, a stocky man with a dimpled baby face, continues to lead a double life, with gusto. A dual citizen of the Dominican Republic and the United States, he wears a custom-made lapel pin that entwines the Dominican and American flags. He is fluent in Spanish and English, in the business handshake and the business hug, in yucca and plantains, bagels and lox. But there is nothing fractured about his existence.

Every few weeks, Mr. Mateo, who owns a money-transfer company, simply commutes between the Westchester County suburb of Irvington, where he lives, and Santo Domingo. Many a day, he and his wife, Stella, start out in blaring traffic on the Grand Central Parkway and end up on horseback in the verdant Dominican countryside, cantering down to a river to feast on rum and goat.

"I believe people like us have the best of two worlds," Mr. Mateo said. "We have two countries, two homes. It doesn't make any sense for us to be either this or that. We're both. It's not a conflict. It's just a human fact."

For modern immigrants like Mr. Mateo, the homeland is no longer something to be forsaken, released into a mist of memory or nostalgia. As the world has grown smaller, the immigrant experience has inevitably changed. Unlike the Europeans who fled persecution and war in the first half of this century, few modern immigrants abandon their motherlands forever, shutting one door, opening another and never looking back. Instead, they straddle two worlds, in varying degrees, depending on where they came from and what they can afford.

Some immerse themselves in two societies at once -- economically, culturally, politically. Jesus Galvis, a travel agent in New Jersey, ran for a Senate seat in his native Colombia earlier this year; had he won, he would have considered holding office simultaneously in Bogota and Hackensack, where he is a City Councilman.
Most immigrants, however, base themselves more fully here, but maintain ties so vital that their homeland is a part of their American-born children’s identity. Mersuda Guichard, 47, leads a hectic New York-centered life as a subway token clerk and single mother of three. But she travels to Trinidad at least once a year, and plans to retire there, which will keep alive her children’s connection, already strong from so many summers there.

Either way, this here-there phenomenon, while common to every immigrant center in the world, makes a particularly clear stamp on the psyche of New York, the American city with the largest and most diverse population of immigrants, living side by side in neighborhoods where the very fact of their double identity is a bond. It has evolved during the newest wave of immigration, which began in the late 1960’s, eventually driving the city's immigrant population to an all-time high of 2.7 million, according to an analysis of the Census Bureau's latest population survey. More than a third of the city's residents are foreign-born, and about 60 percent are either immigrants or their children. Most are black, Latino and Asian, unlike the Europeans of the previous waves of immigration.

To some extent, the new immigrants bear a resemblance to the Ellis Island generation. During that last great migration, which began in 1880 and petered out during the 1920’s, some immigrants did revisit their homelands, and many returned for good. But their experience was largely erased from popular consciousness by the mid-century immigrants, most of whom, fleeing war, never looked back.

Still, for the newest immigrants, technological advances and global political and economic changes have revolutionized the relationship with the homeland -- just as the American embrace of multiculturalism allows it to flourish as never before.

Armed with cut-rate phone cards and frequent-flier miles, with modems, fax machines and videocameras, immigrants can participate in the lives of their families back home -- be they in Barbados or Tibet -- with an immediacy unknown to any previous generation. Indeed, this phenomenon has given birth to an entrepreneurial subculture -- the money-transfer houses, phone parlors, barrel shippers and even videophone centers dotting immigrant neighborhoods.

In the last few years, a proliferation of dual nationality laws has allowed many immigrants to formalize their double identities. And, among other worldwide political changes, the break-up of the Soviet Union and liberalizations in China have allowed even refugees to reconnect in commonplace ways they once could not have imagined.

Mei Yung Liew left China 19 years ago, and settled into a garment worker's life in New York, quickly securing her American citizenship. She made a first visit back for her father's funeral. Three years ago, she traveled back for a meeting of labor-union women. Now, she watches with awe as her brother, an artist who sells his work in China, not only conducts business by fax from their Bushwick, Brooklyn, apartment but even returns for long stretches to the land they supposedly fled forever.
So fluid is the exchange between the homeland and New York that it alters both places. People move back and forth, money moves back and forth, ideas move back and forth.

Families and sometimes whole towns bestride borders. The population of Chinantla, Mexico, is evenly divided between that tiny town and New York City, but the Chinantecans still consider themselves one community -- 2,500 people here, 2,500 people there. In New York, the first-generation Chinantecan immigrants are waiters, garment workers and mechanics; back home, they are the big shots whose earnings built the town's schools and rebuilt its church.

The extent to which the newest immigrants have held onto their homeland identities has unsettled many Americans, and this unease underlies current debates about immigration, multiculturalism and bilingualism. Among a growing army of immigration experts, there is a raging debate, too, about the importance of this phenomenon, which the academics call transnationalism.

Many experts believe that modern immigrant families are ultimately shifting their allegiances here, even if their resettlement takes decades. They see transnationalism as a phase on the way to what they imagine will be the eventual assimilation of the immigrants' grandchildren, and pronounce the modern immigrant experience a variation on an old theme.

Others disagree, but only with their conclusion. First, they say, it is significant that the resettlement can span decades in the life of an individual family, especially in a city where more than 100,000 new immigrants arrive yearly. Also, they say, transnationalism seems to transform the life of the first generation's children and sometimes their grandchildren, creating a hybrid identity that is genuinely novel.

"At the same time as they are keeping their old links, many are successfully integrating themselves into the United States," said Robert C. Smith, a sociologist at Barnard College and expert on transnationalism. "They're redefining what it means to be American."

They are also making immigration a much more complex phenomenon than described in policy debates. Immigrants have always had a utilitarian relationship with America. But when the homeland remains alive, every life juncture, from cradle to grave, becomes a time to choose: where to baptize, where to bury?

In 1996, more than half the Dominicans and Mexicans who died in New York City were sent home for burial, as were a third of the Ecuadoreans, a fifth of the Jamaicans and 16 percent of the Greeks, according to an analysis of city death records.

Marriage, too, is a defining moment, especially among Indian immigrant families. Many of the American-born children of, say, gemstone merchants from Jaipur or hoteliers from Gujarat, agree to arranged marriages, often with weddings in India, sometimes followed by new lives based there.

At key points in their lives, many immigrant families separate, some here, some there. Needing day care, some send small children home to grandparents. Fearing drugs, gangs and sexual
precociousness, some ship their teen-agers home for high school. And many retire to their birthplaces, which keeps their children and grandchildren ineluctably linked. The familial webs crisscross the globe.

Margarette Lee, 36, is a vivacious Manhattan real-estate lawyer who came to New York as a child and considers herself eternally wedded to its life style. Her parents retired to Korea about 20 years ago, dragging back her older sister because she was getting a little too independent. After marrying a Korean, the older sister settled in Seoul, as did her younger sister, who was mostly reared in Korea anyway.

Then, her parents re-immigrated -- because golfing is so much cheaper in Fort Lee, N.J. Meanwhile, Ms. Lee married a Korean-American artist, Ik-Joong Kang, who is represented by a gallery in Seoul, where his parents live. And they recently had a baby whom they gave two first names, Kevin and Keeho.

"I hope for my son's relationship with Korea to be continuous, just as mine has been," she said.

Jets and Wires -- Making the Commute To Santo Domingo

Before daybreak on a recent morning, Mr. and Mrs. Mateo left home for Kennedy International Airport after blowing kisses to their sleeping daughters, Megan, 11 (named after a character in "The Thorn Birds"), and Hennessy, 10 (as in the Cognac). Fernando Jr., 19, was away at college.

Left in their grandfather's care, the girls were soon so busy with their suburban social lives -- baking brownies, swooning over Leonardo DiCaprio and E-mailing their girlfriends -- that they didn't mind their parents' absence. Third-generation New Yorkers, they themselves have spent a good part of their preschool years and many summers in the Dominican Republic. They find the intense connection between here and there so natural as to be unremarkable.

That morning, the Mateos sauntered onto a 7 o'clock nonstop flight to Santo Domingo -- the first of six that day -- as casually as if it were a shuttle. The plane was packed with immigrants returning home for a wedding, a visit with an ailing family member, a business meeting. When the plane bumped down three hours later, they applauded, and someone called out, "De regreso, paisanos!" ("We're back, countrymen!")

In all immigrant groups, it is entrepreneurs like Mr. Mateo who have developed the infrastructure that allows their countrymen to keep in touch with home. "They are the vanguard," said Alejandro Portes, a Princeton University immigration expert, "the ones whose economic or sometimes political interests require them to be simultaneously present in their two countries."

Four years ago, on a flight home, Mr. Mateo sat next to a fellow Dominican who sold discounted phone time to immigrants. The man expounded on the profit potential in the link between here and there, and by the end of the ride, Mr. Mateo had decided to go into the money transfer business.
"I set myself up in this business so I would have an official reason to go back as often as my heart wants to take me there," Mr. Mateo said.

Mr. Mateo's money-wiring business, like some 15 other companies, provides an electronic lifeline between Dominicans in New York and their families on the island. Dominican immigrants send back $500 million a year (including about $100 million that the authorities believe to be proceeds from drug sales). The cash sustains their relatives and their homeland's economy, just as such remittances bolster familial, and sometimes national, economies throughout the world.

While there is no total estimate of immigrants' remittances, New York State Banking Department statistics indicate that the industry has mushroomed here in the last decade. The number of companies licensed to send money has increased 40 percent since 1988, and those companies have as many as 2,000 store fronts and agents.

Among them, Boby Express says it transfers about $1 million a year to Haiti; Habib Exchange sends about $6 million a year to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; Pekao Trading wires about $320 million a year to Poland. Mr. Mateo has 200 agents throughout the city, and transfers $40 million a year.

Dominicans, regardless of class, are probably the most transnational of all New York's immigrants. The city's largest immigrant group, they have transformed their nation while laying claim to whole New York neighborhoods. The Dominican President, Leonel Fernandez Reyna, grew up on the Upper West Side, still holds a green card, and has said he intends to rejoin his family in Manhattan at the end of his term.

In Santo Domingo, the influence of New York-based immigrants is so visible it can be toured. Here is the new residential subdivision built close to the airport for the back-and-forth immigrants; here is a bagel shop, a video store, a pizzeria that delivers; here is a parochial high school whose student body is 20 percent New York-born.

Just before his recent trip to the island, Mr. Mateo traveled by subway to Brooklyn, his pinstriped suit equipped with beeper, cellular phone and computer organizer. He was making a routine visit to one of his 200 agents, Teresa Guzman, who runs Family Travel on Myrtle Avenue.

Behind a glass partition, Ms. Guzman and her employees sat before computers and typed in orders from the immigrants who dribbled in that morning. A home health attendant sent $65 to her elderly father. A garment worker sent $69 to relatives with a succinct message: "THIS IS FOR FOOD." The directions were often quite specific:

"Ten kilometers past Hatos de Yaque, left at the henhouse, climb the hill past two herds of cattle and you can find Mercedes in the small green house."

From Ms. Guzman's agency, the orders traveled electronically to Mateo Express headquarters in midtown Manhattan, then on to Santo Domingo, where the company's war room holds a giant city
map divided into sectors. Each sector is assigned to a messenger who packs his pockets with cash-filled envelopes that he delivers by motorbike within four hours of an immigrant’s visit to a storefront in New York.

On his recent trip, Mr. Mateo accompanied a messenger to the home of Jose Antonio Ortiz Sanchez in Bani, a small city outside the capital. Mr. Ortiz Sanchez, a skinny, toothless old man who suffers from a nerve disorder, was lying on a cot on his patio when the envelope arrived. He clutched it to his chest -- $70 for a doctor’s visit. When Mr. Mateo asked who had sent the money, the man rose from his cot, hoisted his blue boxers, walked inside and pointed to a poster of a St. Louis Cardinals Double-A farm team.

"My son," he said proudly. (The son no longer plays for the team.)

Just as they scratch together enough money to send home, even the poorest Dominican immigrants make at least one trip back a year, travel agents say. Fares run as low as $330 round-trip.

Mr. Mateo does not come from a wealthy family. His father began as a gardener. He is a Seward Park High School dropout whose outsized hands bear decades of calluses from manual labor. Before starting his money wiring company, he built a carpet business from scratch, while his wife, who now runs a small construction company, worked at an accounting firm.

But they and their families have been moving back and forth for decades. Even now, Mr. Mateo's mother, Carmen, 76, hops between the family's modest, airy house in Santo Domingo and a spare apartment in a retirees' building in lower Manhattan.

After a few weeks in Santo Domingo, she begins "kvetching" (Mr. Mateo's word) about the heat, the blackouts, the lack of Haagen-Dazs ice cream. So she flies north.

After a few weeks on the Lower East Side, she starts complaining about how cooped up she feels and about the outrageous price of mangos, which are supposed to be free. She insists on flying back to visit the grave of her husband, who died in Manhattan years ago only to be transported south for burial. There, she sprinkles his grave with his favorite beer and plays him salsa from a boom box, often accompanied by Mr. Mateo's half-brother, Dagoberto Linares.

Mr. Linares, 51, a small man whose jeans hang low and baggy like a teen-ager's, also shuttles between East New York, Brooklyn, and Yamasa, the Dominican Republic.

In New York, he works as a carpet-layer; in the Dominican Republic, fulfilling a lifelong dream, he lives on a farm -- riding horses, raising chickens and harvesting a cornucopia of fruit trees.

Technology -- Breaking Barriers Of Space and Time

When Hamid Ali drives his yellow cab through Manhattan, the images of his family in Pakistan run through his head as if on a loop. They keep him company through 10-hour workdays and lonely
nights in a one-bedroom apartment he shares with three other drivers. But they are stale images, four years old and frozen in time.

It pained him, until a friend told him about a cutting-edge solution to old-fashioned immigrant heartache: videophones.

At the end of June, on Ditmas Avenue off Coney Island Avenue in Brooklyn, Mr. Ali sat nervously before a large computer screen in the darkened conference room of Satellite Tech Telecommunication. His wire-rim glasses slipped to the very tip of his nose; he pushed them up, and they slipped back down.

Without warning, the screen came to life, and the image of his older sister, draped in a floral head scarf, flickered and died. He gasped softly. Then she reappeared, live from Islamabad, a four-hour drive from their town of Okara. And she had a thing or two on her mind.

For four straight minutes -- at $5 a minute -- his sister, Shamim Kusar, harangued him for not writing. He protested that he phoned weekly, but his sister told him letters were better; they could be fingered and re-read and kept under pillows. No one could fathom why he didn't just come home, she said, or why he was so ambitious. Their father thought he probably no longer cared for them, she reported; now he was American.

When Mr. Ali's eyes brimmed, Mrs. Kusar softened. She told her brother he looked weak and underfed. He told her he was working too hard, that everyone worked too hard in America, which was why it is such a prosperous country. "Is everyone so skinny?" she asked. "I will tell Mother you are fat." She reached out to tickle his face on the screen.

"I will tell everyone in town that I saw my brother on TV," she said, giggling. "They won't believe me. We are simple people."

"Pray to Allah for me, dear sister," he answered, biting back tears, "and I will be home soon -- two years at the most."

This scenario, unimaginable even 10 years ago, shows just how far technology has gone in breaking down the barriers of space and time that used to separate immigrants from the lands they left behind.

Early in the century, it was too difficult and expensive to lead a genuinely double life. Immigrants might return home for good, but they could not hop a steamship to the Old World for a long weekend. Letters were the bond between families, but they took so long that communication was herky-jerky.

Now, Chinese immigrants jet to Hong Kong for meetings with investors in their Queens banks; Bombay movie stars fly in for standing-room-only performances at the Nassau Coliseum, and highland Indians from Ecuador fax home orders for more ponchos to sell on the streets.
The most revolutionary technological change in the lives of immigrants, though, is the inexpensive direct-dial phone call.

It was not even possible to make a trans-Atlantic phone call until 1927, and it was prohibitively expensive -- $200 in current dollars for a three-minute call to London, said Sheldon Hochheiser, the corporate historian for A.T. &T.

In the last 10 years, small communities around the world have obtained direct phone service, fiber-optic cables have drastically improved the quality of long-distance calls, and rates have become dirt cheap: in 1965, it cost $10.59 to call the Dominican Republic for three minutes, and $15 to call India; now those rates are $1.71 and $3.66, respectively, with A.T.&T.'s one-rate international plan.

Many immigrants, however, seek out even cheaper rates at phone parlors, now ubiquitous in the city, or with prepaid phone cards. The phone parlors and card businesses, typically immigrant enterprises, buy telephone minutes in bulk from long distance carriers and sell them at sharply discounted rates.

If the ability to call home cheaply connects immigrants to their families, the ability to click on the homeland's news or soap operas connects them to the society they left behind.

All a Korean immigrant need do is turn on the 24-hour Korean Channel, which is offered in Queens as part of basic cable service, to watch the news from Seoul, as well as Korean soaps, children's programs and Sunday morning religious shows. Similarly, a Russian emigre can turn to WMNB-TV, based in Fort Lee, N.J., for live performances from the Moscow Concert Hall.

For immigrant communities that lack television channels, there are closed-circuit radio stations that operate on side frequencies leased from FM stations. If they get their radios equipped with a special chip or filter, immigrants can listen in on the Ukrainian Parliament, and Haitians can participate in call-in shows that link listeners in Flatbush with those in Port-au-Prince.

Reflecting the dual interests of their audiences, the immigrant radio and television channels have also become electronic settlement houses, offering all manner of advice.

"We're killing a lot of different birds at the same time," said Evgeniy Lvov, president of the Russian-American Broadcasting Company, which owns WMNB. "We're making this world smaller for everybody."

The New Breed -- Rebuilding A Burnt Bridge

Before Leonid Slepak left Russia in 1979, he traveled three days over land from Moscow to Siberia to say goodbye to his parents. They were well-known dissidents; he was a draft evader living underground and a poster boy for Soviet Jewry, his photograph marched through the streets of New York, Washington and Los Angeles.

Mr. Slepak was only 19. He had finally won his 10-year-battle to emigrate, and in that moment,
sitting opposite his parents in a Siberian prison, he thought he understood with a panic what a permanent rupture it would be. "It would be like dying, I imagined," he said recently.

Two decades later, it has not turned out to be so final after all. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Soviet Jewish refugees ventured back for a visit. They were the last immigrants who had ever expected to lead transnational lives; they had relinquished their passports and possessed little nostalgia. But the years away had taught some that they were more Russian than they thought, and that it made sense -- business sense, family sense -- to re-establish ties.

Like Mr. Slepak, many have reconnected with a vengeance, building businesses that require them to travel back and forth, to E-mail, to adjust their body clocks to the eight-hour time difference. They have bought second homes in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

Mr. Slepak, who puts together business deals that require financing and know-how in both countries, even moved back for a year. He has a family here and a family there: three very Americanized teen-agers in New Jersey (whose mother he divorced in the 80's), and one Russian child, 7-year-old Anastasiya. His parents live in Israel.

Mr. Slepak considers himself more American than Russian, but calls himself "bicontinental." Has he embraced Judaism in exile? He laughed and called this a "very American question." Being Jewish is a matter of blood, not deed, he said. But then, he elaborated, with a very American answer: "If I arrive home on a Friday, and the sun is just setting and the mood is right, I will light the candles, and say a bracha," a blessing. "But it's more in the spirit of T.G.I.F."

The Old Breed -- When Goodbye Meant Forever

When the new immigrants began arriving in large numbers, many Americans believed there was a protoypical immigrant experience: immigrants were supposed to shed their old selves and become Americans in language, culture, dress and appetite.

That model was based on the living memory of Morris Adler's generation.

At 103, Mr. Adler is a spry, stoop-shouldered man, happily retired in Jamaica, Queens, with 5 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren and a great-great granddaughter. His eyes are milky with age but his memory is undimmed.

After anti-Semitism drove him from Poland, he said, he arrived at Ellis Island in 1920 with $9 in his pocket. Within days, he found work as a hat maker and enrolled in night-time English classes. He quickly changed his name from Gershon Szmedra, just as he tried hard to lose his accent and Americanize. He didn't want the stigma of being a greenhorn; he wanted to belong in his new land, where no one ever told him to get off the sidewalk because he was a Jew.

In New York, he married the daughter of Jewish immigrants from Poland and built his American family. But he never saw his Polish family again. He corresponded with them until the letters stopped in 1943; nearly everyone perished in the Holocaust.
"I never wanted to see Poland again," he said. "My country where I'm born showed me hate, so I never had love for it. To me the other world is, 'Forget it.'"

But if Mr. Adler's seems to be the prototype of the American immigrant experience, immigration experts say this kind of abrupt break with the homeland was actually a historical anomaly. The current immigrant experience, they say, more directly echoes the mass immigration that stretched from 1880 to 1930.

Then, just as now, millions of immigrants came expecting to go home. Some crisscrossed the Atlantic by steamship, like the Italian migrant workers whom immigration officials called "birds of passage." And many returned for good, carrying back their earnings and buying themselves new prominence and comfort in their homelands.

One historian, Mark Wyman, believes a quarter to a third of the 23 million Europeans who emigrated to America between 1880 and 1930 repatriated. But their story has rarely been told because the history of immigration was written by those who stayed.

With a return home on their minds, many immigrants behaved very differently from Mr. Adler. They were slower to learn English and become citizens. They lived and worked in ethnic enclaves, and belonged to homeland village associations. Homeland politicians courted them; Irish nationalists made fund-raising trips to New York in the early 1900's, just as Dominican candidates -- and Irish nationalists -- do now.

"It's a mistaken idea that everyone always rushed to Americanize," said Roger Waldinger, an immigration expert at the University of California at Los Angeles.

From the late 1920's to the 60's, though, the fluidity of these migration patterns was interrupted by the Depression, World War II and the cold war. In 1929, Congress also imposed severe immigration restrictions that were not lifted until 1965.

For those 35 or so years, the majority of newcomers were refugees fleeing political persecution: first European Jews, then Hungarians, then Cubans. They are the immigrants whose experience has shaped the living memory of New York.

Unlike those who came before, and those who would follow, they knew they would never go home. And since their numbers were relatively small, they could more easily be absorbed into America at a time when it was consciously forging a national identity. At that moment in history, with the concept of Americanization taking an ever-stronger hold, ethnic identity was a leftover, and often an embarrassment.

"There was a zero-sum notion of identity," said Aristide R. Zohlberg, director of the International Center for Migration, Ethnicity and Citizenship at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan. "If you became 10 percent more American, you became 10 percent less of what you were."
Ethnic Pride -- A New Notion Of Americanization

Philippe Vielot arrived in New York from Haiti in 1969, four years after Congress lifted immigration quotas. He was 12, and he didn't know he was at the vanguard of a new wave of immigration that would bring in black, Latino and Asian immigrants in an era when many Americans were asserting their ethnic and racial pride for the first time.

During Mr. Vielot's American lifetime, the idea of assimilating to a single American norm would come to be seen as a dated, even racist, concept. It would become socially acceptable for immigrants to hold onto their cultures, but then the extent to which they did so would unnerve many Americans.

Mr. Vielot's family arrived intending to return to Haiti, and after 20 years as hospital workers, his parents did retire there, keeping their apartment in East Flatbush for visits north. When Mr. Vielot's daughter was little, she was sent home to her grandparents, the best (and cheapest) day care imaginable.

Mr. Vielot never stopped following the ins and outs of Haitian politics. He never gave up his languages, Creole and French, never stopped listening to zouk and compas, never stopped going home for visits. He still awaits the perfect moment to return for a long stay, maybe for good. He wants to be a farmer.

But Mr. Vielot long ago became an American citizen. He is fluent in English; he peppers his speech with exclamations like "oh, gosh." He works for a New York City agency as a mechanical engineer. His wife is a kindergarten teacher, his children are American, and they all live in Bridgeport, Conn.

He is the very model of the modern immigrant, part of the mix of cultures that has been called everything from a salad bowl to a gorgeous mosaic. But has he Americanized? Mr. Vielot was at first stumped by the question, then said, "By my estimate, maybe not by yours."

Sociologists say that to many modern immigrants, the issue of becoming American is pretty much beside the point, the kind of question best left to the sociologists. To many immigrants, assimilating means sinking into the dead-end universe of the inner cities where they live; holding onto their culture and values, then, is a way of inoculating their children against all those American ills.

Experts prefer to ask if immigrants are integrating themselves into American life even as they hold onto their language, culture and ties. The test, they say, lies with the immigrants' children, and that is whom they have been studying, although the studies, and the children, are too young for definitive answers.

Still, families like Mersuda Guichard's offer some tentative answers. For Ms. Guichard, Trinidad is the past, the island that felt too small when she left in 1971. It is the present, the place she goes to restore herself when the pressures of bringing up three children alone are too much. And it is the
future, the "paradise" where she will retire, using the nest egg -- $6,000 so far -- squirreled away in a Trinidadian bank.

But it is not the past, present or future for her teen-age children. When they were younger, Ms. Guichard sent them home every summer -- because she was working, and because she wanted them to absorb her love for Trinidad. Her daughter, Starr, 16, still goes, and she describes it as a glorious vacation: walking barefoot on the beach, tending rabbits and ducks, learning to cook callaloo. But, every fall, Starr balks when her mother, who thinks a little Caribbean discipline would do her good, asks her to stay and attend school in Trinidad. Starr has no desire to wear a uniform or get her knuckles rapped for tardiness.

"There, you can't wear make-up or nail polish," she said. "You have to wear plaid pleated skirts and white shirts and little socks that fold at the bottom."

Ms. Guichard now wishes she had sent all her children home to school when they were small, but, she says, it is too late for regrets. She herself is Trinidadian through and through. Her children are a hybrid: part West Indian, part American -- and all New Yorker. "They were born here," she said, "and they will die here."

Overwhelmingly, the experts say, American-born children of immigrants seem to have their feet planted in this country, no matter how many trips they make to their parents' homeland. While bilingual, they express themselves better in English than in their parents' tongues. And they feel more at home in the hyperdeveloped United States than in the developing world.

Still, their parents' dual identity affects them, sometimes profoundly. In many cases, they have relationships with their parents' hometowns that help shape a newfangled identity. They are not going to move back, but they often consider their parents' birthplaces second homes.

The back and forth can be confusing, and some feel they fit in neither here nor there. "Here they say, 'You're from the islands,' " Starr said. "In Trinidad, they call me a Yankee, and that's considered an insult."

At the same time, however, these ties to home are often a source of strength -- an escape from a city where many live in a social underclass to another, freer world, where their families' social status has been elevated by emigration. It helps keep their immigrant aspirations alive.

Liliana Maldonado, a 20-year-old computer student, has spent every summer in her parents' hometown in Ecuador.

"I think of it as going home, and I was born here, which says a lot," she said. "What it feels like to me is a relief."

Citizenship -- Dual Identities, Dual Loyalties

That the McManus Midtown Democratic Association, a century-old bastion of Irish-American
politics, has a president born and raised in Cali is testament to the changing face of New York City.

That the president, Carlos Manzano, is a dual citizen of Colombia and the United States speaks volumes about the changing immigrant identity. At the same time as he courts Jewish, Italian and Irish voters in the district he seeks to represent in the New York City Council, he sends routine mailings about Colombian politics to his countrymen in the New York area.

"Fortunately, the election cycles here and there don't overlap," he said. "This spring, I was focused on the presidential elections down there. By fall, I'll shift gears back here."

Although immigrants taking the oath of United States citizenship must renounce their homelands, the renunciation carries no teeth. American courts increasingly tolerate dual nationality, and since the end of the Cold War, other nations have relaxed their attitudes toward the concept, too.

Some countries have long allowed it, and in the last decade, many others, including Russia and Poland, have decided to simply ignore their countrymen's new citizenship. And others have enacted dual nationality or citizenship laws as they have come to see their emigrants as assets rather than traitors; among them are Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Italy and Mexico.

The Mexican law, overnight, created a potential population of millions of dual nationals, as it not only recognizes Mexican-born Americans but their children. Since the new law took effect, five New Yorkers a day have sought to recapture their Mexicanness.

"The binational society is a trend that is unstoppable," said Jorge Pinto, Mexico's consul in New York. "It used to be limited to the border, but now the links are far afield."

For some, the issue of dual citizenship poses the ultimate question raised by the transnational phenomenon: Where does an immigrant's allegiance lie? Some fear that dual loyalties are necessarily dueling loyalties, and that the bond between a citizen and his state should be exclusive.

Others, though, say this is an old-fashioned notion in a world that is not at war, and an impractical one in the face of a global reality of entwined economies, of businesses and families that straddle borders.

Like Mr. Manzano, Fernando Mateo sees himself as doubly loyal. Naturally, almost physiologically, ebullient, Mr. Mateo hungered for a public role in his community once he no longer had to work day and night to keep his business afloat. His civic energy expressed itself both here and there.

In New York, he devised a campaign to urge New Yorkers to trade their illegal guns for toys. The Toys for Guns program went national and international. Mr. Mateo went on Oprah, met Bill and Hillary Clinton, and became a darling of Spanish-language television, which has hemispheric reach.

Through his minor renown here, Mr. Mateo was able to assert himself as a player in Dominican politics there. Last year, he won a battle to secure immigrants the right to vote from the United
States -- making the Dominican population in New York the second-largest concentration of votes in any Dominican election, after Santo Domingo.

It also allows New Yorkers, including Mr. Mateo, to contemplate running for their homeland's highest offices. Mr. Mateo feels he has two countries, one that shaped him emotionally, and another that helped him rise above his station in life. He would fight for either country in a war, he said.

On a spring morning, from his home in Irvington, Westchester, Mr. Mateo debated by phone his potential as a candidate for election in the Dominican Republic -- with David Garth, the veteran New York political consultant.

In Yamasa, the Dominican Republic, Mr. Mateo continued the conversation with his wife as they danced to salsa on his brother's porch. Stella Mateo admires her husband's political ambitions, but she does not want to move back to the Dominican Republic.

Hips swaying, Mr. Mateo dipped her and said, "Babe, you smell that goat on the grill? That's not a smell you get every day in Westchester."

"Freddy, honey," she answered, "you like the smell of hamburgers and hot dogs, too."

Mr. Mateo's cellular phone rang. The music stopped. A third conversation began, this one private. Mr. Mateo's mother, who had been rocking in a chair drinking milk from a coconut, said: "Who is it? New York again?" She smiled proudly.

"My little gringo," she said.

Here and There

TODAY -- Coming to America, holding on to the homeland.

MONDAY -- From New York to Jaipur: The pull of tradition.

TUESDAY -- The global village: A community in two places at once.

MORE ON LINE -- These articles, with additional photographs and charts, as well as a forum for discussion, are available on The New York Times on the Web, at www.nytimes.com/immigration. Readers may offer accounts of their own immigration experiences by E-mail to herethere@nytimes.com.

Photos: Stella and Fernando Mateo commuting between their homeland, the Dominican Republic, and their home, New York (Edward Keating/The New York Times)(pg. 1); VIDEOPHONING HOME -- Hamid Ali, a cab driver, talking with his sister, Shamim Kusar, in Islamabad, Pakistan, from a videophone parlor in the Kensington section of Brooklyn. He had not seen her in four years. (Photographs by James Estrin/The New York Times)(pg. 28); CACHE IN A BARREL -- Eric
Beckford, a Jamaican immigrant, packing a barrel of food and clothing to send to his parents back home. Mr. Beckford, as well as his four siblings who live in New York, frequently send staples to Jamaica because American prices are relatively low. THE FINAL RETURN -- At the Ortiz funeral home in Harlem, saying goodbye to Jorge Cruz, 30, a Mexican immigrant who was stabbed to death. Mr. Cruz, like half of all Mexicans who die in New York, was to be flown back for burial. (pg. 29); MATEO EXPRESS -- Fernando Mateo at his company's headquarters in midtown Manhattan, right, and in Bani, Dominican Republic, far right, at the home of Jose Antonio Ortiz Sanchez, who had just received money from his son in the United States. (Photographs by Edward Keating/The New York Times) (pg. 30) Graph: "More Than Ever, a City of Immigrants" A new immigrant identity, with intense bonds to home, has evolved over the last three decades, as a vast tide of newcomers has given New York City the largest, most ethnically varied immigrant population in its history. Graph tracks the percentage of foreign born residents in New York City in the years 1930, 1970, and 1997. (Source: New York Times analysis)